

FAHMIDA'S WORLDS: GENDER, HOME AND THE GUJARATI MUSLIM DIASPORA IN MID-20TH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

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This paper focuses on the journalistic writing of Zuleikha Mayat, a housewife living in Durban, South Africa who wrote a weekly column for the newspaper *Indian Views* between 1956 and 1963. It explores how this body of work drew upon, and constructed, conceptions of belonging and unsettlement in relation to political and customary practices shaping the lives of Muslim women within her diasporic and class milieu. Through opinion, commentary, historical narrative and allegorical fiction, her published writings moralised an ideal of the 'domestic' to bridge the worlds of household and nation as domains of action and concern. Falling within a period of expanding apartheid legislation, when the state abandoned its determined push for the 'repatriation' of 'Asiatics' to instead incorporate 'Indians' as a unitary racial group through a specialized political bureaucratic structure, the column 'Fahmida's World' can be seen as an endeavour to imagine conceptions of belonging, home and identity for her readership and to grapple with political exclusion.

Keywords: Gujarati, Muslim, South Africa, Indian, Identity, Politics, Resistance

Introduction

From 1956-1963 Durban housewife and community organizer, Zuleikha Mayat, wrote a regular column for the Gujarati/English language South African newspaper *Indian Views*. With a readership that extended from the Cape to Mozambique and trickled northward as far as Malawi, the weekly (later bi-weekly) *Indian Views* covered news on both shores of the Indian Ocean and helped to reproduce a communal imaginary for Gujarati-speaking Muslims in early-mid 20th century southern Africa. At its height, its run hovered at just 5,000 papers. Still, as Mayat knew from her own childhood¹, a single subscription—costing £1 11s 6d per annum—provided shared reading and discussion within households and between extended family members and neighbours. It circulated through immigrant families and their African-born progeny who had in common a notion of home and belonging that straddled the Indian Ocean (Waetjen and Vahed, 2011).

Founded in 1914, the paper had been in circulation for precisely three decades when 'Miss Zuleikha Bismillah of Potchefstroom', then a young woman of 18 years, submitted her first commentary to be published in its pages. This letter-to-the-editor advocated education for Muslim girls and lamented that 'in these modern times' parents denied their daughters secondary and tertiary education.² Twelve years later, her own dreams of a higher education thwarted by family and religious

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authority, Zuleikha was now married to the dynamic Dr. Mahomed Mayat and living in the Indian Ocean port city of Durban, associating with the tightly networked Muslim professional and business classes, including the influential Meer family headed by the editor of *Indian Views*, M. I. Meer. She was invited to take up her pen and try her hand at writing a women's column. Under the pen name 'Fahmida', Zuleikha Mayat developed a witty conversational style in which she took up issues pertinent to her social milieu.

This article considers Mayat's writings as a window on the dynamic and progressively unsettled conception of home and belonging that was shaping the cultural worlds of the Gujarati-speaking Muslim diaspora during a period of intensive spatial and social re-mapping by apartheid's engineers. It highlights the historical centrality of sexual and domestic relations in structuring local and transoceanic orientations and identities, as well as their changing political meaning and gendered divisions of labour. Mayat writes in her capacity as a housewife and modern enthusiast, her submissions expressing the progressivist optimism of her times, welcoming the technological innovations that are mechanizing the household domain of women in her class. Situated in the world of the customary, her writing was one of several means she employed in crafting a public voice and in bearing witness to the political transformations around her. Thus, she is not merely an individual woman, expressing her lived experience. Her column was written as a public intervention, a moral prescription towards a definition of national citizenship that she envisioned could best secure the local reproduction of diasporic community and its hard-won socio-economic prosperity and class standing. She wrote during crucial years of political ferment, when apartheid's attempt to correlate civic identity with racialized geographical space was unifying people from diverse backgrounds through acts of resistance. Yet much of her column remains focused on the positional concerns of the peers who comprise her female readership, and her expertise is offered around housework, marriage, and childrearing. For Mayat, agency in these quarters comprises a local politics of home, situated at the heart of a changing cultural world.

Indian Muslim Families in South Africa

Born in the Transvaal in 1926, Zuleikha Bismillah was the daughter of a shopkeeper who operated 'Dabhel House', one of several Muslim-owned shops on King Edward Street in the town of Potchefstroom, capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). Her paternal grandfather, Hassim Bismillah, hailing from the village of Dabhel in Gujarat, had arrived in the southern Africa in 1881, a young entrepreneur. In a few years he established a successful trading business in the territory between Kimberley and Johannesburg, the two key sites of the region's unfolding scramble for mineral wealth. Hassim Bismillah's venture was far from uncommon. With South Africa's mining boom, migrants with different commercial and occupational

interests arrived from all over the globe, seeking opportunities. Young men from villages in Gujarat were sponsored through family networks and fraternal capital to seek their fortunes in the colony of Natal and the Boer Republics (most prominently in the ZAR and but also in the Republic of the Orange Free State). In these regions, they established culturally distinct residential and associative spaces that helped to preserve the vibrancy of transoceanic links and identities. Empire, through its transportation and communications technologies and its political and spatial discourses, helped to facilitate these flows.

