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ROSABELLE BOSWELL

Narrating Muslim Women's Identities in
Cape Town



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MPI zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften
MPI for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
Hermann-Föge-Weg 11, 37073 Göttingen, Germany
Tel.: +49 (551) 4956 - 0
Fax: +49 (551) 4956 - 170

www.mmg.mpg.de

info@mmg.mpg.de

Abstract

This paper* considers the complexity of Muslim women's identities in the city of Cape Town in 2010. It is argued that emerging super-diversity in the form of African immigration, the commercialisation of Islam and increasing freedoms for women in South Africa impact on women's engagement with religion and diversifies their identity. The paper also offers glimpses into the diversity of Islam in Cape Town, suggesting that this religion is not monolithic in the city and that it is continuously diversified by processes of internal differentiation (i.e. institutional management of belief) as well as external social changes (i.e. the role of the local and national media and broader national politics on identity). In South Africa, unlike some European countries, Islam is not perceived as a threat to national identity. Instead, the history of apartheid (and essentially the suppression of diversity) is encouraging the creation of new spaces for the expression and experience of belief. However, these have not gone unchallenged. Other groups, seeking to maintain or achieve recognition and space in the city are resisting the Islamization of Cape Town. The discussion asks how the delicate process of diversity management will be achieved in Cape Town given its particular demographics.

Keywords: Women, Muslims, diversity management, Cape Town.

Author

ROSABELLE BOSWELL is associate professor of anthropology at Rhodes University, South Africa. She has done research on superdiversity in South Africa, race relations in Mauritius and heritage in the southwest Indian ocean region.

R.Boswell@ru.ac.za

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‘Noise ought not to be confused with dominance and neither should relative silence be seen as irrelevance’ (Kamrava 2006:2).

Introduction

A contemporary analysis of super-diversity in South Africa should probably prioritise a consideration of post-apartheid expressions of diversity. Super-diversity in the words of Steven Vertovec is:

A term intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. ‘Super-diversity’ is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables, including: *country of origin* (comprising a variety of possible subset traits such as ethnicity, language[s], religious tradition, regional and local identities, cultural values and practices), *migration channel* (often related to highly gendered flows, specific social networks and particular labour market niches), and *legal status* (including myriad categories determining a hierarchy of entitlements and restrictions). These variables co-condition integration outcomes along with factors surrounding *migrants’ human capital* (particularly educational background), *access to employment* (which may or may not be in immigrants’ hands), *locality* (related especially to material conditions, but also to other immigrant and ethnic minority presence), and the usually chequered *responses by local authorities, services providers and local residents* (which often tend to function by way of assumptions based on previous experiences with migrants and ethnic minorities).¹

It is argued in this paper that present manifestations of diversity need to be historically and politically contextualised, as expressions and experiences of diversity evident before and during apartheid continue to influence the ways in which Cape Town’s residents respond to diversity in the post-apartheid setting.

This paper also focuses specifically on the stories of a few Muslim women from Cape Town and discusses the construction and reconstruction of their identity before, during and after apartheid, indicating that in all these periods super-diversity is evident. The discussion also suggests that such women, though they were often less vocal in the public sphere (Kamrava 2006:2), they actively engaged with systems of racial segregation and resisted homogenisation and oppression in their family. Thus, in present day Cape Town, it is difficult to imagine Muslims as a monolithic group,

1 Vertovec, S. 2007. *New Complexities of Cohesion in Britain: Super-diversity, Transnationalism and Civil Integration*. Commission on Integration and Cohesion: Communities and Local Government Wetherby, West Yorkshire. URL: http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/files/pdfs/Non_WP_pdfs/Reports_and_Other_Publications/Vertovec%20-%20new_complexities_of_cohesion_in_britain.pdf. Executive Summary, (accessed 23 May 2011)

Islam as an all-encompassing religion and Muslim women as an essential category. Like Hefner, I am interested in 'the nature of forces shaping religion's meaning and authority...processes promoting conversion and religious standardization [and] the implications of these religious refigurations for an understanding of late modernity itself' (1998:84). As I observed in 2010, Muslim women in Cape Town constitute a dynamic, stratified and heterogeneous group. They have responded creatively to the impositions of apartheid and Islamic patriarchy and present a diverse and diversifying group in the South African landscape.

Even prior to the implementation of apartheid, Muslim women carefully negotiated identity by accommodating new voices of Islam, expressing their identity as gendered subjects and attempting to respect the rules and regulations of their religion. These navigations are not always successful, as the patriarchy under which South African and Muslim women live, makes it difficult for them to challenge categorisation and essentialism.

One of the areas in which Muslim women are homogenised is marriage. Women are not generally seen as key players in the marriage process and once married are deemed to be submitted to the authority of their husband. Although a full discussion of the law regarding Muslim marriages is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that except for Lailah all of the women discussed below, were married only according to Shariah Law and none of them obtained any kind of alimony after their marriages were dissolved. Presently, the South African government is considering implementing Muslim Personal Law or Muslim Family Law. The draft bill was presented to parliament in 2003 but as yet, the bill has not been passed. The Muslim Women's Association of South Africa, which is one of two women's associations dealing specifically with issues influencing the lives of Muslim women in South Africa, feels that the passing of the Muslim Marriages Bill (MMB) will give the Constitution power over the Quran (Rawoot 2009). However, Rawoot and others feel that the 'formalisation' of the marriage law will compel the Muslim authorities to follow due procedure, such as providing women with their divorce decree (*talaaq*) when requested.

