

Muslim women's identities in South Africa: A Zanzibari perspective in KwaZulu-Natal

Goolam Vahed

Department of History, Howard College

University of KwaZulu-Natal

vahedg@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

This article examines how Zanzibari women in KwaZulu-Natal are negotiating their identities within the context of local and global realities. In South Africa, while the post-apartheid period gave birth to non-racial democracy, South Africa is haunted by high unemployment, widespread poverty and poor service delivery. Globally, this period has witnessed increased conflict since the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and the subsequent War on Terror which has led some to suggest that the irreconcilable fault lines of religion and culture have ushered in a clash of civilisations. This article examines the identities of Zanzibari women in the context of these rapidly changing local, national and international conditions. It also speaks to the local context of apartheid race engineering as the Zanzibari experience underscores the contingent nature of race as a category of identity. The article argues that while religion is important in the lives of the women, their identities are shaped by the complex interplay between religion, politics, class, race, language, community, and geography. An analysis based solely on religious laws and “race” deflects from a nuanced one that takes into account social and economic conditions when it comes to historicising identity

Keywords: Zanzibari; Muslim; Women; Gender; Apartheid; Race.

Introduction

This study focuses on how Zanzibari women are negotiating race and womanhood in present-day KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.¹ It examines how

¹ Under apartheid, the term “African” referred to the indigenous population, also classified as “Native” or “Bantu”; “Black” was a political designation coined from the late 1960s to refer to those who were not white (Indians, Africans, Coloureds); “Indian” referred to people of Asian descent; and “Coloured” to people of “mixed race”. While these categories are social creations rather than biological facts, they continue to have purchase in the post-apartheid era where the government requires individuals to categorise themselves according to “race”: white, Black African, Asian / Indian; and Coloured. The government’s rationale for retaining these categories is that that they will assist in implementing affirmative action to achieve an equitable society.

they negotiated apartheid laws and classifications, Group Areas relocations, anti-apartheid struggles and negotiating educational opportunities, post-apartheid socio-economic-political changes and dynamic ideas about religious modernity/traditionalism in the post-Cold War era.

The article is based on open-ended interviews with three women.² This approach is adopted to give voice to the self-knowledge of the women, as they reflect on their own lives, circumstances, changing subjectivities, and paths to a civic identity and political participation. While life stories are subjective, they can offer a deeper perspective. As Portelli reminds us, “history has no content without their stories”.³ Ojermark points out that “feminist scholars employ the method primarily to uncover the diversity of women’s experiences and to project women’s voices into areas where they have previously been ignored”.⁴ Oral history can be a valuable research tool to expand and even transform our knowledge of various marginalised groups, including women. Personal histories are useful in revealing the diversity of lived experience and the way that women “weave beliefs, choices and practices; the changes they initiate, the opportunities they perceive; and the barriers they encounter”.⁵ The “thick” descriptions of the social world that life history yields, make it possible to “both understand the subjective experience of social change, and bring it to

2 These interviews were conducted by Goolam Vahed as part of a project on Chatsworth, funded by the South Africa-Netherlands Research Partnership, 2011-2013. The interviews took place as follows: Joyce, 7 December 2011 and 21 February 2012; Mariam 3 February 2012; Halima 27 February 2012.

3 L Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, Routledge, 2010), p. 53.

4 A Ojermark, “Presenting Life Histories: A literature review and annotated bibliography”, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC Working Paper 101, 2007 (available at: http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/WP101_Ojermark.pdf, as accessed on 10 December 2011), p. 8. As with most research methodologies, a life history approach carries certain risks and has some shortcomings, such as context specificity, insider (emic) perspectives, and power relations. A Wicks and G Whiteford, “Conceptual and practical issues in qualitative research: Reflections on a life-history study”, *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 13(2), 2006, pp. 94-100. While critics believe that life history is individualistic and focuses on respondents’ narration of their lives in ways that capture personal experiences at the expense of all else, advocates of this approach adopt it precisely because it prioritises the perspective of tellers and helps to restore their agency. Rather than being passive objects of research, subjects “actively engaged in the process of interpreting and evaluating their lives”. J Herbert and R Rodger, “Society narratives of South Asian Muslim women in Leicester 1964-2004”, *Oral History*, 36(2), 2008, pp. 54-63, p. 62. Another concern about the life history approach is that respondents’ stories do not take place in a social vacuum. They are relational and shaped by the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, which is specific to a particular time and place. The narration may be influenced by the power of the interviewer or interviewee and a conscious desire on the part of the respondent to present a particular perspective of her/himself, while the kinds of questions pursued by the interviewer may also shape responses. A Ojermark, “Presenting Life Histories...”, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC Working Paper 101, 2007, p. 8. Abrams, “There is no natural and unchanging life story: It is created and recreated through the telling” (Abrams, *Oral History*), p. 53.

5 A Narayan and B Purkayastha, *Living our religions: Hindu and Muslim South Asian American women narrate their experiences*, Sterling (VA, Kumarian Press, 2009).

discussions of what is historically significant".⁶ A focus on these specific cases underscores some of the constraints on the everyday lives of women.⁷ While it is recognised that this sample is too small for broad generalisations about Zanzibaris, these stories are nevertheless valuable in providing insight into Muslim womanhood.

In South Africa, where apartheid and anti-apartheid narratives appear as the defining narratives of the political past, life histories can offer a more complicated view of social and historical change and broaden existing approaches to histories of South Africa.⁸ Central to the women's narratives is the concept of intersectionality, that is, that socially and culturally constructed axes of identity, such as gender, race, faith, and class crisscross at various levels in historically specific contexts.⁹ As Brah and Phoenix point out, "different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands".¹⁰ Knowing that a woman lives in a patriarchal society, for example, is inadequate to describe her life experience without taking cognizance of the historical context, such as her religious orientation, class position, ethnic or racial group, and language background.¹¹ The interviews focused on faith, domesticity, familial relationships, and changing patterns of employment, as well as things such as leisure and sport which together inform women's