By the late 1890s, there were at least 15,000 people of Indian extraction living in the Boer Republics, mostly working as traders. In Natal—and the Cape colony—other so-called ‘passenger Indians’ found commercial opportunities in and around urban centres, though economic class standing diverged greatly between unskilled migrants and powerful trading families (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2009; Vahed, 2005; Padayachee and Morrell, 1991). A few Muslim families based in Durban were long-standing mercantile capitalists with enterprises around the Indian Ocean basin. The migration of free Indians may be contrasted in important ways with arrivals to the sugar-producing colony of Natal, between 1860-1911, of 150,000 people shipped from mainly from Calcutta and Madras under repressive contracts of indenture as part of a post-slavery system of continental transfer negotiated through the tentacles of British imperialism (Desai and Vahed, 2010). Still, over the decades a barrage of xenophobic legislation levelled at immigrants from South Asia began to amalgamate the status of Indian migrants in terms of delimiting residential spaces, sexual relations and access to rights of various kinds (Horrell 1978; Swanson 1983).

In response to anti-Indian laws, there developed a relatively unified Indian identity as a politics of resistance, consolidated especially through the actions, public writing and unifying leadership of Mohandas K Gandhi. Yet, socially and culturally, distinctive religious and linguistic notions of community and interest were retained through religious practices, marriage and family networks, and ongoing contact with ancestral villages (Vahed, 2000, Swan, 1985). The sexual organization of bi-continental households were key in escaping the force of anti-immigration laws introduced by the state. Men like Hassim Bismillah, pursuing migrant mercantile strategies for livelihood and capital growth, considered home and domicile as located across the Indian Ocean. This meant that, for two or more generations, irregular periods of sea travel were standard for marriage and child-rearing. Sons who came of age joined their fathers in South Africa but then returned to Gujarat for marriage. Within a few decades, however, wives and daughters routinely migrated with husbands and fathers to settle on African soil. Zuleikha's own parents, Mohammed and Amina Bismillah, were married in Gujarat in 1914. Within a few years, Mohammed returned to Potchefstroom but by 1920 Amina and their child had emigrated also, and she was helping him run the shop. Six additional children, including Zuleikha, were born in South Africa and would grow up speaking

Afrikaans in addition to Gujarati, with some English and Urdu taught in the schools that were now being constructed.

Despite discriminatory legislation, the reasonable economic security of trading families like the Bismillahs combined with national trends of inter-war development to present opportunities for young men to enter higher education, in Johannesburg or overseas, and to become professionals. One of Zuleikha's brothers became a doctor. When Zuleikha moved to Durban in 1948 to join the Mayat family, it was widely accepted that she was moving up in class standing. Her new social circles incorporated the Gujarati intellectual elite, modernist in orientation, politically vocal and important architects of communal and economic infrastructures in the city. Yet, despite these new advantages, she found the gendered worlds of Durban Muslim households—including those of her in-laws with whom she resided six years—to be in many ways more constraining and culturally partitioned than what she had encountered in her previous life.

By 1956, when she began writing for *Indian Views*, she found herself positioned within customary and political spheres transforming on a number of fronts. The national status of people of Indian ancestry had been among the vexed concerns of the National Party which, by this time, had enjoyed almost a decade of state domination, introducing legal measures for intensified racial segregation in employment, education, residency, sexuality and a classificatory system of identification that defined rights, civic status and geographical space. This Apartheid legislation was crafted around the 1946 Sauer Report which had advised that 'non-Europeans' be moved to ghettos and reserves and that Indians, defined as 'foreign' and 'temporary sojourners', should be 'repatriated as soon as possible'. The 1951 census had counted 366,664 'Asians' in South Africa, overwhelmingly of Indian—but including those of Chinese—ancestry (Horrell, 1978, 166). The Immigration Regulation Amendment Act of 1953, which sought to stem new inflows from India addressed a key weakness of the earlier 1913 law by targeting the long-standing transoceanic marital practices. To be given complete effect from 10 February 1956, it specified that the entry of Indian women who had married South African-born men overseas, along with their children, would be prohibited without special permission. Yet, within a few years, the obvious failure by the state to implement its ideals of repatriation saw Indians incorporated as permanent residents in 1961. Categorized as a sub-group of 'non-Europeans', the Indian diaspora in South Africa was subjected to the racial zoning of land and property. The Group Areas Act, initially promulgated in 1950, introduced a complicated list of amendments and was consolidated into a new law in 1957. By 1977, about 2/3 of all Indian residents had been moved under the terms of this act, along with thousands of other South Africans (Horrell, 1978, 75).

