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Education and madrassahs in South Africa: on preventing the possibility of extremism

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Nowadays education in the madrassahs (Muslim schools) is constantly being placed under the spotlight, such as being considered as seedbeds for terrorism. This article takes a critical look at some South African madrassahs with the aim to find out what these educational institutions do and whether or not the possibility for radicalisation and extremism exists. It concludes with an argument for democratic citizenship education to be taught in the madrassahs.

Keywords:

Introduction
Since 9/11 some government’s attention, particularly the USA and Australia have focused on the madrassahs (schools attended by Muslims)¹ because these educational institutions are considered by them as the possible seedbeds of terrorism. The UK government, however, takes the view that madrassahs are not proactive enough in inculcating in learners the values that would promote integration and participation in issues of belonging and citizenship but does not see a direct link with terrorism. Moreover, there are strong perceptions that the madrassahs are the places where Islamic fundamentalists are taught a type of radical Islam which is in opposition to the West.

In South African context a community-based movement comprised mostly of Muslims emerged in the late-1990s to oppose drug lords and gangsters, whom they claim to be responsible for the escalating levels of drug trafficking and drug abuse in some communities.² They became known as the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), which subsequently marched in protest on to the houses of suspected drug lords to demonstrate their anger and dissatisfaction.³ Thus it happened that a known drug dealer was publicly lynched by alleged PAGAD members and subsequently the members were incarcerated because of public violence. Critics of PAGAD soon made links between the violent actions of suspected PAGAD members, their Muslim backgrounds and the madrassahs where they were taught. The main criticism levelled against PAGAD was that it violated the rule of law and that it had no regard for human life. Because of this specific incident, somewhat expectedly, Muslims in South Africa were stigmatised by some members of the police as violent and as people who would do anything to disrupt democratic rule in the country. And,

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considering that men covered in balaclavas wearing thaulgs (traditional Muslim wear for purposes of covering the body from neck to ankle) and women wearing mostly hijab (headscarves) became associated with PAGAD, and the children who attended madrassahs had similar modes of attire, these madrassahs were immediately suspected of breeding perpetrators of violent action – people who disregard the rule of law in a fledgling democracy like South Africa.

Of course, I do not condone the actions of PAGAD or of any person intent on inciting and perpetrating acts of violence in local communities. But I find it somewhat surprising that madrassahs in the Western Cape can be associated with violent actions and other hostilities which could disrupt democratic rule in the country. And, having taught in a madrassah for many years myself, I became even more concerned when some madrassahs were now suddenly placed under police surveillance – as if the intention is to catch the perpetrators of potential terrorist acts in places which I found to be quite passive in relation to societal-political developments in the country. For me, these madrassahs were always places where young children and adolescents acquired their basic knowledge of the Islamic faith without contriving to cause havoc in the communities. Hence, I decided to rekindle my interest in madrassah schooling, in particular finding out how these educational institutions potentially contribute (or not) to democratic citizenship and whether these institutions in South Africa can be held responsible for inculcating in young minds extremist ideas which can potentially result in violent action – more specifically whether these institutions actually breed terrorists.4

This essay is an attempt to analyse critically the pedagogical activities in some madrassahs in the Western Cape province of South Africa and to ascertain whether, on the one hand, madrassah schooling has the potential to cultivate democratic citizenship, and on the other hand, if it can be held responsible for religious extremism and violence.

**Madrassah schooling: towards a minimalist view of democratic citizenship**

To begin with, Islamic education is taught in several institutions: the maktab or elementary school which caters for learners between 7 and 10 focusing on Arabic grammar, stories of the prophets, the Quran, articles of faith, reading, writing and poetry; the madrassahs or masjid colleges which cater mostly for 11–16 year olds; and the jami or university (Makdisi 1981, 9–11). In this article, madrassah learners include both learners who attend the maktabs and masjid colleges – more specifically schools attached to both private homes and public mosques, although there are currently several Muslim private schools such as Islaamia College and Darul Islam in the country which are not attached to either private homes or public mosques.

