MIGRANCY AND NATIONHOOD IN EAST AFRICAN-ASIAN WRITING: THE EXAMPLE OF M.G.VASSANJI

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The South Asian Community's movement cuts across multiple continents and in which as they migrate, are inducted into a hybrid state whose composite cultures collapse, the first and third words in what Homi Bhabha in a different context calls a "differential community", (1990: 398). Through this, the physical geographical boundaries against which they travel are breached hence scattering their sense of identity and this yields room to the emergence of new hybrid identity attuned with the privileged state of the modern world and the contemporary metropolis.

In this paper, I read the *Gunny Sack and No New Land* as narratives that disavow the puritanical conception of a nation as a function of political and ideological components that comprise homogenized and clear boundaries engendered in the distribution of a series of material and ideal practices tailored towards embracing the customs and lifestyles of its citizens instead, these narratives vouch for a more encompassing practice that embraces political, economic and ideological concerns that are founded on openness, deterritorialization and heterogeneity. I appropriate the term nationhood, as core going by its use in describing an individual's /group's sense of belonging and its use and association in a wider sense with international migration as well as its use in tracing a character's continent of origin and descendence. Just as the (in) formal construction of the national community is conditioned by changes overtime, so it is also shaped by the particularities of the South Asian Community.

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The Gunny Sack and No New Land chronicle the diasporas of the South Asian Community as constituting what Chambers in another context calls, "the ground swell of hybridity" (Chambers, 1994). These historical fictional testimonies interrogate and undermine any simple sense of origins, traditions and linear movements. Within this hybridized state of representation, the south Asian community negotiate both their past and present as captured in Salim Juma in *The Gunny Sack* whose heritage cuts across two ancestries Asian /African, as relayed by Ji Bai who bequeaths him a gunny sack that in a sense is a collection of various historical temporalities.

> Memory Ji Bai would say in this old sack here, this poor
>
> Dear that nobody has any use for anymore stocking the
>
> sagging brown shape with affection she would drag
>
> it close…in would plunge her hand…she should rummage
>
> inside…you bring out their naughty little nut and
>
> everything else in it rearranges itself. Out would come
>
> from the dusty depths some knick-knack of yester year; a bead
>
> necklace shorn of its polish a rolled up torn photograph, a cowrie
>
> shell, a brass incense holder, a Swahili cap so softened by
>
> age that it folded neatly into a small square, a broken rosary
>
> tied up widely to a …..the remaining beads, a blood stained mushin
>
> shirt, a little book…(3).

The history of this community is executed through memory which fractures the narrative into parts; one which struggles to recollect a fragmented past and the other that traces their journey from East Africa and further to Canada in the West and the interweaving of this community's life during the pre-colonial, to colonial and post colonial time has been captured through multiple sites such as landscape, body and archive, which have obvious implications in the post colonial writings. The two texts are structured in such a way that several characters gradually interlock with their present and past experiences that are accentuated with tradition that pulls them back to restrictive and conformist lives roles as a counter force. In *The Gunny Sack* Juma spills the milk accidentally and Kulsum takes it for a bad omen and with the death of

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Salim'sfather we realize that memory is inescapable despite being unreliable and erratic, it can be harnessed for the sake of the future. Juma realizes that memories sustain people in their determination and steadfastness.

The Gunny Sack presents us with the Burial of Ji Bai in the West (Pg. 3) as an example of the coming together of a majority of the Shamsi living overseas no matter the little they knew of her. For them, it is the death of one of 'their own' that reawakens a sense of belonging. Considering the volume of their dispersal, the funeral of Ji Bai presents us with a community whose mixed history, cultural mingling and composite religious aspects are central to the migrant nature of their identity as exemplified by the funeral rites that are conducted in a supermarket that has been improvised into a mosque.

