

Returning to East Africa via India: On M. G. Vassanji's *And Home Was Kariakoo*

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Shizen Ozawa,

"Returning to East Africa via India: On M. G. Vassanji's *And Home Was Kariakoo*"

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Abstract: In his article "Returning to East Africa via India," Shizen Ozawa examines how M. G. Vassanji further develops his diasporic aesthetics in his latest travel book/ memoir *And Home Was Kariakoo: A Memoir of East Africa* (2014) from two perspectives. First, the essay explores some possible influences of his earlier travelogue *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* (2008). It seems partly because of his deepening relationship with his land of ancestral origin that in *And*, Vassanji emphasizes the cross-continental connections between East Africa and India more strongly than in his earlier works. Especially, he characterizes the very presence of Asian Africans as testimony to the enduring relationship between the two regions in spite of the post-colonial turbulence they had gone through. Second, my article examines how Vassanji at the same time affirms his "African" identity. Describing East Africa as a place to return to, he foregrounds his strong attachment to it. Moreover, he highlights the emergence of a racially inclusive society in which Asian Africans can feel a genuine sense of belonging. By doing so, Vassanji widens the corpus of an Asian African literature and at the same time brings a new phase in his own diasporic writing.

Shizen OZAWA

Returning to East Africa via India: On M. G. Vassanji's *And Home Was Kariakoo*

M. G. Vassanji's second travel book *And Home Was Kariakoo: A Memoir of East Africa* (2014) begins with his recalling the overwhelming sense of homecoming that he felt at the age of twenty-one: "This was my country. This was East Africa and I was returning home." This strong attachment to his "African home", he claims, has never changed since that time (1).

In order to start examining the complexities in Vassanji's sense of belonging to East Africa described here, it is helpful to turn to his biography briefly. He is a writer of Indian origin, whose paternal great-grandfather migrated from Gujarat to East Africa in the 1880s. Vassanji was born in Kenya in 1950 and grew up in Tanzania. He went to the United States for his university education—his homecoming mentioned above took place during this period—and eventually settled in Canada. There, he started to produce fictions, many of which thematize the predicament of Asian Africans; despite their families having lived in East Africa for several generations, they cannot entirely feel home at "home" because of the ethnic frictions with the numerically dominant black Africans in the turbulent transitions from colonial to post-colonial periods. In this sense, the opening of *And* touches upon one of the central themes of his oeuvre.

And is a record of Vassanji's several return journeys to mainly Tanzania but also Kenya, the earliest of which seems to take place after nineteen years' absence from Tanzania (12).¹ Given that "a tremendous sense of loss at being away from the place [he] grew up in" had been driving Vassanji to write about it (Vassanji, "Moyez Vassanji" 70), *And* is worth considering as an interesting case study of a diasporic writer's return journey. Robert Clarke observes that postcolonial travelers' narratives of return often "take the form of bearing witness to failure: the failure of home to fulfil its promise (of development, modernisation, decolonisation, human rights and democracy)" (104). Nevertheless, their sense of disappointment does not solely derive from the socio-cultural problems of their homeland. It is also probably related to the very nature of diasporic imagination. As Jonathan Rollins points out, "not only do these diasporians ... no longer belong in the homes they have left behind, but such a place does not exist and never did exist except for those diasporians themselves" (137). To put it differently, what often disappoints and even upsets diasporic returnees is not only their inability to identify themselves totally with their homeland due to the cultural transformations that they have gone through while living elsewhere. They inevitably become aware of the gap between what Salman Rushdie calls an "imaginary homeland" (10), a homeland constructed by the diasporic imagination of a geo-culturally dislocated writer, and its actual counterpart. However, what really interests me in Vassanji's return narrative is that it seems to resist these general observations. His relationship with his African home seems far less troubling. As the passage quoted at the opening of this essay indicates, a deep sense of belonging to the land of East Africa is conspicuous. What does this affirmative tone of the narrative reveal about the particularities of his diasporic imagination?