My contention is, firstly, that if madrassahs cultivate aspects of democratic citizenship in learners, then it seems very unlikely that these institutions can be held responsible for inculcating in them (learners) the potential for violent action; and secondly, if learners were to be taught through rote learning, then that learning could potentially result in unreflective belief and commitment which might in turn lead to extremist attitudes and behaviour. This brings me to a discussion of some of the empirical findings of a project.

This project, involving two field workers, set out to ascertain through semi-structured interviews whether private madrassahs (home-based and mosque-based) in two major districts in the Western Cape province of South Africa (Grassy Park and
Lotus River; and Strand, Maccassar, Stellenbosch and Wellington) implement aspects of democratic citizenship education. We focused mainly on 20 educators responsible for the teaching of Grades 2–10 learners between the ages of 8 and 16. These madrasahs function mostly after public school hours from 16:00 to 18:00 from Mondays to Thursdays (public schools run between 8:00 and 15:00 from Mondays to Fridays). The parents of these learners vary between working- and middle-class families with some upper-class parents sending their children to madrasahs in these areas as well. Some of the educators interviewed (roughly 40%) occupy full-time teaching posts at local public schools and consider a madrasah position as a way to supplement a low income. These educators are mostly in possession of a college diploma, with some of them having done Arabic and Islamic Studies at first-year university level. Some educators either have a local Islamic Studies qualification (mostly incomplete) or no formal training in madrasah schooling – the latter educators mostly rely on a limited knowledge of Qur’anic reading and some exposure to Islamic Studies through the attendance of lectures. Usually the local imām or shaykh, who is often a product of a local Muslim seminary or college, or has studied for a Bachelors abroad, serves as an educator. The majority of the Muslims in the Western Cape either follow the Shafi‘i (with its stronghold at Al-Azhar in Egypt) or Hanafi jurisprudential schools of Islamic thought (with its stronghold in Deoband, India). Despite the intellectual excellence associated with Al-Azhar for many years, there were ‘lapses’ in Islamic education, such as pockets of conformity which exists at Al-Azhar. According to Wan Daud (1989, 14), ‘there have been some important deviations from the teaching of the Quran and Sunnah … caused by the lack of comprehensive and systematic articulation of the Islamic worldview … [since] the political controversies that almost destroyed the Islamic community barely half a century after the death of the Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)’. It is precisely this incoherent articulation (i.e. a distorted view of Islamic education) of the Quran and Sunnah on the part of some teachers which has given rise to pockets of rigidity in Islamic education practices and institutions such as Al-Azhar. In the words of Wan Daud (1989, 15), ‘many classical Muslim thinkers such as those of the Mutazilites, the Mutakallimun (theologians), the philosophers and the traditionalists [like some of the Azhari teachers] have missed the purpose of the Quran …’. Similarly, these conformist trends in Islamic education were also associated with the Darul ‘Ulim Deoband seminary founded in 1866 in India. Despite Deoband’s early intellectual advances since its inception, it later advocated isolation, inflexibility to change and trust in a single interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah (Metcalf 1982, 149). This claim about Deoband’s preference to remain isolated is corroborated by Sophie Gilliat-Ray’s (2005, 7) unsuccessful attempt to do research in four Deobandi seminaries in the UK. These rigid trends in Islamic education influenced many madrasah teachers in South Africa as is evident from some of the conformist practices which impacted madrasah education (Waghid 1994, 17–9).

The conceptual framework used for this case study draws on a liberal conception of democratic citizenship education, which takes into account the following actions: firstly, learners are taught to respect the life-worlds of others, which involves demonstrating a judicious tolerance of ways of living that are perhaps deeply threatening to one’s own. In turn, learners are taught to find a civil space for the sharing of commonalities and disagreements; secondly, learners are afforded opportunities to engage in public deliberation. They are taught about their rights to various speech acts, to initiate new topics and to ask for justification of the presuppositions of the conversation
Public deliberation takes place when learners can speak their minds (to the point when injustice to others begins) and no one has the right to silence dissent (Callan 1997, 215); thirdly, learners are taught about their rights to protection of life, liberty and property, the right to freedom of conscience and certain associational rights (Benhabib 2002, 163-64). Learners are taught that to enjoy these rights they should accept appropriate responsibility for the rights of others, and not just make a fuss about their own rights (Callan 1997, 73).

