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Migritude’s Decolonial Lessons

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I trace the deep time of the Indian Ocean through and against which Shailja Patel fabulates the notion of migritude and, in particular, what its valences are for solidarities between black and brown Kenyans and other south-south relationships. Attentive to the multiple voices she invites into the text and the material objects that she imbues with those voices, I show how Patel animates histories otherwise obscured toward a larger political project of reckoning with Empire’s violences. The essay in three movements meditates on (1) the transmutation of Migritude across generic forms; (2) in the book text, the grafting of Patel’s familial history onto (macro) History, which ruptures the telos of modernity by exposing its violences; and (3) the consciousness raising that occurs as Patel accounts for the sexual violence British soldiers perpetrated upon Kenyan women and children from the colonial to the postcolonial period. Migritude’s decolonial lessons move trans-temporally toward the past to repair relationships between women in the Global South, and into our present and its conditional futures to imagine new solidarities and alliances in the heartlands of the dispossessed.

KEYWORDS  Indian Ocean; migration; East African Asian Literature; British colonialism; feminist studies

Shailja Patel’s Migritude (2010) is a multi-polar movement narrative1 that weaves together numerous histories: of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa; of those South Asian Africans who migrate west to Europe or North America; of those who turn east toward Australia or return to South Asia; as well as those, who like her, after time in the Global North, return to Africa. These transit lines visualise not only the paths migrants take, they reveal circuits of capital across contingent time as the narrator describes her family’s first migration from South Asia to East Africa and, later, of family members who travel to England and the United States, and of those who remain in (or return to) East Africa. The migrations that Patel focuses on the most are the ones mediated through EuroAmerican colonial/imperial power from the 19th century onwards. Thus, even in
this text, much of the earlier histories of movement and migration across the Indian Ocean have been relegated to the margins of memory; the introverted attitude of postcolonial nation-states with their hardened territorial borders drive the momentum. However, as Jeremy Prestholdt (2015) and Christopher J Lee (2013) have noted, the Indian Ocean’s significant histories of connectivity did not disappear with the formation of the postcolonial nation-state. In fact, they both demonstrate the enlivened political and economic partnerships across the Indian Ocean rim as well as note (especially Prestholdt) the enduring desire for and persistent narration of a shared history that continues to undergird the state-sanctioned affiliations. Buoyed by this work, as well as Migritude’s own peripheral investment in those earlier histories — they are accounted for in the world historical timeline appended to the book edition — this essay makes a case for the decolonial lesson of migritude in the context of Indian Ocean studies. Here, I take decolonial to enact an ongoing process of disavowing and, indeed, dismantling the structures, policies, and institutions of European colonisation. Whereas anti-colonial movements marked a particular period of struggle and imagined, in large part, the nation-state to be the desired outcome, a decolonial perspective reveals how the postcolonial nation-state has often continued to disenfranchise the vast majority of its people.

The term migritude is a neologism that emerges from the words ‘migrant’ and ‘attitude’. In his foreword to Migritude, Vijay Prashad traces the relationship between the two terms, locating immigration in the vectors of imperialism. He writes, ‘[i]mmigration is always already about mobile capital and immobile race’ (Prashad in Patel 2010 iv) and thus he connects the condition of the migrant to the category of race as it has been articulated within this framework of European colonialism and imperialism. This focus on the racialised experiences of migrants in an imperial framework undoubtedly recalls the 20th century Négritude movement pioneered by Francophone African and Caribbean poets and writers, including the Martinican Aimé Césaire and Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor. For Césaire, who coined the term, and Senghor, who elaborated upon it, négritude functioned in direct contradiction to the ways in which the colonial-imperial world structured blackness (as an inferiority). Similarly, Patel cultivates an attitude against the imperial articulation of racialised migrant experiences. She describes migritude as the ‘voice of a generation … who speak[s] unapologetically, fiercely, lyrically for themselves’ (2010, 143). On her website, she calls it a ‘reassertion of the “dignity” of outsider status in its play on “négritude” and “attitude”’
(Patel 2010, 143). Elaborating on the relationship between négritude and migritude, Patel explains that the former created political and cultural spaces where the latter could ‘germinate’ (2010, 144). In this way, Patel not only grafts an ideological connection between the two, but opens up temporal and spatial dimensions of interconnectedness between a period of anti-colonial independence movements and the neo-colonial/imperial structures in which we continue to be embedded. Indeed, as Prashad notes, there is a relationship between the ‘compass of suffering’ which for Césaire was pivotal in the making of négritude that finds another life in migritude, which for Prashad is the ‘compass of suffering’ in the heartlands of power (Prashad in Patel 2010 iv).

Whereas Prashad reflects more so on the ties that bind migrants to one another in imperial spaces, this essay attends to the migrants who are not in the heartlands of power. My readings of Patel’s work, specifically Migritude (2010), consider the experience of the South Asian diaspora in eastern Africa with attention to the millennia-old multilateral exchange that shaped the Indian Ocean World prior to European arrival in the region. What, then, is migritude in this context? Migritude. Mi-grit-(t)ude.3 Mi/my/me- sutured to an exertion of -grit- articulated with an attitude. Mi/my/-me reflects on the self, perhaps an unmoored self, attempting to locate itself, instantiate itself. Grit points to the labouring black and brown bodies, cultivating colonial plantations and building railroads, both of which played a fundamental role in European colonial powers’ ability to extract resources from eastern Africa to import them into the heartlands of power. -(t)ude, named here as the colloquialism ‘tude (its formal iteration being attitude) is also a form of labour: the attitude that labourers must manage that dare not betray their exhaustion alongside the other violences they endure physically and emotionally; but, this ‘tude is also the attitude of a collective reservoir from which they drink to fortify themselves, to resist colonial and imperial violences. It is my grit that accrues to create an attitude against the forces which seek to dominate me, my people, us. Migritude. This is the gift Patel brings home to Kenya rather than the expected gifts of ‘German cars, iPods, and designer handbags’ (2010, 96). It is a hard fought for gift, which refused her any easy victories, even in her storytelling practice. She tells us in the shadow book of ‘Prelude: How Ambi Became Paisley’ that she ‘wanted the story to be a one-way straightforward colonial appropriation. Instead [she] had to engage with multiple migrations, roll back several more eras of history.’4 This essay follows in the practice of ‘engag[ing]
with multiple migrations’ and probes the meaning and manifestation of migritude beyond the heartlands of power.

