

# DIASPORIC IMAGINARIES: MEMORY AND NEGOTIATION OF BELONGING IN EAST AFRICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN NARRATIVES

by

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## **Declaration**

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores selected Indian narratives that emerge in South Africa and East Africa between 1960 and 2010, focusing on representations of migrations from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the entrenchment of mercantile capitalism, to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century entry of immigrants into the metropolises of Europe, the US and Canada as part of the post-1960s upsurge in global migrations. The (post-)colonial and imperial sites that these narratives straddle re-echo Vijay Mishra's reading of Indian diasporic narratives as two autonomous archives designated by the terms, "old" and "new" diasporas. The study underscores the role of memory both in quests for legitimation and in making sense of Indian marginality in diasporic sites across the continent and in the global north, drawing together South Asia, Africa and the global north as continuous fields of analysis.

Categorising the narratives from the two locations in their order of emergence, I explore how Ansuyah R. Singh's *Behold the Earth Mourns* (1960) and Bahadur Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow* (1971), as the first novels in English to be published by a South African and an East African writer of Indian descent, respectively, grapple with questions of citizenship and legitimation. I categorise subsequent narratives from South Africa into those that emerge during apartheid, namely, Ahmed Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978), Agnes Sam's *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989) and K. Goonam's *Coolie Doctor: An Autobiography by Dr Goonam* (1991); and in the post-apartheid period, including here Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding* (2001) and Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002) and Ronnie Govender's *Song of the Atman* (2006). I explore how narratives under the former category represent tensions between apartheid state – that aimed to reveal and entrench internal divisions within its borders as part of its technology of rule – and the resultant anti-apartheid nationalism that coheres around a unifying “black” identity, drawing attention to how the texts complicate both apartheid and anti-apartheid strategies by simultaneously suggesting and bridging differences or divisions. Post-apartheid narratives, in contrast to the homogenisation of “blackness”, celebrate ethnic self-assertion, foregrounding cultural authentication in response to the post-apartheid “rainbow-nation” project.

Similarly, I explore subsequent East African narratives under two categories. In the first category I include Peter Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* (1972) and M.G. Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989) as two novels that imagine Asians' colonial experience and their entry into the post-independence dispensation, focusing on how this transition complicates notions of home and national belonging. In the second category, I explore Jameela Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (1995), Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's *No Place Like Home* (1996) and Shailja Patel's *Migritude* (2010) as post-1990 narratives that grapple with political backlashes that engender migrations and relocations of Asian subjects from East Africa to imperial metropolises. As part of the recognition of the totalising and oppressive capacities of culture, the three authors, writing from both within and without Indianness, invite the diaspora to take stock of its role in the fermentation of political backlashes against its presence in East Africa.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie fokus op geselekteerde narratiewe deur skrywers van Indiër-oorsprong wat tussen 1960 en 2010 in Suid-Afrika en Oos-Afrika ontstaan om uitbeeldings van migrerings en verskuiwings vanaf die einde van die 19e eeu, ná die vestiging van handelskapitalisme, immigrasie in die vroeë 21e eeu na die groot stede van Europa, die VS en Kanada, te ondersoek, met die oog op navorsing na die toename in globale migrasies. Die (post-)koloniale en imperial liggings wat in hierdie narratiewe oorvleuel, beam Vijay Mishra se lesing van diasporiese Indiese narratiewe as twee outonome argiewe wat deur die terme "ou" en "nuwe" diasporas aangedui word. Hierdie proefskrif bestudeer die manier waarop herinneringe benut word, nie alleen in die soeke na legitimisering en burgerskap nie, maar ook om tot 'n beter begrip te kom van die omstandighede wat Asiërs na die imperiale wêreldstede loods.

Ek kategoriseer die twee narratiewe volgens die twee lokale en in die volgorde waarin hulle verskyn het en bestudeer Ansuyah R Singh se *Behold the Earth Mourns* (1960) en Bahadur Tejani se *Day After Tomorrow* (1971) as die eerste roman wat deur 'n Suid-Afrikaanse en 'n Oos-Afrikaanse skrywer van Indiese herkoms in Engels gepubliseer is, en die wyse waarop hulle onderskeidelik die kwessies van burgerskap en legitimisasie benader. In daaropvolgende verhale van Suid-Afrika, onderskei ek tussen narratiewe wat hul ontstaan in die apartheidsjare gehad het, naamlik *The Hajji and Other Stories* deur Ahmed Essop, *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989) deur Agnes Sam en *Coolie Doctor: An Autobiography by Dr. Goonam* deur K. Goonam; uit die post-apartheid era kom *The Wedding* (2001) deur Imraan Covadia en *The Lotus People* (2002) deur Aziz Hassim, asook *Song of the Atman* (2006) deur Ronnie Govender. Ek kyk hoe die verhale in die eerste kategorie spanning beskryf tussen die apartheidstaat — en die gevolglike anti-apartheidnasionisme in 'n eenheidskeppende "swart" identiteit — om die aandag te vestig op die wyse waarop die tekste sowel apartheid- as anti-apartheid strategieë kompliseer deur tegelykertyd versoeningsmoontlikhede en verdeelheid uit te beeld. Post-apartheid verhale, daarenteen, loof eerder etniese selfbemaagtiging met die klem op kulturele outentisiteit in reaksie op die post-apartheid bevordering van 'n "reënboognasie", as om 'n homogene "swartheid" voor te staan.

Op dieselfde manier bestudeer ek die daaropvolgende Oos-Afrikaanse verhale onder twee kategorieë. In die eerste kategorie sluit ek *In an Brown Mantle* (1972) deur Peter Nazareth en *The Gunny Sack* (1989) deur M.G. Vassanjiin, as twee romans wat Asiërs se koloniale geskiedenis en hul toetreding tot die post-onafhanklikheid bedeling uitbeeld (verbeeld) (imagine), met die klem op die wyse waarop hierdie oorgang begrippe van samehorigheid kompliseer. In die tweede kategorie kyk ek na *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (1995) deur Jameela Siddiqi, *No Place Like Home* (1996) deur Yasmin Alibhai en *Migritude* (2010) deur Shaila Patel as voorbeelde van post-1990 verhale wat probleme met die politieke teenreaksies en verskuiwings van Asiër-onderdane vanuit Oos-Afrika na wêreldstede aanspreek. As deel van die erkenning van die totaliserende en onderdrukkende kapasiteit van kultuur, vra die drie skrywers – as Indiërs en as wêreldburgers – die diaspora om sy rol in die opstoot van politieke teenreaksie teen sy teenwoordigheid in Oos-Afrika onder oënskou te neem.

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## **Introduction: Contexts, Circulations and Transitions: Imagining Indian Diasporas in Selected Narratives from South Africa and East Africa**

Narratives of Indian<sup>1</sup> presence in Africa trace a long history of circulation and exchange across the Indian Ocean, amplifying how these have been variously reconfigured by colonialism, nationalism and globalisation. The transoceanic contacts that these narratives represent, while predating European colonialism as many studies have shown, intensify under British colonialism in the Indian subcontinent and across the continent.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of the colonial economy in South Africa and East Africa creates acute labour shortage that is met only by the influx of indentured labourers, introduced in the former to supply the labour requirements on plantations and in the latter mainly to construct the Uganda Railways. Indian indentured labourers first arrive in South Africa in 1860 and in East Africa from the close of the nineteenth century. In both locations, the presence of indentured labourers is reinforced by the simultaneous arrival of voluntary passenger-migrants<sup>3</sup> (Govinden 2004; Fainman-Frenkel 2006; Hofmeyr 2007), resulting in a flourishing diasporic Indian presence across the two locales. Kamiti, the eponymous wizard in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, in recognition of this long history of circulation and exchange, describes the western coastline of the Indian Ocean as “a cultural highway with constant migrations and exchange” (82). Noel Mostert captures this Afro-Asian transactions concisely when he suggests that “if there is a hemispheric seam to the world between Occident and Orient, then it must be along the eastern seaboard of Africa” (xv).

The Indian presence across the two continental sites provides fodder for substantial scholarship from diverse disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology and political science.<sup>4</sup> These works are important for the ways they offer contextual understandings and historical perspectives from which to approach the texts under study. As a literary intervention into Indian diasporic studies, my work explores how selected narratives grapple

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<sup>1</sup> As in chapter 1 (see n. 2), I use “Indian(s)” here as a generic term for both East African and South African contexts to cover people who trace their descent to the Indian subcontinent. Where I talk specifically about East Africa, however, I use the politically correct East African term, “Asian(s).” Otherwise, the two terms should be treated as nearly synonymous.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ojwang 2001; Simatei 2001; Gilbert 2002; Herzig 2006; Hofmeyr 2007; Hawley 2009; Desai & Vahed 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The notion of “passenger” Indians, as a signifier of free-paying migrants, resonates only with the South African experience. In East Africa, where circulation across the Indian Ocean predates the first arrival of indentured labourers, and where the Asians are socialised differently, the category is superfluous.

<sup>4</sup> See, inter alia, Parson 1973; Mamdani 1973; Adams 1974; Gupta 1974; Jamal 1976; Thobhani 1975; Wallerstein 1987; Gilbert 2002; Herzig 2006; Herbert 2009; Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000; Hawley 2008; Salvadori 1996; Vaheed and Desai 2010.

with the lived, quotidian textures of experiences, revealing multiple perspectives and contradictions that tend to be suppressed by historical archives and social science perspectives that privilege monological perspectives. I argue that representations of race, nationality and citizenship, as categories of identification and frameworks for thinking about the past, are determined by political contexts that necessitate such processes. In their shifting configurations, these frames of identification are constructed as shaped, and complicated, by alternative markers of identity such as religion, class and gender. Against this complexity, I explore how articulations and ascriptions of selfhood and collectivity in a world where identities are in a constant state of flux are invariably performed for particular political and personal ends.

In these narratives, the operations of memory are critical to the identification processes that migrant or diasporic subjects perform. In foregrounding the interface between the historical, the political and the literary, my study furnishes insight into how the shifting configurations of race, nationality and citizenship simultaneously inscribe diasporicity and frame “pastness.” I treat “pastness” in Immanuel Wallerstein’s sense as “a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act”, serving as a tool people use against each other. “Pastness” in this sense is paradoxically diachronic and often dictated by present needs. Wallerstein points out that, insofar as it is used as a mode of social control, “pastness is always a contemporary phenomenon” (381). Memory and reinterpretations of the past, conceived and deployed as such, beyond simply the need for cultural authentication, are invariably rallied to serve other more urgent political ends such as rights, entitlements, legitimation and belonging within national and transnational sites. In the context of the various forms of racial injustices and segregation under colonialism, post-independence, apartheid and post-apartheid dispensations, this role becomes ever more important.

Under such fraught moments, memory and identification become deeply interwoven processes. Paul Connerton, in his insightful book *How Societies Remember*, emphasises this political nature of memory, treating it not as an individual but as a collective – or social – faculty (1). Connerton grapples with the question of how social memory is conveyed and sustained, arguing, with regard to memory in general, that societies’ experience of the present is determined by their knowledge of the past; and, with regard to social memory in particular, that “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order” (3). Connerton describes the desire to engage from a shared social memory as a search to “exchange a socially legitimate currency of memories”, contending that social memory is conveyed and sustained

by commemorative ceremonies, so defined because they are performative, entailing the notion of habit and, in turn, that of bodily practices (4-5). Connerton maintains that historical reconstruction that is undertaken in the process of remembering can function as a way of contesting hegemonic power, especially where state apparatuses have been used to systematically deprive a people of their memory (14). The narratives of the Asian diasporas in South Africa and East Africa featured in this study are all involved in this process.

The study, however, emphasises “re-remembering” rather “remembering” to designate more than just memory processes. *Re-remembering*, as used here, captures the totality of processes and practices that are generated or necessitated by conditions of dislocation. The severance of diasporic subjects from the “motherland”, the sense of cultural loss and the resultant anxiety produce in them the need for cultural authentication. I contend that if diasporicity is a form of cultural or metaphorical dismemberment, then the processes of “re-remembering” symbolically link diasporic subjects to their cultural centre in the subcontinent, construed both as a physical place of origin and an imagined space of authenticity. Remembering, in this sense, encompasses various forms of cultural signification, including the fetishising of Indianness, as a way of mitigating the unhomely (see chapter 5). In exploring these processes and practices, I engage the period from 1960-2006 for South Africa and 1971-2010 for East Africa to reveal how different moments of narration produce different forms of cultural significations and imaginative engagements with the past.

The comparative framework – across location and time – enables me to tease out nuances that may not be readily available to localised studies or those that are bounded within particular moments. In exploring works that emerge at various historical moments, representing a wide range of experience, from pre-migration from the subcontinent to the present, I show how memory and identification processes are determined by contemporary realities. The comparative framework further enables me to surface the different processes of socialisation facilitated by different historical and political experiences. As such, the study generates fresh insights into the narratives from the two locations, and across the various periods explored, while engaging critically with current trends in literary theories and discourses on the Indian/Asian presence in Africa.

In the case of South Africa, I take the period from 1960, with the publication of Ansuayah R. Singh’s *Behold the Earth Mourns* – the first novel by a South African writer of Indian descent – to 2006, with the publication of Ronnie Govender’s *Song of the Atman*. Singh’s novel, chronicling the launching of the non-violent anti-apartheid struggle, envisions a model Indian South African subjectivity in the anticipated post-apartheid nation, while

Govender's, which constructs the history of Indian beginnings in South Africa, reveals the limits of cross-racial engagements. Alongside these two novels, I also explore Ahmed Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978) that relates the experiences of Indian South Africans under apartheid and how these determine their engagements with both blacks and whites. Agnes Sam's *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* (1989), in which she sets out to reclaim the history of Indian South Africans as part of the wider group of peoples who have been marginalised under apartheid, emphasises how conditions of indentureship have been critical to the formation of Indian South African subjecthood, especially that of the woman. Dr. K. Goonam's *Coolie Doctor – An Autobiography by Dr Goonam* (1991) expounds on these themes, focusing on the author's negotiations of identity against the backdrop of anti-apartheid struggle. Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding* (2001) and Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* (2002) are both concerned with Indian origins in South Africa following migrations that convey them from one colonial location to another, while surfacing the various processes through which Indians inscribe their purchase on South Africa in the post-apartheid moment.

The period focused on in the case of East Africa is asymmetrical, though largely overlapping, with that of South Africa, extending from 1971 to 2010. This period is framed by the publications of Bahadur Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow* – the first novel in English by an East African writer of Asian descent – and Shailja Patel's *Migritude*, a one-woman performance poetry work that recounts what it means to enter imperial sites as an immigrant and the violence enacted by empire on the bodies of women. What make the period remarkable are the political backlashes that subject Asian East Africans<sup>5</sup> to vicissitudes of fortune. The most far-reaching of these are the Africanisation<sup>6</sup> policies of the late 1960s to the early 1970s and calls for integration,<sup>7</sup> which mask but maintain the view of Asians as an

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<sup>5</sup> I employ the nomenclature "Asian East African(s)" instead of "East African Asian(s)" – and, likewise, "Indian South African(s)" instead of "South African Indian(s)" – to privilege their East Africanness and South Africanness rather than Asianness/Indianness, while still maintaining their diasporic identities. Uganda's context is exceptional in this regard as the nation's diaspora, prior to the 1972 expulsion, includes considerable non-citizen Asians.

<sup>6</sup> Africanisation programmes, couched in the registers of decolonisation, result in the first major waves of migration that sweep across all the three East African countries in the late 1960s, culminating in the 1972 expulsion of Ugandan Asians by Idi Amin. Although "Africanisation," strictly speaking, has resonance only with the Ugandan context, in this study, I use the term loosely to capture the ideological pursuits by both Julius Nyerere's government articulated in the Arusha Declaration (1967) and A. M. Obote's in the Common Man's Charter (1969). Although Kenya itself was not directly impacted by these ideologies, Asians in the country responded in similar ways, largely out of fear that they too may be subjected to the same fate as their Ugandan counterparts.

<sup>7</sup> The call comes from both African political elite and nationalists from India who, under the influence of the "Bandung Spirit" (see chapter 2), fear that the insularity of Indian diasporic subjects in East Africa and their orientation toward Britain jeopardise India's national interest and interstate politics. Part of the pressure also comes from Indian South African intellectuals, who feel that the outlook of their East African counterparts is detrimental to the quest for Indian nationalism.

alien presence. Most of the literary and cultural productions of this period depict, or reflect on, how Asians have responded to these political pressures.

Besides Tejani's and Patel's texts, I explore Peter Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* (1972), which shows that Asians' collusion in British colonialism is tempered by exceptional cases of cooption in the cause of nationalism and explores prospects of Afro-Asian engagements. M.G. Vassanji's novel, *The Gunny Sack* (1989), picks up these themes, representing the way (post-)colonial and familial histories are conflated as a way of making sense of self and the present – a present tainted by political persecutions and realities of exile. Jameela Siddiqi's *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (1995), narrated from exile in the UK, constructs the 1972 expulsion of Asians from Uganda as a post-independence political backlash, showing how race determines the experience of migration and relocation from post-colonial sites to imperial metropolises. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's *No Place Like Home* (1996), also narrated from the UK, continues with the same theme, taking a critical look at the experience of the Asians in Uganda and inviting Asians to reckon with their own complicity in entrenching socio-economic injustices that lead to the 1972 expulsion.

Exploring Indian experiences across the two locations, these particular texts, emerging at – and re-membling – different historical moments, reveal the politics implicated in negotiations of belonging and quests for entitlements. In South Africa, belonging and citizenship, which have been contentious prior to 1960 when formal – albeit limited citizenship – is finally granted to Indians, are constructed more as questions of entitlement, given their participation in anti-apartheid struggles. In East Africa, in contrast, political backlashes in the guise of Africanisation, – a series of pre- and post-independence political reforms meant to empower Africans – and the resultant problematic nature of Afro-Asian engagements – has been the singular issue around which Asian East African narratives revolve. Against this volatile political backdrop, Asian East Africans' legitimacy is represented largely as ambiguous, often involving competing tendencies of affirming or disavowing belonging simultaneously. Where complicity in British colonialism and orientation towards the UK undermine Asian East Africans' legitimacy in the region in the post-independence period, in South Africa, claims to belonging are staked on Indians' investment in, and purchase on, South Africa through the "sweat" and "blood" sacrifices made, i.e., in terms of the labour that built the country's economic base and the ultimate price paid in the course of the anti-apartheid struggle.

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Mahmood Mamdani argues in his reflection on the twenty years after the Ugandan Asian expulsion that the main difference in the experiences of Indians across South Africa and East Africa comes down to the uniqueness of the Asian/Indian question in those different countries. This question, according to Mamdani, stems from the structural difference between settler colonies (where immigrants from imperialist countries dominated the middleman's function) and non-settler colonies (where the function was delegated to immigrants from older colonies, in this case the British Colonial India). Mamdani observes that in settler countries such as South Africa and Kenya, Indians were among the victims of colonialism, while in non-settler countries such as Uganda and Tanganyika (Tanzania), the Asian population comprised both victims and beneficiaries of colonial system (4). Mamdani elaborates:

The difference can be seen by contrasting the relationship between the Asian minority and the nationalist movement in South Africa with that in Uganda. In South Africa, Asian participation in the nationalist movement grew as did the movement. In Uganda, participation was limited to a few individuals; on the other hand, as the nationalist movement grew, among its targets were Indian traders and ginners. (4)

While it is true that complicity with – and the struggle against – power determines different modes of socialisation and Afro-Indian engagements in the narratives under study, the pattern across settler and non-settler colonies is not as neat as Mamdani maintains. Both Kenya and South Africa, for instance, are former settler colonies, yet the trend of Asians' participation in nationalist movement and nation-building in the former bear closer similarity to that in Uganda, a non-settler colony than in the latter. Narratives of the Asian experience across South Africa and East Africa, in intriguing ways, complicate Mamdani's rather neat binary, striving to contextualise Indian experiences and highlighting how their position in the colonial economy as a "buffer" between European colonialists and Africans engender homogenising tendencies that ignore significant differences that Indianness embeds. The narratives suggest that what determines collusion with power or identification with nationalist struggles across the two locales has more to do with the question of Indians' security within – and complacency about – the socio-political order that apartheid and colonial governmentalities established.

Indian South African narratives, in anticipating a free, democratic nation and reflecting on historical injustices and the resultant struggles, centre around – or unsettle – the

ideology of Black Consciousness under which many Indian South Africans, alongside other racially underprivileged national groups, adopt a “black” identity to counter apartheid’s racial taxonomy. Within this movement, blackness is re-deployed as a category of assertion rather than as a signifier of race (Driver 46). Articulation of blackness under the movement entails a conscious rejection of apartheid racial taxonomies and forging alliance with other underprivileged racial groups that have been disenfranchised by apartheid. Thus, where Africanisation programmes in East Africa drive an insurmountable wedge between Africans and Indians, in South Africa, anti-apartheid struggle, under the umbrella of Black Consciousness, forges a non-racial alliance among the Indians, the Africans and the Coloureds.<sup>8</sup>

Besides affording the study a platform for comparison, Black Consciousness and Africanisation frameworks further highlight the fact that identification and re-memorialisation processes are functions of historical and political realities. The fact that these realities have played out differently within and across South Africa and East Africa means that the narratives they stimulated also manifest some striking contrasts that studies with singular geographical and temporal focus have not adequately captured. Further, while admitting that the quest for – or at least anxiety about – belonging has historically been the ultimate preoccupation of diasporic Indians across the two locales, offering them a platform for conversation with their host communities, the same realities suggest that any such conversations are bound to play out differently across the two locales. Against this background, John C. Hawley suggests the need to investigate ways in which conversations between – and among – “Indians” and “Africans”<sup>9</sup> are still ongoing and how constructive they are (6). While admitting the need for such an investigation, I consider it more instructive, with Indians and Africans of South Africa and East Africa in view, to question *how* to account for these ongoing conversations between the two groups in order to better understand the *ways* in which they are constructive. I take into account the various, often contrasting, voices that emerge from these narratives as critical to their appraisals of contemporary realities. In doing so, I draw attention to slanted readings that result from

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to ignore the fact that race has invariably been a contentious issue among the disenfranchised South Africans. The Indians, in particular, as Govinden highlights, have always found themselves on the receiving end of racially-inflected homogenising tendencies of Africans and Europeans alike to smooth over significant differences among them. Govinden maintains that such anti-Indian sentiments have intensified a pan-Indian identity in South Africa (37).

<sup>9</sup> Hawley, here, is referring to subcontinental Indians and his term “Africans” seems to refer loosely to people of African descent (i.e., blacks), whether in India or on continental Africa. But the argument he makes can, and should, be extended to diasporic Indians in Africa and their host communities.

ignoring the historical and political contexts that generate these narratives as well as the blindness to such phenomena arising from deployments of problematic analytical tools.

A number of significant studies on the narratives of the Indian experience in both South African and East African contexts, against tendencies of homogenising Indianness, emphasise the fractures and contradictions within the diasporas (cf. Simatei 2001; Ojwang 2004; Siundu 2005; Govinden 2008; Rastogi 2008; Phirbhai 2009; Frenkel 2010). These studies variously emphasise the fastidiousness surrounding differences of caste, class, religion, ethnicity and how these categories of identification engender different socialisation processes and patterns of engagement. All these studies recognise, or hint at, the entrenchment of racial consciousness among the Asians, but what they surface more unequivocally is the strong social insularity of, and class divisions among, the various Indian communities. The complicity of the Indians in colonialism and apartheid – and the tensions between the diasporic subjects and the host / national groups – are acknowledged but the deeper racial implications of these are often smoothed over. Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow*, for one, has, in virtually all cases, been read progressively or along Negritude's project of cultural authentication despite its inclination towards expatriate writing. This study, beyond highlighting the misrepresentation involved in the homogenisation of Indianness, problematises the mythologising of suffering and victimhood, likening it to what Thomas Hylland Eriksen describes as the hypocrisy of being racist "downwards", i.e., in relation to the blacks and anti-racist "upwards" vis-à-vis the whites (84).

Toward a more productive reading of the circulation of the Asian diasporic subjects in the national and global spaces that they navigate, I draw on a combination of postcolonial theory, globalisation discourses and diaspora studies, recognising the limitations of these theoretical paradigms, singly, to furnish a reading that is complex enough to grapple with the multiple attachments that these narratives represent. In this respect, I take my cue from Peter Kalliney, who, in his exploration of East African literature and the politics of global reading, highlights the inadequacies, on the one hand, of postcolonial theory to tackle globalisation as the emerging form of sovereignty that displaces nation-states and the complex web of transnational affiliations that it activates; and, on the other, of globalisation discourses to offer a historical account of transnational exchange that is complex enough for regions such as the western Indian Ocean. Kalliney conflates postcolonial theory and globalisation discourses as mutually complimenting frameworks for exploring the western Indian Ocean imaginary, capitalising on the former's attention to historical nuances and narrative ambivalence to complicate globalisation's often linear story of historical evolution and the

latter's range of critical vocabulary for engaging with new systems of power and dominion that operate in the contemporary geopolitical climate (3-5). The recent upsurge in global migrations makes it ever more crucial to entwine these theories, given the national politics and cultural contacts that are implicated in such movements.

Ato Quayson emphasises a similar symbiosis and inextricable links between postcolonial and diaspora studies with regard to their objects of studies. Quayson laments, however, that despite such intersections, little has been done either towards conceptualising their connections or systematising mutually instructive methodologies (244). Quayson locates this lack of methodological confluence "in the reluctance to interrogate colonial space-making through the instrumentalization of diaspora that was a central if hitherto unacknowledged aspect of colonialism." He asserts further:

[I]t is important not to see colonialism and diasporization as separate processes, but as integral to each other. In the British Empire the deployment of diaspora becomes most focused from the 1850s, speeding up decisively after the First World War... The only way to understand the process is to deploy a mutually illuminating Post-colonial and Diaspora Studies lens. (245)

With respect to Indian diasporas in South Africa and East Africa, I read this reluctance to systematically draw clear connections between the two processes as rooted in the desire for political correctness and the anxiety that any such link may prove injurious to the diaspora. Such concerns are not unfounded, given that the history of Indians in the two continental sites has been littered with various cases of violence, mostly orchestrated by the state.<sup>10</sup> Such outbursts of violence are offshoots of complicated relationships that colonialism fostered between Africans and Indians. Much as Indians migrated to both locations under the auspices of British colonialism, in East Africa their complicity in colonialism and orientation towards Britain exacerbates inter-racial relationships, with far-reaching implications that extend beyond the end of the colonial period.

The study underscores the fact that colonialism does not simply mediate the Indian presence in South Africa and East Africa but also shapes the very character of the diaspora.

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<sup>10</sup> In East Africa, cases in point are the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution in which Indians were among the most heavily victimised; the 1972 Amin expulsion of the Asians from Uganda; and the 1982 coup attempt in Nairobi in which the Asians were once again targeted. In South Africa, the 1949 Durban riots come to mind.

The racial consciousness meticulously fostered by the British colonialists widens the social gap between Indians – with their penchant for social insularity – and Africans. A number of narratives from both South Africa and East Africa chart the breach opening up between the racial groups across the two locations. These narratives show that the deterioration of Afro-Asian engagement has an inverse relation with the entrenchment of both colonialism and diasporicity. Dana April Seidenberg traces the evolution of the Indian family system in East Africa and how its earliest configuration took various forms such as “casual liaisons to marriage with local women (although these were few) to ordinary culture-bound marriages” (97). Unlike in South Africa where Indian women worked side by side with their men as indentured labourers, Seidenberg notes that indentured labour migration to East Africa “was one hundred percent male.... Along the coast, Asian Muslim males, bound by an Islamic ideology that knew no differentiation of people by colour, probably married African women more than other groups” (97). The narratives of Vassanji (1989) and Alibhai-Brown (1996), for instance, reveal that the experience of pioneers involved mixed unions between Indian men and African women.

The arrival of Asian women in large numbers bolsters the social insularity of Asians, with a “masterful manipulation of the moral cultural policemen... leading to the closure of inter-racial as well as inter-ethnic advancement” (Seidenberg 97-98). Felicity Hand, along similar lines, maintains that this trend replicates that of the British in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “when the arrival of the memsahibs put an end to any sexual relationships – official or otherwise – between white men and Indian women.” Hand adds:

The British closed in on themselves and became a close-knit caste-like group that lived in dread of the threat of the lascivious Indian male. In East Africa it would be the African who would represent a similar sexual menace for Indian womanhood. (104)

The situation in East Africa is exacerbated by colonialism’s divide-and-rule policy that sought to discourage any form of cross-racial engagement. In South Africa, the legalisation of racial division, first under the Union (1910-1948) and later the apartheid state (1948-1994) has been critical to the consolidation of diasporic formation. In both locations, the legal and political environments within which Indians operate impel them to close in on themselves, thus paradoxically reinforcing their performance of Indianness and the attendant inscription of diasporicity.

Diaspora has emerged in contemporary literary and cultural studies as one of the most hotly contested analytical categories in the study of displaced peoples and of identification. As a network of communities linked by their relation to the central image, the motherland, diaspora has resonances of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (1991). As such, it boasts "national" characters of its own – the main reason why its presence stirs so much tension among national (host) groups. James Clifford observes that, like nation, diaspora has its borders, distinguishing it from other competing analytical categories. These, for Clifford, are "the norms of nation-states and... indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by 'tribal' peoples." Clifford further distinguishes diasporas from other categories of displaced peoples – such as immigrants, who are amenable to assimilation or integration within the dominant groups – in terms of their allegiances and connections to a homeland or some other displaced community (307). My aim here is not to re-define diaspora – a number of scholars have already done that quite eloquently (Cohen 514-15; Clifford 304-05; Hall 235; Mishra 4) – but, rather, to engage with its representation in Indian/Asian narratives in South Africa and East Africa.

My dissertation is divided into five main chapters: Chapter one explores Singh's *Behold the Earth Mourns* and Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow*, the first novels in English to be published by a South African and East African writer of Indian descent, respectively. The two novels grapple with questions of citizenship duties and participation in nation-building as a way of negotiating belonging. For both novels, utopianism presents a suitable framework for projecting visions of racial harmony and national formations that embrace Indians as free citizens of the emerging nation-states. For Singh and Tejani, the utopian emerges as an intercultural site for richer cultural signification and engagements between Indians and Africans, the subcontinental and the continental. The social visions that Singh and Tejani project carry implicit indictments of contemporary social realities against which their works situate themselves.

Chapter two explores Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* and Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* as two novels that grapple with a complex web of national and global politics, produced as they are by a nexus of local and transnational forces. The two novels represent the emergence and disintegration of the western Indian Ocean world and the transition from colonialism to political independence in East Africa. I explore ramifications, for the Asians represented in the two novels, of the disintegration of the western Indian Ocean world into the emerging nations-states and their later dispersions to destinations outside East Africa, focusing on how these processes complicate notions of home and national belonging.

Chapter three focuses on the inscriptions of national subjectivity in three Indian South African narratives: Ahmed Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories*, Agnes Sam's *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* and Dr Goonam's *Coolie Doctor: An Autobiography by Dr Goonam*. I explore how these narratives represent tensions between the apartheid nation – that by nature aimed to reveal and entrench internal division (separateness or 'apartheid') within the state as part of its technology of rule – and an anti-apartheid nationalism that coheres around the unifying 'black' identity, drawing attention to how the texts complicate both apartheid and anti-apartheid strategies by simultaneously suggesting and bridging difference or division. These anti-apartheid narratives thus anticipate a post-apartheid South African nation that will dutifully embrace all its fractured parts.

Chapter four examines how the history of the origin of Indians in South Africa and their struggle for belonging and citizenship from the 1950s have been traced retrospectively from a post-apartheid moment in Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*, Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* and Ronnie Govender's *Song of the Atman*. I explore how the disenchantments and anxieties of the post-apartheid moment that lie at the heart of the search for roots in these works bolster the claim that fiction, for Indian South Africans, presents a real possibility for asserting both Indianness and the right to belong. In light of Stuart Hall's reminder that identity is constructed within rather than outside representation, I treat these narratives as products of particular ideologies that allow the authors to position themselves to make specific claims on history.

Chapter five features Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's *No Place like Home*, Jameela Siddiqi's, *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* and Shailja Patel's *Migritude* as works that represent how race determines the experience of migration and relocation from post-colonial sites to imperial metropolises. These authors chronicle the experience of Asians, who, alongside other (ex-)colonial subjects, especially from Africa and the Caribbean, enter metropolises of Britain, the ex-colonial master, and other white setter-countries, as *immigrants* between the 1960s and 1980s, following the demise of colonialism and the subsequent fallout generated by the politics of post-independence nation-building. The three authors write from a heightened awareness that Asian presence in imperial metropolises, among other factors, results from a combination of failures of cultural integration or inclusive nation-building – and racialisation of national belonging by the political elite – in post-colonial East Africa.

## Chapter 1: The Utopian Envisioning in the First Indian South African and East African Novels

### Introduction

Ansuyah R. Singh's *Behold the Earth Mourns* (1960) and Bahadur Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow* (1971) are, respectively, the first novels in English to be published by a South African and an East African writer of Indian descent. The period of their publication marks the launching of armed anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and the height of Africanisation politics as part of the decolonisation process in East Africa. The corpus of writing African that emerges from the continent during this time as a response to the colonial encounter situates itself primarily as a contestatory discourse.<sup>1</sup> African writers find themselves faced with the urgent task of having to authenticate their cultural specificity – and, indeed, their very humanity – in the wake of their encounter with European colonialism. For Indian writers,<sup>2</sup> the task is rather different. Having been brought to South Africa and East Africa, which like the country they have left behind, are also under the British Empire, Indians' special role in the colonial economy places them in the middle of the power hierarchy, entrenching their position as a buffer between Africans and Europeans. Within the racialised worldview of the empire and, later, the post-colonial states, their brownness itself becomes the signifier of their in-betweenness. The challenge of becoming part of the emerging political landscapes requires Indians to write themselves into the new national formations.

*Behold the Earth Mourns*, which chronicles the launching of non-violent anti-apartheid struggle, envisions a model Indian South African subjectivity in the anticipated post-apartheid nation. Resisting apartheid's racial discrimination emerges as a test of commitment to the nation and a purchase on South Africanness, especially for Indians, whose claims to citizenship and belonging are still in contention at the moment of writing. In the contrast between the protagonist, Srenika, and his elder brother, Krishandutt, the novel endorses the path of the struggle taken by the former, as opposed to the latter's collusion with the apartheid system, as definitive of Indian South African subjecthood. Though embedded in the apartheid moment, Singh's novel is future-oriented; and its hero is overly romanticised. The world to which the novel ushers him in the end, along with his wife and child from a

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<sup>1</sup> See Abiola Irele's elaboration of this theme in his insightful article, "Dimensions of African Discourse."

<sup>2</sup> I use the term, "Indian" here in a generic sense to cover both regions, East Africa and South Africa. In my discussion of *Day After Tomorrow*, however, I use the politically correct East African term, "Asian", otherwise, the two terms should be treated as nearly synonymous.

transnational marriage, and for which the plot prepares him throughout, is modelled to perfection, and represented as free from the limitations of apartheid South Africa.

Like Singh's novel, Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow*, too, is utopian in the reconciliation it forges between the cultural particularities of Asian East Africans, on the one hand, and the imperatives of Africanisation, especially by the immediate post-independent governments, on the other, as a blueprint for national belonging.<sup>3</sup> The novel opens with a cinematographic description of Kampala, which, as a city sitting on seven hills, acquires a fitting metonym as "the Rome of Africa" (5). The panoramic, if romanticised, depiction of the city, which at first appears innocent, sets the stage for the utopian motif in the novel. The epithet of Kampala as "the city of a new civilization", with its "hopes and ambitions" (5), conjures up a particular kind of citizenry. This ritualistic unveiling of the city ends with a close-up of a small house with a child playing on its verandah. This is the child of the "new civilization", born of the union between the protagonists, Samsheer, an Indian man, and Nanziri, a Muganda woman. The novel closes as it opens with this selfsame family as the nucleus of Tejani's utopian nation. The embedded story presents an account of the genesis of Samsheer's and Nanziri's utopian union. The upholding of miscegenation as the lasting solution to racial and cultural disharmonies in the nation, however, involves substituting the "real" nation with utopian one.

For Singh and Tejani, the utopian emerges as an intercultural site for richer cultural signification and engagements between Indians and Africans, the subcontinental and the continental. For a more productive reading, I locate the meanings of their novels in the interstice between two distinct sets of images: those that are given to the construction of the real and those to the utopian. The gap between the two worlds highlights the tensions between the quest for citizenship and national belonging, on the one hand, and the literal or metaphorical baggage that Indians carry into the post-apartheid or post-independent dispensations, particularly that of social exclusivity and the appearance of having been an appendage of, or benefitted from, apartheid or colonialism, on the other. Both threaten to derail any claim to belonging advanced by Indians. For the two novelists, utopianism thus presents a suitable framework for projecting visions of racial harmony and national formations that embrace Indians as free citizens of the emerging nation-states.

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<sup>3</sup> While my focus here is on the deployment of Africanisation policies by the post-independent governments, the policy dates back to the colonial era where it was intended as a divide-and-rule strategy to forestall any form of alliance between Africans and Indians. The logic of Africanisation programmes under both the colonial and post-independent regimes was the economic empowerment of the Africans and to curtail the steadily increasing hold of the Asians onto the economies in East Africa.

The social visions that Singh and Tejani project carry implicit indictments of contemporary social realities against which their works situate themselves. The two novelists deploy a combination of what Soyinka, writing in the period separating the publications of their novels, identifies in *Myth, Literature and the African World* as a form of visionary reconstruction of the past – and, implicitly, imaginative constitution of the future – for the purpose of social direction (106). Significant here is the fact that the fictive worlds that the two authors project, as with all utopias, are contiguous with – or even produced by – the horrors of the “real” worlds against which they project themselves. This demands that the two novels be read as products of their time of emergence.

In the case of *Behold the Earth Mourns*, 1960 marks the centennial anniversary of the arrival of the first batch of indentured Indians in South Africa, in recognition of which the novel is dedicated to the entire nation of South Africa.<sup>4</sup> 1960 is also the year Indians are finally granted formal, albeit limited, citizenship after a hundred years of presence and wrangling. As the year of the Sharpeville Massacre, 1960 also marks the launching of armed anti-apartheid struggle during which non-racialism becomes the guiding ideology against apartheid’s legislation of racial divisions. The novel anticipates Black Consciousness, which emerges later in the course of the decade as a dominant, non-racial movement in the anti-apartheid struggle. Under the Black Consciousness Movement, a common “black” identity, embracing Africans, Coloureds and Indians is forged in defiance of apartheid racial taxonomy as an assertion of the right to self-definition.

The social vision that Singh presents in the novel projects itself against a legalised racial division that apartheid enforces through violence. The denial of citizenship and the enforcement of limitations on economic and socio-political opportunities, for Indians and all other oppressed peoples of South Africa, are represented as militating against the full realisation of humanity. Against apartheid divisions and fragmentation, Singh envisions a nation that is more than the sum of its fractured parts. It is one that evolves organically, if dialectically, from the contradictions of both apartheid injustices and caste prejudice among Indians. Singh explores the convergence of the personal and the political in the transnational marriage between Srenika and Yagesvari as a gesture towards the humanistic, a fitting closure for a nation torn apart by racial division and violence. Towards the end of the narrative, Srenika tells Yagesvari, who has just been released from detention for flouting a law that bars wives from marriages contracted outside from entering the country: “Let the

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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, however, the novel grants no space to the descendants of indentured labourers themselves.

cosmic heavens be our home” (Singh 198). In this heightened, if sentimental, moment, the couple are reunited by “the oneness of love” and they find themselves inhabiting “the infinity of the universe” (Singh 199). Faced with the limitations of the nation, Srenika and Yagesvari are forced to strive for a supranational identity. The utopian gesture of the novel is both an indictment of – and an expression of frustration with – the apartheid nation.

In the case of *Day After Tomorrow*, written in the late 1960s though published only in 1971, this period, as the aftermath of political independence, is characterised by politics of economic nationalism, geared towards wresting away the economy from the firm grip of the Asians.<sup>5</sup> Africanisation programmes, as they are referred, follow on the heels of earlier similar initiatives by the colonial government in the 1940s and 1950s, designed to increase the participation of Africans in the economy. Genuine economic empowerment of the Africans was certainly no preoccupation of the colonial regime. The initiatives, rather, were gestures calculated to bring Africans and Indians into collision in a bid to forestall any possibility of cross-racial anti-colonial alliance. The intensification of Africanisation programmes after independence triggers a large wave of Asian exodus in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Idi Amin’s 1972 expulsion pronouncement emerges as the culmination of a series of earlier Africanisation drives.

But an account of the 1960s Uganda’s racial politics that attends only to the plight of Asians would be lopsided. It ignores the thrust of Tejani’s novel itself, namely, the part played by Asians themselves in fermenting Afro-Asian tensions that climaxes in the 1972 political backlash. Africanisation programmes, especially in the immediate post-independence period when nationalist fervour is at its strongest, gain currency mainly because most Asians at this time regard themselves as aliens in Uganda. As Jack D. Parson notes, most Asians frowned upon the citizenship options available to them, preferring, instead, to cling to their British passports at the time of independence, with sympathy and

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<sup>5</sup> The earliest forms of this agitation take the form of demand for the removal of Asian monopoly over the economy. Jack D. Parson documents the anti-Asian “disturbances” of 1945 and 1949 and precursors to the 1959 boycott of Asian goods (64). The other tools were statutory policies of both the colonial and post-independent governments. The colonial government in 1952 established the African Loans Fund under the Trade Development Section (T.D.S.), Department of Commerce, to boost the participation of Africans in the economy. A later initiative by the newly independent government, the African Business Promotion Ltd (A.B.P. Ltd.), a subsidiary of the government owned Uganda Development Corporation, supplemented the efforts of Trade Development Section to promote African business initiatives. National Trading Corporation was formed in 1966, “combining in one organization the commercial and service functions” of A.B.P. Ltd. and T.D.S. (Parson 65). In 1969, the government passed The Trade Licensing Act, which prohibited non-citizens from trading in specific areas and in specified items (Parson 65).

orientation towards Britain (67).<sup>6</sup> In the epilogue, Tejani contends that “the Africans have come to know the Asians inside-out” and that their “findings are negative.” He remains optimistic, however, given that a good number of Asians have indicated their commitment to the country. “Surely”, Tejani muses, “it need not be pointed out that the post independence Asian exodus to India and England has sifted the grain from the chaff? Those brownies who have *chosen* to remain behind should be trusted, accepted, made at home” (144; original emphasis). The disharmony and the atmosphere of suspicion that pervades the nation is typical of what Soyinka, in “The Writer in an African State”, decries as the “collapse of humanity itself”, with which only a writer possessed of a social vision can possibly come to terms (13). For Tejani, miscegenation as an expression of interracial engagement presents the most enduring, if radical, approach to social harmony. The social context against which Tejani writes is, however, one that is still far from embracing this utopian remedy.

### **Utopianism without utopia**

As modern utopian narratives, both Singh’s and Tejani’s novels deploy forms of utopianism devoid of utopias. This strategy enables the two novels to circumvent the pitfall of perfectionism and its attendant totalitarian tendencies that critics of utopia such as Krishan Kumar have emphasised. The transformative power of modern utopian literature stems from its representation of what Kumar calls “speaking picture” of the good society and its effect in making us want to live in such a society or bring it about (555). Kumar emphasises the “present-day” form of utopia that, as a departure from grand utopian projects, “promotes instead local designs and projects that offer small-scale models of the good life” (562). Such models operate from an awareness of the global dimension of their conditions as well as the opportunities offered by the local and transnational forces and sites in which utopian projects are caught up. This global-local nexus, as a feature of the worlds that Singh and Tejani construct, diffuses Kumar’s more rationed utopian fragments “both as an idea and as a lived reality” (563). Kumar observes:

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<sup>6</sup> There was, of course, a considerable number of Asians who took nation-building responsibility seriously and allied with the nationalist struggle, eventually taking their place in the new post-independent government. Parson observes: “Part of the Asian community were also interested in widening the involvement of Africans in the economy.” He cites for example the case of the Ismaili community who endeavoured to recruit African traders as partners following the passing of the Trade Licensing Act in 1969, “offering to take them into or start them independently in business.” For further details on Asians who held sensitive position, especially in A.M. Obote’s first regime, refer to Parson (66-67).

What these show are designs for a better world in full consciousness of the failures of the past and the need to heed those lessons. What they also show is that the scaling down of ambition, the move to the local in light of the global, needs not less but more imagination, more thought. (563)

Reflective of this moderation, both Singh's and Tejani's novels are cognisant of the ills of the societies that produce them, and each offers alternative visions for the realisation of a just, harmonious and democratic socio-political order. As a fitting closure to the narrative, each novel represents a glimpse of utopia with the respective protagonist's family at its threshold. As such, the novels are clear cases of what Kumar, in view of the model of utopianism expressed in glocalisation, considers to be a return by modern "utopia" to the very origin of the term in Thomas More (563-4).

More's original use of the term, *utopia* or *outopia* – a coinage from Latin words, *u* [no] or *ou* [not] and *topos* [place] – as Lyman Tower Sargent highlights, primarily meant the artistic appending of nonexistence to a topos, a spatial and temporal location, in the interest of verisimilitude (5). In view of her aim to demystify and advance a richer understanding of utopianism, Sargent draws a striking parallel between utopia and fiction more generally. "All fiction", she asserts, "describes a no place; utopian literature generally describes good or bad no places" (5). Its goodness or badness, Sargent suggests, is an incidental quality. In the face of terminological laxity surrounding *utopia* and its cognates, Sargent, in a series of definitions, limits the term "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (9). It is against this sense of the term that I argue that Singh and Tejani deploy utopianism without utopia.

Sargent uses *utopianism* more deliberately to mean a form of social envisioning or dreaming – "dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (3). Utopianism in this sense has as its object, not *utopia*, as broadly defined above, but, rather, what Sargent more narrowly terms, *eutopia* or *positive utopia*. By this she means, "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (9). With these definitions, Sargent deliberately rejects the aspect of *perfect* or *perfection* previously associated with "utopia" or utopianism

by both its detractors and adherents alike.<sup>7</sup> This rejection permits a wider applicability of utopianism as an analytical framework to texts such as *Behold the Earth Mourns* and *Day After Tomorrow*, which, strictly speaking, do not conform to the utopian genre.

These novels emerge at critical historical junctures when modes of both self and collective articulations emphasise praxis in the spatial present, with the view of producing a better future. The historical contexts of the novels appear to be the impetus behind their grounding in the present, even as they gesture towards the future. Bill Ashcroft, in drawing attention in postcolonial literature to forms of utopianism devoid of utopia, as in these novels, assumes such realities as the very force behind the anticipation of a better future, which in turn energises the present (9). The commitment to the spatial present in these works brings along with it a shift from the representation of utopia, no longer as a place but, rather, as a “spirit of hope”, as Ashcroft puts it – “the essence of desire for a better world” (8). Ashcroft points out that the shift also gestures towards dialogically resolving three key contradictions that he identifies as attending utopia: that between utopias and utopianism; the future and memory; and the individual and the collective. These contradictions underlie the tendency of utopias to degenerate into dystopias, given their association with the erasure of individual autonomy and history and demand for uniformity among their individuals (8). The gesturing towards the future in these novels, far from being an escapist indulgence, to use Soyinka’s handy phrase, are forms of indictment and as such signal genuine commitment to transforming the present, making it more liveable.