-
- 6 M Sarkar, *Visible histories, disappearing women. Producing Muslim womanhood in late colonial Bengal* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2008), p. 2.
 - 7 NK Denzin and YS Lincoln, "Introduction. The discipline and practice of qualitative research", NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (London, Sage Publications, 2008), pp. 1-43.
 - 8 G Frank, "Anthropology and individual lives: The story of Life History and the History of the Life Story", *American Anthropologist*, 97(1), 1995, pp. 145-149.
 - 9 K Davis, "Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful", *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), 2008, pp. 67-85; L McCall, "The complexity of intersectionality", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 2005, pp. 1771-1800.
 - 10 A Brah and A Phoenix, "Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 2004, pp. 75-86.
 - 11 G Ritzer, *Contemporary sociological theory and its classical roots: The basics* (Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2007), p. 204. The work of hip hop singer, Anaya Alimah illustrates this. For example, her song "More than usual" explores the intersection of race, class, gender, music, industry politics, and her own faith: Simply complex, the best way to describe my demeanor / I'm all about my freedom, don't follow I'm a leader / That's why they tapping me tracking the books that I be reading / My double consciousness, multiplied exponential / To hold these facts I'm into, to be exact I'm into / Hill Collins, Tricia Rose, that's how my mental grows / ... While brothas shouting P Huey, G Marcus / I'm politicking, sifting through the thoughts of Fatima Mernissi, Listen / I mean no disrespect, them brothas spit some wisdom / But history erased, the sistas right there with them / Silenced with the devaluation of femininity / We don't revolve around you, my brothas can't u see / ... So while the people sleep, conspiracies I find / Its revolution time, better yet solution time / Too many just fall in line, capital control they minds. "My double consciousness, multiplied exponential" is Alimah arguing that her consciousness is intersectional. She factors in race, class, gender, and even faith. She writes that "issues of social justice such as the treatment of women, government surveillance, and the greed that often accompanies capitalism are necessarily spiritual challenges and are represented as such in my lyrics, which merge my concerns as a member of the hip-hop generation with my faith, A McMurray, "Hotep and Hip-Hop: Can black Muslim women be down with Hip-Hop?", *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 8(1), 2007, pp. 74-92.

identities.

The following questions form the backdrop to this study: How have / are the women adapting, changing, confronting, and negotiating their lives in response to changing economic, social and political circumstances, particularly since the end of apartheid? How do identities such as race, class, gender, religion and language intersect in the women's lives? What is the role of religion and culture at the local level and how does it connect to the larger polity and to national and international trends?

Local setting

Zanzibaris are a tiny proportion of the Muslim population of South Africa. Muslims constitute less than two per cent of South Africa's population of over 50 million and are heterogeneous in terms of race, class, ethnicity and religious practices. Historically, the largest sub-groups have been the descendants of Indian migrants who arrived in South Africa from the late nineteenth-century and are also the descendants of slaves who were imported to the Cape from the seventeenth-century. In the post-apartheid period, the Muslim population has been augmented by migrants and refugees from other parts of Africa as well as the Asian sub-continent.¹²

The women who are the subject of this study live in the township of Chatsworth which was established by the apartheid government 20 kilometres south of Durban (eThekweni) for Indians as part of its Group Areas relocations in the 1960s.¹³ They are part of a group that identifies itself, and is known by others as "Zanzibaris". Their origins in Natal date to the 1870s when close to 500 'liberated' slaves landed in the then Colony of Natal. After completing their terms of indenture they settled at King's Rest on the Bluff. The original liberated slaves were not from Zanzibar but were Makhwa from Northern Mozambique. Zanzibar was the port from which they were shipped to Natal.

12 S Jeppie and G Vahed, "Multiple communities: Muslims in post-apartheid South Africa", J Daniel, R Southall, and J Lutchman (eds.), *The state of the nation: South Africa 2003-2004* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2004), pp. 252-286 for a discussion of the origins and diversity of the Muslim population in South Africa. According to the 2001 census, Muslims numbered 654 064 out of the total population of 44.8 million. This included 296 023 Coloured / Malay Muslims and 274 931 Indian Muslims. Most observers believe that this a gross underestimate. The 2011 census did not take account of religion. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims have arrived in the post-apartheid period from places like Malawi, Somali, Nigeria, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, as well as North African countries and the figure is probably closer to 2 million.

13 G Vahed, "Segregation, group areas and the creation of Chatsworth", A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), pp. 19-30.

Over the years this group came to include Yao-speaking Malawians, and some Swahilis, as well as local Zulus with whom they intermarried.¹⁴

Racial segregation was central to the policy of the National Party (NP) government that came to power in South Africa in 1948 and a slew of laws were passed to separate South Africans of different race groups in every aspect of their lives.¹⁵ The government was determined to fix a “race” to each individual and Zanzibaris were classified as “Other Asiatics” because they were Muslim and placed in Bayview, a sector in the newly created Indian township of Chatsworth. Although initially there were some racial tensions, Zanzibaris eventually integrated with locals and formed an integral part of Chatsworth.

Many of the residents of Chatsworth, particularly the women, worked in the clothing and textile industries in nearby Clairwood, Jacobs and Mobeni. While factory wages were low, this employment at least allowed them to subsist. In the post-1994 period, shifts in economic policy have created new challenges for working class people. The 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic programme commodified basic services such as water and electricity and liberalised the trade regime. In Chatsworth, services and rents escalated during a period that coincided with huge job losses in the clothing, textile, footwear, and leather industries as a result of the government’s liberalisation policies. Additional hardships such as lower wages, and longer working hours occurred due to the casualization of labour. For women especially, maintaining the home and family was a daily struggle. All these factors contributed to increasing political disillusionment.¹⁶

14 For studies on the Zanzibari community, see P Kaarsholm, “Population movements, Islam and the interaction of Indian and African identity strategies in South Africa during and after apartheid”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 24/25, 2006/2007, pp. 37-63; ZB Seedat, *The Zanzibaris in Durban: A social anthropological study of the Muslim descendants of African freed slaves living in the Indian area of Chatsworth* (MA, University of Natal, 1973); G Vahed, “Zanzibaris”, A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), pp. 84-98.

15 P Maylam, *South Africa's racial past: The History and Historiography of racism, segregation and apartheid* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001), for a discussion of the history of race in South African history.