Political opposition to state policies saw leadership of the African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress forming alliances. In the decade of the

1950s, this was strategic also as an effort to combat severe animosities that had been exposed in January 1949, when the beating of an African youth by an Indian shopkeeper mobilized crowds of Zulu-speaking residents in a mob-campaign to purge Indian South Africans as a foreign element (Edwards and Nuttall, 1990; Freund, 1995; Soske, 2009). High numbers of Indian and African participants in the defiance campaigns of 1952, and in the treason trials beginning in 1956, saw themselves as part of a broad-based move for universal citizenship rights that were shaping the colonial world. Meanwhile, local contestations over interpretations of Islam were being waged around authority and practice, as well as around women's participation in various aspects of public life. An 'Arabic Study Circle' was initiated by professional Muslim men in Durban to weigh in on customary relations and to 'modernize' certain practices (Jeppie, 2007). Housewives in elite and middle class Muslim Durban families formed voluntary organisations to manifest a public voice and informal civic life. Of the most enduring and well-known one of these, the Women's Cultural Group, ZuleikhaMayat was a founding member (Vahed and Waetjen, 2010).

The importance of Zuleikha Mayat's column lies not only in what it reveals concerning the changing position of women in her diasporic and class milieu but also in how the negotiation between boundaries separating public and private 'worlds' were part of a larger discussion concerning the meanings and agency ascribed to the spaces of home, nation and transnationality.

Writing Women's Worlds

M. I. Meer, editor of *Indian Views*, was deemed a conservative in his political leanings, but was vocal in the modernist camp and promoted women's education and political voice. Zuleikha Mayat took up writing her column with the understanding that she had full license to express her own ideas, and her writing was never censored or altered. Yet, despite this freedom and her capacity to write with an edgy sharpness around certain issues, her writing reflects the sense of diplomacy she had developed since the loss of her early dreams of becoming a physician. In a letter to her future husband in 1944, she had confided that her desire to be a doctor was motivated by a passion for women's rights, the hope that she might be in a position to 'make the women dissatisfied with their menial and subordinate position'³. The defiant, feminist ambition and anger behind these early declarations is not evident in the tone and content of Mayat's public writing. Instead, she adopts a conversational and chatty voice in which a range of musings about everyday life is integrated with broader, political observations. Still, sometimes she became aware that she often rode a fine edge around what was considered proper. Mayat explained that

[S]ometimes, I might write something—one time it was about my dog, running away to pursue...something sexual. And I learn, but through indirect channels that my father-in-law

disapproves of me writing this way. He doesn't tell *me*. Instead, he asks a cousin to address it. The cousin writes it in an anonymous letter to the editor. I know it is my father in law. But I write back a response in my column to this writer, knowing my father-in-law will read it.

This extraordinary example, in which public space is used to sort out a private concern, helps to demonstrate how these worlds were linked, with diaspora and family as mutually constructive discourses in the disciplining of appropriate gendered behaviours and speech.

Mayat's column accommodated a variety of styles, formats and topics, showing a flair for irony and satire. Observations about everyday life, handy household tips, anecdotes, quips and social commentary appeared in bite-sized inches of text, divided by conversational or provocative subheadings. Sometimes the column contained her didactic pieces of fiction, serialized over several issues. Topics varied across and within weekly installations: praise for disposable nappies, ironic comment about the (un)civil service, a description of the plight of Africans seeking city work, excitement over new bathroom décor, condemnation of colour-bias in the facial complexions of Indian women, or an anecdote she heard meant to illustrate a bit of wisdom. Much of her content delivers a moral lesson, with principles for right living related to the larger social good in the South African context.

Zuleikha Mayat titled her column 'Fahmida's World'. The Persian name 'Fahmida', to her mind, spoke of cultural roots in the East and of the heroines in novels she had read. But the word translates also as 'intelligent' or 'one who is knowledgeable' and in using it Mayat hoped to highlight an aspect of women's nature she regarded as essential but too frequently sidelined. Key to the themes of Mayat's writing is the ongoing and negotiated construction of 'world', and its gendered and historical meanings. The possessive construction of the phrase 'Fahmida's World' suggested a world both belonging to and created by its protagonist. World, thus, is a term that signifies several tensions: the tension between the communal (transnational) spaces of diasporic identity and those of the local pluralist and national context; the tension between Muslim woman's seclusion in domestic spaces and the secular, liberalizing spaces of modernity.