The shift from the spatial, future-oriented utopias, in More’s sense, to the present-oriented utopianism as a metaphorical place of hope – or an “anticipatory consciousness”, as Ashcroft would put it (9) – emphasises the ontology of becoming and the liberatory possibilities that channel the energies of subjects. It also invites us to come to terms with the complex, if ambiguous, operations of temporalities, involving the re-animation of the present

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<sup>7</sup> Levitas, for one, in her article, “Introduction: The Elusive Idea of Utopia”, conceives of “utopia”, in its various usages, as having at its core the notion of a *perfect society that is both impossible to attain and sustain* (3; my emphasis). In “Looking for the blue: The necessity of utopia”, she defines the term along similar lines as “an imagined perfect society” or “wistfully constructed place” (296). Levitas, however, comes closer to Sargent in pointing out that “utopia” is at its root “the expression of the desire for a better way of being” (290). This definition, she points out, is more analytical than descriptive (291). Its strength, for her, lies in the ways it “encourages the identification of an element that different cultural forms have in common – although in so doing, it may also at times gloss over important differences between those cultural, especially musical, forms” (291). Sargent’s notion of utopianism salvages the term from its rigidly prescriptive application and deploys it as a universal phenomenon, given human desire for improvement, for something better (3-4). Sergeant maintains that utopianism, at its root, “is the result of the human propensity to dream while both asleep and awake” (4).

both by the anticipation of a better future and by the “visionary” reconstruction of the past.<sup>8</sup> This double orientation of the present, both to the future and the past, in significant ways, implicates the centrality of memory as a force of transformation, the wellspring of the hoped-for world. Ashcroft maintains that memory, viewed in this light, “is not about recovering a past that was present but about the production of possibility... it is not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to a horizon, somewhere ‘out there’” (9). This creative force of memory extends beyond works with utopian bent to the entire gamut of postcolonial literature or, more generally, works produced from oppressive social conditions that invariably leaves room for the possibility of social dreaming.<sup>9</sup>

Memory thus conceived is concomitant with forms of contestation against ideologies and hegemonies whose role it is to maintain the status quo. The past that memory re-creates, the past that power would rather suppress, is a living past, one that constantly interacts with the present and examines itself in anticipation of the future. Such a past is necessarily, if implicitly, critical of contemporary realities, structured as it is by present considerations and future anticipations. Within this dialectical interaction of temporalities, memory becomes a critical part of the power struggle and social envisioning. This notion of memory as a structured response to the present in anticipation of a better future emerges as a key impetus behind utopian thinking. The re-centring of memory – or human consciousness, more generally – in utopianism decentres utopia in its narrow classical sense as a place. Drawing on Bloch, Ashcroft captures this point cogently:

[T]he utopian impulse in human consciousness does not rely on utopia as a place (unless we understand freedom as a metaphysical place). Rather the dynamic function of the utopian impulse is a dual one: to engage power and to imagine change.... Place becomes central, not as utopia but as the site of transformation, the location of identity, and the generation of a utopian idea. (13)

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<sup>8</sup> See more discussion on the interplay of temporalities in shaping social vision by Soyinka *Myth, Literature and the African World*, especially in the two chapters on “Ideology and Social Vision.” In an earlier review article in *Transition*, Soyinka takes a seemingly contradictory position on the issue, asserting unequivocally: “The African writer needs an urgent release from the fascination of the past.” But even there, Soyinka acknowledges the shaping influence of the past on both the present and the future, pointing out further that the past “is virtually dependent on the sensibility that recalls it.” His main aim is to draw attention to the main danger that attends a preoccupation with the past, which he identifies as the destruction of the will to action (13).

<sup>9</sup> I add this point deliberately in the spirit of extending the application of utopianism beyond the confines of classical utopia.

Ashcroft implies here that utopia as a place is simply an alternative projection of the utopian impulse. But the actual fountain from which both utopias and utopianism spring is the consciousness itself, the imagination, which alone possesses the faculty to dream a better world. The past, through memory, is conjured up in this process, not because of any association with some earlier utopia or from any nostalgic impulse necessarily but, rather, because it is the only site capable of generating critical energy with which to engage the present and dream the future. In concluding, Ashcroft locates the utopian function of post-colonial literatures in both its practice and its vision – “the practice of confronting and transforming coercive power to produce an imagined future” (13).

In *Behold the Earth Mourns* and *Day After Tomorrow*, there is a fluid relationship among the three temporal planes. In both novels, the oppressive conditions of the present, coupled with fond images from the past and the possibility of a better future commit the protagonists to assuming control over their own destinies. Pitted against an apartheid system, committed to sustaining European privileges and suppressing the aspirations of all the other less-privileged peoples, Srenika finds himself split between gratifying his narrow personal considerations and the wider political cause, the anti-apartheid struggle. His decision as to the proper course of action is determined by temporal considerations as well as his commitment to justice and freedom. Samsher, for his part, finds himself under similar circumstances. Initiation into adulthood, for him, means that he must embark on a time-honoured, if stultifying and reactionary, life in the shop, viewed among his community as a fitting destiny for an Asian, in total disregard for own autonomy. Conscious of the changing times, Samsher decides that he must contest the life that his Asianness is bent on imposing upon him, even if it means exiling himself from the community. Paramount in Samsher’s mind is his dream of becoming his own man. In both novels, engagements with power – the apartheid state for Srenika and the community for Samsher – become the only avenue to a just world. For both novels, the making of a better world, as I argue in the subsequent sections, hinges on the liberatory choices that are made in the present.

### ***Behold the Earth Mourns: Evolving political consciousness and subjectivities***

Singh represents the Satyagraha, which in the novel takes the form of non-violent anti-apartheid resistance, as the impetus behind the evolution of political consciousness and the shaping of model subjectivities. Written at the height of the clamour for belonging and citizenship, the novel represents Indian participation, alongside other freedom-loving peoples,

in the making of a just South Africa, seemingly a deliberate move to showcase the community's investment in, and purchase on, the nation. This representation also seems to be an endeavour to debunk any impression of Indians as a group that connived with the system.<sup>10</sup> In the novel, the anticipation of a post-apartheid nation, free of its caste, race, gender and other prejudices, by implication, involves presently exposing and challenging the structures that, in perpetuating these ills, hinder the realisation of full humanity within the national border.

Apartheid emerges in the novel as a system that both produces and obstructs the realisation of the anticipated nation. Importantly, it is also central to the structuring of the narrative. Emphasising belonging and rootedness, when the novel opens, Srenika is haunted by the prospect of forced removal from "the only home he had known in all his existence." His plight is described as resulting from "the destiny of his birth." Srenika is saddened by his helplessness in the face of "the wrongness of things." The novel represents apartheid as a system that has taken "long years of planning and design", which, by implication, calls for an equally deliberate and carefully worked-out response (Singh 1). As the novel largely keeps in the background its real antagonists, the architects and functionaries of apartheid, the centred, albeit subtle, conflict is that between Srenika and Krishandutt. Theirs is, more broadly, a conflict between resistance and complicity – what Devarakshanam Govinden captures more aptly as "passivity without resistance" (150).<sup>11</sup> Srenika's agitation against apartheid's racist legislations contrasts sharply with Krishandutt's compliance and deviousness. Where Srenika thinks beyond his personal plight and identifies with the less-fortunate victims of forced removal, Krishandutt cares only about the effect of the planned eviction on the family and the "compromise" that he can strike with the system (Singh 2). Rather than functioning simply as a foil for Srenika's evolving political consciousness, however, Krishandutt embodies the narrowness of vision that, along with the aforementioned prejudices, needs to be expunged from the nation. The vision that Singh charts, in this regard, is implicit in the contrast between the two brothers.

Both Srenika and Krishandutt invoke the sanctity of the family to justify their positions on anti-apartheid resistance. Singh's novel, like Indian South African fiction more generally, constructs the family as a critical site for the performance of identity and the

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion the suspicion against Indians, culminating in the 1949 Durban riots, see Dhupelia-Mesthrie's *From Cane Fields to Freedom* (26).

<sup>11</sup> Govinden suggests that Krishandutt's main problem is his tendency to separate the personal from the political: "[He] chooses to view the historical reality around him in a wider, impersonal context, seeing it as part of the masculine and rational pragmatism that Gandhi criticised.... He wants to embrace the landscape and not its people" (150).

determination of selfhood. Srenika and Krishandutt, as second generation Indian South Africans – their father, Nirvani, and his wife having come to Durban as free-paying passengers – are equally concerned about the protection of their family (Singh 3-4). The patriarch, the novel notes, “believed in his family keeping together as a closely knit unit” (Singh 5). The symbol of this unity is the big family house and the home that it provides. With the looming forced removal, this unity comes under threat and, with it, the sanctity of the family, depicted as a protective vessel against threats of cultural erasure (Singh 2). Srenika resolves to challenge this systematic onslaught on the essence of peoplehood by joining the Satyagraha. His commitment to protecting the family, this atomic unit of social integration, signals his growing political consciousness. Significantly, Srenika’s decision is prompted not simply by the danger that his own immediate family faces or from any personal humiliation, but, rather, by a heightened sense of social responsibility – his realisation that injustice to one person is injustice to all and the need to take a clear stand and resist unjust laws. Joining the Passive Resisters, for him, is not a decision taken lightly on the spur of the moment, but from careful consideration, after a number of years of studying the country’s repressive legislations which makes it impossible for him to remain blind to the conditions around him (Singh 5-6).

Where Srenika acts from a heightened sense of political consciousness, Krishandutt does so from narrow personal considerations, concerned, as he is, only about the wellbeing of his immediate family. Krishandutt’s inaction – and inaction for Srenika, at least, is a compromise of one’s consciousness or even an outright connivance with the system (Singh 8-9) – is born out of what he conceives as a deep-seated sense of helplessness. He advises Srenika about the need to “obey the rules and live on” (Singh 3). Krishandutt’s life is designed on avoiding “thinking about anything that would mar the routine of his business.” For him, “All the laws, the cancerous plans could go on as long as it did not touch him, his home, his life, his family and business.” It takes Srenika to remind Krishandutt that he cannot remain untouched for long (Singh 6). Like Srenika, Krishandutt also, in his own way, acts out of family considerations. Fulfilment, for him, means a “gentle tenderness of [his wife’s] love” (Singh 3). It is, however, not as though Krishandutt disagrees with Srenika from any conviction that the course of action the latter has embarked on is wrong; rather, he quantifies his family’s contribution and feels that his father’s philanthropic gestures to the community are sufficient. Out of his own sense of family loyalty, Krishandutt feels anxious about Srenika’s priorities. He is uncomfortable with Srenika “spending more time buried in libraries, discussing and seeking the knowledge of human emotions instead of learning

economics.” Krishandutt would rather his brother exerts his energy and “his interest unlimitedly into the complicated machinery of the business left to him by his late father” (Singh 6). To him:

[Srenika] should be developing [the business] further to make it pay bigger dividends. Instead he was tormenting himself, torturing himself with dead material in books. If he must read, then he should learn the methods and technique, the rise and fall of foreign currency, the new ways of enhancing further production of what the family expect of him. (Singh 6)

In so capturing Krishandutt’s interiority, Singh simultaneously reproduces and in so doing debunks through Srenika’s stance the stereotype of Indians as a people overly obsessed with business and the economic side of life. Such perception seems unpropitious and has to be expunged as Indians prepare to take their place in the new nation. Of course Srenika is also involved in his family’s business, but his pursuit of business is counterbalanced by his political commitment.

While the novel’s plot is largely linear, there are subtle evocations of the history of the Indians in South Africa that testify to their hope and investment in, and attachment to, the nation. Notable here are the advent of the Nirvani family in South Africa as “passenger Indians”<sup>12</sup> and the long history of Indians’ political commitment through the Satyagraha. As continuations of earlier Satyagraha campaigns launched by Gandhi in 1907,<sup>13</sup> the impetus behind passive anti-apartheid resistance in the late 1940s and early 1950s is traceable to the gap between the promises that brought indentured and passenger Indians to South Africa and the politics of both colonial and apartheid regimes that denied their fulfilment.<sup>14</sup> From the

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<sup>12</sup> Indians, as is already well known, arrived in South Africa in two distinct categories: either as indentured labourers or as voluntary, self-paying passengers, who mostly belonged to the business class, thus the label “passenger Indians.” Although the term resonates more with the South African context, the arrival of Asians in East Africa follow similar trend.

<sup>13</sup> See Dhupelia-Mesthrie (21) for details.

<sup>14</sup> In their book, *Inside Indenture: A South African Story*, Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed (2010) present a telling account of the promise that brought Indians to South Africa as indentured labour under British colonialism. The British Indian Government, through its office of the Protector of Indian Immigrants, formerly Coolie Agent (78-9) that was set up ostensibly to look after the interests of the indentured labourers, was mandated to issue a notice to planters and other concerned parties (which include for my purpose here, “COOLIES INTENDING TO EMIGRATE TO NATAL”, i.e., passenger Indians), detailing “the exact terms upon which Indian Immigrants were enlisted for service in Natal” (Desai and Vahed 38; my italics). The seed for future resistance is sown when the indenture system turns out to be nothing but a veneer of slavery. For further exploration, see Sam’s *Jesus is Indian* (5-11; 130) and Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie’s *From Cane Fields to Freedom* (10-11).

beginning, the degrading conditions under which Indians and the rest of the underprivileged peoples of South Africa lived and worked and the racially-inspired legislations that were passed to restrict their freedoms and opportunities in a bid to preserve European privileges have been antithetical to their purpose of coming to South Africa. Non-violence, in this sense, emerges as a crucial means of holding the nation-state to deliver on its promises and ensuring that it measures up to its responsibilities to the general populace.

Read in this context, Singh's novel, as Antoinette Burton points out, represents a critical history of Indian contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle as a departure from earlier initiatives that focused on institutional and organisational sources while drawing on reflections in memoirs and autobiographies (64). Nonetheless, the novel chronicles not so much the birth of personal and political consciousness among Indians, as Burton contends (64) – for that, in view of the long history of the struggle, predates the phase of passive campaigns captured in the novel and, in any case, Srenika is already politically conscious when the novel opens. Rather, the novel represents the birth of intersubjective engagements that defy and transcend racial boundaries, reflecting how the determination of Indianness hinges on its location in South Africa. The non-racial campaign that emerges in the novel, in anticipation of its more protracted form during the Black Consciousness Movement, rehearses for the anticipated post-apartheid nation, free of racial divisions and segregation.

Written around the time of the inception of grand apartheid, *Behold the Earth Mourns* espouses the dismantling of prejudices in all its forms as definitive of its brand of utopianism. The rejection of racial segregation enforced by the system demands a far-reaching regime of tolerance. The consolidation of non-racial alliance in anti-apartheid politics, as such, becomes the most significant step towards the making of the nation. Singh represents a four-way axis of inter-race relationship, both in defiance of apartheid's demand for racial separation and as a concerted resistance against the system, with the ultimate goal of undoing it. Indianness, as part of this wholly-embracing nation, is determined both by its history in the land and engagements with other racial groups. Burton argues that far from being incommensurate, the fate of Indians as a racialised group and the politics of non-racial alliance,<sup>15</sup> together, become galvanising factors in anti-apartheid resistance for those who embraced it in the late 1940s (64). Thus, while anticipating a free post-apartheid nation, Indians' participation in the

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<sup>15</sup> Although Burton speaks of these alliances as “cross-racial”, the guiding principle at the time, and later during the Black Consciousness Movement, was a non-racial one, designed deliberately, as it was, to defeat apartheid's logic of racial separation.

struggle simultaneously legitimises their claim on South African citizenship which, at the moment of writing, remains unresolved, largely on racial grounds.

While all the four racial groups in South Africa are represented, it is Indians and, to a lesser degree, Africans, who occupy the most prominent roles and stage the most significant pattern of inter-racial engagements. Burton reads the novel “as a site where inter-racial interaction – and even co-dependence – has been achieved”, granting, correctly, that Singh’s representation of the nation’s racial landscape is not a model of inter-racial harmony (65). As a product of the period that initiates non-racialism in anti-apartheid struggle, the novel’s politics seems to be driven by the need to showcase instances of and possibilities for collaboration and interdependence in inter-racial spaces. As such, the novel, given its orientation to contemporary historical realities, is conspicuous in its suppression of the tensions between Africans and Indians which erupt during the 1949 Durban riots,<sup>16</sup> eleven years before the novel’s publication. Singh’s selective chronicling of only the positive forces of inter-racial engagements, at the risk of grounding her utopian vision on a lopsided history, seems to be guided by the urgency to avoid jeopardising the delicate non-racial anti-apartheid alliance that is beginning to take shape at this moment.

Yet the Afro-Indian engagement, far from being founded on an unexamined alliance, has its own moments of tension, more so, on divisive issues such as the very viability of non-violence. In the first significant Afro-Indian conversation, Serete Luseka, Srenika’s African friend, provides a counterpoint to Srenika’s defence of the Satyagraha during the latter’s inaugural speech, delivered to a group of Passive Resisters. “People like you Srenika spoil things for us”, Serete says, “and there is no strength in this type of talk” (Singh 18). Serete’s and Srenika’s involvement in the leadership of non-violence signals the readiness and commitment of Africans and Indians to present a concerted front against apartheid. Burton recognises the significance the material presence of Africans in the novel in the following remarks:

Rather than erupting intermittently along the plot-line... African characters in *Behold the Earth Mourns* serves as its superstructural apparatus: they are integral and even

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<sup>16</sup> The 1949 Durban riots marks, perhaps, the lowest moment in Afro-Indian relation. It stems from the economic frustration by the Africans, who without any state machinery to protect them from the superior Indian business infrastructure, as was the case with the Europeans, vented their fury on the Indians. Many accounts of the riots, both historical and fictional, while acknowledging the racial overtones (with Indians depicted as victims and Africans as perpetrators), implicate class conflict and the role of the state as being the underlying causes (see, for instance, Dhupelia-Mesthrie 26; Hassim 132-57).

indispensable to its forward (and backward) motion. Re-materializing the *inter-racial* modes of engagement on view in the novel not only destabilizes the story of progressive Indian political development, it helps to underscore the multi-dimensionality of racial formation in South Africa... and to address the relationship between fiction and politics. (65; original emphasis)

The re-materialising of Afro-Indian engagements, perhaps more significantly, also has the potential for social direction. Singh's emphasis on the constructive ramifications of these inter-racial engagements and, by extension, her silence on the excesses that they generate stems from the utopian proclivity of her writing. This seems expedient, for a novel published in 1960 when the common aspiration of disenfranchised South Africans is to present a united front against apartheid would do more harm by representing the uglier side of inter-racial tensions than by glossing over them.

In what appears to be a reproduction of the Indian-employer, African-worker stereotype, Singh, through various such relationships, explores how class differential complicates inter-racial harmony. Srenika and Serete, for instance, are independent of each other when the novel begins, and are bound only by their common opposition to apartheid, even though they disagree on how best to go about it. In fact, Serete, with a slight edge over Srenika, quickly seizes the opportunity to remind him of the emptiness of his defence of the Satyagraha, when they find themselves in detention, crushing stones. Srenika views their exertion as a wanton waste of human energy where crushing machines would be more efficient. Serete reminds him: "This is your punishment. This, my boy, is part of the labour sentence that makes for our spiritual and physical survival" (Singh 25). Serete alludes here to Srenika's earlier speech, delivered shortly before their arrest, in which he presented non-violence as "a disciplined mastery of the physical, emotional and spiritual forces of passivity against any wrong" (17). Serete turns Srenika's own words against the speaker himself, referring to him patronisingly as "my boy." As Burton highlights, the term reverses the brown-employer, black-worker hierarchy and highlights the political mentorship that Serete offers Srenika in this scene (72).

Class differences underlie Srenika's and Serete's differential experience of detention. Where Srenika has the luxury of turning down a bail application by his family, Serete has no other option than to serve his full sentence. Serete's vicissitude and vulnerability contrast sharply with the ease with which Srenika resumes his interrupted life, with his family's resources at his full disposal. A virtual destitute, having lost his job and unable to provide for

his family, Serete turns up at the Nirvani business premises and blames Srenika for his “imposed suffering to cure other people’s ill mind” (Singh 66). Srenika, justifying himself, launches into a lofty speech about the search for truth, a “goodness to give to mankind [which] is not security of material things – a house, three meals a day” (Singh 66). The novel suggests that the demands of the Satyagraha seem suited to people in Srenika’s station, assured, as they are, of their daily meals and a house to live in. For those like Serete, it is rather stringent. Serete demands of Srenika: “But how does this improve my situation? How do I get a job, some money, some land to build a home. I must breathe, eat, sleep. Neither God nor the devil give me anything” (67). In a telling moment, when their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the Nirvani business’s bank manager, Srenika tells Serete that the business is “in a bit of a mess.” In an effort to level their plights, he remarks, “You see everything – poverty, riches, people, the rich, the poor, the dogs, animal life, we all have situations to overcome” (67). The *situation* that Srenika has to “overcome” turns out to be overdue bills. The two world views that Serete and Srenika represent in this episode reveal what Burton describes as “the tension between ‘Indian’ political idealism and ‘African’ realism” (72). Such tensions complicate any possibility of meaningful inter-racial harmony. The novel’s solution only endorses prevailing racial hierarchy and, while it works for Srenika and Serete who happen to be friends, it does little to ease the wider Afro-Indian tensions of the sort that culminated into the 1949 Durban riots.

While Afro-Indian relations are significant, Singh centres her utopian vision on the engagements between Indians as an emerging diaspora in South Africa and their “homeland” in India. The privileging of diaspora/centre engagements over the nationally bound inter-racial ones, while presently compounding the nation’s predicaments, holds hope for a richer mix of cultural heritage. In a masterly handling of plot, Singh exploits Srenika’s marriage to Yagesvari to frame the convergence of the personal and the political, the diaspora and the centre or the national and the transnational, gesturing ultimately towards the humanistic. Srenika’s marriage is first broached following his detention as a way of detaching him from politics. Upon release, Srenika tells Krishandutt that prison “jolted [him] into maturity” (Singh 33). But this jolt, as Burton points out, propels him not toward the ongoing political activity, as he imagines, but along his family’s plan. Marriage, the family expects, will strap Srenika with personal considerations that will redeem him from the precarious waters of politics. Burton points out that Srenika, far from “maturing” beyond the clutches of politics, “finds himself at the heart of the politics of conjugality in South Africa” (68). Exercising his freedom, he rejects his family’s choice, Ravina – recommended on grounds of family

connections and caste considerations – for Yagesvari, whom he had met during his last visit to India. Srenika's preference for Yagesvari (in India) over Ravina (in South Africa) enables the author to explore not only personal struggles against apartheid racial laws but also the resultant tensions between political and cultural consciousness.

In keeping with the tenor of the novel, Yagesvari is a perfect match for Srenika. Despite her initial caste prejudice, she is just as politicised as Srenika. The complication in their transnational relationship stems, first, from her parents' misgivings about the dehumanising conditions in South Africa. Naresh, Yagesvari's father, tells Krishandutt, who, as Srenika's putative father, has travelled to India to ask for Yagesvari's hand in marriage:

I would find it most painful to send her to any place where her dignity as a human being, where her nobility as a person would be ignored or wounded. She has been brought up with unlimited freedom, for I should know that the sweetest treasure of mankind is to feel free. She has learnt this when she was still very young, and can be trusted with great responsibility. (53)

In response to Krishandutt's appeal to the love between the intending couple as the most important factor in the proposed marriage, the liberally-minded Naresh shifts the burden of decision to her daughter. Yagesvari welcomes Srenika's overture at the expense of Chitral, her childhood friend and admirer, who fails in his desperate bid to dissuade her. In view of the novel's progressive rhetoric, the one redeeming element of Srenika's and Yagesvari's transnational marriage is the readiness with which each foregoes a more conventional suitor – Ravina, also South African, in Srenika's case and Chitral, also subcontinental, in Yagesvari's. While it helps to highlight apartheid's injustice, the marriage only seems to endorse the widely held stereotype of Indians as a socially exclusive group, which threatens to undermine whatever has been gained in terms Afro-Indian solidarity.

The second, far more serious, complication comes soon after the engagement as though in vindication of the fear that Yagesvari's parents had from the very beginning. Krishandutt returns to South Africa to the breaking news that Srenika will not be able to bring his wife into the country. Deemed auspicious in India, Srenika's marriage coincides with the passing of the legislation barring wives from marriages contracted outside South Africa from entering the country (Singh 85). Srenika's dilemma is compounded by Naresh's resolve not to allow his only child to suffer any form of indignity. Naresh's concern is that the passing of the new legislation means, in effect, that his daughter may be without citizenship (Singh 90).

Sangamitra, Naresh's wife and Yagesvari's mother, in a sudden change of heart, enlightens her husband of "a greater citizenship than one that man creates" (90). She amplifies:

If we understand this then our relationship to one another, to the sentiments of country, to people is without any barrier. It does not matter whether one has citizenship but it does matter if one is incarnated in the human form and relates with himself and his fellow beings with harmony and Godliness. I cannot oppose this marriage. It has been our desire and it came through the love of our two children. I beg you to allow it to be consecrated with a spirit of goodwill and blessing. (Singh 90)

This utterance features Sangamitra as Singh's mouthpiece, given the novel's privileging of the humanistic over the national at a time when Indians are still denied citizenship and the nation is still reeling under the weight of racial discrimination and violence. The gesturing towards the supranational, or the universalistic,<sup>17</sup> in this excerpt as in the novel more generally, though utopian, is much less an escape from the realities of the nation than the raising of the standard to which it must aspire.

Srenika's marriage to Yagesvari becomes a test of his loyalty to South Africa. Initially, he brings his wife into the country amidst fear and uncertainty. Yagesvari is allowed into the country on a temporary permit that will guarantee her residence status until the authorities decide otherwise (111). The long-awaited decision, when it finally comes, stipulates that "No wife of a marriage contracted by Indians outside South Africa will be allowed to remain or enter the country" (Singh 147). Yagesvari returns to India forthwith. Both Chitral and Naresh are of the view that Srenika should relocate to India. Chitral, from a humanistic consideration, maintains that Srenika can continue with the struggle from "where his life is cast, above a place, above nation... for the human race" (174). Naresh's demand is guided by both his attachment to Yagesvari and business consideration. He implores Yagesvari: "let [Srenika] relinquish the rights to his country.... I have no son.... He could take over my business entirely.... He could manage it from now. I have no one else but the two of you" (Singh 174). Yagesvari feels that her husband's duty is primarily to his country and his people. She knows that even though Srenika is split between South Africa and India

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<sup>17</sup> Compare this to the project of Third World Universalism that emerges in Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* in Chapter 2. The Bandung Spirit following the first Non-Aligned Movement Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, united the political elite of the "Third World" countries, then emerging from colonialism. Groups such as Indian East Africans, who identified more with the British colonialists found themselves politically isolated as they remain reluctant to heed calls for integration.

by virtue of marriage, he clearly privileges South Africa. She argues with her father that Srenika's relocation to India would amount to a betrayal of the struggle: "He cannot give up at this stage. So much is involved and so many people are concerned... he does not belong here. This is part of your country. You are its life. He has his own life, his own country and I am his wife. I hope to be able to join him soon. I'm going to try and re-enter the country. I have got to do this for both our sakes" (Singh 174). Here, as elsewhere, Singh privileges the political over the personal and the cultural; South Africanness over Indianness. Like Srenika, Yagesvari places a far higher premium on political than economic consideration. She evinces a heightened sense of political consciousness and a fighter's mentality, making her a fitting companion to Srenika in his political commitments.

Yagesvari's political development, as in Srenika's experience against the backdrop of apartheid in South Africa, requires her to awaken to caste prejudice in India. As an anti-apartheid narrative, Singh's novel draws clear parallels between the two evils in each of the two locations, showing how revulsion to one logically produces similar effect with regard to the other. In this sense, *Behold the Earth Mourns* anticipates Goonam's autobiography as an anti-apartheid narrative as discussed in the third chapter. Relocation to South Africa, coupled with Srenika's influence, galvanises Yagesvari's evolving political consciousness. Initially, she defends caste practice to Srenika, who, coming from a background of anti-apartheid resistance, finds her position shocking. Yagesvari takes an essentialist stance, maintaining that while there are opportunities for people from the lower caste, not many of them would dare to aspire for higher (such as artistic) ambitions. When Srenika asks her why Prabhu, a young taxi driver they have hired to take them to the shrine of Rama and Sita, wears his dhoti short, Yagesvari explains and justifies it on caste grounds. Srenika finds such caste rules preposterous but Yagesvari as yet does not share Srenika's unease: "All these rules", she says, "rose out of sensible reasons. Gradually these people became classified into caste. The reasons may have been exploited but some of them made senseless" (Singh 101). Through Srenika, Singh indicts such an outlook as a contradiction to the Satyagraha. The novel denounces the double standards of upholding caste prejudice and objecting to the Union's, and later apartheid's, racial discrimination as Yagesvari and the rest of her family does. The height of political consciousness from which Srenika operates demands outright denunciations of all forms of prejudice. The painful realities of racial discrimination under the Union, and later apartheid South Africa, mediate a transformation in Yagesvari, heightening her political consciousness.

Yagesvari's illegal return to South Africa marks a new phase in her political development. In choosing to join her husband in South Africa in preference to her father's design to have him relocate to India, Yagesvari identifies with the political over the cultural. In her first journey to the country, she harbours a naïve assumption that marriage to a South African grants her automatic right of entry. The intervening period enlightens her about the racial bias behind the Union's immigration restrictions. Her decision to slip into South Africa, this time by sea rather than by air as in her first journey, highlights how the new mode of transport introduces tighter control of the gateway into the country. The sea journey is necessitated by her determination to reunite with her husband against the country's legal barriers that have torn them apart. With Yagesvari is her infant daughter, conceived in South Africa but born in India. Although the narrative does not foreground the child's identity, it draws intriguing parallel with its hybrid counterpart in Tejani's novel. Where Samsher and Nanziri's child is billed as belonging to a "new civilisation", Srenika and Yagesvari's is imagined as destined for the "cosmic heavens" or "the infinity of the universe" (198-99). The association of the two children with the utopian thus emerges as the authors' strategy for indicting the limitations of their respective societies. Although Yagesvari sneaks into South Africa successfully, the country's immigration officials successfully track her down and arrest her. Faced with imprisonment and prospects of deportation, she attempts suicide, forcing the prison authority to discharge her (190-91). The novel ends in suspense, with hints of Yagesvari's death. Even though the utopian moment that the plot envisages does not arrive, her struggles and development lays down the foundation for its realisation.

The novel shows that besides the Union's racial discrimination, South Africa challenges Yagesvari's "Indian" (i.e., subcontinental) sensibilities. Her "Indianness" – or "naturalness", as Almon, Krishandutt's daughter, describes it – destabilises that of other Indian South Africans, underlining the contingent nature of identification processes. At a welcome party hosted in Yagesvari's honour, Ravina, as a barbed criticism of that naturalness, tells Yagesvari: "You are lucky to be in *our* country. You see we have the provinces of India well represented here to meet you today (Singh 115; my emphasis). This affected gesture of magnanimity, while intended to assuage any anxiety that Yagesvari may feel in the face of difference, also emphasises her difference and the role of South Africa in the making of Indianness. The tension between subcontinental Indianness and the one articulated in South Africa further emerges over the question of decorum. As Yagesvari's guide in Durban, Almon, while adoring her charge for her beauty, cautions her against going to town with her "half of [her] back naked" as that will make her seem immodest. Almon's

concern makes little sense to Yagesvari who is used to a different dressing style: “Everybody in India”, she says, “wears blouses or cholis like this. It is not unusual” (Singh 124). In both her personal and political outlook, Yagesvari resists South Africa’s stifling tendency, regarding the double heritage she uniquely straddles as an advantage. She stresses the point in her altercation with Santosh, Krishandutt’s wife, when the latter, in affirming her South Africanness, disparages the former’s Indianness: “You forget that you are an Indian”, Yagesvari says, “and I am both, a South African by marriage and an Indian by birth” (136). Here as elsewhere, Singh contrasts the tendency to disavow Indianness while clinging to immutable traditions and values that are sourced from the subcontinent, with a positive articulation of both Indianness and South Africanness, suggesting the need to embrace the possibilities – and reckon with the limitations – that each heritage presents. Towards the end of the novel, Yagesvari confides in Serete, following her unwitting infraction of a racist law forbidding her from sitting on a bench at a public garden: “I feel very sad. I feel guilty. Now I know that it is also wrong that Prabhu should wear his dhoti short” (Singh 130). The eventual realisation that caste practice is founded on the same injustice as apartheid qualifies her as a deserving citizen of Singh’s utopia.

### ***Day After Tomorrow: post-colonial citizenship vs. post-colonial survival***

Since its publication, Tejani’s novel has stoked much controversy, mainly emanating from the tendency to read it as offering a model of post-colonial citizenship. Creative responses to the novel, especially from fellow Asian writers, have offered alternative representations of the Asian experience in East Africa, while critical engagements with it have tended to reconcile the seeming contradiction between Tejani’s vision of “Afro-Asian engagement” and the problematic perception of Africans on which it founded. I set off *Afro-Asian engagement* (notice the deliberate singular form) in inverted commas to forestall any misconception that what Tejani proposes is a two-way affair, as one would expect of such a model. Rather, Tejani’s model – I call it a *manual* since *the survival of the Asian*, his target audience, is its end, with the initiative on *his* side – is a one-way affair. In this section, I argue that most of the novel’s apparent contradictions can be resolved by, instead, reading the work as a *manual* of post-colonial survival. The novel’s utopian gestures, itself, demand such a reading. Within the utopian framework that it employs, the novel engages with, and indicts, contemporary realities, not to explicate or predict socio-political trends, but to signal possibilities for both

present and future enactments and it zeroes down on Asians' sexuality as the main route to the envisioned utopia.

In accounting for the popularity of "half-castes" in Asian East African writing, one key question that Dan Ojwang explores pertains to how these products of mixed-race relationships, as "figures of post-colonial shame", become "signs of post-colonial hope" (17). The stigma that East African communities in fictional works by both African and Indian writers attach to such relationships and children born out of them, is precisely what Tejani deliberately sets out to challenge in *Day After Tomorrow*. In the novel, the treatment of how miscegenation as a practice that is denigrated in the nation's present becomes a "blueprint" for future national coherence requires a closer attention to questions of form. In his thematic reading of the construction of inter-racial relationships in selected Asian East Africans novels, Ojwang contends that miscegenation is deployed in these works as part of the literary intervention to imagine a more inclusive citizenship that is cognisant of the cultural heterogeneity of the post-colonial states that produce them (18). These novels recognise the urgency, in Ojwang's words, "to shake off the demands of particularistic sense of belonging and... the narrow claims of community", seemingly in response to charges of social exclusivity directed at Asian communities by both British colonisers and Africans (17). In the context of Africanisation politics against which *Day After Tomorrow* emerges, these demands and Asians' sense of social exclusivity become what Ojwang, after Rosemary Marangoli George, has referred to as "cultural knapsacks" – unnecessary burden that complicates the communities' sense of belonging – contending that "the marginality of immigrant communities is not an enabling condition, but an affliction that only assimilating can counteract" (19). Tejani's novel revolves around Samsher's endeavour to rid himself of his cultural knapsack – his badge of identity as the son of a *Wepari*, a "settler-merchant."

While the *Wepari* identity is inextricably linked with Asianness in its broadest sense, the novel presents a worrying disconnect between the impulses that motivate Samsher's rebellion and the "remedy" that Tejani pursues through the protagonist's recourse to miscegenation. This, to me, is perhaps the most critical structural and thematic inconsistency in the novel. Tejani himself, however, locates the novel's main limitation outside the text. In the epilogue, he intimates that the novel would be richer and more complex if its East African audience were possessed of a "larger than life" liberalism. "Good writing", he opines, "comes out of that sense of liberalism, that sense within the writer which makes him confidently place his trust in his vision and communicate it with confidence to the public" (143). In keeping with its utopian impulse, Tejani presents the novel to his East African audience in the

hope that “soon, very soon, people will emulate the rudiments of this structure for a fine building” (144). What he calls for here is nothing but the demise of Asianness itself and what he regards as its strongest signifier, the brownness of the Asian. “When that goes”, he speculates, [the Asian] may be happy (144). The unhappiness of Asians, constructed here in racial terms, is unconvincingly related to their social exclusivity. The essence of Samsher’s rebellion, however, is constructed as the urgency to escape his destiny as the son of a *Wepari* and “live in a different world” (Tejani 9).

Stereotypically, Samsher is raised in the ways of his people. His socialisation emphasises not his brownness or cultural connections to the subcontinent, but what it means to be (the son of) a *Wepari*. All that Samsher and his siblings know about the subcontinent are gleaned from the anecdotes that their Bombay-born father, Mohemadali, has narrated to them about how, as a desperate run-away, he ended up on board a ship destined for “the coast of dark Africa” (Tejani 7). Mohemadali, “inspired by an ancient tradition and the old spirit of pioneers, which brought him and other men to this land”, believes that such narratives will toughen Samsher “in mind and body”, as proper for a *Wepari*’s son (Tejani 23). Though expediently not part of Samsher’s consciousness, this romanticised account of his father’s recruitment into indentureship, and his migration to East Africa and subsequent adventures against the lions of Tsavo, implicates British colonialism in mediating the contact between Asians and Africans. In entrusting the economy to the Asians, British colonialists helped to consolidate Asians in their *Wepari* identity. Samsher offloads this “burden of the past”, which all the brown people are constructed as carrying with them from a past that predates his forebears’ migration to East Africa, without much reflection. His rebellious consciousness is produced, against his father’s desire, by the urgency to escape into another world, away from the shop, from this “barricade against humanity” (Tejani 8-9). It is primarily this *Wepari* lifestyle, and not Asians’ brownness, that the novel, in disagreement with Tejani’s own afterthought in the epilogue, structures as the real burden of Indianness.

Given the novel’s utopian proclivity, the formal disconnect above displaces to the background Peter Nazareth’s charge against Tejani’s treatment of the Asian question in sexual rather than political terms. Nazareth indicts Tejani for failing to transcend the personal by writing about a love relationship between an Asian man and a Muganda woman and thus failing to tackle what he regards as “some of the deepest racial taboos brought about by colonial rule.” The pairing, to Nazareth, would have been more effective if it had been between an Asian girl and an African man (25). Nazareth deems the novel’s didacticism as having failed due to Tejani’s lack of awareness about the fundamental shortcoming of

Samsheer / Nanziri pairing, evident in the author's apologetic afterthought. He extends Tejani's naivety to his failure to predict the 1972 Asian expulsion to be announced shortly after the novel's publication. While these criticisms are valid in many ways, they centre problematically on the thematics of the novel, ignoring the form that the author deploys. The strength of utopian writings rests not in the "remedies" they provide but in their critique of contemporary realities against which such "remedies" are projected. In any case, the utopian form presupposes that the "remedy" it constructs is not-of-this-world, i.e., utopian. For *Day After Tomorrow*, the power of the narrative rests, not in the merits of the narrated cross-racial union – irrespective of how the pairing has, or could have, been structured – but in the novel's capacity to challenge its contemporary readers to examine the structures that defeat its realisation. The question, then, should be whether the narrative enables the readers to interrogate such structures.

If there is any deliberateness to Tejani's *naivety* as Nazareth contends, the site to locate it is the plotting of the novel itself. This is not to deny that textual silences do speak but that we ought to be attentive to *how* they speak and the *subtexts* they encode. In my view, however, this ascription of deliberate naivety or what Stephanie Jones, after Nazareth, captures more eloquently as "the very strategic historical elisions of the text" indicates a certain discomfort with, or resistance to, the point of Tejani's narrative (35).<sup>18</sup> Jones touches on the utopian proclivity of *Day After Tomorrow* but her intertextual reading of the novel emphasises its gesture towards mythology and Negritude. Jones rightly reads the novel as being at odds with the kind of literary interventions that the fraught post-independence period required (36). Her reading, however, runs into what she regards as the novel's contradictory sets of images, conditioned as it is by certain presumptions about Tejani's seemingly progressive rhetoric.

Jones approaches the novel in light of Soyinka's critique of Negritude, which Soyinka indicts for simply reversing, without challenging, the "the very components of ... racist syllogism[s]" that underpin European colonialists' Manichaeism and inflicting the system of thought on a culture that is otherwise "most radically anti-Manichean" (127). While it is true that the novel deploys the same Manichean binaries that shaped European colonialists' perceptions of Africa, Tejani does not, as Jones claims, follow in "the tradition of strident expression of Negritude" (36). He *preserves* these images and depictions and reverses them only where such reversals suit Samsheer's desires. Jones's reading of *Day After Tomorrow* in

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<sup>18</sup> Tejani's own afterward – presented as an epilogue – bears similar discomfort.

light of Negritude is thus quite problematic. To the degree that Tejani romanticises Africa, he does so less in the Negritude spirit, as most readings of his novel have tended to assume, and more in the expatriate tradition. In merely shedding his *Wepari* cloak without examining its ideological fibres, Samsheer simply substitutes one form of imperialist orientation for another. The *Wepari* economic privileges that he disavows are conditioned by the same colonial superstructure that nurtures Asians' imperial ambition in East Africa, which is reproduced in his dominant role in his relationship with Nanziri.<sup>19</sup> Tejani's utopian vision is thus a model not of post-colonial citizenship, but of Asian dominance in a heterogeneous post-colonial state. This reading is at odds with Jones's in the way it implicates Tejani's text in the expatriate rather than Negritude tradition.

The "inter-racial engagements" that Tejani envisions are continuous with the structures and ideologies of imperialist domination. Only in the post-independence moment, he realises the urgency to alert his Asian audience to the direction of the currents of nationalism so they may swim along with it. From the outset, Samsheer is conscious of his privileged position of dominance. He does not outgrow his impression of Africans as objects of curiosity and desire. In his first depicted encounter with Africans, he is struck by their "peculiar smell .... The strong smell of people who live life in the open, at one with the earth, the beast and the elements" (Tejani 14). His fascination with Africans is heightened by his desire to tap into their essential freedom, this "mysterious power which made them completely at home in their surroundings" (Tejani 15). Samsheer is most unsettled by Asians' failure to realise that their destiny lies in Africa and that they share it with Africans on whom "they depended ... for their livelihood" (Tejani 15). That destiny, coupled with the reality of political independence, requires a different mode of engagement with Africans than what existed during colonialism – one that disdains overt forms of violence and exploitation.

The novel harnesses Samsheer's privileges and equips him for the new mode of engagement. Yet his aversion to violence and ethnic or racial particularities leads him not toward examining the structures that produce them, as the plot initially suggests, but to reproducing a different form of power. As a young boy, Samsheer witnesses colonial racial violence directed at African passengers trying to board the steamer that brings his family to Kampala. He is disturbed by the sight of European crews clobbering the Africans back into the lake as they struggle to board the departing steamer. Samsheer asks his father why the African passengers were not allowed to board in time. But all Mohemadali can say is that it is

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<sup>19</sup> See Arlene A. Elder's article "Indian Writing in East and South Africa: Multiple Approaches to Colonialism and Apartheid" (117-18).

“[b]ecause they are Africans. Also third class passengers” (27-8). The phrase is said to have gone through Samsher like a hot needle. In what appears to be Samsher’s first birth to a new consciousness, the novel remarks that a cold hatred of violence grew deep in his young soul (28). What Samsher finds particularly more disturbing is complacency with which Asians enjoy their position of relative privilege as a buffer between the Africans and the Europeans. This experience congeals into some vague hatred in Samsher towards his Asianness but it is devoid of any far-reaching liberatory energy.

Samsher’s rebel consciousness awakens merely as a vent for his sexuality rather than any wider political cause. The trigger is a ritualised Kiganda greeting enacted in his presence by a Muganda pair, a woman and a man, whose traditional attires – a *basuti* for the woman and a *khanzu* for the man – attest to their gracefulness and cultural pride, reigniting Samsher’s long-held desire to escape his destiny in the shop. The novel observes:

Only this time he very much wanted to escape into something, with someone. Samsher looked at the harmony which surrounded the *khanzu* clad white figure of the man and the colourful figure of the woman before him... [A] fierce longing came into him, a yearning to be with such harmony. For the first time in his young malehood, watching the man and the woman before him, now talking gently, their fingers intertwined and playing with each other, he woke up to his puberty. (36)

This moment captivates Samsher for its exoticised and sexualised enactments. But it is merely Samsher’s masculinity that awakens. His disavowal of his Asianness does not acquire any political significance since it is simply a price he must pay to partake of the graceful Kiganda culture.

The allure of this enactment contrasts diametrically with the outrageous display by the “cruel Punjabi neighbours” that awaits Samsher and his brother when they return home. They find their mother on the verge of despair, with a pile of clothes that have been trodden upon with dirty feet, spread out on the floor before her. “Some of the other clothes... had been thrown into the gutter, and carried black marks of the hotel sewer” (Tejani 37). The inexorable pull of the Kiganda culture on Samsher is juxtaposed with Samsher’s steadily increasing disaffection towards his own heritage. Tejani’s denigration of Asianness in the novel seems calculated to bolster every stereotype against Asians. The strongest of this is that they, especially of the trading class, are swindlers and exploiters. “In public”, the novel states, “the elders stole, cheated and manoeuvred a thousand ways that would fatten their

treasury somehow. The children deprived of any humanitarian ideals, learnt from their parents, swore freely, were lewd to the females since they could not talk to them, both of their own colour and especially of other colours” (Tejani 37). Although the focus here is on Samsher’s neighbours, the Masood Din’s family, the discourse invests them with a representative function. The idea of Asians turning against one another is represented as resulting from their in-betweenness, which make them afraid of Africans on the one hand and gripped with terror for the European colonisers, on the other.

Tejani’s exasperation with Asians ought to be read against the general mood of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Seemingly oblivious of the waves of Africanisation sweeping across the region, Asians, especially in Uganda, continue to insulate themselves and lean towards England, even when it becomes increasingly clear that their destiny lies in East Africa. Concerned about their survival in a post-independence dispensation, Tejani’s strategy here involves ripping their cultural heritage of all its allure so that they may embrace their destiny in East Africa. Tejani locates the impetus for his utopianism within Asianness itself, couched in the form of a common joke among Samsher’s elders, who insist that Asians will never have any standard of civilised ethics as long as they retained their brown colour. The implicit logic here is that racialised identity, as well as the cruelty and intolerance associated with it, as in the case of the Din family, all originate from lack of inner freedom (Tejani 39). Not surprisingly thus, miscegenation, constructed as the strongest “liberatory” impulse with the capacity to restore the lack, emerges as the route to Tejani’s utopia.