Another factor that distinguishes *And* from many other narratives of diasporic return lies in the complexities of Vassanji's return route, as it were; *And* can be read as a sequel to his earlier travel book *A Place Within: Rediscovering India* (2008).² A record of the writer's numerous visits to the land of his ancestral origin, the first of which takes place only in 1993, *Place Within* describes the gradual process in which the writer explores India and his connections with it. For many of those who have diasporic background, the land of ancestral origin assumes a special significance. As Takeyuki Tsuda observes, "most diasporic descendants imagine their ancestral homelands from afar in rather idealized, romantic, if not mythical ways" (175). However, partly because Vassanji has gone through what Vijay Mishra calls a "twice-displaced diaspora" (156), the writer's relationship with his ancestral homeland is much more complicated than many other diasporic authors'. After all, his "imaginary homeland" is first and foremost

¹ Although *And* does not make the following point entirely clear, while Vassanji regularly went back to Kenya in the 1970s and 1980s, it was only in 1989 that he returned to Tanzania (Ball 261). This is partly because his family moved back to Kenya while Vassanji was studying abroad, in order to escape from the repercussions of Tanzania's socialist policies (Vassanji, *And* 12), and partly because his decision to study in the United States breached an agreement with the Tanzanian government (Ball 261).

² These two books are similar in that neither of the narratives follows chronological order, normally a generic characteristic of travelogues; neither work specifies which part of the narrative is a result of which trip. The fact that photographs are occasionally inserted in both narratives without any explicit explanations (although very brief captions do appear at the end of the book in *And*'s case) also creates an impression of a certain continuity between them.

East Africa, not India. How, then, does the complex exploration of his "Indian" connections in the earlier work affect his relationship with East Africa in *And*? Is there any significant new development in his diasporic imagination when he in a sense returns to East Africa by way of India?

My essay tackles these questions and thereby examines how Vassanji further explores various facets of the diasporic identity of Asian Africans in this latest travel book. For the purpose, I first consider how, partly influenced by the exploration of his roots in *Place Within*, Vassanji emphasizes the cross-continental relationship in *And*. Compared with his earlier works, *And* depicts East Africa as more deeply imprinted with the historical connections with India. Second, how Vassanji at the same time affirms his "African" identity is discussed. He not only describes East Africa as a place to return to. He also highlights the emergence of a racially inclusive society and thereby characterizes East Africa as a place to which Asian Africans presently feel a genuine sense of belonging. By doing so, Vassanji widens the corpus of an Asian African literature and at the same time brings a new phase in his own diasporic writing.

Affirming "Indian" Connections

A Place Within is a significant thematic departure for Vassanji in seriously dealing with his relationship with India, the land of his ancestral origin. Most of Vassanji's earlier works thematize how the fate of second- or third-generation Asian Africans is affected by the turbulent process of decolonization in East Africa. Therefore, their connection with India had not been a major theme. For instance, in his debut work *The Gunny Sack*, a few characters are from India, but the story focuses upon how they and their descendants fare in East Africa, not their early life in the land of origin. Peter Kalliney's observation that the novel, despite its highlighting of traumatic experiences of Asian Africans in East Africa, is notable for the absence of nostalgia for India (8) is in fact true of most of Vassanji's early works. His first and subsequent visits to India transform such a detached relationship with it. He explains the impact of his first trip: "When I went to India this time, I realized that I have to go back there again, both physically and metaphorically, and basically reclaim that part of me that I had sort of decided I didn't want any more" ("Taboos" 209). In this respect, *Place Within* is a fascinating record of how he carefully re-examines the "Indian" component of his identity that he had hitherto paid little attention to.³

The examination of his "Indian" roots in Vassanji's earlier travel book seems to affect *And*, as the cross-continental relationship between India and East Africa, especially the very presence of Asian Africans as its concrete manifestation, emerges as a conspicuous theme. Most superficially, this new thematic focus results in his discovery of resemblance in appearance between the Asian African community and its land of origin. Referring to the similarity in outlook between Dar es Salaam's Indian quarter where he grew up and Gujarat's Jamnagar, he asserts that his ancestors "had brought Gujarat with them" (9). The familiar urban landscape presently appears as a piece of concrete evidence of historical and cultural connections between the two regions.