In this essay, I trace the deep time of the Indian Ocean through and against which Patel fabulates the notion of migritude and, in particular, what its valences are for solidarities between black and brown Kenyans and other south-south relationships. Attentive to the multiple voices she invites into the text and the material objects that she imbues with those voices, I show how Patel animates histories otherwise obscured toward a larger political project of reckoning with the truths of imperial violences. I first demonstrate how the concept of migritude that underpins the performance and book narrative draws its critical energy, in part, from its own mutations in form and how each generic shift speaks an experience of migritude that is elusive in a different form. I suggest that such fugitivity in form is a decolonial praxis that explicitly attends to the audience-artist relationship, creating a dialogic engagement based on the form in which one encounters it. Second, I illuminate the utility of the timeline included within the book form, which grafts a familial (micro) history onto the (macro) History of an oceanic and global world. Here, I suggest that even as time asserts itself linearly, there are moments of rupture — gestures toward the deep time5 of the Indian Ocean — that expose the telos of modernity and the postcolonial nation-state by making present their violences. The final portion of the essay examines Patel’s accounting of one form of such violence: the sexual violences perpetrated by British soldiers upon Kenyan women and children from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Attending to the theatrical and rhetorical choices Patel makes in these pieces, I argue that Migritude’s embodied practice of unraveling received histories paves necessary pathways toward actualising justice for the dispossessed.

1. Art is a migrant.6

Art that stays intact
will be retired.
– Shailja Patel ‘Please Do Not Touch’7

The itinerancy of art manifests in Migritude’s numerous formal iterations. They testify to the proliferation of perspectives that are part and parcel of the scope and experiences of human migrations — forced, coerced, and voluntary — that Patel documents in her work. Beginning as a collection of poems before migrating into a one-act performance, Migritude now
circulates primarily in a book form that refuses to confine itself to a single genre. In a preface, Patel recounts the generic shifts *Migritude* has undergone and the locations in which she performed the piece prior to its taking shape as a book. Between 2005 and 2008, this performance version toured across the world, from San Francisco (USA), where Patel was living at the time, to Zanzibar, Austria, Kenya, Italy, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. In fact, LietoColle, an Italian publisher, first put out a printed version — a bilingual stage-script in English and Italian. In 2010, Kaya Press produced the version I refer to throughout this essay. As *Migritude* shifts in form, it adapts — adding, losing, mixing. Its generic reincarnations speak to the multiple creative outlets through which *Migritude* appears in the world and how each form honours its collaborators. The mutation of the text into its book form owes much to its conceptual underpinnings of migrancy and mobility and is crucial to understanding its decolonial lessons.

These movements in form and genre expose different modes of storytelling and inform one another, for the book iteration is highly performative in its own right as it mixes visuals and texts to stretch beyond Patel’s authorial perspective by incorporating her mother’s voice as well as speeches and oral testimonies from a range of sources. Such textual interactivity destabilises the performed script reproduced herein with an accompanying reflective narrative. Further, it is highly mobile in how it morphs between topics, manifesting histories that have been relegated to the margins by colonial and postcolonial states. It is divided into four sections: The first section, entitled Migritude, reproduces the stage-script and incorporates complementary visuals motifs. The second section is, according to Patel, ‘an extended debrief’ a ‘behind the scenes … and after the fact vignettes [that] illuminate[s] … by offering context.’ Section three — The Making and Other Poems — collects poems that ‘laid the groundwork for Migritude.’ The fourth and final section, The Journey, consists of an interwoven personal and historical timeline of events as well as two interviews.

In addition to its basis in visuals, texts, and performance, *Migritude* makes material speak. For instance, in the theatrical production Patel repurposes the trousseau of saris her exasperated mother gave her when she grew tired of waiting for Patel to marry. Collected over 30 years, these saris range from her childhood training sari to those reserved for important family functions, such as marriage. The saris function in two key ways: their primary purpose is in costuming and props, which I elaborate upon later in this essay; additionally, they advertise the show, providing potential audiences with some context about the performance and as
Patel would put it offering them something else, too. Catch phrases advertising the theatrical performances included ‘come for the saris and stay for the politics’ or ‘come for the mehndis and stay for the migritude.’ The combination of the visual image of the saris with the evocation of more to come intertwines recognisable — and, arguably, orientalised — products of South Asian culture to capture ‘mainstream audiences who wouldn’t normally be interested in “political theatre”’ (Patel 2010, 141), yet her use of the saris to tell the stories of the violences Empire enacts on women disturbs the audience’s ability to see these saris as mere cultural objects evacuated of material histories and politics. While these saris do not and, indeed, cannot appear in the book form as they do in the theatrical iteration, Patel reproduces vignettes of how they were received and commented upon by a group of her friends and the director of Migritude. In fact, the substitute rhetorical gesture of incorporating the saris via reflections in the shadow book and as a discussion among friends and colleagues demonstrates Patel’s commitment to making the saris meaningful in a politically-charged way. Readers who come to the narrative through the book form, which is the primary basis of this essay, might be disappointed by our inability to access the actual saris and how Patel not only wears them but manipulates them toward different purposes in the theatrical production; however, the book form continues to mobilise the sari through direct engagement (such as in ‘Swore I’d Never Wear Clothes I Couldn’t Run or Fight In’), the reflections in shadow book, as well as the descriptions and discussions compiled in ‘What Came Out of the Suitcase’.

The Kaya edition of Migritude — a collaboration with artists Chez Bryan Ong, Jen Chou, and Pritsana Kootint-Hadiatmodjo — offers an intricate play between the textual and visual that both revives the sari-performance narrative relationship and refuses to replicate it exactly. The lack of exact reproduction of the saris prevents readers from evacuating the sari’s political purpose and, as Patel puts it in her acknowledgements, the ‘intertextuality of content with shape, design, colour, and texture, have challenged [her] to deliver verbal potency that matches the material poetics of the pages’ (2010, 153). The motifs throughout the text articulate a visual rubric of violence. Among the most prevalent recurring images are forms of transportation, such as trains and airplanes. Driven as the text is by the notion of migration, this comes as no surprise and indeed the representation of planes is not of commercial travel, but military, or fighter, planes. Even as vehicles of transportation — in some ways — both types of vehicular imagery call forth capitalist militarised violence, from
the violent system of indenture used to build railways during British occupation of East Africa to the military aircraft, including drones, that surveil and bomb regions across the Global South. Other repeating imagery includes scientific diagrams of body parts (limbs, organs, bones) often represented in isolation from the rest of the body and labelled as they might be in a textbook. The particular form of representation of the human body echoes in the rendering of animals and insects as well. Together on the page, they speak softly of the scientific racism of European Enlightenment that lent credence to colonial missions.