Another area in which women are perceived of as sharing the same experiences, is in the high levels of violence visited on working class Muslim women. This has tended to create the impression of Muslim women as a homogeneous group that is weak and submissive. Violence against human beings is in itself morally reprehensible but we need to understand how women have responded to these impositions or rejected them in order to have a deeper understanding of gender relations in Muslim communities. The experiences of these Muslim women also suggest that an under-

standing of super-diversity cannot only take into account that which is only visible to the public eye.

Thus one needs to interrogate the expression of identities in different spaces. The narratives of women presented in this paper also indicate spaces that those interested in promoting democracy may find it difficult to reach, although as noted further on, the state is now attempting to intervene more, especially in cases where violence has been perpetrated against women.

A third challenge is the association of Muslims with fundamentalism since 9/11. This has encouraged a global association of Muslims with radicalism and fanaticism. In the following discussion, it is interesting to note the re-emergence of religious fundamentalism among younger Cape Town Muslims – that is, those with limited experience of apartheid, whereas those with substantive experience of apartheid appear to be less interested in fundamentalism. The discussion suggests that fundamentalism is deeply implicated in individual contemporary returns to identity/authenticity and it is this need to ‘return’ that is popularly evoked as fundamentalist. Thus it is not a feature of minority (*Shi'ite*) Muslims in Cape Town.

The association of Muslims with fundamentalism (Goody 2004) also hides the great diversity within Islam itself. This produces multiple locations from which identity might be constructed. Existing divisions in Islam the religion, recent theorisation on Islamic feminism, the contributions of scholar jurists in Islam, new media in Cape Town, Muslim social institutions, the Islamization of space, as well as arguments regarding alternative identities put forward by moderate Muslim intellectuals present the complexity of identity in Cape Town. Furthermore, not only does one have to consider the individual influences of the above, one also has to carefully consider their intersections and what these might mean for the experiences of South Africans in an increasingly diversifying society.

Using the frame of discursive analysis, I show how Muslim women actively engage with the narratives of apartheid, have diverse experiences of life and contribute to super-diversity in the city of Cape Town. Before proceeding with this however, I will contextualise these women's identity historically by considering the particular trajectory of the Muslim community in Cape Town. I also take into account the legacy of apartheid and the ways in which the system impacted on their conceptualisations of identity-producing constricted understandings of the self and other. A brief account of demographics and socio-political issues in Cape Town are also offered, as a way of further contextualising Cape Town for a better understanding of the manifestation of super-diversity.

Islam in Cape Town

The final revelations made by God to the Prophet Mohammed in the 7th Century led to the birth of Islam. The word Islam, meaning 'submission' requires believers to profess that there is only one God and that the prophet Mohammed is his last messenger who was tasked with bringing the Truth to all mankind. The revelations made to Mohammed were written word for word by the prophet and came to form the foundation of the Koran. Today, Islam is a global religion practiced by billions of people. It is also the religion of 2 million South Africans located in the three big cities of the country: Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town (Vally 2001a).

Islam 'arrived' in Cape Town with the first group of Malays in 1667 shortly after the landing of the Dutch in 1652 (du Plessis 1944: 2). The Malays came from Indonesia and were set to work as slaves in the construction of roads, ports and buildings. They were called Malay because of the language they spoke – Malay being the lingua franca of the Indonesian Archipelago. Slaves also came to Cape Town from other places, such as southern Africa, Madagascar and Indonesia. During the long period of slavery these groups contributed to the formation of the Dutch based Afrikaans dialect, enriched the Cape with their cultural festivities, foods and rituals and suffered under the yolk of Dutch oppression. They also intermarried and interbred with slaves and slave owners as well as the indigenous Khoi people, producing a phenotypically and culturally mixed society in the 1800s. In 1814, the British gained control of Cape Town but continued to use the Malay as labour for the British colony even after the abolition of slavery in 1834. After abolition there was further immigration into Cape Town. Poor whites from Europe arrived and settled in the city. Historians of the Cape agree that a racially heterogeneous society divided along the lines of class, emerged in the late 19th Century. This population, enlarged by European and African refugees fleeing the Anglo-Boer War, was kept in check by a series of plagues which decimated the Cape (Bickford-Smith, van Heyningen & Worden 1999). After the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, Cape Town began to expand once more. Light industry in food, textiles, manufacturing and canning provided inhabitants with their livelihood and was a source of social contact (Bickford-Smith et al. 1999).

Reflecting on the character of early Muslim immigrants, du Plessis notes that because of their religiosity, they were perceived as law abiding people by the British Empire. Du Plessis provides an inkling as to internal diversity within the groups of Muslims in Cape Town (1944: 2-3), but in keeping with social perspectives of the

day, he writes about them as though they are bounded groups with fixed identities and as a 'people' that mounted little resistance to colonial rule. He does, however, distinguish between Malays and Indian Muslims, specifying that the latter retained 'languages' from the Indian subcontinent and appeared to be more culturally distinct, while the Malay used either Urdu or Arabic in the mosque and tended to be less culturally distinct. This distinction is apparent in the later discussions on Muslim identity, as it appears to influence the choice of spouse (an Indian Muslim is favoured above a Malay Muslim) and also is important in discussions on commitment to the faith. Du Plessis also romanticises the Malays referring to genetic strain, phenotype and linguistic affinities among them (1944: 1). He also emphasises their 'love of display and decoration' (1944: 15) and asserts that 'they are far in advance of the dark races in utility...trustworthy and cleanly [and] kind to horses'.