Vassanji's strong interest in how the community of Khojas, to which he belongs, fares in East Africa is a far more significant by-product of his trips to India. Khojas are the descendants of those Hindus who converted to Ismaili Islam around the thirteenth century. In his early writing, Vassanji fictionalizes them as the Shamsis, whom his debut work *The Gunny Sack* explains as the descendants of those who "converted to an esoteric sect of Islam that considered thundering Allah as simply a form of reposing Vishnu" (7). Nevertheless, his early works hardly explore their cultural and religious particularities or the influences of these particularities on their diasporic experience. This seems to be partly because Vassanji deliberately invents the Shamsis as a generic group of Asian African migrants ("History" 51), and partly because he had been relatively ignorant of his own cultural background before his first visit to his land of ancestral origin (*Place Within* 293). In addition, the fact that he had become a non-believer probably weakens his sense of belonging to the community ("History" 50-51). However, numerous trips to India, particularly to Gujarat where his ancestors are from, radically re-define this somewhat distanced relationship with Khojas. For instance, he vividly records the shock he experiences on his visit to a shrine dedicated to a descendant of the saint whose precepts and spiritual songs he grew up with: "I emerge quite shaken. What I have seen, evidently, and by accident, is a shrine and prayer hall of a group related to my own. And what had seemed a distant history of medieval sultans and rajas has been connected back to me through the sultan's relationship to the saint buried here, a descendant of the pir whose songs I sang" (*Place Within* 287). Here Vassanji feels unnerved precisely because the shrine presses home his connection with India in a tangible manner. What had been a "distant" and abstract history suddenly turns into something immediate and relevant. On this and subsequent

³ In this essay, I will discuss *Place Within* only in order to consider how his exploration in India possibly affects *And*. For fuller analyses of *Place Within*, see Asma Sayed's essay as well as mine.

occasions, his encounter with Khojas and their cultural relics urges him to "reclaim the ancestral land and memory" (Sayed 131).

Partly for this discovery of his Indian roots, Vassanji in *And* becomes strongly interested in how Khojas keep their cultural traditions so many years after their migration. He observes small Khoja communities scattered around Tanzania and pays particular attention to their prayer house called khano, a symbol of their religious and cultural identity. Often located in the town or city center, khano is described as an enduring testimony to the history of Khoja migrants. In the town of Dodoma, for instance, Vassanji happily records that one street and one bus stop in its central area are named after the khano located there (*And* 143). Its presence points to how the Khoja migrants achieved success in East Africa while keeping their religious identity. In fact, Vassanji's own travel is presented as eloquent evidence of the community's survival. He often seems to choose to stay either at guest houses managed by Khojas for fellow Khojas or hotels run by them. In the town of Tanga, his initial plan to take a room at a Khoja guest house falls through, but he is invited to stay at the house of a friend's friend. Moved by such generosity, he muses: "This was typical community hospitality. It was the kind of welcome our grandfathers gave to new immigrants when they arrived penniless from India to start afresh in a foreign land.... Here too, a complete stranger, I was given a home" (44). The host's hospitality is here presented as revealing how the communal spirit of mutual support is still very much alive.

Nevertheless, Vassanji cannot but notice how much the life of Asian Africans had been affected by the stormy post-colonial turmoil in Tanzania and Kenya. In order to understand his despondency, it is helpful to have a quick overview of history here. While India and East Africa have a long history of contact, it was after the so-called "scramble for Africa" that a larger number of Indian migrants, lured by better economic prospects that the development of the new colonies offered, started to arrive. While their proportion in relation to the total population of East Africa never amounted to more than two per cent (Oonk 254), they became crucial intermediaries between European colonizers and Africans (Gregory 21). Especially in the field of commerce, they almost monopolized smaller-scale businesses through most of the colonial period (61). Partly due to their economic strength, they were treated better than Africans, even though they were also subservient to Europeans. One important consequence of their secondary yet pivotal socio-economic position as intermediaries in the colonial society was that they maintained their ethnic and cultural difference (Oonk 258). Their religion also strongly discouraged them from intermarrying with Europeans and Africans and thereby helped to keep their communal orientations (Gregory 34-35). For these reasons, the racially stratified social structure remained mostly intact during the colonial period (357). However, their socio-economic superiority and cultural distinctiveness caused serious problems once the East African countries achieved independence. Perceived as the middle classes who had been exploiting Africans and thus indifferent or even hostile to nationalist aspirations (78), Asians' status in the new nations was increasingly questioned. While the most notorious example of such racial frictions was Idi Amin's decision to expel Asians from Uganda, their counterparts in Kenya and Tanzania were also severely affected. In Kenya, its nationalist "discourse of racial majoritarianism" "on the one hand, emphasized a deliberate state bias aimed at the preferential treatment of Africans by taking economic advantage away from Indians and, on the other hand, positioned Indians as extraneous to the nation" (Aiyar 269). While Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere opposed racism, the country's nationalism assumed an "exclusionary racial-national" tone (Brennan 159). Moreover, the government's socialist policies severely affected Asians. Especially, the nationalization of properties was catastrophic for Asians, as most such properties were owned by them (191). The resultant sense of insecurity drove nearly half of the Asian population in Tanzania and Kenya to migrate elsewhere (Oonk 254). Ironically, in the eyes of Africans, the Indian exodus only confirmed their suspicion that Asians did not really belong to Africa (Brennan 5).