The question arises: Is democratic citizenship education necessarily at variance with a normative conception of Islamic education? A normative conception of Islamic education is inextricably linked to the achievement of justice (Al-Attas 1991, 36-7). The first act of justice involves the notion of *ijtihād* (rationality). A liberal form of *ijtihād* occurs when the possibility exists for learners to begin to question, debate, undermine – all those critical qualities necessary to articulate and practise a form of Islam which not only aspires for change through the application of the rational mind, but also cultivates respect for persons through deliberative engagement (*shūrā*). What follows from this is that a philosophy of Islamic education whose aim is to achieve justice through *ijtihād* cannot be considered as incommensurate with an important feature of democratic citizenship education, that is, public deliberation. A second act of justice involves the practice of *ikhtilaf* (diversity, pluralism, disagreement), considered as an offshoot of *ijtihād*, that is, a way through which justice can be achieved (Alibasic 1999, 258). Some Muslims perceive *ikhtilaf* as a necessary evil and feel uneasy about it, while others consider it as a source of flexibility and resourcefulness in the *Shari‘ah* (Islamic law) (Al-‘Alwani 1994, 11-9). Now considering that both the Qur‘ān and Sunnah (the primary sources of madrassah schooling) call for the unity of the Muslim community, it can be claimed that interdependence and consensus are highly prized in Islamic practices – an idea which has some connection with reaching a shared compromise (Callan 1997) and finding shared commonalities (Benhabib 2002). In this way a philosophy of Islamic education has the potential to cultivate a collective community – an idea constitutive of democratic citizenship education. But this collective community – what Muslims would refer to as *ummah* – can be attained by giving consideration to *ikhtilaf* (disagreement). In other words, in a collective community there also exists disagreement or the recognition that there are not always commonalities amongst people that can be shared, but that the different ‘life-worlds’ of people should be respected under the pretext of recognition of difference or pluralism. In this way, *ikhtilaf* as a just Islamic educational activity has the potential to engender democratic citizenship and, more specifically, a collective community of interdependence and disagreement.

The third act of justice is embedded in the Qur‘ānic dictum *la ikraha fi-al-din* (non-coercion), which implies that learners have the right to question, as well as the right to freedom of religion, conscience and expression as corroborated by Qur‘ānic injunctions: ‘You are not one to compel them by force’ (*Surah Qaf*, 50:45); ‘Will you then compel humankind against their will, to believe’ (*Surah Yunus*, 10:99); and ‘Revile not you those whom they call upon besides Allah, unless they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance’ (*Surah al-An‘am*, 6:108). Not only do these verses point out the importance of recognising the rights of learners to make their own choices, but also educators’ responsibility to ensure that others enjoy their rights (whether social, political and civil) which might be different to ours. Of course, the only condition seems to be that people do not commit an injustice against others, for instance, disparaging the God of others or perhaps their Prophets. In other words, our
responsibility to ensure the rights of others, say, to freedom of speech, ends as soon as injustice to others begins. This means freedom of expression should not become what Gutmann (2003, 200) calls ‘an unconstrained licence to discriminate’ – only if one avoids that does one act responsibly, that is, ‘within the limits of doing no injustice to others’ (Gutmann 2003, 200). The point I am making is that such unconstrained and irresponsible actions are in fact unjust and do not offer any possibility for cultivating democratic citizenship.

With the above understanding of democratic citizenship education in mind, and its links to a normative conception of Islamic education, three primary interview questions were asked: first, what constitutes madrassah schooling? Second, are learners taught to deliberate? Third, do learners learn to respect others and to take responsibility for the rights of others?