In 1948, the Nationalist Party came into power and institutionalised segregation. Under Section 30 of the Population Registration Act of 1950, the South African population was segregated into Whites, Africans, Coloureds and Indians. Coloureds included Cape Malays, Other Coloureds and Khoisan. While Du Plessis's work reaffirmed Cape Malays as a distinct category, in reality, the boundaries of this group were more porous and dynamic and it was difficult to separate Indian Muslims from the Cape Malays. Vally (2001b), discusses diversity within the 'imagined Umma' or Muslim community in the 20th Century and attempts to distinguish characteristics of Indian Muslims and Cape Malays. Her research establishes social and cultural connections between Indian Muslims and Hindus – showing there as well, that identities are constructed for particular purposes.

The line between Cape Malays and other Coloureds is also not easy to establish, except perhaps that Cape Malays are largely Muslim by faith. However, even the marker of religion is insufficient as a means of identifying Cape Malays – since there is significant intermarriage in Cape Town and religious conversion. What is missing from the early accounts of identity there, is attention to the socio-political situation of Malays and Coloureds in general. Whisson & Kaplinsky (1969) documented the devastating impact of apartheid on Coloureds in Kalk Bay; decades later Erasmus (2001), Martin (2001), McEachern (2001), and Salo (2003) provided detailed ethnographies on Coloured identity and gender issues in the Cape. The Centre for Popular Memory (CPM) based at the University of Cape Town conducted similar studies on Coloureds and Africans in Cape Town, indicating the ways in which Capetonians have actively imagined their city (Field, Meyer and Swanson 2007).

Cape Town is a rapidly growing city. The 2007 Community Survey states that the population has grown by nearly 21 percent since 2001 and in 2007 now stands at nearly 3.5 million people. The category that has increased the most is that of black Africans, increasing by 89.4 percent since 1996. Women outnumber men in Cape Town. Fifty-two percent of the population are women compared to 48 percent men (Small 2008: 6). Most of the latter are migrating from the Eastern Cape Province, where poor service delivery, inefficient institutions and poverty are posing enormous challenges to the quality of life.

Theorising Identity and Gender in Super-diversity

Anthropological and sociological studies on identity have, since the late 1960s, shifted from primordial to instrumental conceptualisations, emphasising the construction of identity and community for political purposes. In South Africa and especially in the eyes of the *Volkekunde* (mainly politically conservative Afrikaans speaking scholars), identity remained primordial, groups were homogeneous and ethnic boundaries were set (Hammond-Tooke 1997). Such scholars presented groups like the Cape Malays as an organic entity, internally undifferentiated and slow to change (cf. du Plessis 1944). Primordialists in South Africa also paraded as cultural relativists, emphasising the uniqueness of groups and their needs. After the fall of apartheid, it was argued that South Africans are now free to reconstruct their identities (Zegeye 2001). More processual and situational accounts of identity construction emerged, indicating the exercise of agency in the making of more meaningful lives. These identity constructions were created in a discursive context, in which there was an imagined nation (Anderson 1991), fractured and fragmented by apartheid (Comaroff 2001).

A feature of post-apartheid society is the increasing numbers of African migrants in South Africa. African Migrants maintain important linkages with places and peoples beyond the country's borders as do European descendant minorities in the country. Transnational theories of identity (Anthias 2001, Papastergiadis 2000, Cohen & Toninato 2009) have allowed scholars to explain various global connections and the ways in which these disrupted and/or reconstituted the narrative of the nation. A resurgence in religious fundamentalism benefited from the globalization of mass societies. However and as Hefner (1998) noted, even religion has not escaped the process of globalization, 'the study of religion has gone from local presumed

'bounded' societies to the study of religion as a global transnational process'(ibid:84). These developments suggest that one must anchor a study of identity in more post-structural analyses, as the latter allow for an analysis of identity both within and across national borders.

As gender theory falls within the broader schema of identity theory, a similar theoretical trajectory is observed. Primordial theories of gender were quickly superseded in the 1960s by more critical and liberal approaches to the understanding of the situation of women in society. At first, women were perceived as belonging to an undifferentiated category that shared similar tribulations. It was the task of western liberal feminists to achieve material and social liberation for women in general and for their downtrodden Third World sisters in particular. Muslim women, perceived as a homogeneous category, seemed to be treated in the same manner as Third World women (c.f. Dwyer 1978), and were discussed as a category of women that was sexually, materially and politically oppressed. In response to western liberal feminism, Third World feminists demanded more 'accurate' and particularist accounts of identity (Mohanty 1970). In some instances this resulted in more positive accounts of the realities of African women (Cornwall 2005) and in other cases, accounts of indigenous feminisms emerged (Oyewumi 2003).

The situation of Muslim women in Cape Town cannot be adequately theorised via universalistic, particularistic, postcolonial (including indigenous) or materialist theories of gender. This is because Muslim women's experiences contain elements of oppression and suffering akin to the experiences of women worldwide. Their experiences also contain elements which are specific to their situation as Muslims and their situation as postcolonial and post-apartheid subjects. Materialist understandings of gender, which suggest that women's situation improve when they are given increased chances at earning a better living, are useful but do not adequately explain why economically independent women continue to experience oppression at home. Transnational theories of gender on the other hand, might help to shed light on the benefits or burdens of transnational connections for women but do not explain how women who do not have these connections still manage to thrive and create meaningful lives. Even the more victim-oriented accounts on the situation of women, in which much attention is given to the triple oppression of women of colour (Boserup 1970), 'crushed' by the apartheid system, on the basis of their colour, gender and class status, do not help us to fully understand the dialectics of gender relations in Cape Town Muslim women's experiences.