Mayat makes use of these ambiguities in staking her claim for a public voice. The right to comment about the world outside the home was something she felt the need to continually argue for. A breezy, often self-deprecating tone is feigned to disarm her critics before launching into a political observation. For example, as a prelude to a discussion of the Group Areas Acts, Mayat frames her desire to broach such burning topics as a kind of gender transgression:

This week the femininity in me struggled to re-affirm itself, by expression in this column of a truly woman's world. More often than not Fahmida's world is an escape from household chores and problems, but this week I had resolved to be a practical and efficient house-wife & give our readers a wealth of information in hints and tips. However...⁴

On another occasion she explains that 'When dabbling about on the periphery of politics our readers complain that I prattle of things a woman should not or does not know anything about....but I feel that taking an interest in things around us, in problems of life, is as essential as our daily intake of nourishment.'⁵ The light tone she adopts provide a context for declaring her sense of entitlement, as a woman, to speak across – and to bridge – the ideological boundaries separating domains of gendered action. This is evident at the very outset of her journalistic career in January of 1956.

On 14 March 1956 Mayat begins her piece with the complaint that 'Some of my friends accuse that this column is not typical of women's affairs. That for instance it should contain recipes, hints on housekeeping and advice as to the upbringing of children.' But, she continues,

That is dependent entirely on one's conception of what is a woman's world. Whilst recipes and training of the young are most important in our lives such advice should come from specialists in these respective fields and not from novices such as Fahmida. Granny is any day a better teacher than I shall ever be in these matters. To my mind what is rightly a woman's world is the awareness of the social and political conditions of our environment, of the country and the world. ...No friends, a woman's world is the central point round [sic] which society and life revolves.

The reproach against which she defended herself on this particular occasion had been levelled against her column of two weeks previously on 29 February 1956. This had comprised a critique of nothing less than the Immigration Regulation amendment of 1953, commonly known as the 'banning of [Indian] wives' act, of which a key deadline for marriages between South African born men and Indian women had passed on the 10th of that very month.

Entitled 'When the Law Takes Hand', Mayat's submission was in the form of a didactic fictional short story. The story tells of Sabira 'a young girl just out of her teens dwelling in a little village in the environs of Surat.' Her cousin, Rafiq, a resident of South Africa visits the village and, although his 'first impression [of the town] was that its people were primitive, the sanitation nauseating, and the general living conditions intolerable', becomes interested in Sabira. The interest seems mutual as 'she was often seen to peep at Rafiq through the curtains.' The couple are wedded and blessed with a child: Mayat notes the date — 1951. Immediately, Rafiq must return to South Africa upon news of his father's death only to find that hard and lengthy work is required to set his affairs in order and earn Sabira's passage. Other contingencies create further delay, but by 1956 all is set and Rafiq's young family arrive by boat. Yet, the month is February—South Africa's 'banning of wives' immigration act has been implemented, Sabira and her daughter spend a week in gaol and are deported.

Till the very last there was hope and faith but at the brief and final meeting, the pent up emotions of years fell away like snow melting in the heat. Sabira sobbed that she asked for

nothing more than to be with [her husband] ... She could not understand a law which was contrary to all the scriptures and teachings of her people; that which said that the place of a wife was beside her husband....Rafiq was bereft of pride and Sabira of shame as they clutched each other [but then they were] dragged apart and now the boat was steaming out of the harbor.⁶

It is notable that the story, which Mayat claims to be based on an actual case, presents strong political comment through the device of fiction. Written in melodramatic tones, and showing care to describe the impoverished conditions pushing many in India to seek an improved economic life on other shores, the tactic of this story is to demonstrate the connections between personal and political 'worlds', as well as the stake of women in paying attention to public issues. Its indictment of the law in question is waged in terms of gender propriety and domestic morality, underscored by reference to religious scripture. In this pious register, it draws into focus a key cultural dilemma of the Muslim diaspora of South Africa at this time: the transnational nature of its conception of the domestic in a context of political and spatial nationalization. The National Party had identified women/wives as a wedge in their attempt to achieve the legal foreignness of the Indian South Africans. Mayat's assertion, two weeks later, that 'a woman's world is the central point round which society and life revolves' was neither a plea nor platitude but rather the confirmation of a political reality.