16 South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world, with a Gini coefficient (which measures income inequality) of 0.69. Due to high levels of poverty, social grant payments reached \$12 billion in 2014, with the number of beneficiaries increasing from 2.4 million in 1998 to 16 million in 2011. Major grants include child support (71 per cent), old age (18 per cent) and disability (7 per cent). The main beneficiaries are the poorest 40 per cent of the population. Without grants the Gini coefficient would have been 0.74. See H Bhorat and A Cassim, “South Africa’s welfare success story II: Poverty-reducing social grants”, *Brookings Institute*, 27 January 2014 (available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2014/01/27-south-africa-welfare-poverty-bhorat>, as accessed on 13 October 2014). For a discussion of the socio-economic conditions in Chatsworth in the post-apartheid period, see A Desai, *The poor of Chatsworth* (Durban, Institute for Black Research, 2000); S Mottiar, O Naidoo, and D Khumalo, “Women’s organisations and the struggle for water and sanitation services in Chatsworth and Inanda, Durban: The Westcliff Flats Residents Association and the Didiyela Women’s Group”, *Agenda*, 25(2), 2012, pp. 122-130; TH Ramjattan, “The relationship between the participants of social movements and movement intellectuals: A case study on the Westcliff Flats Residents’ Association (WFRA)” (MA, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008); G Vahed and A Desai, “The Flats of Bayview”, A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African Township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), pp. 171-184.

Respondents: Joyce, Halima, and Mariam

The women interviewed for this article identify themselves as Zanzibari even though in the case of each interviewee one of their parents was not Zanzibari. Joyce was born on the Bluff in 1956. Her father was a court interpreter and her mother was a Zulu woman who embraced Islam at the time of the marriage. Joyce's father died when she was very young and her mother raised the children. The family was forcibly relocated to Chatsworth when she was five or six years old. She recalled being "very excited ... they [government authorities] just load us into trucks and they brought us to these big houses. They were empty but the lights were there. We clicking [the light switch] off-on, toilet was there, flushing water, you know, it was like, 'America here I come'". Despite the novelty of their new surroundings, the family experienced severe poverty and Joyce recalled that her childhood years were "bad times, very bad times because there was no food, there wasn't a pair of shoes. In fact ... sometimes we used to hit the Indian children for their lunch because the Indian children used to carry lunch".

Halima was born in 1952 in Mayville, Durban, where her Tanzanian-born father, Sa'eed was an *Alim* (scholar) who led the prayer at the local mosque. Her mother, Khadijah was a Zanzibari from the Bluff. She said that she came from a background "where we were concerned about people". She described her mother, a homemaker, as "a very quiet person, but very intelligent, very giving, very loving, very caring. Although she was very homely, people came to her for advice and up till this very day people have good words ... My father was also very giving, very caring." They were a family of 11 children.

Mariam grew up in a family of nine children. She was born on the Bluff in 1960 but moved to Chatsworth as a young child. She described her father as "a very religious man. He's come from Malawi and married my mum. She is a Zanzibari". Her father was a "religious leader, a five-time *namaazi*, people came to him for assistance, he did a lot of *taaweez* for people who were ill. When he first came from Malawi he worked as a *muezzin*¹⁷ at the West Street mosque".

¹⁷ *Namaaz* refers to prayer, and *namaazi*, as used here, refers to one who prays the five daily prayers. A *taweez* is a "charm" consisting of a Qur'anic verse wrapped in black cloth which is worn by a person as protection from evil. *Muezzin* is a person at the mosque who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day.

Race and religion

When the Bluff was proclaimed for White residence in terms of the “Group Areas Act, it seemed that Zanzibaris, who were Africans in origin, would be classified as ‘African’ in terms of apartheid designations and relocated to an African township”. But Zanzibari identity has long been contested and while Christians among them were given homes in African townships, Muslim Zanzibaris did not consider themselves “African”.¹⁸ SQ Bourquin, manager of the Municipal Bantu Administration in Durban, was “absolutely convinced that these people are not Natives,” and could not be absorbed into “African housing schemes”. Zanzibaris applied to be classified as “Coloured” and 153 Zanzibari families were in fact re-classified as such in 1959. “Local Coloured leaders,” however, objected to this classification on the grounds that they (Coloureds) were “more or less of European descent and these people have never been associated with us.” The Juma Musjid Trust, the Indian Muslim benefactors who had built the Juma Musjid in Grey Street and who established the settlement on the Bluff,¹⁹ applied successfully to the government in 1961 to designate Zanzibaris as “Other Asiatics” purely on the basis of their being Muslim.²⁰

As Preben Kaarsholm, who has worked on the links between Africans in KwaZulu-Natal, Mozambique, and Zanzibar, points out, this designation meant that Zanzibaris “were at least citizens of a sort rather than mere subjects, and would be issued with identity cards instead of passes or reference books. They also now had access to housing opportunities made available to Indians under the Group Areas Act”.²¹ Although the architects of apartheid sought to create a totalising system of race, the Zanzibari experience illustrates the fluidity of race identities and in particular underscores the fact that race is a social construct.

Religion shaped Zanzibaris’ formative experiences under apartheid as it determined their “race”. Pointing to her multiple identity categories, Joyce

18 The Native Taxation and Development Act of 1925 imposed an annual two-rand poll tax on African male adults but Zanzibaris claimed that this did not apply to them as they were of “Arab” descent. South Africa’s highest court of appeal, the Appellate Division in Bloemfontein, ruled in a 1938 case that Zanzibaris were “Native within the definition of the legislation”. The governance of Zanzibaris was consequently shifted from the Protector of Indian Immigrants to the Department of Native Affairs and they had to carry a “dompas” or reference book. In Seedat, “The Zanzibaris”, pp. 37-45.

19 G Vahed, “Unhappily torn by dissensions and litigations: Durban’s ‘Memon’ Mosque, 1880-1930”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 36(1), 2006, pp. 23-49.

20 ZB Seedat, *The Zanzibaris in Durban...*, pp. 45-50.

21 P Kaarsholm, “Population movements, Islam and the interaction...”, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, p. 18.

said:

This [Bayview] is my community – but as a Zanzibari, I belong to the Zanzibari community. Many [people] do not know who the ‘Zanzibari’ are: ‘If I tell them I’m a Zanzi, people say what’s a Zanzi? I said, I’m a South African Black Muslim to make it easy. [But] some people say, “How can you be a Muslim because you haven’t got straight hair, you look like us?”’

