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## Reading the Double Diaspora: Representing Gujarati East African Cultural Identity in Britain

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August 2012 saw the fortieth anniversary of the South Asian population's expulsion from Uganda, by Idi Amin. Many members of this community, who were indeed also Gujaratis, migrated to Britain. My research, grounded in literary studies, excavates the cultural impact of these painful deracinations, which were forced in Uganda, and less coerced in Kenya. Given the trauma of departing from multiple homelands and relocating in a sometimes racist host nation, this article explicates how both individuated and collective identity are formed and reformed. Here I also seek to demonstrate a broad overview of the intervention my research effects within scholarship on the Gujarati diaspora, their narratives of belonging and, as Parminder Bhachu describes, discourses on the 'twice migrant'. Within this remit, close reading of selected dance, culinary practices and visual materials will illustrate the trajectory of my research. Because of the paucity in fictional literary representation of the Gujarati East African in Britain, it is to these other forms of social knowledge that I turn. I argue that this lacuna in fictional writings highlights an inadequacy in the written text when articulating the experience of the twice displaced community. I demonstrate that it is the embodied 'text' that is favoured by this diasporic community in communicating identity. These embodied 'texts', of dance and culinary practices, are also significant in embedding knowledge covertly. The sense of secret or 'esoteric knowledge', that manifests itself time again within the double diaspora, is here too examined.

Keywords: diaspora; identity; Gujarati; embodiment; dance; food

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### Una doble lectura de la diáspora: la representación de la identidad cultural gujarati del este de África en Gran Bretaña

Agosto de 2012 contempló el cuadragésimo aniversario de la expulsión de Uganda de la población del sur de Asia, por orden de Idi Amin. Muchos miembros de esta comunidad, que eran en realidad también gujaratis, migraron a Gran Bretaña. Mi investigación, basada en estudios

literarios, indaga en el impacto cultural de estos dolorosos desarraigos, que fueron forzosos en Uganda y menos coaccionados en Kenia. Este artículo explica cómo se forma y reforma la identidad individualizada y colectiva, debido al trauma de dejar atrás varias patrias y reubicarse en una nación de acogida a veces racista. También intento ofrecer una amplia panorámica del impacto de mi investigación en la crítica especializada en la diáspora gujarati, sus textos sobre el sentimiento de pertenencia y, en la descripción de Parminder Bhachu, los discursos de los 'dos veces migrantes'. Con este cometido, ejemplificaré mi investigación mediante una lectura atenta de una selección de danzas, prácticas culinarias y materiales visuales. He recurrido a estas formas de conocimiento social debido a la escasez de representaciones literarias de los gujarati del este de África en Gran Bretaña. Sostengo que esta laguna de textos de ficción pone de manifiesto la inadecuación del texto escrito para articular la experiencia de una comunidad que ha sido desplazada dos veces. Demuestro que la preferencia de esta comunidad diaspórica para comunicar su identidad es el 'texto' corporeizado. Estos 'textos' corporeizados de la danza y las prácticas culinarias son significativos a la hora de arraigar el conocimiento implícitamente. También se estudia el sentimiento de un conocimiento secreto o 'esotérico', que se manifiesta una y otra vez en la doble diáspora.

Palabras clave: diáspora; identidad; gujarati; corporeización; danza; comida

August 2012 saw the fortieth anniversary of the expulsion of the South Asian community from Uganda, by the dictator Idi Amin. Given just ninety days to pack up their belongings and find a new home, this diasporic community were part of a much larger migrant population. Having migrated to East Africa to undertake voluntary and coerced indentured labour under colonial rule, to build the Kenya-Uganda railway, and engage in mercantile activities as early as 1890, many members of the South Asian community lived in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania until the sixties and seventies. When ‘Africanisation’ policies were introduced in East Africa after decolonisation, large numbers of South Asians—long settled in East Africa under the British Empire—left their established homes.<sup>1</sup> Many came to Britain, starting new lives as double migrants.<sup>2</sup> These double migrants are characterised by their Gujarati heritage, though some also are Goan, Punjabi and Ismaili.<sup>3</sup> Through the literary critical interpretive practices of close reading this article examines the cultural representations of the Gujarati community who are *now* settled in Britain, via not only Uganda, but also Kenya.

There is, however, a dearth of literary production by, or indeed about, the Gujarati East African in Britain and consequently a lacuna exists in the emergence of literary criticism centred upon this diaspora.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore through both the existing literary material and a range of other modes of cultural production, which have thus far gone unexamined, that I investigate forms of cultural representation. I shall consider individuated and collective memory by the close reading of culinary practices in Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s *The Settler’s Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration and Food* (2009);<sup>5</sup> how the dance practices of *dandiya* embed esoteric knowledge of the ‘double diaspora’; and how the defining ambitions of progress and improvement are manifested in visual materials. By refocusing my critical gaze beyond the traditional fictional text, and considering how other forms of social knowledges can better represent the diaspora, I aim to outline an understanding of multi-layered cultural identity formation amongst the twice displaced Gujarati East African community in Britain.