This provides a perspective on Mayat's own interpretation of life in the home, her understanding of the political importance of the domestic sphere, the household. Home and the household is a spatial assertion of belonging, cast in contradistinction to the tentative status afforded to Indian South Africans by a nation-state increasingly dedicated to exclusion. Home is also a space of cultural identity that is not geographically fixed to place, anchoring the diaspora both to local and to transoceanic orientations. Home, in the context of the racial residential relocations that were beginning to take effect in these years, had also become a threatened space. Yet, for Mayat, home is space being transformed by innovations and discourses of modernity and scientific progress. Women in the home provide for the reproduction of culture. Yet geographically rooted in South Africa, they also preside over the modern transformation of a dynamic space with expanding opportunities for women in public life.

The Politics of Homemaking in Unsettling Times

'Fahmida's World' can in many ways be placed within the genre of a 'housewifely' women's periodical. The mid-century enthusiasm for the applications of science to domestic management and the rise of expertise in customary matters, like child rearing, appeared as frequent topics. Despite her declaration of being a 'novice', Mayat takes up an advisory role with confidence. The column is replete with enthusiasm for time-saving household technologies ('I have started to persuade

the bread earner in my family that a freezer is the best buy of the century...I will make a year's supply of samoosas...'7) and supports this as a means of advancing the traditional work of women ('...our friend gave us a depreciating smile. "I have a mixmaster which I improvise for this tedious work. No more pounding with a mortar for me ever." That explains her tasty fruit drinks as well.'8) Child-rearing techniques are another aspect to be modernized, with psychological expertise applauded. One issue features a clinic for 'problem' children and Fahmida explains modern ways of understanding bed wetting, verbal stammering and parental responses to these and other behavioral issues ('Very often we call a child naughty and punish it for some misdemeanor...but we are at fault not the child who is after all building up experiences...by trying things out for themselves.'9).

Mayat's championing of the new modern housewife enables her to place gender at the centre of a progressive historical narrative, one which firmly locates 'home' on African soil through its domestic discourses and which legitimates women's civic identities. As the reproducers of culture, women had long been positioned through their labour in the home as key both to the survival of Indian identity and to its anchorage to local social realities.

In the years she wrote for *Indian Views*, the residency of the Indian diaspora was a fraught question for the state and an anti-Indian sentiment was vocal in some segments of grassroots politics. The meanings of home and belonging are taken up by Mayat to demonstrate the national orientation of her compatriots and their intrinsic South Africanness. This is most clearly expressed in relation to consolidation of the Group Areas Act, which, in light of the obvious failure of repatriation as a means of addressing the status of residents of Indian ancestry, was beginning to be directed towards Indian South Africans. Two examples of her published work, each written over several weeks, demonstrate her uses of history and social rationale in constructing moral entitlement to calling South Africa home.

The first example showcases the use of family history as a device to bring women's worlds to the centre of political analysis. In a 6-part series, published between 14 November and 19 December 1956, entitled 'Where Did We Err?', Mayat's aim is to expose the injustices of the 'monstrous inhumane legislation the Group Areas Act [according to which] thousands of people who had lived peacefully for years will be asked to move to areas especially demarcated for them on the basis of their colour.' The Transvaal town of her childhood, Potchefstroom, is fictionalized as Pampoensville ('Pumpkintown').¹⁰ That it is indeed autobiographical, based on her own Bismillah family history, is denied ('All characters in this story are fictitious'¹¹). The story follows the family history of the young woman, Zainub, through whom we read of three generations in which the relationship between Indian immigrants and their African residential status is transformed. Zainub conceptualizes her own historical location, with reference to its unique set of material aspirations, in relation to earlier generations.

Her mother had called this 'modern fad' but because of the western education she had received, Zainub insisted [on] better living conditions for her family. Whereas her Grandparents had been interested in buying land in India and her parents in accumulating properties here [in South Africa], Zainub and her friends aspired towards better living conditions. Gone were the quaint bathrooms, funny pots and pans a legacy from India; Instead ...the modern plumbing, furniture and fittings both in the shop and the house was a delight to behold.

Yet Zainub's dreams are under threat by the relocations taking place in her town. Indians are not alone in being targeted for removals. First, she is alarmed to discover that the Africans were being moved out of town, their homes now considered by the town council to be an unsightly menace to cars on the new national road. Although it is revealed that the people she knows in this neighbourhood are childhood playmates she has kept in touch with, patrons of the shop or people who have worked for her family, Zainub reflects on the meanings of belonging and home in relation to their plight:

By all means provide new houses for those of the newer residents who did not own homes...[but] Why remove people from homes they had come to love? These little mud-plastered huts had individuality and the owners were proud of them...The little plots of gardens [and fruit trees] with the huts were carefully tended...To uproot a people who had dug in their roots so deeply just because passersby found their mud-plastered huts ugly was the height of injustice.¹²

In the sixth and final installment of the series, it is clear that the Indian population of Pampoensville, too, will be moved. Zainub 'felt as if the end of the world was near'.