At the outset, a preliminary analysis of the interviewing transcripts suggests that madrassah educators do not consider it their function to prepare learners as democratic citizens. In fact, most madrassah educators consider it their duty to inculcate habits in learners associated with ‘goodness’ which would enable them to gain the pleasure of Allah (God) in this world and the afterlife. Aspects of ‘goodness’ referred to here include, kindness to parents, compassion for the poor and destitute, and to do justice to humanity – universal moral values which are not alien to other religions such as Christianity, Judaism. As one educator remarks: ‘My purpose is to teach the Islamic religion and not democratic action’. What surprises me is the fact that many of the qualified educators who work full-time in public schools clearly refrain from invoking discussions about democracy and citizenship in relation to madrassah schooling, bearing in mind that these educators are exposed to democratic policy initiatives in their professional lives of being educators in South African public schools. This suggests that what is experienced ‘elsewhere’ (in the ‘secular’ public school) cannot be transferred to an Islamic environment such as madrassah schooling because ‘politics and madrassah schooling should be separated’. This is despite the fact that the histories of Muslim luminaries such as Tuan Guru and Shaykh Yusuf of Macassar, who championed the cause of Islam at the Cape during a period of colonisation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are taught in most madrassahs, it seems as if educators unjustifiably want to separate Islam and politics.

In the main, it seems as if madrassah schooling is primarily concerned with inculcating in learners the tenets of Islam such as cleanliness, prayer (salāḥ), fasting and pilgrimage – that is, teaching learners to be good ‘practical’ Muslims – those who enact the various tenets. By far the majority of educators emphasise the importance of teaching the Qurān, specifically its memorisation in rote fashion, and the learning of invocations/supplications (duāh) and ahādīth in order for Muslims to acquire a heightened sense of piety or God-consciousness (taqwāh). Although some educators indicate that madrassah schooling is in some ways linked to contemporary societal issues such as teaching learners to respect life, others’ property and the rule of law, by far the majority of educators did not conceive of madrassah schooling as having anything to do with what learners learn in public schools, for instance, biological, physical and technological, economic and management sciences. In this way there seems to be a bifurcation between madrassah schooling (as education in the religious sciences) and public education (as education in the rational, non-revealed sciences) to the extent that some madrassah educators claim that only the former type of education would secure a Muslim’s place in paradise in the afterlife – an untenable view which assumes that, for instance, learning ‘respect for life’ has nothing to do with learning about the
biological natures of humans and animals. However, given the fact that madrassah schooling aims to inculcate in learners respect for life, others’ property and the rule of law, it can be argued that it has the potential to contribute towards engendering a minimalist view of democratic citizenship education, because the latter is concerned with learning, for instance, to respect others and to abide by the rule of law. This is so despite the fact that most educators claim that their teaching has no links with democracy and citizenship. However, whether madrassah schooling in its current form actually cultivates in learners the capacity to assume responsibility for ensuring the rights of others seems unlikely at this stage, because some educators claim that education in their schools ‘has been isolated from world affairs’. This suggests that learning to share commonalities and to respect the differences of others might not be so easy, because madrassah schooling seems to be quite an insulated activity.

Moreover, some educators claim that occasionally they do engage learners through discussion, open debate and questioning, as two educators at different madrassahs remarked: ‘We don’t want the children just to sit and take in what we tell them’ and ‘We don’t just dictate’. This suggests that madrassah schooling has some affinity for dialogical action: ‘In introducing new topics learners are allowed the opportunity to engage in conversation or dialogue’. Yet, by far the majority of educators acknowledge that little or no opportunity is established whereby learners can question particular viewpoints. As aptly put by one educator: ‘We do not encourage learners to think critically or participate (actively) in the lesson due to time constraints and large classes’ and ‘No time is given for children to engage with a specific topic’. Thus, in the main, dialogical action is not necessarily implemented in madrassah schooling, although some educators claim to do so. One gets the impression that the preponderance of rote learning somehow makes it difficult to use dialogue as a mode of educating learners. For instance, one educator remarks: ‘We do allow for interaction and opportunities of dialogue which is necessary for the older students. They come with all sorts of questions … mainly challenging issues of their daily lives … the teachers then have to stop with whatever they are busy with to accommodate these questions and try to answer them to the best of their ability’. It seems as if dialogical learning is treated as an *ad hoc* activity and does not seem to be integrated into the teaching process. Also, dialogue is considered as questioning and answering, which rather sums up the limited perspective educators have of dialogical learning. By implication, madrassah learners are not necessarily taught to be critical, because the practice of public deliberation (*shūrā*), so highly regarded in normative Islamic education, seems to be somewhat neglected at madrassah schooling level.