Beyond that, the mobility of the text underscores the necessity of multiple artistic and storytelling traditions required to bring silenced narratives to the fore. Movement in the text’s formal manifestations resonates with the book’s polyvocal narration, as well as its shift between Patel and her family’s personal narrative and the historical events of colonialism and imperialism globally and in East Africa and Kenya specifically. A movement narrative like Migritude harnesses the deep multi-textuality and plural linguistic interplay that is part and parcel of the Indian Ocean world, historic and contemporary. Throughout her works, Patel spins together Kiswahili and English, and coaxes South Asian languages such as Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, and Punjabi alongside them. The prelude begins with a Gujarati proverb, ‘You cannot rush mangoes to ripeness.’11 Time intervenes into the present in Gujarati, cautioning hurriedness, asking for patience from the audience. Such temporal inversions and interruptions into the time of the text and of its viewing/reading through Gujarati and Sanskrit proverbs that frame each section call up the deep time of the Indian Ocean. This time, which Patel catalogues, from 800–1500, first as a time of trade and exchange, is also the time of the rooting and routing of Indian Ocean languages, when Kiswahili — spoken across East Africa — emerges as a mixture of Bantu, Arabic, and South Asian languages. Patel calls forth South Asian languages like Sanskrit and Gujarati into a Kenyan/African space where she was born and raised, into a UK and US space, where she developed the project under discussion, and into a global space in which Migritude the book travels with or without the artist’s physical accompaniment.

II. Migritude’s Indian Ocean Imaginaries

The notion of movement underpins both the narrative and concept of migritude. Having considered its formal innovations across poetry, performance, and book publication, I now focus on the chronotope of the
text. In particular, I contend that *Migritude* develops a theory and enacts a practice of plural temporalities that are a key feature of Indian Ocean studies. Taking a cue from Tom Odhiambo and Godwin Siundu’s introduction (2014) to the inaugural issue of the journal of *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* where they discuss this publication’s journey, I now turn to *Migritude*’s final section, ‘The Journey’. I approach it from a perspective not dissimilar to Odhiambo and Siundu who called this journal ‘a journey into the past as well as the future, literally and literarily’, stressing that ‘the metaphor of the journey is significant’ and promising not ‘to be restrained by a cartographer’s vision’ because of ‘the interconnections and intertextualities that define both the subject of study … and the practices of scholarship itself’ (Odhiambo and Siundu 2014, 4). Their journey as well as the one articulated in *Migritude*’s timeline are indeed temporally and spatially significant for how they craft the intersections of plural temporalities in a multi-sited manner. The main script of *Migritude* divides itself into two sections: Part I: Nairobi, Kenya (1972–1989) and Part II: United Kingdom & United States (1990–2004). Yet, these temporalities and geopolitical spaces only offer a partial view of the more global cartography the text traverses. As my focus on ‘The Journey’ portion of the book demonstrates, *Migritude* easily elongates the relationship between Africa and Asia, moving it out of the common container of a colonial relation.

The timeline included in ‘The Journey’ largely represents the historical events of the region that comprise the contemporary nation-state of Kenya as well as its connections to British colonisation and American imperialism; at times, the perspective zooms out enough to reference other regional colonial powers, such as the German occupation in what is today Tanzania as well as the European scramble for Africa concretised at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. Laced within this (macro) History is the Patel family narrative, which appears most explicitly only from 1982 onwards, even as *Migritude*’s audiences are aware of her family’s much longer relationship to East Africa.12 The brevity of her own family’s experience seems especially striking considering the vastness of the timescape she captures: the first entry is in 6th century BCE, the recording of the ‘earliest depiction of boteh / ambi / paisley in Central Asia’ (2010, 129), and the final entry is *Migritude*’s publication in book form by Kaya13 Press in 2010. However, the second entry gives us some sense of a larger shared history between East Africa and South Asia as it takes us from 800 to 1500, a period Patel describes as an era of ‘flourishing Indian Ocean Trade between inland African Kingdoms, [the] East Africa[n] Coast, [the] Arabian Peninsula, India, and SE Asia’ (2010, 129). The inclusion of this
period of exchange and interaction is a curious, if at times submerged, feature of Patel’s narrative, for much of what unfolds in the book engages more robustly with the colonial period and its accompanying vio-
lences. Including this earlier history of the Indian Ocean World, resurfaces the possibilities of such engagement in the postcolonial period. And, as Isabel Hofmeyr notes ‘[a]n Indian Ocean optic introduces longer time frames which relativise European empires and their legacies … Instead the Indian Ocean world is always already imperial, semi-imperial, colonial and anti-colonial at the same time’ (2015, 3). Thus, we are pushed to con-
sider, what are the obligations that black and brown Kenyans have to one another, not only as citizens of the contemporary Kenyan nation-state, but as peoples whose cultures have a deeper and more dynamic history with one another. Effectively, it asks, how else might we consider the origin of black and brown Kenyans.

Each proverb in Migritude’s titular section deals with the concept of time as if to signify that migrants continuously occupy more than one temporal location. It is perhaps unsurprising then that the final section of the book, ‘The Journey’ opens with the following Sanskrit proverb: ‘Beginnings are imperfect, like the smoke fire releases before it burns.’14 To call the journey — a timeline and interviews15 — a beginning probes one of the central conceits of migritude. It suggests that shifting temporal frames intrude, alter, revise received state-sanctioned histories. Placing ‘The Journey’ at the very end of the collection unsettles the very concept of linear time as it places a guiding tool like the timeline as an endpoint, yet Patel marks it as a beginning through the usage of the Sanskrit proverb. Her readers are forced into a referential circularity as we cycle between ‘Migritude’, ‘Shadow Book’, ‘The Making’, and ‘The Journey’; each section provokes the reader to consider skipping ahead, moving backwards — a series of returns in which the journey could have begun in any section. While the performance version of Migritude is a chronology controlled by the artist, the book iteration makes it possible for the reader — if not downright insists upon us — to refuse the prevalent ordering of time. It invites returns, meditations, revelations. In that way, it spurs us into this migratory space, keeping us on the move.

While much of the timeline follows an expected progressive chronol-
ogy, there are rare moments where it recoils from the linear trajectory it seems to be on. There are two such notable moments: the first indication in the timeline is 1965, which points to one possible beginning of British soldiers’ crimes of sexual violence against Kenyan women. In the accom-
panying description,16 readers learn that these sexual assaults are not
isolated to the immediate aftermath of Kenyan independence but were ongoing until the recent past of 2001. What is elaborated upon in the description rather than stated in the time intervals on the left-hand side of the page is one of the critical accountings of Empire on the bodies of women. Although readers of the text know that Patel, and the global community, learned of these events through news reports that emerged around 2002, Patel’s choice to re-write the timeline, so to speak — to locate these events in the time of their occurrence rather than when they entered her worldview — begins to disorder the sanitised narrative of post-independence Kenya and its relationship with its coloniser, Britain. Springing forward in the timeline from 1965, these rapes come to haunt the events that follow: the 1966 ban on opposition parties and its 1991 rescind; Idi Amin’s 1971 rise to power in Uganda and 1972 expulsion of Indians; the International Monetary Fund’s imposition of structural adjustment programs in the early 1980s that wreaked economic havoc for decades to follow; 17 1982 military coup in Kenya, which resulted in Patel’s US-based family sponsoring her and her Kenyan family for immigration. Even as we understand the different ways these political decisions perpetrated violence upon the dispossessed, it becomes impossible to deny the tactic of sexual assault deployed by the colonial and postcolonial state.