<sup>1</sup> Africanisation policies primarily sought to privilege the African population over minority groups in East Africa. Agehananda Bharati outlines some of the initial moves to elevate the African above the South Asian. For example, he delineates the withdrawal of import licences after 1965 in East Africa, which “automatically ‘discriminate[d]’ against the Asian” (1972: 113). Mahmood Mamdani too outlines pre-independence intentions of elevating the African. He, however, also illustrates post-independence changes. For example, he discusses the policies that were introduced to expand the volume of trade carried out by Africans (1976: 236). Of course the most notorious of Africanisation policies was Idi Amin’s act of expelling South Asians from Uganda in 1972.

<sup>2</sup> The diaspora, in the main, also settled in Canada, United States and India.

<sup>3</sup> Many of those who migrated and settled in East Africa from India were from Gujarat. Dharam P. Ghai describes the *dukas* as being “owned almost exclusively by Gujarati speaking Asians” (1965: 14) and it is these migrants who came to Africa of their own free will and formed the overwhelming majority of the 360,000 Gujarati Indians in the region (Tinker 1975: 15). The Gujarati majority in East Africa has, then, been translated into the double diaspora.

<sup>4</sup> There are some sociological and historical scholarly works on the ‘singly displaced’ Indian East African diaspora (Ghai 1965; Mangat 1969; Ghai and Ghai 1971; Bharati 1972; Tandon and Raphael 1978; Twaddle 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Henceforth referred to as *The Settler’s Cookbook*.

The structure of this article is set out in three parts: having outlined my aims, I shall now substantiate my thesis *vis-à-vis* close readings of the written and embodied ‘texts’ of food, dance, and visual material. I later conclude this article by drawing together my examples, and commenting upon representation within this diasporic community.

### 1. COOKING UP IDENTITY

One of the few texts produced by the Indian East African in Britain, concerned with cultural identity, is political commentator-cum-author Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s *The Settler’s Cookbook*.<sup>6</sup> Alibhai-Brown’s non-fictional account, couched in the written form, fuses together the genres of memoir and cookbook to narrate the writer’s experience of Uganda, the expulsion, and resettlement in Britain. Whilst using the memoir form to articulate the pain of deracination and relocation, she also calls upon the cookbook genre to adequately articulate her experience. It is this combination of genres, and the written text alongside the embodied narrative of culinary practice, which I will now scrutinise.

The intimacy and sense of revelation one experiences on reading *The Settler’s Cookbook* emerges from the personal narratives Alibhai-Brown entangles within the recipes and the prose of her writing, and it is these combined aspects of the cookbook memoir that perform autobiography. In these personal narratives, a marked sense of pain is revealed, as too is the racism experienced in Britain on resettlement. For instance, the reader is presented with: a bus conductor who scolds Jena, Alibhai-Brown’s mother, for smelling like a “curry pot” (10); an emasculated Punjabi factory worker who quits his job because of racism, only to go home and, out of frustration, beat his wife, who miscarries their first baby (334); a “young white man” on the bus who shouts “fuck your bastard. Don’t touch me again”, to a heavily pregnant Alibhai-Brown (318). Merely a few of the incidents narrated—an indication of the endless abuse encountered—this habitual narration of racism, as Cathy Caruth’s distinguished scholarship suggests, is symptomatic of trauma. Caruth explains: “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (1995: 4-5).<sup>7</sup>

There are, however, other instances of habitual traumatic narration within the text, pertaining to liberated Uganda, and the use of sexual violence as a strategy of subjugation: from the chilling tale of how a fellow student of Alibhai-Brown’s, part of “Amin’s circle of concubines”, was most probably murdered by mutilation, disposed of in a bag, while

<sup>6</sup> Whilst others texts do exist, like Parita Mukta’ *Shards of Memory: Woven Lives in Four Generations* (2002) and Jameela Siddiqi’s *Feast of the Nine Virgins* (2001), Alibhai-Brown deals explicitly with migration and resettlement.

<sup>7</sup> I am compelled to include a note here pertaining to the racism encountered by Africans in East Africa. The prejudice against the native people of East Africa was prolific and dealt out by all sections of society. Both South Asian and white settlers adopted as standard practice of subjugating the Africans, and, as Alibhai-Brown points out, often these attitudes remain endemic within the South Asian communities that once lived in these countries. Alibhai-Brown recounts an upsetting incident which exemplifies these attitudes: a Ugandan servant is subjected to accusations, swearing and physical abuse for simply wearing the gift of cuff links from his employers (129-30). She later outlines Indian East Africans’ continuing prejudice toward Ugandans (131).

“her naked sister was made to watch as he [Amin] stroked her” (240-2); to the two sisters who disappear from campus, one returning with a painful shuffle and the other appearing in hospital “with a severely ruptured anus and bleeding, infected nipples” (247). There are other incidences involving the author herself: whilst a friend is violated on the way to a lecture, Alibhai-Brown wets herself (249); and later, again en route somewhere, her friends, and perhaps the author herself, experience “molesting hands crawl . . . over breasts and faces” checking to see if “Indian ladies are having bosoms” (251). These stories gesture towards the landscape of new, free Uganda and the violent conflict that dominated the birth of this nation. Such conflict is often, and not unusually, played out upon the bodies of the female population.<sup>8</sup>

From Greek, ‘trauma’ once referred to a literal ‘wound’; however, now in medical and psychiatric terms it “is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 1996: 3). The term has come to name “a wide spectrum of responses . . . and cover a multitude of disparate injuries” (Miller and Tougaw 2002: 2). I contend that because of their repeated appearance in the text these prolific experiences of racism and sexual violence can be understood as internalised trauma. Whilst the proliferation of these experiences, which are also repeated in various other texts by Alibhai-Brown, suggests that there is a need to articulate them, it also accounts for the deployment of the memoir mode.<sup>9</sup> The confessional genre of writing enables the expression of these anxieties, and highlights the need to speak of them.