They were to be sent away further than the Africans since the latter were essential to cheap labour of the industries and to work for the whites, but the Indians were not needed at all. In fact, were they to disappear altogether, there were many would-be businessmen amongst the whites who would willingly step into their hard established businesses. The demarcation of areas was nothing else but an attempt to oust the Indian people from the business world.

The ironies of this betrayal are linked to the history of her diasporic community. For two or more generations, Gujarat had been the place they looked back to as 'home' but her 'pioneer forebears' had made a success of their economic life in Africa. Now, her own generation, fully settled and rooted in their South African home, are to be forcibly removed from long-standing properties, their very success becoming a reason for their desired 'disappearance'.

The story ends with Zainub summing up her reflections on her family history: in her 'mind's eye [she] saw Grand-Pa taking leave in India from a tearful Family. He was going to an undeveloped, unknown country, his few possessions tied together in a piece of home-spun dhoti.' She 'sees' him mastering Afrikaans and accumulating his fortune, bringing his wife from India, building a house on vacant land he had bought himself. Zainub reflects on how each subsequent generation:

had broken off the ties with the old country, till at last they and their children could no longer be called Indians but were by any standard South Africans as pure and worthy as the Whites of Voortrekker descent, or the Africans who claimed that they were the original inhabitants of this fair country. Any country would be proud of such pioneers...but here were they, the children, banished in disgrace.

Zainub reflects on this inheritance and the ambiguities of belonging: 'Perhaps, thought Zainub, we should, before a worst fate overtakes us, collect our possessions in a piece of home-spun dhoti and return to India.' But 'return' is not possible, nor desirable:

She smiled bitterly at the idea fully realising that nowhere else would they be happy. This was the only home they had ever known. This was the only home they wanted. They were a patient people and for their children they envisaged a more bright future with full citizenship...There were good qualities in her people bequeathed to them by their illustrious forebears, and given the opportunities they would further prove their mettle...Given the opportunity they would, Zainub knew, let these qualities flow in the right channels and together with the other children of Southern Africa make this a wonderful country.

Family history is the platform Mayat utilizes for making her case against the dispossession of the diasporic community of Indian South Africans by the Group Areas Acts. It is a story framed emotionally by notions of home left, home created, home found, home lost. Zuleikha Mayat's own father was among those dispossessed of his shop in Potchefstroom and she attributes his death by heart attack in this period as linked to his grief and betrayal as a contributing member of the community suddenly disenfranchised of his standing. The title 'Where did we err?' demands an explanation for what appears a punishment; it conveys the incomprehensibility of the injustice being waged.

Her story ends with a conception of geographical rootedness and the desire for civic contribution within the diversity of South Africa. Her narrative condemns the ongoing political complacency she witnessed among some Muslim families, warning her readers not to be like the characters in her story, 'people who suddenly found the need for prayer only to find that they had forgotten how.' She wrote this in the weeks during which the first treason trial arrests were made. The Meer family was among those affected. IC Meer, the son-in-law of *Indian Views* editor MI Meer, was amongst those arrested and his daughter, Fatima Meer, was banned. IC Meer, in fact, was ill and so was under house arrest in Durban, probably in MI Meer's house while he recovered from hospital. These were among Mayat's closest friends. The final summing up in her fictional serial reflects with some despair on the generally low key support for the defiance campaign in Durban and subsequent political activity. Mayat prescribes local political action and joining forces with other dispossessed groups, while cautioning that it might be too late.

Had all the non-Europeans then rallied to the call of their leaders perhaps they would have achieved something. Now that their very existence was threatened, they ran around like one

demented...alas, the leaders were out of action – being banned by the suppression of Communism Act from participation in politics. Many like Zainub, who had always maintained that politics was something which people who had nothing else to do dabbled in now suddenly found the need for it.

Mayat's writing against the Group Areas Act was grounded in a sense of entitlement to rootedness, belonging and home. This was not merely based on the multi-generational duration of family history. Another source of her outrage was the compliance of many Indian families to the call for community segregation. As Zuleikha Mayat herself recalls this period, the aims of her writing were shaped by her feelings of remaining in many ways an 'outsider' to elite Durban circles, a sense of being a 'country bumpkin' in genteel surroundings. Her upbringing in a shop that benefited from the patronage of people of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds had secured a sense of the value of diversity. Her co-founding of the Women's Cultural Group was motivated by the conviction that Muslim Indian South African people should make an effort to be part of, and invested in, the local scene: 'we all live in the same country, yet we don't know one another'. Although a cultural chauvinism and communalist loyalty—the sense of her concern for *aarpawalla* compatriots, people 'of her own kind'—comes through her writing, this is offset through criticism of those those complicit in the group-think that manifested in compliance with the segregationist program. She urged those of her own heritage to look beyond India or Islam as the source of identity. Her own sense of national home was firmly South African and she encouraged her readers to embrace and value themselves as a part of the local human variety and mix of traditions, to identify themselves as South Africans.