Thus the theoretical orientation in this discussion is complemented by a discursive approach to identity to unravel the structural and social factors influencing women's access to resources.² It complements past ethnographies on the lives of African, Coloured (Western 1996, Erasmus 2001 and Salo 2003) and Indian women (Vally 2001a). The discursive approach as well as the sources noted above, indicate the deep engagement of South African women in both private (cultural life) and public (social life). The discussion also draws on the theorisation of Muslim women's identity in an increasingly westernised world (Abu-Lughod 1992, Mernissi 2002, Mojab 2001 and Ahmed 2006), as these highlight the dialectics of identity construction in both global and local contexts. Critical discussions on the category of woman itself, as noted by Arnfred (2004) are also necessary, as these focus attention on the dichotomisation of identities and also on viable alternatives. But as shown further on, just as there is a need to convey the nuances of agency/oppression, it is also important to remain aware of the endurance of particular dichotomies (Collins 1990).

In the following discussion I adopt a discursive approach to analysing identity construction among the Muslim women encountered and interviewed, acknowledging the fracturing of identity and its discursive reconstruction. I offer several life histories, which indicate how identities were discursively constructed before and during apartheid in South Africa, producing diversities of different kinds. I question whether the state managed to homogenise identity and the role of resistance in creating new identity. I also discuss the link between modernity and new orthodoxy. In the final section of the paper I consider the role of emerging social institutions and spaces on these dynamic identities.

State homogenisation of identity?

A common perception in South Africa is that the apartheid state managed to homogenise identity along race lines and that people continue to hold to these categorisations today. In the following, I offer the story of Aisha, who was forcibly relocated to Manenberg, and discuss the ways in which her identity and the identities of Muslims in Cape Town were diversified under apartheid.

2 Such as Rosaldo and Lamphere's early study which suggested that women in general 'are social actors whose goals and strategies are intrinsic to the processes of social life' (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974:11).

Aisha was born in District Six in 1938 to 'Cape Malay' parents and although, as she told me, there were a lot of challenges in her life, she at least lived with her parents and their families. As the oldest of 11 children (three of whom died at a young age), she had to assume a lot of responsibility. At the age of thirteen she was forced to leave school and to find work in a linen factory in the District. There she earned the minimum wage of one pound and 12 cents per week and that money was handed over to her father. In the factory where she worked there were about 40 women workers. Only two men were employed as drivers at the factory. The men in District Six and the men in her family were, in Aisha's words 'mostly unemployed. It was the women putting food on the table.' Aisha worked for nine years in the linen factory before she got married and then continued to work for another fifteen years with the same company.

Aisha's parents were among the last people to be evicted from District Six and she and her husband left before her parents left the place. 'In those days', she told me, 'things were very cheap. People did not go hungry. Half a loaf of bread, a quarter litre of fish oil and a butter brick would cost us five cents or three cents'. In those days Muslims and Christians lived side by side in District Six and Aisha regularly came into contact with Jewish people (shop owners and factory managers) in the city. Aisha clearly remembers the day she moved to Manenberg on the Cape Flats, a desolate and sandy plateau to which Coloured people were forcibly moved under the apartheid regime. It was a Sunday afternoon and they had been told by white municipal workers that they would be moving to 'bigger houses, much better than the ones we were living in'. Arriving in Manenberg, Aisha and her husband discovered that it had all been a terrible lie. Although there was electricity in some of the houses she saw, there was no electricity on the street. In fact, there was no street to speak of, only dusty roads separating the houses. 'I wanted to go right back... it was dark, dark, dark.' It was also the middle of winter and there was flooding in Manenberg. People had to walk on planks to avoid sinking into the mud that was created by the flooding. They realised that they had to take the bus to get to work and that this was going to cost them a lot of money. It was only in the second week that they received guidance from a neighbour who told them about the train station (which would cost them less to travel to Cape Town).

Aisha remembered that the people arriving in Manenberg came from Constantia, Kensington, Diep River and Claremont. They too came 'for the bigger houses – as they had been living in small rented homes owned by the council'. Fortunately, Aisha could still rely on her parents for help with the children that came to be born in

Manenberg. Her father came to fetch the children to take them to school in District Six until the day when there was no way of going back to District Six because it had been razed to the ground. There was also no way for those people to return to areas that had now been declared 'white' areas by the apartheid government. After her parents were evicted from District Six, they went to live in Belhar, another settlement set aside for Coloureds under the apartheid system. This meant that Aisha could no longer rely on their support for childcare. Life got progressively more difficult as she had to figure out who would take care of her children while she went to work.

Aisha's story suggests, as the authors in Field, Meyer and Swanson (2007) argue, that Capetonians (residents of Cape Town) actively imagine their city. The eviction of people from District Six in the 1960s did not necessarily result in the homogenisation of identity along race lines, as expected by the apartheid government. It allowed a wide range of people to encounter one another and to re-craft their identities. Thus, instead of simply being Cape Malay wage workers in the textile factories, they became commuters to the city; displaced people, victims of apartheid and residents of Manenberg. Life stage events (i.e. getting married, becoming a mother or grandmother or getting divorced), also allowed women to re-imagine their identities in the new context and to connect with those sharing similar experiences. This was certainly evident in the long friendship established between Aisha and Mrs. Fisher, a Christian from Manenberg, whose story I relate elsewhere (Boswell 2010).

The first school that Aisha's children went to in Manenberg for example was Islamic. Eventually however, the number of relocations from Cape Town to the Cape Flats meant that the school had to accommodate non-Muslims. Aisha describes non-Muslims as 'all races' suggesting that although the people relocated were 'Coloureds', they were not necessarily Cape Malay. It seemed that in her mind, Coloureds and Cape Malays belong to different race groups. Aisha noted however that apartheid erased distinctions between Coloureds and Cape Malays because all of these people were 'lumped' together in the Coloured Only areas. Under the Group Areas Act of 1950, Coloureds and Cape Malays could no longer live in 'white' areas and those working there had to prove that they had permanent employment otherwise they would be 'endorsed out' of the area or arrested (Boonzaier & Sharp 1988).