In speaking of such experiences there is an attempt to overcome this sense of trauma. However, I argue that, paradoxically, the text’s continual return to the pain of relocation, in its many citations of racism, illustrates an inability to overcome them. This inability culminates in Alibhai-Brown pondering whether she should “keep a bag half packed. Just in case” she is thrown out of Britain (421). In these last lines of the main body of the text there is a voiced struggle to belong, an echo apparent throughout the memoir, and indeed the author’s talks and other writings.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the epilogue Alibhai-Brown complicates this lack of belonging by referring to London and stating that “the city where no one belongs is where I belong” (426). The paradox between these two assertions highlights the ambiguity in her sense of belonging. Thus, whilst the memoir form can potentially be seen as (part of) a healing process, it proves to be only palliative. The inadequacy of the memoir lies in the limits of language, because, as the evidence suggests and Gilmore explicates: “Trauma is beyond language in some crucial way. . . . Language fails in the face of trauma... Yet, at the same time language about trauma is theorized as an

<sup>8</sup> During the partition of India, for instance, the female body became the subject of grotesque sexual violence, an arena where the conflicts of the two emerging nations were played out and the honour of each nation was tarnished via the abuse of women.

<sup>9</sup> With particular reference to the repetition of the racism experienced: Alibhai-Brown relives her experiences of a racist cab driver in her cookbook memoir (233), as well as in her texts on race, ethnicity and culture (2001: 74). She also regularly makes use of the account of her racial transgression during a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the beating she encountered from her family as result (2009: 207; 2012).

<sup>10</sup> During her talk at Asia House, 6 May 2010, the memoirist again expressed this complication of belonging.

impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma” (2001: 6).

There is thus, following trauma, a necessity to represent; however, language fails to perform this task, resulting in the persistence of the trauma. This inadequacy of language highlights the significance of the genre of the cookbook memoir. I would like to suggest that the reliance on food —manifested in the culinary genre— attempts to compensate for the limitations of language in expressing the trauma of double dislocation.

The cookbook form enables the pain of multiple displacements to be embedded and articulated. In the act of recipe writing, and the subsequent act of culinary ritual, the author can defy and resist, or weave intimate memories of family members and difficult times. These purposes are embedded in the recipes of ‘Retribution Beef’ and ‘Jena’s Fish and Chips’. ‘Retribution Beef’ asserts the author’s politics and belonging; a tailor-made concoction which doles out justice to those she feels have wronged her and her family and, as the name suggests, is cooked to execute revenge. The recipe is fiery, including plenty of spices, and furthermore “[three] dried whole hot chillies”. Served to “British friends [invited] over to meet the [newly born] baby and tuck into a curry”, Alibhai-Brown makes the dish “so hot [that] they burned . . . and cried” (323). This offering was her retribution for Thatcher’s thinly veiled racist attitudes of the late seventies, readily accepted by the British public. The pain of dispossession is clear as the multiply displaced Alibhai-Brown writes about her sentiments over Thatcherite discrimination, just after she has given birth: “We [migrants] were breeding too much and too fast for this leaderine too. My breasts were bursting with milk as those unforgivable words resonated through the land. She meant my boy and me and his father – who played croquet like an English gentleman” (323).

The sense of rejection and defiance the author feels is not only manifested in the words of her writing and the recipe, but also in her body: her breasts burst with milk, a metaphor for her overwhelming emotions of anger and dispossession, being transcribed for a third time through the body, after they have been firstly articulated through writing the recipe and then, secondly, by cooking it. It is the fiery beef curry itself, however, that compels her guests to “cry, pa[ying] them back for Thatcher’s words” (323). Alibhai-Brown deploys food to resist, and to defend her family who are under attack, and this reading begins the consideration of the entangled relationship of food and the body in relation to collective and individuated identity.

I would like to argue that Alibhai-Brown fashions selfhood *through* community. Because the recipes in her cookbook memoir have been collated from family and friends, and the product of these recipes are often produced and consumed communally, the culinary instructions and techniques are of a collective nature. It is *vis-à-vis* the collective of culinary practices that this memoirist is recreating an individuated sense of selfhood. ‘Jena’s Fish and Chips’ —a collective endeavour in many ways— reifies some of these conceptual paradigms. Not only is the recipe handed down from the author’s mother (Jena), but it is also with Jena after her husband has left her that the author is able to



cook the dish.<sup>11</sup> On the conclusion of her marital relationship, Alibhai-Brown tells us, “That night I cooked Jena’s fish and chips, an ensemble I had refrained from making for many years. How TL [the author’s first husband] moaned if we left spicy smells lingering too long, and fried food had more or less been banned” (355). Layered narratives of experience and cultural memory are entwined in the cooking and eating of this spicy, fried repast.