This brings us to the second example of her claim to political voice through a bridging of the public and private meanings of 'home'. In 1957, the year of the first consolidation of the Group Areas Act, she wrote about the development of Lenasia, a residential area outside of Johannesburg constructed for people of Indian ancestry. A columnist—and a married Muslim woman—she was not a reporter, and the prospect of conducting interviews for a real-life investigation was beyond both her means and her job description. For this reason, it is interesting to observe the narrative angling that allows her to yet position her story both as analysis and as human interest story. She draws both on what she has heard from affected family and friends in the Transvaal and on her imagination to construct a picture conveying the effects of this social engineering project on real people.

As a way into her fictional human interest story, Fahmida claims to be troubled by dreams so distressing that she must consult a psychiatrist. In her dreams, she has a persistent vision of a family that has moved into Lenasia. Her protagonist is an Indian man, sitting in his new, fancy Lenasian residence, mulling over his decision to move from Vrededorp, the suburb where he had built up a successful shop serving a cultural mix of customers with the help of African labourers in his service. Why did he agree to move? He recalls the pressure to leave his premises within eighteen

months, from an area designated to become a whites-only zone. In his mind's eye he pictures the bribes, dealings and apathy of the town counsellors who promote this policy. He remembers being visited by anti-apartheid activists who implore him not to give in, but also the resulting anguish of being fingered as a political trouble-maker when he raised his concerns with members of the town council. He reflects on the line of propaganda he had been fed that the government wanted nothing more than to 'give the Indians a fair deal.' The government, the counsellors informed him, 'wanted Indians to have good residential areas where their children could play and go to school. Areas with parks, bioscopes, theatres, swimming pools, in fact every amenity which was up till now the prerogative of Europeans only.'¹³ Fahmida pauses here, affecting a sudden realisation that Indians in Durban, too, are being subjected to similar inducements, that the new 'Indian Areas' of Reservoir Hills and the like are being promoted as places where modern comforts are on offer, with 'lovely sites for garages, bioscopes and shops'. The government is urging the Indian diaspora to 'Go to these areas and develop along your own lines' and Fahmida fears that the general enthusiasm for modern household amenities has become effective as a political tool.

The man she pictures in her dream is shown to have been bitterly betrayed. His story, taken up in more than one submission, follows his plight. With the sale of his shop in Vrededorp, he is able to buy a place he could call his own, a lovely modern house and a fancy shop in Lenasia. Yet

Not for long did he remain so pleased...There were few customers in his posh shop...most of the people preferred to buy in town...[Now] he had learned that the government proposed to amend the Group Areas Act 'that no African can be employed in defined Indian Areas' which meant that in Lenasia they could not employ any Africans.¹⁴

The loss of labour is one important loss of value, in Fahmida's World. Her protagonist laments, in frank terms, the assistance with the heavy and difficult work and the work of cleaning from which his business had benefited. He confesses 'I won't be a hypocrite and say I don't miss the African servants...I was never so progressive as to have Africans for friends I thought but now I realize that they were my friends although I was not prepared to acknowledge them as such.'¹⁵ African consumer power is another severe loss. But Fahmida is also adamant that cultural diversity itself is a value, the very essence of life as a South African. She conveys this through the next installation of this series, describing a second 'dream' (but this time called a 'nightmare'). This time, she sees herself walking in an urban setting that appears to be India, but

I said to myself 'Don't be silly, how can this be India when the Indians here are dressed like typical South African Indians and look at Cassim there, dressed in Newtown school colours. Isn't that sufficient evidence for you?' Immediately upon mumbling this it dawned on me that the difference lay in the absence of the other races which belong to South Africa. No wonder it appeared so drab and colourless.¹⁶

Here 'Cassim', who turns out to be the man from the previous column, is described as 'one who is bored with life'. In discussing his discouragement, he tells Fahmida 'I may as well be in India for all the pleasure I derive in conversation with the other races here.' Upon learning that she is from Durban 'his voice became feverish in its agitation as we concluded our conversation in the land of fantasy' and he provides a warning:

Do not make the mistake I made. Do not go and reside in any of the areas set aside for your own group or you will rue the day as surely as I do, both economically and socially. God intended South Africa to be a stew pot of many races and cultures and in that way it retains the tang and piquancy of the chow chow pickle. Dividing it in unnatural barriers makes it insipid.