Sexual violence, which Patel centres in pieces such as ‘History Lesson’, ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’, and ‘Maasai Women Rioting [Mother’s Voice]’, is also at the margins of Migritude as evidenced in this timeline. However, being on the margins does not mean relegation to the dustbin of history. Rather, the margins frame the centre and draw increased attention to the experiences of sexual violence that intentionally catalogued into the timeline of Empire demonstrates how patriarchal states inflict violence upon women. That these assaults persisted into the postcolonial period and have yet to offer justice to survivors reveals the deep imbrication between the contemporary postcolonial state and colonial-imperial England. Patel’s reassertion of a history that the colonial and postcolonial state alike continues to evade underscores the need for ongoing decolonial movements, for even as the postcolonial state has won a sort of independence from its former coloniser, there remain structures of dependence that dispossess the majority of people in postcolonial nation-states the world over. The need for decolonisation persists into postcolonial time, making the notion of the decolonial both an antecedent to anti-colonial movements and an aspect of our continuing struggles for more just futures.
The second notable recursion in the timeline follows Patel’s sponsorship for US immigration. As I noted above, Patel’s US-based aunt began the visa sponsorship process for her family in 1982, yet it took until 1996 for Patel to receive the appropriate papers, permitting her to live and work in the US. These series of events are documented rather curiously in ‘The Journey’, where the year 1991 and the unbanning of opposition parties in Kenya interrupts the linear time that carries Patel from receiving papers for US immigration (1996) to Daniel Arap Moi’s KANU party’s defeat in the 2002 Kenyan elections. 2002 appears as a pivotal year in many ways: Patel completes her poem ‘Shilling Love’, which perhaps best represents migritude in the ‘heartlands of power’ (2010, iv) to borrow Prashad’s phrase and it is during this time that she participates in the anti-war campaign against the US-led ‘Shock and Awe’ campaign in Iraq. Nevertheless, the entry for 2002 is framed by Kenyan political news: Moi’s defeat and the legal victory of Kenyan pastoralists against the British Ministry of Defence in the case of unexploded bombs and other ammunition left in Kenya by the British Army. Even as this section of the timeline appears to be devoted to Patel’s trajectory in the UK and US (as evidenced by the time she attaches to that period of her life in the titular section), Kenya refuses to release its hold on her; instead, it continues, continuing to structure her relationship to global geopolitics and its effects on her artistic production.

*Migritude* is widely read (and understandably so) in the context of Euro-American colonialism and imperialism in the Global South. In fact, the book is celebrated as such; one indexing of this is when CNN calls Patel ‘the face of globalisation as a people-centered phenomenon of migration and change’ (n.p., *Migritude* Patel bio). However, I find this review blunts the critical impact of Patel’s work. In fact, Patel’s contributions to an Indian Ocean literary and cultural archive mitigates the simultaneous hyper- and in-visibility we have come to associate with Africa, the idea of Africa, as well as African people and their heterogeneous cultures. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall’s essay, ‘Writing the World from an African Metropolis’ (2004) speaks to the plurality of African thought and art, resonating with the manifold temporalities of the Indian Ocean World. Similar to how Hofmeyr argues for the relativisation of Western history through an Indian Ocean frame, Mbembe and Nuttall suggest that one practice to counter the singular way Africa is signified is to ‘draw on multiple models of time so as to avoid one-way causal models … to account for the multiplicity of pathways and trajectories of change’ (2004, 349). They note how numerous academic disciplines and creative forms ‘have long seen Africans as fundamentally and even essentially
rural creatures’ (2004, 352). Once more, the Indian Ocean is instructive due to its focus on littorals and their cosmopolitanisms that pre-date European conceptualisation of such diversity. Demonstrably evident, too, in Patel’s work are African figures such as the Maasai whose global image does relegate them to ‘rural’ yet consumable. However, unlike corporate Western media that dutifully recirculates such images, further inscribing it into the colonial tourist imaginary, Patel offers a counter depiction through the testimonies of Maasai women who survived sexual violence. Her overwhelming focus in Migritude is on Empire. She does not ‘relativise’ Western history in exactly the same way that Hofmeyr proposes. Rather, the practice of ‘sideways’ or ‘lateral exchanges’ that Hofmeyr attributes to the Indian Ocean resonates throughout Patel’s oeuvre as she crafts relations between black and brown women, drawing on a range of feminists of colour, including US-based black internationalists, Audre Lorde and June Jordan. Through a global network of black and brown women’s solidarities, manifest through intellectual and artistic exchange, Patel offers a counter network to the cartography crafted by the machinations of imperial violence.

In numerous interviews, compiled in Migritude or widely available elsewhere on the internet, Patel speaks to her responsibility as poet as one of being a truth teller. She tells Sonya Renee Taylor (2014) that her ‘job as a poet is to wake myself up and take responsibility for learning the truth … doing hard working, looking beyond headline stories, being willing to interrogate data, structure, systems. Then it’s my job to create the conditions, in my poems, where others can wake up to these truths.’ Patel’s intertwined artistic and activist practices productively confound audiences who are expecting a neatly packaged, easily consumable image of Africa. In so doing, Patel exemplifies Mbembe and Nuttall’s (2004) call to move beyond human rights and developmentalist discourse of African experiences that simply datafy life on the continent, often evacuating it of local contexts, histories, and norms. Her mutating transnational practice of migritude moves against the overrepresented image of the rural African by invoking pwani, eastern Africa’s coastal communities as she invites us to remember the centrality of these communities and their worldmaking capacities across time and space. In fact, pwani is not only on the margins of Migritude, but an enduring relationship that Patel explores in later works, such as the second cycle of Migritude performed under the title ‘Bwagamoyo’, her homage to Bi Kidude, and her activist work in the communities on Lamu.
III. Beckon Forward the Histories that Haunt

By pluralising the genres it inhabits and the languages and histories it weaves together, *Migritude’s* itinerancy offers readers access to a range of affective engagement points, including silences and erasures that Patel discovers in her journey, as well as how she repairs them. Rather than offer us wholly new narratives that revise from below the historical events of colonialism and imperialism, *Migritude* fractures how we came to know and how we remember the histories we have been told through juxtaposition of text and visuals, or alternating voices and perspectives in the text. This creates a series of small incisions in calcified knowledge, initiating a process for its readers — one that asks us to question continuously received wisdoms, particularly as they appear in institutional forms. For Patel, this is what art is: ‘as much process as product’ (2010, 128).

If Patel situates this fracturing of history as necessary, what exactly is the calcified knowledge she works against? In an interview with Emanuele Monegato, Patel says ‘A whole generation of Africans have been denied the truth of their own history, and so we do not really know ourselves, or our countries’ (2010, 137). She adds, by way of an introduction to the selected timeline included in the text: ‘Migritude is political history told through personal story [and] the tale of a creative journey[: it] show[s] that Empires reproduce themselves; that history buried becomes history repeated’ (2010, 128). The mixture of the personal and political is one of the gifts of migritude; through her own itinerancy Patel cultivates a perspective that questions and speaks back to the official history of the Kenyan independence movement. A piece called ‘History Lesson’ offers one such illumination as it moves back and forth in time in a call and response sequence between the present and Patel’s childhood education at a Nairobi primary school as well as the Patel’s present perspective and oral testimonies of women who survived British concentration camps in Kenya.