While Vassanji's early writing considers how such a history psychologically affects Asian Africans by exploring their sense of belonging and unbelonging to East Africa, in *And* he is forced to confront the concrete evidence of how much their community had been scarred. In the town of Tanga, for instance, he notices that what was the Karimjee Secondary School, named after a well-respected Asian family that had donated it, is now called "the Usagara Secondary School and looks as decrepit as any of the old endowed schools in the country that were taken over by the government" (56). The nationalization policy, he implies, tends to erase the economic and cultural contributions that Asian Africans had made to the wider society. What he finds in the town of Kilwa Kivinje is its "ghostly" Asian quarter with "a restaurant with a large veranda that's a mockery of its former self." Witnessing the abandoned khano, all he can do is to imagine the area's liveliness in the past (86). Kigoma's khano is still functioning, but due to the decreasing number of Asian residents, it is "only a sad reminder of a thriving, hopeful past" (203). The elegant clothing that the attendants wear for their gathering only accentuates the pathos. Even in Dar es Salaam where there exists a far larger Asian African community, history's damaging

influence is palpable, as affluent and liberal Khojas or Hindus have left and been replaced by the Asians of the Shia faith arriving from the upcountry. Consequently, the Indian quarter is in Vassanji's eyes characterized by "its new grimness, its lack of song" (186). His observation on the painful damage that the Asian communities suffered gives parts of his narrative an elegiac tone.

It is also important to notice, however, that Vassanji, as if to fend off his sense of loss, emphasizes whenever he can that those Asian Africans who remained overcame considerable difficulties and presently thrive. In Tanga, where its Asian population has much declined and half of their khano is disused, he gladly notices that business seems fine for the remaining Asians (51-52).⁴ Later in the essay, I will analyze another significant dimension of Vassanji's portraits of those Asian Africans who remained, namely their deep attachment to Africa. For the moment, it is enough to point out that his frequent mentioning of their presence in East Africa subtly draws attention to the endurance of cross-continental connections between India and East Africa.

In this respect, equally significant is Vassanji's insistence that the history of racial discrimination does not deter Indians from migrating to Africa. He recalls that during an earlier trip to Gujarat, he heard stories about recent emigrants to Africa (62-63). In Mbeya, he comments on the young Asian businessmen gathering in a hotel bar: "These are the new Indian entrepreneurs, a world apart from my ancestors who came in dhotis and turbans a hundred years ago; these young men are trim and fit, they wear smart casuals and carry laptops and briefcases and represent the multinationals of a new India" (237). What is described here is the difference between the "old," early modern Indian diaspora and the "new," late modern one, a distinction Vijay Mishra deems crucial to consider the contemporary diasporic world from a historicized perspective (2-3). Referring to the difference in question, however, Vassanji at the same time highlights the continuation of cross-continental rapport across the two periods. No matter how much history changes, India and East Africa will maintain their dynamic exchanges, he seems to imply.