That Islam is an Indian religion is a common perception in KwaZulu-Natal and stems from the fact that the first sizeable Muslim population was Indians who began arriving from 1860 as indentured migrants.²²

Other than religion, markers of difference between Zanzibaris and the local indigenous population included language, food, and dress. Occasionally, dress has created problems for Zanzibaris. Halima, for example, said that indigenous Africans in her community could not understand why she “dressed in foreign garb”. When she was growing up, most Zanzibari women wore long, loose-fitting clothing. Nowadays, some women who are influenced by Islamic reformist tendencies wear the *abayaat* and even the *niqab*,²³ while younger women and girls wear pants or skirts. The dress adopted by Zanzibari women sets them apart from the indigenous women. According to Halima this sometimes creates difficulties:

I couldn’t like walk around by myself because people used to harass me because of the way I dressed. They had a problem with me being black and following the Islamic teachings. They didn’t understand that I was born Muslim, my father came from Tanzania [where] the majority of people are Muslim and my mum’s people come from Nampula [Mozambique], ... They [local Zulu] believe that Islam’s for the Indians only.

Language is also a marker of difference between Zanzibaris and indigenous locals. According to Joyce, most Zanzibaris have a good command of English. This creates a problem with the indigenous people who expect them to speak fluent Zulu which is not their language. She pointed out that when Zanzibaris don’t converse in Zulu, they often get this reaction from Zulu speakers: “she can’t speak Zulu, she’s speaking English. And, you know, our English will be perfect but because we look like you [Zulu], you want us to communicate in Zulu, and you make it a problem for nothing”. Zanzibaris also speak the

22 G Vahed, “Uprooting, rerooting: Culture, religion and community amongst indentured Muslim migrants in colonial Natal, 1860-1911”, *South African Historical Journal*, 5, 2001, pp. 191-222.

23 An *abaya* is a long loose fitting, long-sleeved garment worn by women to conceal their shape. The *niqab* is the veil worn by some women to cover all of the face with the exception of their eyes.

Makhua language (of Northern Mozambique).²⁴ Ironically, when Halima moved from Mayville to Chatsworth, her Zanzibari friends and neighbours chided her for not knowing Makhua: “I was very pressurised because most of the people from Kings Rest spoke Makhua, the children spoke Makhua more than they spoke English. We spoke English at home. I felt pressurised and there was that to say, why are you speaking English as a child?”

Food is also a marker of identity. Joyce identifies herself as “Indian” through her culinary practices. She said that she could:²⁵

... never cook any other food besides Indian food. I learnt from my mother, I learnt from my family and we used to buy the Indian Delights... samoosas, everything, mastermind it. Everything. You talk about the breyani, the best masala breyani. When there's functions here, we cook pots and pots of breyani. Soji. Kheer (rice porridge).

Mariam identifies the same foods as coming:

... from our ancestors [Zanzibar]. As you very well know Zanzibar is one of the countries that's very rich in spices. Breyani is traditional for us on Eid Day and our samoosas and our special milk which is called mahaza. It's made with vermicelli, sago and elachee and then you sweeten that with condensed milk ... [Indian Muslims] have the exact same thing, I don't know how. I think it's because of the way the countries are situated so Zanzibar being on the east of Africa, maybe that was then moved to other countries where Indians as well inherited that type of ingredients or recipes. I'm not saying they stole it so maybe some kind of trading recipes.

In describing the breyani that they prepare (“layered”) Mariam highlights the link with Indian Muslims rather than Indians of South Indian descent that are mainly Tamil speaking.

[Our breyani] doesn't differ [from the Indian Muslim one] – the only thing I will say is that they make it very hot and ours is not hot but it's the same layered breyani, it's not the Tamil breyani you will get which is mixed. Ours with the pure masala breyani, nice and spicy with all the condiments in it and then the layered rice and boiled eggs in it, ya, with fried onion on the top - very lovely.

Although African, Zanzibaris were marked as different from the indigenous African population in various ways, and in the past were legally designated as

24 R Mesthrie, “Lessons in survival: The Zanzibari story”, *Bual*, 10(2), 1996, pp. 14-16.

25 The Indian Delights series was edited by Zuleikha Mayat and published by the Women's Cultural Group of Durban, South Africa. See G Vahed and T Waetjen, *Gender, modernity and Indian delights. The women's cultural group of South Africa* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2010).

being of a different “race”. The informants’ use of “us”, “they”, “we”, and “them” points to how racial and religious membership was and remains relevant to them. Race was not a simple matter of colour pigmentation. This remains the case in the post-apartheid era when, as discussed below, although they now categorise themselves as “Black African”, the Africanness of Zanzibaris is questioned because of their names, dress, language, and religion.

School: Race and gender

Zanzibari children attended neighbourhood schools where the majority of the learners were Indian. Joyce attended Protea Primary and Chatsworth High. Like Maryam and Halima, she spoke positively about school sport which formed an important part of their identity within the education system. Joyce has fond memories of Protea where sport was an avenue through which she gained self-worth. She represented Natal schools in athletics. Joyce dropped out of school before completing her matric, something that she regrets. As she put it, “it was a very big mistake” that she does not want her children and grandchildren to repeat. She has related her life story to them as a lesson: “that’s why my grandchildren ... can tell you my whole life story because I told them as is, because I don’t want your’ll to go down the same route”.

Mariam attended local schools, Summerfield Primary and Protea High, from where she matriculated in 1979. She, too, excelled in athletics. Her joy at her sporting achievement is tinged with sadness and loss:

I was very popular in terms of my athletic achievement. I was a 100m and 200m specialist. I went to Kimberley, I went to Paarl, I went to Johannesburg, competed, I got my SASA [South African Schools] colours. I had my green Natal blazer. I was also a high jumper, I was very good. School sport was very important. Even today, when I sit and watch [sports on television], I tear because I feel, if our country was then liberated, I could have went very far in sport. We couldn’t go to the Olympic Games. Had we been given the opportunity I could have got colours for this country.

Halima attended Ahmedia School in Mayville and Southlands High when the family moved to Chatsworth. Although she was the only black learner at Southlands, she “was welcomed, it was warm, I had lots of friends, the teachers were good”. She, too, excelled in sport and represented the Natal schools team in netball and athletics: “I was very good at high jump, sprinting, shot-putt and javelin, so I was like an all-rounder, I would say”. She enjoyed

travelling to other provinces in South Africa with the Natal High Schools team. She described the experience as “absolutely great, I think that exposure contributed to who I am today and also I had a lot of support from my parents”.

Although all three women came from relatively “religious” families, their families were fairly liberal in supporting their sporting endeavours, even though it meant breaking the Islamic dress code prescribed by the *ulama* as well as travelling away from home without the company of male family members.