Embedded within the preparation and eating of ‘Jena’s Fish and Chips’ are the tensions and ensuing break-up of the author’s marriage. Indeed the meal can be understood as a metaphor for the divisions between TL and Alibhai-Brown, and, beyond that, the struggles of relocation. I would like to suggest that where TL manages twice migration through dispensing with what could be termed traditional culinary practices, and becoming a croquet-playing English gentleman (323), Alibhai-Brown instead longs to taste and cook these comforting spicy, fried foods. The recipe for and enactment of ‘Jena’s Fish and Chips’ is therefore an embodied practice that discloses (distinct) narratives of dislocation, and the resulting tensions in the couple’s marriage. The dish, however, also embodies the experience of two-fold movement more extensively, by accounting for the mixing often engendered in the diaspora. This narrative is available through the ingredients: the fish is marinated in garlic, chillies, lime and coriander, whilst the ketchup for the chips is spiked with 2 tablespoons of *garam masala*. Thus this version of fish and chips, a meal often noted as typically ‘English’,<sup>12</sup> has been spiked with full, fiery flavours to create a repast that reflects the movements from India to East Africa and then to Britain. Taking into account Arjun Appadurai’s scholarship on the “social life of things”, which suggests “meanings are inscribed in their [the commodity’s] forms, their uses, their trajectories”, and given that “human actors encode things with significance”, it is possible to think of the fusion in this recipe as a microcosm for the mixing that dislocation engenders (Appadurai 1999: 5).<sup>13</sup> Like those who make and eat such meals, these foods themselves have also taken on new qualities and adapted according to the displacement experienced.

## 2. DANCING *DANDIYA*, DRESSING TO IMPRESS

The investment in the embodied practice by the double diasporas is deeply entangled with a desire for esoteric knowledge. The dance practices of the Gujarati East Africans in Britain demonstrate these twin preferences. The quintessentially Gujarati dance of *dandiya raas* is an example of another form of embodied text used to express identity. Although now performed all over the sub-continent, and originating in western India, *dandiya raas* is well known as a popular dance of Gujarat. The folk ritual involves the use

<sup>11</sup> In her talk at Asia House, 6 May 2010, Alibhai-Brown discussed her mother’s support, and “fish and chip intervention”, during this difficult time.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth commenting here that despite common belief, the origins of English ‘Fish and Chips’ lie in Irish, French and Jewish cooking (Panayi 2008:16-19).

<sup>13</sup> This ‘mixing’ shall be discussed further in this article, with reference to dance.



of *dandiya*, sticks of varying material and colour around twelve to eighteen inches long.<sup>14</sup> Contemporary *dandiya* dance is ‘played’ in pairs, generally by participants forming two lines with partners facing each other: “The lines move clockwise, and each person steps forward to hit sticks with their partner, then moves on two people”. The arrangements of this practice are said to symbolise the Hindu mythological fight between the deities Durga and Mahisasura, with the sticks symbolising swords (David 2005: 138-40).

The primary data on *dandiya* referred to here has been obtained through qualitative methods: namely the observation, participation in and documentation of the community event of *Navratri*. I attended *Navratri*, an annual Hindu festival lasting nine nights, in various North London locations during 2010 and 2011. Here I shall refer to the festivities at Harrow Leisure Centre and those at the *Mochi* Kenton Hall in October 2010.<sup>15</sup> Through the abundance of material on *YouTube.com* from Harrow Leisure Centre, it became clear that this was a large, popular, local place for energetic *Navratri* festivities. The *Mochi* Kenton Hall is a community venue known to me via my familial affiliation to the ethnic group. My findings on *dandiya* suggest that a link with India, and Gujarat, is deliberately formed via particular dress modes, yet a vernacular youth culture also spontaneously emerges during the *Navratri* festival.

Male sartorial preferences at *Navratri* festivals demonstrate the changing relationship between the double diaspora and India. During my fieldwork I observed men generally wore jeans, t-shirts and jumpers, although some donned *kurtas*, a long sleeved, hip-length thin shirt associated with Indian men’s clothing. Though rarer, there were other, rather conspicuous, modes of dress which aligned the wearer with an Indian identity. It is these modes of dress that I examine, and Figure 1, taken in the *Mochi* Kenton Hall, illustrates the style. What characterises the male dress, and differentiates it from the *kurta*, is the excessively baggy style of the trousers and tops, the bright colours and patterns, and the sequins and jewels. I argue that these more unusual types of garments hark back to India and the folk traditions of the dances at these events. The red and green/black *sari* worn by the female participant in Figure 2 has a unique pattern, and Linda Lynton describes these patterns as *Bandhani saris*. *Bandhani* work, which translates as ‘tie-dye’, “is traditional in western India and appears in many saris used for special and ritual occasions” (2002: 38-39). Though of not exactly the same material and design, the male attire in Figure 1 and 2 also signal towards these styles that are orientated towards festivals and special events. The *dandiya* dancer’s garment in Figure 2 has some animal iconography on it, and although the exact representation cannot be identified from this image that captures fast dance moves, as Lynton points out, these icons refer to the customs of “traditional rural India” (2002: 161).