Patel recalls from her childhood folk tales of Gikuyu and Mumbi as well as songs about the Maji Maji uprising in Tanzania and Shaka the Zulu king that are set to the tune of popular music such as Boney M’s ‘River of Babylon’ or ‘My Favourite Things’. Pointing to the history they did learn, she quotes Jomo Kenyatta, speaking 10 months after independence. He says, ‘Let this be the day on which all of us commit ourselves to erase from our minds all the hatreds and the difficulties of those years which now belong to history. Let us agree that *we shall never refer to the past*
… in concern for the reconstruction of our country and the vitality of Kenya’s future’ (qtd 17, emphasis mine). The past Kenyatta refers to is the history Patel did not learn at Hospital Hill Primary School. It is the histories of the Mau Mau uprising from 1952 to 1960 during which more than a million Kenyans were incarcerated and tortured, of whom approximately 25,000 were murdered. Nor did she learn of women’s oral testimonies that detailed the physical and psychic violence enacted upon them by British soldiers (people of all genders, for the record). Such events were pushed into crevices, away from popular memory and official education about Kenya’s anti-colonial struggles and independence. Patel brings them back into view, detailing the multiple forms of sexual violence endured: rape by means of bottles filled with mixtures of petrol and water, or cayenne pepper and water; rapes that took place ‘in full view of everyone’ (2010, 17). She accounts for the children who died from sickness and neglect as their mothers were forced to work without being able to care for them.

Working against institutional histories that, historically, have favoured masculinist narratives, Patel highlights the crimes against women and children. In the ‘Shadow Book’ reflection of ‘History Lesson’, Patel explains how she uses the crimson sari from her trousseau for this piece. She writes, ‘the sari shaped the choreography of this piece. Told me it wanted to be knotted for the oral testimonies of the women in camps. Each knot a dead child’ (2010, 80). In the performance, the knotted sari sits in a circle on stage; once Patel has completed the knots, she ‘gather [s] it up in her arms,’ claiming, ‘it feels like a part of my body … a glowing rope of knots, a testament to children killed by Empire’ (2010, 80). Here, Patel fuses the body of historical knowledge to the material object of the sari to her own human body. History is embodied; it is something we wear; and it is something we carry — something that can speak to us and around us. Vanita Reddy (2016) describes Patel’s refashioning of the sari as part of a developing ‘decolonising aesthetic [that] work[s] against the “divide and conquer” racial logic of empire and … recognize [s] overlapping and intersecting histories of imperial and postcolonial state governance and political repression’ (185). Drawing on the work of black feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman, Reddy argues that Patel’s practice of ‘archiv[ing] an unfamiliar scene of black femicide through a defamiliarizing repertoire of saris’ (emphasis original) avoids ‘reproducing indifference to, overidentification with, or prurience toward the spectacularisation of these scenes of terror and subjugation’ (2016, 189–90). In other words, layering colonial violence against Kenyan women
and children, as she does with the crimson sari in ‘History Lessons,’ remediates the audience’s relationship to an aesthetic object without objectifying black women and children.

In ‘The Making (Migrant Song)’ Patel tackles head on the issue of voicing one’s experience. She observes, ‘We are terrified of African bodies that speak’ (2010, 37). Although the claim within the text is directed explicitly toward an imperial West, I argue that it also applies to the postcolonial context of Kenya. Even the country’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, himself an anti-colonial activist, asked Kenyans to ‘erase from our minds [what] now belongs to history’ and ‘to never refer to the past … for the vitality of Kenya’s future.’ Kenyatta’s call to erase this history, to never refer to it, continues to present challenges for the Kenyan politic today as evidenced by the controversial elections in the last decade. The nation’s current president, Uhuru Kenyatta (the son of Jomo Kenyatta) made similar claims in his 2002 address, ‘My Vision for Kenya’ in which he notes that ‘[a]fter nearly four decades of independence … [w]e have remained at peace with ourselves and our neighbors.’ He uses this point to pivot to what the nation has not yet accomplished, calling upon ordinary Kenyans to be more disciplined. There appears to be a potent — and perhaps exceedingly patriarchal — strain of nationalism that remains committed to collective amnesia. For what Uhuru Kenyatta writes out of his own recollection here is the ‘twenty-four-year tyranny of Daniel Arap Moi’ (Patel 2010, 132). Also forgotten here are the violences British soldiers enacted upon Kenyans that Patel recounts in ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’.

The ongoing silencing of women continues to mar Kenya’s capacity for a fully democratic and representative society. Since the August 2017 presidential election, women in Kenya have spoken out against their grievously limited representation in elected office, citing Article 81b of the Kenyan Constitution, which states that ‘not more than two-thirds of members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender’ (Kenya Constitution, 2010). Effectively, that means women are promised a minimum of one-third of the elected and appointed positions in government. Tweeting under the hashtag #WeAre52pc, started by the Twitter user @gathonii__, women of differing positionalities across Kenya are sharing their views and desire for greater political representation. Dr. Wambui Waiganjo [@wambuiwaithaka] tweeted, ‘The more women we have in representation, the more likely they can represent the diversity of all women’s experiences in Kenya.’ As Patel told her interviewer, Monegato, ‘history buried becomes history repeated … we cannot
know ourselves or our nations — or meet the truth of our present moment — until we look at how we got here’ (2010, 128). Thus, the stories of war crimes against Kenyan women and children that were pushed to the margins, permitting the official histories to be sanitised of these violences, continue to fester.27

Patel’s multi-faceted explication of imperial violences crafts another entry point into the deep histories of the Indian Ocean as well as trajectories of literary and cultural studies of what Sugata Bose has called ‘an interregional arena.’28 Further, an Indian Ocean perspective usefully complicates how we might imagine Patel’s national and diasporic subjectivities for, as Hofmeyr has argued, such an ‘orientation helps complicate ideas of diaspora, often understood simply as a one-way process of movement from a homeland to far-flung locations which then become the side of minority studies of cultural remainders’ (2015, 7). In Patel’s case, is she a diasporic African making this work in the US West? Or is she a diasporic South Asian, once more in the US West? Or is that she’s a South Asian diasporic in East Africa? To which diaspora does she belong, and what of the fact that throughout the making of this work she made her home in both the United States and Kenya? In her case, like the case of travellers, traders, and labourers who moved across the Indian Ocean for millennia, circularity is the operating logic of mobility. Such detours produce their own cartography and in their re-ordering of spatiality interrupt the linear flow of time that has come to mark colonial modernity. When Patel knots the crimson sari in the memory of dead children, she is reaching both backwards and forwards in time: her embodied action turns toward their deaths to honour them and the knotted sari lies before a live audience asking them what they will do now that they have the knowledge of this violence?