The insular nature of the Asian society that Tejani focuses his attack on appears at odds with the pioneering spirit that brought them across the sea. The mythologised representation of the voyage, in keeping with Tejani’s utopianism, emerges as an indictment on Asians’ present complacency and exclusivity. In representing it the narrative assumes a nostalgic tone:

To understand the pioneering fortitude of the Indians of those days, one had to only think of Vasantlal’s journey. Lions, unknown countries, the wilderness, do not shake him. The sea and its might do not move him. There he sits in one of the seventeen dhows, his brown face and hands mingling intimately with the sun-scorched sail. Smoking peacefully on the hookah, he looks ahead, rocking gently in the motion of the sea, his wife sits next to him creating anew the peace of domesticity which they have left behind. Like Janaka’s daughter, Sita, she would walk to infinite eternity with her man. (Tejani 32)

This account is not a unique tale of a couple's maritime voyage but one with an infinite representational capacity. Sustained in its timelessness by the present tense, Vasantlal's exploits typifies the experiences of the Asians, who made it to this part of the western Indian Ocean world in search of new opportunities. The voyagers' resilience and their capacity to live "anywhere in dark Africa" are attributed to their strong tradition of adventure, discipline and industry (32). The novel suggests that these ethos risk being undone by Asians' insularity in the post-independence nation. Tejani realises the urgency to awaken Asians to the opportunities that Africa has to offer. Significantly, the celebration of their industry and adventurousness simultaneously involves fossilising the African as an unchanging object. Thus, the ensuing encounter is one that involves Tejani's industrious and adventurous seafarers on the one side and, quite magnanimously, the noble African savages on the other. In setting up the stage for this initial encounter, Tejani acknowledges that East Africa, this dark wilderness, was no ordinary one: "It contained people as well. People very different from [Asians, people] who lived a life close to the earth and the elements. Who had no consciousness of shame because of the fullness of their natural dignity. Men and women at one with their surroundings" (32). This is the same quality that that attracts Samsher to the Kiganda culture and ultimately to Nanziri.

Tejani's purpose in constructing the Nanziri/Samsher pairing, and the latter's role in it, if it was not already clear, emerges towards the end in the dream that Nanziri has just minutes before Samsher makes his overture to her. In the dream, she is transported back in time to a primeval, paradisaal state in which she has "turned into a huntress, searching for food." She is terrified when suddenly all the animals, seemingly unaware of her, start running towards her, sniffing her and stampeding away into the horizon when they finally see her. Only a gorilla-like figure remains, "with heavy chest, holding a club" and "[a]n antelope lay dead at its feet, his food for the day." Then the narrative comes to how they negotiate their encounter:

Like two primeval creatures, their only thought for food, they stared at each other for some time. He gave a gruff, wanting to protect his kill for himself. The woman kept staring and never took her eyes off him. In obedience to the command in her eyes, the club gradually slipped from his hands and he turned and went back to the skinning. Equally slowly she came and sat near him.... Suddenly he pushed her away with his head, like a bull butting a cow. She lost her balance but didn't fall.... She looked into

his eyes which shone like carbon. He got up, slung the animal on his back, snatched the club and began walking towards his cave. Dumbly she followed him. (Tejani 113-14)

This encounter re-inscribes the racial hierarchy that the dawning of political independence threatens to interrupt, given the increasing waves of Africanisation politics. While the dream reveals the common humanity, and primitive origin, that the Asian and the African share, it particularly emphasises Nanziri's hopelessness and Samsher's role in providing the rescue. At a metaphorical level, this dream furnishes insight into the distinction I made in the title of this section between the model of post-colonial citizenship and post-colonial survival. If Tejani's was primarily interested in the former, one would expect *Day After Tomorrow* to emphasise liberatory possibilities that inter-racial engagements present. Instead, the novel reproduces and preserves the very structures of power and domination that the surface structure of narrative appears to denounce. The cumulative force of the narrative merges Nanziri's racialised identity with her femininity and Samsher's racialised identity with his masculinity. Contrary to the superficially progressive tenor of the novel, Samsher's masculinity and Asianness are re-inscribed as sites of power. What clearly emerges here is an expatriate Tejani who, far from following in the footsteps of Negritude, as most critics have tended to assume, is writing for his settler community, urging them to a new vision of settlers'hip.

## Conclusion

The utopian motif in *Behold the Earth Mourns* and *Day After Tomorrow* is generated by, and in response to, the racial and political tensions that are stoked by colonial, apartheid and post-independence politics in both South Africa and East Africa. The two distinct versions of Afro-Indian engagements that the two novels present are indicative of the specific racial politics that against which each projects itself. Where Asian East Africans emphasise their Asianness or even Britishness – by the virtue of the British passport they carried – as their primary affiliation, Indian South Africans, who have to contest apartheid's racial segregation and the denial of citizenship – hence their South Africanness – prior to 1960, find themselves emphasising their South Africanness as primary. Within the context of the emerging diaspora consciousness in South Africa, Singh's characters transact their transnational dealings with India as South Africans, while simultaneously performing their Indianness. The implicit

displacement of Indianness in the performance of South Africanness emerges in the novel as a more convincing process in the evolution of national consciousness than Samsher's contrived disavowal of his racialised identity to embrace a national one, while preserving the underlying power structures that calls it into being.

Even though both novels gesture towards the utopian, they engage in different ways with the realities that produce them. *Behold the Earth Mourns*, despite its aesthetic weaknesses, more effectively engages the power structures against which it projects itself. Constructing apartheid as the main obstacle towards the realisation of the envisioned utopia, the novel, in engaging ways, represents the struggle against the system as critical to the emergence of Indian South African subjecthood. *Day After Tomorrow*, while purporting to achieve a similar end, turns away, and deliberately so, from the real structures of domination that generate the protagonist's revulsion and explores what is merely symptomatic. In effect, the novel ends up reproducing the same power that the protagonist denounces, only in a different form, leaving the intention behind the author's utopia suspect. The utopian vision that each novel presents is not so much hinged on a belief in the possibility of perfecting Indian/Asian – or, indeed, human – conditions as on the creation of structures capable of guaranteeing a just and enduring inter-racial harmony. That Singh's novel emerges as more politically progressive has less to do with authorial idiosyncrasy than with particular pressures exerted by apartheid racial injustices. The South African context diametrically contrasts with the East African one where most Asians, apprehensive of the post-independence regime, look nostalgically at the by-gone colonial order while orienting themselves towards the UK.

## Chapter 2: Transnational Movements, the Unhomely and the Politics of Belonging in Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle* and Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*

### Introduction

Postcolonial Asian East African fiction chronicles the arrival of Asians in the western Indian Ocean<sup>1</sup> and how their association with British colonialism, real or perceived, later triggers post-independence political backlashes, dispersing them to metropolises across Europe, the US and Canada.<sup>2</sup> This fiction shows that the demarcation of the western Indian Ocean littoral into post-colonial nation-states brings with it new regimes of citizenship and belonging, displacing old forms of migrancy and settlership, as extensive and untrammelled transoceanic and cross-border movements, especially under colonialism, give way to greater border controls under the new dispensation. The complex web of mobility, exchange and transnational affiliations that unfolds against the backdrop of the transition from colonialism to independence complicates notions of home and national belonging. Representations of these processes in *In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* foreground the nation as a site where nationalist politics and diasporicity jostle for the determination of Asians' subjecthood and legitimacy in the emerging post-independence nations.

*In a Brown Mantle*, published in 1972, is remarkable for its accurate prediction of Amin's expulsion of Asians later that same year. Emerging a year after *Day After Tomorrow* at the height of Africanisation, the novel complicates Tejani's earlier plea for the recognition of Asians, offering instead a model of post-colonial citizenship based on their evident participation in nation-building. Nazareth emphasises a separate Goan identity as an implicit rejection of the homogenising Indian category. Against the common stereotypes of Indians as a race of exploiters, he underlines Goans' history of dedication to the country's civil service rather than economy with which Indians are typically associated. Narrated by Joseph D'Souza from London where he is exiled, the novel explores how the colonial history of the Goans and their exploits under Portuguese and British colonialists shape their orientations and attitudes towards nation-building in the present. The novel is set largely in Damibia, Nazareth's fictitious name for Uganda, with a cyclic plot that ends as it begins with the news about the assassination attempt on Robert Kyeyune (the fictional figure of A. M. Obote), the

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<sup>1</sup> I use this designation to distinguish between the East African coast and its hinterlands as a cohesive regional entity defined by coordinated pre-colonial maritime activities and later forged loosely into British East Africa during colonialism and the region's later fragmentation into independent East African nation-states.

<sup>2</sup> I pick up on the political backlashes behind this trend of dispersion in chapter 5, where I explore narratives that, as part of the need to reckon with the past, highlight the contribution of Asians in fermenting their own plight.

country's first post-independence Prime Minister. Constructed as a fictional memoir,<sup>3</sup> the novel presents the narrator's confession of his involvement in the political corruption and a nation-building process that has gone terribly wrong. As with the general presence of Goans in the country, the political corruption, ineptitude and the atmosphere of mutual suspicion between the Goans and Africans are constructed as postcolonial conditions. The novel takes stock of what it means for Goans to inhabit a heterogeneous, post-independence Damibia, relating – without excusing – the history of their relationship with British colonialism, while emphasising that the loyalty that a majority of them express towards the British Empire is tempered by notable cases of cooption in anti-colonial nationalism.

Similarly, *The Gunny Sack* amplifies the themes of mobility in the western Indian Ocean, representing Asians' later dispersion to imperial metropolises as post-independence political backlashes. Like Nazareth, Vassanji constructs Asians' experiences in East Africa as a postcolonial condition. Narrated from Boston, United States, where the narrator, Salim Juma, the great-grandson of the first-generation patriarch, Dhanji Govindji, is exiled, *The Gunny Sack*, like *In a Brown Mantle*, constructs the "West" as the preferred migration destination for Asians. Despite Asians' long sojourn in East Africa, which in many cases becomes permanent settlements, the region, as in Nazareth's novel, doubles as a connecting node on a complex migratory trajectory that begins from Junapur, India in 1880s. A member of Shamsis, a fictitious, esoteric sect of Islam, Dhanji leaves Junapur, the ancestral birthplace of the sect, as part of a more complicated exodus, impelled by inter-community conflicts that result from the establishment of the sect some three centuries earlier.<sup>4</sup> His choice of destination, as with the rest of the Shamsis, is not accidental, for the sect is founded on the prophecy about the sun one day rising from the west, with a promise that they should "wait for a saviour" (Vassanji 7). The novel thus constructs the westward journey partly as a spiritual quest for the long-awaited saviour, who three centuries later is yet to arrive.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> The subject of the narrative, of course, is Joseph D'Souza, even though the narrator's story bears striking resemblance to author's. A second-generation migrant, his father having come from Goa to work in the British Civil Service, Nazareth's Goan characters share similar experiences with the author. In his work on editing an anthology of Goan Literature, Nazareth draws attention to what he describes as the "perpetual exile that Goans seem unable to end" as being part of his own experience (374).

<sup>4</sup> Vassanji, like Nazareth, also foregrounds the fictional nature of his novel, despite – or even because of – traceable autobiographical elements in the work. A third-generation Indian on one side and fourth generation on the other, Vassanji, like his characters, lived in both Kenya and Tanzania before migrating to the west. See "Life at the Margins" (Vassanji 119).

<sup>5</sup> A similar motif runs through *Amriika*, where Ramji, the narrator, at the beginning of the novel, recalls that his ancestors were instructed to await the final avatar of their god, Vishnu, whose arrival, as in *The Gunny Sack*, would be heralded by the sun rising from the west. The novel is similarly preoccupied with locating the west.

Shamsis wander all over the East African coast throughout the colonial era. At the height of post-independence political pressures, many of them flee the region for imperial metropolises, continuing with what the novel depicts as their west-bound journey.

In designating these narratives as "postcolonial" instead of the more specific "immigrant genre", as Rosemary Marangoly George proposes in her reading of Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack*, I recognise not only their inextricable link with the history of European colonisation across large parts of the Indian Ocean world and the resultant anti-colonial nationalisms but also their emergence during particular moments in the national histories of the region. George herself acknowledges that the immigrant genre, which, for her, is typified by the aforementioned novel, belongs to the wider gamut of postcolonial literature, generated as it is by experiences of global colonialism, and as such forms part of postcolonialism and decolonising discourse. For George, what is distinctive about the genre, besides its construction of immigration to the "West" and the straddling of multiple countries and continents, is its characteristic "disregard for national schemes" through its proclivity towards spatio-temporal boundaries that are in excess of the nation's and, especially, its detached treatment of conditions of homelessness, while privileging "the metaphor of luggage", both spiritual and material, in ways that make it seem apolitical (72-75). I deviate from George's otherwise useful separation of the immigrant genre from postcolonial literature in recognition of the significance of nationalist politics that generate these narratives, while simultaneously remaining cognisant of the transnational and global networks in which the diasporic subjects they represent are caught up and how these complicate notions of "home" and belonging.

More importantly, I do so to show that these narratives are products of particular nationalist politics that are themselves implicated in wider imperial and anti-imperial nationalisms that seek to offer competing universalisms. Produced by a combination of local and transnational forces, *In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* grapple with a complex web of national and global politics. In the two novels, the transition from colonialism to political independence – and the attendant disintegration of the western Indian Ocean world into the emerging nations-states – has far-reaching socio-political ramifications for Asians. These historical and political developments demarcate, in Vijay Mishra's terms, the "old" and "new" diasporas, which, as products of maritime mercantile capitalism and the post-1960s

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Ramji observes: "My people sought it first in Africa, an ocean away, where they settled .... But in time this west moved further, and became – America; or, as Grandma said it: Amriika" (*Amriika* 3). The mythical element in the apparatus of memory is also attended by material considerations, transforming this religious quest into an economic one.

global migrations, respectively, inhabit two different kinds of locations. Mishra points out that the subjects of the old diaspora, in the colonial or post-colonial spaces they occupy, are implicated in a complex relationship with other (formerly) colonised host/national peoples, while those of the new diaspora, having entered metropolises of the former imperial masters or other white settler countries negotiate their subjecthood within a multicultural paradigm along with other immigrants from former colonies (13). I turn to how multicultural politics determine how East Africa is imagined from imperial metropolises in chapter five. In this chapter, I confine myself to the tensions between the old diaspora and the host/home nation,<sup>6</sup> touching on the new one only insofar as it illuminates the former.

In the post-colonial climate in which Nazareth's and Vassanji's novels emerge, the desire for, and the question of, national belonging and Afro-Asian engagements are shaped by two interrelated ideological pursuits – one local and the other global – that the postcolonial governments in Uganda and Tanzania embarked on shortly after independence. The local one comprised programmes of economic nationalism, which in Uganda becomes popularly known as Africanisation, designed largely to mitigate Asians' stronghold on the economy (cf. Mamdani's "Ugandan Asian Expulsion"). The global one was an offshoot of the loose anti-imperial Third World alliance born out of the 1955 Bandung Conference, which in both countries, involved a move to the left. The two ideological pursuits are articulated in the Arusha Declaration (1967) and the Common Man's Charter (1969), which the immediate post-independence governments in Tanzania and Uganda, respectively, passed to present to their citizenry popular versions of socialism as a vital initial step towards the actualisation of the full meaning of independence and the realisation of national ideals.<sup>7</sup> Each of the two documents crystallises the respective government's policy resolutions and

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<sup>6</sup> I use this designation in view of the problematic, often shifting conception of home. Neither "host" nor "home" is a stable category in view of the movement from the old – to the new – diaspora.

<sup>7</sup> Both documents identify feudalism and capitalism as twin evils that endanger the new nation. To isolate them, the Tanzania under its ruling party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), restricted its membership to peasants and workers. Similarly, the register of the *Charter*, passed by Uganda's ruling party, the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), hinges on the notion of the "common man", preventing effectively, as stated in article 3, "any one person or group of persons from being masters of all or a section of the people of Uganda and to ensure that all citizens of Uganda become truly masters of their own destiny." The two documents deal with slightly different political threats. In Tanzania, which is already a republic at the time, the threat is primarily from capitalists; in Uganda, it is from both feudalists and capitalists, though the former present a more urgent threat as the passing of the *Charter* follows the 1966 Kabaka Crisis – the first coup d'état that deposes the country's first ceremonial president (also the Kabaka of Buganda) and ushers in Republicanism after the abolition of monarchies – and the subsequent promulgation of the 1967 Republican Constitution. In both countries, the capitalists are predominantly Asians. In Uganda more so than in Tanzania, the rhetorical force of the "common man", defined primarily against the feudalist, rests in its capacity to conflate the feudalists and the capitalists as enemies of the new state.

articulates proposals for national service. The so-called Asian exodus of the late 1960s and early 1970s that Nazareth's and Vassanji's novels represent is mainly fuelled by these ideological pursuits. Thus, for a more productive reading, I draw attention to these political developments as motivating impulses behind the two novels, insisting on the need to read them against the context in which they emerge.

In the three sections that follow, I explore, first, the early history of Asians in East Africa and what the transition from colonialism to political independence means to them. This transition produces new diasporas in the west, with complex relationships with the old one that is embroiled in a problematic relationship with the home / host nations. Second, I explore how the experience of migration and the complex affiliations that result from it complicate questions of belonging, especially in the post-independence dispensation. Third, I turn to how the plotting of the two novels represents a search for a workable model of positive Afro-Asian engagements. I conclude that Asians' victimisation in the wake of the immediate post-independence nationalist fervour, are shown to stem less from popular perception towards the diasporic subjects as vestiges of imperialism than from their failure to adjust to the demands of the post-independence dispensation.

### **From the western Indian Ocean littoral to the nation-states**

*In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* construct the western Indian Ocean region as a site for the confluence of African, Asian and European cultural streams. While cultural exchanges in the region predate European colonialism by several centuries, the history of tripartite exchange among these groups, as constructed by Nazareth and Vassanji, falls into two distinct phases.<sup>8</sup> The pre-independence western Indian Ocean phase – framed by the rise and, eventually, the collapse of mercantile capitalism and, with it, new patterns of imperialism – dates from 1750–1960 while the post-independence era of nation-states dates from the early 1960s, with the coming of political independence, to the present.<sup>9</sup> These geo-historical

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<sup>8</sup> While grappling with slightly different textual choices, Dan Odhiambo Ojwang, in his reading of the images of "Africans" in Asian East African literature, treats the narratives he explores as depicting three distinct periods in history of the East African coast: the reign of Omani-Arabs, that of European colonialists and the post-independence period (47).

<sup>9</sup> The period after 1960, besides demarcating the emergence of the nation-state in East Africa, also marks the end of the great age of steam ships and dhows from the long-distance trade. The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Persian Gulf introduces new migration patterns. And the new era of air travel further quickens the dissolution of the western Indian Ocean as an integral geographic unit, with the influx of people from outside the region (Gilbert 17).

demarcations resonate with Erik Gilbert's argument for cross-cultural interactions as the best determiner of historical and regional unity (8-9). Gilbert credits British colonialism across the region for galvanising regional processes for more intensive cultural production during the period in question, with empire-building, migration, and long-distance trade occurring on a much more dramatic scale. Ironically, however, it was the 1000-1750 period – which he characterises as marked by minimal regional processes – that, in fact, registered more far-reaching cultural creations (Islam being a case in point) than the period that he credits.

I draw on Gilbert's periodisation here not to endorse his claim about the intensity of cultural creation from 1750 to 1960 but, rather, in recognition that the intervention of British colonialism, as a factor that sets apart this period, injects new dynamism into the cultural exchange in, and the cosmopolitanism of, the region, drastically changing terms of engagement among its different peoples. If anything, writers such as Amitav Ghosh argue that European colonialism actually presented a disruptive influence on the cosmopolitanism that existed in the region. Describing the characteristic emotion of the time as xenophilia – “the love of the other, the affinity for strangers” – Ghosh insists that colonial domination, far from galvanising meaningful cultural conversations, actually forestalled them. Thus, in the field of culture, the period of decolonisation represented “attempts to restore and recommence the exchanges and conversations that had been interrupted by the long centuries of European imperial dominance” (37). Ghosh's view on the resumption of this “interrupted cosmopolitanism” as the “necessary and vital counterpart of the nationalist idiom of anti-colonial resistance” resonates with the spirit of Bandung – or its brainchild, the Non-Aligned Movement – in its denunciation of all forces of imperialism.<sup>10</sup> Rather than spawning this harmony or cosmopolitanism, however, the Movement, Ghosh contends, was “an institutional aspect of a much broader and older cultural and political tendency” (38). Animated by desires and hopes for a certain kind of universalism and a continuance of Afro-Asian cultural exchange, the Bandung Conference and Non-Aligned Movement after it sought to ensure that the cosmopolitanism of the old Indian Ocean world lives on in the post-colonial time of the nation-states.

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<sup>10</sup> The spirit of Bandung, as articulated by Indonesia's president, Ahmed Sukarno, sprang from an awareness of the diversity of the twenty-nine newly independent Afro-Asian countries in attendance and their transnational unity against imperialism. “Conflict”, Sukarno warns, “comes not from a variety of skins, nor from a variety of religions... but from a variety of desires [...] We are united by a common detestation of colonialism in whatever form it appears. We are united by a common detestation of racialism. And we are united by a common determination to preserve and stabilize peace in the world” (Prashad 33-4). Ghosh, along similar lines, suggests that this unity was at the heart of the “interrupted cosmopolitanism” and that reclaiming it represents the attempt by Third World anti-colonial nationalism to create a universalism of their own (37).

*In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* show that the practicability of this grand vision rests, on the one hand, on how diasporic Asians view their destiny and negotiate the critical question of affiliation in the post-independence moment and, on the other, on how the nation-states react to their presence. Given the diaspora's association with British colonialism and their orientation towards the UK, the transition from colonial domination to political independence becomes increasingly significant. Drawing on what he regards as a central, yet hitherto unacknowledged, connection between colonialism and diasporisation, Quayson adds an important dimension to understanding the regional processes and inter-racial engagements facilitated by colonialism. Colonial space-making through the instrumentalisation of diaspora, Quayson argues, beyond simply establishing and demarcating a geographical reality projects particular socio-political ethos upon such spaces. Most importantly, colonial politics, he points out, involved altering pre-existing relations among the local groups over whom it established control (245). The steady intensification of diasporisation and the simultaneous weakening of Afro-Asian engagements, as reiterated in my exploration of these novels and in chapter four, stems largely from the racial consciousness that colonialism inculcates as part of its modality of control.

*In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* thus strive to put in perspective Asians' colonial history and their entry into the post-independence moment. The two novels challenge prevailing perceptions of Asians as colonial stooges and the concomitant post-independence politics that brand them as vestiges of colonialism and as such objects of further decolonisation processes. They offer more redeeming narratives of Asians' purchase on the nation-states in the region to legitimate their claims of belonging. Writing in the wake of post-independence political backlashes, Nazareth and Vassanji grapple with issues that complicate Afro-Asian engagements both during colonialism and after political independence. But these are concerns to which I return in the last section of this chapter. In this section, I focus on how the two novelists represent the ramifications of the disintegration of the western Indian Ocean region into the nation-states and, by extension, the shift from colonialism to political independence. In my discussion, I treat the novels as works generated by the shockwaves of these changes, exploring how they respond to the challenges that the new heterogeneous, post-independence nation-states present to the Asians while offering useful perspectives from which to appreciate their experiences.

Nazareth's novel presents a long flashback that shows how Goa's history of colonial domination simultaneously accounts for the presence of Goans in East Africa and determines their political loyalty and sympathy towards the British Empire. The Goan seafarers, who

leave the island of Goa, their homeland, first for the subcontinent and, later, East Africa, follow the routes charted by their successive imperial masters. Their mobility and shifting allegiances are constructed as signs of, and subterfuges against, their susceptibility and the imperative to survive as a people in the face of the vagaries of imperialism. The novel constructs Goa's vicissitudes as determining Goan character as captured in this condensed history of the island:

Hardly anybody paid any attention to Goa until India decided a few years ago to reconquer it from the Portuguese who had ruled it for four hundred and fifty years. The world cried "Aggression" against India. Then the world started crying "Aggression" on behalf of India against China who, it was said, had attacked India at the border on the pretext that the land was originally Chinese. Meanwhile, having got used to the idea of being Indian once again instead of Portuguese, Goans started wondering what it would be like to be Chinese. (Nazareth 2-3)

In a geopolitical climate where allegiances are ever shifting, the Goans quickly learn the costliness and futility of resisting such drastic changes. Conscious of their defencelessness in the face of unrelenting colonial aggression, they learn the expedience of yielding to colonial authority with a lasting sense of fatalism, opting for security. The novel implicates the efficiency of the propaganda machinery of the British colonialists, in cohort with the tendency of the Goans themselves to kowtow with the former, for the latter's failure to realise that they are in Eastern Africa due to shortage of opportunities in Goa – itself a colonial condition – not out of the benevolence of their colonial masters and as such do not owe them any gratitude (4-5). Nazareth attributes this loss of perspective to Goans' servitude, a condition of their long history of imperial domination.

The vulnerability of Goans and their loyalty to successive colonial masters determines their migratory trajectories. Abala and Zindere – Nazareth's fictional codes for Entebbe and Kampala – are just two nodes along a winding circuit that begins from Goa and, through Bombay, ends up in London, the British imperial metropolis. What sustains this transnational migration pattern is the promise of better opportunities that Empire extends but seems unable to deliver on. D'Souza's father leaves Bombay, prompted by the need to get away from his two brothers who are said to have "no staying power", and settles in Abala, where he, like those who had preceded him, joins the British colonial Civil Service. The reason for this choice is said to be "embedded in the bitter history of our race", a "history of conquests and

reconquests – rule by Hindu empire-builders, Moslem imperialists, and finally Portuguese" (Nazareth 3). Subjection to this long chain of colonial domination conditions the defenceless Goans to embrace the imperative of collaboration in the face of powerful adversaries. They come to believe that their very survival depends on how wisely they negotiate their loyalty. As such, forging anti-colonial alliance with Africans against the British colonialists in keeping with the politics advocated for by D'Souza and Pius Cota – a Goan nationalist from Mosaki, Azingwe (Nazareth's fictional codes for Nairobi, Kenya) – could not have been more un-Goan.

The novel shows that the desire for opportunity and stability that brings Goans to Damibia is undermined by their primary loyalty to Goa and sympathy towards the British colonialists at the expense of identifying with Damibia's anti-colonial struggle. This loyalty and sympathy in the Goan psyche are inextricably linked and are generated by their self-perception as immutable colonial subjects. D'Souza's father, for one, in drawing Pius Cota's attention to the need for loyalty towards the British, asks the young radical nationalist who seeks to rally his fellow Goans against British colonialism, "whether, as an immigrant race, we could bite the hand that fed us what we could not obtain at home." Articulating a sojourner's consciousness, the older D'Souza wonders "whether an immigrant race could get involved in somebody else's fight" (Nazareth 11). This acknowledgement of gratitude, and the concomitant loyalty towards British imperialism that it produces, undermines Goans' participation in nationalist struggle and claim to belonging in the post-independence Damibia. Thus, the transition to political independence shatters the old colonial order in which they had invested so much faith, heightening their anxiety. Written at the height of Africanisation and the resultant upsurge in the "exodus" of Asians to imperial metropolises,<sup>11</sup> the novel is motivated by the urgency to relate the story of how Goans awaken from colonial servitude to the realities of post-independence politics as they adjust from their tendencies as colonial subjects to post-colonial citizens. In D'Souza and Cota, the novel showcases the contribution of Goans to the process of nation-building.

Unlike Nazareth, who constructs the migratory trajectory of Goans as an expedient response to the successive waves of imperial onslaughts, Vassanji imagines that of the Shamsis – their quest for the west (Africa being the most immediate westerly destination) –

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<sup>11</sup> The Asian exodus in the late 1960s, though stemming from Asians' great displeasure with the upsurge of Africanisation politics of the period, is largely voluntary. Cases such as D'Souza's are exceptions other than the rule. The 1972 "exodus", which I explore in the course of the chapter, marks a significant shift, both in magnitude and initiative, as voluntary departure is substituted by expulsion in the respective endeavours to resolve "unhomely" and "alien" presence in the country.

as having both spiritual and economic dimensions. Besides the interest in the long-awaited saviour, Shamsis' journey across the Indian Ocean is also driven by tales of riches that continued to reach Junapur from Zanzibar. Salim remembers that "men returned from Zanzibar invariably rich" (Vassanji 8). Dhanji yields to the allure and, through Probanda, Gujarat, leaves Junapur for the island. As the hub of commerce in the western shores of the Indian Ocean, Zanzibar is a thriving cosmopolitan site. Dhanji's first impression of it is that of "a dream city suddenly rising from the ocean, with its brilliant, luxuriant verdure, the shimmering white of the Arab houses in the foreground, the numerous dhows, boats, steamers and naval vessels of different flags in its harbour" (Vassanji 8). The novel constructs the exchange between the subcontinent and Zanzibar to be centuries old. Dhanji's arrival on the island in the late nineteenth century is preceded by those of other migrants who, over the centuries, voyaged across the ocean to partake of the lucrative trade in slaves, spices and other precious commodities that the island offers.

With the ease of mobility that the western Indian Ocean region affords, Dhanji soon leaves Zanzibar for Matamu on the mainland. He capitalises on the diasporic network that the region boasts by contacting the local *mukhi* – the religious/cultural head of the Shamsis community – to help him settle in this new location (Vassanji 10). In Vassanji's fictitious scheme, the *mukhi*, or the Shamsis community generally, as Peter Simatei points out in his exploration of the Asian question, "provides the centre that enables a re-enactment of Indian identity and is therefore the symbolic link with mother India" (87). Ironically, however, it is the Matamu *mukhi*, Ragavji Devraj, who, in his endeavour to help Dhanji establish himself, sets him up with an African former slave woman, Bibi Taratibu, who eventually bears him a son, Huseni, the narrator's grandfather. The Dhanji-Taratibu liaison is emblematic of the widespread pattern of miscegenation in the region, which with the consolidation of diasporic presence, attracts strong outcry from India, resulting in the sending of "missionaries" to the region to keep the community in line (Vassanji 11). Dhanji, from a combination of pressures from his community and his own growing prosperity, marries Fatima, an Indian-Zanzibari woman, who bears the rest of his other children.

*The Gunny Sack* plots the vicissitudes and wanderings of the Govindjis across the East African coast, with several of them ending up in the West. The family's history, as part of the wider Asian experience in East Africa, is contained in the eponymous gunny sack that Ji Bai, Dhanji's daughter-in-law, bequeaths to Salim. When Salim receives the sack after Ji Bai's death, he finds inside it an assortment of paraphernalia from which he is able to piece

together the family's troubled biography.<sup>12</sup> The gunny sack, as Derek Wright maintains, emerges in the narrative as a confluence of memory and imagination, history and fiction. This intersection emerges as an important site from which the past is invoked to legitimate the present. Wright highlights that the sack's nickname, "Shehrbanoo" – or "Shehru" as Salim shortens it – conflates Scheherazade and Shahryar, the narrator and the narratee of *Arabian Nights*, respectively. In this compilation of tales, Scheherazade faces imminent death in keeping with Shahryar's daily ritual of marrying a new virgin and having her beheaded the next day. The wily Scheherazade postpones her death indefinitely by regaling her heartless husband and king with thrilling tales that she tactfully leaves unfinished night after night under the pretext of having run out of time with dawn fast-approaching. Each subsequent day the king spares Scheherazade's life so that she can finish the tale only for her to repeat the same strategy the next night. A thousand and one nights and stories later, a much humanised and wiser Shahryar spares Scheherazade's life and marries her, having had three children with her in the course of those long nights.

Wright aptly observes that the nickname "Shehrbanoo" connotes the simultaneity of the sack's roles as the narrator and the narrated. Each object in the sack has biographical exploits that make it a repository of the memory of the Govindjis' early experience on the coast. In Wright's terms, "the gunny sack itself constitutes the history that it memorialises" (126). The sack gains significance in the narrative in the way it resists manifold attempts by the Govindjis to destroy it in their attempt to sever themselves their unsavoury past. Aziz, Salim's cousin, who hands over the sack to the narrator in the opening pages of the novel, tells the latter of his family's long-standing desire to rid themselves of their accursed baggage. "It has brought nothing but bad luck.... They want you to burn it, once and for all to bury the past" (Vassanji 5). The pressure to break with the past is matched by the capacity of the same to perpetuate itself by virtually becoming the source of its own sustenance.<sup>13</sup> For Salim, who is keen to piece together the contained memory, the survival of the gunny sack, like that of Scheherazade, depends on its capacity to satisfy that need.

The anxiety that the Govindjis have about their past stems largely from their attempt to escape traces of black ancestry in the family. In his early endeavour to grapple with the "stain", Dhanji forbids contacts between Huseni and his African mother in order to maintain

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<sup>12</sup> For detailed discussion of the cultural biography of material objects, refer to chapter 5 of this dissertation, with references to the works of Arjun Appadurai (1896) and Igor Kopytoff (1986), among others.

<sup>13</sup> In an interview with Chelva Kananayakam, Vassanji describes the unease that association with the past stirs in Asians after arriving in the West, "immigrant syndrome." Its remedy, Vassanji suggest, is to acknowledge the past, in order that it may become real (25).

the family's "respectability", resulting in the son's permanent estrangement from home (Vassanji 22). In his futile search for his disappeared son, Dhanji traverses the plains and coastal towns in the western Indian Ocean region, exhausting all his fortunes in the quest before encroaching on the community's funds entrusted to his care as the mukhi. His fruitless journeys in search of Huseni become a plotting device in the novel. Wright reads Dhanji's appropriation of the community's fund symbolically as the "siphoning off [of] part of India in pursuit of the piece of Africa he has engendered, the Africa in himself" (135). The patriarch pays the ultimate penalty for this indiscretion, which not only leaves his already impoverished family wallowing in even deeper desperation but also cuts them off from their community. Later, the Govindjis are forced to change their family name to Hasham to escape the "*double* shame of sin against community and... God" (Vassanji 138). Their wanderings, whether in search of fortunes or to escape their stigma, underscore the porosity of boundaries or lack thereof, in the old western Indian Ocean world and the possibilities that mobility affords. When Dhanji returns from Mombasa after yet another futile trip in search of Huseni, he tells Ji Bai: "Our people are doing well under the British" (Vassanji 31). The progress of diasporic subjects within the colonial economy, however, needs to be understood in light of their position as a buffer between European colonialists and Africans and thus as part of the larger "success story" of colonialism.

The coming of political independence turns the table against the Asians. The now-sovereign nation-state does not only circumscribe cross-border movements that colonialism had facilitated but also injects new nationalist ideologies and political ideals, unsettling the old colonial order. Where the British colonialists prized Asians' middle-man role in the economy, the new post-independence government, with its commitment to socialism, now sees them as exploitative capitalists and vestiges of colonialism. The social insularity of the Asians further exacerbates popular perception of them as an alien presence.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, they are viewed as threats to the independence of the new nation. As part of the remedy, the nationalisation of their commercial ventures, following the Arusha Declaration, replicates Africanisation initiatives that generate much of the tension in Nazareth's *In a Brown Mantle*. Where Dhanji had revelled over Asians' success under the British, Hassan Uncle now laments in the wake of TANU's nationalisation drive: "We are washed out" (Vassanji 242). Uttered by Hassan, whose contempt for Tanzania's independence is undisguised, the lament

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<sup>14</sup> Asians' insularity is an effect of diasporisation, which steadily reverses earlier cases of miscegenation. Transgressive liaisons such as that between Salim and Amina, an African girl, attracts a lot of antagonism and, as such, has to be kept secret as in the case of Kulsum (Salim's mother) and her employee, Edward.

carries a twist of irony. The novel suggests that independence calls for the kind of realignment that most Asians are unprepared or unwilling to make.

Vassanji's novel constructs the Declaration as just another version Africanisation politics which, in Uganda, culminates in the 1972 expulsion. The parallel between the two political developments becomes evident in the way they galvanise the Asian exodus of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Focusing on the expulsion as the culmination of Africanisation, Salim remarks that it "cracked our world open like an egg" (Vassanji 246). Underscoring how the expulsion re-orientates the Ugandan Asians, he further elaborates:

There was a world, outside this egg, that you could escape to. Previously, even less than a year ago, going there was like going to the moon: only a few brave souls went to its alien loneliness and survived precariously. Only a few months ago the pious would tell you about the moral degeneracy of the West. Now there were Ugandan Asians in India, Pakistan, UK, US, Canada and Australia. (Vassanji 246-67)

The anxieties that post-independence Africanisation politics leaves in its wake disperse Asians to destinations in imperial metropolises and the subcontinent. Imperilled by his agitation for political reform, Salim, for his part, flees Dar es Salaam for Lisbon and eventually Boston. His family – mother, wife and daughter – migrates to New York. Despite the political tenor of these flights, however, Vassanji, remarkable for his aversion to oversimplification, simultaneously draws attention to their personal underpinnings. In Salim's case, for instance, exile is also a flight from marriage, from "an impossible domestic situation... like my grandfather, Huseni... and even his father Dhanji Govindji who went to look for him" (Vassanji 265). Through this conflation of the personal and the political, the novel, in Salim's desire for an end to these repetitious flights, gropes for closure. But there remains a lingering unease that even the new location will continue to deal the restlessness that impels him to flee Tanzania. Double displacement, as Tina Steiner argues, far from mitigating the disorientation and anxiety about migration, exacerbates it as it signifies a failure to assert belonging (126-27).

### **The unhomely and the national question**

Extending from the subcontinent to the west, the transnational trajectories plotted in *In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* complicate questions of home and negotiations of belonging in the post-colonial moment. In these novels, the interstitial spaces that the Asians inhabit unsettle simplistic notions of home and home-nation. As structures of both exclusion and inclusion, these spaces are critical to understanding not only the anxieties that migration and relocation produce but also the subsequent question of affiliation and its determination in a post-colonial context. As migrant and post-colonial subjects, Asians are constructed simultaneously as agents and victims of exclusion; they are self-defined – and defined by others – as belonging and not belonging to the nation. The determination of the question of belonging hinges on the distinction that George, in her insightful work on politics of home, draws, after Edward Said, between two levels of affinity – "filiation" (biological ties) and "affiliation" (socially constructed ones), with a progressive privileging of the latter (16). In both novels, filiations, via migratory history and diasporic networks, connect the Asians to the subcontinent whereas affiliations are either negotiated on the basis of their long history of settlement or denied due to their association with, or sympathy for, the British Empire.

In these novels, the urgency to negotiate affiliations is compounded by the competing demands of the different locations of migrant – or diasporic – subjects, who, as Wright observes, are defined, simultaneously, by their origins or locations of departure as well as their destinations. Wright maintains that immigrants face the challenge of accommodating themselves to their new locations as well as modifying these locations to suit them (137). Deemphasising impacts of location and political agency, critics such as Simon Lewis read postcolonial Asian East African fiction rather pessimistically.<sup>15</sup> Maintaining that diasporic identity in Asian East African fiction has more to do with "a shared sense of homelessness than with a shared sense of home", Lewis ponders what happens to political agency and subject formation when individual identity is problematic (217). He contends that the kind of postcolonial subject produced by conditions of homelessness is one not so much concerned with dual identity as in other postcolonial fictions but with non-identity, "which renders their various flights ever away from, never towards (or even between) homes" (222). Nazareth's and Vassanji's novels, against this reading, reveal that identification is produced by the diasporic subjects' engagements with the locations they call home or seek to belong. Thus, it seems to me more productive to explore the kind of affinities that Asians negotiate and the

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<sup>15</sup> I use "postcolonial Asian East African fiction" here rather loosely; Lewis himself, while noting that Abdulrazak Gurnah's and Vassanji's novels that he explores are "rich test-cases of contemporary literary and postcolonial theory", as they problematise question of national allegiance and self-identification (216), commits to no specific category.

impulses that inform such negotiations. In these novels, what the various configurations of home underscore is that migration, far from being a condition of homelessness, demands and invariably involves the process of home-making.

The deferral of that process, either due to stronger attachment to the “homeland” or in preference for more desirable destinations, engenders a weaker affinity with the respective home- / host-nation, which should not be confused with homelessness but, rather, viewed as a particular condition of relocation. Privileging their diasporicity or association with the west, for instance, Asian East Africans tend to eschew any claim by postcolonial nationalism on them, while, as citizens, maintaining a civic affiliation with the home- / host-nations. What Nazareth’s and Vassanji’s novels thus underscore is not the incidental, if reductive, condition of homelessness, but the politics that complicate Asians’ presence in East Africa. This complication is constructed as emanating from the interplay between the diasporic subjects’ own desire for a limited – or, in some cases, non – affinity with the nation-state and the backlash against them as an alien presence. The two factors combine to make the region all the more “unhomely”, to use Bhabha’s handy term. For Bhabha, the unhomely captures not conditions of homelessness but, rather, the disorienting effects of *relocations of home* in the aftermath of migration (141). Where homelessness defines a rather ephemeral, incidental condition, the unhomely extends to the overall experience of migration and relocation. To ignore this distinction is to subject these novels to a skewed reading that fails to take stock of the impulses that motivate them.

In amplifying this point, I contend that Nazareth’s and Vassanji’s novels are products of particular nationalist politics that repeatedly breaks to the surface of their respective narratives. The processes of home-making and negotiations of belonging in these novels emerge as a necessary response to the disorienting effects of relocation and shockwaves of Africanisation politics in the aftermath of political independence. Representing the desire to assert belonging, each of these novels situates itself as a counter-version to the dominant national discourse in the respective country that produces it. Thus, other than unwriting the nation, as George maintains in “Travelling Light” (83), the novels resonate, instead, with Bhabha’s argument in *Location of Culture* – writing the nation from the margin (8). Such a posture invites the need to refocus the nation – and, by extension, the nationalist politics that generate the narratives – for a more productive reading. Vassanji’s novel complicates the nation’s narrative, challenging prevailing representations of victimhood as unique to Asians. Alongside Salim’s family, Amina, his African friend and lover, herself ends up in exile,

highlighting that the politics of the time does not subject *only* Asians to this unhomely condition.

Generated by the fallout with post-independence nationalist politics, *In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack*, while chronicling the making of the new diaspora in the wake of Africanisation politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, underscore Asians' investment in East Africa and construct their history from a more redeeming perspective. Simatei emphasises this point in his recent reading of the tensions between the diasporic memories and national histories, arguing that "the very act of writing the Asian presence in East Africa is in itself an attempt to uncover connections to histories of resistance that get suppressed when the stereotype of Asians as collaborators of colonialism is amplified within the official discourse of nation-building." Simatei highlights that the nation remains the site to which Asian East Africans return to enact their difference even as they gesture towards diasporicity, suggesting "the continuing significance of the nation as the site of enacting the politics of identity" (57). The dismissal of the nation from critical engagements with these novels, especially by western critics, stems from their tendency to emphasise these works' circulation within the global system (Kalliney 5), the problematic national allegiance and conditions of homelessness that they imagine (Lewis 216-17) or their purported "disregard for national schemes" (George 72). While these arguments are enriching in the ways they amplify the global dimensions of these works, their blindness to local politics, which, if anything, is the thrust of the narratives, produces lopsided readings.

Both Nazareth's and Vassanji's novels are firmly grounded in the local, largely in a bid to affirm Asians' legitimacy in the nation-states even though that end often fails. Narratives of Asians' experience take a different significance when viewed against the prevailing political rhetoric that depict diasporic subjects as an appendage of colonialism, that should thus have no part in the post-independence dispensation. As counter-narratives, the two novels give a different spin to their respective national narratives by not only highlighting Asians' investment in anti-colonial nationalism and nation-building but also, more significantly, retelling the history of Asians, especially their relationship with British colonialism, from a different perspective. Their cooption and participation in the colonial project appear in a different light when read against those of the African political and military elite, who upon inheriting the state from the departing colonialists become Asians' main detractors. The novels suggest that if Asians stand condemned for their association with colonialism, they should share the dock with the new African political, bureaucratic and military elite. Nazareth and Vassanji juxtapose the complicity in colonialism by both

Africans and Asians with the racially-indiscriminate political banishment of critics of the post-independence regime. As an implicit critique of the reductive, racialised reading of post-independence politics, the two novels – Vassanji's more so than Nazareth's – construct the fate of their characters as symptomatic of the wider betrayal of the ideals of political independence. The unhomey thus emerges not as the antithesis of the nation but, rather, as a manifestation of its inherent contradictions.

For his part, Nazareth, in claiming belonging and legitimacy for Asians, challenges the general perception of them as sojourners who must vacate the country after political independence. He captures this exclusionary tendency in the row between Gombe-Kukwaya, a cabinet minister in Damibia's post-independence government, and D'Souza during their very first encounter. When D'Souza, in responding to Gombe-Kukwaya's enquiry about what country he hails from, states matter-of-factly that he is from Damibia, the latter dismisses his claim outright, insisting on the former's "real country – [his] country of origin." D'Souza is adamant that he was conceived and born in Damibia, forcing Gombe-Kukwaya to answer his own question. From D'Souza's name, he deduces that the former must be a Goan and now he wants to know when the former intends to return to his own country. Whipping up racist politics, Gombe-Kukwaya tells D'Souza that after political independence, no immigrant will be allowed in the country. D'Souza, as Nazareth's mouth piece in this context, responds: "Fine, I'll do that if you'll do it.... I'll go to Goa the day you go back to the Congo. And the day all immigrant tribes in Africa move back to where they came from" (Nazareth 75).<sup>16</sup> The invalidity of autochthonous claims as the basis of belonging, if only by default, justifies D'Souza's own claim to the same on account of a more or less overlapping history of mobility, settlement or resettlement.

In *The Gunny Sack*, Salim bases his claim to Africanness on similar ground. At the national service camp, he challenges Amina for stubbornly calling him "Indian." Salim affirms: "I too am an African. I was born here. My father was born here – even my grandfather!" Amina, with an autochthonous bias similar to Gombe-Kukwaya's, retorts: "And then? Beyond that? What did they come to do, these ancestors of yours? Can you tell me? Perhaps you don't know. Perhaps you conveniently forgot – they financed slave trade!" Salim's defence that not every Indian participated in the trade makes no difference to Amina.

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<sup>16</sup> George seems to draw on claims and counter-claims of this sort when she argues in "Traveling Light" that "[t]he sentiment accompanying the absence of home – the homesickness – can cut two ways: it can be a yearning for the authentic home (situated in the past or in the future) or it can be the recognition of the inauthenticity of all homes" (75).