Furthermore, most of the educators seem to be oblivious of issues related to democratic citizenship education, because learning about the latter requires that one engage dialogically with co-educators and learners. As some educators remarked: ‘Our curriculum is not linked to citizenship and democracy … we focus on the child becoming a good person’, and ‘The purpose of my teaching is not grounded in politics’ – as if learning to be a good person is unrelated to being a good citizen in a democratic post-apartheid South Africa. Educators in most of the schools consider their role to be teaching ‘the din (religion)’ and not to concentrate on democracy and citizenship. Thus, it seems as if madrassah schooling focuses on teaching a form of pristine Islam, which can remain ‘untainted by issues which involve secular education’ – that is, democratic citizenship education is not considered as Islamic education.

Hence, it seems as if madrassah schooling in South Africa seems to be overwhelmingly biased towards cultivating Islamic moral beliefs (mostly the essentials of the
Islamic faith such as belief in God, His angels, revealed books, prophets, eschatology, good and evil, prayers, fasting, charity, pilgrimage and selected historical moments in Islam – mostly involving the life of Prophet Muhammad – and values (particularly respect for others, greeting, supplications, sayings of the Prophet and reading and memorisation of the Qur’an) in learners – ‘Our purpose is to produce good Muslim persons’, although, in some instances, these beliefs and values are taught through discussion and questioning. Otherwise, rote learning seems to predominate in madrasah schooling. Therefore, it seems rather unlikely that madrassah schooling could engender deliberative engagement. Or, madrassah schooling seems unlikely to produce moments of public deliberation which could create doubts about the correctness of their moral beliefs or about the importance of differences between what Muslims and non-Muslims believe accompanied by ethical confrontation.

Although not a single madrassah educator mentioned the importance of teaching acts of justice such as *ijtihād* (rational interpretive judgements) and *ikhtilaf* (pluralism and disagreement), it does not necessarily mean that the idea of cultivating a collective identity with others who are not Muslim – whereby both parties can learn to share commonalities and to respect one another’s differences – will not necessarily materialise. It seems as if madrassahs do not teach a maximalist view of democratic citizenship because they neglect the cultivation of public deliberation, which would allow them (learners) to share commonalities and disagreements and to speak their minds without being silenced, as well as to assume responsibility for securing the rights of others. However, madrassahs do cultivate a minimalist view of madrassah schooling, whereby learners are taught to respect the life-worlds of others, the rule of law and the protection of others’ rights – that is, madrassah schooling does focus on teaching learners to be good Muslims, in particular what it means to respect human and non-human life. This is where the potential lies for madrassah schooling to begin to extend what it means to be a good Muslim to ideas which involve being a good citizen, in particular learning to recognise and take responsibility for people’s civil, political and social rights. Therefore, I am reluctant to claim that madrassahs do not teach democratic citizenship. Rather, the fact that madrassahs cultivate in learners respect for human and non-human life means that one can justifiably claim that these schools engender a minimalist view of democratic citizenship as against a maximalist view, which in addition to respect for others also foregrounds deliberation and assuming responsibility for the rights of others.