One of the critical features of the ocean’s circularity is the uneasy friction with colonial binaries. Even in the context of colonial racial ordering, South Asians played a third role as the British colonial apparatus mobilised them to serve as in-between figures, a buffer zone between white English and black Africans. We see the sedimentation of such in-between-ness when Patel’s other recounts an encounter with ‘Maasai Women Rioting [Mother’s Voice]’. Although this piece highlights Maasai women and their political and embodied movements in the disembodied communication from her mother, the actual information presented herein is limited. The letter is three paragraphs that increase in length from first to third; the second paragraph that discusses the protest is five sentences, only two of which describe in very plain terms the action her mother
witnessed: ‘But the road to her [mother’s friend’s] house was blocked by Maasai women rioting outside the British High Commission. They say they were molested by British soldiers’ (2010, 49). Before moving on from this thought, Patel’s mother notes ‘the security situation has deteriorated so badly … I long for the days when we didn’t need all these gates and askaris and fences!’ Here, Patel’s mother does not seem particularly sympathetic to the plight of her fellow Kenyans; instead, her witnessing can hardly be called as much for it’s simply a descriptive retelling of an interruption in her day. Even her own despair about the cages — human (askaris) and otherwise (gates, fences) — seems disingenuous not only because she moves past it so quickly, but also because her recognition of the security apparatus suggests that there was a time when such restricted mobility was not a feature of Kenya, colonial or postcolonial.

The accompanying entry in the shadow book entry does not reveal much direct insight into either Patel or her mother’s perspective. We only get a glance into Patel’s childhood reading and writing coupled with memories of British soldiers who she saw in Nanyuki, their ‘faces sunburned raw pink or angry red, looking sweaty and miserably uncomfortable … [b]elted and booted in the heat’ (2010, 89). Of her own stories, she says, ‘Creating these ordered worlds of material security’ what she calls ‘imitations of the Enid Blyton books [she] read … was incredibly satisfying’ (2010, 89). Is this a suggestion that she finds her mother engaging in an imaginative practice of creating an ordered world with material security, one in which there are no askaris or fences keeping some in and others out? Dan Ojwang’s (2013) analysis of Migritude is instructive here as he peels back the layers on other explanations for Kenya’s ‘institutionalized amnesia’ (125) articulated in ‘History Lessons’. Specifically, Ojwang indicts the particular middle-class schools Patel attended, suggesting that such institutions are more likely to ‘downplay the fraught character of the country’s class and racial politics’ (2013, 125). The tensions of this piece evidence how incomplete the process of decolonisation remains for individuals, communities, and states. The offering from Patel’s mother, which she herself perhaps has not taken as an offering to herself, a moment to reckon with her own state of (in)security is reminiscent of the questions around cross-racial relationships, intimacy, and solidarities that Gaurav Desai (2013) poses in his superb engagement with historical and cultural narratives of African and Asian exchange.

Whereas Desai finds his answers in the life writing of South Asian merchants and traders in East Africa, Patel’s responses take shape in her own artistic practice, which reflects an ongoing commitment to finding
moments and making space for ethical engagement in an unequal world. Her piece, ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’ navigates such entanglements in its juxtaposition of reportage that brought to wider audiences the rape allegations Kenyan women and children made against British soldiers; yet, also present in this piece is how the media also participated, if not perpetuated, the denial of such violence. She recalls the shifting media landscape through which this news surfaced, dating it to 2002, and noting how it first appeared in local news (presumably Kenyan) before reaching international outlets.

Like other works that cite survivor testimony, ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’ weaves in Patel’s recollections and analyses of colonial phenomena. The three survivors whose narratives are re-materialised here include one young woman preparing to study law, a woman pregnant with her first child, and a teenage boy; all three were gang raped by British soldiers. ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’ mobilises redness from start to finish; its opening lines spoken in the voice of a survivor, ‘Blood is red. The land is red.’ The repetition of red, which appears four times in as many sentences, recalls the crimson sari Patel imbues with re-memories of the deaths of children murdered in the concentration camps during the nation’s independence struggle. The motif of redness reappears in the closing moments, where Patel re-articulates it as a curse against the British: ‘May the redness overtake them. May red ants feast in their groins… Wherever they go, may the land rise up in redness against them…. May they never escape the redness on their hands’ (2010, 47–48). Similar to ‘Maasai Women Rioting [Mother’s Voice]’ Patel does not share, which, if any, saris were used in this piece; however, she does explain the choreography:.

Parijat and I enter lying flat on our backs, pushing ourselves across the stage with our feet while pulling a length of black cloth us. The black cloth becomes a river, a demarcation of space and time…. The fabric had to be folded just so at the start in order to unfold evenly into a long line … At May the redness overtake them, I pick up the river cloth and begin to loop it around my elbow and shoulder. Pull the energy tighter, bind the curse into its vortex. (2010, 88)

The resonances of ‘History Lesson’ permeate ‘The Sky Has Not Changed Colour’. The prominence of redness not only reminds us of the sari used during ‘History Lesson’, the kinetic practice of looping the black river cloth around her elbow and shoulder brings us back to the knots tied into that sari, commemorating the deaths of children in concentration
camps. In this text, the critique though potent is more diffuse than the targeted criticism of imperial Britain and postcolonial Kenya’s complicity in hiding violences perpetrated by the departing colonial power, for it does not hold any specific individual, community, or system accountable. The task of reckoning belongs to us all.

**IV. Contesting Imperial Remains**

*Migritude*, according to Patel, is ‘an accounting of Empire enacted on the bodies of women.’ The heart of that accounting are the oral narratives and survivor testimonies of women and children who survived sexual and other physical violences during Kenya’s independence movement and their aftermaths. Appearing in multiple sections of *Migritude*, they reveal the depth of colonial atrocities that Patel — and presumably many others — had not known about. Weaving them into *Migritude* as counter-narratives to the official accounts allows Patel to illuminate the plurality of violence and domination: how it germinates during war times and persists into periods of relative calm; thus, it can re-emerge explosively at the slightest encouragement. Additionally, the centring of indigenous women’s experiences is a decolonial call to action and consciousness raising for the South Asian diasporas in eastern Africa: it asks them to reckon with how British forces mobilised their difference for colonial gains. Further, in highlighting the need for and import of a revisionist history that centres such testimonies, Patel calls upon us to interrogate what other histories and networks have been obscured. In so doing, she provincialises the colonial experience as the single story of South Asians and East Africans, which makes room for us to consider other longer histories of cultural and material exchanges between their littoral communities.