Salim indicts Amina in turn, reminding her of the culpability of her own Swahili ancestors. "If mine financed the trade", he points out, "yours ran it. It was your people who took guns and whips and burnt out villages in the interior, who brought back boys and girls in chains to Bagamoyo. Not all too, you will say" (211). In the novel, the "African"/"Indian" or "us"/"them" binaries are further complicated by Amina's imprisonment and exile for her political activism. The nuancing of these binaries presents new ways of reading (pre-) and (post-)colonial victimhood and post-colonial responsibility. For Vassanji and Nazareth, alienating Asians on grounds of their migration history and participation in slave trade and colonialism masks some of the more critical issues that underpin post-independence politics. The rhetoric against Asians carries political dividends for political elite, who are at pains to demonstrate the genuineness of political independence.<sup>17</sup>

In the two novels, Asians are alienated, paradoxically, for their attempt to mitigate unhomey conditions that attend their presence in East Africa. As Simatei argues, the presence of the old diaspora into the emerging postcolonial nation is complicated by "its essentialist and regressive self-portrayal as a guest community", determined as it is to insulate itself from the rest of the East Africans in the hope of returning to the "homeland" untainted (58). Writing about life at the margins, Vassanji notes that besides the physical proximity to India, what distinguishes Asian East Africans from other diasporas is that they migrated to the region as communities, preserving their language, religion, sect and caste (117). While these trappings of Asianness enable the subjects to constitute themselves into a diaspora, the resultant insularity becomes problematic with the coming of political independence. In the new dispensation, these "cultural knapsack[s]", as George terms them after Jürgen Hesse, far from being "movable asset[s]", become burdensome, complicating the diaspora's affiliation (73). In Salim's experience, the out-of-place metallic trunk that he lugs to the national service camp becomes the very instrument for his punishment when he is forced to jog with it on his head. Furnished with new insight, he articulates a few weeks later: "We Indians have barged into Africa with our big black trunk, and every time it comes in our way" (204). Salim's

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny the structural imbalances that colonialism established. In *Chimurenga 14*, Mahmood Mamdani, emphasising the nationalistic impetus of popular sentiment against Ugandan Asians as vestiges of colonialism, has argued: "it was the expulsion of 1972, and not the independence of 1962, that brought the first significant institutional change in Ugandan society as shaped by colonial rule. At a stroke, the 1972 expropriation sliced off the dome of local privilege that had crystallized over decades. With that expropriation, Uganda became, in popular language, the land of opportunity for its African inhabitants" (5).

ordeal emerges as a statement of East Africa's aversion to Asians' performance of diasporicity.

In the context of the mid-twentieth century anti-colonial rhetoric – and its corollary, the unity of all colonised peoples – the hostility towards articulations of diasporic difference conceals the demand for assimilation as part of the full dissolution of the erstwhile colonial order. The old privileges that survive the demise of formal colonialism exacerbate the divide between citizens and “foreigners” in the nation-state. For independence to be seen to have dismantled the colonial order, the privileged world of the Asian can no longer be entertained as part of the new dispensation. The predicaments that Asians face largely have their roots in colonialism itself, which as Eng seng Ho highlights, recognised rights as inhering in collectivities. Thus, claims advanced by indigenous nations and cultures increasingly followed similar logic (247). The transition to political independence brings with it tighter national boundaries, obligating the straddling diasporic subjects to decide where they belong. Ho notes further that “[d]iasporic circuits of travel and return [become] troublesome, if not suspect” as diasporas are increasingly regarded as anomalous (247). The grammar of belonging in the post-independence moment, and the urgency towards full decolonisation, demands that the diaspora must prove that they are assimilable or be excluded or evicted as in the 1964 Zanzibar revolution that anticipates the 1972 expulsion.

In Nazareth's and Vassanji's novels, the urgency to assert belonging emerges as a necessary response to the politics of Africanisation in the anti-colonial period and in the immediate aftermath of political independence. Both D'souza and Salim identify with anti-colonial nationalism and nation-building processes in their respective countries. But their experiences reveal that their individual investments are no insurance against political alienation and subsequent victimisation. D'Souza views his dedication to the nation as a service to his fellow Goans, hoping this will win popular acceptance for them. Unfortunately, national service and popular acceptance in the post-independence moment prove incommensurate: “The harder any Asians in public office worked”, D'Souza laments, “the more it seemed to be taken for granted” (Nazareth 127-8). Identifying with anti-colonial nationalism alienates him even from his own Goan community.<sup>18</sup> For Salim in *The Gunny Sack*, identification with the African part of his heritage and the resultant agitation for post-

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<sup>18</sup> D'Souza's friend and mentor, Cota, who finds himself similarly alienated, indicts the Goan community of East Africa of being too chauvinistic, “too concerned with its own self and not what goes on outside... they prefer to remain ignorant” (Nazareth 68).

independence political reforms culminates in his exile.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the two novels underscore the limitations of individual agency, suggesting that Asians' alienation in the post-colonial nation-states stems from the failure to negotiate affiliation at the collective level.

### **Engagements between Asians and East Africa(ns)**

*In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* reveal that communal prejudice and stereotypes – and the pressures that they generate – jeopardise Afro-Asian engagements, complicating diasporic subjects' presence in the post-independence nation. These complications are constructed as postcolonial conditions, originating largely from the hurried transference and imposition of a European mode of nationalism based on the nation-state upon varied, often rival and arbitrarily clustered ethnicities, posing serious challenge to the process of nation-building. The integration of these different ethnicities into a cohesive nation is compounded by the very nature of British colonial projects in Uganda and Tanganyika. Wright points out that unlike in settler-colonies (e.g., Kenya, Southern Rhodesia or South Africa) where land alienation forged a common bond between the masses and the elite, in protectorates (e.g., Uganda) and trusteeships (e.g., Tanganyika, where Colonial Britain assumed "responsibility" after the defeat of Germany in World War I) there was little to unite the various classes and ethnicities into a concerted anti-colonial alliance. In such colonial holdings, the elite were simply groomed and co-opted into the system to continue from where the colonialists had left off at independence (4). Besides, the British colonialists in Uganda and Tanganyika recruited the Asians to fill the middle-man's role, resulting in the latter's eventual domination of the economic sector.<sup>20</sup> The absence of any systematic overhaul of the colonial superstructure at independence intensifies the pressure on the new elite to demonstrate to the masses the substance of political independence.

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<sup>19</sup> Salim's choice here is significant for the way it contrasts with that made by his brother, Sona, who is more fascinated by the Asian part of his heritage.

<sup>20</sup> See Mamdani's article on the Ugandan Asians' expulsion for more on the distinction between settler and non-settler-colonies. The main difference that Mamdani highlights between the two is that where immigrants from imperialist countries monopolised the middleman's function in settler colonies, in non-settler colonies, "this function was carried out by immigrants from older colonies", in this case, the Indian subcontinent (4). Asians' role as a buffer between the Europeans and the Africans, as Wright notes, rather than uniting them divided against the Africans as their fellow imperial victims (129). In *In a Brown Mantle*, Kyeyune, who later becomes Damibia's first post-independence Prime Minister, captures Asians' in-betweenness succinctly: "The British are clever", he remarks. "They placed a middle-man of another race between themselves and the Africans so that they could rake in the profits undisturbed [...] It is the one who deals directly with the Africans who is hated most. The British remain aloof and are neither loved nor hated [...] I can only present you as an exception, not as representative. Paint you black, so to say" (Nazareth 45).

The process of decolonisation, which for both Uganda's/Damibia's and Tanzania's governments ostensibly continues beyond political independence, intensifies the mutual suspicion between the Asians and the East African political elite. For one thing, association with British colonialists and uncertain affiliations with the nation-states limit Asians' political presence in the moment of nation-building; for another, the socialist proclivity of the immediate post-independence governments in both Uganda/Damibia and Tanzania and the nationalisation programmes they pursue put the Asians and their businesses on the receiving end of anti-capitalist and populist ideologies. Capturing this tension, D'Souza observes:

Whereas the Asians were non-existent politically, physically they were all too real. They were the custom and immigration officials, the desk-clerks and managers, the shopkeepers, the landlords, etc., etc. and Damibia was supposed to be an African country! There *were* African business, but they were invisible. Our task, then, was to turn the towns of Damibia into visible African areas only speckled with Asians and Europeans. So many Asian businessmen were dispossessed by making it mandatory that only citizens ran businesses [...] Their businesses were usually bought up at low prices by Africans, often relatives of my colleagues. (128)

What D'Souza captures here, even though he does not explicitly use the term, is the practice of Africanisation, designed to wrest the economy from "foreign influences" and "manipulations" and simultaneously empower the Africans. Historically, Africanisation pursuit combined the new nation's vision of a leftist, post-war, "Third World" politics and its efforts to fortify itself against forces of global imperialism by dismantling local structures of capitalism. Nazareth's conspicuous silence on the ideological impulse behind these nationalisation drives is significant, for the Common Man's Charter that legalises the dispossession of Asians is adopted as an ideological and legal instrument of the Kyeyune (Obote I) government just a year before the novel's publication. Nazareth evades engaging with the ideological underpinnings of Africanisation as part of the new nation's decolonisation process. Such textual silence opens his novel to criticism for oversimplifying Afro-Asian tensions in Damibia.

The overlap between Kyeyune and Obote I – as that between Damibia and Uganda – is, of course, inexact. But it would be a misreading to ignore the parallels between the historical and its "fictionalised" representation, for the mappings, as the novel's strategy for censoring with impunity, carry artistic import. The arbitrary discrepancy between the two

levels of representation thus militates against the artistic merit of the novel and its capacity to illuminate Damibian (Ugandan) social structures. Similar to this is the selective representation that tells a deliberately incomplete story. For instance, the novel, in foregrounding Afro-Asian tensions, silences simmering ethnic tensions such as that between Kyeyune and Gombe-Kukwaya and which, if anything, were historically stronger. The implementation of the Common Man's Charter, for one, targeted the feudalists (monarchists) more than capitalists (Asians) and abolition of kingdoms and the appropriation or occupation of their properties (as a strategy against feudalists) was more ruthless than the controlled nationalisation programmes (against the Asians). A more complex narrative of the events of this period would put in perspective the racial and ethnic tensions that characterise the immediate post-independence period, both of which result from the ideological pursuits of the Kyeyune/Obote I government in the name of decolonisation and nation-building.

Nazareth's narrator, D'Souza, instead, amplifies the ideological bankruptcy of Damibia's new political elite. Damibia's independence movement, for him, "was mainly a revolution one shouted and drank one's way into." Excusing his own ineptitude on grounds of marginality – even though Nazareth himself, in contrasting him with Cota, suggests that it stems from the same "ideological bankruptcy" – D'Souza castigates Kyeyune for being so involved "in the immediate future" that he neglected "the distant future" (49). Echoing D'Souza, Wright identifies the greatest obstacle to Africa's postcolonial progress and the failure of nation-building as the lack of any framing national ideology beyond the ousting of the colonialists. African nationalism, he contends, was "primarily a struggle against colonialism, not a movement for or toward anything and its proponents had a better idea of what they wanted to remove than of what they wanted to replace it with. Few of the new leaders thought beyond the moment of independence to the kind of states they were creating or evolved any original ideas or directions for their construction" (7-8). Drawing such inferences from D'Souza's perspective results in a superficial reading, for Nazareth's novel consciously strives to reveal the narrator's unreliability. The novel suggests that D'Souza's own corruptibility, ideological bankruptcy and sensuousness disqualify him from critiquing similar flaws in his political handlers. D'Souza believes that these flaws in himself emanate from the influence of Damibia's unscrupulous political elite against whom he is powerless. His figure thus functions simply as part of the novel's elaborate masking device, licensing the author to censure Damibia's political system and inept political elite that produced and mentored him.

Nazareth represents Cota, not D'Souza, as his mouthpiece and model nationalist. Unsurprisingly, Cota's assessment of Damibia's politics differs significantly from D'Souza's, stemming as it does from a down-to-earth politics which, contrary to the empty theorising that characterises the latter's, engages with the lived experiences of the dispossessed masses. Cota dismisses D'Souza, and with him the rest of the Damibian political elite, for having learned all his "left-wing talk from left-wing English country clubs!" D'Souza's experience of society, Cota highlights, "is petty bourgeois Goan society" (Nazareth 67). The novel accounts for this anomaly in D'Souza in terms of his having been nurtured in Damibia, a protectorate, where anti-colonial nationalism is not as exacting as in a settler colony such as Azingwe. It is through Cota that Nazareth touches on the class dimension and socialist politics that define Afro-Asian relations in Damibia. Cota, nonetheless, remains a minor character in the novel and class politics and economic independence, as critical issues of the day, even though hinted at, remains largely unexplored. Cota also remains the only positive check on D'Souza's incongruities. Thus, the novel reeks of ambiguities and reads as a rushed satirical project, owing to the unclear boundary between the narrator's unreliability and the author's own stance.

This slippage, for instance, manifests itself in the colonialist mindset with which D'Souza analyses Damibia's postcolonial condition. The corruption and ineptitude that cripples Damibia bear racist overtones. It is not simply that D'Souza himself succumbs to the very vices for which he faults the political elite, while suspecting such flaws to be innately African, but that Nazareth himself seems unconscious of his narrator's incongruities. This makes the novel read like a failed attempt at satirical excoriation. The model of Afro-Asian engagement envisioned in the post-colonial moment draws on the same stereotypical contrast between Africans and Goans/Asians that colonialism promoted. In keeping with the colonial logic that constructed Africans as people who are incapable of managing their own affairs, D'Souza diagnoses the problem with Damibian Civil Service as resulting from the departure of the European colonialists and, especially, their replacement by Africans. Unfortunately, the new bureaucrats "thought like the British or else they didn't think at all"; the Goans, in contrast, "were faithful and efficient civil servants, but they merely executed policy and did not make it, and they were too few" (Nazareth 104). Implicit here is the need for the Goans to assume "the burden" that the colonialists have relinquished, thus nullifying the fact of political independence as most Goans still perceive Africans as a people incapable of self-determination.

The African political elite, for their part, are equally prejudiced against Goans/Asians, largely on historical grounds. Resorting to the same practice of racial stereotyping and homogenising – perfected under colonialism – to reinforce their anti-Goan rhetoric, anti-colonial nationalism is represented as ill-prepared to dismantle the racial prejudice established as an immutable colonial order. The process of nation-building fails to transcend the Afro-Asian racial divide and produce any far-reaching cross-racial engagement since whatever little attempt to that effect remains on the personal level. Asianness is perceived to be essentially anti-nationalism and full assimilation is the only terms on which diasporic subjects can be co-opted. Kyeyune presents *Yosefu* D’Souza to the people as “a brown man outside but he is all black inside”, one who is different from “his brothers, the *Muindis*, [who] have forgotten the cruelty of the White Man and now work with them to hurt us.” The brotherhood that is forged with D’Souza, if opportunistically, is anchored in Goa’s four hundred years of Portuguese colonial rule (Nazareth 44). Critics such as John Scheckter read Africanised tags such as “*Yosefu*”, “*Mugoa*” or “*Muindis*” as expressions of that “brotherhood.” While such tags, as Scheckter maintains, represent the inadequacy of Goanness or Indianness to explain Nazareth’s characters and as such regularise their “solid, visible presence in East Africa” (83), the failure of these new identities to attain any political significance is inescapable. Scheckter contends that such tags seek to strengthen Asians’ identification as Africans “by demolishing their own claims to exclusivity” (84). His argument ignores the fact that these tags are imposed by Africans and not necessarily claimed by the Goans/Asians themselves. As such, they are, rather, statements of Africans’ desire to undo Goan or Asian identities through assimilation.

In the novel, such assimilation initiatives or, at least, co-option into the cause of nationalism – and the ultimate project of inclusive post-colonial citizenship – fails, largely because neither Africans nor Goans/Asians are prepared to shake off the colonial hangover that shapes their perception of one another. Kyeyune’s brand of left-wing politics and populist manoeuvres, for instance, exacerbates mutual suspicion. He attacks not just systems but “the races and individuals who were part of those systems [...] He did not attack only Exploitation – he attacked Asian Exploiters. In the minds of most people [...] Kyeyune was not condemning Exploitation but Asians” (Nazareth 25). Nazareth debunks the stereotype of Asians as an exploitative people, exclusively obsessed with commerce. But his endeavour is offset by a conscious effort in the novel to earmark a separate identity for Goans, apparently

to extricate them from the larger Indian community.<sup>21</sup> Both Kyeyune and D'Souza are instrumental in distancing the Goans from involvement in the economy and the attendant charge of exploitation by emphasising their specialty in Civil Service.

For their part, most Asians take an anti-nationalist position, further complicating their relationship with Africans after political independence. Nationalist politics, as Thobhani points out, represents a threat to their privileged position (77). Thus, in joining it, D'Souza, while strengthening his relationship with the Africans, if only in a limited way, alienates himself from his fellow Goans/Asians. D'Souza's investment in the cause of nationalism, thus seems insufficient to confer upon him the legitimacy he seeks. Towards the end of the novel, his closing farewell: "Goodbye, Mother Africa [...] Your bastard son loved you", as his exile-bound plane takes off, underlines his illegitimacy (Nazareth 150); his self-reference as a "bastard", as Scheckter observes, valorises filiation (83). In his absence, D'Souza becomes a liability to his people, his political pursuit having gone wrong. The Damibian political elite single him out "as a hammer to knock down other Asians" (Nazareth 153). His fallout with Damibia's political elite emerges as a minor key in the failed attempt at assimilating Asians. It is a foretaste of the fate that would befall the diasporic subjects on the altar of political expedience. The accuracy with which Nazareth's novel predicts both the coup against Kyeyune and the expulsion of the Asians emerges as one of its most redeeming features, its structural weaknesses notwithstanding. Part of Nazareth's foresight is to imagine and project the exilic condition that produces the narrative even though the actual writing takes place in Uganda.

*The Gunny Sack*, like *In a Brown Mantle*, highlights the colonial underpinnings of Afro-Asian engagements. Besides the complicity of Asians in colonialism, the novel constructs strong diasporic networks as one other set of factors that complicate these engagements. As in Nazareth's novel, the resultant social insularity of Asians augments their perception as an alien presence in East Africa. The novel structures the engagements between Asians and Africans dialectically as manifest in the predispositions of the three female characters – Ji Bai (born in India), Kulsum (intermediate) and Amina (an African) – around whom the three parts of the narrative are organised. The use of these three figures as pegs

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<sup>21</sup> Both Nazareth and Vassanji hint at the internal division that exist among the Asian East African communities through their exclusivist nature of their respective communities, the Goans and the Shamsis. Akbarali H. Thobhani, a Ugandan Ismaili, in a review essay, highlights the discriminatory tendencies among the different Asian communities and the different manner of their interaction with Africans, noting that such differences, however, did not stop the Africans from treating them as a homogeneous group (78).

around which Asian experiences are chronicled is significant, for as Vassanji himself observes in an interview with Chelva Kanaganayakam, women in Indian communities are entrusted the custodianship and transmission of customs, values and traditions that define Indianness (26). The movement from Ji Bai, Kulsum to Amina represents a search for a workable model of relationship, if not inter-racial harmony, and even though this end proves elusive, the novel suggests alternative modes of relationship and hints at future possibilities. As an African woman, Amina's placement at the end of this dialectical structure signals the novel's gesture towards some form of synthesis. Vassanji observes in the interview: "By the time the novel ends, a relationship might have been possible, but then it is too late because the narrator is already committed to someone else in a very Indian way [...] So he develops a new relationship with Amina, which is very close but cannot be consummated" (26). The lost possibilities emerge as a critique of the circumstances that defeat the relationship and the wider inflexibility of the two communities.

The Dhanji-Taratibu coupling that activates prospects of positive Afro-Asian engagement functions as a thesis. This cross-racial union produces Huseni, the narrator's grandfather. The novel hints at the prevalence of miscegenation on the coast – and, with it, prospects of hybridity – in the early phase of inter-racial contact in the western Indian Ocean world. But this trend is quickly arrested by the consolidation of diasporic links between the coast and the subcontinent, as increase in miscegenation attracts outcry from the "homeland", resulting in the sending of "missionaries" to keep the community in line. Lamenting this interrupted process of integration, Salim muses whether the world would have been different had this trend continued – "if there had been more Husenis", and if they "had grown up unhindered, playing barefoot... clutching Arabic readers" (Vassanji 11). The variance between cultural fusion and diasporicity captured here challenges Gilbert's previously cited argument that stronger regional processes engender stronger cultural creation. The novel represents diasporic pressures exerted from the subcontinent as having disruptive influence on the cultural processes evolving in the western Indian Ocean region. Colonialism interferes with the process, as Ghosh contends, not only by galvanising diasporic presence in the region but also but also enforcing racial separation through violence.

Vassanji's novel invents its own mode of nostalgic indulgence in the form of a concerted search for a disappeared figure, Huseni, embodying a world that has ceased to exist. Huseni's disappearance generates much of the narrative material. Preceding the disappearance, the diasporic pressures that separate Huseni's parents are reproduced in his father's own attempt to sever ties between the son and his African mother. Where Dhanji

succumbs to community pressure, Huseni rebels and disappears from home. Dhanji's protracted search for Huseni is later reproduced in the form of Salim's search for the past world of his mixed-race father. Unlike Dhanji's efforts that ultimately cost him his life, Salim's reconnects him to his family. For Dhanji, the search for Huseni represents his attempt to reconnect to that part of himself that he has surrendered to Africa, while for Salim it represents his attempt at reconnection with the African part of his heritage. Huseni thus emerges as a symbolic figure in the novel. Like Samsher and Nanziri's mixed-race son in Tejani's *Day After Tomorrow*, Huseni is markedly idealised as a celebration of inter-racial union. Vassanji represents him as a "beautiful" product of inter-racial union, "with virtues of both races and the prejudices of neither" (185). Dhanji describes Huseni as "Big and strong", "Muscular", "Strong as Bhima!" in sharp contrast with an apology of a man who has been mistaken for him (Vassanji 28).

In the novel, the threat of erasure that attends the African part of Dhanji's family is compensated by Ji Bai's commitment to that memory. As the figure who bridges the present and the past and through whom memories of the lost African connection are mediated, Ji Bai, beyond Wright's estimation of her as crucial to the novel more at a symbolic level than for her dramatic presence (129), serves strong structural, even dramatic, significance. Her apparent marginality conceals her role as the indispensable bridge between the diegetic and metadiegetic levels. As an implied metadiegetic narrator, Ji Bai's presence is eclipsed only by the liberty with which Salim exercises what the French narratologist, Gérard Genette, in his exploration of a narrator's functions, terms the "testimonial function" (255).<sup>22</sup> The centrality of Ji Bai is commensurate with that of the gunny sack. Where the latter operates at the literal level, preserving vestiges of the Dhanjis' irretrievable past, Ji Bai does so metaphorically as the wellspring of memory. The novel's commitment to preserving the Dhanjis' African connection as a living memory and perhaps actualising the possibilities it holds manifests itself in the continuities from Ji Bai to Salim, establishing the latter simultaneously as the heir to the gunny sack and the memory that it embodies. Thus, unlike his brother, Sona, who evinces stronger attachment to his Indianness, Salim directs his preoccupation towards the African part of his heritage, for his Indianness, as Vassanji observes in the interview with Kanaganayakam is one already "transformed by the Africanness" (21).

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<sup>22</sup> See details under Genette's analysis of *voce* as the third element in the *verbal* aspect of the narrative. The verbal, for Genette, defines properties that govern the shift from narrative discourse (*recit*) to *story* (255-56). Genette conceptualises the testimonial function – alternatively termed, "function of attestation" – as homologous to Roman Jakobson's "emotive" function.

Within the framework of the novel's dialecticism, if Ji Bai functions as the thesis in the establishment of Afro-Asian connection, Salim's mother, Kulsum, does so as the antithesis. She evinces strong prejudice against Africa, conveniently oblivious of Juma's pedigree, having been married to him in Mombasa where he has relocated and effectively been cut off from his family after a series of vicissitudes. Following Juma's death, Kulsum relocates to Dar-es-Salaam with her children. Her anti-African sentiments are at odds with the post-independence nationalist fervour and the call for racial equality by Tanzania's political elite. Kulsum's antagonism towards Salim's orientation towards Africa knows no bounds. In her contempt towards the liaison between Salim and Amina, Kulsum eyes her son suspiciously each time he returns home as if he "had come with hands soiled by the vilest deed" so has to be purified (Vassanji 229). Similarly, Kulsum is determined to shut out the world that Ji Bai opens up to Salim. Preoccupied with the marriage prospects for her two pubescent girls, Kulsum regards the past revealed by Ji Bai, with its "stories of black ancestry", as an inconveniencing one, one that could "bring the mercury of social standing racing down to unacceptable levels" (Vassanji 149-50). While she exists in her own right as a fully realised individual, Kulsum epitomises the retrogressive forces of diasporicity that undermines Asians' negotiation of belonging.

Against Ji Bai's and Kulsum's competing orientations, Amina emerges as a figure of compromise, of negotiated engagements, if not of hope. As the most complex of the three female figures, she resists any simple description. At their first encounter at the national service camp, Amina's assessment of Salim is informed by common anti-Asian stereotype but her receptiveness enables him to present a self-redemptive image, resulting in a relationship based on mutual acceptance. She comes to acknowledge imprints of Asianess on the cultural landscape of East Africa, especially with respect to cuisine practices and furnishing culture. Amina affirms the Africanness of Indians, pointing at their centuries of presence on the coast (Vassanji 245). Her change of attitude results from the positive influence of her relationship with Salim. Despite their mutual acceptance of one another, however, their relationship becomes more secret as their return to the city after leaving the camp involves being subjected to the prejudices of their respective cultures (Vassanji 228). Both Salim and Amina later end up as exiles in the United States, away from their constricting communities. The novel ends with a suggestion of future possibilities, not for the two former lovers – as Salim is already trapped in an unhappy marriage – but for his daughter, also named Amina. In his final address to the younger Amina, Salim alludes to "wounded selves" and "wounded dreams" from which "flowers still grow", closing:

We had our dreams, Little One, we dreamt the world, which was large and beautiful and exciting, and it came to us this world, even though it was more than we bargained for, it came in large soaking waves and wrecked us, but we are thankful, for to have dreamt was enough. And so, dream, Little Flower.... (269)

Where the nation and the old diaspora defeat the young lovers' dream both of a blissful union and a tolerant nation, the new diaspora is represented as full of possibilities. The younger Amina emerges as a figure of hope, signalled by both her metonymic relation to her father's first love and the metaphoric significance of "Flower" that grows from the wounded "selves" and "dreams."

As with Nazareth, Vassanji's relation to the narrative is quite complex. The Govindjis are split into those who evince strong orientation towards colonial Britain, the subcontinent or East Africa. Dhanji himself is split between his sympathy for the cause of Tanganyikan nationalism and his admiration of, and gratitude to, the British colonialists. In contrast, his grandson, Juma, is not only oriented towards the British colonialists but decidedly anti-nationalist. The complexity of his characters' orientations, however, does not spare Vassanji from criticism of selective memory. Amin notes, for instance, that whereas Vassanji's narrator makes no secret of the harshness of the short-lived German colonialism in Tanganyika, there are scant references of the atrocities of British colonialism. This becomes even more significant for a novel that portrays, or at least hints at, the harshness of the Mau Mau. Amin highlights the narrator's preoccupation with the corruption and inefficiency of the post-independence political elite and the racial conflicts between the Africans and the Asians. It is not as though Vassanji chooses to steer clear of overtly political subjects. In fact, he is as political as a writer can be. As a further instance of his "glossing over", Amin draws attention to how carefully the narrator chronicles the racially-motivated carnage that the 1964 Zanzibar revolution leaves in its wake (10). Against this conspicuous silence on the brutality of British colonialists, one may argue that there is no master narrative of any single event and Vassanji is chronicling only one of the many versions of Tanzania's history, the Asian one.

## **Conclusion**

*In a Brown Mantle* and *The Gunny Sack* show that diasporicity, for Asians, rather than mitigating their unhomely conditions does more to exacerbate them, thereby complicating

negotiations of belonging in the post-independence moment. In the two novels, the diasporic subjects inscribe their marginality by situating themselves uneasily between the British colonialists and the Africans and, in the post-independence period, between their respective diasporic communities and African cultures that seek to assimilate them. In the post-independence dispensation, the politics that Asians espouse is contingent upon how they define their destiny and negotiate their affiliations. As one of the motivating factors behind the two novels, questions of belonging and citizenship are shown to drive a wedge between Asians and Africa. Both Nazareth and Vassanji, however, evince keen awareness of the point highlighted by Godwin Siundu, that invoking history does more to undermine than strengthen Asians' claim on East African countries as home. Siundu accounts for this difficulty in terms of Asians' association with, or participation in the entrenchment of, British colonialism in the region, on the one hand, and the autochthonous claims of home, made, especially, by the political elite in the post-independence period, on the other (15). Nazareth and Vassanji's novels, without denying this role, seek to complicate Asians' contribution to the emergence of the nation-states in the region, including their often-overlooked participation in anti-colonial politics, as a basis upon which to claim belonging in the post-independence dispensation.

For both Nazareth and Vassanji, however, attempts to highlight Asians contribution to anti-colonial nationalism and nation-building repeatedly return to the tensions generated by the contending aspirations of Africans and Asians, which, coupled with burdens of history that the latter carry, galvanises strong waves of Asian exodus in the late 1960s and early 1970, culminating in the 1972 expulsion in Uganda. In the two novels – Nazareth's more so than Vassanji's – Asians' victimisation in the wake of the immediate post-independence nationalist fervour stems less from popular perception against them as the most prominent vestiges of imperialism than from their failure to adjust to the demands of post-independence dispensation. In the climate of the ideological jostling of the late 1960s and the pressure to actualise the full meaning of independence, Asians emerge as the most convenient target to the new political elite. The resultant exodus, while signalling Asians' failure to assert belonging, opens new possibilities that had been stifled by East African nations and the old diasporas. Vassanji, however, departs from this rather reductive racialisation of victimhood to show that post-independence political violence is symptomatic of the wider betrayal of political ideals of the new dispensation.

### **Chapter 3: Nationalism and the Processes of Subject Formation in Anti-Apartheid Indian South African Narratives**

#### **Introduction**

Historical and fictional subjects are products of particular material and discursive practices. They are shaped by strife and tensions that emanate from the fringes of contending cultures. In Indian South African narratives produced during the apartheid era, the regime's repressions and the resultant anti-apartheid movement, together, galvanise the process of subject formation that, within the general climate of the struggle, mould Indian South Africans into particular kinds of national subjects. This chapter explores how these subjectification processes, the contesting of dominant categories of identification and classification, are represented in three apartheid-era texts: Ahmed Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories*, Agnes Sam's *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* and K. Goonam's *Coolie Doctor: An Autobiography by Dr Goonam*. In staging the emergence of agency and national subjectivity, these texts constitute the intersection of socio-political imperatives and assertion of selfhood as the site for the instantiation of particular subjectivities.

#### **Forms and frameworks of representation**

The three texts represent tensions between an apartheid nation – that aimed to reveal internal division ("apartheid" or separateness) within the state as part of its technology of rule – and an anti-apartheid nationalism that cohered around a unifying "black" identity. Particularly, they complicate both apartheid and anti-apartheid strategies by simultaneously suggesting and bridging division or difference. The complication, as Dorothy Driver (45) highlights, arises from the separations and fragmentations that apartheid enshrines which within the regime's register makes it impossible to conceive of any notion of nationness that was coterminous with stateness. Drawing on Bessie Head's indictment of apartheid divisions and legislation of difference which made it impossible to write South Africa, Driver points out that where the nation's fractures defeated Head's desire to write South Africanness, for writers such as Zoë Wicomb – and, for my purpose here, Sam, Goonam and, to some extent, Essop – such an endeavour becomes possible due to the framework afforded by two key historical movements, Black Consciousness<sup>1</sup> and feminism (45-6). Both of these movements

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<sup>1</sup> Black Consciousness, as Driver points out, was developed in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s to draw together the deprived and disenfranchised people of colour under a unified "black" identity (46).

provides a platform for challenging a web of racial and gender oppressions meted against "black" South Africans and women, respectively. Black women, for their part, disadvantaged by race as well, find themselves further segregated and victimised on grounds of gender and class difference.

The oppressive conditions that blacks and women contest have simultaneously been an "othering" process. Their key strategy for re-centring themselves through their material and discursive practices has been to emphasise what Sidonie Smith (398) has termed, after bell hooks, as their "experientially based histories", in which they represent themselves, collectively, as subjects. Through these subjectification processes, the foremost concern among most women and blacks has been the urgency not only to challenge binaries that essentialise their difference, but also redress structural inequalities that are generated by both apartheid and entrenched patriarchal practices within Indianness itself.

In discussing how Essop, Sam and Goonam draw on Black Consciousness and feminism to open up new spaces for subjectivity, I simultaneously engage the short story and autobiography as forms that most conveniently lend themselves to the constitution and articulation of specific realities that apartheid presented. In the short story form, black literary production begins to flourish from the 1950s,<sup>2</sup> largely due the outlets provided by literary magazines such as *Drum* and *Staffrider*, along with other periodicals that promoted black writing. Many critics have commended the form as the one most suitable for production under conditions of urgency and uncertainty and for capturing the fragmented experiences of apartheid South Africa. Drawing on Wicomb's observations in "South African Short Story", Pallavi Rastogi, for one, highlights other practical considerations that made literary practitioners writing during apartheid era favour the short story. Notable among these are limited facility with English as the medium in which most texts were composed for wider circulation, lack of time to devote to producing novel-length pieces as dictated by economic pressure, political harassment, overcrowded housing conditions which deprived writers of the privacy they needed, personal insecurity which, for safety reasons, condemned many writers, who often doubled as activists, to being constantly on the move (24-5).

Rastogi underscores Wicomb's point about the "pedagogical advantage" of the short story – the ease with which the form lends itself to use in the classroom to teach about other cultures – making a compelling case about what she describes as the "teacherly" possibilities

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Trump, while identifying 1950s as the period in which the short story becomes a predominant black fictional form, marks out 1976 (the year of the students' uprising) as the pivotal point during which new works in the form begin to flourish (34).

inherent in the form. The need for this pedagogy stemmed largely from the very place of Indians in South Africa's formation:

Indians were among the few nonwhite South Africans subject to anxieties of diaspora, particularly those centered on recuperating the Indian culture lost in the act of migration. Indians, therefore, felt a dual narrative responsibility. They needed not only to preserve their Indianness, but also familiarize other races with their culture in order to counter the "taint" of their foreignness. The "pedagogical advantage" of the short story collection was particularly useful for recording and showcasing Indian identity. (Rastogi 25)

The "taint" that Indians carried, as critics such as Devarakshanam Govinden have shown in their reading of apartheid-era anti-Indian sentiment, was certainly far more complex than simply that of foreignness, making the task of counter-representation even more urgent. Against such backdrop, the imperatives of intercultural understanding and non-racial anti-apartheid alliance make the instrumentalisation of the short story captured above an important feature of apartheid-era narratives.

The short story form works well in this regard, largely owing to its inbuilt mechanisms for deflating tendencies towards oversimplification. Andries Walter Oliphant credits the form with enabling the "articulation of the specific." For Oliphant, this capacity stems uniquely from the flexibility of the form, which enables it to concentrate and focus on what he describes as the "fragments and fractions of everyday life" (59). Oliphant observes:

The fractured and discontinuous articulations which a body of short stories produces over a particular period further provide the reader with a field of multiple perspectives on the divergent perceptions and experiences. It is, in other words, a literary site inscribed with the marks of a particular historical moment. (59)

If the short story works well for Essop and Sam, it is largely because, besides the logistical and pragmatic conveniences that it affords, the form also mimics the fragmentary nature of the object it represents – the Indian South African experience. The form allows the two writers to constitute experiences that are spatially and temporally disjointed in the wake of apartheid disturbances, with emphasis on the pain shared by all the disenfranchised peoples of South Africa.

Philip Holden re-echoes Oliphant's point above in his postcolonialist reading of politics of form. In contrast with the novelistic form that he aligns with Bhabha's notion of the "pedagogical" in nationalist discourse, Holden contends that the short story enacts the latter's notion of the "performative." For Holden, where nationalist pedagogy constitutes national narrative retrospectively or anticipatorily, the strategy of performativity serves to foreground an uncertain contemporaneity of the nation's people (455). For Bhabha himself, the emergence of the nation's people in "double-time" – that is, from a "pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*" and as "subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people" – constitutes a process of splitting which "becomes the site of *writing the nation*" (208-9; original emphases). The insightful contribution that Holden introduces into this debate is to associate the two fictional forms, the novel and the short story, each with a particular process of the nation's ambivalent time of emergence. Though Holden is engaging a slightly different context, his conclusion that the short story dramatises a moment of transition from a hegemonic plural society to a national multicultural one resonates with the anticipation of a post-apartheid South African nation in Essop's and Sam's texts.

For Goonam, the autobiographical form, as though taking its cues from the short story, also provides a performative strategy for constituting the writer's experiences, collaboratively with those of other subjects, out of what Bhabha describes as the "scraps, patches and rags of everyday life." The narrative, as Bhabha maintains, repeatedly turns these materials "into the signs of a coherent national culture" (209). As a female writer-cum-political activist, Goonam is particularly concerned with the place of women in the anticipated post-apartheid South African nation. In choosing a form that has canonically been arrogated by bourgeois white males, whose claim to unique selfhood purportedly set them apart as the only individuals capable of self-narrative, Goonam's autobiographical act opens up many fields of contestation as well as possibility.

Susan Stanford Friedman, in her critique of Georges Gusdorf's model of separate and unique selfhood as a precondition for the autobiographical act,<sup>3</sup> faults it for establishing "a

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<sup>3</sup> Sidonie Smith offers a similar critique, arguing that preoccupation in literary and cultural studies with representations of selfhood has arisen in the wake of the supplanting of notions of Enlightenment self, perceived to be autonomous, rational and unified (and individualised or unique) by new understandings of the subject arising from developments in historical process such as Marxist thinking, Freudian psychoanalysis, Saussurian linguistics and postmodernism (Smith 393). Reading self-representation as a hegemonic act, Smith points out that the act has been effected through Derrida's notion of "law of genre" which produced and consolidated the West's notion of the self by dressing *him* in what she dubs "[g]eneric clothes" (that is, "the white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual human being [who] becomes representative man, the universal human subject. 'His' life story becomes recognizable, legitimate, and culturally real.... Moreover, they neutralize or suppress ideologies,

critical bias that leads to the (mis)reading and marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities in the process of canon formation” (34). Friedman identifies two reasons for the inapplicability of the individualistic model to women and minorities: first, both groups are defined by an imposed group identity which makes it self-defeating to insist on individual identity; and second, the model ignores differences in socialisation in the construction of gender identities. Friedman contends that individualistic paradigms of the self “ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process of women and minorities” (34-5). For these marginal groups, collective identity and conditions of marginality, as Friedman suggests, has a potential for producing a new consciousness of self by stirring in the subjects an awareness of the power of collectivity (38-9). The new identity that is produced in women’s writing is neither purely unique nor purely collective, but merges the two. It is “often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness – an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women’s individual destiny” (40-1).

Other critics of auto/biography, in recognition of the power of the collective, have emphasised the fact that self-consciousness and self-representation are profoundly different for women, minorities and other oppressed peoples. For Goonam, self-representation – the very fact of it and the details of its execution – subverts what Sidonie Smith critiques as “the official history of the universal human subject” (394). Goonam’s contestation of normative constructions of feminine subjectivity pits her against both her patriarchal Indian community and the wider European cultural hegemony within which she operates. The autobiographical act for her becomes a way of renegotiating what Smith has referred in Derrida’s terms as “laws of genre” (404; cf. n. 3) and multiply individuating her subjecthood. It offers her the means of self-assertion and, in Judith Lütge Coullie’s terms, becomes a political act where the enunciating self “asserts the right to speak rather than to be spoken for” (136). For Goonam, however, the autobiographical form, in emphasising the collective experiences of women and blacks in which she shares, decentres the author as speaking subject. As many critics have noted about autobiographies by women and other writers from marginal groups, *Coolie Doctor* thus inscribes agency as an effect of intersubjectivity.<sup>4</sup>

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histories, and subjectivities non-identical to those of the universal human subject. The life histories of many people whose history differs from that of the universal human subject because of race, class, and gender identifications go unwritten, or if written, misread or unread” (393-4).

<sup>4</sup> My use of “intersubjectivity” here draws on Angela Woollacott’s notion of the term, conceived after Camilla Stivers, to mean the “construction of self through narratives about others, and about the subject’s own actions involving others, as well as large-scale social structures and processes” (330).

## Nation, diaspora and agency

For Essop, Sam and Goonam, and across the short story and autobiographical forms that they employ, there is a palpable tension between South Africanness and Indianness. While the former, in the spirit of Black Consciousness, is more forcefully asserted as the logic of non-racial alliance, the latter is widely disavowed for political expedience, but paradoxically affirmed in lived, quotidian textures of experiences through practices, such as cuisines, customs, festivals, dress codes, religious ceremonies, value systems, choice of marriage partners, etc., all of which have their roots in the Indian subcontinent.

The disavowal of Indianness in these narratives emerges as an enactment of the claim to belong. Generated by apartheid realities, these narratives anticipate a post-apartheid future in which Indians envision themselves taking up their place as citizens of a free South African nation-state. The anti-apartheid imperative that drives Black Consciousness's politics of non-racial alliance, as such, rehearses for this future South African nation-state that would embrace all its fractured parts. In this endeavour, Black Consciousness opens up new spaces for subjectivity within which "blackness", as Driver underscores, is constituted in defiance of apartheid racial taxonomies as "a category of assertion rather than a term signifying subordination and victimhood" (46). But underneath the veil of blackness lurks a forked desire for national identity that, while anticipating a post-apartheid South African nation, also inscribes itself as a diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

To argue that the performance of Indianness alongside South Africanness inscribes a diaspora is not to ascribe any separate identity to Indian South Africans, and much less to deny their South Africanness; rather, it is to point out that their Indianness connects them also to cultural site(s) outside South Africa. In Essop's, Sam's and Goonam's texts, as is the case more generally in Indian South African narratives, diasporicity is performed through attachment to the subcontinent and gestures toward racial purity, especially through endogamy and other forms of social inclusivity.

James Clifford's emphasis on defining diaspora based on its borders is useful here for appreciating the tension between diaspora and other competing analytical categories. Clifford observes that diasporas are defined against "norms of the nation-state and... indigenous, and especially autochthonous, claims by the 'tribal' peoples" (307). He reminds us that both the nation-state and diaspora have national aspirations which often contend with one another,

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<sup>5</sup> James Clifford (307) has tellingly argued that diasporas have national aspirations that contend with the nationalism of the nation-state.

adding the caveat that "[w]hatever their ideologies of purities, diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist. They are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms" (307). Clifford emphasises further that diasporic cultures struggle to balance the need to accommodate the norms of their host nations and preserve their own cultural uniqueness. In Essop's, Sam's and Goonam's texts, identification with India presents an instance of what Clifford describes as a positive diaspora consciousness in contrast with one that is produced negatively through experiences of discrimination and exclusion (311-12). To paraphrase Clifford and adapt his argument to the context of this discussion, the process of identifying with India is not about being "Indian"<sup>6</sup> but, rather, being South African differently – being both South African *and something else*. The unease that the label "diaspora" stirs among Indian South Africans underlies the decision by some critics to dismiss it as a suitable analytical category. It stems largely from the recognition of the investment made by Indians in the anti-apartheid struggle and their symbolic purchase on South Africanness.

In Essop's, Sam's and Goonam's texts, the balance between the performances of South Africanness and Indianness is negotiated against the backdrop of the historical experiences of indenture, colonialism and apartheid. For Sam and Goonam, particularly, the position of women within the context of these overlapping frames of marginality further complicates the process of representation and threatens the very coherence of national subjectivity itself. The "othering" of *black* women within Indianness itself means that before they can negotiate their national subjectivity, they must, more urgently, contest what it means to be marginalised so that they can, from a position of strength, be able to insert themselves into the space that nationalism opens up. In contesting this double "othering", Sam's and Goonam's subjectification processes seek to produce individuals who straddle multiple subjectivities and who can inscribe themselves as active participants or what Sidonie Smith, drawing on Paul Smith, has described as "agents." To Paul Smith (qtd. in Smith 16), a person is not simply an "*actor* who follows ideological scripts, but also an *agent* who reads" in order to decide whether to insert himself or herself into them. Angela Woollacott echoes Smith's point in her argument that far from simply exhibiting historical and social specificity, historical – and one cannot help adding fictional – actors, in contesting dominant forms of

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<sup>6</sup> Here, I mean a citizen or national of the Indian Subcontinent.

social power, exercise creativity and flexibility in constructing their subjectivities despite the constraints under which they operate (332).

For Essop, Sam and Goonam, a pertinent question remains how conditions of marginality within the nation and diaspora galvanise agency. What emerges in the movement of their texts are characters and individuals who gesture towards resisting subjectivities provided by the apartheid regime, Indianness and, for women, the patriarchal structures of their community. The emergent subjects, in defining themselves against these dominant ideologies, instantiate what Bhabha describes as “agency in the apparatus of contingency” (269).<sup>7</sup> The sense of group consciousness and capacity for collective action that spur them, far from stifling individuation of selfhood, actually provide a springboard for its actualisation.

### ***The Hajji and Other Stories: From cultural to civic consciousness***

*The Hajji and Other Stories* captures a community in a moment of transition. Published in 1978, the collection demonstrates Essop’s profound understanding of tensions that haunt and disrupt the Indian enclaves of Fordsburg and Lenasia. Previously known for its permeable borders, Fordsburg has been declared a whites-only enclave under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and its Indian inhabitants are forcibly relocated to an Indians-only enclave of Lenasia on the outskirts of Johannesburg – one that, as Rowland Smith points out, had to be constructed “out of bare veld” (158). With overtones of nostalgia, the stories celebrate the vibrancy and communal existence that Fordsburg, constructed in Essop’s pieces from memory, offers just as they lament the loss that follows the removal of Indian inhabitants to Lenasia as part of what Preben Kaarsholm has described as “the formalisation and tidying-up of grand apartheid” (222).<sup>8</sup> The realities of this disruption enable Essop to capture with startling economy how Indianness is haunted by its presence in South Africa.

In the collection, Essop’s power as a storyteller rests in his ability to pare down the loss and trauma that loom large in the wake of apartheid brutalities. In so doing, Essop foregrounds the human element in the component stories. The pieces that make up the

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<sup>7</sup> In his conception of agency, Bhabha explores how subjects of culture are altered from an epistemological function to an enactive, enunciative practice. The shift, for Bhabha, “provides a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience” (254-5). Bhabha’s discussion of agency is informed by what he describes as the menacing contiguity between the non-sentence and the sentence – the material and the discursive (261).

<sup>8</sup> In his interview with Rajendra Chetty, Essop contrasts life in Lenasia with that in Fordsburg, observing, “We lived very close to each other, many houses had shared walls and it was a sort of Casbah—a communal existence. People visit you, you talk to your neighbours, and there was this joy in Fordsburg and Pageview. In Lenasia we live as the whites live, with high walls and edges and so on...” (Chetty 273).

collection, though individually whole, are unified by cyclic features, the most central one being their setting in Fordsburg and Lenasia. These features enable Essop to paint a recognisable social milieu in which Indianness, in Rastogi's terms, is Africanised through its presence on the continent just as South Africa is, in turn, Indianised by that presence (134). As an extension of this familiar setting, Essop fashions the constitutive pieces around prominent cyclic characters such as Hajji Musa, Aziz Khan, Gool and Molvi Haroon, whose activities define the tensions and contradictions of Indianness in apartheid South Africa.