If respect towards others and their otherness is considered as important in the cultivation of democratic citizenship, madrassahs cannot be oblivious about their responsibility to educate learners about minimising and even eradicating exploitation, marginalisation and powerlessness. Iris Marion Young (1990, 59) claims that others and their otherness are invariably threatened by ‘cultural imperialism’ that universalises a dominant group’s experience and culture which in turn, stereotypes others and renders them as invisible. Madrassah education which fails to inculcate in learners qualities of non-exploitation, inclusion and connecting with the other would find it difficult to achieve ideals of democratic citizenship – a situation in turn which could make the move towards radicalisation and extremism possible.

**On the (im)possibility of violent action**

The question arises: if madrassahs are mainly concerned about ensuring a minimalist view of democratic citizenship, does it necessarily mean that violent action would be
perpetrated by Muslims schooled in the madrassas? If madrassah schooling teaches learners only to respect others and not public deliberation and taking responsibility for the rights of others, can such a minimalist view of democratic citizenship potentially lead to violent action? On the one hand, learning to respect others cannot result in violent action, because learning to respect others on the basis of being persons would rule out disrespect towards others’ ways of being. But learning to respect others’ ways of being which might even be deeply threatening to one’s own means that one has to find different ways of responding to people. If this happens, one can begin to experience what is other and different. Perhaps this can mean getting to engage with others so that one can experience them in order to learn what others consider as important for themselves. Now considering that deliberation is one way that people can experience one another’s commonalities and differences, it seems unlikely that people can respect others without engaging with them. The possibility exists that learning to respect others would be enhanced if one also learns to engage with others – to deliberate with them about their agreements and disagreements. In this way, the possibility of violent action would be stifled, because one would engage with others and hopefully learn to respect the differences of others. On the other hand, learning to respect others in the absence of deliberative engagement can also result in becoming willing to engage with others on the basis of respecting others for who they are. This means that public deliberation would not ensue if the respect and willingness to engage with others do not exist. In this way, learning to respect others can enhance the possibility of wanting to engage with others in order to listen what others have to say – a situation which could also in turn potentially minimise or prevent violent action.

The possibility of violent action is reduced as soon as respect for others is practised, because learning to have respect for others could make it possible to want to engage with others. In turn, learning to engage with others – and subsequently learning about others’ differences – could potentially extend the notion of respect for others. Hence, a minimalist view of democratic citizenship such as having respect for others could potentially lead to a maximalist view, when having respect for others could enhance the possibility of engaging deliberatively with others about their commonalities and differences. This situation in turn could further advance respect for others. So, if madrassahs are emphasising respect for others and human/non-human life, then the possibility for engagement would be enhanced and the likelihood of violent action counteracted.

Of course, my potential critic might legitimately claim that madrassahs over-emphasise rote learning, which could perpetuate doctrinaire thinking or alternatively promote a powerful and normative ‘we-consciousness’ that leads to an awareness of difference from others (Heller 1984). In extreme cases this could lead to a position where others are regarded as less human or morally unaware humans. More specifically, rote learning in the madrassahs could potentially lead to the uncritical acceptance of views which could contribute towards Muslims not listening attentively to the views of others, or even reflecting on their own views with which they have been indoctrinated. I agree. If madrassah learners are taught that Islam is the universal religion and that only Muslims can secure a passage to paradise, then it seems very unlikely that these views would be challenged. Such dogmatic views then might not necessarily lead to Muslims wanting to listen to the views of others, and even if they do, they might reject such views outright – a situation which could in turn potentially spawn disagreement. Although such a criticism could be valid, this does not necessarily mean that disagreement would lead to conflict and even violent action. I have not
encountered madrassah learners who might be directly linked to forms of radicalisation or extremism. For instance, the lynching of a drug dealer as well as the bombing of the Planet Hollywood restaurant on the Waterfront in Cape Town in 2002 has not been found to be linked to madrassah learners. So, the question that needs to be asked is not whether radical activities can be associated with madrassahs, but rather whether the possibility exists that madrassahs produce people who can potentially become radicalised.