Patel’s use of material objects — in this reading, the saris, which her mother saved for her wedding, that now appear as narrative devices in her politicised creative work — offers feminist materialist methods for revising the received historical narratives of postcolonial South Asia and East Africa. I conclude by returning for another moment to the crimson sari that Patel knots to represent children murdered during the British gulag in Kenya. In ‘What Came Out of the Suitcase’, Patel tells us more about this sari, which ‘[l]ooks demure, but becomes transparent when wet’ (2010, 65): during Diwali in India, upper middle-class people give such saris to their servants because the bright synthetic cloth from which they are made washes easily. A closer look on the sari’s stamp
reveals its location and style: Surat Mills and American Georgette; but upon
closer inspection, Patel notes a smaller stamp near the border: Made in
China (2010, 65). Through this series of connections woven by Patel:
saris from India collected by her mother in Kenya gifted to Patel while
she is in the US; saris saved for marriage but used by Patel to craft a per-
formance that blends art and activism; and at least one sari in particular
that carries the manufacturing stamp of China. It is as if the whole world
lives in the crimson sari Patel uses for ‘History Lesson’, Noting the circuit
of production of the sari and of Patel’s Migritude, parallel lines of circulation
come into view illustrating the shape of contemporary globalisation as
well as its earlier permutations rooted in and across the Indian Ocean
World.

In this essay, I have explored the manifestation of migritude in the
heartlands of the dispossessed, migritude as a gift that Patel brings
home rather than the migritude that is the protective shield that migrants
cultivate to survive in the ‘heartlands of power’ (Prashad in Patel 2010, iv).
To re-route migritude in this way manifests not only a spatial turn (away
from the imperial West); it also provokes a temporal re-orientation by
asking what is the Indian Ocean World of the present? Can the kind of net-
works of cultural and economic exchange35 that flourished during earlier
historical periods find some relevance today? Or is the contemporary
moment so indelibly marked by European colonialism that there are no
possibilities of relating to one another that are not mediated by the
event of colonisation. I contend that Migritude’s decolonial lessons demon-
strate that other accountings of south-south networks are possible. The
principle of circularity, which has long plotted how Indian Ocean
peoples have interacted with each other, is reprised in Patel’s deft hand-
ling of time and temporality in Migritude. The continual returns make it
possible for us to see something new, find something that is under the
pressure of erasure, hear stories that had been largely forgotten. Patel
uses the saris and the movement of her body (both in performance and
as a migrant) to awaken those histories. To use textile — a material that
is central to the historical South Asian-East African trade — shows how
the past which European colonisation attempted to erase refuses to stay
in the past.36 In fact, toward a truly decolonised future, this is the path
that postcolonial nation-states of the Indian Ocean World need to
contend with, for what troubles them today is equally seeded in this
history, as it is in the colonial and imperial period.

The sari, as a particular textile, points to the relationship between
women and their role within historic and future Indian Ocean worlds. If
one aspect of Migritude is the violence that Empire perpetrated upon them, then another cartography of Migritude is a call to action: how can women of the Global South offer redress to one another? The crimson sari, which I have referenced throughout this essay, has been the vehicle of one such attempt at repair between brown and black Kenyan women and children whom British soldiers violated. The sari imbued with their memory serves as a kind of memorial to that violence, while bearing traces of other kinds of violence. As its description in ‘What Comes Out of the Suitcase’ reveals, this sari connotes a domestic relationship between differently classed women and, in so doing, prompts more questions about the relationship between women of the Global South. In this way, the crimson sari, and indeed how Patel mobilises it throughout Migritude, function in extremely timely and urgent ways: they draw our attention to contemporary circuits of migrant labour in which women domestic workers comprise a significant number of the global workforce and their care work serves a critical function in the upward mobility of an elite few. This perhaps more latent aspect of Migritude exposes the work that must continue to be done in studies of the Indian Ocean across historical periods. The gift of migritude, or rather its decolonial lessons, then, is to interrogate the litany of violence against women across Indian Ocean, colonial and postcolonial histories, including the experience of migrant women today whether they are intra-national or international migrants, often forced into movement due to economic and environmental disasters.

Notes

1. I describe Patel’s Migritude as a movement narrative because of its relationship to movement in many forms: its own textual transitions from poetry to performance to book, the plurality of movements within the performance itself, and the multiple migrations the text addresses. I elaborate upon this in a subsequent section of this article.

2. The formulation of a trans-temporal spatiality that I articulate in this essay draws from Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel’s (2016) provocation of a queer geopolitics that ‘focus[es] on the idea of area as a postcolonial form through which epistemologies of empire and market can be critiqued’ (156). Among Migritude’s central aims are the disruption of the logic of Western empires, which include practices of knowledge production that subtend area studies models of knowing and thinking.

3. Aarthi Vadde (2016) elaborates on the portmanteau that constitutes migritude as a combination of migrant and attitude by drawing our attention to the homophone ‘my grit’ that resides within migritude (226). My reading here elaborates
on these multiple valences of migrancy that constitute migritude and considers them within the frame of an Indian Ocean context.

4. Patel’s process recalls Maaza Mengiste’s (2016) reflection about her 2010 trip to Rome, where she came to see herself and the strangers around her as ‘kinds of monuments and vessels of a still unnegotiated past’ (183). Mengiste writes, ‘I began to see my own figure as a carrier of a kind of history I didn’t want and I didn’t fully understand’ (2010, 183). Throughout Migritude, we see Patel interrogating herself as a carrier of normative history and through a creative practice disordering that history to create the time and space for alternate histories, that have been otherwise submerged and subjugated.

5. As Dilip Menon (2010) has argued in his reading of the historical writings of ‘Kesari’ Balakrishna Pillai and the southwestern coast of India, one of the practices of colonial domination was to abbreviate the sense of time, and thus history, of a place and a people in order to render it in the dominant narrative of the coloniser. Indian Ocean deep time provides counter temporalities and thus counter histories to the EuroAmerican colonial telos.


7. This poem is included in Section III of Migritude, ‘The Making and Other Poems’.

8. The poster of Migritude’s world premiere in Berkeley is an image of the artist in a Gujarati-style gagra choli ‘in the colours of the ANC’, carrying the red suitcase in which her mother stored the trousseau of saris that animate the performance.

9. Most of the images are in the first section of the book, ‘I. Migritude’, and they often encase the text, functioning as a frame for performed verse that has been reproduced on page. In ‘II. Shadow Book’, each entry carries one image that appears between the title of the piece and its accompanying reflection. There are no images in sections III and IV, with the exception of their title pages.

10. For multilingual reader like myself, who can navigate several of the languages incorporated in this text, Patel’s tapestry provokes deep reflection, troubling the distance I imagined between South Asian and East African languages. I repeatedly ask, ‘Is this Urdu or Hindi, or is it Kiswahili?’ which leads to further meditation on the much more striking possibility of whether or not it matters that I can trace an origin story of a word to my own native languages or to the language I have arrived to as an academic. This experience, for me, mimics the decolonial potency of Migritude as Patel herself demonstrates her own process of unlearning and relearning before it venturing forth to any audiences to make demands of them to decolonise. In so doing, she crafts a path for us to follow, but for each of us it is a path of our own unmaking and making.