Schooling in Chatsworth resulted in the women attending schools with children who were different from them in terms of race, language, religion and often class. As a “Zanzi”, as Joyce refers to herself, she grew up in an “Indian” area, attended an “Indian” school and mixed with children of various religious backgrounds, which contributed to her cosmopolitanism:²⁶

Growing up, I mixed with Indians too much. I used to go to their houses [and] they used to come to my house. And we used to be together like, when I went to mosque, some of them would follow me to mosque and when they used to go to the Tamil school, I used to go with them. When they had Diwali they will invite us.... When it was Eid I'll invite them.

The women would have attended school with fellow Zanzibaris had they remained on the Bluff. Growing up in Chatsworth resulted in them breaking racial and religious boundaries and forming bonds and friendships across racial and religious lines. This was unusual in apartheid South Africa where life was heavily circumscribed by race.

Race

While race did not create any special problems at school, it was (and remains) a problematic category for all three women from the time they left school. Mariam recalled that she and other Zanzibaris experienced problems during the apartheid era as prospective employers assumed they were Indian:

We carry so-called Indian names and surnames so when we went out to look for employment and you send your CV and they say, okay, fine, this is good, come in for an interview. When you go in then people say, “but we looking

²⁶ Joyce uses the word “Indian” in two ways, first to distinguish those of Indian ancestry from herself as “African” and, at times, to distinguish Indians of the Hindu faith from Muslims.

for Mariam” and I said, yes, I am [Mariam], and then they’ll take a second look and say, “oh, okay, come in,” and you’ll find maybe you’ll be not judged according to your qualifications then, you’ll be judged according to your looks because now, who are they looking for? Somebody with straight hair.

It appears that Indian Muslim employers identified the applicants’ race on the basis of their names, accent and command of English and were caught off guard when they discovered that the interviewees were African.

Race remains a prickly issue for Zanzibaris despite the deracialisation of South African society in the post-apartheid period. For example, Joyce maintained that life has not changed “so much for us, you know why? I’ll say that maybe it changed for the “Black” people [author’s emphasis]. And us, also classified as Indians, there’s not much changes for us.” Although Joyce is “Black African” in terms of official post-apartheid designations, she and other Zanzibaris feel that they are discriminated against because of their names. She points to her daughter, Rabia as an example:

If, say, Rabia will go and apply for a job. Now, because Rabia is an Indian [Muslim] name and they don’t know Rabia and then they have this thing like three Blacks, one Indian whatever [so] it doesn’t work for us. We have so many matriculants. They have done so well [but] they’re having that problem, they can’t get a job... So it changed for some people but for us, it hasn’t changed. Our children are not working, they’re sitting at home and that’s how you finding the children getting into drugs.

Joyce’s remarks about unemployment in the Zanzibari community are probably correct but unemployment is not confined to Zanzibaris. Unemployment is high in South Africa across the various racial groups and communities.²⁷ Her perception derives from what she believes is happening in her area, namely, that banks and major retail chain stores in Chatsworth are hiring African staff from outside the local community to meet affirmative action targets. This perception has not been objectively tested. Whether or not this is the case, Joyce’s views shows the extent to which race classification and race-based affirmative action policies ensure that race identities continue to shape the experiences and perceptions of the interviewees and many

²⁷ According to Statistics South Africa, the unemployment rate in South Africa averaged 25.27 per cent in the period from 2000 to June 2014. Youth unemployment (ages 15 to 34) stood at 36.1 per cent. High youth unemployment is a global trend. Contrary to what Joyce perceives, there were substantial shifts towards skilled work among the white and Indian/Asian populations. Among the white workforce, the proportion of skilled workers increased from 42 per cent in 1994 to 61 per cent in 2014; for Indians/Asians this proportion increased from 25 per cent to 51 per cent over the same period. There was minimal movement towards skilled employment among Black Africans (15 per cent to 18 per cent). Available at: http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=737&cid=1, as accessed on 9 October 2014.

other South Africans.²⁸ The interviewees' religious affiliation (Muslim) may have given them relative advantages in the apartheid period but is seen as a handicap at the present time because the government's attempts to achieve economic redress are increasingly focused on "Black Africans".

Work

Both Mariam and Halima achieved university entrance passes at school but could not pursue tertiary education for financial reasons. Class was instrumental in determining access to higher education and many young people in the local community were forced to enter the labour market, usually finding employment in the clothing and textile industries. All three women started their working lives in the clothing industry. Mariam secured a job at a clothing company after matriculating. She was determined to study further and when she had saved up sufficient money she completed a course in early childhood development. She worked at Summerfield Primary School for over a decade before becoming a trainer in Early Childhood Development. With the AIDS epidemic rampant in South Africa from the late 1990s, Mariam joined the NGO, Senasizo ("We Help" in isiZulu) in 2004. This is a project of the Catholic Archdiocese of Durban that provides training, support and care for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Mariam subsequently joined Hafsa Ally in opening an adult education training company, Malaika's Education and Resource Consultants, which has offices in Durban and Johannesburg. Mariam is the company's Programme Development Manager and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the programmes facilitated and managed by the company.

After matriculating, Halima ran a pre-school class at the local madressa for a few years before joining a clothing factory. In her words, she worked "so that I could acquire some money to get myself educated because my father was late (passed away) then and my mother had never worked in her life." She completed an instructor's course part-time and became a Quality Instructor (one who trains others to inspect the quality of the clothing) at a clothing

28 See, for example, A Dawes & G Finchilescu, "What's changed? The racial orientations of South African adolescents during rapid political change", *Childhood*, 9, 2002, pp. 147-165; N Singh-Pillay and SJ Collings, "Racism on a South African campus: A survey of students' experiences and attitudes. Social behavior and personality", 32, 2004, pp. 607-618; KA Whitehead, "Racial categories as resources and constraints in everyday interactions: Implications for racialism and non-racialism in post-apartheid South Africa", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(7), 2012, pp. 1248-1265.

factory. Halima then completed a “training the trainers” course and joined the Department of Labour where she taught sewing to women in rural areas. In 1990, she completed a diploma in Adult Basic Education at the distance learning University of South Africa (UNISA) and was employed by an NGO, Operation Upgrade to teach Adult Literacy at various companies. In 2001, she joined the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), working mainly with young girls, “instilling values and morals and giving them capacity-building skills.” She also ran a hostel for abandoned girls (mainly Black). A strong advocate of women’s empowerment, Halima saw this as her way of assisting young girls. She also completed a course in Montessori teaching and a B. Ed degree through UNISA part-time and has been a Montessori teacher since 2009. She currently runs a Montessori School at her home.