The simple dyes and patterns are also closely aligned with the styles set out in the second chapter of *The Sari*, which outlines the rural and tribal dress of the “The Western

<sup>14</sup> The dance style is often referred to by simply this word: *dandiya*, and I will henceforth use this contraction.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Mochi’ refers to a Hindu caste. The Kenton Hall has been built for, and is frequented predominantly by, this community.



Figure 1. Taken in Kenton Mochi Hall,  
traditional folk dress



Figure 2. Taken in Harrow Leisure Centre,  
traditional folk dress

Region” (Lynton 2002: 25-41). The preference for folk ‘fashion’ by these participants, during *Navratri* in North London, inverts once traditional dress for festival attendees in western regions of India, to dress which is overtly performative of ‘Gujaratiness’ in its diasporic context. The relationship of the folk dress to that of the Rabari tribe, who live in the western regions of India and would wear these types of clothing, underlines the ‘Gujaratiness’ of this style.<sup>16</sup> Rabari garments would have been made from coloured wool, and would signify the types of jobs the wearer undertook, for example herding sheep. This context is now, however, lost, with just the colours and icons remaining. In the diaspora these garments, it seems, are the signifier without their signified.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, these styles are seen more often in the diasporic dance space; attendees, if not dressed in full regalia, are often in simple, less dominant patterns, that give an inconspicuous nod —perhaps often without the wearer’s knowledge— to traditional rural dress and Gujaratiness.

The continued alignment of the diaspora with India, through dress, becomes complicated if we take a moment to look towards East Africa. As Aghananda Bharati has explained, the preference for western dress by the South Asian in East Africa was ubiquitous, and indeed, commenting on his own experience, the critic explains how in East Africa his hosts once “shrieked with laughter” when they saw him dressed in monastic Indian wear. This reaction was elicited as Bharati’s clothing was considered neither ‘decent’ nor compatible

<sup>16</sup> See Edwards (2010: 35), for a visual example of a Gujarati Rabari garment. The similarities to what is seen in the diasporic space immediately become clear.

<sup>17</sup> Here I refer to Saussure’s (1990) widely acknowledged structuralist theory of the sign.

with the image of the 'modern man' (read: educated and English speaking) (1972: 249). Taking into account the preferred male dress in this instance, it would seem the British South Asian diaspora has in fact lost some of these prejudices. And, indeed, given that folk dress, which is intimately rooted in rural India, is also donned by some it seems that there is an inverted outlook on 'Indian' modes of dress. There is, now, a preference on the part of some to simulate authenticity. By wearing what are considered to be authentic garments, an imagined link with the homeland is cultivated. However, I contend that despite these preferences, if a close analysis of dance is undertaken, a sense of cultural hybridity is paradoxically revealed and it is towards this exploration that the article now moves.

A sequence of energetic dance, captured on video in Harrow Leisure Centre, complicates how identity is manifested amongst the double diaspora. It is what occurred in the interior of the dance space, amongst many groups of dancers, which was both surprising and fascinating. Behind a group of proficient *dandiya* players, another group of participants danced the *macarena*, a popular nineties routine that accompanies the Spanish song of the same name. I would argue that in this moment boundaries are traversed through the insertion of non-folk dance. As the tempo intensified this version of the pop dance quickly disintegrated into free form dancing. The *macarena* moves were, nevertheless, uncannily in time with the *dandiya* beat, up until its disintegration.

Within the grid formation of the *macarena*, behind a row of girls, a row of boys were moving with a bounce in their knees and their arms outstretched, not horizontally as the *macarena* dictates, but at an upward angle. Both of these movements I argue introduce an element of popular culture *bhangra* to the European dance.<sup>18</sup> Once free form dancing commenced there were unstructured moves, and, in the clapping and throwing up of the hands in the air, this section of dance is further aligned to contemporary *bhangra*.<sup>19</sup> There was one young male participant wearing a chequered shirt and jeans, beside the female dancers, partially hidden by the *dandiya* players, who particularly exemplified this amalgamation of the dances. As the tempo increased, from taking part in the *macarena*, this participant suddenly began to frantically punch his hands into the air and kick his feet out. This change into *bhangra* then just as suddenly became a faster, more bouncy version of the *macarena* once again. The two styles of dances impressively merged and seamlessly entangled, all the while to the *dandiya* beat, and this entanglement of moves was observed once again during my 2011 fieldwork, at the same venue.

Within this sacred space of *Navratri* there is then the emergence of a vernacular youth culture. The occurrence of the secular within the sacred space of the *Navratri* celebrations

<sup>18</sup> *Bhangra* itself originates from Punjab and was a Sikh celebratory folk dance and song marking harvest. It has now modified paralleling diasporic migrations, and is synonymous with modern 'British Asian' culture. For some of the debates concerning *bhangra*, and discussions of its early occurrence in the UK, see Sharma, Hutnyk, and Sharma (1996); Banerji and Baumann (1990: 137-53); Roy (2010). See Vatsyayan (1976) for a discussion of the roots of *Bhangra* in India.