11. In the text, Patel offers the proverb first in Gujarati before its English translation, which I quote above. I reproduce it here: ‘Utaavale ambe naa paake.’


13. Strikingly, the Sanskrit word ‘kaya’ means body (Kaya Press, 2018). Whether Patel knew this when she began working with the Press to transform her highly
embodied performance into prose form, I am not sure, but the connection por-
tends the kind of coincidence familiar to the linguistic plurality of the Indian
Ocean world. Kaya Press is an Asian American press and highlights the meanings
of the word kaya across multiple languages in its ‘About Kaya’ page.

14. The proverb is offered in Sanskrit originally, preceding its English translation. I
reproduce it here: ‘Sarva aarambhaa hi doshen dhoomena agni iva aavruta.’

15. The first interview is with an interlocutor who has known the narrative only in its
textual depictions (Emanuele Monegato) and another who first encountered it in
theatrical release (Vanita Reddy).

16. The years are displayed on the left side of the page with descriptions of varying
length marking one or more significant events that took place that year.

17. Christopher Ian Foster (2015) attends to the relationship between movement,
migrants and markets on migritude as a phenomenology of movement.

18. While Patel does not acknowledge it specifically, it is likely that her aunt’s ability
to sponsor her was due to the Hart-Celler Act’s new provisions, which created
pathways for US residency and citizenship through family reunification and
employment-based options for highly skilled/educated professionals. The
Hart-Celler Act, often better known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of
1965, departed from prevailing US immigration policy that disadvantaged immi-
grants who did not hail from northern European countries.

19. As a working woman artist of the Global South, I do not disparage CNN’s recog-
nition of her powerful work; however, in being recognised as such, corporate
Western media incorporates Patel’s contributions and has the power to reframe them on colonial-imperial terms. For example, highlighting Patel’s
South Asian background can position her as the saviour of black African
women whose narratives she weaves into her own work. Thus, the African
figures are re-consigned as brutalised and abject. See my discussion of Vanita
Reddy’s Fashioning Diaspora (2016) in subsequent pages for how Migritude actu-
ally engages in a counter-action, which refuses to objectify African women and
children.

20. Nevertheless, even Patel’s engagement with survivor testimonies has been
invoked in theorising human rights. See Krishnamurti (2014) in Humans Rights
and the Arts: Perspectives on Global Asia and Kulbaga (2016) on ‘Sari Suasion:
Migrant Economies of Care in Shailja Patel’s Migritude.’

21. The full quote from Hofmeyr is: ‘the Indian Ocean[s] … dense networks of “side-
deways”, lateral exchanges … [provide] a deep archive against which Western his-
tories can be relativised’ and ‘complicates postcolonial categories and time-
schemes by embedding them in longer and more entangled networks’
(‘Beyond Medieval and Modern’ 1, 13). See also Hofmeyr (2007) on “The Black
Atlantic and the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism
for the Global South — Literary and Cultural Perspectives” in Social Dynamics
33(2). In both essays, Hofmeyr theorises primarily from the position of southern
Africa; however, the deep ties that bind the Indian Ocean’s western littoral are
even more pertinent in the case of eastern Africa, where interaction and
exchange far pre-date the encounter between South Asia and southern Africa.
22. Indeed, the Swahili Coast of Kenya is a well-known hub of commercial trade and cultural exchange. In that way, the turn toward *pwani* in a subsequent cycle of *Migritude* counters the scholarly lacunae that Mbembe and Nuttall (2004) identify in their critique of African Studies, which has too often portrayed urbanity and its accompanying plurality as a ‘new’ concept to Africa. Whereas they offer the position of an African city (Johannesburg in particular) to demonstrate the urbanscapes of the continent, I contend that *pwani* functions as an equally dynamic counter to the prevalent image of rural Africa.


24. Patel has been involved with the deCOALonize campaign for Lamu. She has also published in *The New Inquiry* an essay titled ‘Postcards from Si Kenya’ (2013) that interrogates the relationship Kenya’s political leaders have with the island county, including international development projects and controversial land reallocation.

25. Curiously and rather revealing, Uhuru Kenyatta quotes Theodore Roosevelt (United States) and Mahatma Gandhi (India) in this speech, crafting a rather interesting transnational triangulation between India, Kenya, and the United States. He utilises both of these figures to circumvent potential criticism, referring to Gandhi’s oft-quoted ‘we must become the change we want to see’ and yet it is clear that there is no change to come, for the shared practice of erasure that both Kenyattas participate in is simply more of the same colonial/imperial strategies.


28. For more on how Bose defines an interregional arena, see *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in an Age of Global Empire* (2009).

29. For instance, in the shadow book entry to ‘History Lesson’, as I have discussed, Patel speaks at length about how she incorporated a particular sari into the piece, whereas here, we gain no similar insight. In fact, the only instances in which she connects a particular sari to a particular piece in the book is the crimson sari (Mau Mau) that she uses for ‘History Lesson’. The other specific connection made is between the yellow and red *bhandni* *gagra choli* that she wears in the ‘iconic *Migritude* photo’ presumably part of advertising materials not appended to the book (Patel 2010, 70).
30. These include specifically questions such as: ‘What are the possibilities of cross-racial relationships in contexts of structurally unequal exchange? What is the nature of cross-racial intimacy and how is it negotiated in times of crisis? … What are the ideal conditions for human solidarity —– how do individuals with recognisably different filiations reach out to creative productive affiliations?’ (Desai 2013, 12–13).

31. Reporter Adrian Bloomfield, writing from Nanyuki, says, ‘Human rights activists have encouraged Kenyan prostitutes to submit fake rape claims against British soldiers’ (Patel 2010, 48).

32. In this case, it is a reading of the Maasai as a ‘global brand … everyone’s dream of a people untouched by modernity’ (Patel 2010, 45).

33. It is italicised like all survivor testimonies in this piece but it does not append a survivor number to it as is the case with the testimonies that follow.

34. Black feminist writer Toni Morrison coins the term rememory in her novel, *Beloved*, first published in 1987. Rememory refers to an avenue of reactivating the past, a visualising of a specific past or an ongoing presence of something a person may not remember. It recalls Lisa Lowe’s (2015) theorisation of the past conditional temporality. Lowe describes it as ‘a thinking with twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, and also the matters absent, entangled, and unavailable by its methods’ (40). Thus, rememory is a productive in and of itself, moving beyond the person remembering to activate multiple registers of possibilities: a past that refuses to stay in the past, the futures that past invites or imagines, and the futures in which it has been activated.


36. To be clear, the past of the south-south Indian Ocean has its own grave violences to contend with and I certainly do not intend to reproduce it here in a romantised, nostalgic vein.

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