Rote learning and the (im)possibility of extremism
The question remains: if madrassahs encourage learning by rote, would religious extremism necessarily be enhanced by this, particularly resulting in terrorism? Firstly, rote learning can potentially lead to a dogmatic understanding of Islamic discourse on the grounds that educators could socialise learners into a literalist understanding of Islam – that is, an understanding of Islam which narrowly advocates an understanding of the primary sources (Qur’an and Sunnah) within the context of its revelation. Simply put, understanding the sources as they were practised in the early years of Islam could exclude more flexible understandings in relation to contemporary societal developments. For instance, dogmatism means that explanations are offered which seem clearly out of step with societal changes – such as when extreme punitive measures are taken against fornicators, or when inheritance laws are implemented which are clearly prejudiced against women. A rejection of such dogmatic views about Islam could potentially radicalise people to ‘defend’ their religion in the light of what might be referred to as ‘moderate’ views. What I think could intensify such potential radicalisation amongst Muslims is repressing such views and not engaging with them in order to come up with more tenable views. For many years the South African apartheid state repressed politicised views of Islamic discourse, which often resulted in many Muslims who might have endorsed such views about their religion being silenced. It could be that, as a consequence, many of these Muslims might have become more politicised in their understanding of Islam. Here I specifically refer to the Qiblah Movement, which during the apartheid years became a vociferous voice amongst Muslims against the injustices of apartheid rule to the extent that violent action against the apartheid regime on the part of Qiblah ensued.

Secondly, rote learning in the madrassahs could also lead to what Ramadan (2007) refers to as ‘political naivety’. This, he argues, happens as a result of a ‘very strict’ interpretation of what is permitted (halāl) and forbidden (harām) in Islam, which potentially leads to Muslims being willing to be used as political pawns (Ramadan 2007). Quite parochially, some Muslims could be taught that it is permitted to perform jihād against an external visible enemy because they are defending their faith. These Muslims could then proceed to act as ‘suicide bombers’, who could even go as far as taking the lives of innocent bystanders. The point is that to be politically naivé is to act blindly – that is, without rationally justifying one’s actions. In other words, one acts without necessary offering reasons which others might find persuasive or not. For instance, when women are prevented from working because of possibly intermingling with men in public spaces, this is a matter of political naivety on the grounds that such actions are prejudiced against women. Such politically naïve views could also contribute towards radicalisation, because the naivety breeds insulation and a failure to see the point of the other.
Of course, one can argue that doctrinaire thinking and political naivety alone do not potentially contribute towards Muslim radicalisation and extremism. For instance, there is a view that the support of several political dictatorships in some Middle Eastern countries on the part of the USA and UK, and which in turn seems to undermine resistance movements in these countries, also contributes to the rise of radicalisation and extremism (Ramadan 2007). Consequently, Ramadan (2007) argues for a ‘duty of shared responsibility’ whereby those who seemingly support dictatorships should also be held accountable for the rise of radicalisation and extremism – a claim with which I agree. This brings me to a discussion on what madrassahs in particular ought to teach in order to minimise the possibility of radicalisation and extremism.

Towards the cultivation of democratic citizenship in the madrassahs

Firstly, madrassah educators should constantly inculcate in learners the important virtues of democratic citizenship in order to prevent the possibility of injustices against human beings. The possibility that inhumane and unjust acts against human beings can be reduced is highly likely, if learners are educated to be democratic citizens. What does this entail? Important virtues of democratic citizenship include, firstly, the capacity to deliberate as free and equal citizens in a democratic polity, and secondly, conducting such deliberations so that they are about the demands of justice for all individuals (Gutmann 1996, 68–9). If we deliberate as free and equal citizens, then we first of all give an account of what we do to others, who might find our reasons justifiable or not. In turn, we consider the reasons of others equally, which can lead either to our accepting or rejecting their reasons, or their understanding of our reasons or justifications. Such justifications and concomitant actions happen in an atmosphere of free and open expression and are hindered when our reasons embody injustice towards others. Hence, educating madrassah learners to be democratic citizens involves inculcating in them a spirit of openness and respect for the justifications of others, a recognition that others should be listened to, and that injustices should not be done to others under the guise of equal and free expression.