<sup>19</sup> Vatsyayan describes the folk *bhangra* style as "an abrupt jerky movement of the shoulders and a hop-step: this is followed by many vigorous movements of the whole body and the raising of the hands to the shoulders or above the head level" (1976: 126).

complicates the primary understandings of the *Navratri* space as purely spiritual. The performance of non-folk dances in the *Navratri* space speaks of the cultural hybridity of the British South Asian youths who perform them. The term cultural hybridity has, however, often directed these discourses on South Asians in Britain to suggestions that there is a ‘clash of culture’.<sup>20</sup> The addition of the secular into the non-secular space also quickly brings to the forefront discourses based on competition. Whether the spirituality of *Navratri* is being marginalised for the inclusion of, for example, the *macarena*, is pertinent to this discussion. However, in conjunction with Michael Rothberg’s recent work on multidirectional memory, I argue the framework of competitive identity need not dominate, and other, less linear modes of thinking are more appropriate (2009).

Accordingly, a more useful approach, which moves away from the hegemonic binaries that define western thought, would be to think of cultural hybridity in the Indian diaspora as akin to bilingualism. In *Desh Pardesh*, Ballard states, “[Asian youths are] skilled cultural navigators, with a sophisticated capacity to manoeuvre . . . both inside and outside the ethnic colony” (1994: 31). Whilst this vision of the British Indian community certainly speaks to how the double diaspora manages identity, I would nonetheless argue there is less of the code-switching between cultures that Ballard describes, and instead an amalgamation of varying traditions and identities. As Jane Desmond in *Meaning in Motion* (1997), alongside Barbara Browning in *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995) articulate, the body, and the way it moves, is able to express this multi-faceted, constantly evolving ethnic identity. On the one hand the attendance of *Navratri*, and the partaking of religious dance and quintessentially Gujarati dress, expresses a religious and ethnic identity affiliation; on the other, the inclusion of non-secular moves signals towards vernacular culture. Of course, the bodies that embed these varying identities are not necessarily the same ones; however, together they represent the entanglement of representation found in the dance space, and the potency of the body itself in these stakes. In short, the body, as we have seen with culinary ritual, can articulate the entangled complexities of collective and individuated identity in a way that the mind, via the written text, cannot.

### 3. BACKWARDS, YET FORWARDS

Before I draw this article to its conclusion, I would like to demonstrate how the narratives of progress and modernity are central to the twice migrant story. Emma Crewe and Uma Kothari contend that migration for East African Gujaratis to Britain was often about finding a modern, progressive existence. This ambition far outweighed those connected with materialism because “Gujaratis have it in their blood to be enterprising, to migrate and to have a sense of adventure” (1990: 16). The Gujarati, it is argued, has left a prosperous life in India to ultimately find a “modern, clean, ‘civilised’ country with high morals and

<sup>20</sup> See Mukadam (2007: 107) for a list of critics who have posited this type of argument.

plenty of opportunities” (Crewe and Kothari 1990: 16). The desire for modernity perhaps accounts for the multiple migrations that this double diaspora has experienced.

This sense of modernity can be identified in the visual materials from my family archives.<sup>21</sup> Figure 3, 4 and 5 capture my mother’s uncle, and are set in Kenya during the 1950s. Each image is from a family album belonging to this same uncle, Ramanmasa. Figures 4 and 5, both in black and white, showcase a figure, Ramanmasa, who dons sunglasses, which to a contemporary voyeur resemble retro Ray-Bans. The sunglass-wearing figure sports a dark suit, tie, white shirt and has a moustache and short, curly black groomed hair. Each image has him looking away from the camera into the distance, at a slight upward angle. He smiles in neither, but in the second there is less gravity in his countenance. These images, each framed by a white border, are striking for their stylistics. Nothing appears in the background, yet the foreground is sharp and well composed with decent proportions attributed to the face and body. In Figure 3, Ramanmasa stands on what appears to be sand, in front of a deserted road and a block building. He no longer wears his retro ‘Ray-Ban-esque’ sunglasses, but instead, a seemingly unlit cigarette—an accoutrement of modernity—hangs from his mouth. He again wears his dark suit, white shirt, tie and polished shoes. He holds something lightly in both his hands, contributing to a stylish, charming pose. Each image portrays the subject as not only smart to the last detail, but also fashionably ‘cool’. The way the sunglasses are worn, the way the body is directed away from the camera, the way the cigarette hangs in the mouth, are all very suggestive of a role undertaken.

The background of Figure 3 can be read as harmonious with the fashionably ‘cool’ character that appears in the foreground. On close inspection the large building looks to be comprised of apartments on the upper floor, denoted by the curtains and hanging clothes, with offices on the lower floors. Below the block is what appears to be a row of shops with some pristine cars parked outside. All is well set out and organised by posts and roads: there is a clear regulation, and creation, of the urban city space. Peer a little closer, and the shop appears to be only one outlet, which is a bank: the words “STANDARD BANK” can be seen written in white on the front and along the side of the shop section. Why a picture of Ramanmasa standing outside a bank was taken is unclear, and why it has indeed been deemed important enough to enter the space of the family album is also unclear. On requesting further information, from close family and in conversation with my aunt, it seems there are few direct links to that bank itself.<sup>22</sup> The location of the shot is peculiar, and its appearance in an album filled with collective family photographs too is incongruous.

Some continuity between the background and the figure seen in the foreground can be fathomed. Like the confident looking lone figure, the block building seems architecturally smart and modern for its time. Further, where the bank can perhaps be read as a symbol of capitalism, and progress, the figure that poses in front of it, by his simple appearance in

<sup>21</sup> I would like to acknowledge the generosity of my family members, in particular Aman R. Chauhan, for lending me these images for analysis.