Joyce left school without matriculating, and worked in various clothing factories in nearby Clairwood. She was initially treated, in her words, as “just another unskilled worker” until, as she puts it, “this Indian guy saw – because as a Zanzibari I was classified as an Asian and, like I’m not trying to be a racist now, we were [considered] better than other Blacks because we were good in English.” She trained as a machinist and was eventually promoted to supervisor at the factory. Due in part to her marital problems, Joyce accepted a job in Maseru, Lesotho, in 1980 where she managed a restaurant for five years. She eventually became homesick and returned to Chatsworth. She was struggling to make a living and her daughter was taken care of by her cousin, a nurse, who, according to Joyce, was “a ‘hajji’²⁹ [who] played a very important role in my life”. This cousin helped her to turn her life around by reminding her of the role that her father had played in the religious life of the community. Joyce became much more focused through religion; she also remarried and has made her mark through her involvement in civic organisations in Bayview, Chatsworth. Joyce uses her sewing skills to earn a living.

Community engagement

This transformation in Joyce’s life coincided with the end of apartheid and worsening economic conditions, high levels of unemployment, drug abuse, child abuse and other socio-economic problems in the local community.³⁰

29 *Hajiani* refers to a woman who has been on pilgrimage to Makkah.

30 T Waetjen, “A private island: Gender and everyday struggle in political times”, pp. 99-111; T Waetjen and G Vahed, “Gender, citizenship and power: The Westcliff Flats Residents Association”, pp. 189-198; T Waetjen,

Joyce reacted by immersing herself in the affairs of the community and was voted Chatsworth Woman of the Year in 1993. Her most prized possession is a photograph taken with soon-to-be South African President, Nelson Mandela who visited the township prior to the 1994 elections. For almost a decade she was vice-chairperson of the Bayview Flats Residents Association (BFRA), which worked with other civic organisations in Chatsworth and surrounding townships from the late 1990s to resist the eviction of those who failed to pay rent and service delivery charges. From around 2002 she ran a Women's Empowerment Centre in Westcliffe, Chatsworth, which was the initiative of Fatima Meer, Professor of Sociology at the University of Natal, who wanted to impart sewing skills to women from Chatsworth as well as the nearby African township of Lamontville. Joyce was also the Community Liaising Officer (CLO) from 2006 to 2012 for a local municipal programme that upgraded housing in the area. This required her to deal with local residents and the municipality, as well as political parties.³¹

Halima and Mariam are also involved in various community initiatives, although to a lesser extent than Joyce as they have fulltime jobs. According to Halima, at one time she and Joyce “used to go to the supermarkets to get food to feed the people in the flats, practically, physically go and clean people's flats but now, because I haven't got the time, she's doing it on her own.” Halima mentors teenage girls (on weekends) whom she would like to guide to a professional career because “every year ... you would find that children get matriculated and they end up working for Pick 'n Pay [a supermarket chain] do nothing – where are they going, you know? [They] are quite intelligent, they can do much, but the guidance is not there.” She believes that factors such as difficult economic conditions, single parent homes, the lack of role models and a lack of opportunities are resulting in young women in particular not fulfilling their potential and she is working hard to rectify this.

“Bathola Ikhaya’: Two African women come to Chatsworth”, pp. 218-233, A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013) for the impact of poverty and unemployment at a local level in Chatsworth. At national level, Leibbrandt et al make the point that “the sharp increase in unemployment in the 1990s was driven by the rapid rise in the supply of less-skilled labour, accompanied by a failure of labour demand to keep pace. Skill-biased technical change exacerbated the problem”. While GDP has outpaced population growth, “this economic growth has not been equitably distributed throughout the population” with the result that “inequality has worsened”. See Murray Leibbrandt, I Woolard, H McEwen and C Koep, “Employment and inequality outcomes in South Africa”, Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) and School of Economics, University of Cape Town, 2009, Report for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/45282868.pdf>, as accessed on 10 September 2014).

31 G Vahed and A Desai, “The flats of Bayview”, A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African Township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), pp. 171-184.

All three women are also members of The Women's Association, which tries to bridge the gap between women in the Zanzibari community and the adjoining Kokoba informal settlements where many recent migrants from Africa live. According to Mariam, the first meeting in 2010 drew ten members, but attendance now averages around 50. They organised a Mother's Day function where:

... we entertained mothers and we had Haleema Giles who was responsible to get sponsorship in terms of getting materials for the old people so each lady that attended received a gift, we cooked a meal and served everybody. Then we had a Children's Day function and we started arts and crafts, and we've tackled lots of other issues from there.

Such links are tenuous but the women hope to build upon them to bridge the gap across religious lines as well as between locals and foreign migrants, so that they can address the problems common to them as women.

The post-apartheid period has presented many changes, some of which, such as non-racial democracy, are welcomed by the women while others, such as increased unemployment and threatened evictions, have created hardships for many members of the community. Joyce, Mariam, and Halima have reacted in different ways to the opportunities and challenges. Mariam is involved in skills training in a context where the government has prioritised such training, Halima is running a pre-school, and Joyce has been involved in various civic endeavours to confront the challenges facing members. While the women are active in the public sphere, they continue to place importance on their domestic duties.

Marriage and household

Mariam, Halima and Joyce married spouses of their choice. Joyce married a man from the local community and the marriage lasted almost a decade. When she returned from Lesotho, Joyce married her present husband, a panel beater by trade, who is originally from Maputo. She has a son from this marriage, who is now in his teens.

Mariam also married a man from the local community, and they have three children, a daughter who is a nurse, and two teenage sons. Married life was difficult for Mariam because of their dire economic circumstances: "There was no furniture, we didn't have a bed, we had to sleep on the floor until we saved up some money. In the kitchen there wasn't even a cupboard. I was the breadwinner of the family then and it was difficult growing two children at

that time". Mariam has been the breadwinner for most of her married life as her husband continues to struggle to find a permanent job. Mariam believes that the various challenges that she has faced over the years have empowered her and that she has grown as a person:

We've become very independent as women and therefore we are able to actually take the step and move out.... I think women have a lot of courage, we've come a long way because even we grew, we saw our parents were taken care of by their husbands so we all had this image of, you know, getting into a marriage where the husband will look after you, look after the kids. But, as you are in the marriage, you find that's not the case and then women tend to leave home and find employment... It's making women stronger that you are able to do things for yourself and for your family.