Secondly, if democratic citizenship demands that people deliberate about the demands of justice for all individuals then, as aptly put by Gutmann (1996, 69), ‘doing what is right cannot be reduced to loyalty to, or identification with, any existing group of human beings’. Madrassahs should teach learners, on the one hand, about their duties as citizens to advance justice and not to limit performance of these duties to some individuals or groups, and on the other hand, about their responsibilities as citizens to support institutional ways of moving towards better societies and a better world (Gutmann 1996, 71). Like Callan (1999, 198), I contend that students should be taught ‘to see their neighborhoods and the international community as arenas of civic participation’. Of course some madrassahs are structurally organised in grades with learners of different ages often being grouped together. On the one hand, in the lower grades which cater for learners between the ages of 5 and 10, madrassah education can introduce aspects of democratic citizenship which relate to questioning. On the other hand, learners in the senior grades which accommodate those between the ages of 11–16, should be sensitised towards debate and deliberation – all aspects related to learning what it means to engage with people.

In essence, educating for democratic citizenship does not only involve cultivating in people a sense of deliberating together freely and equally about their common and
collective destiny, but also about achieving justice for all. Deliberating about the demands of justice is a central virtue of democratic citizenship, because it is primarily (not exclusively) through our empowerment of democratic citizens that we can further the cause of justice around the world.

Notes
1. Although ‘madrassah’ is an Arabic word which literally means school and of which the plural is ‘madāris’, for purposes of this essay I shall use the English plural ‘madrassahs’.
2. Out of a population of approximately 45 million, at least 2 million are Muslim, of whom 60% live in the Western Cape province of South Africa.
3. Many Muslim families have become victims of drug abuse and PAGAD saw it their duty to obliterate the drug and gang lords.
4. In 2002 Planet Hollywood on the Waterfront in Cape Town was bombed and fingers were directed at PAGAD, although no evidence has emerged thus far that PAGAD is actually responsible for such a heinous crime. More and more claims are beginning to surface that a drug-related ‘third force’ perpetrated the bombings in order to frame PAGAD, which has emerged as a thorn in the flesh for drug-related activities (this last bit is a bit ambiguous – the use of the idiom ‘thorn in the flesh’ could imply that ‘drug-related activities’ need some kind of protection).
5. The two fieldworkers conducted 20 40-minute interviews with educators through the medium of English. These interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Educators’ ages varied between 24 and 58. These interviews constitute part of a larger project involving 40 madrassah educators in the Western Cape province of South Africa.
6. Many of the shayks studied in the Middle East (mostly Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait and Egypt), maulūnas in India and Pakistan, and muftis (in Iran). The imāms are usually locally produced.
7. Four major schools of Islamic jurisprudence developed during the early centuries of Islam, noticeably after the demise of Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). These schools were led by four jurists, namely M. Alik b. Anas (AD d.795), Abu Hanifā (AD d.767), Muhammad Idris al-Shafi’i (AD d.820) and Achmad b.Hanbal (AD d.855). They exercised personal judgements about Islamic law (Shari’ah) in the context of the Quran and the Sunnah (as the Prophetic commentary of the Quran).
9. The madrassahs mostly function as complementary to the public school education system and are held after the completion of a normal school day. These madrassahs are mostly home-based and mosque-based schools in which the majority of the educators do not have any formal qualification (although some are professionally trained as educators).
10. For instance, one educator claimed: ‘The purpose of my teaching is not grounded in politics … I concentrate more on values and morals of Islam and how to shape or educate Muslims’.
11. Usually madrassah schooling lasts for about 1–2 hours in the late afternoon, that is, after learners have been dismissed from public schools.
12. It seems as if some educators understand the need for dialogical learning yet do not adequately implement such practices.
13. The memorisation of the Qur’ān (in its entirety or passages) is considered as the most important aspect of madrassah schooling. This does not necessarily occur with an understanding of the messages of the Qur’ān.
14. The use of jihād cannot merely be linked to fighting an external enemy, but more significantly and linguistically to striving or intellectual exertion.

Notes on contributor
References