While the centrality of South Africa<sup>9</sup> in shaping Indianness cannot be overemphasised, the unity of Essop's collection rests, rather, in its particular "Indian" ethos that radiates through individual pieces and which mostly expresses itself through values and structures within, or against, which Essop's characters define themselves and articulate their hopes and frustrations. To use Bhabha's term once more, the "scraps, patches and rags of everyday life" from which Essop moulds his subjects, though consisting in practices and values that derive mostly from the subcontinent, define them, tacitly or otherwise, as South Africans. "Dolly", the fifth story in the collection, offers one of the clearest examples. In the piece, Dolly, the eponymous character, assumes a South African consciousness that sets him apart from those he defines as "Indians." In the process, Dolly also reveals one of the internal contradictions underlying Indianness in South Africa, when in his suspicion that Mr Darsot, a richer passenger Indian, has been seducing his wife, he lambasts the trader along with his lot: "You Indian dogs, there were not enough bitches in India so you came to South Africa. Now you look for our wives. You lock you wives up and want to joll ours... you Indian bastard" (27). Dolly's outburst here underscores the class differential in the socialisation processes that, for the protagonist, seem to mould indentured Indian labourers into South African nationals and traders into diasporic subjects thus threatening the very notion of Indianness in South Africa.

Religion features in Essop's pieces as another factor that disrupts the idea of a unified Indian community. The tension that religious difference stirs up among Indians places it at the centre of the collection and sets the practice apart as one of the definitive elements of the Indianness in Essop's world. Rowland Smith, in his exploration of Essop's works, draws attention to the ways religion functions to unify the collection, arguing that specific religious and cultural aspirations that are inscribed by Essop's characters are sourced from the subcontinent and other diasporic sites. In Smith's words, "The Islamic underpinning of much

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<sup>9</sup> Here, I am particularly thinking about the broader South African history, not simply its apartheid phase but also that of colonialism and especially the experiences under the indenture labour system.

of Essop's imagery and symbolism is an element in his writing that exists outside the specific problems of South African politics" (157-8). However, as with the indentured/passenger Indian divide, religious tensions, especially between Islam and Hinduism, undermine the purported collective consciousness of Indians in South Africa.

In "The Yogi", for instance, this tension is insinuated in the barbed criticism directed at Yogi Khrishnasiva. In "Aziz Khan", the eponymous character, in his critique of Muslim marriage, directs his attack to the *sari*, describing it as "essentially a Hindu garment" (55). A similar tension runs through "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" between the titular characters – who, respectively, represent the two faiths. In this piece, Hajji Musa, in a bid to demystify fire-walking at the expense of Hinduism, offers to perform the feat himself to the good humoured incredulity of onlookers. Gravely scalding the soles of his feet, he uses his miserable failure to disparage Hinduism further, accusing its adherents of charlatanry. Beyond simply attesting to the ruptures within Indianness, Essop's pieces reveal the inadequacy of the religious and the cultural to pave way for the shift to the civic. The Fordsburg community, under increasing threats of forced removal, begin to shift their attention away from cultural concepts as the basis of social action to political activism, as people's consciousness as a racially and politically oppressed community heightens. Hints of this change are evident in "Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker" and "The Yogi", where the community's attitude and loyalty shift as people begin to question and expose as charlatans the selfsame cultural elite, such as Hajji Musa and Yogi Khrishnasiva, who had previously commanded popular respect.

The agitation we notice here may be directed at particular individual elite, but it is quite clear that in their humiliation, the systems they claim to represent are undermined along with them. For instance, Hindu cultural values themselves are called to question when Yogi Khrishnasiva begins to lecture to various groups and organisations on mystical maxims such as "non-being is life, being is death; man's life on earth is a phantasmagoric trek to nowhere; meat-eating is the root of all evil; *if you have inner liberty, political liberty is unnecessary*" (Essop 20; my emphasis). Yogi Khrishnasiva prints out his thoughts on these "mysticisms" and other religious matters and begins distributing his scrolls to individuals and groups. The Orient Front, which features in the collection as "a representative organization" among Indian South Africans (Essop 14), reacts hostilely to these activities, regarding Yogi Khrishnasiva to be "undermining the political struggle" and he is seen to be "nothing but a stooge of the ruling class" (Essop 20). The point that the Orient Front seems to be making is that, in the wake of state-inspired brutalities and systematic deprivation, the community's energies ought

to be mobilised for the cause of social-political liberation. Yogi Khrishnasiva's activities are viewed as a dulling the consciousness required for the struggle thus signalling his alliance with the ruling class against the people.

Yogi Khrishnasiva becomes an object of ridicule when it emerges that he, a bachelor, has been appointed by a social welfare society as a marriage guidance counsellor. While Soma, a law student, extols the choice, reasoning that “[f]rom [Yogi Khrishnasiva's] lofty moral and intellectual position he can survey the field of human follies and offer his wisdom” (Essop 21), Mr Das Patel calls the Yogi a fraud and he is vindicated, ironically, by apartheid's legal machinery when, several months later, Yogi Khrishnasiva is arrested on suspicion of having an illicit liaison with a white woman and charged under the Immorality Act (22). Yogi Khrishnasiva is finally denounced as belonging to a dead civilisation. Typical of what Partha Chatterjee has characterised as a shift from civil to political society, Ebrahim, one of the Yogi's detractors, remarks: “In an era when politics govern everything, he turns his face towards the negatives of renunciation and asceticism... attitudes which are essentially irresponsible” (23).<sup>10</sup> The subversive outbursts that the Yogi attracts seem to signal people's loss of faith in institutions and individuals that they had previously cherished and honoured. Instead, we see faith being reinvested in anti-apartheid political struggle and, with it, a shift from Indianness to South Africanness, that is, from the cultural to the civic rather than from Hinduism to Islam.

This shift does not imply that Indianness has no purchase. Despite an emerging civic consciousness, the need to police an ideal cultural image as a key ingredient in the continuity of Indianness remains strong. In “Two Sisters”, for instance, the “nefarious activities” of the two sisters, Rookeya and Habiba, attract the disapproval of the community and the general outrage against them heightens as their out-of-wedlock pregnancies become more

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<sup>10</sup> In this article, Chatterjee contends that this shift from the civil society to political society involves the most significant sites of transformation during the colonial and postcolonial periods, respectively. As a corollary to this shift, Chatterjee contends that “[i]n the context of the latest phase of the globalization of capital, we may well be witnessing an emerging opposition between modernity and democracy, that is, between civil society and political society” (65). A clear understanding of these opposing forces illuminates the subjectivity that emerges in the real time-space of the nation. I use the concept of *civil society* here, after Chatterjee, to designate “those characteristic institutions of the modern associational life originating in Western societies that are based on equality, autonomy, freedom of entry and exit, contract, deliberative procedures of decision making, recognized rights and duties of members, and other such principles”; and by political society I mean “a domain of institutions and activities” that are open to the population, a concept that I am using here to designate more than just the citizenry (60). A critical distinction here is that where civil society is exclusive and elitist, political society by its very nature is inclusive with respect to the “public” it recruits and serves. This distinction is significant because it impinges on the forms of negotiation that take place within political society as a buffer between the people and the state and at sites where nationhood is inscribed.

pronounced. The community considers it inappropriate to have two unmarried pregnant women living in the yard (Essop 32-3). At the height of their moral outrage, the community begins to consider evicting the girls, “[f]or their continued residence is a threat to the moral fibre of the people living in the yard and a blot on the fair name and fame of our religious and our holly Prophet” (Essop 34). Although the community invokes Islam to justify their righteous indignation, Molvi Haroon, the head of the Islamic Academy, tells Aziz Khan, the community’s self-appointed representative, that “the punishment of the two women rested in the hands of Allah” (Essop 34). The incapacity of Haroon and Khan – the religious and community leaders – highlights further the increasing insignificance of cultural institutions. Failing to get a sympathetic hearing from the cleric, Aziz Khan turns to the landlord, Mr Joosub, who readily agrees to evict the sisters. In this story, the hegemonic power that the community exercises over its subjects galvanises agency in characters such as Solomon in a manner that anticipates anti-apartheid agitation that only emerges in Goonam’s *Coolie Doctor*. Essop suggests here that excessive power produces what Bhabha calls "rebel consciousness" when people wake up to its injustices.

As a subtle writer with a flair for complexity, Essop juxtaposes these emergent resistant subjectivities with those steeped in complicity. In “Gladiators”, for instance, the author represents Rijnhumal Rajespery’s disparagement of all things Indian as a counterpoint to Indian subjects who prided themselves in their cultural identity. At school, Rajespery wants the pupils to “behave like Europeans”; for to him, Indians are “a mob of unruly Yahoos” (61-2). Rajespery ridicules his fellow Indians as easily as he extols his European benefactors. Essop represents him as a stooge of the regime. His collusion with apartheid earns him a commission to design the residential Indian enclave of Lenasia. In his portrayal of Rajespery, Essop underscores the fact that apartheid divided Indian South Africans into resisters and collaborators. Class plays an important role in determining those the regime finds more useful to its cause. This is not to deny the fact that there were many middle-class Indians who resisted the system; the point is that middle-class status predisposed one to benefit more from the regime than one’s counterpart hailing from the bottom of social hierarchy.

In “The Film”, Essop draws further on satire to amplify the shift from the cultural to the civic. When the members of the Action Committee of the Islamic Council convene a meeting to stop the debut of *The Prophet*, they view their opposition to the film as a fight for freedom (Essop 80). Whether that opposition is political or otherwise is not the issue; what is important is that it draws from the same wellspring as those we find in Goonam’s *Coolie*

*Doctor* and delineates the character of both group and individual agencies. The piece ends in a twist of irony as Molvi Haroon and his entourage, “[s]hocked and bewildered by the tumult they [have] caused and the sudden arrival of the police”, view with relief the sudden appearance of Mr Winters, the manager of Hermes Films, who as part of the alleged anti-Islamic conspiracy, had earlier invited them to sit in the theatre and “sin by seeing the film” (Essop 77). Now Mr Winters reappears as the holy men’s saviour, conducting them to a place of safety inside the theatre (Essop 84). In their “white robes with ferocious beards”, Molvi Haroon and his group ditch all their earlier bravado and pretension to holiness and sit through the film without any further ado. In responding to the threat to their personal safety with the same fear that grips the crowd, Essop suggests that these self-styled leaders are not endowed with any more agency than the “ordinary” member of the community who cannot withstand any harassment. Essop thus questions the claim to leadership by this elite group. By ending the piece this way, he undermines allegiance to religious and cultural institutions, directing it towards a civic establishment.

Thus, in “In Two Worlds”, Essop captures a complete shift from the cultural to the political. In this piece, Essop shows the student members of the Capricorn Society, the central institutional agency, as united, not by their cultural identity as in the case of Orient Front, but by a shared ideology. The piece foregrounds the problem of alienation and dislocation through the crucible of Henry Levin, a young, white liberal, who has come to live in Fordsburg among his underprivileged fellow members of the Capricorn Society, having realised that he owes his privileges to apartheid. In addition, Levin also gives up an opportunity to join Oxford University, as he would have to use his parents’ “parasitically acquired wealth” (Essop 100). Despite these sacrifices, Levin is expelled from the Capricorn Society for volunteering to fight for Israel during the Arab-Israeli War. The charge against him is that by going to the war, he flouted a basic principle of the Capricorn Society based on a humanism and rationalism that opposed “forces that label and categorise and separate” people along national or racial divide (101). A more serious charge against Henry Levin, though, is that by volunteering to fight for Israel, “he has identified himself with the oppressor’s belief in apartheid. You are all aware of the ideological dogma that there will be peace on earth and goodwill to all men when every race has its own ghetto...” (102). Henry finds himself alienated from both worlds: “the world he had rejected and the world that rejected him” (102).

There is, however, a degree of disingenuousness in the case against Levin. While the charge of identifying with Israel is understandable, the claim that the society is non-partisan is hypocritical. Consider the passage below:

When the members of the Capricorn Society came to hear of Henry's decision to separate himself from the white world he was warmly welcomed. There was his clear grasp of principles and single-minded allegiance to a cause that distinguished him from the mere sympathiser, the liberal who, living in some affluent suburb, periodically indulged in conscience-soothing verbal brickbats at the white establishment. *Henry was one of us, living among us*, with the threat of arrest ever present. (100; my emphasis)

The "us" in the last sentence of the passage above identifies Levin's peers as members not of Capricorn Society but the community of Fordsburg. The designation is in no way as civic as the ideology of the society would have us believe but rather cultural. The offense taken at Levin's sympathy with Israel is revealingly on account of the power of the collective identity designated by this "us." Essop suggests that the shift from a cultural affiliation to a civic one does not mean that the former ceases to function. The "us/them" divide is cultural inasmuch as it is political.

In *The Hajji* thus, the general trend that emerges is that the transformation of Indian South African consciousness into a civic subjectivity has its rallying point in the cultural force of Indianness. In underscoring the contradictions underlying Indianness in apartheid South Africa, Essop suggests that it is along the selfsame pillars of differences and tensions that Indian South Africans define themselves. In this treatment of nationness, Essop echoes Clara A. B Joseph's view that the nation, while functioning as unifying entity, simultaneously draws attention to its various representations that reveal "division and disruption at strategic junctures." Joseph contends that the essence of the nation is, in fact, the contradictions and differences that it attempts to smooth over (57). In view of the fault lines that the nation reveals, and especially against apartheid's legislation of differences, Essop interrogates the discrepancy between the vision upon which anti-apartheid struggle is founded and its praxis. The Indianness that Essop's subjects inscribe, in this sense, far from undermining their South Africanness actually bolsters it.

### ***Jesus is Indian and Other Stories: Subjection and resistance***

Emphasising the experiences of women, Sam explores how indenture has been critical to the formation of Indian South African subjectivity. At the same time she sets out to reclaim the history of Indian South Africans as part of the wider cluster of peoples who have been marginalised under apartheid. The collection, as Govinden has pointed out in *Sister Outsiders*, appears to be structured along the trajectory of Sam's own life (217). Born in 1942 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa as a great-granddaughter of an indentured labourer, Sam spent her childhood in South Africa and left the country in 1960 to continue her studies in Lesotho and Zimbabwe when the apartheid government introduced the Separate Education Bill. After graduation, she worked in Zimbabwe for a while before once again migrating in 1973, this time to England, where she studied English at the University of York. As though patterned on the author's own experiences, the opening pieces, featuring a series of little girls and maturing female protagonists, are set in South Africa and subsequently in unspecified locations elsewhere in Africa – with one piece clearly set in Lesotho – while later stories are set in Britain. The visions that we get of Sam's worlds are mediated through the desires, hopes, fears and frustrations of the various protagonists.

The collection is framed by an introduction in which Sam contests the silencing of Indian and other marginalised histories in South Africa and two closing pieces, "The Story Teller" and "And They Christened it Indenture", that offer insight into conditions under the indenture system. The penultimate piece, "The Story Teller", represents one version of the author's family narrative that has been handed down through subsequent generations and details how her great-grandfather was "shanghaied", or kidnapped as a child of nine, along with three other children, and hauled to Natal as an indentured labourer. The guile that the sailors use to lure these children aboard their ship points to a more complex web of duplicities that *arkatis*, the unlicensed recruiters, used to dupe unsuspecting Indians into literally jumping onto the bandwagon of indentureship.<sup>11</sup> In the closing piece, "And They Christened it Indenture", Sam satirises the presumption that indentureship was a more humane system of labour than slavery, maintaining that the circumstances under which labourers were carted off from India to Natal and the conditions under which they worked blurred the distinction between the two labour systems. As such, Sam and critics such as Uma

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this, see Ashwin Desai & Goolam Vahed *Inside Indenture: A South African Story*.

Dhupelia-Mesthrie (10) have described indentureship as “a new system of slavery” following Hugh Tincker’s book of the same title.

In *Jesus is Indian*, Sam explores issues ranging from childhood and upbringing, love and marriage, class and race to migrancy and its liberatory potentials. In doing so, she dramatises striking cultural clashes that open up a number of discursive spaces. Sam’s characters, in negotiating their way around these issues, often find themselves caught up in a web of conflicting desires and roles. The contradictions and ambivalences that they express are manifestations of what Jaspal Kaur Singh, in her work on representation and resistance by postcolonial Indian and African women, has attributed to the oppositional discourses of tradition and modernity that lie at the heart of their formation (135). Sam’s writing, in this regard, is guided by the double vision of contesting the marginalisation of both her race and, especially, the subjection of women by hegemonic European and Indian diasporic and nationalist ideologies,<sup>12</sup> exploring liberatory possibilities that are open to marginalised Indian women.

The tension between nationalism and modernity that Singh highlights offers Sam a framework for contesting the model of Indian womanhood and the subjection propagated by nationalist ideology. As Miki Flockemann argues in her reading of the structure of *Jesus is Indian*, this tension emerges as a trope running through the rest of the stories in the collection, establishing a dialogue between the present and the past (76). To appreciate how nationalism came to define the idea of “Indian womanhood” at specific moments in India and abroad, Singh suggests the need to turn to the Subcontinent as the centre of “Indianness” (137). In their vision of an ideal Indian woman, nationalist ideologues in their anti-colonial struggle took special care to preserve her essential feminine qualities. As Singh highlights, “on the one hand, women had to be educated so that they would become more suitable for their Western-educated husbands, while on the other hand, patriarchal control of women’s sexuality became an added concern at this time because of women’s changing consciousness due to modernity” (137). Nationalist aspirations or the performance of Indianness, more generally, was, as such, averse to effecting any meaningful change in the material conditions of women. Singh contends that the performance of Indianness by diasporic Indians in transnational spaces becomes “doubly oppressive for women due to the intersection of racist as well as sexist structures of social and cultural institutions” (140). Within the context of apartheid South

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<sup>12</sup> I have in view here the doubly-pronged diasporic nationalism, oriented towards both South Africa and the Indian subcontinent. (cf. n. 5 for Clifford’s thoughts on diaspora’s nationalism.) Intriguing here is the connection between diasporic nationalism and nationalist ideology in the Colonial India.

Africa, representation of the woman as a doubly oppressed subject, for Sam, reveals contradictions that come to define her collection.

“High Heels”, the first story in the collection, represents its central tension as stemming from the concealment of a Hindu prayer room within a Catholic home. This tension is more widely symptomatic of that between nationalism and modernity. The family that Sam depicts in this story is torn between its loyalties to Hinduism and Catholicism. Home is represented as a site of contradiction. For Ruthie’s parents, the contradiction arises from the simultaneous practice of both Hinduism and Catholicism – and unearthing it becomes the central plotting device. When Ruthie betrays the existence of a secret door in their house, her friend, Lindiwe, dares her to enter through it. At stake is Lindiwe’s oversized pair of high heel shoes that Ruthie is desperate to have as a birthday present. The power of the piece rests in the economy with which it invests the high heels with symbolic significance as a high-class marker, a trapping of modernity. Ruthie’s desire for them points to that elevated social space that, in the era of modernity, offers the Indian woman the possibility of emancipation. The plot of this opening piece thus prefigures the abstract structure of *Jesus is Indian* which, in turn, marks the emancipatory path of Indian womanhood, albeit encoded in a pair of footwear that hampers mobility.

Ruthie’s determination to enter the secret room is quickly checked by the realisation that the room is permanently locked and that she cannot access the key. Ruthie’s persistence only heightens the mystery surrounding the locked door. When she finally prevails with the help of her grandfather, her triumph is anticlimactic, for despite her consuming curiosity, what she finds behind the secret door is a simple room, whose significance is initially lost on her. Among the paraphernalia in the room is “a picture of Jesus with a bleeding heart and a statue of his Hama [Mother]” (Sam 22). Ruthie eventually learns that the room is a Hindu prayer room. Its concealment within a Catholic home highlights not only the resilience of old religious attachments in the wake of unsettling cultural encounters but, more significantly, the deeper conflict between the East and the West, a conflict that is central to understanding diasporic practices on the continent. The diaspora’s unease revealed here emerges an extension of the spiritual/material dichotomy that Partha Chatterjee elaborates in his account of the Bengali nationalists’ resolution of the problem of modernity. As an extension of this dichotomy, *home* is regarded as the site for the inner, spiritual, true identity and the core values of Indianness and the *world* the external sphere – the domain of the material and the space of domination. The nationalist ideologues reserved home, the “inner sanctum”, for the woman while conceiving the “world” as the contaminating domain of the male (156). The

presence of Catholicism in the home thus emerges as a violation of the “inner sanctum.” Within the narrative’s symbolic scheme, Ruthie’s own attempt to access the already-violated space is itself a form of violation. The implication here is that the promises of modernity will elude the Indian woman for as long as she entertains the inviolability of home.

In “Jesus is Indian”, the second piece in the collection, the tension between nationalism/Indianness and modernity re-emerges as a central trope and manifests itself in a more complex manner. Angelina, the protagonist, is represented as a conflicted figure and her resilience, as Flockemann contends, “offers alternatives not possible to either her mother or Sister Bonaventura, precisely because she is able to negotiate a position between both English-speaking Catholicism and Indian-ness” (83). For Angelina, as for her generation, this hybrid space opens up many possibilities for asserting her selfhood as Indian South African. Her inquisitiveness and straightforwardness seem to underlie Hama’s reference to her generation as “electric light children”, a descriptive tag that captures the influences of post-enlightenment modernity upon them. Sam implicates their restlessness and resilience as the qualities necessary for the realisation of agency.

Angelina approaches her writing assignment as an act of resistance, a process of reinscribing her Indianness in the face of increasing threats from a hegemonic school system. Her determination to uphold her cultural identity pits her against Sister Bonaventura, an embodiment of European cultural hegemony, whose strategy is to erase the Indianness of her young charges as a necessary step towards translating them into modern subjects. It is significant that the cultural clash between Angelina and Sister Bonaventura unfolds over the question of language, one of the vital markers of identity. In her role as an English teacher, Sister Bonaventura has forbidden the use of non-English words in her students’ writing but for Angelina, certain words defy translation. She remarks:

I never going to call Hama “mother”. Even when I’m writing English in my book. Sister can say mother for sister’s mother. I say Hama for my Hama. Because Hama say Jesus is Indian because Jesus wear a dhoti and Jesus can understand our language.  
(Sam 33)

Angelina’s reinscription of her Indianness provides a strong countercurrent against the dictates of a European cultural hegemony that seeks to deny and erase other people’s uniqueness. The passage emphasises the significance of language in erasing or preserving

cultural identity. In projecting Indianness onto Jesus, Angelina paints a vision of cultural hybridisation that simultaneously defies and indicts apartheid's reification of difference.

If "High Heels" anticipates the emancipation of the Indian woman, "Jesus is Indian" sets her on that course and highlights the pitfalls strewn along the path. Claiming the emancipation that modernity dangles in her face plunges Angelina into the heart of contradictions: she desires the benefits of modernity but is simultaneously determined to preserve her cultural identity. Yet it would be hasty to account for Angelina's resultant conflictedness in terms of the two value systems that she straddles, especially if doing so excludes Hama from that "space." After all, Angelina is not the only Indian child in the Christian school, yet not all her classmates are as conflicted. Hama's influence has to be factored in for a fuller account for the contradictions we see in Angelina. As a woman who privileges her Hindu heritage over western influences, Hama wants her girls to retain their cultural identity and she would be glad if they quit school so they do not have to learn English (31). Whereas Angelina is sympathetic to Hama's view on cultural identity, she is at the same time not prepared to quit school. She will do her best where possible to resist Christian or western influences. On the issue of names, she concurs with her mother. When Sister Bonaventura decides to write to Hama, she insists on addressing the latter by her Christian name, ignoring Kamatchee, the Hindu one (31). Angelina insists that Kamatchee is Hama's only name, but Sister Bonaventura would have none of it. The contestation ends in a stalemate, after which Angelina, with a touch of innocence, if not cheekiness, prays, having, ostensibly, realised the full import of having a Christian name:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, [...] send me a book for Christmas with all the Christian names so I don't give my children a Hindu name by mistake. I don't want my poor children must die and go to hell for damn nation. (Sam 31)

In this skirmish, Sam highlights apartheid's determination to erase the cultural subjectivity of its subjects. Though ostensibly founded on the principle of separate development and the implied preservation of distinct cultural groups, in practice, apartheid short-changed its subjects and sought to deny them their cultural identity. The pun on "damn nation" at the end of the citation simultaneously insinuates a parallel between hell and the world of apartheid from which Angelina seeks to protect her children and condemns the split within the nation that the neologism, "damn nation", mimics.

Afterwards, Angelina asks Hama whether she has a Christian name. Hama defiantly contends that “if she’s a Christian and her name is Kamatchee then Kamatchee is a Christian name” (33). Challenging Sister Bonaventura’s claim that those with Hindu name will not go to heaven, Hama snaps:

*What that sister know? Hey? Don’t Jesus wear a dhoti like Gandhi? Don’t Hama talk to Jesus in our language? Don’t Jesus answer all Hama’s prayers? Don’t Honey get a rich husband? You so clever, what you think that means? Hey? You electric light children and you don’t know? Jesus is Indian. You go to school and tell that Sister.*  
(33)

Following this riposte, Angelina undoes her earlier prayer, pleading instead, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, never mind what I said before about Christian names. First I want to go to town and do window shopping before I tell you what to get for me for Christmas” (33). Angelina’s conflicted self results from the encounter between a self that has been acculturated under the tutelage of Hama and the hard-headed Sister Bonaventura. When she submits her book for marking and Sister Bonaventura asks her to explain in front of the whole class what the offending Indian word is doing in her English story, Angelina reaffirms her resolve not to use “mother” for her “Hama.” As Govinden points out, the piece ends with “no synthesis, reconciliation or closure and we are back to the place where we began” (245). Through this cyclic plot, Sam questions the sort of agency capable of challenging the Western cultural hegemony.

“Jesus is Indian” thus represents the cultural clash that results when Indian conservatism encounters a dogmatic faith in modernity. This plays out in the conflict between Angelina’s worldview and the mores of the Christian school she attends that becomes the driving force behind the narrative. In sending their daughter to a Christian school, Angelina’s parents had hoped to prepare her for the benefits of modernity that education would bequeath to her. The school system dutifully embarks on the task of preparing Angelina, along with her fellow pupils, to partake of the gains of modernity. But to do so, it must strip the pupils of the trappings of Indianness—religion, language, values, etc. Unknown to Sister Bonaventura, these are cultural gems that Angelina and Hama are not prepared to let go, even if that means quitting school. From this narrative it emerges that at critical junctures where Indian cultural values stand at variance with modernist values Angelina and her Hama cast their lot with the

former. The self that emerges from this confrontation is one that is keenly aware of its “Indian” subjectivity.

Sam returns to this question in “The Well-Loved Woman” a couple of stories later. Through her portrayal of Chantel, a restless teenager, Sam explores the tension between individual and community values. Chantel’s fascination with an idle African man she seems to have fallen for draws out the intolerance of her family and community to the sheer possibility of such an affair. The idea of falling in love as such, let alone with an African man, draws attention to the ubiquitous lack of freedom under which the women in the Indian community are held. While the intolerance of the community stems from its desire to preserve its Indianness, it also aligns the latter with apartheid. The reaction of the community makes better sense when viewed in light of the responsibility it has entrusted to its women as custodians of culture and guarantors of “national boundary.”

When Chantel’s free-spirited elder sister, Kamilla, arrives from England where her own family lives, she immediately drives a wedge between individual and community values. Upon revealing her plans to return to school, the women in the community are scandalised by the very idea of a woman leaving behind her husband and children to study abroad. When Kamilla suggests that the unmarried girls in the family should “have a chance to go to university, college, run the family business, be mechanics” or pursue whatever goal they may cherish, “[h]er friends expressed fears that the destiny of their daughters – as wives and mothers – would be threatened.” They fear that their daughters would “despise [their] tradition if they’re educated.... And – as if it were the final damnation – Men don’t marry educated girls!” (Sam 49). Kamilla, with little concern for what she regards as antiquated social values, has a simple solution: “Let our girls choose their own husbands. Instead of sitting at home while brave young men come forward with proposals, let our girls come home with a young man and say – this is the man I want to marry” (50). In her portrayal of Chantel and Kamilla, who are bent on exploring prohibited zones, Sam suggests that emancipation of the Indian woman can only be attained outside the enshrined patriarchal order. Where “High Heels” and “Jesus is Indian” only hint at the possibility of emancipation, “The Well-Loved Woman” brings it within the protagonist’s reach. Though Chantel herself only toys with the idea of doubly challenging the status quo by choosing her own man – an African one at that – and marrying out of love as opposed to the prevalent practice of arranged marriage, real possibility is shown to rest within the liberated space from which Kamilla operates. For Kamilla, this becomes possible largely because of her elevated status that are largely

attributable to her migrancy and class, which positions her outside the Indian community, giving her the detachment required to critique the system.

For characters who find themselves confined within the bounds of their community, defiance only leads to a heartless shattering of the individual's world. In "A Bag of Sweets", Khadija, by choosing to marry outside her Islamic faith, brings an unbearable and unforgivable disgrace to the family. Her parents, one after the other, die from the grief that their errant daughter has brought to bear on the family by obstinately marrying a Christian. Khadija's repeated attempts to be reconciled with the family are futile. She dutifully visits the family shop every Friday, expecting forgiveness but her sister, Kaltoum, ruthlessly ignores her. Kaltoum cannot suffer Khadija's offer to help with the little tasks at the shop. Instead, Kaltoum condescendingly gives her a bag of sweets to signal to her that she is not wanted. Coming just before "The Well-Loved Woman" in the collection, "A Bag of Sweets" seems to pose the question to which the latter responds. The implicit argument that Sam seems to be making through the arrangement of the two pieces is that the community is not (yet) prepared to tolerate assertiveness in women; that the space for emancipation lies outside the confines of both the nation and the diaspora.

In "Innocents", Sam makes similar point about the need to escape the sphere of a constricting system. In this piece, Marya (white), Beauty (black) and the narrator, Letschmi (Indian) on a vacation in Lesotho force themselves into striking an uneasy friendship that they are disturbingly aware will "fizzle out the moment [they] cross the border" back home (Sam 79). Here, away from the reaches of apartheid, the three girls, along with some elderly white hikers, enjoy the hospitality of a grey haired man whom they encounter on the mountain. The racially mixed characters find themselves drinking from the same beer tins, their lips "touching the same rims" (Sam 80) in clear contrast with the practices of apartheid. Among any other group, this would have been an insignificant detail. But for people conditioned by apartheid separatism, the mixed social gathering is a sight to behold. The narrator is baffled as to why the white guests should behave so naturally away from the South African soil. "Were they not responsible for making the law there [in South Africa]?" (Sam 80). In this piece, as in "The Well-Loved Woman", Sam highlights the constricting power of social-spatial confinement and celebrating the power of mobility against oppressive systems. This trope is developed in later pieces that, because of their setting, fall outside the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that in these pieces, migrancy is portrayed to be liberatory.

Through the structure of *Jesus is Indian*, Sam suggests that just as diaspora offers opportunities for self-advancement to Indian migrants, migrancy, for individual Indian

women, opens possibilities for emancipation. Migrancy functions as a critical strategy, not only for resisting confinement in designated “group areas”, but also for transcending limitations imposed by the nation and the diaspora. Unchecked by political gains and advances made in the areas of rights and entitlements, some of the values that these cultural entities cherish militate against individual freedom, especially for women. Govinden surmises in *Sister Outsiders* that the lot of Sam’s protagonists resembles that of the Biblical Ruth expressed in her plea with which Sam closes the introduction to her collection:

Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people will be my people, and thy God my God. (Ruth 1:16; qtd. Sam 13)

To Govinden, the portrait of Ruth captured in the Biblical verse above is prototypical of Sam’s heroines in *Jesus in Indian*. Govinden reads Sam’s own plight, her migrancy – and by extension that of her characters as well as that of Goonam before her – as similar to that of Ruth, who has been “feminised into subjection by her colonial lord and master” (222). A critical difference, though, is that the migrancy of Sam’s protagonists prefigured by a more subservient Ruth is itself a form of resistance and self-articulation, a refusal to capitulate in the face of oppressive systems, whether in the form of apartheid brutalities or patriarchal excesses in the Indian community. This is evidently a clear reversal of the kind of submissiveness typified by Ruth. In a sense then, Sam, through the mobility of her heroines, dramatises the vicissitudes of the victims of apartheid. Unlike Essop, whose characters are confined within Indian enclaves, Sam’s strategy involves freeing her characters, not only from the oppressive world of apartheid but also from the constricting world of Indianness.

### ***Coolie Doctor: Migrancy and self-effacement***

In Dr Goonam’s *Coolie Doctor*, we encounter a clearer and more elaborate representation of the liberating power of migrancy. Goonam’s experience of migration and the possibilities it opens up enables her to challenge some of the excesses of her patriarchal Indian community. As a young girl growing up in the pre-apartheid ghetto of Grey Street in Durban, Goonam learns early in life to fight for her rights and carve for herself a space in a community that is otherwise bent on keeping her down. Goonam relates that staying in school beyond the onset of puberty was itself “revolutionary” and that “it flouted the prevailing morals” (25). When

she expresses interest in university education, her father is initially supportive but soon succumbs to pressures from the community, which is scandalised at the very idea of giving a girl such liberty. Her father maintains:

It's impossible. They will laugh at us, allowing a slip of a girl to make a fool of us. They are already saying we are giving in to her whims and fancies. They are warning that she will marry a white man there. What if it happens? What a disgrace. Can we risk such a thing? Should we deliberately place our head in the lion's mouth? (26)

Goonam, however, prevails over the patriarchal dominance of her community by her sheer determination coupled with her mother's unwavering support. This initial triumph becomes a threshold upon which she later pushes for greater opportunities for Indian women. The twin privileges of education and travel which enables her to her community become her greatest assets in her commitment towards the emancipation of Indian women.

Education and travel are, however, privileges that are not available to a majority of marginalised black women. Even for Goonam, the realities of marginalisation, despite her class privileges, are inescapable. She suffers prejudices as a "black", female doctor, receiving lukewarm acceptance even within her own Indian community. She remarks, "My difficulties seemed insurmountable and I felt impotent, frustrated and disillusioned. I suffered a sense of failure as a doctor; politically and socially, I was an outcast" (57). This ubiquitous condition of marginalisation, for empowered subjects such as Goonam bolsters a strong sense of collectivity as a counter strategy against racist and patriarchal tendencies. In the autobiography, group consciousness emerges to counter racial and gender marginalisation and it is inscribed in the very texture of the narrative through the use of first person plural, "we"/"us"/"our" as a departure from the singular "I" of the narrative. Karyn L. Hollis, highlighting the significance of group consciousness to women's empowerment, has emphasised that "unless women and other oppressed groups are provided with discourse of collective experience, protest, and power, they will likely remain in a weakened individualist frame of mind" (97). For Goonam, the collective consciousness that she endeavours to impart in Indian women are nurtured by experiences of travel and education through which she is able to break free from the limitations imposed by both apartheid and Indianness.

It is while in London, and later in Edinburgh, dislocated from her community, that her political consciousness first begins to overshadow the cultural one as her "otherness" from her Indian friends becomes more conspicuous. Goonam's insertion into this new diasporic

space enables her to transcend her Indianness, opening for her possibilities that are not available to underprivileged Indian South African women. This transformation marks a new phase in her life as an instrument of change. Goonam's sojourn with the Ali sisters, her friends from the subcontinent, during her first one and half years in Britain bolsters her South Africanness, since Indianness can no longer function as a marker of identity between them. She embraces her South Africanness despite the shame involved (Goonam 37). A significant formative influence on Goonam at this stage is the commitment of the Ali sisters to the Indian national struggle and the patriotism of the Indian students' body in Edinburgh (44). According to Govinden, Goonam saw in India's independence struggle a model that South Africa could adopt (47). The gathering in imperial metropolises galvanises in Goonam and her fellow student activists a desire to be part of the movement for political reforms. During their first holiday in South Africa, Goonam and Beryl – her Indian South African friend, also studying in Edinburgh – realise how much they have changed and that they have acquired “a far lower tolerance for colour discrimination than [their] parents” (41). The explanation for this change lies not in any magnanimous initiative by the empire in effecting the change but in the empire's double standard of guaranteeing a freer political environment at home while oppressing and dehumanising its subjects in the colonies.

In South Africa, oppressive and degrading conditions are exacerbated further by apartheid legislations. Colonial and apartheid regimes, as Govinden points out, assumed the European identity as the norm and difference from it homogenised Africans, Coloureds and Indians into a bandwagon of oppression, deprivation and racial indignity (35). While the three disenfranchised racial groups were subjected to gross racial injustices, apartheid, as “divide and rule” project par excellence, allowed Indians and Coloureds some semblance of privileges, leaving Africans to wallow in squalor. The Tricameral Parliament of 1983, for instance, while creating special chambers for Coloureds and Indians made no such provision for Africans. The regime was determined to frustrate any kind of racial alliance among oppressed peoples. It is only much later that non-racial alliance across class becomes a key strategy in the anti-apartheid struggle, anticipating the emergence of a new nation founded on aspirations of freedom, dignity and common citizenship.

In the struggle, Goonam evinces an undivided loyalty to South Africa. Her migrancy involves sojourns in the UK and India but it is South Africa that she regards, and returns to, as home, despite all its shortcomings. The UK-India-South Africa triangular passage that had produced the indentured labour system and the Indian South African diaspora, for Goonam, becomes the same route that facilitates her transcendence of the limitations of nationalism.

The sacrifices she makes along this route, the privileges and opportunities she readily foregoes and the commitment she demonstrates to advance the cause of freedom are exemplary. Against these activities, what defines Goonam's character, as Govinden argues, is her political commitment rather than her "cultural peculiarity or difference" (278).

In her reading of the role of memory in *Coolie Doctor*, Govinden underscores the fact that "[r]emembering her formative years does not signal a nostalgic longing for a lost world; it is crucial part of the trajectory of her life in the struggle" (279). Govinden contends that the shaping influences of Indian cultural heritage and background prepare Goonam from an early age to face up to "colonial and apartheid denigration of her Indian identity and that of others like her" (279). Upon completing her medical training, Goonam returns to South Africa. At a personal level her struggle is far from over. Doubly disadvantaged as a female "black" doctor, she faces a seemingly insurmountable challenge. Her private practice falters though she eventually manages to secure an appointment at The Indian African Clearing Station that has just been newly opened. Her medical career enables her to bridge race and class divides. Combining her medical career with political activism, Goonam embarks on challenging the strongholds of tradition, ignorance and rituals that dominated the lives of blacks (60-1). In relating this aspect of her activism, Goonam seems to underscore the fact that no community can undergo any meaningful transformation for as long as these reactionary forces still have firm grip over it.

The second major influence on Goonam occurs during her trip to India which occasions her first direct encounter with Passive Resisters with whom she immediately identifies (76). Goonam receives many speaking engagements and is also invited to join the Satyagraha that enables her to participate in mobilising people around the cause of ousting the British (84). The irony of the politics of location in this phase of Goonam's struggle is inescapable. While the Satyagraha was born in South Africa during Gandhi's sojourn in the country, it takes the mediation of India for Goonam to embrace the philosophy which she later practices upon her return to South Africa. Goonam's involvement in anti-colonial and anti-apartheid activities frees her from the domesticating confines of nationalism and enables her to step out into the new space that modernity has to offer to the Indian woman. As she travels through India, Goonam demonstrates strong commitment to encouraging Indian girls to enrol for nursing and high school (93). She urges the women "to fight, not only for political freedom, but ensure that they also gain economic and social freedom and expressed the hope that Mahatma Gandhi's liberatory movement would also mean freedom for women so that they would stand side by side with their menfolk in building a new society" (86).

Goonam keenly understands that emancipation demands that the woman must step outside the confines of "home" into the "world" that has been dominated or, rather, arrogated by men. To reap the dividends of modernity, women must transcend the bounds of nationalism. For Goonam, this means breaking out of the confines of both apartheid and her patriarchal community that seek to keep her in her "proper" place.

After her return from India, Goonam become far more active in politics and far more radicalised. Her participation in passive resistance leads to her arrest and imprisonment, with hard labour, on several occasions. But apartheid harassments in form of threats to expropriate her house continue to attend her, forcing her to sell the property and relocate to London, before proceeding to India. Goonam returns to South Africa in 1959 to resume her medical career and political activism where she had left off. But by the end of the 1970s her activism again earns her "the unsavoury attention of the security police" and it is only by a narrow chance that she manages to elude the police officer who has shown up in front of her house to arrest her (167). This time she leaves the country for a prolonged period of exile that comes to an end only when ANC is unbanned and Nelson Mandela is released from prison. In between she has a brief sojourn in Britain and Australia before settling in Zimbabwe. This itinerary underscores the shaping influence of Goonam's cosmopolitan life and sketch the material that feed into her autobiography. As with in Sam's *Jesus is Indian*, migrancy in Goonam's *Coolie Doctor* is emancipatory, with the caveat that it is a path open only to high-class women.

*Coolie Doctor* relates the struggle against political and patriarchal domination in both in South Africa and India. Goonam underscores the urgency for self-assertion, particularly for women, who are doubly oppressed by ubiquitous racial and gender marginalisation. She stresses that the process of national liberation must go hand in hand with women's liberation. In the anti-apartheid politics that frame the author's self-narrative, Goonam, as Govinden aptly observes, "locates herself in the subject position of 'political activist'" (271-2). Like Essop, Goonam privileges the civic over the cultural. The urgency of non-racial anti-apartheid struggle – and the wide-spread marginalisation of "black" women – makes emphasising the cultural rather counterproductive. In the interest of foregrounding the political, however, the personal disappears from view almost entirely as the author concentrates increasingly on political activism. The decentring of the enunciating self signals not so much a resistance to self-disclosure but rather emerges as an effect of collectivity that, as Stanford suggests, seeks to produce new consciousness of self by stirring in the subjects an awareness of the possibilities that are available through group consciousness (38-9).

Goonam's politics, both in the subcontinent and later in South Africa following her return, is emphatic on the point that women's emancipation will be genuine only after they are able to step out of their domestic environments and take part in public affairs alongside their male counterparts as equal partners. Goonam emphasises the need for Indian women to advance their education and pursue careers of their choice as the only meaningful way of attaining true emancipation.

## **Conclusion**

In Essop's Sam's and Goonam's texts, nationalism, in both its double expression as a strategy and effect of anti-apartheid struggle and as an aspiration of a diaspora that must fend off anxieties and threats of cultural erasure provides a framework for the articulation of specific, often contestatory, subjectivities. For Goonam and Sam as women writers, nationalism provides the platform for challenging marginalisation of women given the democratic foundation and the rights-consciousness on which it is founded. For all the three writers, the collective consciousness that is generated by conditions of liminality paradoxically heightens consciousness of self and, in effect, galvanises agency and articulation of selfhood as an intersubjective effect. The subjects that emerge in these narratives are those whose consciousness of citizenship rights and obligations position them to hold the community and the state to be more accountable to them as their members and citizens, respectively. These texts, as anti-apartheid narratives, thus anticipate a post-apartheid South African nation that will dutifully embrace all its fractured parts.

## Chapter 4: Narrativising the Past: the Quest for Belonging and Citizenship in Post-Apartheid Indian South African Fiction

### Introduction

Imaginative re-construction of history in post-apartheid Indian South African narratives is concerned not so much with cultural authentication as with the question of legitimacy in the new dispensation. While chronicling the common origin of Indian South Africans in the subcontinent, these narratives emphasise the diasporic subjects' investment in, and purchase on, South Africa. Identification with India in the post-apartheid moment presents an instance of what James Clifford describes as a positive diaspora consciousness as opposed to one that is produced negatively through experiences of discrimination and exclusion. To paraphrase Clifford, the process of identifying with India, as represented in these narratives, is not about being "Indian" but, rather, being South African differently – being South African *and something else* (311-2). In re-constructing the history of Indians in South Africa, these narratives suggest that this extra dimension of South Africanness is not a cause for apprehension.

In this chapter, I trace how the arrival of Indians in South Africa and subsequent struggles for citizenship and belonging in the 1860s-1980s are represented in Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*, Aziz Hassim's *The Lotus People* and Ronnie Govender's *Song of the Atman*. These narratives emerge in the context of the desire for a definitive history that both reassures Indian South Africans of their legitimacy in the post-apartheid nation and balances the tension between common citizenship founded on a non-racial constitution and the articulation of Indianness in South Africa. For many scholars,<sup>1</sup> the post-apartheid moment and its "rainbow nation" project simultaneously activates the past and the opportunity to articulate Indian identity that in the apartheid era had, for political reasons, been rejected in favour of a "black" identity claimed by all the oppressed peoples of South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

*The Wedding*, Coovadia's debut novel, written during the author's sojourn in the United States, constructs the story of Ismet Nasin's and Khateja Haveri's voyage from Bombay to Durban. Narrated by the protagonists' grandson, the novel represents experiences

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie (2000: 27), Mariam Pirbhai (2009: 71), Pallavi Rastogi (2008: 114) and Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai (2010: 4).

<sup>2</sup> Anti-apartheid struggle deployed non-racialism as its guiding ideology to counter apartheid's separatism. During the struggle, affirmation of blackness was regarded as a marker of political identity rather than a racial one and an act of self-definition rather than being defined by others. It was also a conscious rejection of apartheid's deliberate strategy to undermine the unity of all the oppressed peoples of colour.

that are prototypical of passenger Indians in Durban in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The materials from which the narrator (re-)constitutes Indians' beginnings in South Africa are gleaned from the narrator's forebears, and he claims it as a "knowledge that belongs to [him]" and which he needs in order "to find [his] bearings" (Coovadia 267). The resonance between the narrator's articulated desire for his "bearings" and the voyage to and migration from South Africa implicates politics of location as critical to the construction of Indian South African subjecthood. Narrativising these beginnings for the narrator becomes critical to navigating his cultural identity across different locales.

*The Lotus People*, also Hassim's debut novel, represents the experiences of passenger Indians in Durban. In the novel, Hassim, a third-generation Indian South African, represents what he claims in an interview with Pallavi Rastogi to be a historically accurate portrait of conditions of the passenger Indians in South Africa (221). Set in Durban's Casbah, the novel traces the lives of two passenger Indian families through four generations. But it encompasses a larger communal backdrop, as Devarakshanam Govinden notes (29), weaving the stories of both ordinary and affluent Indians into a common tapestry of belonging and citizenship. Written from the author's articulated conviction that "the truth that remains untold is the beginning of a lie", the novel is devoted to showing "where all the Indians are coming from" (Rastogi 221), a grand aim that the author indicated he hoped to realise with the publication of the sequel, *Revenge of Kali* (2009) that constructs the harsh conditions of the indentured Indians.<sup>3</sup>

Govender's *Song of the Atman* also retrospectively constructs the history of Indian beginnings in South Africa, but, unlike the aforementioned novels, it focuses on the experiences of indentured labourers. The novel, a fictionalised account of Chin Govender, the author's uncle, traces the protagonist's life across different locations in South Africa while anchoring its trajectories in the protagonist's humble origins. Chin's father, Karupana Govender, as a young man accompanying his parents, comes to South Africa from Thanjaoor, India as an indentured labourer. Remarkable for his resilience, Karupana is undaunted by the toils and hazards of working the cane fields daily as he sings his favourite Carnatic songs (Govender 28). Karupana initiates a culture of the refusal to suffer indignity which is handed down to his descendants and that in later years becomes for them an inspiration for outright resistance against the apartheid state.

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<sup>3</sup> The two novels, together, construct the "truth" of Indian beginnings in South Africa from two distinct categories of migrant experiences – that of indentured labourers and of voluntary, self-paying passengers mostly belonging to the business class.