In addition, Vassanji happily observes that the recent development of diasporic culture has encouraged many Asian Africans to embrace their Indian background more positively than before. Noticing that one of his Asian African acquaintances loves Indian music and often visits India, he points out "an unabashed acceptance of Indian heritage without a feeling of betrayal" among his generation (*And* 312); their land of ancestral origin is now "a reality that looms closer today than it did" (3). Globalization strengthens their sense of connection with India. In fact, the very corpus of Vassanji's writing can be read as another piece of evidence for this tendency. As I have already explained, his early works hardly thematize India or its influence on Asian Africans. Since his first visit to India, however, it has become a significant location, so much so that his sixth novel *The Assassin's Song* (2007) is mainly set there. *And* is another result of this enlargement of geographical and thematic range in Vassanji, in that it highlights the cross-cultural connections between East Africa and India more strongly than his earlier writing.

The careful embracing of his Indian background is probably one factor that prompts Vassanji to revise the history of East Africa in light of its cross-continental connection with India. For instance, in the section on Kilwa, he mentions that the town had already established and maintained its rapport with India and China by the time Milton mythologized it in *Paradise Lost* (100). In his re-telling of the rivalry between Richard Burton and John Speke over the so-called discovery of the Nile's source, he mentions that they received assistance and hospitality from several Indian merchants who had already settled in the region (121, 126, 131). He also records how Indian soldiers were transported to East Africa and deployed in a regional skirmish between Germany and Britain in the First World War (47-49). The highlighting of Indians' presence implicitly questions and relativizes a Western-centric version of the history of East Africa, wherein the emphasis upon the colonial encounter with the West tends to erase the relationship with India. *And* offers a more multi-faceted version of history by casting light upon the often overlooked entanglement among Europe, Africa and India. In its depiction of travel as well as its treatment of history, *And* foregrounds the cross-cultural connections between East Africa and India.

Affirming an "African" Identity

It would be too simplistic, however, to argue that Vassanji merely seeks to highlight the hitherto marginalized or neglected presence of Asians in East Africa; while he does attempt to conceptualize East Africa's past and present as products of cross-cultural connections with India, his observations are also

⁴ In his portrayal of thriving Asian Africans, Vassanji does not fail to notice that it is more difficult for Asian African women to have a meaningful life. While their community is getting smaller, gender norms strongly discourage them from participating in social activities outside it. He guesses that their sense of confinement at home and their worry about status within the community are significant spurs to emigrate (52, 203).

often made from what could be called an "African" perspective. Discussing Western colonial adventurers, for instance, he points out that a Zanzibari merchant named Tippu Tip traveled farther and longer than the more renowned European adventurers (199). The reference to this Arab-African trader-cum-traveler indicates that the purpose of Vassanji's revision of history is more than a mere retrieval of Asians' presence. Such an impulse to "write back" from an "African" point of view can be also detected in his criticism of the more recent Western travelers to the area. Referring to Evelyn Waugh and Paul Theroux, who allegedly continue to describe Africa as a dark continent, he states that "the people who live here are not shadows or mere creatures but human; all you need to do is touch them" (238). Speaking for "the people who live here," he implicitly characterizes his narrative as an attempt to redress condescending Western representations of the region from an African, not necessarily an Asian, perspective.

This implicit cultural self-positioning is closely related to the writer's strong sense of belonging to East Africa. In this respect, it is significant that the book's epigraph taken from Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* characterizes Vassanji's trips as returning journeys and East Africa as a place to return to. The phrase from Césaire's poem, "this land whose mud is flesh of my flesh," conveys Vassanji's intense identification with the land of Africa (*And*). Intriguingly, in quoting this phrase, Vassanji omits what immediately follows, namely the speaker's apostrophe to his native land: "I have long wandered and I will return towards the deserted hideousness of your wounds" ("J'ai longtemps erré et je reviens vers la hieure désertée de vos plaies"; my trans.; Césaire 21). If the phrase "the deserted hideousness of your wounds" evokes the political and cultural scar that colonialism inflicted on Césaire's homeland Martinique and black Africans, Vassanji's omission characterizes his return as much less traumatic. While he deplores Tanzania's various problems such as excessive dependence on foreign aid (327), his return is more conspicuously imbued with delight and excitement. For instance, he joyfully records how an immigration officer starts to treat him as a returnee, rather than a visitor with his Canadian passport, as soon as he pronounces "Uhuru Street" as native Swahili speakers would. The sense of being accepted as a fellow member of the imagined community of Tanzania makes him feel that he is genuinely "back" (16).