Today the situation of people of colour in general in Manenberg is similar in many ways. Although many Coloureds and Cape Malays do not share in the same faith, many still do not own their homes; they are employed in the lowest paying jobs in the city and are exposed to gang violence. Aisha said that she still does not own a home;

since her arrival in Manenberg in the 1960s, she has been paying 17 Rand (just under 2 Euros) a month as rent to the municipality.

Some internal differentiation was, however, maintained in Manenberg. Not only did Muslims belong to different sects within the religion and orientations towards Islam were influenced by one's proclivities, Muslims in the city were also beholden to the local Muslim structures of authority. The Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) for example deliberated on matters related to the faith and also implemented initiatives related to service to the community. All Muslims are expected to donate money to the MJC to fulfil the *zakat* (a form of tithing). The donations are then pooled and used to assist the Muslim community in general. The MJC, dress of Muslim women and religious observances made members of the Muslim community distinct in Manenberg, as the MJC along with the imams deliberated on matters of the faith, which for Muslims touched every aspect of their lives.

The authenticity of belief also contributed to differentiation within the Muslim community. Aisha revealed for example that her daughter had married a Christian who has *reverted* to Islam – but he does not behave as a 'proper' Muslim does, because he does not go to the mosque and does not perform the daily prayers and service as believers are expected to do. Thus, there are varying degrees of religious behaviour and different ways of being 'Muslim' even within specific sects. Aisha also said that even though her son-in-law was not a 'good' Muslim, she did not reject him because he is ultimately, a part of the family. Aisha's story also offers insight into the challenges faced by women of colour under the 'diversity' management system of apartheid. In brief, women of colour were often subject to forced relocation, poor housing, long work hours and low pay. As a Muslim woman, Aisha's life was embedded in the social networks provided by her religion. Her children attended the local Madrasa and her daily life was structured by prayer, service and charity. However, her story also reveals a life experience diversified by a myriad of encounters in Cape Town. As a married woman, Aisha experienced 'involuntary' encounters with different others, as she was relocated to a Coloured area – Manenberg. While District Six contained both Christians and Muslims, encounters in Manenberg with non-Muslims occurred because Christians were enrolled in the Madrasa. Moreover, the deplorable conditions of life in Manenberg and its distance from the city centre (where most of the work was), meant that people, regardless of belief, depended on one another to survive and in the process cultivated solidarity and identity based on the experiences of displacement.

Honour and Shame

Amina also grew up in District Six and although the family lived in a four bedroom home, there were 6 or 7 people sleeping in each room. The family was, according to her, very poor, 'we ate every part of the cabbage and often had a meal of fish bones and potato'. Amina's father was a tailor and her mother a cleaner. She told me that her grandmother, who was a stay at home mother, had an affair with a Jewish man when she was very young, 'he was like a cat under the bed', always around but never seen to be doing anything wrong. His name was Cohen and he lived in Oranjezicht (just below Table Mountain) and because they were both married to other people and Cape town residents were increasingly encouraged to be racially conservative, Amina's mother only saw her real father in his fabric shop. She would regularly 'drop by' and he would give her presents of fabric or sweets. 'Nobody took notice because in those days, whites were always giving Coloured people things'.

Amina's family was also forced to relocate when District Six was razed to the ground. Her family moved to the Coloured township of Kensington. As apartheid increased its stranglehold on people, they were not allowed to buy things there at black shops and were not permitted to stop at black train stations. At the age of 14 however, Amina became pregnant. This was a great shame for her and for the family because her father was an imam (teacher/preacher) and because the man who was the father of her child was her mother's brother. When Amina had the baby, her family pretended that it was not her child but that it had come to live with them from another family. Amina told me, 'in those years, everything was a secret'. The fact that Amina was also physically abused by her husband in her first marriage was also kept a secret. At the age of 20 she married a Muslim man and moved to his family's house in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). As she knew no-one there, her in-laws made life difficult for her, making her work long hours and regularly beating her up. Amina said, 'they kept that dog's life such a secret. I had bruises all over. One day they punched me in the eye and I developed a blue eye. In public they said, "Oh shame, we don't know what happened" but in private they beat me up even more for daring to draw attention to it in public'. In the meantime, Amina's son grew up as her brother. But he eventually found out the truth and when he did, 'he became *mal* [crazy] and *taartie* [stupid] unable to deal with this terrible truth about himself'. Amina eventually divorced her abusive husband; the MJC, aware of her plight, granted the divorce. She had to cajole them however, into believing her and brought a note from a doctor, to show that her husband had infected her with a sexually transmitted disease and

that his disrespect warranted a divorce. After the divorce was granted, the 'terrorising continued and the police had to come and fetch him from the house. He even had the [gall] to comment on the fact that the children were well dressed!'

Today, Amina lives with her two daughters in a council flat in Hanover Park. The park consists of three storey blocks of flats arranged in numerical rows and separated by concrete alleys. There are no trees, playgrounds or centres in this area. Inhabitants have to create their own entertainment, often parking their car, opening the trunk of the car to retrieve a drink and listening to the car radio at high volume. As we had 'arrived' at Amina's house on a Saturday morning, long lines of washing were stretched out between buildings that were being buffeted by the Cape southeaster. Young women clambered up and down the stone and metal staircases, their heads full of either green or orange rollers. The rollers seemed to be part of a hairstyle, as no attempt was made to remove them or to comb the hair further in the course of the day. Amina told me that not all of her children have remained in South Africa. She still has family in Zimbabwe, a child in England and two others that have emigrated.