In the sections that follow, I explore how pastness is produced as a function of contemporary post-apartheid politics, showing how oceanic voyage and subsequent processes of transplantation translates Indian seafarers into South African citizens. In this translation process, anti-apartheid struggle emerges as an altar upon which Indian South Africans' lives are sacrificed as a symbolic purchase on South Africanness. In all the three novels, the family as a structure that mediates memory emerges as critical to the determination of Indian subjecthood. The reading of the celebration of Indianness as part of the post-apartheid rainbow nation project that I undertake here draws on anthropological, Marxist and Freudian conceptions fetishism as frameworks for understanding the relationships between material objects, as fetishes, and Indian subjectivity. I conclude that fetishisation of Indianness in these works emerges as a vital strategy for navigating the new life in South Africa.

### **Post-apartheid politics and representations of pastness**

Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govender's novels construct apartheid and pre-apartheid pasts in ways that invite re-examination of contemporary realities. The novels suggest that imaginative engagements with these pasts stem from the urgent demands and anxieties of narrating the post-apartheid present. The new dispensation, for many Indian South Africans, ushers in profound disillusionment and a victim consciousness that Goolam Vahed and Ashwin Desai have captured in the parallel they draw between the experiences of Jewish merchants in anti-Semitic Europe and the "stranger" stereotype borne by "Indians" in South Africa (3). Vahed and Desai highlight how affirmative action policies have occasioned widespread disaffection among many "Indians" towards "Africans" for appropriating the "Black" identity forged during the anti-apartheid struggle and excluding them from the promises of the post-apartheid nation (6-8).<sup>4</sup> The particular pasts that the three novels

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<sup>4</sup> Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie captures a similar disillusionment in a common refrain voiced by many Indians, that "for years apartheid discriminated against us as we were too black, now we are not black enough to gain from affirmative action" (28). These concerns, however, do not acknowledge the provisions of Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 of the Ministry of Justice, Republic of South Africa which sanctions affirmative action. Section 2 of this legislation states as its purpose the need "to achieve equity in the workplace by (a) [p]romoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and (b) [i]mplementing affirmative action measures to address the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, in order to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce." Section 1 defines "designated groups" to mean "black people, women and people with disabilities" and "black people", in the spirit of Black Consciousness, as "a generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians." Section 3 states that the Act must be interpreted, among other stated restrictions, "so as to give effect to its purpose." The sense of exclusion that these novels articulate is partly an identity fiction in light of the provisions above.

construct articulate these concerns to legitimise belonging and citizenship claims advanced by Indian South Africans.

Focusing on the oceanic voyage and subsequent transplantation that, as Meg Samuelson (273) has underscored, translates indentured and passenger Indian subjects into South Africa's citizens, I explore how anxieties and celebrations of cultural identities in the post-apartheid moment motivate the search for roots and imaginative engagements with history in the three novels. The "narrative performance" that these novels stage, in Bhabha's expression, "interpelletes a growing circle of national subjects" and produces the nation as a narration (209) simultaneously through what Philip Holden has termed, after Bhabha, its "retrospective" and "anticipatory" pedagogies (455). In their articulation of both Indianness and South Africanness, I explore, in light of Mariam Pirbhai's inquiry into South Asian diasporic formations (68),<sup>5</sup> not only how these novels constitute Indianness in South Africa through its place within the quadratic axis of race relationships, but also how the vexed question of citizenship and belonging are complicated by race and class.

Belonging, as Vahed and Desai define it, implies being "a part of or connected with something"; it "assumes voluntary membership by those who constitute a self-generated group" (9). Belonging can further be construed after Gerard Delanti as a component of citizenship. For Delanti, citizenship, beyond its preoccupation with rights, involves participation in the affairs of the political community:

It concerns the learning of the capacity for action and for responsibility but essentially, it is about learning of the self and of the relationship of the self and other. It is a learning process in that it is articulated in perception of the self as an active agency and a social actor shaped by relations with others.... Citizenship concerns identity and action; it entails both personal and cognitive dimensions that extend beyond the personal to the wider cultural level of society. (64-5)

The performative sense of citizenship that Delanti captures here underlies Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govender's choice to focus not so much on the granting of formal citizenship to the subcontinentals, albeit in a limited sense, in 1961, a century after the first batch of their

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<sup>5</sup> Mariam Pirbhai reads Indianness in South African as "determined by its place within a triadic axis of racial interrelationship, where it has vied for political or cultural representation and territory within indigenous Africans and European Settler societies" (68). Given the prominence of Coloureds, both in the anti-apartheid struggle and their engagements with Indian South Africans, however, I emphasise the need to include them in any analysis of racial interrelationship or determination in South Africa.

forebears arrived in South Africa, as on the group's struggle and sacrifice for a just South Africa. In these novels, belonging is contested and re-inscribed in ways that complicate questions of national and diasporic identities. For Indian South Africans – as a group that from the dawn of their arrival in South Africa have had to contend, first, with the oppression, deprivation and segregation under indenture, colonialism and apartheid and, later, with uncertainties of the post-apartheid moment – belonging can be constituted imaginatively by re-constituting the past as a site where desire and hope converge.

For Pallavi Rastogi, the return to the pasts is prompted by the need to stake a claim on the present. Rastogi contends that this gesture was part of a wider trend in South African fiction, elaborating the call by writers such as Njabulo Ndebele to move away from the “spectacle” to “rediscovering the ordinary” (114). In the three novels, memory lends itself readily to the critical task of not only bridging the present and the past but also mining quotidian experiences and strategically asserting continuities between the two temporal planes to legitimise national belonging and citizenship claims in the post-apartheid moment. Recognising this tendency towards the ordinary, Samuelson has postulated:

To the extent that we can talk about a South African literature [...], it is one marked, even fractured, by the search for a form through which to articulate the extraordinariness of everyday life in this place, to harness the resources of the ordinary, while simultaneously pushing beyond its cruelties, reaching for the horizon.  
(Unpublished conference paper)

Celebratory in her approach, Samuelson acknowledges the “tyranny of place” that Eshia Mphahlele identifies as the condition of South African literature under apartheid, emphasising the need to turn to the “here and now as a location from which to open up into connections to other places, or to imagine other ways of inhabiting this place.”

Samuelson's insistence on a specific spatial present resonates in intriguing ways with Rastogi's reading of the return to the past in post-apartheid fiction. Both, for my purpose here, are different strategies of a nationalist pedagogy that, in the former case, is retrospective and, in the latter, anticipatory; and both surface quotidian textures of experience which, as Rastogi notes after Ndebele, had been “forgotten in the grand narrative of political struggle.” The surfacing of such forgotten or, indeed, “erased” experiences and histories becomes for Indian South Africans an avenue through which to carve for themselves a space in the democratic present. As Rastogi aptly notes, the “return” to the pre-apartheid – and, for this

chapter, apartheid – past(s) in Indian South African fiction produces a form of literary “retrieval” that “uncovers the story of Indian *arrival* in South Africa... in order to assert national belonging in the present” (115).

As a departure from this mode of reading which posits the pasts as frozen segments of time to be *returned* to or *retrieved*, I treat pastness here as a site of contestations or, as Immanuel Wallerstein contends, a tool that people use against one another – *and* in a bid for legitimation. Pastness, in this sense, signifies “a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act”; it is paradoxically diachronic and often dictated by present needs. Wallerstein notes further that in so far as it is used as a mode of social control, “pastness is always a contemporary phenomenon” (381). Such notions of pastness suggest a critical tool that, while attending to its modes of imaginative construction, takes into account its textual or transitory nature.

As works of historical fiction, Coovadia’s, Hassim’s and Govender’s novels rally tropes of memory and genealogies to constitute narratives of national belonging by traversing vast locales and temporalities in the interest of producing Indianness in South Africa. In Michael Green’s sense, the “historical” in this context evokes not the traditional notions of “change over time” but rather “the particularly intransigent set of circumstances signified by the word apartheid.” It signifies not so much a series of temporalities as “an extreme awareness of the present as history” (3-4; 16-17) and, indeed, history as the present. The hermeneutic strategy that this notion of the historical as bound temporalities calls for implicates the interplay of history, narrative and ideology and re-echoes what Green terms “resistant form”, by which he means

the search for a critical model as much as an aesthetic mode that can, at one and the same time, recognise the inevitable constructedness of its subject within its own productive processes, yet create that subject in such a way that that subject challenges the terms within which it is constructed – thus resisting the very form within which it is produced. (6)

The notion of resistant form expressed here resonates with the ways in which narrativisation of the past emerges as subjectification processes in the three novels. The historical revisionism that these novels stage from the post-apartheid present is not so much about the narrated contents as with the production of the historical. Thus, the novelistic form, as Green

maintains (16), becomes critical to the construction of collective identity– an Indian South African one in this case – requiring a keen awareness of its politics.

### **Sea and soil in pre-apartheid pasts**

Indian migrants, as indentured labourers or as free passengers, come to South Africa in the late nineteenth – and early twentieth – century under the auspices of British colonialism. Their voyages across the Indian Ocean, as Rastogi notes, engender “a new framework of racial contact and diasporic exchange” between Africa and the Indian subcontinent (4). The conditions and dreams that attend their migration to South Africa are compounded by the realities of British colonialism within which they are enmeshed. Coovadia’s, Hassim’s, and Govender’s novels plot the processes of claiming citizenship and belonging that follow their settlement which, as Isabel Hofmeyr and Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie suggest elsewhere, reflects developments in the ways “India” perceived itself – and is perceived – within the empire (7). This perception is, in turn, reflected in the ways Indian South Africans positioned themselves in anti-apartheid struggle and remains relevant in making sense of how the group relates to their host/home country. The shift from an India within the empire (which thus shares its boundaries, particularly that of “the native”/“African”), to one positioning itself outside the empire and in opposition to it has significant bearings on the ways Indianness is constituted in South Africa and how Indian South Africans claim belonging in the post-apartheid present (Hofmeyr and Dhupelia-Mesthrie 7).<sup>6</sup>

In intriguing ways, the sea and British colonialism provide useful frameworks for appreciating the migration of the subcontinentals to Colonial Natal. In *The Wedding*, these two forces are central to the tensions that propel the narrative. The story that Coovadia plots in this hilarious novel begins with the pre-migration ill-starred marriage between Ismet and Khateja. In her determination to regain her freedom, having been forced into marrying the quixotic, “thimble-witted” Ismet, Khateja schemes to make her husband’s life “a long gigantic horror” (74, 82). Ismet, on his part, obsessed with the idea of domesticating Khateja and turning her into a loving wife, decides to haul her across the Indian Ocean to Durban with a double vision of “forging a commercial empire” and founding “a new race” (105,119). Seemingly unaware of the ambit of British colonialism within which he is enmeshed, Ismet,

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<sup>6</sup> Hofmeyr and Dhupelia-Mesthrie point out that this shift in Indian nationalist thinking takes place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the first instance, India saw itself as a self-governing colony within the empire but soon realises that it can attain freedom only outside the empire (6).

along with his wife, sets sail for Natal – which, like India, is also a British colony – bubbling with his own imperial fantasies

The Africa that he envisages is “a clean table of a continent”, a place without a history, yearning for settlement. Ismet, in his assumed role as the father of a new race, fantasises: “From Khateja’s womb would spill a legion of children.... A hundred, a thousand, peopling the vast land” (Coovadia 119-20). Ismet’s vision, as Samuelson eloquently argues, is “allegorical of the emergence of a new Indo-African people” and “suggestive also of the ways in which ‘India’ is a product of what the novel describes as the ‘aboriginal forge’ of Africa” (270; cf. Coovadia 120). The parodying of the colonial register here heightens the novel’s satirical effects. In Ismet’s settler vision, the author satirises the colonialist orientation of the Indian business class “of which Ismet is a classic example” and mocks it for sustaining the group’s illusions and attitudes about Africa (264), suggesting that the settler orientation evinced by the business class actually threatens any belonging and citizenship claim that they may advance.

The imperialist orientation that produces Ismet’s fantasies is indicative of the perspective from which he operates. As the ship approaches the shores of Durban, Ismet, in his momentary euphoria at the prospects of carving for himself a fortune out of Africa, romanticises the continent as he disparages India.

[U]nlike India, Africa had been spared the nonstop penny-pinching of the spirit.... The important thing: there was a final break with this conniving, rhetorical, feverish India, this India of gambit and deception, this India in which it was beyond the capacities of any man to build up something new and strong, this tropical India in which it had become impossible to love! (Coovadia 119-20)

Sooner than later, however, Ismet realises that Africa – actually, colonial Natal – was not any different from colonial India. With its myriad of draconian legislations around which Indian traders had to skirt painstakingly, Natal was possibly even worse. Dhupelia-Mesthrie points out that as early as 1896 there were fears in Natal that Indians would overrun the colony (16). The resultant climate of fear ushered in an avalanche of restrictive legislations in the first two decades of the twentieth century which culminated into the institutionalisation of apartheid in 1948.

*The Wedding* constructs the oceanic voyage and the subsequent transplantation of Indian migrants in South Africa, in Stuart Hall’s term, as a process of *becoming* (294). The

experience of dislocation and the compounding of their trauma in the wake of determined racist repressions, while deepening Ismet and Khateja's disenchantment with the continent, paradoxically compel them to relinquish their initial perception of themselves as mere sojourners – "tourists on an extended pilgrimage" – who "should keep to themselves, pacifically, and then... return home" (Coovadia 189). The couple's attachment to "India" as a source of cultural sustenance and pride is suddenly supplanted by the reality of rootedness and they realise:

It was time, to start shooting off roots, to set seeds in the patient earth, time to husband their pool of resources. Had they travelled so far to embrace stagnation? India is a portable country, to some extent, which moves as people do, accommodating itself freely to new environments, but if they started off forsaking her, forgetting her in this and that detail, what would happen at the end of time? (Coovadia 157)

The ambivalence of adopting South Africa while conserving Indianness becomes a delicate matter in the process of identification. The need for "shooting off roots" that the couple experience suggests a commitment to, and dependence on, the South African soil, negating their earlier perception of themselves as mere sojourners. For Ismet and Khateja, Durban becomes the closest approximation of their homeland as they grudgingly come to terms with the reality of their rootedness while still harbouring a vision of Indianness that is untainted by its contact with Africa. With its population of a million residents, equally distributed among blacks, whites and Indians, Durban, as the narrator remarks, "housed the largest number of Indians in a single place outside India [and] it was, excluding the subcontinent, the most rhetorical city in the world... and... in a sense... created the nation-state of India" (Coovadia 142-43). *The Wedding* credits Durban, in Rastogi's words, for "willing the Indian nation into existence." Rastogi notes that it is in Durban that the diasporic subjects first constituted themselves into Indianness (134). The harsh conditions under colonialism and later apartheid enable the "Indians" in Durban to suppress their internal differences in the interest of forging a pan-Indian identity. Gandhi returned to the subcontinent with this notion of Indianness learnt in South Africa which culminated in the creation of Indian nationality in 1947.

While the privileging of Indianness in *The Wedding* unsettles the diasporic subjects' South Africanness, it also serves to highlight its embedded internal divisions and the complex

layeredness of identity that Indian subjects have to negotiate. The novel shows how the insularity of the diasporic subjects and their attachment to the subcontinent undermine their commitment to South Africa. The atrophying of Ismet and Khateja's sojourners' dream towards the end of the novel leave only a hint that they have eventually rooted themselves in South Africa. To the narrator, a third-generation Indian South African, India has become quite remote and has to be disavowed on careful consideration. In the United States, he does not have a clear answer for a Sikh driver who wants to know whether he is from India. Uncertainly, he struggles to pinpoint his Indian roots as his double heritage complicates his articulation of national identity in this new location (Coovadia 274).

In *The Lotus People* as in *The Wedding*, Indian migrants set sail for Colonial Natal in the late nineteenth century in pursuit of new opportunities. The novel implicates British colonialism for engineering their voyages. Yahya Ali Suleiman's father, for one, in sending his son to Natal, invokes the British colonial policy of using Indians to open up remote colonies for exploitation (Hassim 50). As it turns out, however, the subcontinental seafarers arrive to a hostile reception. Their economic adventurism comes into competition with that of European colonialists who view it as their prerogative to exploit Africa. The rich economic prospects that Africa presents set the two groups on a collision course. This tension highlights not only the question of India's place within the Empire but also the delicate divide between privileges and legitimacy or entitlement and belonging, suggesting that belonging and citizenship claims ought to be wagered on the nature of a people's relationship to the soil. The novel represents how the quest for belonging and citizenship supplants the sojourners' tendency of the first-generation Indian migrants. The translation processes implicated here resonate with Delanti's observation that citizenship, in its cultural dimension, concerns identity and action (65). These processes, for the subcontinentals, involve dismembering attachments to the subcontinent in favour of asserting South Africanness. The re-membering processes that follow involve reckoning with the realities of colonialism and apartheid and are vital to the making of Indianness in South Africa.

The grammar of belonging and citizenship espoused in the novel requires the heirs of the first-generation migrants to perform their South Africanness as a gesture of home-making. Hassim sets the urgency of this citizenship duty against the temptation to emigrate from the country as Dara contemplates doing in a moment of what the novel describes as the "fear generated by political impotence" (41). It is, however, not as though the Dara has not done anything for the country; in fact, he catalogues a list of his evident commitments to South Africa, emphasising the hard work and contributions of his family in building the

country's economy and infrastructures (Hassim 24). Dara's concerns highlight the victim consciousness that steadily entrenches itself among the diasporic subjects in contrast to the complicity that characterise Coovadia's world.

The novel suggests that economic investments and acts of charity do not in themselves endear one to a country that is torn asunder by injustice and misery. Likewise, it represents bitterness and impotence as antithetical to the quest for belonging and citizenship. Dara realises the futility of the sojourning dream that sustained his father's pioneering generation and paints a bleak future that awaits Indians in South Africa. His recourse is to prepare to vacate the country lest the business empire that his family has built comes to nothing. Jake, Dara's eldest militant son, however, dismisses his father's fears. "We belong here", he says, "we are part of the struggle... this is our country. We can't just forsake the country" (Hassim 26). Jake's generation and the one after them have, in Dara's views, acclimatised themselves to the country and have "comfortably accepted the African way of life" (Hassim 25). Where economic investment, largely viewed as another form of exploitation, seems ineffective as a rooting strategy, the younger generation resort to "blood sacrifice" in the form of armed struggle as a more radical mode of asserting belonging and citizenship claims.

Govender's *Song of the Atman* makes a significant departure from *The Wedding* and *The Lotus People* in its representation of indentured, rather than passenger, Indians in South Africa. In this novel, belonging and citizenship rights are wagered on the "sweat sacrifice" made by the protagonist's indentured forebears. Upon completing his indenture contract, Karupana Govender, as a marker of his valorisation of freedom and dignity, rejects an improved offer from his employer that would re-indenture him as well as the colonial repatriation scheme. Instead, he secures a job as a court interpreter (Govender 30). By choosing to settle in South Africa, Karupana redefines his relationship with the country's soil from that of a bonded labourer *tilling* it to that of a free migrant *owning* a piece of it. This choice prompts a particular mode of transplantation that Govinden has described as the setting up of "little Indias" in South Africa. The process defines, among other things, construction of temples or mosques, observing religious festivals, observance of "Indian" customs, values, cuisine, architecture, forms of dressing, etc. As Govinden notes, such practices are not about replicating the subcontinent but rather "reworking and recreating it in a new context" (83). The transplantation processes that Karupana activates spring from and signal the new relationship to the soil. The accommodation of Indianness in South Africa becomes a legitimate ground for advancing belonging and citizenship claims.

While transplantation emerges in the novel as one of the strategies for navigating the new life in South Africa, one of its unintended ramifications is the general waning of Indianness and privileging of South Africanness. The Govenders' command of Tamil deteriorates as they increasingly adopt English, owing to the opportunities it presents, especially in terms of integration into the South African and global economies. In the novel, South Africa also mediates conversion of Indians to Christianity and, as in *The Lotus People*, the Anglicisation of Indian names. The resilience of characters such as Amurtham, Chin's mother (remarkable for her devotion to her religious faith), or even Veerasamy Govender (the author's paternal grandfather, reputed for his mystical powers), nonetheless, forms a bastion of resistance against the hegemonic forces of cultural imperialism.

As part of its identity politics, *Song of the Atman* foregrounds the tense race relations in South Africa. The novel opens with a prologue that depicts Chin's visit to Robben Island. He has with him a letter that has "the potential to disrupt the course of his life – which up to now had been so ordered, so jealously private. This danger lay in its being made public" (Govender 14). As a product of a community that so jealously polices its members' conduct, Chin is ashamed of his paternity of Devs, an illegitimate son produced out of his liaison with Grace, an African woman. The unease with which Chin negotiates his cross-racial liaisons and their aftermaths highlights the incapacity of transgression to obliterate the rigid racial boundaries between Indians and the black "Other." Chin's attitude towards Grace and Gretta, his white lover and benefactor, betrays his consciousness of racial hierarchy and, by extension, the racial superiority of his own Indianness over Grace's blackness.

As a novel that reconstructs indentured Indian lives in South Africa, *Song of the Atman*, of the three novels, represents not only the broadest spectrum of Indian characters, especially in terms of class, but also stages the most meaningful patterns of cross-racial engagements among the four designated racial groups of South Africa. The novel grants prominent spaces to characters from the four races and, in forging inter-racial transactions, deconstructs apartheid racial taxonomies. These broad representations are possible because the experience of indenture positioned the diasporic subjects within contact zones where meaningful engagements with other groups become both necessary and inevitable.

The novel, however, does not posit any essential Indian subject. Rather, Govender centres the contradictions that class, caste, ethnic and racial differences raise among Indian South Africans. For instance, when Baijnath (also of indentured Indian parentage), who had earlier toyed with the idea of employing a gifted young man who could marry one of his daughters and become a partner in his business, discovers that Chin, whom he is set to

employ, is a Tamil and (more importantly) belongs to a different caste, he discards the whole idea. "No matter how good Chin was", Baijnath resolves, "he could never marry one of his daughters. The prospective bridegroom had to belong to the same caste" (24). In another instance, a combination of caste and class differences prevents Chin from marrying Rani, Gopal Puckree's daughter, while Chin's elevated class later in the novel enables him to marry Gopal's younger daughter, Mogie. These contradictions reveal the split within Indianness itself and highlight that caste prejudice among Indian communities is as unjust as apartheid segregation.

### **Blood sacrifice and anti-apartheid past**

The politics of Coovadia's novel, as is the case with Hassim's and Govender's, suggests that the struggle for a just South Africa remains the most significant way of inscribing belonging. Although the reach of the narrative stops short of the country's apartheid phase, the politics of Durban presents Ismet with a choice similar to what the business class in *The Lotus People* and *Song of the Atman* faces in terms of whether to focus on business exclusively or take the path of the struggle. Faced with the restrictive climate of Durban, Ismet, as typical of the business class in all the three novels, takes the former path. Getting embroiled in the politics of Durban, to him, amounts to "playing with dynamite." Vikram, Ismet's landlord and business partner, after trying in vain to politicise him, complains about "this shortsightedness in the hearts of Indians who will only have themselves to blame if the road to freedom in this country is built over their heads" (Coovadia 223). The segregationist climate of Durban and the concomitant agitations against it anticipate the more concerted forms of anti-apartheid struggle that emerge in *The Lotus People* and *Song of the Atman*.

In *The Lotus People*, anti-apartheid struggle is reproduced as a critical avenue for inscribing rootedness and claiming belonging and citizenship rights. Samuelson argues that in the symbolic and structural movement of the novel, the transformative force of the ocean is displaced by the soil as a marker of national belonging. Samuelson contends, after Mishra, that the soil becomes a receptor for the "blood sacrifice" that is "a necessary component of the right to claim the [country] as one's own" (275). Jake's death in the hands of apartheid's dreaded Security Bureau is significant for its symbolic purchase on South Africanness. It also highlights the irony that while Indianness is represented as antithetical to the recourse to violence in the struggle, the unmasking of Jake as the famed *Aza Kwela*, the daredevil of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (the African National Congress's armed wing) instantly transforms him

into a hero among his fellow Indians. Jake becomes an inspiration to many young Indian South Africans. His son, Zain, like many of his generation, pledges to continue from where Jake has stopped. The pride that Indians draw from the realisation that *Aza Kwela* is one of their own highlights the value that the author attaches to their contribution towards the making of a just South Africa.

In the novel, Indianness functions as a rallying point, mainly in the earlier non-violent phase of the struggle. The novel identifies key historical figures such as Naicker, Goonum, Dadoo, Zainub Asvat, and Fatima Meer, who, in solidarity with Blacks and Coloureds, play a pivotal role in forging a united front against apartheid. In particular, women feature quite prominently in the struggle, mobilising their men across class, religious and ethnic differences to present a concerted opposition to a series of repressive laws (Hassim 95-6). The generation that takes over from these activists, however, make a significant strategic shift, sacrificially resorting to armed struggle as the most effective way to stamp their claim on South Africanness. The recourse to violence emerges as a counterpoint to the Satyagraha that South Africa has rendered as an unworkable signifier of the discourse of civilisation.

Hassim masterfully manages the oscillation of the plot between the past and the present to surface the tension between Indianness and South Africanness. The generational politics that pits the patriarchs and their valorisation of non-violence, against the younger generations and their militancy emerges as an extension of this tension. To the younger Indians, the principles of non-violence, to which their elders seek to bind them, militate against their claim on South Africanness. Their stance seems to be informed by the wide-held view of non-violence as “essentially Indian” (Govinden 56).<sup>7</sup> The equating of Indianness and non-violence in the novel, as Gandhi does in a highly rhetorical delivery in which he claims implicitly that recourse to violence is tantamount to the destruction of Indianness, is seen to privilege Indianness over South Africanness (Hassim 67).<sup>8</sup> The rejection of non-violence by the third and fourth generations, as such, constitutes a disavowal of Indianness and thus an embracing of South Africanness.

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<sup>7</sup> Such a view is, of course, not without problem, given that both the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress employed similar strategies in their civil disobedience campaigns prior to the 1960 Sharpeville Armed Struggle.

<sup>8</sup> One intriguing contradiction that emerges in Hassim’s novel, however, is that while defensive violence is represented as definitive of Dara’s Pathan ancestry, Dara’s locatedness in South Africa has come to redefine it as a total negation of Indianness. The first-generation immigrants, Yahya Ali Suleiman, Pravin Naran and Madhoo Daya, in instructing their descendants, equate non-violence with Indianness. In effect, belief in the practice emerges as a measure of one’s worth. Jake, Dara’s firstborn militant son, loses his inheritance to his younger brother, Sam, due to his recourse to violence in the anti-apartheid struggle. Jake’s choice of lifestyle, informed by a greater loyalty to his country, alienates him from his family.

The novel's logic suggests that South Africanness can only be purchased through unreserved participation in the struggle for justice. The path of the struggle, far from negating or stifling Indianness, is actually an endorsement of its truest codes. The novel ends with vignettes of personal, soul-searching odysseys as the four male protagonists – Sandy, Nithin, Sam and Karan – unburden themselves to their wives in a bid to resolve their inner conflicts and come to grips with the social imperatives that bind them to the cause of justice – seemingly the only path to South Africanness. While their children have irrevocably committed themselves to resisting apartheid and embraced the country as their own, the four men, in the face of the only logical recourse suggested in the novel, continue to vacillate on the vexed question of what form their participation in the struggle should take.

As in *The Lotus People*, the younger generation in *Song of the Atman* inject militancy into the struggle for South Africa. Govender, as Hassim does, plots the processes through which armed struggle supplants the Satyagraha in the anti-apartheid movement, highlighting how the generational divide becomes critical to the shift. Besides, there are striking similarities between Hassim's Jake and Govender's Guru, Chin's militant nephew. Both readily forsake family privileges to devote themselves to the struggle. Their capacity for sacrifice and the readiness with which they forfeit their privileges debunk the stereotype of Indians as a privileged group, obsessed only with making money. For Govender as for Hassim, "blood sacrifice" becomes the ideal mode of inscribing belonging and citizenship. Just as Jake is returned home in a coffin, having been tortured by agents of the Security Branch, Guru's body is returned home riddled with bullets after he attempts to engage the apartheid repressive machinery through military resistance. The cause for which they give their lives cements their relationship with the South African soil.

In the struggle, articulation of a "black" identity is constructed as particularly desirable in presenting a common front against apartheid in the face of the regime's divide-and-rule policy. In keeping with the policy, the apartheid regime, like the British colonial authority before it, as Govinden notes, entrenches a European cultural hegemony under which both indigenous and indentured peoples are rendered as foreigners and systematically "Othered." Anti-apartheid struggle as such seeks to ensure that Africans, Indians and Coloureds belong to South Africa alongside the English and Afrikaners (Govinden 81). Govender's novel is given to the realisation of this all-embracing nation, as succinctly captured by Guru in his view that "Indians need to identify more with the African people if they are to secure the future of their children" (Govender 269). This is the same politics espoused by Michael Mbele, a coloured who chooses to identify himself as a "native." It

contrasts sharply with Chin's stance. When he is invited to join the Cape Branch of the Indian Congress, Chin opines that political union with the ANC in the fight against racism might "make things more difficult for the Indians" (Govender 250). Chin's view is shared by many Indian traders (Govender 270). As in *The Lotus People*, generational politics pits the young, who are far more radicalised, against their older counterparts, who are reluctant to join the struggle. Where Guru finds his uncle's anti-apartheid zeal wanting, he looks up to activists such as Velliammah Moodley and Thumbi Naidoo and many other unsung heroes and heroines who lost their lives in the struggle against colonialism and the colour bar. Through their "blood sacrifice", they demonstrated inspiring patriotism and secured their place in a South Africa that their children can share.

This vision of a non-racial South Africa is, however, undermined by the suspicion that the Indian business class harbour towards Africans. When Guru tells Chin that his decision to return to Durban to set up an ANC cell is prompted by apartheid injustices such as the destruction of Cato Manor and the impending destruction of District Six, Chin shoots back:

What can you do about it? What can you, as an Indian, do about it? Just be thankful of what you have. Look at me, look at all these. We are living well. What more do you want? Indians are caught up in between. If the black people get into power you won't have a chance. Look at what happened during the 1949 riots.... (Govender 308-09)

As in *The Lotus People*, the 1949 riots become a watershed moment in defining relations between Africans and Indians. It also underlies much of the anxieties that Indians have about the post-apartheid present. These anxieties arise from a sense of vulnerability and a distrust of the "black people." Govender represents Chin's angst about the prospect of the "black people" at the helm of power with the benefit of hindsight, inviting a re-examination of non-racial alliance in the anti-apartheid struggle. The urge to narrativise the country's history from the vantage point of the post-apartheid moment is prompted by the fear of a repeat of outbursts similar to those of 1949 and the urgency for self-definition. Guru's response, "I am not an Indian. I am South African" suggests that anxieties over question of belonging and citizenship stem from the position one takes in the process of identification (309).

If South Africanness is claimed on the basis of oppression under apartheid and the investment that Indians, along with other oppressed South African peoples, make in resistance to it, Indianness, too, is constructed around the narrative of a shared experience of

trauma.<sup>9</sup> The "sign of trauma" that post apartheid Indian South African narratives emphasise, is not so much the "middle passage" – even though that, for Indentured Indians, was quite traumatic – as the general anti-Indian sentiments and racial violence under colonialism and apartheid. The mythologising of suffering and trauma in these narratives has homogenising tendencies that ignore the historical processes that have intervened to complicate Indian identity in South Africa. Particularly, the conflation of Indentured and passenger Indian experiences in the interest of reproducing a unified sense of Indianness, as Coovadia parodies in *The Wedding*, results in a simplistic rendering of the processes of identity formation in the late nineteenth, and early twentieth, century. The narrativisation of those historical processes depend in important ways on the politics of location and the forging of Indianness by conditions of rootedness in ways that bolster the diasporic subjects' claim on South Africa thus demanding a keen sensitivity to these narratives as products of particular historical and political forces.

### **Familial structure and mediation of memory**

The post-apartheid moment inaugurates a new beginning in the experience of Indians in the long-anticipated post-apartheid nation. For Indians as one of the formerly disenfranchised peoples of South Africa, the entry into, and reflections on, the democratic, multi-racial South Africa becomes a moment of recollection, as Paul Connerton emphasises with regards to all beginnings (6). The idea of locating a new beginning in history already implicates the ambivalence that the very modes and processes of re-membering deploy. For fiction writers, the task of historical reconstruction, as Connerton suggests, functions strategically as a way of contesting hegemonic power, especially where state apparatuses have been used to systematically deprive a people of their memory (14). As a strategy against what Connerton calls "forced forgetting", writing in the post-apartheid moment emerges as a process of both historical reconstruction and preservation of social memory by groups that find themselves threatened with various forms of cultural erasure. Connerton maintains that social memory, in such cases, is conveyed and sustained by commemorative ceremonies, so defined because they are performative, entailing the notion of habit and, in turn, that of bodily practices (4-5).

While Connerton's model of performativity that attends the inertia in social structures is already implicated in the process of memory (re-)construction, I emphasise the fetishism

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<sup>9</sup> See Mishra's "The Diasporic Imaginary" (5).

operating in the processes of re-membling from a particularly diasporic context, where identity and belonging is split between the home country and the “homeland.” Coovadia’s, Hassim’s and Govender’s novels construct the present and the past as severed domains. Under the post-apartheid “rainbow nation” project, the need to anchor the Indian South African selfhood to its “Indian” past becomes urgent. In the three novels, family structures are represented as vital to the practices and transmission of value-systems associated with Indianness. These structures emerge as sites where material objects that are sourced from the subcontinent are fetishised to mitigate anxieties about cultural loss in the wake of dislocation.

In all the three novels, family narratives consisting of story materials handed down from forebears to descendants bridge the past and the present and constitute sites in which the two temporal planes converge. These novels depict the family as central to the process of imaginative (re-)discovery upon which nations or nationness depend for their existence. As a structure that has been dismembered and re-territorialised, the family functions as one of the key sites for the performance of Indianness in South Africa. Re-membling in these works, through attachment to both the imagined “homeland” and material objects that originate from there, is not only about reconstituting and reinterpreting pastness but also deploying it to serve contemporary politics. As such, it is simultaneously cathartic and restorative and serves to address questions that arise from conditions of liminality.

In *The Wedding*, the family is constructed as an entity that has been dislocated from its “natural” environment in the subcontinent. The novel’s protagonists evince a strong, self-conscious need to preserve Indianness, given their perception of themselves as sojourners who eventually plan to return to India. Ismet labours to impress upon his wife that there is no getting around customs and tradition. In South Africa, his goal is to preserve all the subtleties and fastidiousness that defines his peculiar brand of Indianness and struggles fervently against attempts to lump him into the undifferentiated Indian mass. When the novel’s narrator professes the need to know the story of his parents’ beginnings in South Africa in order to find his bearings as cited earlier, he is articulating both his desire for belonging and a felt need for self-rediscovery.

But the family is represented as an entity that has been dislocated from “natural” environment in the subcontinent. If Durban affords Ismet a social milieu to which he can relate, for Khateja the city is constricting. Khateja is constructed as the quintessentially dislocated subject. Before setting sail to South Africa, she experiences a foretaste of dislocation when she is forced to marry Ismet, resulting in her relocation to Bombay. As “a child of nature”, leaving rural India later and coming to Durban involves not only

disconnecting from a country that was her home; it also amounts to loss of a way of life, a culture. “In Durban, South Africa”, the novel points out, “the stovepipe roof and the plaster walls made her feel like nothing so much as a chicken in a coop. *His* [Ismet’s] chicken in his coop” (Coovadia 183). The voyage that should have liberated her from the tyranny of her Bombay family presided over by her mother-in-law, as Samuelson highlights, opens her to the tyranny of confinement, this time in her diasporic home, underscoring the gender element in the differential experience of migration (281). The new social environment of Durban contrasts sharply with the Indian village in which she grew up, a location that animates Khateja’s inner liberty or wildness of spirit that Ismet hoped the voyage to South Africa would tame. Khateja resists transplantation in South Africa and remains a virtual sojourner throughout the novel. She finds her “confinement” in their Durban apartment or exile from India, as she perceives it, quite stifling. Home in South Africa becomes a hostile environment for Khateja and constantly shocks her Indian sensibilities. In Khateja’s experience, the conflation of belonging and autochthony seems to be the novel’s way of inviting a re-examination of what it means to belong. Re-membering her Indian past becomes a process of healing the wounds of dismemberment.

In *The Wedding*, home is constructed as a reflection of the vision of the late nineteenth century nationalist ideologues in colonial Bengal. In keeping with the spiritual vs. material dichotomy of culture that informs this conception of home,<sup>10</sup> Ismet confines Khateja to their apartment while he ventures out after material success. This fits perfectly with his broader plans, for domesticating his recalcitrant wife has been one of his main motivations in setting out on the high seas. Like Ismet, Vikram, too, does not want to see his wife involved in activities outside home, engaging in “cultural evenings” at the British Council, or waving placards and petitions. To him, the proper place for women is *inside* the house (Coovadia 216). In the novel, domestication thus generally seems to be the lot of Indian women.

*The Lotus People* and *Song of the Atman* both represent the family as central to preserving religious, linguistic and cultural practices among Indians. The novels, while recognising the tensions and differences that Indianness embeds, represent family structures as mediating close bond among the subcontinentals as a foundation for peoplehood. It is through these structures that Indians preserve their cultural links to “India.” In the post-apartheid context in which these works emerge, these links become vital in forging a pan-Indian identity. In both novels, the tracing of memory through generations, while testifying to

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<sup>10</sup> See Chatterjee for a more elaboration discussion of the Bengali nationalist ideologies about home.

Indians' hard-earned claim to belonging and citizenship, simultaneously set them apart as a people.

In *The Lotus People*, Arvin remarks: "The contact between all of us at the family and neighbourhood level, provides a certain rapport and a court of last appeal" (Hassim 370). The closely-knit family network implied here is invariably invoked in important matters, notably in the choice of marriage partners. But the "contact" upon which these networks depend, itself, draws on a shared past that connects the diasporic subjects to their common origin in the subcontinent. In the novel, this connection, as explored in the last section, is objectified by the heirloom that cements the relationship among the Suleimans and their enduring friendship with the Narans. In its role as the common thread through generations, the heirloom also bears witness to the rupture in the family that the process of re-membering attempts to heal.

In Hassim's novel, as in Govender's, the processes of re-membering the past, for Indians, simultaneously involves celebrating cultural identity and legitimising belonging and citizenship claims in the enunciating present. The values that the younger generation are instructed in are, likewise, calculated to give them a firm sense of cultural bearing and remind them of their hard-earned right to claim the country as their own. In these novels, the family thus emerges as a vital structure in the determination of Indian South African subjecthood. Individuals who exercise agency outside the limits set by the family risk being ostracised. In *Song of the Atman*, the dinner table is represented as the symbol of family unity. "Around it, over meals, major decisions were taken and important issues discussed.... Within the consciousness of the Govenders there resided a firm commitment to what the table stood for: they were a family, and all other considerations took second place" (79). The novel implicates Chin's self-imposed exile from home as the source of all his turmoil. It is only after his reunion with his family that he regains some stability.

### **Fetishism: Anthropological, Marxist and Freudian conceptions**

The fetishising of Indianness in Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govender's novels functions as a way of re-membering Indianness and keeping it alive in the lived, quotidian textures of experience and processes of identification. It implicates the rootedness of Indians in the country and – in "retracing" the middle passage that both connects and disconnects the continental and subcontinental cultural sites – centres the raptures, alienation and the longing that lie at the heart of Indianness in South Africa. In these works the fetishisation unfolds as

part of the wider celebration of ethnic self-assertion that post-apartheid's "rainbow nation" project activates. It is both negative and positive – negative in that it responds to anxieties about the prospects of cultural loss that attend migration and dislocation, and to threats – real or perceived – arising from anti-Indian sentiments during colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid eras; and positive in that it celebrates and keeps alive memories of "India" and, with them, the individuals who are so constituted.

For Thomas Blom Hansen, fetishisation of Indianness in South African fiction is structured by conditions of marginality to which Indians have historically been subjected. Hansen points out that Indians found themselves having to turn their gaze towards the subcontinent in the process of negotiating their identity in a land that threatens to erase their cultural specificity (111). To Indians, Hansen observes:

India was either a site of authenticity, our motherland, or a site that stood for other, non-African, political and cultural loyalties. The coolie past is indeed seen as a shameful and imperfect past, not because it was Indian but because it was not Indian enough or, rather, it was Indian in the wrong way. In this sense, the contemporary attachment to things properly Indian works as a form of supplement that promises to purify and solidify a cultural identity *always haunted by its contested legitimacy in South Africa...* Attachment to things Indian have a fetishistic character because they are ambivalent – objects of desire and disavowal at the same time. (Hansen 111-12; my emphasis)

Hansen conceptualises a fetish both as an object that is highly desired for the awe-inspiring and uncanny qualities that it represents and condenses, and as constituting "a lie that works." In this second sense, such an object is invested with "hidden or more opaque powers... so that it seems as if this object itself *is* identical to, and embodies, those powers" (Hansen 112). The ambivalence that Hansen highlights as characterising the fetishising of Indianness arises from the particular nature of the locatedness of Indians in South Africa. Where desire gratifies the cultural pride that such attachments yield, disavowal privileges their claim to South Africanness. Against Hansen's reading of "India" as an unwieldy fetish, I read it as a portable one, drawing on both the processes of routing and rooting and the inscription of Indianness through material objects that are sourced from the subcontinent.

I use fetishism in this chapter as a productive framework for understanding the relationships between material objects and human subjects, drawing on a combination of

anthropological and Karl Marx's and Sigmund Freud's thoughts on the subject. With a greater interest in the social world, Arjun Appadurai elaborates in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* how the flow of things is embedded in that of social relations (11). Along similar lines, Igor Kopytoff, after W. H. R. Rivers, proposes a cultural biography of things. The cultural exploits in the biographical details of an object's life, Kopytoff argues, "reveal a tangled mass of aesthetic, historical, and even political judgments, and of convictions and values that shape our attitudes to objects labelled 'art'" (67). Kopytoff treats such objects as culturally constructed entities, "endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified... into culturally constituted categories" (68). Echoing Kopytoff's argument, Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshal maintain that the biographical approach is useful for the ways it clarifies how social interaction between people and things produce meaning. "Meaning", they maintain, "emerges from social action and the purpose of an artefact biography is to illuminate the process" (169).

At the other end of the pole, Bjørnar Olsen contends that the history of progress from the prehistoric human existence to the postmodern era has been that of increasing materiality. Agency is increasingly mediated by things as more and more tasks are delegated to non-human agents (88). Fetishism, for Olsen, designates the projecting of human properties and relations onto empty things (94). He argues that such fetishistic relationships, despite all the falseness associated with them, are as true as those that obtain between human subjects. Olsen's argument rests on the assumption that people and things share the same ontological order and that, in their existence, humans have always extended social relations to the world of things (88). Drawing on Bruno Latour, Olsen calls for the need to ascribe agency to more than simply human subjects (89). To him, material objects, through their interaction with humans, shape experience, memories and lives (90). These objects are re-membered not because of their status as human artefacts but because, in Olsen's words, they "construct the subject" (100). Olsen's point re-echoes Melanie Wallendorf's and Eric J. Arnold's contention that material objects are markers of social identity. For Wallendorf and Arnold, "we derive our self-concept from objects", convey and extend it to others as well as demonstrate it to ourselves (531).

For Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govender's novels as works that emerge from a diasporic context where questions of authenticity or legitimacy split Indians in terms of their orientation towards South Africa or India, I turn specifically Marx's and Freud's concept of fetishism. The essence of commodity fetishism that Marx sketches is the double functionality of commodities as "objects of utility" and "depositories of value" that displaces the worker's

labour as the source of value (19). The concept, in Marx's analysis, originates from the religious world where objects are invested with mysterious power beyond their physical properties. It enables Marx to account for the split between products of labour and their physical realities as well as the uniqueness of commodities from other physical objects (31). For Marx, commodity fetishism springs out of a self-generating value that is concomitant with disavowal of its real source in labour power (31). Fetishisation, as such, effects a transferral of relations where social relation between persons assumes "the fantastic form of relation between things" (31).

For Freud, the fetish functions as a substitute for an unattainable object – the mother's penis – that the fetishist once believed in as a little boy and to which he must now cling in the absence of the original object of desire. The fetish, as such, transforms the female genitalia which it has been appointed a substitute into an object of desire (152-3). In its ambivalent role, it also preserves the original object of desire from extinction and – to ward off the fate that befell it – "remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it" (154). The ambivalence that Freud highlights here emerges as a stab at psychic integrity. On the one hand, the fetishist, driven by internal instinctual demands, represses affirmation of castration – the logic of his new knowledge that the woman does not actually possess a penis. On the other, he disavows the reality that his knowledge bears witness as his own defence against threats of castration – the fate that befell the woman (153-4). The simultaneous functioning of both repression and disavowal in Freud's analysis resonates with the manner in which the post-apartheid moment allows for the inscription of both South Africanness and Indianness. In reading the three novels, I assume a simple homology between the Freud's object of desire and attachment to "India", the motherland, which underlies the fetishisation of Indianness in these novels.

My exploration of these works extends the way fetishism for both Marx and Freud surfaces hidden structures of reality to the understanding of social history as a series of representation. For both analysts, as Laura Mulvey notes, fetishism functions as a structure that emanates from the difficulty of representing reality (5). It provides a framework for explaining the resistance of the psyche and the inability to understand the symbolic structures within the social and the psychic spheres (Mulvey 8). The reading of historical representations in Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govender's novels that I undertake here, in Mulvey's terms, seeks to reveal the "relation between representation and their skewed referentiality" (5). This problem stems from the fetishisation of Indianness on the South African soil which emerge here as part of the politics of location.

In the aftermath of migration, performing cultural identity through the process of remembering, as anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson observe in an unrelated context, reveals “how imagined communities come to be attached to imagined places, as displaced peoples cluster around remembered or imagined home” (10). This attachment has resonances with – and draws from the same wellspring as – what critics such as Appadurai and Kopytoff have highlighted between people and things. Attachment to fetish-like objects, for Indians, becomes critical to performing cultural identity in the South African diasporic context that they inhabit. Such objects function as vessels of culture and keep alive memories of the homeland. In the three novels, practices of diasporicity complicate belonging and citizenship claims and articulation of identity.

### **Material objects and processes of subjectification**

In *The Wedding*, the migration from India to South Africa thrusts the novel’s protagonists, Ismet and his wife, Khateja, in the midst of anxiety. To allay the negative ramifications of dislocation and to help them adapt to their new cultural environment, the couple bring along with them household items from India, among them, cutleries, utensils, household furnishing items, all seemingly for the purpose of preserving illusions of continuity (147). The language of the narrative itself, as the couple unpack, captures how the material objects they have brought along with them are invested with Indianness: in the narrator’s words, “India”, described as “multifold, many-fingered, articulated, cloth-covered... issued from their luggage: a Koran in a soft cream binding”, the walking stick that once belonged to Ismet’s father, a collapsible umbrella stand that their next-door neighbour gave them upon hearing about their travel plans, a lace mosquito net from Tejpal and Jairam and Yavini and Roshni (who knew a thing about Natal), and Ismet’s *namaaz* prayer mat (148). The cuisine and dress codes that come to define their new life on the continent are all sourced from the subcontinent. These items, while underscoring the couple’s apprehension about the continent, also capture their readiness to make a *home* for themselves away from “home”, despite their illusion of themselves as sojourners.