Such a strong sense of identification with East Africa might be to some extent influenced by the communal conflicts that Vassanji witnesses in India. On one level, he certainly responds to the country of his ancestral origin with much warmth. Nevertheless, the joy of confirming a diasporic bond uneasily co-exists with his deep shock at the intensity of communal violence. His first visit to India took place at a time when the relation between Hindus and Muslims was particularly tense due to the destruction of the Babri Mosque by the hand of Hindu fundamentalists (*Place Within xv*). In the subsequent trips, he realizes that in Gujarat, the region where his ancestors are from, Hindu fundamentalism has gained particularly strong momentum, which eventually results in the shockingly intense violence of 2002 (236).

These communal conflicts pose a serious challenge to Vassanji's diasporic identification with the land of ancestral origin and thereby seem to affect the narrative of *And* at least in two ways. First, India's violence makes him all the more clearly realize the danger of the concept of a fixed identity. He strongly criticizes the notion of the binary opposition between Hindu and Muslim (*Place Within* 82, 238), partly because fundamentalism would never admit the very presence of peoples such as Khojas, whose history is defined by religious heterogeneity. For this reason, he vigorously endorses cultural and religious syncretism, which he defines as one of the most fundamental characteristics of India (xii, 26). As Sayed points out, *Place Within* "becomes a symbolic act of political transgression as Vassanji questions the singular and linear history perpetuated by right-wing Hindu forces" (136). In fact, his aversion to the extreme form of identity politics seems to dampen his own exploration of his "Indian" roots; even the eventual visit to his ancestral village that comprises the narrative climax of *Place Within* is to some extent characterized by "a sense of detachment" (*And* 38).⁵ His identification with India becomes much more qualified, if not totally erased. Second, the awareness of his own difference from his new Indian acquaintances who more or less take the communal violence as part of their everyday life (*Place Within* 4) seems to make him re-examine the source of that difference, namely his Asian African background. One of the reasons why the exclusive concepts 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' are so alienating for him is that they "have not defined people for me in Africa (where we were simply called 'Wahindi,' Indians)" (238). Thus, if communal violence shatters Vassanji's notion of an Indian home (Sayed 125), it is possible that this disillusionment leads him to reconsider and embrace the particularities and heterogeneities of his East African background.

⁵ For a fuller analysis of the tension between Vassanji's visit to his ancestral village and his critique of fundamentalism, see my essay (49-51).

Given Vassanji's subtle distancing of himself from an India deeply riven by Hindu fundamentalism and the notion of damagingly exclusive identity that undergirds it, it is not surprising that the place he returns to in *And* is not necessarily the transplanted Asian community but the much larger geo-cultural space of East Africa. In this respect, it is revealing that the very title of the book defines "Kariakoo" as his home. According to his explanation, the urban space of Dar es Salaam was structured in a typically colonial manner, in that European colonizers and the colonized people lived a geo-culturally segregated life along racial dividing lines. Behind the European section which is closest to the sea lies the Indian quarter, and further behind is the African area called Kariakoo. The location of each residential area thus reflects the racial hierarchy in the colonial society. Interestingly, however, Vassanji's mother opened her store somewhere between Kariakoo and the Indian quarter (*And* 6). Of equal interest is that he unhesitatingly calls the former, rather than the latter, his home. Given that "[m]any people today—Asian or African—would balk at the thought of visiting the tumult of the Kariakoo area," his emotional attachment to it functions as "credentials" for his belonging to East Africa (232). This psychological closeness to Kariakoo is subtly, but crucially, different from how the quarter is described in his debut work *The Gunny Sack*. In it, although the quarter is where Africans and Asians meet (Desai 191), it is still characterized by "the darkness that lurked outside, that could stretch out its fingers and take you away." Its "frightening" and "mysterious" atmosphere derives from the very fact that it is predominantly an African area (*Gunny Sack* 88). In contrast, *And* characterizes Kariakoo more positively as an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous space where Asians and Africans co-exist and interact. Vassanji emphasizes that while the colonial authorities tried to separate the Asian quarter and the African Kariakoo by creating an open space between them, many Indians did live in the latter and conducted their business with African customers (23, 263). The geo-cultural boundaries between Indians and Africans are described as more porous than are commonly assumed. Correspondingly, the sense of social and cultural instabilities that his earlier works claim plagues Asians in Africa seems to have largely disappeared. Elsewhere he even goes so far as to say that in East Africa he is free from a sense of "insecurities, with a fractured being and an in-betweenness" that accompanies his life in Toronto despite its material comfort (170). He now completely feels at home in the multi-racial space of East Africa, the microcosm of which is Kariakoo.