Halima married when she was 30. The marriage also lasted a decade and when it ended she took on the role of "mother and father" to her four children. Her youngest son had Down's Syndrome and passed away at the age of 11 as a result of hospital negligence. Halima describes her children as "the pride of my life". One of her sons is a lecturer in sports science, another is a chartered accountant, and the third is a karate instructor who competes in international competitions. Halima also adopted a daughter who runs a Montessori School. She remarried after her children left home.

The patterns of marriage and household of these three interviewees are similar to many other households in the community. Their experiences raise the old debate of cultural versus structural explanations of poverty. The institution of marriage is under threat from factors such as changing gender roles, greater female economic independence, and low-income or unemployed fathers unwilling or unable to play breadwinner roles, something to which Mariam alluded. While both Mariam and Haleema (but not Joyce)'s children have overcome the negative consequences of a single-parent family, in many other cases in the community children have not been as fortunate, with crime, gang membership, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy presenting as problems that the community is struggling with which to come to terms.³²

Islam

Islamic beliefs and practices are important to all three women. Here we must

³² See various chapters in A Desai and G Vahed (eds.), *Chatsworth. The making of a South African township* (Scottsville, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013).

concur with Political Scientist, Bruce Baum that it would be “a mistake to see religious and cultural norms, practices and identities as nothing more than expressions of oppressive power, discounting the meaning that these phenomena have for the agents who enact them”.³³ Islamic beliefs and practices have helped to shape the women’s identities, and are a means to maintain social bonds with fellow Zanzibaris and to identify with Muslims beyond the immediate community.

Joyce described some of the rituals practiced in her household:

In my house everybody does salah (prayer) but sometimes, you know the young boys, they duck, but we say, no matter what you do, you have to make a salah and, in my house, because I have learnt from my parents, every Thursday we have dhikr and burn lobaan (incense) and Friday it’s Jumuah. And then when it’s fasting month (Ramadaan), it’s compulsory for everybody to fast, from my [very young] grandson that’s going to fast at 9 o’clock, 11 o’clock he’s opening his fast, and then in the evening again he’s fasting, you see [laughs].

Mariam’s description of Ramadaan, the month of fasting, also points to the important of Islam as a marker of her identity.³⁴

You find this area very vibrant during the fasting month – people going to the mosque, the azaan going, traditional wear – guys with the kurthas, ladies with the abbayas – and Eid - I can’t explain. You have to be here to experience that. Like, you know when you see on TV, they showing Madinah, this is a mini-Madinah, we’ll call it. Eid morning it’s fantastic – people reading, going to the mosque, children dressed in their traditional garb...

Mariam was animated when she spoke of Islamic festivals and rituals which clearly brought joy to her life.

The Zanzibari experience is unique within Chatsworth as well as among Muslims in that the 199 families that were forcibly moved from the Bluff to the township were given contiguous homes. Thus, Mariam pointed out that, “you’ll find that within this area we all are Muslims, we are very close-knit community.” She regretted that second and third generation Zanzibaris are forced to move out of Bayview as the small homes cannot accommodate them. “We would love to be within the community because, there, we are just on our own and, like when you are here, you know the neighbour, you know the person that’s passing by, there’s a lot of camaraderie and you feel safe”. Zanzibaris who live in other areas send their children to Bayview, if possible,

³³ B Baum, “Feminist politics of recognition”, *Signs*, 29(4), 2004, pp. 1073-1102, p. 1077.

³⁴ Call to prayer.

to receive madrassah education to make them into what she described as “proper Zanzibaris.”

While most Indian Muslims are of the Hanafi madhab (School of Law), Zanzibaris follow the Shafi School of Law, as did their Makhuwa ancestors in northern Mozambique.³⁵ The Juma Masjid Chatsworth, known colloquially as the “Zanzibari” *Masjid*, was built in Bayview in 1967. “That” Indian Muslims built a mosque a short distance away is testimony to different practices and traditions between Shafi and Hanafi as well other differences between “Indian” and “African” Islam. For example, from earliest times, Zanzibari women have been allowed to pray in the mosque, although they do so separately from men. Women are rarely found in mosques run by Indian Muslims. Children continue to receive religious instruction in the afternoons from the madrassah teacher (called *Woshath*). Whereas in the past, teachers were male, madrassah teachers nowadays are all women. Girls attend the madrassah until puberty. The old Zanzibari practice of isolating girls in the home once they reach puberty is no longer strictly observed because of the need for them to acquire secular education.

According to Joyce, the *Ratieb* remains an important part of the Islam of Zanzibaris. This ceremony takes place on the occasion of the birth of the Prophet (in the Islamic month of Rabi-ul-Awwal) when worshippers reach a state of ecstasy by repeating the Prophet's name, beating drums, and reciting verses from the Qur'an. Some males engage in acts of self-flagellation by piercing their body parts with metal rods or swords. Another common practice is *Dhikr*, a form of communal worshipping by constantly repeating the name of God until worshippers reportedly experience divine reality. Such sessions are organised by both men and women. They involve devotees sitting around in a circle, and swaying their heads and bodies rhythmically while reciting fixed phrases. According to Joyce, *dhikr* has a therapeutic effect on worshippers, especially in times of insecurity. She herself organizes *dhikr* at her home on Thursday evenings which is the beginning of the day of *Jumuah*, an auspicious day in the Muslim week. The *Moulood*, another act of devotion to the Prophet, usually takes place during a joyous occasion, such as family

35 The broadest divisions in Islam are between the Shi'ite, who constitute a minority of Muslims, and Sunnis, who make up the overwhelming majority. There are four accepted *madhhabs* among Muslims, each of which represents the school of thought of a particular scholar. The Hanafi madhab is named after Abu Hanifa and the Shafi's madhab after Imam Shafi'i. Each of these scholars checked various evidence and operationalised the practices of the Prophet and the Qur'an. Unlike the deep differences and schisms between Sunnis and Shi'ite, differences between the madhhabs are not over fundamental beliefs but over certain different interpretations of the rules mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah with regard to such things as prayer, fasting, and so on.

celebrations of birth, circumcision, and marriage, and to mark the birth of the Prophet.