Amina concluded that her life is 'full of surprises'. Her husband, who had left for Zimbabwe, returned to Cape Town after 15 years. But by then, his son had taken over his accounts and had robbed him of all his money. When the man heard this news, he had a stroke, 'he just fell over in the street in Claremont'. The doctor told him that he was 'gonna die soon' and so 'the man sat up in his chair all day, waiting to die'. Amina was relieved when he did die in 2006 but her life is not much easier. She is paid 80 Rand (8 US dollars) per day by the Mustafaddin (financial group of the MJC) to wash the bodies of the dead. She told us, that she was quite 'well off, because here in Hanover Park, there might be 18 or 22 people in a two bedroom flat. People will sleep in toilets and baths. Lounges do not exist'.

Hanover Park is also politically inscribed. It is a Democratic Alliance party (DA) stronghold and the mayor, Helen Zille wants to introduce paid electric meters and to get people to buy the apartments in which they are presently living. But as Amina explained, people do not want to have pay-as-you-use option because then they will have to pay more and they will not be able to avoid payments. Plus, people do not have money. Amina told us that in a good number of flats, people are using big black plastic bins as baths and storage. No-one wants to buy their flat because the prices have gone up and if they accept that these should be bought/sold (and they cannot afford to buy it), then the drug dealers will move in and buy these. But (and then she reinforced the racial stereotypes and ignored religion), they are '*klip kop*' (their brains are as short as their hair) and they are '*naam lekkers*' (like brand names). 'They won't

start a business they will buy eggs and chickens from blacks at a higher price rather than sell these things themselves. I know that if something goes right, it's the Jewish blood in me. But they, they are *gedjies* [trouble makers]'.

Amina's experience suggests that while there are major commonalities between poor Coloured women in the cape there are other factors influencing the identity of Muslim women. Age, marginality, feelings of honour and shame and distance from one's maternal home, influences deeper identity. It is therefore inaccurate to perceive women who live in a particular locale and those that share in similar structural conditions, as having the same experience or the same anchors for personal identity. Moreover it suggests that super-diversity is not a new phenomenon, brought about by global flows of technology, values and practices. Such diversity exists on a smaller scale and continues to differentiate what would otherwise be perceived as established and coherent identities.

Processes contributing to diversification were also evident under apartheid. As the next story shows, identities in South Africa were further diversified when people engaged directly with the apartheid state and resisted segregation and inequality.

Resistance Producing New Alliances

Fatima was born in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. However, at the age of 18 she moved to Cape Town because she 'wanted to become something'. The situation at home in Port Elizabeth was not good, because her mother was not married to her biological father and she was used to being regularly beaten by him. 'Every Friday I worried about what was going to happen and my grandmother used to hide all the knives'. Her biological father also resented her, as her mother used to give her books to read. Before she turned 10 years old, her father died. At around the same time, a new man arrived in their neighbourhood. He was also an abuser, a Christian and in the words of Fatima, 'he was pitch black'. To her dismay, Fatima's mother married this man and eventually had five children with him. She was embarrassed by her mother for having married a Christian and a man of dark complexion, 'she put me through embarrassing moments, but she didn't know any better'.

In those days, the only professions open to young women of colour, were teaching and nursing. Thus, any woman, regardless of her particular ambitions could only

choose between these two careers. Fatima's mother said that she could not become a teacher and therefore, she had to become a nurse. Initially Fatima lived with friends in the city because at the only family home in Cape Town, her uncle's wife was very sick. Fortunately for Fatima the woman did not last very long and within two months of her arriving in the city, her uncle's wife died. So she moved in and luckily found work as an assistant radiographer at Groote Schuur Hospital. Fatima told me that she lived in a 'different time, a time when women had no rights. If a woman went to the police and spoke about her domestic troubles, she would be told "no, no, no, go home". Men could do what they want to.' Most Muslim women however, did not reveal what was going on in their homes, Fatima said, 'in that time, in a Muslim household, women held their secrets so that no-one would know what is going on'.

After a short stint as a radiographer assistant, Fatima got a new job in a textile factory in Saltriver, one of the suburbs just beyond the city centre. Although the Group Areas Act did not allow it, with the help of a Jewish family that was employing her in Saltriver, she managed to get an apartment in Wynberg (about 30 kilometres away). Saving her earnings from the factory, she eventually managed to buy a house, this time in another Coloured Only area on the sandy Cape Flats, known locally as Mitchells Plain. The house was bought with financial support in the form of a loan from the same Jewish family that she had been working for.

Like Amina, Fatima's married life was also difficult. Her husband, who was abandoned by his parents at a very young age, physically abused Fatima so that she had to eventually divorce him and raise their four children on her own. The children were put to work after school, handing out shopping store pamphlets and doing light delivery work in and around the mixed race suburb of Woodstock. Fatima's situation was so dire that she had to register with the social services in order to get welfare. Her choice to divorce her husband was not well received in the Muslim community, because at that time, it was believed that a woman should endure whatever needed to be endured in order to safeguard marriage. As Shaqira (a recent revert) told me, 'in Islam marriage fulfils one half of one's spiritual obligations, to get divorced means giving up a lot!'

It was also at the time of her divorce that Fatima became involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. She told me, 'the people in the struggle were my social network. The struggle provided me with an outlet for the frustration that I was experiencing at home', she continued, 'I went on my first march in 1976. This was organised by the Student's Union [not clear] and we marched on the parade. My eldest son, Achmat was only three months old. I joined the UDF [United Democratic Front] when it

was launched in 1983. It was a scary, turbulent time but we took a stand, no matter what. In 1985 a neighbour in Saltriver was shot by the police. Hundreds of people gathered around and the crowds killed the policeman. That day, a lot of people went into exile'.