The plot of the novel revolves around unmaking this illusion. For Ismet and Khateja, “India” gradually becomes simply a source of cultural sustenance and pride from “being linked to an ancient culture”, as Vahed and Desai (5) have put it in an unrelated context. The couple’s orientation to India is checked by the realities of rootedness in the continent. Despite their attachment to the subcontinent, the couple comes to a sudden realisation:

It was time, to start shooting off roots, to set seeds in the patient earth, time to husband their pool of resources. Had they travelled so far to embrace stagnation? India is a portable country, to some extent, which moves as people do, accommodating itself freely to new environments, but if they started off forsaking her, forgetting her in this and that detail, what would happen at the end of time? (Coovadia 157)

The ambivalence of adopting South Africa while conserving Indianness becomes a delicate matter in the process of identification. The need for “shooting off roots” that they articulate here suggests a commitment to, and dependence on, the South African soil, which negates their perception of themselves as mere sojourners – “tourists on an extended pilgrimage” – who “should keep to themselves, pacifically, and then... return home” (Coovadia 189). Written retrospectively from a post-apartheid moment, the novel’s logic seems to emphasise the nature of the constructedness of Indian South African identity over any essentialist notion that attachment to material objects that are sourced from the subcontinent may suggest.

Yet within the same representational economy that the Indian artefacts, as cultural signs, function in Coovadia’s novel, their proximal linkage to India elevates their status from that of mere cultural symbols to that of indices. In Ismet’s mind, they attain iconic status, if one takes Roy Ellen’s sense of iconicity as the representation of an abstraction – in this case, “India” or Indianness – as material things (230). Within this iconic scheme, the material objects represented in the novel are amenable to all the four cognitive processes that Ellen associates with the functioning of fetishism. First, they objectify not merely “India”, but one that “travels” and “accommodates itself freely to new environments” (Coovadia 157; my emphases). This image of “India” resonates with Ellen’s second process – that of *animation* (223-6). Ellen’s third process, “the conflation of the signifier and the signified”, suggests the way in which these material objects are not only inhabited by Indianness as an abstraction but also become one and the same thing with it (226-8). In Freud’s sense, this process captures a substitution effect in a similar manner to how labour as a source of value is displaced in Marx’s commodity fetishism. For the Indians in Coovadia’s novel, the material objects are valorised for their capacity, in themselves, to confer Indianness.

Ellen’s fourth process, the mutual power exchange between material objects and human subjects (228-9), emerges as the underlying appeal to fetishism among Indians. Ellen observes:

By turning ideas or relations into objects you can more easily manipulate and control them, or at least you may believe that you can. By animating what has been concretised the object acquires utility over and above its appearance. (288)

The power with which human subjects invest material objects paradoxically stems from the capacity of those very objects to alter the subjects' social realities. The lives of Indians in South Africa are represented in Coovadia's novel as entangled with those of material objects sourced from the subcontinent. In this regard, family structures are deployed to cement the bond through practices such as cuisine, dressing, architecture and ceremonies as explored in the next section. Through these practices, Indians are shown to forge a balance between the cultural heritage that links them to the "motherland" and the realities of their location in South Africa.

In *The Lotus People*, the priceless heirloom that Yahya Ali Suleiman, the first-generation patriarch, receives from his father (shortly before setting sail for South Africa) and later hands down to his own son, Dara, emerges as a cultural icon of the "Indian" heritage to which subsequent generations are heirs. The heirloom, a golden dagger dating, at least, some one hundred years from the moment it surfaces in the narrative, is an antique from the Mughal period and its passage through the generations of the Suleimans bind them to their Pathan ancestry (Hassim 17). Normally unveiled at the moment it is bequeathed to the next heir, Yahya's plight, after being defrauded in a land transaction, compels him to entrust it as a security deposit to Naran Pravin from whom he intends rightfully to buy the same piece of land. Although Naran declines custodianship of the heirloom owing to its inestimable value, he welcomes the responsibility much later in the novel as the appointed executor of Yahya's will. The friendship and trust that develops between the two patriarchs and their families for generations stem from this initial transaction as well as in the Indianness of their heritage.

The circumstance under which the heirloom is unveiled – and, indeed, its career in South Africa – reinforces its semantic union with Indianness. The instability in the status of both the object and the group stands out conspicuously as a function of their presence in South Africa. Where Indians grapple with anxiety and uncertainty in the wake of restrictive and discriminative legislations after their arrival in South Africa, the golden dagger, singularised, and thus fetishised as an heirloom and effectively elevated above its status as a mere commodity, is threatened with re-commoditisation due to its dislocation from the

subcontinent.<sup>11</sup> The move to append a price to the dagger, and the implicit possibility of sale, threatens its career as an heirloom and thus its link with Indianness.

As a signifier of Indianness, the dagger embeds one of the contradictions that emerge in *The Lotus People*. For all its aesthetic finesse, the dagger is “nonetheless a weapon of destruction, conceived for no other purpose than to inflict death” (Hassim 17). In the novel, a similar irony emanates from the conflation of Indianness and non-violence. The irony here is that while defensive violence, which the dagger itself objectifies, is represented as definitive of Yahya’s Pathan ancestry, the patriarch’s locatedness in South Africa has come to redefine it as a total negation of Indianness. Yahya, along with the other first-generation patriarchs, Pravin Naran and Madhoo Daya, so much emphasise the conflation of non-violence and Indianness in their instruction of their descendants that it comes to function as a measure of one’s worth. Jake, Dara’s firstborn militant son, loses his inheritance to his younger brother, Sam, due to his recourse to violence in the antiapartheid struggle. Jake’s choice of lifestyle, informed by a greater loyalty to his country, alienates him from his family.

In the novel, the bequeathing of the heirloom demands that each heir be equal to his inheritance. Dara comes close to losing his inheritance when under the spell of youthful rage he nearly succumbs to violence. In contrast, Sam, his son, chooses family loyalty and conformity to tradition when his father, alarmed by his brief stint in the underworld, gives him an ultimatum to choose between friends and family. For Sam, privileging the family over friends is not a choice but a “moral imperative” (Hassim 218). Dara’s fear of losing Sam to the streets as he has lost Jake is allayed by Sam’s pledge of loyalty. The understanding between father and son positions the son in line for the inheritance. Yet Sam usurps Jake’s inheritance rights not by being true to his ancestors’ tradition but rather by betraying it. By that very betrayal, he also turns his back to his country at its moment of need. The filial and affilial bonds that Sam and Jake evince in the novel emerge as a test of the efficacy of the family in policing the loyalty of its members.

Sam recognises and comes to terms with his double acts of betrayal only retrospectively upon overhearing a conversation between Shaida, his mother, and Zain, Jake’s militant son, who is prepared to continue with the struggle from where his father has left off. Shaida wants Zain to regard his Indian affiliation as primary, impressing upon him the fact of his narrower identity as a Pathan. The Pathanness of his heritage obligates him to observe the *Paktünwali* – “the the code by which every Pathan lives” (Hassim 471-72). Elaborating on

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<sup>11</sup> See Kopytoff (1986) for a detailed discussion about the processes of commoditisation and singularisation.

the code, Shaida tells Zain: “It is your... honour, without which you are nothing. Without [which] you are less than an animal.... *Paktünwalī* also means that you are the equal of all men, that you are in fact the first among equals” (Hassim 472). A time-honoured tradition of the Pathan “is the protection of that which belongs to [them]”, Shaida amplifies:

It is your bounden duty to allow no man to interfere with your *zan*, *zar* and *zamin*. It is the prime reason for your existence. These three sacred things – your women, your wealth and your land – they are your personal responsibility, to cherish and protect with all your might. Fail to do that and you cease to be a man. (Hassim 473)

The acquisitiveness that patriarchy has invested in the Pathan male becomes a recipe for intense interracial conflicts in a South African setting where autochthonous claims and political power position “indigenous” Africans and European settlers to stake competing claims over questions of entitlement. The gender blindness of the *Paktünwalī* further means that entitlement, including belonging and citizenship claims, is a preserve of males.

Prompted by his mother’s discourse on the *Paktünwalī*, Sam, in a self-redemptive move, contemplates reclaiming his past, his *zamin*, to atone for his negligence in having “*allowed it to be looted*” (original emphasis; Hassim 474). Challenged, first, by Jake’s – and now Zain’s – commitment to social justice, Sam’s anxiety that he has not lived according to the *Paktünwalī* starts him on a more politically conscious and active life. For Sam and his peers in the business class, the realisation that they have not done anything significant when it mattered compels them to lend their full support to their children’s generation and their wives who, being far more politicised, have radicalised how to engage the apartheid state. Shaida’s intervention and the wider contributions of Hassim’s female characters to the anti-apartheid struggle invite the need to re-examine the gendered dimension to the remaking of Indianness in South Africa.

The unease that Shaida stirs within Sam does not abate for the rest of the novel. Towards the end, Sam is driven by an overwhelming disquiet and nostalgia for the past. When he yields to an irresistible impulse stirred by fond memories to visit the old neighbourhood that had been appropriated under the Ghetto Act over thirty years earlier, the past that he encounters is a realm of ruin that actively resists his entry. The gap between imagination and reality becomes all too apparent. The passage implies the inaccessibility of the past except as imaginative or textual constructs. Hassim closes the passage with an apostrophic flourish in which Sam directs his rage at the appropriators and draws inspiration

from “the spirits of the living” that have driven them away from the appropriated property (457-64). The code of the *Paktünwali* that he has newly imbibed specifies the struggle as the only course of action available to him. As the son positioned to inherit the heirloom, Sam’s recognition that abiding by the *Paktünwali* is simultaneously his most effective purchase on South Africanness emerges as a fitting closure to the novel as a narrative about belonging and citizenship.

In *Song of the Atman*, material objects originating from the subcontinent, in their various forms, give the diasporic subjects their cultural bearings and a sense of continuity – or illusions of continuity. Among these are seeds and seedlings that the first indentured labourers are represented as having brought along with them on “the long, taxing journeys on rickety sailing vessels” (Govender 154). From these, the migrants plant fruit trees, vegetables and flowers around their homes to ensure steady supply of traditional foods and create a familiar environment. The long list of plant species that the Indians introduce to the country further underscores their vibrant contribution to both the culture and biodiversity of South Africa.<sup>12</sup> These material objects are significant not only as signifiers of Indianness but also because they facilitate its transplantation in South Africa. Indianness, as transferred through “foreign” objects, extends to architecture and home furnishing, as evident in the description of “regularly whitewashed exterior walls and gloss-painted interiors – often somewhat garish, in bright primary colours” that reflect “an abiding pride in one’s home” (Govender 154-5).

Religious practices and festivities are other fields where fetish-like objects are planted as part of the inscription of Indianness. For Amurtham, for instance, spirituality, as definitive of her Indian subjecthood, is inscribed through fetishes, involving what Chin, her liberally-minded son, describes as a “steadfast observance of meaningless rituals” (114). In the shrine, depicted as a vital component of every Hindu home, fetishes in the forms of brass lamps, chombus, incense holders, garlanded pictures of deities, etc, form an important part of religious practices (194). The diasporic context within which these fetishes are deployed invest them with stronger emotional attachment and their association with the subcontinent capacitate them to mitigate negative ramifications of dislocation among Indian subjects. In revisiting these practices and tracing their origin to India, the novel celebrates the resilience of culture in the face of dislocation and threats of cultural erasure.

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<sup>12</sup> Among others, this includes tamarind, peepul, mango, jack fruit, coconuts, avocado, guava, curry leaf, mustard, dhania, chillies, brinjals, snapdragons, marigolds, carnations, dahlias, roses and pride-of-Indians (Govender 154-5).

The construction of pastness in these works doubles as a process of authenticating practices and values that have come to define Indianness in South Africa. For indentured Indians, who see themselves initially as sojourners in South Africa, the inscription of Indianness forms a vital aspect of their performance of cultural identity. The preserving of these material-cultural items through their practices of cuisine, taste, architecture, home-making, dressing, etc, emphasises their significance to the determination of Indian subjectivity. The dislocation from the subcontinent leaves Indians with only these material objects to cling to for cultural signification. In their role as signifiers of Indianness, these material objects accrue power unto themselves to determine specific subjectivities.

In the novel, Mogie's exploits furnish the clearest instance of the shaping influence of Indian practices and values. In her moments of trial as her marriage to Chin threatens to crumble, the singing of *kirtans* and *thevarams* during the thirteen days leading up to the cremation Mrs Reddy, Chin's surrogate mother and housekeeper, becomes a route to self-discovery.

The words made their way into her consciousness from a reservoir deep within her soul. They had been there all the time, waiting to surface, and when they did they brought with them an all-encompassing peace. Sometimes she would reflect on the excesses of her youth. Those things had happened, but they had happened to *another person*, someone who had meandered from her own nature. It was time to bring *the true person back*; every time she sang the thevarams or meditated on them, *that person came closer home*. (Govender 292; my emphasis)

Mogie's deteriorating marriage and her relocation to Cape Town, away from her Durban environment where she was born and grew up, leaves her with a deep sense of loss and alienation. The *kirtans* and *thevarams* carry echoes of Indian songs that she has brought along with her from Durban and which keep alive her memories of home. It is ironic, though, that the home she recalls, in turn, carries with it her deepest moments of vulnerability and irreparable loss. The allusion to "the excesses of her youth" and "[t]hose things" that "happened"<sup>13</sup> in the excerpt above highlights the ambivalence that attends the image of home. For if home, as the "inner sanctum" represented by the woman, is a space of security and the

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<sup>13</sup> These remarks allude to Mogie's sexual liaison with Balakrishna, her elder sister's husband, which results in pregnancy. Balakrishna, unwilling to pay a fortune for a safe abortion, resorts to a back-street abortionist as a result of which Mogie now cannot conceive (Govender 249-50).

core values of Indianness, as Partha Chatterjee maintains, then Mogie's experience in the novel is a reversal of that role. The violation of her honour by her brother-in-law, her complicity in it notwithstanding, undermines the time-honoured security that home is supposed to provide. Home, in its essentialist sense, alienates Mogie from herself and it takes the mediation of another kind of home – one that is corrupted by its contact with the “world” – to reconcile her to her true self. The novel, through this ambivalent representation of home, seems to suggest that purist conceptions, whether of home itself or Indianness more generally, are untenable in a diasporic context defined by a quadratic axis of racial interrelationships that makes contact with the “outside” inevitable.

### **Conclusion**

Coovadia's, Hassim's and Govinden's novels emerge as products of a post-apartheid moment, which under the “rainbow nation” project witnesses the supplanting of the politics of non-racial alliance by ethnic or national self-assertion. The novels evince an increasing awareness that the assertion of blackness as the logic of anti-apartheid imperative risks effacing Indianness that, as Rastogi notes, was “already made fragile by migration and public invisibility” (26). Despite these shifts, the anxieties that the post-apartheid moment presents for Indian South African writers occasion the urgency to reconstitute the pasts that Indians share in a bid to legitimise their belonging and citizenship claims. The narrativisation of these histories reveals the remaking of Indianness by conditions of rootedness in ways that simultaneously bolster Indians' claim on South Africa. The desire for a particularly redeeming history that these authors articulate thus demands a keen sensitivity to their novels as products of particular historical and political forces.

Fetishisation of Indianness in these works as such emerges as a vital strategy for navigating the new life in South Africa. The historical reconstruction that these writers undertake simultaneously celebrates the making of Indian South African subjectivity through cultural transplantation and conditions of rootedness in ways that simultaneously bolster Indians' claim on South African citizenship. In these novels, the processes of re-membering link Indians to the “homeland”, construed both as a physical place of origin and an imagined space of authenticity. The novels represent how Indians, in the face of the adversities that South Africa deals them, find themselves fetishising India as representing a glorious past, now accessible only through memory. In fetishising Indianness, the discontents with South Africa that Indians articulate, as Rastogi suggests, simply express their hard-earned

citizenship right to hold the nation-state to account, which “makes Indians more South Africans, not less” (18). The desire for a redeeming history that these novelists articulate demands a keen sensitivity to their works as products of particular historical and political forces.

## Chapter 5: Cultural Pluralism and Global Justice in the New Post-1990

### Asian East African Narratives

#### Introduction

The new post-1990 Asian East African narratives emerging from the UK and other white settler-countries imagine the region in light of the racial politics and cultural pluralism in the sites of narration. The (post-)colonial and imperial sites that this body of works straddles recalls Mishra's reading of Indian diasporic narratives as two autonomous archives designated by the terms, "old" and "new" diasporas. The former, Mishra maintains, results from the 19<sup>th</sup> – early-20<sup>th</sup> century colony-to-colony movements of labour in the wake of mercantile capitalism, with subjects who, in the (post-)colonial spaces they occupy, are implicated in a complex relationship with other (formerly) colonised host / national peoples. The latter, as products of the post-1960s global migrations, in the imperial metropolises they have entered, negotiate their subjecthood within a multicultural paradigm alongside immigrants from other former colonies. Mishra draws this distinction not because he regards the two diasporas as neat categories but to challenge claims and assumptions by Indian intellectuals that privilege the new diaspora as the more legitimate case of diasporic subjectivity. He highlights that diasporic flows between the two sites disturb the old / new divide without rendering it redundant, unsettling the reductive association of the two diasporas with the local and global, respectively (3-4).

The *new* in my designation of this body of works thus suggests neither a complete break with older narratives nor any one-to-one mapping with the new diaspora but a reformulation of the old Asian question from new locations. Informed by the phenomenon and discourses of multiculturalism in imperial metropolises, these narratives, as marked departures from the earlier ones, reckon with the past in radical ways. Beyond simply surfacing the pluralism of the transnational and global spaces that they imagine, they rigorously tackle the racist consciousness among Asians and some of the deep-seated prejudices that characterised their conduct in East Africa. Where earlier narratives are generated by tensions emanating from Asians' position as a buffer between Africans and Europeans, the newer ones emerge as products of the gap between the optimism and expectations with which Asian East Africans enter the new destinations and the hostilities meted out against them from such sites. Against such injustices, these works position themselves as part of the movement for global justice.

In exploring these issues, I focus on Alibhai-Brown's *No Place like Home*, Siddiqi's, *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*<sup>1</sup> and Patel's *Migritude* as works that represent how race determines the experience of migrating from post-colonial sites to imperial metropolises. These authors chronicle the experience of Asians, who, alongside other (ex-)colonial subjects, especially from Africa and the Caribbean, enter imperial metropolises as *immigrants*<sup>2</sup> – a racially-loaded and homogenising category – between the 1960s and 1980s in the wake of political backlashes that follow the demise of colonialism. The three authors write from a keen awareness that Asian presence in these sites results, among other factors, from a combination of failures of inclusive nation-building and the racialisation of national belonging in post-colonial East Africa. In the new locations, Asians as immigrants are subjected to new forms of racism that are no less oppressive than the more blatant ones earlier invoked to justify colonial domination.

In these narratives, Asians challenge the homogenising and assimilationist propensities of dominant host / national groups and their tendency to view the state as a projection of their nationhood. In contrast with their prior experience in East Africa where such projections follow autochthonous lines, in imperial metropolises these tendencies are prompted by concerns about the dilution of national identity by the presence of immigrants.<sup>3</sup> Such xenophobic reactions are vestiges of nationalist ideologies that under colonialism established clear boundaries, mainly along racial lines, to exclude racial minorities. As Will Kymlicka points out, however, most western democracies, and virtually all post-colonial states, have abandoned the goal of a mono-national state in favour of a more multicultural model (18). Kymlicka accounts for this shift as resulting from a combination of two sets of underlying structural factors: the increasing assertiveness of subaltern groups themselves and the steady decline of the capacity of nation-states to resist rights claims advanced by the subalterns (25; cf. Eriksen 141).<sup>4</sup> Multiculturalism not only demands that the state must

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<sup>1</sup> Herein after shortened to "*The Feast*" and Alibhai-Brown's autobiography to "*No Place*."

<sup>2</sup> In his insightful chapter, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" that informs much of the subsequent discussions of new racism, Etienne Balibar identifies the functioning of category, *immigrant*, which in imperial countries displaces that of nation and provides "a solvent of 'class consciousness,'" as indicative of the reality of "neo-racism" (20).

<sup>3</sup> In "From a Colonial Past to a New Multiculturalism", Paul Gilroy writes eloquently about how migration has impacted on national culture/identity in Britain, producing what he describes as "contemporary post-imperial melancholia." "Britain", Gilroy maintains, "has become extremely concerned about the ebbing cultural content of its uncertain national identity. These anxieties... are an unwelcome product of postcolonial circumstances. Fears that globalization has emptied Britain of its distinctiveness can be traced back to the nation's loss of empire, and the disappearance of the greatness that went along with it" (unpaginated).

<sup>4</sup> Assertiveness factors, Kymlicka highlights, comprise demographics (with minorities consolidating their presence through steady population growth), rights-consciousness (involving the repudiation of ethnic/racial hierarchies in favour of the inherent equality of human beings, demanded as a *right*) and democracy, providing a

belong equally to all its citizens and protects the rights of minorities within its borders but it also acknowledges, and seeks to redress, historical injustices suffered by marginal groups (Kymlicka 18-19). The fervent excoriation of Asians' exclusivity and complicity in (post-)colonial injustices in East Africa in Alibhai-Brown's, Siddiqi's and Patel's works position the authors to make similar demands on the new home / host-nations. The commitment to advancing inclusive, just metropolises in these countries is reflected in attempts to surface the racial pluralism of East Africa and structural injustices that underlie race-relations in the region.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen identifies multiculturalism, alongside assimilation and domination, as one of the three main strategies through which states in the contemporary era of globalisation contend with the presence of minorities within their borders. Eriksen maintains, however, that these strategies of inclusion are ideal types; in reality, states normally employ them in combination. Indeed, Alibhai-Brown's, Siddiqi's and Patel's works show that in both East Africa and in the imperial countries, Asian affiliation to the hosting nation-states takes the form of ethnic incorporation, which, as Eriksen highlights, involves resisting assimilation or attempts at cultural domination by hegemonic groups (124). Incorporation in these sites entails Asians negotiating their affiliation collectively. As such, it involves both subtle and blatant forms of racial segregation and clear demarcations of cultural boundaries by both the Asians and dominant national groups, even though the states in question may no longer have any official policy to that effect.

What these narratives thus bring out is the ambivalent nature of cultural pluralism within the ambit of Empire. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri capture this ambivalence aptly in *Empire*. Drawing on Etienne Balibar, Hardt and Negri contend that the proliferation of difference, though celebrated by advocates of cultural pluralism as liberatory, also doubles as the preferred weapon of imperial control. The authors' contention builds on the premise that the decline of the sovereignty of nation-states in the face of the ever-increasing mobility of factors of production does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined but, rather, that it has transformed itself into a range of national and supranational structures, united under a

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framework within which these groups can mobilise for their rights and entitlements. Kymlicka identifies the factors explaining the steady adjustment in the tendency of states and dominant groups to accept cultural pluralism, albeit reluctantly, as de-securitisation (which configures ethnic politics as a matter of democratic politics, resulting in increase geo-political security) and the consolidation of liberal-democratic consensus with its attendant rights-consciousness and guarantee of the security of the individual. Kymlicka maintains that these two factors have emboldened states to be more accommodative towards multicultural reforms (25-28).

single logic of rule – what the authors designate as "Empire" (xi-ii). Hardt and Negri emphasise that the structures and logic of power in the contemporary global world are not only immune to the "liberatory" politics of difference but that the strategy of focusing resolutely on the very forms of power that advocates of pluralism challenge works to the advantage of the new power. Empire, Hardt and Negri highlight, "is bent on doing away with those modern forms of sovereignty and on setting differences to play across boundaries" (142).

For Hardt and Negri, as for Balibar, imperial racism – or differential racism, as the latter terms it – replaces a biological concept of race that was invoked to justify colonial domination with a cultural one that contends that differences between cultures and traditions are insurmountable (192; 21). Both Hardt and Negri and Balibar caution against attaching too much importance to the shift from modern racism to the imperial one, highlighting the "essentialist" character of both, their underlying structure and ultimate end – the denial of rights.<sup>5</sup> Rather than implicating Alibhai-Brown's, Siddiqi's and Patel's works in the entrenchment of imperial sovereignty, however, the theory of neo-racism expounded by Hardt and Negri and Balibar is useful for illuminating these narratives' contribution to the critique of multiculturalism. The narratives, instead of celebrating cultural identities in the context of their locatedness in imperial metropolises, represent a shift from competition between cultures to the contribution that each makes to world development, as Alibhai-Brown herself maintains ("Excluded majority" 48). Alibhai-Brown observes further: "Encouraging people to feel pride in the affirmative aspects of their history makes it easier to get them to accept the wrongs that have been carried out in the name of heritage" (49). This is the same concern that pervades *No Place, The Feast* and *Migritude*. In these works,

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<sup>5</sup> Hard and Negri point out that the pluralism obtaining under imperial sovereignty "accepts all the differences of who we are so long as we agree to act on the basis of these differences of identity, so long as we act our race. Racial differences are thus contingent in principle, but quite necessary in practice or as markers of social separation. The theoretical substitution of culture for race or biology is thus transformed paradoxically into a theory of the preservation of race. This shift in racist theory shows us how imperial theory can adopt what is traditionally thought to be an anti-racist position and still maintain a strong principle of social separation" (192-93). Balibar contends that the same racist logic that was rallied to justify colonial domination is at work in the assimilation demanded of immigrants in imperial metropolises. Their "[integration] into the society in which they already live... is presented as progress, as an emancipation, a conceding of rights." What is at work here, Balibar maintains, is "barely reworked variants of the idea that the historical cultures of humanity can be divided into two main groups, the one assumed to be universalistic and progressive, the other supposed irremediably particularistic and primitive" (25).

differences are surfaced less as a gesture of cultural authentication than as a platform from which to launch attacks against the injustices and segregationist tendencies of Empire.

The three authors thus ally with various critics of multiculturalism, showing how Empire, by appropriating immigrants' pluralist agenda, undermines the liberatory potentials afforded by articulations of cultural difference. Such critics operate from an awareness of how culture lends itself as an instrument of imperial control. Seyla Benhabib, for one, maintains that cultures are faultily regarded by both opponents and proponents of multiculturalism as "unified, holistic, and self-consistent wholes" (86). Such misrepresentations smuggle in the centre-periphery model of cultural relations that characterised colonial modernity. Benhabib faults multiculturalists' insensitivity to the fractures and contestations within culture, which carries over to visions of selves constructed as "as equally unified and harmonious beings with a unique cultural centre" (86). Against multiculturalists' totalising claims of culture, Benhabib views individuality, instead, as fraught with contradictions. Such a vision affords doubly marginalised constituencies within subaltern communities avenues for self-assertion.

Along similar lines, David Bennett maintains that multiculturalism, under the rubric of "culturalism", obscures fundamental analytical categories of power relations such as class, race and gender, whose dimensions are manifestly political. Bennett notes how culture in the globalised economy is regarded as a matter of choice as much as of inheritance thus less as a "politicising" category of relation than colour, ethnicity, class or gender (4; cf. Brent 214). State-managed multiculturalism, he contends, reifies and exoticises alterity and that in treating ethnic and racial difference as a question of "identity" rather than of history and politics, "they translate alterity as cultural diversity, treating difference (a relation) as an intrinsic property of 'culture' and as a value (a socially 'enriching' one), to be 'represented' as such" (4).<sup>6</sup> *No Place, The Feast and Migritude* challenge the imperialist instrumentalisation of culture critiqued by the theorists above and strive, instead, to surface oppressive power structures underlying racial, class and gender violence and segregations. In contrast to the narratives of the old diaspora, Asianness is disarticulated in the three works in favour of the more revelatory categories, *immigrants* – and *refugees*, in the case of Ugandan

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Brent makes a similar point about "community", highlighting how it maps itself onto, and naturalises its identity with, location thus obscuring divisions and structures produced by globalisation. "Community", Brent maintains, "carries the danger of the fetishization of locality and the face-to-face in social life that can ignore the importance of movement and diaspora, and wider issues of national and global inequalities and oppressions" (214).

Asians<sup>7</sup> in Britain where most of them are actually citizens – thus highlighting the racially-charged exclusivity of Empire.

The juxtaposition of the old colonial world and the new imperial one in *No Place*, *The Feast* and *Migritude* exposes how colonial racial structures are reproduced in thinly disguised forms under the new imperial global order. In these narratives, the widespread xenophobia and racial profiling that characterise immigrants' experience in imperial metropolises emerge as Empire's way of creating a social order similar to overt racist repressions and the more blatant demarcations and restrictions of space and movement in the colonies. This is not to say that imperial metropolises are extensions of the colonies necessarily but that the psychological impacts of racial segregation in both sites are similar. Faced with newer and subtler forms of racism and threats of cultural domination in the wake of globalisation, immigrants in imperial sites campaign not so much for the recognition of their cultural specificities as for their political rights. As exigencies behind the pursuit of justice in these narratives, the consciousness of injustices induced by conditions of marginality in the sites of narration determines how the authors imagine East Africa.

As feminist activists who are actively involved in immigrants' politics, the three authors are concerned with Asian women's experience of migration – with stories of “forgotten pioneers”, as Dana April Seidenberg describes them (93; cf. Hand 101) – challenging the narrative of singular economic adventurism that has been constructed almost exclusively around the male dukawallah figure. The three authors give prominence to strong female figures, highlighting their determination to lay the foundation for new beginnings and settlement in imperial metropolises, as they struggle against illiberal patriarchal family structures. In these narratives, representations of the female presence in public spheres marks a significant departure from earlier male-authored counterparts, where women are confined largely to the domestic sphere and are celebrated for their role as foils for the courage, generosity, stoic determination and, indeed, the very worthiness of the male figures in their life (fathers, brothers, husbands). The heroines featured in the three narratives, out of the shadow of domesticity, chart their own destinies in defiance of the dictates of the patriarchal ideologies of their communities.

If *No Place*, *The Feast* and *Migritude* move away from the preoccupation of earlier narratives with cultural authentication, it is because their authors recognise that the kind of totalisation that such representations entail obscures fractures and contestations that take

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<sup>7</sup> I use the designation “Ugandan Asians” instead of “Asian Ugandans” because a considerable section of this group view themselves – and are viewed – as non-citizens.

place within cultures. Echoing Benhabib's critique of multiculturalism, these narratives evince awareness about the contestations that Asian women engage in. As a way of unsettling the multiculturalist project of "cultural defence", Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi and Patel deploy strategies similar to Benhabib's notion of "deliberative democracy", which, contrary to the ubiquitous policing of women's sexuality within Asian communities, afford them an empowering framework enabling their female subjects "to develop their autonomous agency vis-à-vis their ascribed identities" (Benhabib 86). The central female figures in the three works are all career women, determined to venture outside the confines of domesticity to the public sphere that patriarchy has reserved for the males to chart their own destinies.

In these works, education, mobility and class privilege enable women to challenge orthodoxies and escape limitations of culture. Alibhai-Brown's capacity for self-determination, for instance, contrasts sharply with her mother's experience. At the age of 16, the mother, like a chattel, is handed over in marriage as part of some complicated business arrangement (*No Place* 21). Because she cannot picture a life outside of marriage, she is condemned to a life of misery, stuck with a worthless man whose only source of authority is his masculinity. Termination of marriage, for her, is an unthinkable option. Alibhai-Brown's autobiography, like Siddiqi's and Patel's narratives, underscores patriarchy's domination of women through the marriage institution. Characters that resist the oppressiveness of marriage either through divorce or by snubbing marriage altogether do so from the liberatory spaces opened up by education and mobility. The exercise of autonomy and the courage to narrate such heretical subjects in these works depend largely on the distance that travel facilitates and the fact of their narration from imperial sites.

### ***No Place Like Home: Racial divisions and Asians' complicity***

*No Place* narrates Alibhai-Brown's life against the backdrop of the vicissitudes that Ugandan Asians experience immediately before and after political independence. The narrative unfolds in three main parts: the immediate pre-independence period from 1955-1961; the onset of independence to Amin's expulsion of Asians in 1972; the post-expulsion and relocation of Ugandan Asians in Britain. The work closes with an epilogue that captures Alibhai-Brown's 1994 home-coming after twenty-two years away. Narrated retrospectively in the early 1990s from Britain, where Alibhai-Brown lives, the autobiography comes in the wake of the influx of "returnees" tracing their way back to the country with the return of expropriated properties following the 1989 invitation from Yoweri Museveni's government. The retrospective stance

of the narrative offers Alibhai-Brown a vantage point from which to appraise the state of the nation. As part of its commitment to the pursuit of justice, the narrative thrives on its openness about the complicity of Ugandan Asians in colonial injustices. Alibhai-Brown turns around the narrative of victimhood and instead of showing Asians' in-betweenness as a site of vulnerability, as earlier narratives have done, invites the diaspora to reckon with its own complicity in entrenching socio-economic injustices, the main cause of the 1972 expulsion.

The racialised worldview of the old diaspora is produced largely by its self-consciousness as privileged colonial subjects on whom the country's economy depends. The complicity of Asians in colonialism is constructed as originating from their racial consciousness, readily accepting their inferiority to the Europeans and superiority to the Africans. It is this consciousness that rationalises their position as a buffer between the Africans and the Europeans, translating it into their role as the country's economic stewards. The text suggests that if British colonialism ever forged a model colonial subject, it was the Ugandan Asian. Alibhai-Brown mocks the tendency among the group to regard themselves as superior to those who never left the subcontinent: "We spoke English with a better accent, we had been colonised for much longer, we were therefore better" (104-45). This self-exultation, nonetheless, masks the unease that many Ugandan Asians have about their command of the language. Alibhai-Brown constructs this limited facility with English, the language of trade and integration into the global economy, as one of the most excruciating factors that convince Asians of their inferiority to the British. The appeal that Britishness holds for them thus emerges as one strategy for compensating for their perceived inadequacy.

This appeal swivels Asians' orientation towards Britain. As with the earlier narratives of the old diaspora, the economic adventurism that brings the subcontinentals to East Africa enjoins them to look up to the "motherland" – a term that, for Ugandan Asians, takes on a new meaning – as their final or, at least, favourite destination. Many Ugandan Asians furnish themselves with British passports in favour of the Ugandan ones, anticipating the momentous journey to the west. The British passport, to them, becomes a status symbol. Amid the political changes sweeping across Uganda in the period between independence and the expulsion, with many Asians re-negotiating their national affiliation, Kassam, the author's father, evincing an unshakable faith in the British, views it as his "messianic purpose" to caution Asians against giving up their British passports for Ugandan ones. He is convinced of Britain's unflinching support for its subjects: "They will send gunboats to save us anywhere in the world, the British will, nobody can dare to touch a British subject" (Alibhai-Brown

111). An early death spares Kassam the ugly reality that the blue passports actually do little to compensate for their skin colour.

For the Asians in *No Place*, the period between political independence and the expulsion represents a decade of tension and vacillation over the question of national affiliation. The nationalist fervour and political realignment that independence inaugurates require them to embrace their Ugandanness while loyalties to their cultural identities and to the British colonialists produce in them an ambivalent attitude towards Britain. Desired and dreaded simultaneously, the economic prospects and security that Britain represents balance against the separation from family and threats to Indian values that relocation to the country entails. This ambivalence makes them all the more contemptuous of Africans. They interpret their economic success in terms of the gullibility of Africans who they consider to be *shenzis* [fools or barbarians] – an attitude that exonerates them for their callous exploitation of Africans. Alibhai-Brown exposes the gross exploitation and mistreatment of domestic servants, who are constantly treated suspiciously for their "thieving dispositions" despite decades of service (3; 7). Asians are untouched by the indignity and maltreatment to which they subject domestic servants, who often have part of their already meagre wage deliberately withheld as a way of tying them to the job (58). Instead of improving working conditions, they believe that it is in the nature of Africans to be poor; that they are so destined (9). In the context of the rigidly policed racial hierarchy, Asians' meteoric rise in fortunes widens further the gap between them and Africans, which is then naturalised.

Alibhai-Brown challenges Asians' reductive explanation of racial inequality in Uganda, suggesting that it originates, instead, from the racialised compartmentalisation of the colonial political economy. As Mahmood Mamdani observes in *From Citizen to Refugee*, colonialism legally barred Africans from entering trade and Asians from owning land. The colonial economy thus forged Africans primarily into a class of peasants and workers and Asians into that of shopkeepers, artisans and petty bureaucrats. "Race", Mamdani maintains, "coincided with class and became more politicised" (15). Alibhai-Brown shows vividly how this politicisation of race and racialisation of class as part of the colonial order produce conditions where class and racial privilege or deprivation coincide, resulting in the association of privilege and destitution with racial superiority or inferiority, respectively. This conflation of class and race masks structural inequalities even among the Asians themselves. The myth of a model minority and the urgency to maintain the falsely created totality of economic success exacerbates Asians' fastidiousness about issues of racial purity. The boundary between Asians and Africans thus becomes ever more jealously policed.

Alibhai-Brown highlights that by the 1950s, such an unbridgeable racial gap had developed between Asians and Africans that Japan's (her family's domestic servant's) joke about having Asian blood is deemed to have become "too horrible to contemplate." This angst is set against the experience of the pioneers and explorers for whom miscegenation, now an outdated practice, was "perfectly acceptable" (4). Alibhai-Brown observes of the pioneers:

Survival and the searing ambition to make good was all that mattered. Through the thirties and forties, sexual liberties were taken, Asian men took up with African women.... By the time we were in the fifties, these freedoms had gone. A stiffness had set in our attitudes and we started seeing the African as some kind of irredeemable barbarian. (57)

This shift highlights the connection that Quayson draws between colonialism and diasporisation. Quayson contends that colonial space-making, through the instrumentalisation of diaspora, beyond simply establishing and demarcating a geographical reality, projected particular socio-political ethos upon such spaces. Most importantly, it involved altering pre-existing relations among the local groups (245). The steady intensification of diasporisation and the simultaneous widening of the gap between Asians and Africans stem largely from the racial consciousness inculcated under colonialism. Among the various Asian communities, fear of blacks, especially the black male, becomes the key ingredient in their performance of Asianness. The intensity of the Asian prejudice against Africans is best captured in the 1968 staging of *Romeo and Juliet* by Alibhai-Brown's mixed-race school, where the Montagues and the Capulets are played by Africans and Asians to evoke the lack of social contact between the two families. Cast as Juliet, Alibhai-Brown scandalises the Asian community by "kissing" her black Romeo. Her father, to his death about three years later, does not meaningfully speak to her ever again (129-30).

The image of Asians presented by Alibhai-Brown comes dangerously close to the common stereotype of them as exploitative and opposed to integration. Herself a victim of Amin's expulsion, Alibhai-Brown, with unforgiving lucidity, indicts Asians' insensitivity to, and collusion in, the injustices meted out to Africans at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy. Oblivious to the deprivation and exploitation to which they have been subjected and the prevailing anti-colonial / nationalist sentiment, Asians' provocative tendency of flaunting their wealth and aspiring to the luxury and grandeur of the *wazungu* [whites] in the

name of having a *badshai* [lordly] life is presented for critique (59). The subservience of Asians and their tendency to kowtow to colonialism contrast with the anti-colonial stance among Africans, viewed by the former as a sign of the latter's barbarity. The dismantling of colonial order between 1962 and 1972 is thus greatly unsettling. Asians are doubly tormented by fears of retributions for their mistreatment of Africans. In their heightened paranoia, increased assertiveness and castigation of injustices by Africans, which is inevitable and, anyway, long overdue, begin to be regarded as forebodings of doom (114-15).

The dissolution of the colonial order in which Asians had invested so much hope takes them by storm. The anxieties that the onset of independence stirs among them are exacerbated by Africanisation policies pursued by the post-independence government, culminating into the expulsion of 1972. Alibhai-Brown constructs the "cold familiarity and contempt" that comes to define the way Africans view Asians as having its roots in the long years of abuse and exploitation. The post-independence political backlash engineered by Amin reveals another face of injustice. The expulsion process highlights how the regime's initial attempt to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens is discarded in favour of a wide-sweeping racial categorisation that sealed Asians' fate en masse. The grievances that Africans have with Asians are largely class-related. But the political solution that the expulsion signifies obscures this fact and every Asian is deemed equally culpable. According to Mamdani, the middle-level civil servant and traders, marginally well-off artisans and workers – who were not immediately facing threats of Africanisation – were the group most severely affected by the 1972 expulsion. Mamdani amplifies:

They were people who knew that to live in the country would not be possible for them unless they became part of it. They had consciously chosen to reject Duncan Sandy's pre-independence offer of British citizenship and had instead registered as Ugandan citizens immediately after independence. But now they found, as they stood in queues to verify their citizenship, that their passports were being torn up or stamped invalid one after another. (31)

In chronicling the fate of the poorer Asians, whose only crime could not have been anything more than their inaction in the face of the injustices perpetrated in their name, Alibhai-Brown, like Mamdani, draws attention to the capacity of injustice to reproduce itself. This invites a particular citizenship duty that requires the Asians to identify with the cause of justice. Alibhai-Brown and Mamdani certainly do not condone the violence that the expulsion

represents. What they reject, rather, is the slanted narrative of Asian victimhood that is not tempered by historical and contextual realities. Above all, they challenge the blanket imputation of blame to Amin while casting the Asians as innocent victims.<sup>8</sup>

*No Place* suggests that the account of Asian Ugandans makes incomplete sense without touching on their experience in Britain. In the narrative, Britain features as the location that positions the Asians at the receiving end of racial segregation. A foretaste of the hostility that awaits them in Britain presents itself in form of legal restrictions deliberately designed to deny them access to the country (Alibhai-Brown 114; 168). As Mamdani maintains, Uganda's determination to rid itself of its Asian population is matched only by Britain's resolve to keep them outside its borders (30-31). From the moment of entry, the hostile reception that Britain metes out to the Asians – most of whom are actually British citizens, not refugees – shatters their expectations (Alibhai-Brown 184-85). Relocation swings Asians from one end of racism to the other: from perpetrators they become sudden victims. Where racial hierarchy in Uganda benefited them, in Britain it levels them with immigrants from other (former) colonies. In thus juxtaposing the nationalist backlash against Asians for their complicity in colonialism with their opposition to similar xenophobic reaction to their presence in the UK, Alibhai-Brown surfaces what Eriksen describes as the hypocrisy of being racist downwards and anti-racist upwards (84). The narrative demands a categorical denunciation of racism in all its guises.

In the autobiography, Asians enjoy reprieve from blatant racial hostilities only in benign forms that, nonetheless, mask the same underlying racism. Alibhai-Brown highlights how Sir Edward Heath, in an interview with her, remarks about the Ugandan Asians as a "problem" that Britain had to take on (185). Similar signals are sent out by both students and academic staff at Oxford University, where Alibhai-Brown and Sky, her boyfriend (later, first husband), are graduate students. Their hasty assumption that they have integrated into the Oxford society is met with constant reminders that their metamorphoses are not that convincing (188). Despite such signals, however, Britain mediates more meaningful inter-racial contacts than Uganda does. It is in Britain that miscegenation and other transgressive

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<sup>8</sup> In the autobiography, Alibhai-Brown maintains unequivocally: "We shared a dreadful responsibility in denying all our children a future together" (184). For his part, Mamdani, in the preface to the new edition of *From Citizens to Refugee*, reads the expulsion, from a political angle, as belonging to the larger history of ethnic cleansing – the same kind of legalised violence that was relied upon to subjugate each colonised 'tribe' and 'race' (3). In other words, the use of violence to target racialised or tribalised groups, a practice that has been reproduced by post-independence regimes (e.g., the 1966 Kabaka Crisis; the expulsion of the Luo of Kenya in 1970 as part of government's response to working class protest). Such a reading, Mamdani contends, illuminates the expulsion and the larger course of Uganda's history more productively (4).

liaisons become possible. Alibhai-Brown's second marriage is to an Englishman (Colin); her older sister, too, marries an Englishman. For Roger and Rosie (a Goan and a Briton), the acrimony stirred by their "transgressive" relationship causes them to flee Britain for Uganda, where they are effectively ostracised as "misfits" (77-80). The racialised homogenisation of immigrants in the UK, coupled with the pervasive rights consciousness that the location affords, makes racial injustices more conspicuous and the desire for a non-racial nation more urgent. *No Place* bemoans apolitical tendencies that characterise Asians' experience in both Uganda and Britain. In both locations, Asians are depicted as materialists, whose lives gravitate around property. In the house of one of the wealthy Asians in Britain hangs a painting of Margaret Thatcher on the main wall of the living room side-by-side with a picture of Amin, "because he forced them to leave so they could come to this land of milk and honey" (97-8). This attitude contrasts diametrically with the unexamined bitterness that most Asians harbour towards Amin – two extremes that represent the fact of having gleaned no political insight from the expulsion. The title of the autobiography suggests that economic success is no substitute for a home country. It reminds Asians about their obligation to transform Uganda, their home country, into a just nation in which they desire to live. The "return", in this sense, represents for the Asians, another opportunity for the resumption of their interrupted presence in the country. The narrative hints at new challenges facing Asians in the post-Amin Uganda. The author sees in the return of a few Asians an opportunity for reconciliation and mutual respect that must characterise Afro-Asian engagement in the post-Amin Uganda (195).

The Uganda that the "returnees" enter is a non-racial nation. But it is this particular Uganda that the returnees feel most uncertain about. This uncertainty raises questions about the challenges of heterogeneous post-independence citizenship and what it means to inhabit the new dispensation. The distinction that Mamdani draws between the two phases of Asian presence – demarcated by the old and the new Asian questions – may be useful for thinking through these questions and challenges. For Mamdani, the old question, predating the Amin expulsion of 1972, is shaped by the experience of Asians, who despite being products of deeply racialised colonial institutions saw Uganda as home. In contrast, the new Asian question, post-dating the 1989 return of properties, is shaped by the experience of Asians living in racially-mixed communities and institutions where they are defined more by class rather than race, but are paradoxically unlikely to see Uganda as home, orienting themselves instead to the subcontinent and other diasporic sites (8). As with the old Asian question, the paradox at the heart of the new Asian question centres on race. *No Place* suggests that

constructive inter-racial engagements and mutual respect of difference are essential for a sustainable multi-racial harmony.

### ***The Feast of the Nine Virgins: An unofficial apartheid***

Compared to Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi, in *The Feast*, is even more forthright in her construction of the Ugandan Asians' 1972 expulsion as a post-independence political backlash. Instead of foregrounding overt forms of racism that attend the Asians' presence in Britain, however, the novel rallies the narrative form itself to inscribe the immigrants' cultural specificity as a way of challenging imperial domination.<sup>9</sup> Through its complex plot, with three simultaneously running – though not necessarily corresponding – layers of temporality and levels of embedding, the novel traces Asians' connections to East Africa and the subcontinent as important aspects of the new diaspora's cultural identity. The eighty-seven vignettes that constitute the novel unravel like pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, often with astonishing effect.