There are regular communal gatherings in the Zanzibari community to witness rituals and rites of passages, such as birth, puberty, circumcision, marriage, and death. Halima mentioned that on the seventh day after the birth of a child, the grandmother gives the baby a bath and cuts its hair. This first cutting, known as *akika* is an important part of Zanzibari culture and includes the naming of the child and sacrifice of an animal. To protect the baby against evil forces, the grandmother takes the child to view the sun and an amulet is tied around its neck and waist. The coming of age ceremony remains one of the most significant moments in a girl's life. According to Mariam, when a girl reaches puberty, her parents call upon an elder member of the family or community, called *mwethie*, who "will then be in charge of that particular girl, teach them how it's done ... in terms of our culture, how you live with people, how you carry yourself as a female, what are the things that you need to look out for as a young woman". All three women are active in organising these aspects of their community's religious practice.

Over the past two decades, many of these practices have come under attack from reformist segments of the community influenced by transnational movements. In response to pressure from reformists, Halima was forthright when she said, "Oh, I don't give them [reformists] the time of day because I really don't see where they are going. I come from the old school. For me it's like they're re-inventing the wheel - that's my opinion". Joyce is also not swayed by the reformists' arguments:³⁶

We have the so-called, we call them Tablighs now. They change and say, no, this is not in the Qur'an, why your'll must do this and why your'll must do that, you know what I mean? And that's another debate we having now. What the heck ... too much nonsense, they're very fussy. Certain things they'll say they do, certain things they're not going to do...

Some Zanzibaris are embracing the reformists' ideas. Maryam pointed to some of these changes. For example, she has been attending educational classes on Sundays for the past few years:

There's an activity that takes place once a week – a Taleem (education) programme where women come together. It's held in Road 246 mosque by ladies that are now trained as alimas [Islamic teachers] which is an achievement

36 G Vahed, "'Contesting Orthodoxy': The Tablighi-Sunni onflict among South African Muslims in the 1970s and 1980s", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 23(2), October 2003, pp. 315-336.

for our community. In the past it was something very far-fetched but as time is progressing we have a lot of girls who have now graduated as alimas. They run these programmes, talking about death, preparing yourself, talking about how to raise the children, each week there's a different programme and we also take turns in reading the Qur'an. It's very intense, people are learning a lot from the programme. If you look at the community, you'll see gradually people are now changing in terms of their religion, in terms of their attire, in terms of their interaction, because of these programmes. They are impacting on the community. I'm not saying that we are not a God-fearing, conscious community, we've always been God-fearing, conscious, but I think because some of the western culture was somehow pulling us astray but, because of this you find things are gradually going back to what they were supposed to be.

Although Joyce claimed that she was not too "impressed" with reformists, she, too, has undergone a religious transformation. Although she pointed out that her family was always highly religious – "You know, in my house, there's only *hajjis* (those who have gone on pilgrimage)"³⁷ – they warned her that if she passed away without changing her habits they could not "read [the Qur'an] for you." With her children already in their teens Joyce came to the realisation, "Hey, I'm losing track of my religion", and heeded her family's advice: "Forty days you must be clean and you must decide what you want to do. I started recollecting myself. They used to have lots of *dhikr* and I used to go for the *dhikr*. Automatically I became pious". Joyce has great faith in the power of *dhikr* and holds weekly *dhikr* sessions. Reflecting on this change in her life, she said that she is grateful for this transformation:

You know what I tell my children every day? I say I want to thank God that he's made me a better person because I wouldn't have been here now with the life that I had. I tell my children, whatever I got, I must make shukr (gratitude), what I don't have I don't want to cry and say, I don't have and I've done this but, because Allah has corrected me, my family is somebody. I'll make shukr and make your'll better people because without the mother, children go astray. It wouldn't be a good family.

The religious transformation that the interviewees are undergoing reflects the wider changes among Muslims in South Africa over the past two decades. This cannot be discussed in depth here. Briefly, in response to such factors as the secular policies of the ANC government which no longer patrols religious morals through strict censorship, the insecurities resulting from globalisation and the digital revolution, and various other factors, many Muslims have visibly changed their behaviour and practices. This is reflected in such things as women

37 Worshippers who have gone on pilgrimage.

donning the veil; an increased emphasis on consuming *Halaal* (permissible) foods; the growth of Islamic finance and banking; mushrooming of Islamic schools; more Muslims going on pilgrimage to Makkah, and the holding of Taleem classes, as well as a turn to neo-Sufi practices such as communal *dhikr*.³⁸

The narrations of Halima, Joyce and Mariam on the role of Islam in their lives suggest that all three women are committed to their faith which provides meaning and direction in their lives. It is also apparent that their adherence to Islam has become stronger over time. For example, all three women cover their hair in public, a practice that they have adopted over the past ten to 15 years. This reflects generally broader developments amongst Muslims in the country.

Conclusion

This article argues that while race and religion are important in the lives of the interviewees, their identities are shaped by the complex interplay between religion, politics, class, race, language, community, and geography. These identities interact at multiple levels in the lives of Halima, Mariam and Joyce and it would be shortsighted to privilege “a single dimension of experience as if it constituted the whole of life”.³⁹ As Abu-Lughod advises, we should avoid “plaster[ing] neat cultural icons like the Muslim woman over messy historical and political dynamics... We need to develop, instead, a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world – as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires”.⁴⁰ Muslim women’s lives should be analysed on the basis of their lived experience rather than abstract models of Muslim women. In addition to Muslim womanhood, this article also speaks to the local context of apartheid race engineering. The Zanzibari experience underscores the contingent nature of race as a category of identity. Post-apartheid society has both opened up new opportunities and created new challenges. Not being “really Indian” or “really African” appears to be a “problem” in the women’s

38 G Vahed, “Changing Islamic traditions and emerging identities in South Africa”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 20(1), April 2000, pp. 43-73; G Vahed, “Islam in the public sphere in post-apartheid South Africa: Prospects and challenges”, *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 27, 2007, pp. 116-149 for a detailed discussion of reformist ideas and changes in and contestation over Islamic beliefs and practices.

39 A Brah and A Phoenix, “Ain’t I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality”, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 5(3), 2004, pp. 75-86.

40 L Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim women really need saving?”, Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others”, *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), pp. 783-790.

lives but this in-betweenness has also provided a fluidity that can, at times, enable them as agents.