<sup>22</sup> Indumasi Chauhan, interview by the author, London, 26 September 2011.





Figures 3 and 4. Taken from personal archives, Ramanmasa outside bank and posing.

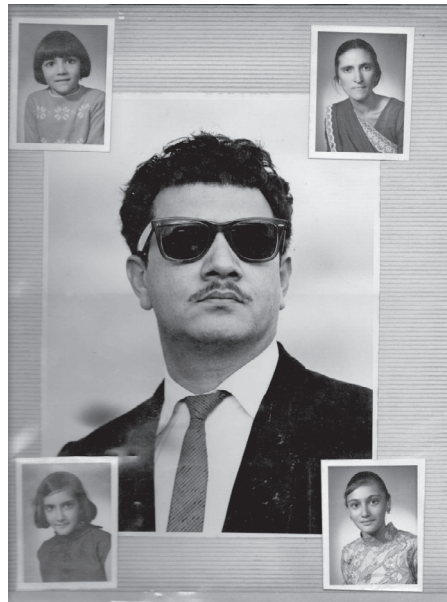


Figure 5. Taken from personal archives, Ramanmasa posing with family photographs

the Kenyan space, is someone who can be read to seek that progress. His dress and pose suggest that there is something of a symbiosis between the cityscape photographed and his ambitions and narrative. Each component of Figure 3, as well as those of Figures 4 and 5, points to a singular desired perception of the individual: he is the ‘modern man’. Figure 3, though, extends this image of the Ramanmasa from the ‘modern man’, to the ‘modern businessman’. The performance of the role of modern businessman in these shots

is heightened when one looks to the rest of the album where Ramanmasa is often captured in family settings dressed in a shirt and cardigan. In these family images, a style that dominates the album, he is no longer acting the part of the 'suited, booted', progressive businessman. In Figures 3, 4 and 5, however, there is a role to be played, and a performance of identity, within the photograph, and also within the album space. An image of progress and modernity is being sought.

Let us delve a little deeper into this construction of the modern businessman, and analyse its formulation by probing the black suit, tie and white shirt, which attire his body, a little further. Gijsbert Oonk has explored why the "western business suit became acceptable among South Asians in East Africa" (2011: 530). He suggests there are three reasons for the prevalence of the suit. Firstly, education played a primary role in western "dress types bec[oming] acceptable", because teachers, although from India, often wore "British clothes". This, according to Oonk, set an example to Indian East African families (2011: 542). I would add that school uniforms were generally moulded around the chequered dress and cardigan or shirts and shorts combination, promoting these types of garments amongst the middle class. Oonk, secondly, suggests that "South Asian settlers in East Africa developed a gradual economic and social separation from India". "In the perceptions of Asian Africans", he comments, "India was on the decline and the future was in Europe". Furthermore, after Indian independence, Nehru made it clear to Indians abroad that they should demonstrate their loyalties to their host nations, as India would not be responsible for Indians living outside of the sub-continent. During the same period the *khadi* was implanted within the national narrative of independent India. Oonk argues that in light of India's turning away from its citizens abroad, middle class Indian East Africans chose to ignore this lead and forsake the *khadi*. Economically and socially speaking, links with India were on the decline, resulting in the proliferation of the business suit (2011: 543). This is perhaps why my aunt, in conversation, declared that the "*kurta* was for India, whilst western wear was for Kenya".<sup>23</sup> Lastly, the critic cites leaders such as Aga Khan III, of the Ismaili religious sect as directing followers towards western clothing and language (Oonk 2011: 544).

The choice to wear business suits, and indeed other forms of western wear, is thus intimately linked with the ideology of progress. These items of dress are associated with being educationally, economically and socially forward. If western wear is metaphorically interpreted as such, the business suit can be understood to be the epitome of this metaphor, which relates to progress. The metaphor of the business suit as symbolising progress does embody the ideologies of community very succinctly. As I have suggested previously, in conjunction with scholarship by Emma Crewe and Uma Kothari, migration for East African Indians was primarily about fulfilling an ambition for a modern, progressive existence, and this community's multiple movements represents a desire for adventure, and their enterprising nature. As Oonk describes above, this enterprise was addressed towards Europe, as this was where the future lay, in the minds of the South Asian East Africans. It

<sup>23</sup> Indumasi Chauhan, interview by the author, London, 26 September 2011.



would therefore follow that to demonstrate this sense of enterprise and progress, western clothes would naturally be privileged, and in particular the business suit. By wearing these clothes for a photograph and in addition inserting them into the framework of the album, it is clear that a particular role is being sought and demonstrated for the benefit of the album user.