This strong sense of belonging to East Africa refracts Vassanji's observations of Asian Africans. Many scholars point out the deep division in his attitude towards the Asian community. Dan Ojwang, for instance, argues that "Vassanji's fiction bears witness to the contradiction inherent in the imagining of community: the comforts of home are always haunted by the coercive moments of their consolidation" (104). To put it differently, many of Vassanji's works explore the paradoxical nature of home and community. As Rosemary Marangoly George points out, home is fundamentally exclusive, in that it is based upon "a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions" (2). Therefore, Vassanji's writing highlights not only the sense of belonging that the Asian African community offers to its members but also the social and psychological costs for maintaining its boundaries. This ambivalence towards the Asian African community is particularly noticeable in *And*, because of its foregrounding of the writer's sense of belonging to East Africa. As I have already argued, Vassanji on one level does seek to highlight and celebrate Asians' presence in East Africa. At the same time, however, he is very critical of their insularity.

For instance, on one trip, he and his African travel companion Joseph—his presence itself is a significant indicator of the extent to which Vassanji's travel is not confined by ethnic boundaries—have an evening meal at a small restaurant run by a Khoja family. After some pleasant conversation with the restaurant owner about their background, Vassanji is urged to wash his hands inside her house, a gesture he deems equivalent to inviting him to her home. On this experience, he has this to say: "It's been a moving experience, my own tribal connection, in a dark little Swahili gully in a little town in Tanzania; and that modesty and simplicity, that mutuality. It's my inspiration. And yet the thought lingers: why didn't she invite Joseph inside? I was family, he wasn't" (161). On the one hand, this episode enables him to affirm his "own tribal connection" far away from their land of ancestral origin. The common diasporic background immediately and satisfactorily creates a sense of bond between the traveler and the woman host. At the same time, however, her pointed exclusion of Joseph makes him hesitate to celebrate the occasion wholeheartedly. He is somewhat upset, not only because her behavior is yet another example of "a permanent self-identity," the perniciousness of which he witnesses in India (367), but also because her attitude implicitly raises a question as to the viability of his model of an inclusive East Africa. As if to present a counter-example and thereby defend his vision, Vassanji a few pages later records another occasion on which his African friend and a Gujarati restaurant owner exchange pleasantries in Swahili (167). As is the case with the aforementioned conversation between Vassanji and the immigration officer, a good command of Swahili functions as an index of the extent to

which Asians have rooted themselves in East Africa. It is possible, he seems to imply, for Asians and Africans to cross ethnic and linguistic boundaries and have an enduring sense of common belonging.

Vassanji's desire to envision a more inclusive East Africa leads him to reconsider Tanzania's nationalism. As I have already pointed out, he deplores how much the socialist government's nationalization policies wrecked the lives of Asian Africans. At the same time, however, he also thinks highly of the country's nationalism in that it outweighed ethnic differences and created a sense of common belonging. For this reason, Vassanji proudly recalls his National Service duty as "profoundly, positively transforming" experience, as it gave him a precious opportunity to travel across the country and meet Tanzanians from different ethnic and regional backgrounds (139-40). He goes so far as to re-evaluate Tanzania's first president Julius Nyerere to some extent, for his creating "a sense of nationhood, the people's sense of themselves as Tanzanians" (324), even though it was his policy of nationalizing private property that resulted in the exodus of many Asian Africans. He also introduces an African acquaintance's view that the government's takeover of property gave him a chance to live side by side with an Indian family, as a result of which his son is now a good friend of his Indian neighbor's daughter (10). While Dan Ojwang thinks that Vassanji's early writing "disavows the rhetoric of independence and nationalism altogether for a diasporic ideal of marginality" (163), the writer in this latest travel book seems to find in Tanzania's nationalism a possibility of dissolving mutually exclusive ethnic boundaries and generating a more supple sense of belonging to the same nation.