Later on, Fatima ventured that QIBLA, a conservative Muslim political organisation, was also perceived as a threat in those days. In 1963 there was a march from Langa (a black's only township) to Cape Town and the leader of QIBLA in those days was a young boy of 16. He was, as Fatima understood it, 'educated in political matters by Nelson Mandela and Robert Sobukwe'. The QIBLA provided the inspiration for the 1990s organisation called the PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs).

Fatima's story, as noted earlier, contains similar elements to that of Amina's story. As young women, they both experienced the violent imposition of patriarchy and also the burden of poverty in their community. As Muslims, they had to achieve redress through particular channels, the imam and the MJC. However, Fatima's story shows that more positive spaces in which to anchor identity existed under apartheid. Fatima, with her more forthright personality, took part in active resistance against apartheid. This provided her with access to a broader social network of politically conscious individuals who also demonstrated a belief in liberal feminism, which perhaps did not exist in the more conservative Muslim households of the day.

In the following story, I present Lailah, a thirty-something career woman who enjoys various opportunities and is free to express herself in South Africa. She is considering a return to her 'roots' (to what in Westernised countries might be perceived as more fundamentalist approach to Islam), because this may allow her to retain important cultural aspects of her belief.

Modernity and new Orthodoxy

Lailah is 31 years old and had been married for one and half years. When I met her, she and her husband were living in an old Afrikaner (whites only) neighbourhood and were expecting their first child. While her mother is from Port Elizabeth, she was born and grew up in Cape Town. As her parents did not have money to send her to university, she had to work part-time two days a week in a pharmacy. She had initially wanted to be an industrial psychologist but after an internship at a light-bulb

factory in the city, where she witnessed first-hand the poor conditions of work, she decided that she did not want to pursue a career in that field. Today, she works in a 'policy' office.

Lailah lived on her own for three and half years prior to meeting her husband. She told me that this is unusual in a Muslim community because it is not easy for the parents and family to know if 'you are behaving when you are on your own'. 'Fortunately' Lailah said, she was encouraged by her mother to be independent and to go and work as a bank teller from the age of 17. Indicating her independence, Lailah told me: 'I am not prepared 'to take shit from a man. If something does not sound right, I question it. The majority of men in my generation are conservative and they are intimidated by a career woman. But I think I am the exception rather than the rule, because of most of my Muslim women friends listen to their husbands and don't question anything'.

When I asked Lailah about the perception of Islam and of Muslim women today, she replied that as she is expecting a child soon, she will certainly follow the precepts of Islam in preparing for the introduction of the child to the faith. This might involve the ritual of *aqeeqah*, at which a sheep will be slaughtered and the child's head will be shaved to indicate a renewal of self in the faith. She 'might' also use prayers to heal her child if she feels that Western biomedical approaches to healing are not working. Lailah was quick to assure me that while her cultural practices do not define her, these cultural practices are being diluted by the processes of change (globalisation) and that this ultimately might lead to the diminishing of the belief itself. Thus she was keen to pursue what are essentially cultural practices as a way of maintaining her religion. This involved conscious veiling, regular prayer, fasting and a level of submissiveness in her marriage. While the latter is in contradiction to her personality, she was 'trying very hard not to take control'.

The diversity of Lailah's identity is also indicated in a brief overview of her genealogy. She explained that her grandmother is Roman Catholic but reverted to Islam. Her mother's family regularly invited the Muslim family members to Christmas lunch and the meals are always *halaal* (prepared in accordance to Muslim requirements). On Eid (the celebration of the end of Ramadan – the period of fasting in Islam), the Christian aunts bring presents for them. Lailah went to live with one of her Christian aunts in the preparation period before her wedding. A distance is apparent between Lailah and her father's family. As her paternal grandmother is Indian, she steadfastly supports 'Indian' culture and as an Indian Muslim is authoritarian and dismisses the Cape Malays' as lax in their belief. The grandmother was not at all happy when

Lailah's father decided to choose his own wife. In fact, the father is originally from the Surat region of India and he boarded a boat to Cape Town, leaving his first family behind. When he married Lailah's mother, (a Cape Malay), he lost his caste status and was forever 'banished' from the family. This history might also partly explain Lailah's interest in orthodoxy – her identity as a Muslim is not as 'certain' as that of Fatima's, Amina's or Aisha's.

However, Lailah is not the only one turning to orthodoxy. Cathy, who is in her mid-40s and recently reverted to Islam, told me that she abandoned Christianity when she learned about the plight of the Palestinians in Israel. Her situation however, is very different from Alleeyah, who wishes to escape her religion but is unable to do so.

Cathy and Alleeyah

Cathy, a teacher in her mid-40s explained that she has always been a spiritual person. Her father is a Christian pastor and growing up, the children of the family spent a great deal of time studying the Bible. But listening to the Muslim radio service in the cape entitled: Voice of the Cape (VOC), she learned more about the Palestinian story and became increasingly interested in Islam. Cathy also teaches religious studies at a Coloured school on the Cape Flats and she said that she always had questions about Jesus being God. She found it difficult to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity and found it difficult to believe that Jesus could be the Son of God. So, from 2004 to 2006 Cathy went in search of her faith. She began slowly at first, reading the Koran and slowly adopting the *hijab*. She explained that the covering of the body is something 'between you and your God – not for everyone else to make a decision about'. Cathy received a great deal of support throughout the process of her reversion, she was formally welcomed into the *umma* (family). Some of her Christian friends were disappointed with the change and tried to convince her to return to Christianity. As for her newly acquired Muslim friends, they tried to 'fix' her up with a man, as there is a deep belief that marriage brings one closer to fulfilling one's religious obligations as a Muslim.