However, let us now take into account gender considerations: with the sartorial choice of the suit by Ramanmasa in the black and white images, there is a contrast with the choice of dress in the photographs of his wife. Whilst there is a presentation of the modern, and indeed cosmopolitan in the Figures discussed, I now contend that the modern and traditional co-exist in representations of my mother's aunt. Figure 6, again found within the leathery red family album and set in Kenya, catches my attention time and time again. Found three quarters of the way through, Figure 6 is again startling in its perspective, composition and stylistic foresight. To recite Annette Kuhn's formulation, from Barthes, the photograph "pierces" me (2002: 18). Standing on a slightly elevated piece of unidentifiable beach debris, my mother's aunt poses in front of the rolling sea, on what is a beautiful day. The sand and the water merge into one, as do the sky and the sea. The subject of the composition, my mother's aunt, is standing stylishly off-centre, to the right, and her deep green *sari*, rather roughly draped, blows in the wind. The *sari* is nothing special, by today's standards at least. It is light in weight, unembroidered and print-less. The blouse could be deemed old-fashioned, with its long sleeves, and simple plain white colour, which does not match the *sari*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the way the entire garb is worn, and how the aunt stands conveys a sense far from the mundane. With her weight on her back foot, her pose is neither timid nor shy. As in all her moments captured on film, littered throughout the album, she looks straight into the camera, with much confidence and character. Her trendily drawn figure stands with authority and her right hand tilts her right shoulder backward slightly by resting on her hip. On closer inspection, this is not the 'hands on the hips' pose that is so popular amongst celebrities and those accustomed to posing, the subject of this image is, it seems, loosely grasping her wayward *sari* around the hip.

It is a number of facets —the self-assured look alongside the suggestive and stylish pose, in such a dramatic, distinctive landscape— that when coupled with an ordinarily *sari* clad figure, results in such a striking composition. In her beautifully illustrated text, Lynton opens with a statement that aligns the idea of 'Indianness' with a certain way of dressing: the "sari is the quintessential Indian female garment. *Nothing* identifies a woman as being Indian so strongly as the sari" (2002: 7, my emphasis). By dressing in the *sari*, the aunt in this image is implicitly signalling her Indian identity. The simple *sari* is not the only paraphernalia that is suggestive of the ordinary or traditional: the figure wears a large red *chanlo* or *bindi* upon her forehead, that, much like a wedding ring, denotes she is a married woman. She also has her hair parted, and slickly oiled back, a common hairstyle

<sup>24</sup> The simplicity of this ensemble is apparent if compared with the dress during *Navratri*, as per the figures cited previously in this article. Of course, *Navratri* is a special occasion, and as such merits elaborate dress; however, the comparison simply serves to illustrate how the dress in this image is starkly simple.



Figure 6. Taken from personal archives, Indumasi posing on beach

for ladies of her generation. The juxtaposition of the ordinary and so-called traditional, and the conviction and modernity of the poser must be what fascinates, and compels me to linger upon its meaning. The distinctive landscape is characterised by the seascape. Whilst the sea and sand almost merge into one, the sea itself can be understood to epitomise movement and migration; a symbol of bringing people, but also taking them away.

How the lone figure stands in an open, confident manner, perhaps aware of the striking composition, or the significance of the photographic image, as well as the landscape of this image, are all suggestive. Perhaps her stance is an acknowledgement of, or testament to, the modernity of the Gujarati, who find themselves in East Africa, in an endeavour to attain increased progress. Though what surely makes this image wonderful, worthy of comment, and eye catching is the manifestation of the modern, with the traditional, the convergence of two identities, which do not compete, but sit happily alongside each other. There is a harmonious blend of tradition and modernity in Figure 6, and an outright determination towards progress in Figure 3, 4 and 5. Each represents a differing mediation of modernity, which is determined by gender ultimately, yet each is a testament to the double diaspora's characteristic 'forward looking'.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

These visual images evidence the twice migrant's drive to move forward and progress, yet, I contend that these innovations are sometimes traumatic and painful, as exemplified by

Alibhai-Brown's writings. These painful experiences are often hidden by the hegemonic stories of success that surround the double diaspora, and it has been my aim to unveil alternative narratives that carve a more nuanced understanding of this community. I conclude that the desire for, and successful achievement of, modernity compels the double diaspora to move forward, yet this often engenders pain. Alibhai-Brown's individuality formed from the collective is ambivalent in its belonging; yet, the dancing youth of Harrow Leisure Centre who forge the *macarena* to *Navratri* beats and infuse *bhangra* moves demonstrate a confidence in their multiplicity. These current identities are underpinned by the story told by the modern figure standing outside the Kenyan bank in his smart get-up. Amongst the articulation of these identities is the common deployment of them via embodied practices. As I have suggested, the embodied practice is significant to the double diaspora, for the capacity of written language is limited. Yet I end by briefly commenting on the need to code culture, something which embodied practices undertake, and is paramount to the twice migrant. For diasporic minority communities who have experienced displacement, there is the continual threat of uprooting and, indeed, this is coupled with an anxiety to protect culture against the encroachment of the other. By positioning culture beyond the decipherability of those beyond the community, through embodied practices, it is not vulnerable to the violence of cultural destruction by the other. This does not mean, however, that cultural practices and expressions of identity remain static. The performances during *Navratri* are a testament to this. Thus, whilst covert culture can be understood partly as a mechanism to protect a continually migrating culture, the understandings of *Navratri* here demonstrate that cultural identity does not evolve as such. Insertions, omissions and re-workings are inevitable. Embodied practices, it seems, are essential to articulating identity for the Gujarati East African in Britain, not least because they are esoteric, but also because they can mediate an identity that is paradoxical, multifaceted, and fascinating.

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