Seeking to further re-evaluate nationalism's potential to unify peoples of different ethnic backgrounds, Vassanji surveys how Asian writers responded to the emergence of an East African national literary consciousness around the time of political independence. In his reading, most of these writers were reluctant to conduct an examination of their cultural particularities, an examination Vassanji thinks a pre-requisite to produce works rooted in Asian Africa and by extension in the larger Africa, mainly due to the real or imaginary pressure from their community (350). Here again, the Asian community's conformity discouraged them from participating in the national literature. Still, some Asian writers such as Bahadur Tejani, Vassanji argues, did explore the possibility of going beyond "a mere racial coexistence" and forging "a single identity" that would subsume both Africans and Asians. In this sense, they "spoke confidently of a collective 'we' and a collective future" (352). For Vassanji, those writers were the new "(Asian) African" (340); their sense of belonging to Africa is so strong to bracket, if not totally erase, the Asian component of their identity. Their courageous willingness to step across ethnic boundaries had potential to create a supra-ethnic literary consciousness and a genuinely inclusive nation. However, the precious creative momentum was quickly lost due to both the Asian community's insularity and the rapid disappearance of political and cultural ideals in post-colonial East Africa. While feeling regretful about the missed opportunity, Vassanji ends his observation by referring to a tribute that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has recently paid to the Asians' involvement in the culture of post-independent East Africa (354-55). Even though Vassanji partly feels that such praise comes too late, his narrative does imply that times are changing, in that the hitherto neglected contributions by Asians to the wider national culture finally begin to be recognized and appreciated. By highlighting such earlier efforts by Asians, Vassanji not only identifies and pays respect to an Asian African literary tradition; he also significantly expands it by foregrounding the Asians' firmer sense of belonging to East Africa. At the same time, *And* itself appears as a latest example of "(Asian) African" writing.

It is therefore not surprising that Vassanji's travel memoir, particularly in its final chapters, strongly endorses the arrival of a new era in which racial difference does not matter as much as before. This seems partly related to the improvement of social status of Asians in East Africa in the last two decades of the twentieth century; in Tanzania, they were regarded as its economy's saviors when the IMF's program started to be implemented, whereas in Kenya, the country's earnest pursuit of capitalist policies helped to improve the position of Asians (Oonk 260). Nevertheless, given that Vassanji's early writing, which actually dates from the time that saw such improvement, consistently thematizes the difficulties of establishing meaningful cross-racial interactions, his optimism in *And* is very conspicuous. In Nairobi, where "the bitter whiff remained of the acrimony of racism and colonial rule," he "speak[s] as an African," and is surprised to find that such a self-definition is warmly accepted (365-66). At one primary school, he is introduced to its African pupils as "an African like you" (366). A genuinely inclusive Africa is beginning to emerge, so the narrative seems to imply.

As if to underscore this point, Vassanji's narrative ends with a scene in which he is invited as an honorary guest to a graduation ceremony of a nursery school. While this school is run by those whom he calls "people ... from my tribe" (369), namely Khojas, he is moved to find that "[t]he majority of the kids are Asian, but there are some who are African and mixed-race, and all belong to the community" (370). The emergence of a racially diverse community delights him, precisely because such a community could be an answer to the problem of Asian Africans' belonging to East Africa, which his writing has

consistently explored from various angles. Dan Ojwang perceptively points out that Vassanji's early works often "dramatize the tension between the necessity for the diaspora to maintain the integrity of community and the need to accept their hybrid status in the face of claims to racial purity" (135). *And* highlights that Asians increasingly endorse both their Indian heritage and their sense of being rooted in Africa. At the same time, this latest travel book also emphasizes that such a "hybrid status" is beginning to be accepted by the wider East African society. These two factors enable Vassanji to affirm Asian Africans' belonging to the land and society of East Africa. The graduation ceremony, which he takes as an epitome of "the new Tanzania, the future" (*And* 370), offers a glimpse of the possibility for Asian Africans of retaining both a sense of being part of their Asian community as well as of East Africa. Towards the end of the journey, Vassanji experiences what most of his Asian African characters cannot: a confident pride in being Asian African. Although the book's title declares that Kariakoo was his home, in an important sense it still *is*. It is East Africa that gives him a sense of genuine belonging.⁶

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