As a revert, Cathy has to speak and act in a certain way. She told me that she is concerned to do things the way they are supposed to be done and not to follow her own instincts. She has made a point of learning the *suras* in Arabic and in reciting all

the prayers necessary to protect one from evil. Cathy felt that present-day Islam is in danger of 'dilution' to the extent that important rituals and practices might fall away.

Speaking to a colleague of Cathy's (that I knew very well) after the 'interview', I learned that Cathy was having an affair with the principal of the school, a Muslim man in his 50s. It was surmised by the colleague that Cathy had reverted to Islam, not because she is deeply committed to the Palestinian cause but because she wanted to legitimately attract and maintain the attention of her lover.

Alleeyah is much younger than Cathy. Raised in a very strict household (she was denied the opportunity of attending her Matriculation or end of school dance), Alleeyah said she had been 'reared to be satisfied with what I got.' However, Alleeyah was happy to have at least been educated. She said: 'many women in Islam are not educated enough to learn about and enjoy their rights as citizens in South Africa, but even as an educated woman one experiences difficulties. The woman might still find it impossible to do as she pleases'. Alleeyah then went on to tell me about the enormous pressure that she is under to get married. She has been 'set up' on numerous blind dates and comments are made about her single status every time she appears at a family function. She has learned all the detail as to who one can and cannot marry. A *mahram* for instance, is a person to whom one is related (i.e. a second cousin), but who by religious law one cannot marry.

Alleeyah seemed to express the view that she is tired of Islam, especially the way in which it is interpreted by the mostly patriarchal scholars in her community. She supported the view (as do those Islamic feminists who endorse particularistic interpretations of identity), that in the Koran, women are to be respected at all costs. Men and women are equal in their knowledge of the religious and the scholarly. Nevertheless, Alleeyah regularly went into the city, she is also discussing with her parents, the prospect of living alone – because in her very orthodox family, if she is not married, she is not allowed to stay on her own.

Conclusion

Under apartheid Muslim women were constructed as a monolithic group, subservient under the patriarchy of the Muslim authorities as Muslims and subservient as women under the white Christian government. The fact that they were not white added another burden, the burden of being among the racially oppressed. In con-

temporary Cape Town, Muslim women seem freer to engage with the wide range of diversities emerging in the city. Education, the news, radio services, shopping malls and local associations all provide 'new' spaces in which to articulate and tinker with identity. However, engagements with a super-diverse world require resources, political consciousness, forthrightness and patience. Access to these spaces is tempered by class and capital. Amina and Fatima may visit Canal Walk and window-shop, but they cannot, like Lailah and today, Aisha, afford items from these upmarket, westernised malls. For Cathy and Lailah a return to 'roots', does not necessarily lead to the kind of fundamentalism conservatives worldwide envisage. Lastly, Alleeyah, although she is not married, does not express any desire to get married any time soon. This goes against what the Muslim authorities in her community and her family want for her but as a woman who has experienced democratisation, Alleeyah is prepared to be patient and to wait for 'the one'.

I began the discussion by arguing that a consideration of super-diversity should probably consider mostly post-apartheid expressions of identity. This is because apartheid placed particular restrictions on the South African population in their personal constructions of identity. While the legacies of apartheid are still being felt in South Africa, there is now more space for the realisation of a diversity of identities as well as cross-cutting social links. A younger generation of Muslim women in Cape Town for example, may choose to pursue a more liberal existence. Thus, while religion remains very important, these women are seriously considering and pursuing their personal career ambitions and are using knowledge gained from the secular sphere to inform their relationships and career decisions. Furthermore and as noted earlier, some Muslim women participated fully in the public and secular sphere during apartheid. Although outwardly very devout, such women pursued the achievement of human rights, not only for others (via the political struggle against apartheid) but also for themselves. The distinction between Indian and Malay Muslim women is a difficult one to identify, mainly because there has been a great deal of interracial mixing in Cape Town. However, there is a tendency to construct Indian Muslims as more religious and conservative than Malay Muslims. As the above discussion suggests however, there are no pure Indian or Malay Muslims as such in Cape Town. There is a great deal of interracial marriage and reproduction, which has produced an internally differentiated Muslim community.

Thus and as this discussion has hopefully shown, it is vital to obtain a deeper, more politically nuanced and historically grounded understanding of super-diversity in countries such as South Africa. Not only does this shed light on the interconnected-

ness of diverse social phenomena it also reveals the politics that influence these interconnections. The research also offers glimpses into the present socio-political phase that South Africa is experiencing. This is difficult to describe and discuss because certain parts of South Africa (especially Cape Town) have experienced extensive globalization and development since 1994 at the high speed at which these changes are happening. This may not appear to be so to the casual visitor to the city. One might still observe the black and Coloured townships and white suburbs. However, a closer look reveals changes that are happening at a rapid pace.

The research has also strongly suggested that Muslim women's experiences are, in the first instance, influenced by the fact that they are women in patriarchal South Africa. As argued in this paper, religion is not monolithic in the city. It is continuously diversified by processes of internal differentiations as well as external social changes. Thus to presume that local and national media accurately portray the identities of Muslim women in South Africa is problematic, since such identities are situational and temporal and are influenced by particular contexts and time. And since, as Hefner also argued, change in religion is not necessarily brought about by religious authorities, the situation of working class Muslim women in Cape Town can improve, as long as state authorities do not undermine the general position of women in South Africa.

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