Set in the 1990s in Britain, the framing narrative represents the scripting of a feature film – the central medium through which events in the novel are relayed. With an overlapping temporal plane, the second-level narrative represents the shooting process, with an assemblage of casts drawn from both Britain and the subcontinent, most of whom boast connections to East Africa. The film story represents the third level of narrative embedding, depicting the sixteen-year, unrequited love of a nineteenth-century legendary courtesan, Tameezan Bai, for the Grand Ustad<sup>10</sup> and climaxes with the duos' momentous encounter on the night they are invited to perform at the same function. Constituting the bulk of the narrative, the third temporal plane – the 1960s and 1970s and its East African connection – emerges as the back-story, profiling the major personalities behind, or featured in, the film. As in Alibhai-Brown's novel, the indictment of racism in Siddiqi's novel is determined by its narrativisation from Britain, the site from where the subcontinent and East Africa are imagined.

The three narrative layers are united by a complex web of genealogies and characters, whose roles in most cases shift from one narrative level to another. Straddling three locations, with characters whose movements are shaped by key historical and political events, *The*

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<sup>9</sup> Madan Sarup, along similar lines, argues in "Home and Identity" that the need for boundary maintenance and validation of cultural identities (such as religion, language, values, ways of life, etc) is invariably triggered by hostilities and threats of cultural domination facing migrant minorities (94-95).

<sup>10</sup> "Ustad", depicting musical expertise, is the Muslim version of Pundit (Sidiqqi 114).

*Feast* weaves together stories of three genealogies (the the Mohanjis, the Tameezans and the Ustads) around the film script and the shooting process. Though the boundaries between the three narrative layers are blurry, the embedding narrative focuses on the friendship between Ash, the script writer, and Sonia, the film producer, which nearly crumbles when it emerges that the former has plagiarised the latter's work in a film script he has submitted for evaluation. Sonia chances on the script through her work as a professional script-reader and editor. Ash's script, "Tameezan", blends Sonia's feature story, based on "real-life" characters from Pearl (Uganda), with the script writer's own fictional elements about Tameezan and the Grand Ustad (from the subcontinent). The blending process forges genealogical connections between Sonia's and Ash's characters, rationalising their movements against backdrops of triangular oceanic crossings and key historical events.

One critical flaw that carries over to the structure of *The Feast* itself, however, pertains to Ash's assumption that Sonia's narrative is autobiographical. In effect, he takes the narratorial for the authorial figure. The focaliser (the Brat), as a grown-up, turns out to be the Composer (Tameezan's great grandson, Sonia's ex-husband), not Sonia herself, as Ash and thus the narrative, leads one to assume. Despite the narrative's attempt to justify the mother's motive in bringing up the Brat as a girl (i.e., in order to avoid losing custody of the child after divorcing the father), the effect is a textual flaw, not a surprise, as the I-consciousness that the "she" represents bears no inner conflict. Instead, the Brat implausibly and unquestioningly regards "herself", and is regarded by others, as a girl.

As in *No Place*, migrations to the UK, from both the subcontinent and East Africa, result from crises that follow political independence in the two locations. From the subcontinent, migrations to the UK and Africa, mostly of professionals, are sparked by the 1947 partition, which send the Muslims caught on the wrong side of the border fleeing to Pakistan and the Hindus to India. The novel further chronicles another hitherto-muted wave of migration that takes place in 1948, this time not across the Indo-Pakistan border but to Britain: "The immigrants were all women, all stowaways, and all descendants of courtesans made stateless by the disbandment of India's various lesser rulers." The group includes one Saloni, Tameezan's daughter, who, along with the others, hopes for a fresh start. But conditions in the new location frustrate their hope. As illegal immigrants, they find themselves trapped in their old trade, only here they go under a new tag, "Socialites" (99-100). The narrative thus debunks the optimism that attends immigration to Britain.

Saloni resolves to keep her only daughter, Seema (later Mrs Henara), far away from home, in keeping with the determination of the stowaway-courtesans to steer their daughters

away from their mothers' seedy lives. Seema, well-provided for, is sent to an exclusive girls' school on the Himalayan slopes and restricted to spending her vacations on holiday tours (100-01). In preparing Seema for the new life in the new location, Saloni advises her to find herself "a nice Angrez", a cultured white man, the kind she believes is "much better at being hen-pecked." She issues her an injunction against marrying a fellow Muslim, if she must marry an Asian at all, which later becomes a recipe for transgression (143). The faith that Saloni invests in the new location reflects the optimism and expectations of most first-generation immigrants in the west. Saloni's mysterious death – thrown from a high tower – highlights the hazards of her new occupation in the new location. Her daughter, Seema, whose medic boyfriend has been offered a post as a surgeon at a new hospital in colonial Pearl, relocates to East Africa. She is thrilled at the prospect of having a permanent place she can finally call home, having spent her entire childhood being tossed from house to house, country to country. Pearl becomes Seema's first proper home, where she is safe from her family's shameful past and the "Indian-Courtesan-Socialite gossip" that it attracts, especially in the wake of steady increase in Indian settler community in England (102-103).

The other trajectory, originating from East Africa, is also, like the subcontinental one, produced by the post-independence crisis. Critical to understanding this trajectory and the characters that ply it is an elaborate vengeance motif that runs through the narrative. In keeping with this schema, if the focal point of *The Feast* is its indictment of racism – or for Ash, the settling of old scores – then the narrative form itself is the means through which this goal is realised. The East African connection, in this regard, constitutes the main plot, with Mohanji (Ash's racist grandfather) and Actress, his estranged daughter-in-law (later revealed as Ash's mother), cast in the role of villains to be punished in the severest manner that the half-caste script-writer, abandoned in infancy and left to die in the forest, can contrive. The subtext of this elaborate revenge scheme is that bigotry merits punishment. The ethics of the narrative yokes Mohanji and Actress along with several other characters to the notion of merited suffering, with the punitive force of the narrative pitting itself against various forms of prejudice, folly, greed and hubris and spreading across the three locations. This is not to say the novel is a vindication of suffering but that it invites a careful evaluation of what it takes to inhabit the post-1989 non-racial nation.

As in *No Place*, Siddiqi's novel, contrary to the tendency to cast the Pearlite Asians<sup>11</sup> as victims, constructs them as subjects who are responsible for their political persecution and

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<sup>11</sup> See n. 7.

dispersion. Mohanji, a caricature of the dukawallah [shopkeeper] class, is insatiably greedy for money "and ever-alert to more money-making opportunities" (45). A quintessential exploiter, one of his many "crimes" include exploiting black Africans to the point of unashamedly selling them water in empty, jugged-rimmed jam tins and his inflexible opposition to inter-racial marriage (52). With a heart described to be "as big as his fist was tight", Mohanji's most outstanding act of generosity is his ungrudging, voluntary service as the head of the *Panchayat* – the Indian Morality Committee of Five Elders: Custodians of Shame, Honour, Dignity and Female Chastity (45). His outlook and zeal are best summed up by his favourite concept, *Kalyug*, designating whatever offended his conservative sensibilities, among them, "any assertion of female rights, birth control pills, love marriages, any kind of shamelessness and any kind at racial equality" (52).

The "Chocolate Coloured Kalyug" [half-caste child] that Mohanji dreads the most enters his family through the rushed marriage of his favourite green-eyed son to the daughter a rich Asian Kenyan family. The haste suits both families: Mohanji's, as a way of cutting costs; and the bride's, as a sure way to avoid the scandal bound to follow the discovery of their daughter's secret liaison with a young African male servant in the household, if the situation is not promptly arrested. The bride (later Actress, playing Tameezan), already pregnant at the time of marriage, later produces a half-caste child (Ash). The Morality Committee demands the expulsion of the mother from the household. But the green-eyed husband is devoted to his wife and Mohanji, in spite of himself, sympathises with his favourite son. As a compromise, Mohanji, who considers himself a reasonable man, gives his daughter-in-law the option of offering the child to a local orphanage. Impervious to Mohanji's notion of *Kalyug*, which in India would have enjoined her to commit suicide in the name of family honour, the young mother adamantly refuses to part with her baby, taunting her father-in-law as the one who is illegitimate (249).

Mohanji's daughter-in-law abandons the child only after falling out with the government minister with whom she had eloped after denouncing her father-in-law to the military authority for racism. When the abandoned baby is found by a group of Asians on their way back from verifying their citizenship claims, this being the moment between the expulsion decree and Asians' departure, Guru, one of the travellers, pronounces it a "Chauthara", an Afro-Asian half-caste. As they fret over the infant's ambiguous race and religion, their African driver points out that the infant needs some milk (279). The travellers fix him with a hateful look for daring to speak to them, his masters, out of turn. With one mind they resolve:

There were far more important things to be sorted out, like the baby's religion. Only Indians understood about that sort of thing. These Blacks! In a million years they would never understand the importance of family, religion, honour, shame, izzat. (279)

The driver, who has to fix the tyre, holding the torch for himself now has the child in his hand too, as no one wants to hold it despite his pleas. In keeping with the revenge motif in the novel, the careful chronicling of the extent of Asians' bigotry serves, at the surface level, to show that they merit the fate that befalls them. At a deeper level, it puts in perspective their experience in Pearl as a way of advancing an enduring model of inter-racial engagement.

The driver eventually takes the infant to an orphanage, the only place where his kind, wanted by neither Africans nor Asians, can enjoy relative safety. The rejection of the half-caste child by both African and Asian communities highlights the racial divide between the two groups:

The Blacks said he was Indian, and his Indian Mohanji family, backed by the Indian Morality Committee said he was black. But the White-do-gooders had embraced him like he was their own, because his predicament helped them to prove a long-cherished point: Brownies and Blackies can never live in harmony unless us Pinkies keep an eye on them. (329)

As a hybrid subject, the infant's identity exceeds the sum of its racial parts. Despite the politics behind the humanitarian gesture that ensures its survival, the European care-givers who raise the child prove significant to his sense of self. Ash's hybridity is largely determined by his severance from his parents' racial communities. While priding himself in his Afro-Indian descent, Ash's name – as with Ronnie, his alter ego in the second narrative layer – highlights his Anglicisation, reinforced by his literal presence in Britain. As Simatei observes of hybrid subjects, Ash is no longer burdened by essentialised identity but, rather, how to negotiate the multiple attachments that he straddles (116). Gilroy makes a similar point in "Nationalism, History and Ethnic Absolutism." He argues that fluid identities developed, of necessity, by diasporic subjects for whom ethnicity or nationality are not coterminous with the nation-state – and who view relocation more as a privilege than an handicap – present a counterpoint to essentialised ideas about ethnic and national identity and

the political problems that they generate (116). As in *No Place*, the de-articulation of essentialised identities is conditioned by the racial politics in the site of narration, which then determines the way East Africa is imagined.

In the novel, the vengeance motif woven around Ash's script unites the personal and the political in a general disavowal of racism. As at the personal level, where the reprisals against Mohanji and Actress are designed to bring them to reckon with their racism, at the political level, the execution of vengeance, beyond suggesting that the Pearlite Asians merit the fate that befalls them, invites a re-examination of their role in the establishment of what the novel describes as unofficial apartheid. This emerges as a positive way of engaging with the new Asian question. The re-imagining of the genesis of the expulsion is carefully orchestrated to recant claims of victimhood. Significantly, Mohanji is constructed as the prototypical Asian. Aware that his self-assigned mission counterposes the agenda of the new military government, Mohanji begins to consider himself a marked man, "personally responsible for prohibiting racial integration" (250). In both his imagination and in the "real" experience of Pearlite Asians, the expulsion targets Mohanji specifically, with his fellow Asians embroiled in it simply as unfortunate victims. Ash constructs the expulsion from Pearl as an act of retributive justice, modelling on it his own vengeance against Actress. As in Mohanji's case, his design is to spare his victim's life so that she may live to suffer the resultant trauma. Against this vindictive schema, a more productive appreciation of the revenge theme requires a view of the expulsion, through Ash's eyes, as an act of retribution.

Ash executes his vengeance only in the realm of imagination but he draws his inspiration from the "actual" fate of Mohanji and Pearlite Asians. As Ash's forerunner, Robert Kasoga, the fictionalised figure of Amin, has a personal score to settle with Mohanji and Pearlite Asians, after his father, Mr Kasoga, a Mohanji employee, dies in a work-related incident. The Kasogas, however, are never compensated. Mohanji, with the full backing of the Morality Committee, reasons that life and death are in God's hands (97). The narrative constructs the Kasogas's privation as typical of the general condition under which the blacks live. Determined to avoid any social contact with the Asians, Robert opts to work for the Mohanjis as a lavatory cleaner, a *Bhangi* in Dukawallah parlance – an untouchable. In Pearl the term acquires a particular racial overtone. The Bhangi-job is reserved for Africans, "a lesser race of humans", whose blackness is regarded as a Karma, "a penance for past-life mistakes" (69). Robert embodies the indignity and privation under which Africans live. Before he re-enters the narrative as the Dictator, the military ruler of Pearl, a position that enables him to vent his grudge against Mohanji and other Asians, Robert plays a central part

in the clamour for workers' rights. His ultimate remedy to the socio-economic problems of the country is to expel the Asians.

The Dictator's invocation of God's name to justify the expulsion, like Mohanji's justification of the subordination of Africans, denies the Asians the moral ground from which to challenge the decree. As part of the revenge motif, Mohanji's daughter-in-law (Actress) is instrumental to both the expulsion and the pre-expulsion carnage visited on the Mohanji family. Blaming her father-in-law for her woes, she denounces him to the new military authority for racism, corroborating the charge against the Asians (268). Mohanji's punishment is severe; though he is spared along with his widowed daughter and his green-eyed son (who, by his wife's prior arrangement, is not be home that particular night), all the six of his other sons are gunned down by the Dictator's soldiers. Mohanji's fate is all the more painful, given his initial enthusiastic approval of the Dictator for his vision for the country and appreciation of Asians' hard work. The myriad of decrees immediately after the *coup d'état* on issues such as dress code, to him, translates into manifold business opportunities. The direction of countless decrees looks ominous and Mohanji's green-eyed son is alarmed that it is just a matter of time before "some other new decree made it illegal for Indians to be shopkeepers" (218). Mohanji, however, dismisses as nonsense his son's anxiety about the fate of Indians. Markedly apolitical, he is blinded by short-term economic gains from recognising the upheaval that awaits Asians.

Siddiqi's novel unsettles several issues around the expulsion, often with a mixture of playfulness, sympathy and sarcasm. It invites a re-examination of Asians' complicity in the entrenchment of racial injustices in Pearl as a positive way of engaging with what it means to inhabit a non-racial post-1989 nation. The expulsion, for instance, takes on a new twist when juxtaposed with the question of Asians' ambiguous affiliation to Pearl. Robert the Dictator, in kicking out the Dukawallahs, simply grants them their wish:

The Indians always said they dreamed of going back to India one day – well, here was their chance! But it's a funny thing that not a single one of them actually returned to India – they ended up in all sorts of places, but not India. (334-5)

*The Feast* underscores how Asians have gained no insight from the expulsion, viewing it instead as a vindication of their age-old distrust of Africans. As a further twist in the narrative, the novel debunks the one-way account of Asian victimhood, showing that many killings were perpetrated by "opportunist Muhindis themselves", who are "[k]een to cash in

on the chaos and... settle old scores" (334). For instance, Mrs Haq allegedly kills Mrs Henara, along with her so-called brother, for her role in helping the Haq daughter elope with her Hindu boyfriend. Exposing these twists provides an opportunity to break with the past, opening a new chapter in Afro-Asian relationship.

As the organising principle in the novel, the motivating impulse behind the revenge motif reinforces this point. The film script is woven around Ash's hatred for his mother, who not only "literally just [drops] him because he [is] the wrong colour" but also abandons her devoted green-eyed husband in Britain and relocates to Bombay to pursue a career in film. "Sinners such as her have to live", Ash resolves, "and they have to suffer" (328). Where Ash earlier avenges himself on Mohanji using the latter's daughter-in-law, now he sets the father-in-law against his estranged, whoring daughter-in-law, his prime target. Like the daughter-in-law, Mohanji has his own personal motive against the former for destroying his family. Having prospered beyond measure in Britain, he (as Moneybags) commissions Sonia to produce him a special film, furnishing her with a limitless budget. The only restriction on Sonia pertains to the choice of the central role, specially reserved for Actress. Mohanji's scheme is to have Sonia cast her in the role of a lifetime that will leave her grossly overweight (329). The role is calculated to destroy the film career that she so cherishes. The script fits the plan as it involves an arduous process of mastering Urdu.

The narrative climaxes with the shooting of the momentous encounter between Tameezan and the Grand Ustad (played by his own grandson, Ustad) on the night of the ghazal. It is a heightened moment when the latter, whose performance is the highlight of the night, enters the hall as the former is in the middle of her stage-warming performance. The ghazal is, nonetheless a special one, written specifically for the Grand Ustad's benefit and rehearsed in anticipation of his presence on the day it is performed. When their eyes meet, the Grand Ustad fatally collapses due to the intensity of a poisonous look from Tameezan, a woman he has declined to meet for sixteen-long years.

"Tameezan" constructs the death of the Grand Ustad as an act of vengeance. With many theories contrived to explain it away, the death deflates the Grand Ustad's conceit, tilting the balance of power towards Tameezan. In keeping with the repetitive pattern of the narrative, the shooting of this scene coincides with Mohanji's unannounced entry into the shooting room. His face-to-face encounter with his estranged daughter-in-law produces precisely the kind of effect the Producer has been seeking in Actress. Like the Grand Ustad, Mohanji fatally collapses in a heap. The parallel between the fictional and the "historical" further entails the fact that the scene involves the actual ghazal that Tameezan had performed

on the night in question. The Composer (the Brat) confesses to have resorted to his great grandmother's actual ghazal after failing to produce a composition that could satisfy Sonia. Like Tameezan, Actress also has to contend with the agony of an unrequited love, in her case, for the Composer.

*The Feast* underscores the perils of an unexamined life. Like Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi adopts an unsympathetic tone, overlaying sympathy with sarcasm as she uncovers the magnitude of racism in post-colonial and imperial sites. The novel suggests the need to reckon with the past as a more meaningful way of inhabiting the present. Against its categorical disavowal of racism, the novel presents a model of inter-racial engagements that involves overhauling all structures of domination. Unlike *No Place* that offers a glimpse of the post-1989 Uganda as non-racial nation, however, *The Feast* is only gestural, confining itself to a retrospective re-imaging of the racialised colonial and post-colonial set-ups, with alternative patterns of inter-racial engagements. The novel's intricate form emerges as a signifier of the complex identities of Siddiqi's characters and their multiple attachments. The unravelling of the plot thus becomes the process of disclosing the characters' often hidden identities.

### ***Migritude: The movement for global justice***

In contrast with Alibhai-Brown's and Siddiqi's narratives, Patel's *Migritude*, a ninety-minute, one-woman performance poetry, directs its indictment towards Empire. Constructed around Patel's trousseau of eighteen saris collected by the author's mother for her daughter's marriage, *Migritude* declaims what it means to enter imperial sites as an immigrant. Crafted from historical, autobiographical and poetic materials, the volume is divided into four parts. Part I, entitled, "Migritude", comprises two sections: one on East Africa and the other on imperial destinations, the UK and the US. The former, framed by Amin's 1972 expulsion of Ugandan Asians and the author's 1989 departure for the UK, constructs Patel's early life in Kenya against the backdrop of political uncertainties engulfing Asians in East Africa. The latter, covering the period from 1990-2004, captures Patel's experience in the UK and the US and her commitment to feminist and marginalised people's causes around the globe. Part II, "Shadow Book", while preceded by a disclaimer against presenting itself as a comprehensive narrative of the making of "Migritude", offers evaluative insights into how "Migritude" works. Part III, "The Making and Other Poems", presents a collection of poems that amplify the theme of "Migritude." The final part, "The Journey", presents the "Migritude" timeline

and a couple of interviews with the author on the work in question. In this chapter, I focus on “Migritude” even though I draw on “Shadow Book” to enrich my discussion.

In the work, Patel’s excoriation of imperial injustices is generated by the author’s own experience of migrations to the UK and the US. Coined from migration, attitude and Negritude, the title, “Migritude”, beyond simply evoking indignities and degradations that define immigrants’ experience in the west, challenges Empire’s pretensions – its self-representation and representations of those under its sphere of control. As a departure from Negritude’s project of cultural authentication, however, *Migritude* underscores the bi-directional cultural flows between the west and East Africa. Patel evinces a keen awareness of the global span of Empire, offering a platform from which those it marginalises or discriminates against can be heard. Her work exposes racial prejudices behind the discriminatory treatments of immigrants in imperial sites. Empire’s labelling of border-crossers as “immigrants”, as Prashad observes in his foreword to the volume, far from being neutral, carries particular racial overtones. Prashad highlights that European colonialists, whenever and wherever it suited them, moved their subjects horizontally from one colony to another, but restricted vertical movements from colonies to imperial metropolises. Those who manoeuvre their ways around such restrictions are admitted not out of altruism but for their labour and are effectively marginalised (Patel ii-iii). Immigration, as a condition of imperial globality, thus becomes a subversive act.

Deemphasising the horizontal racial divide between formerly colonised subjects, *Migritude* situates itself in the interstice between these groups, challenging, instead, vertical structures of control that are facilitated by Empire. Such structures are rendered as vestiges of colonial domination, which, under the new imperial system, are reproduced in new forms that mask their underlying racial character. In the prelude, Patel contends that the shift from colonial to imperial order is part of a long historical chain that merely reconfigures modalities of control, while preserving the underlying power structures established under colonialism. Colonial encounters, as Kobena Mercer notes, demobilised cultural elements from their original settings, inserting them within “a network of travelling cultures” (7). For immigrants, such mobility involves contending with ideologies that were previously invoked to justify their subjugation. The recent upsurge in global movement is constructed as a replica of a longer history of cultural flows between historical empires and their subjects. The narrative points out that the consolidation of colonial domination required a deliberate dismantling of local pre-colonial political economies as a precondition for their integration into modernity. This process produced hierarchical power structures that in the aftermath of formal

colonialism determine the conducts of Empire. *Migritude* puts in perspective the flows of cultural materials and migrants between former colonies and imperial sites, challenging the injustices involved in a bid to dismantle them.

While the narrative, after *No Place* and *The Feast*, constructs Asian emigration to the west as generated by post-independence political backlashes, it strives to expose the influence of imperial powers that pull the strings from behind the scene. Patel pinpoints declassified secret documents belonging to the British Foreign Office that confirm that the *coup d'état* that brought Amin to power was actually instigated by Britain, Israel and the US. The documents describe Amin as “*a man we can do business with*” (11; original emphasis). The representation of Amin’s coup – and his brutalisation of both his fellow Africans and the Asians – moves beyond the limiting Afro-Asian racial divide and the skewed narrative of Asian victimhood, revealing the underlying imperial structures that generate this crisis. Despite the imperial intrusion, however, *Migritude* surfaces the unhomeliness of Asians, best couched in the Gujarati proverb: “The night is short and our garments change.” As a caution against rootedness and complacency, the socialisation process channelled through the proverb steers young Asians away from any close affiliation to East Africa. Rather, it heightens their anxiety, reinforcing their consciousness as mobile subjects, as reflected in Asians’ investment priorities in portable commodities: passport, education and jewellery (10).

The choice of 1972 as the opening moment of the narrative foregrounds the Afro-Asian fallout, emphasising the political nature of Asians’ mass entry into imperial metropolises. The expulsion of Asians from Uganda prompts their Kenyan counterparts to re-evaluate their status, with a good number opting to emigrate from the country before a similar fate befalls them. The Patels travel to England in 1972, smuggling their jewellery with them for safekeeping in a British bank (12). Patel suggests that Asians’ fears are not unfounded, given the way they are specifically targeted during the 1982 coup attempt in Nairobi. The coup comes with threats of a repeat of the 1972 predicament (27). The targeting of Asians as a racial group exacerbates their unease over questions of belonging, hardening their resolve to leave the region. *Migritude* juxtaposes these racialised hostilities against the Asians with earlier integrationist gestures fostered particularly through a non-racial school system that boasts an inclusive syllabus that introduces students to Gikuyu mythology, anti-colonial songs and the nation’s anti-colonial nationalists. The disjunction between the supposedly multi-racial / multi-ethnic educational set-up and the centring of a particular ethnic mythology, nonetheless, reads as a critique of the system.

For Asian migrants, the departure for imperial metropolises opens up multiple trajectories and points of attachment, allowing for positive identification with Kenya. The experience of Asian Kenyans in this sense contrasts with that of their Ugandan counterparts, for whom the fallout with the nation hampers any bidirectional movement between the home country and imperial sites before 1989. The process of articulating Kenyanness involves an initial disavowal of the same. Threatened with racial violence and insecurity prior to her emigration to Britain, Patel declares: "I learn / like a stone in my gut / that third-generation Asian Kenyan / will never / be Kenyan enough / that all my patriotic fervour/will not / turn my skin / black." But entering Britain requires Patel to navigate her way around "a portcullis of immigration spikes" (28). The years spent in Britain and the US bolsters her Kenyanness instead of expunging it. In "Shadow Book", Patel asserts that she considers the designation "Indians in Kenya" a misnomer and that there are only brown Kenyans (94). This designation itself does not seem to be "Kenyan enough", as Patel would want, as it still elicits the not-black-enough response.

In what serves as a corrective to the earlier uncertainty surrounding her Kenyanness, Patel elaborates on her standard response to the anomalous nomenclature, "Indians in Kenya":

I point out that just as black Kenyans who challenged single-party rule and the betrayal of Kenya's independence were exiled, imprisoned, or killed, so also were dissenting brown Kenyans silenced – through assassination, deportation, stripping of citizenship. (94)

The non-racial understanding of state-violence that Patel proposes here marks a radical departure from tendencies in discourses on Asian East Africans to treat the Asian-state conflict as a unique case. As with Alibhai-Brown and Siddiqi, Patel's radical re-imagining of East Africa is determined largely by her locatedness in the west. For Patel, the effect of location manifests itself in the ambivalent stance of the narrative – its simultaneous attention to the tension between the diaspora and the nation, on the one hand, and the non-racial account of history and an inclusive pursuit of justice, on the other. Such ambivalence in the narrative opens up a number of discursive spaces. Instead of focusing exclusively on the place of Asians in nationalist discourse as earlier diasporic narratives have done, Patel widens her scope in keeping with the non-racial gestures of the narrative, surfacing, for instance, the erasure of the Mau Mau resistance from the school syllabus. The narrative thus draws

attention to the kind of deliberate forgetting of history that Jomo Kenyatta calls for in a speech ten months after independence (17).

As part of the wider movement for justice, Patel raises concerns about the patriarchal control of women's sexuality and the violence enacted on the body of women. She contests patriarchal ideologies that rigidly confine women to marginal roles. In keeping with her childhood resolve to challenge such tendencies, Patel reclaims the saris, the central image in the narrative, transforming it from its role as a sign of vulnerability into a garb of assertiveness. She defies the twin patriarchal designs of ornamentation and domestication of women, both signified by the saris, and deploys the pieces, instead, as her choice weapons in her drive towards self-determination. Her decision to take to the stage with the saris undermines the intended purpose for which they were handed to her – the purpose, according to her mother, of “[l]ooking pretty”, as the “least [she] can do... to make up for not being a boy” (20). Hers is a society that regards women as burdens, dependent upon their male folks for protection. Patel challenges the myth about the insecurity of women in a violence-ravaged world, exposing the conspiracy of silence surrounding women who went to the workplace and to battle in their saris as part of a calculated attempt to control women's sexuality in a gendered world. The emphasis placed on women's safety and the care they should take to avoid exposing "the body" is rendered as part of the patriarchal design to patronise them.

*Migritude* constructs mobility and education as two factors that open up liberatory spaces to women. Embracing these opportunities, for the Patels, involves placing their daughters in an expensive elite preparatory school so that they may have "world-class education" and increase their chances of joining British educational institutions (26). While class privileges are implicated in the Patel daughters' mobility and educational pursuits in the west, Patel highlights the crucial role her mother, "the general", plays in arming her daughters "to take on every citadel" (26). The Patel daughters are figured as fighters, who must stand up for themselves in the unforgiving world of immigrants. The support and unsentimental training that they receive from their parents enables them to navigate the new life in the west. This upbringing creates in Patel a determination to succeed, to stand for something, if only to ensure that she does not betray her family's trust. Her entry into the west, in keeping with the Gujarati proverb that introduces Part II of "Migritude", marks a new beginning, with new commitment, one that requires her to denounce marriage as she will "always" be called upon to "stride across dangerous zones, / to shout forbidden words to other fugitives" (61). She chooses to privilege the political over the personal, issues of global justice over marriage and domesticity. Her mother, with full blessings, resignedly presents her with the trousseau of

saris that she should have received as a wedding gift. As a further victory against the patriarchal order, Patel converts the saris from its conventional association with domesticity and uses it to gain entry into the public domain. The saris thus become a tool in the fight for global justice.

Likewise, the *mungal sutra* necklace that she receives from her mother, instead of the husband she will not take, emerges as a sign of her commitment to a life of activism. Patel interprets the item as her mother's affirmation that her chosen path "is no less serious, no less worthy of ceremonial recognition, than your sisters' marriage" (93). This gesture carries an extra significance as it indicates the mother's liberalism and identification with the cause of justice. Patel points out that her mother, by that gesture, shows herself to be the true "revolutionary", and she herself – conditioned by her upbringing to associate mungal sutras with marriage, only to be given by one's husband – a "traditionalist" (93). In "Shadow Book", Patel remarks that her teenage feminist radicalism conditioned her to categorise mungal sutras along with wedding rings – "a symbol of bondage, something that branded a woman as chattel" (92-93). The mother's goodwill gesture enables Patel to realise that the three *granthis* of mungal sutra (intention, declaration and execution) could be a blueprint for her chosen path of activism (93). As cultural symbols that come with the marital commitment that she has disavowed, Patel associates the saris and the mungal sutra with an equally life-long commitment to justice.

In her performance, Patel decries all manners of the gender violence and racially-inspired horrors that have been perpetrated world over, those in which the rest of the world has colluded in their silence. In her juxtaposition of contemporary forms of gender and racial violence with historical acts of mutilations – the Arawaks by Columbus and his men, the British colonialists in Kashmir or the rape of Maasai women by British soldiers – Patel invites her audience and readers to reckon with the severity of the harm that prejudice wrecks. The ubiquitous reach of imperial injustice requires Patel to adopt a universalistic orientation. She defines for herself a battlefield that is not limited by narrow gender, class, ethnic, or race considerations. Her activism takes up the plight of varied groups – the Maasai women and Afghan civilians caught up in the callousness of the War on Terror – thus creating avenues through which they can be heard.

*MigrITUDE* shows that the fallacy that 9/11 forever changed the world for immigrants, masks the fact that racial profiling has always been the lot of darker races entering imperial countries. The four-hour interrogation of Patel's parent by the US immigration officials (in December 2000) replicates the children's ordeal in 1982 at the hands of the British. The wide

range of issues that Patel's work takes on – and the way these experiences are constructed – is determined largely by its enunciation from imperial metropolises. Its global scope and points of focus marks a radical departure from other Asian East African narratives.

### **Conclusion**

The new post-1990 Asian East African narratives, as products of (post)imperial globalisation, invite a new configuration of race and, with it, a new understanding of inter-racial engagements in both imperial and post-colonial sites. These works surface the pitfalls of the imperatives of cultural authentication and the celebration of difference that emerges in response to both colonial encounter and the exclusivist claims of post-independence nationalism. In the face of shifting global configurations, new contests and contacts in the two geopolitical sites that they straddle, *No Place*, *The Feast* and *Migritude* problematise what it means to live in the a post-imperial world, exposing the inadequacy of postcolonial critiques in the face of the evermore fractured terrains of power. Unlike in the earlier narratives, even where these works re-imagine (post-)colonial realities, the lenses that they deploy are inescapably conditioned by a more politicised, rather than racialised, consciousness. In effect, the resultant visions and representations are far more complex than those that are generated by the old colonial racial hierarchy.

### **Conclusion: Of Baggage, Voices, Memory and Meaning-Making Processes**

In the foregoing chapters, I have shown that Indian narratives from South Africa and East Africa imagine migrant and diasporic experiences from post-independence and apartheid and post-apartheid moments, respectively, as part of the challenges of inhabiting these different periods. These narratives are produced by communities that have already established themselves as diasporas. Thus, in reading them as such, I have highlighted their investments in roots and routes as part of meaning-making processes. While highlighting distinctions between the "old" and "new" diasporas, I have been more interested in the former, emphasising not only the gender element in the differential experience of migration but also the two diasporas' engagements with national peoples and the tensions generated in the process. Such tensions have been critical to determining the characters of the two diasporas. In moving from colonial to imperial sites, my concern has been to explore how travels and experiences mediated by colonialism and Empire differ and how these determine the way the old and the new diasporas are positioned vis-à-vis the continent.

In both South Africa and East Africa, conditions of displacement make an ever-present dilemma of the urgency to strike a balance between legitimacy and claims of national belonging, on the one hand, and the desire for cultural authentication, on the other. Narratives from East Africa capture the multiple attachments of Asians and their reluctance to forge affiliation with their host/home nations as one of the most critical challenges of inhabiting diasporic space. The competing claims of national integration and cultural preservation emerge as the central conflict in virtually all these narratives. The situation in South Africa is more nuanced. While apartheid's practice of racially ghettoising people reinforces diasporic identity among Indians, the resultant anti-apartheid struggles simultaneously provides a platform for non-racial engagements and staking claims of legitimacy. Where diasporicity hampers Asians' quest for legitimacy, complicating their relationship with East African nation-states, in South Africa, it is the democratic post-apartheid nation-state that, in the "rainbow nation" project, provides a framework for cultural authentication.

The strong attachment to the imagined "homeland" allays anxieties of separation and cultural loss in the wake of relocation. Treating the severance from the diasporic centre in the subcontinent as a form of dismemberment, I read the various modes of cultural signification that these narratives represent as processes of re-membering – of forging lost or threatened connections to the place of origin. In the following sections, I recapitulate how the prominence of baggage (both as literal and metaphoric cultural symbols), divergent voices –

captured, especially, through different generic choice – and traces of memory emerge in diasporic Indian narratives from South Africa and East Africa as tropes through which the two diasporas are inscribed.

### **Baggage as a cultural symbol**

Baggage features in South African and East African diasporic Indian narratives as a sign simultaneously of relocation and of continuity with the past. It serves to ease Indians' entry into their new locations and, in keeping alive memories of the past, emerges as one of the elements that determine Indian subjecthood. For pioneer migrants, cultural materials in the form of household artefacts such as utensils, heirlooms, articles of religious faith, clothing, and seeds and seedlings brought across the Indian Ocean allay some of the anxieties of relocation, helping the migrants to establish a foothold in the present while maintaining attachment to the Indian past. While these cultural paraphernalia and the values associated with them are positively deployed in the celebration of cultural identity, they tend to become easily retrogressive, evoking and perpetuating the image of a resilient, immutable India that is untouched by its encounter with modernity.<sup>1</sup> This fantastical India (re)produced as an “imaginary” object of desire in the diasporic subjects' quotidian experiences invests these Indian artefacts with fetish-like powers. In both locations the fetishism that these objects wield mitigates much of the unsettling consequences of physical separation.

The cultural pride that attachment to these objects yields re-inscribes Indianness underscoring, simultaneously, the diasporic subjects' separate identity and their connections to the subcontinent. As fetishes, such material objects emerge as powerful cultural symbols, given their capacities to signify beyond their intrinsic worth. The priceless heirloom in *The Lotus People*, for instance, not only connects genealogies across the Indian Ocean but also emerges as the central object around which an enduring friendship between two Indian families is built. The heirloom wields this power because the cultural values that it represents transcend its potential worth as a commodity. Similarly, in *The Gunny Sack*, the contents of the eponymous sack are represented as repositories of memories that underscore the Govindjis' origin in the subcontinent. As with diasporic practices generally, however, these fetish objects, in ascribing a separate cultural identity to diasporic Indians, complicate their

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<sup>1</sup> Hand argues along similar lines, maintaining that diasporic Indian subjects “become frozen in an India of the past and their attempts to preserve their culture translate into rigidly holding on to the values that were prevalent at the time of their departure, ignorant of the fact that Indian society has moved on” (113).

entry into, and affiliation to, the host/home nations. Despite giving Indians a sense of cultural bearing, the metaphor of baggage that the objects acquire carries a negative connotation. In *The Gunny Sack*, Salim Juma's ordeal at the national service camp captures this point succinctly. When the large metallic trunk that he lugs along to the camp becomes the very instrument his instructors seize upon to punish him, Juma muses: "We Indians have barged into Africa with our big black trunk, and every time it comes in our way. Do we need it? I should have come with a small bag, a rucksack" (204). The novel suggests that Juma's cultural baggage becomes cumbersome and counterproductive for its conspicuousness and unwieldiness rather than contents. Implicit here is the possibility for the diaspora and the nation to co-exist through a careful trimming of excesses.

If material objects are literal manifestations of cultural baggage, their metaphorical counterparts are the customs, values and traditions that derive from the subcontinent. As with material objects that have been fetishised, this "spiritual baggage", as George refers to it in "Traveling Light" (72; cf. chapter 5 of this dissertation), are treasured due to the diasporic connections that they boast. While such belief systems and the practices they generate underline divisions and contradictions within Indianness, they derive their import more from their capacity to forge connections to the imaginary, homogenised India. In both South Africa and East Africa, the Indianness that is articulated and ascribed on the basis of such material and spiritual baggage is constructed as a diasporic invention. The resultant fetishing of Indianness through these two sets of cultural symbols is perceived and constructed as undermining Indians' affiliation to their respective host countries. In the two continental sites, the imaginary diasporic ties that unite the various Indian/Asian groups and communities are just as important as the more pressing political issues around which identities are defined.

In both South Africa and East Africa, the fetishing of Indianness lies at the heart of the discontent expressed by the diasporic subjects. As such, it is central to understanding their experiences. The kind of nostalgia that is couched in the narratives from the two locations is directed not at the actual geographical entity, India, but to this symbolic "homeland", frozen in its past. In the narratives, the separation of the cultural from the geographical simultaneously allows diasporic subjects to maintain a cursory, albeit psychologically strong, attachment to the subcontinent while venting their discontents against their host-nations. As a practice that is discontinuous with, or oblivious to, post-colonial realities both in the subcontinent as well as on the continent, the fetishing of Indianness emerges as a thinly veiled indictment of the realities of the host nations. Placed between the fantastical and the hostile, the diasporas themselves are impervious to criticism. It is only in some of the recent

Asian East African narratives emerging from imperial metropolises that the diaspora rigorously reckons with the history of its complicity in British colonialism, espousal of racial consciousness that underpins the colonial order and diasporic orientations implicated in the post-independence political backlash. As part of this reckoning, artists such as Patel put their cultural baggage (in her case the saris) to new, liberatory uses. In contrast, it is in the post-apartheid South African narratives that the fetishising of Indianness flourishes more in keeping with the multi-racial “rainbow nation” project that sanctions ethnic self-assertion. The right to assert Indianness, in this regard, is shown to have been earned by the diaspora’s purchase on South Africanness.

### **Divergent voices**

The study has shown that the different generic choices authors make allow them to feature divergent voices, revealing tensions and divisions within Indianness itself and opening up liberatory spaces from which various hitherto suppressed or underrepresented constituencies can speak for themselves. Such multiplicity of voices paints a more complex Indian experience in contrast to homogenising tendencies that obscure historical and contextual nuances. In the preceding chapters, I have shown how novels such as *The Wedding*, *The Lotus People* and *Song of the Atman*, from within the politics of ethnic self-assertion that the post-apartheid “rainbow nation” project activates, problematise the notion of collective Indian identity, revealing various religious, ethnic and linguistic differences that Indianness embeds. These narratives further complicate homogenising tendencies that invariably lead to the mythologising of suffering by obscuring significant distinctions such as those between as the indenture and passenger experiences. The narratives thus draw attention to the politics involved in the process of identification.

In East Africa, narratives of the Asian experience strive to deconstruct common stereotypes of the diasporic subjects as colonial stooges. Tejani, Nazareth and Vassanji, while acknowledging Asians’ complicity in British colonialism, highlight not only their contribution to the cause of anti-colonial nationalism and post-independence nation-building but also the fact that sections of Africans also similarly colluded with the colonialists. Implied here is the need for proper perspective on history, especially where it is invoked to justify contemporary practices. Where the rhetoric of these three male authors is directed at the host-nation, Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi and Patel as female Asian East Africans writing from the west, direct theirs toward Asians themselves. Taking an uncompromising stance for the

advancement of global justice, the three female authors challenge both repressive tendencies within Asianness itself and its unexamined claims to victimhood. Without condoning the political violence meted against the Asians, the three authors, writing from both within and without, invite the diaspora to take stock of its role in the fermentation of political backlashes against its presence in East Africa.

Similarly, female-authored works, alongside the narratives of economic adventurism constructed around male pioneer migrants, have been keen to emphasise women's experiences of migration and their contributions to the establishment of Indian communities in the two locations. These narratives contest the subordinate role assigned to female characters in male-authored narratives, where they are confined to domestic spaces, if granted prominence at all, and depicted largely as foils for, and beneficiaries of, the courage and generosity of the male figures in their lives. In contrast, these female-authored narratives present heroines who, against patriarchal limitations of their communities, are determined to chart their own destinies. In the preceding chapters, I have highlighted how women have capitalised on opportunities rendered available through mobility and education to venture into careers in public spaces for greater self-determination. In South Africa, their valiant contributions to anti-apartheid struggles have been crucial to Indians' claims of legitimacy and national belonging. In East Africa, where Asians' participation in political struggle has been minimal, female authors such as Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi and Patel have positioned themselves at the forefront of the struggle against patriarchal ideology and for the advancement of global justice.

While there are no sharply defined generic patterns, autobiographical narratives have tended to afford platforms for bridging the personal and the political. Authors such as Goonam, Alibhai-Brown and Patel have tended to de-emphasise issues of cultural identity, which usually reinforce totalising claims of culture, highlighting instead their own personal struggles against patriarchal ideologies and limitations imposed by their Indian communities, which invariably militate against their own advancement as women. The capacity for witnessing and self-reflection that these women's life-narratives present enables the authors to relate their personal experiences against the backdrop of the wider experiences of their communities. The biography of the individual, as such, becomes – or at least informs – that of the community. The study thus underscores the significance of the autobiographical narrative in unsettling homogenising tendencies associated with the privileging of communal discourses. Heretical in their stances, these autobiographical narratives reveal that aspirations of the individual – more so those of the female – and the community do not necessarily

coincide. In this regard, the study underscores how the autobiographical narrative opens up liberatory spaces for women, whose experiences would otherwise be submerged.

The interface between form and experience is also at play in the South African context with its intriguing connections between generic choice and social reality. Building on earlier works that have associated the short story form with writing under apartheid and the novelistic genre with the post-apartheid period, this study emphasises how the narrative trend, for Asian South Africans, mimics the anticipation of a free, democratic nation. The divisions and fragmentations that apartheid legislates and the pluralism that the post-apartheid moment celebrates lend themselves to the short story and novel, respectively, as two forms that have been predominant in the corresponding historical periods. Essop and Sam present segments of experiences that are largely woven around the limitations of apartheid. For Sam, the few pieces that are reflective serve to frame the embedded ones that grapple with particular segments of experience produced by apartheid. Given their situatedness within the apartheid moment that is yet to resolve itself, Essop's and Sam's pieces are of necessity limited to the anticipation of a post-apartheid South Africa in which European hegemony, with its racially oppressive legislation will give way to a democratic, multi-racial nation. The post-apartheid moment in this regard provides the vantage point that allows later authors such as Coovadia, Hassim and Govender to take stock of the Indian experience in South Africa far more reflectively.

### **Traces of memory**

Throughout the study, I have reiterated the fact that imaginative reconstruction of history in diasporic narratives in both South Africa and East Africa are determined by contemporary politics. In these narratives, memory features as an integral part of the meaning-making processes that diasporic subjects in the two locations are involved in as part of the challenges of inhabiting the present. It is necessitated by a combination of the anxieties that relocation trigger and unhomely conditions in the sites of settlement. Transmitted through family structures, memory emerges in the narratives as the metaphorical connective between the continent and the subcontinent. It is the thread that ties together all the concerns explored above. Linking multiple voices and functioning as a metaphorical route to the past, memory – through attachment to material objects sourced from the subcontinent and ceremonies, festivities and commemorative practices as discussed above – emerges as the singular mode

of re-memembering attachments to the imagined “homeland” available to diasporic subjects and through a diversity of voices.

The narratives explored in this study show that what is remembered and how the different political realities call for different memories are context-dependent. In East Africa, against Asians’ background of collusion in British colonialism, antipathy towards anti-colonial nationalism and sympathy towards the colonialists, the relationship between the diaspora and the nation-states has been – or perceived to be – far more volatile than that in South Africa. One of the strategies that early novelists such as Tejani, Nazareth and Vassanji have adopted has thus been to emphasise shared experiences and destinies. While Afro-Asian tensions are hinted at, these narratives highlight points of intersection, the most notable being collaboration in nation-building. Where divisive issues such as inter-racial sexual liaisons are explored, these authors’ approaches have been rather idealistic and utopian, geared at presenting alternative realities as implicit critiques of social practices.

Later post-1990 narratives by Alibhai-Brown, Siddiqi and Patel, informed by what Mamdani calls the “New Asian Question” – the question of what it means to inhabit the post-independence non-racial city – bravely venture into issues such as the exploitation of Africans by Asians and the latter’s espousal of the racial consciousness and social order established under colonialism. These are issues that their male counterparts and earlier generation of writers are too circumspect to tackle. In bringing out these ugly memories, these narratives suggest the need to reckon with the past as the precondition for building just social orders. Both the earlier and the later sets of authors, however, emphasise the contributions of Asian railway labourers, professionals and the business class in building the region’s economic base. These involvements are depicted as legitimating Asians’ claim to belong.

The chapters on Asian South African experiences reveal similar strategies. Whereas apartheid-era narratives chronicle the particulars of the indignities and the oppressiveness of life in segregated ghettos, those that emerge in the post-apartheid period respond to a mixture of the celebrations, frustrations and anxieties about the new dispensation. Where the former narratives are informed by the imperatives of non-racial alliance in the anti-apartheid struggle, the latter seek to hold the new democratic nation to account and deliver on the promises upon which it was founded. The memories that are constructed from the vantage point of the post-apartheid moment simultaneously combine the right to, and desire for, cultural authentication, on the one hand, and Indians’ purchase on South Africanness, on the

other. The critique of the nation thus resonates with the democratic credentials about which it boasts and, as Rastogi maintains, makes Indians more South Africans, not less (18).

The study thus shows that memory, in both South African and East African contexts, is deployed as a form of contestation against power. As a tool for both individual and collective affirmation, memory contests hegemonic claims that deny or suppress the concerns of marginal constituencies. The study reiterates the fact that imaginative construction of memory across the two locations is not a form of nostalgic indulgence but, rather, of political contestation. Memory thus conceived pits itself against the designs of power, for the past so generated is a living one, constantly interacting with the present and examining itself in anticipation of the future. Such a past is necessarily, if implicitly, critical of contemporary realities, structured as it is by present considerations and future anticipations. Within this dialectical interaction of temporalities, memory becomes a critical part of the power struggle towards the establishment of an enduring social order.

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