In a final column in the series, Fahmida announces 'enough of dreams and nightmares now. When the Apartheid machinery starts functioning, life in South Africa will be sufficiently nightmarish for us to waste more time in dreaming about it.' Here she proceeds to provide an analysis of what a racially 'insipid' South Africa will mean, directly linking the household concerns of women of her class, marital status and maternal vocation to the threats of political removal. This does not merely refer to geographical relocation, but to losses in the domestic socio-cultural reproduction that her middle class readers would experience without the labour of African workers in the home. She asks her 'average housewife' readers to acknowledge their dependence on servants in the running of their domestic affairs. A description of jobs ('wash, clean, polish, rub, scrub, shine') makes this labour newly visible for her audience. She imagines the impact on children, sarcastically predicting a segregated world in which

[t]he African in the Indian area will be such a rare sight that children will come running in to inform adults of this whenever one is passing' and in which 'our children will be spared the sight of seeing European children in the swimming pools, on the roundabouts, the miniature trains and the host of other entertainments provided at the beachfront.

She envisions a world of staged interactions that transform cross-cultural relations into anthropological and paternalistic encounters:

[O]ccasionally there will be a tour of the European schools of the Indian Areas when we will be requested to arrange an Indian wedding for the benefit of general knowledge of the whites. Those kind white angels may even bring packets of sweets for distribution amongst our children just as they do at present when they go into [the poor African and Indian neighbourhoods of] Cato Manor.

Mayat appeals to the economic sensibilities and class honour of her readers in the plea against their compliance with apartheid segregation. In other parts of her life, for example, as leader of the Women's Cultural Group, she puts into practice a more idealistic conception of integration, drawing together women from different racial, religious and linguistic backgrounds for companionship and local social welfare drives. For Mayat, such engagements harnessed the powerful entitlement

that came with women's roles as caregivers, cultural custodians, and modern housewives and comprised expressions of citizenship and entitlement to political belonging in a multi-cultural South Africa.

Conclusion

Within modern nation-states, the cultural and social worlds of immigrant communities are shaped by, on the one hand, the local realities and structural pressures encountered in the so-called 'receiving society' and, on the other, by the reproduction of practices and beliefs imported from the 'homeland'. For diasporic movements in which family networks and structures comprised a strategy of voluntary migration, a long-standing feminist observation becomes important and useful. Feminist scholars have highlighted the centrality of gender in enabling a simultaneous embrace of communitarian and local national identities through a spatial division (private/public) of domains of social action. Households are the spaces of family, cultural reproduction—where children are socialized into customary practices of eating, dressing, praying, and so on. A political or public sphere comprises the space where civic and economic power is institutionalized and negotiated through formal political engagement. These spaces have, materially and ideologically, been historically divided into domains of gender performance, where the distinctive labours of women and men are viewed as normative components that materially and ideologically organize that division.

Yet, what we can see so clearly in this case is the porous nature of these spatial and social domains and the political agency that individuals like Mayat could exert in a complex and changing national landscape. For Mayat, writing as Fahmida, women's social and cultural worlds in the Gujarati Muslim diaspora were dynamic, fluid and negotiable, domains of civic concern and action. In mid-20th century South Africa, with the advancement of apartheid legislation, she writes to demonstrate that women's moral power and practical labour in the home afforded them a special role in the project of modernization and meaningful national belonging.

Notes

1. Biographical information about Mayat and her own family history, if not otherwise specified, is derived from interviews: 21 February 2008, 7 March 2008, 6 October 2008, 12 February 2009, and 29 April 2013, as well as informal communications and from her 'fictional' autobiographical history (Mayat 1996) and some of the information appears in another form and to another purpose in Vahed and Waetjen, 2010.
2. Letters to the Editor. *Indian Views*, 1 September 1944.
3. Personal letter from Z Bismillah to M Mayat, 4 April 1945.
4. 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 12 June 1957.
5. 'Fahmida's World', *Indian Views*, 16 October 1957.

6. Famida's World, *Indian Views*, 29 February 1956.
7. 'Fahmida's World', *Indian views*, 4 September 1957.
8. Fahmida's World, *Indian Views*, 2 October 1957.
9. Fahmida's World, *Indian Views*, 18 April 1956.
10. In the 14 November 1956 issue, she declared Pampoensville 'an imaginary town in S.Africa. Readers will recognise it as it is existent throughout the country.'
11. Famida's World, *Indian Views*, 28 November 1956 (editorial notation).
12. Famida's World, *Indian Views*, 12 December 1956.
13. Famida's World, *Indian Views*, 12 June 1957.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Famida's World, *Indian Views*, 26 June 1957.
16. *Ibid.*

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