I argue that. While this diasporic community is enacting their identity by pushing the limits of migrancy, they also articulate a migrant identity that undergoes a radical shift from the very initial stage resulting in the altering of self-perception and (in) an ambivalence towards both the old and new existence. The (Im)migrant is presented as one whose departure is relatively voluntary with the possibility of return, where characters can move back and forth both physically and psychologically between two or more continents through a voluntary search for an improved life and this in effect distorts the definition of identity as fixed and stable. Although they succeed in preserving their cultural heritage, albeit with difficulty, they did not sacrifice their economic aspirations that are associated with modernization and as such, the notion of 'home'becomes a site of constant transformation. In a sense, I read the death of Ji Bai as an allegory for this community's existence on an emotional periphery and thus their negotiation of the use of the supermarket instead of the Mosque, closes in the gap of the emotional distance that has developed between them and the host nation whose ways and values they spurn so intensely. Thus this funeral privileges an opportunity for them to share a longing for a different order, nostalgia for what might have been (in a way) the conventional way a migrant longs for the land of his birth. The funeral rites are carried out in such a way that timing and rehearsed precision has been perfected

> … the head of the committee led formations of select relatives
>
> and friends to partake in the more intimate rituals… now in collective
>
> homage the congregation filled past a sob stiffled, a wail choked

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(practiced wailers, some of these)…(4).

The narrator appreciates the impatience portrayed at the funeral as being responsible for precipitating despair at the emotional and cultural level which is only symbolic of the cultural distance between this community and the surrounding environment and which is almost as significant as the physical distance between India and Canada whose cultural products he relates to. In its combination of deep empathy, the narrator shifts gaze to interrogate the role of the migrant in a racially colour-consious nation and he realizes that for the South Asian, political, religious and personal integrity became fainted with 'artificiality' simultaneously gnawed at – by an inner discontent which undermines the legitimacy of the binarity of belonging/not belonging. Being a cosmopolitan society with poly-identities, Islam only came in as religion that shapes their identity, not because of its tenets, nor of its antipathy for the Western society but because it is a structure that provides him with stability in this deterritioralized community.

In the same breath, Ji Bai's return to India before her death provides an opportunity or a much anticipated re-union with her community as represented by her only surviving sister and children (266) and of her period of absence from India, Ji Bai learns that her return to her longed for childhood home of Bajupur fails to arouse that sense of familiarity and belonging that can only find an equivalence in home as a destination of idyllic memory (Ruth Maxey, 2006: 41;5) of childhood and early adolescent wholeness that has sustained her life in East Africa.

> From Bajupur to the site of Mela is an hour's drive by taxi. Ji Bai recalled that its used to take two days by bullock cart. They used to spend the nights in makeshift sheds, now there were comfortable rest houses set up for just this event (266).

Ji Bai's journey to India, portrays the effort this community engages in as they try to make peace with their past which is a metaphor for the text's destabilizing of this community's nostalgia built around an image of an altered India. She realizes that this nostalgia has turned malevolent enough bearing witness to the desecrated and decayed homeland that has resulted from many

years of flux and change. Though this community is portrayed as already occupying the centre of the Western metropolises they suffer an ambivalence towards their old historical selves and yet cannot freely opt for another history and identity which though an embodiment of their inheritance, cannot be destroyed but is instead opened up to questioning, rewriting and rerouting.

This community is presented as one that has embraced a form of identity constituted and contested through complex hierarchies of power, particularly when used as a term which involves mixing of peoples and cultures. The question about the relationship between the historical legacy and the contemporary experience has resulted in cultural diversity that signifies the productive emergence of new cultural forms, which have derived "from apparently mutual borrowings, exchanges and intersection across ethnic boundaries" (Bhoemer, 1995).

By introducing multiple sites of language and heterogeneity (James Clifford, 1992), Vassanji uses Kiswahili in a way that places his works in an 'ideal space' that transcends national essence hence problematizing the presumed static and unitary configurations of nationalist narratives and premises these works as products of several interlocking cultures and histories. Haji Lalani, for instance in *No new Land* speaks in Kiswahili in his business interactions with the African clientele and this makes clear the invasive force of language which includes labeling that pins one to their roots. In this context, language does not only serve as a means of constructing a national identity but as a signifier that makes the migrant to shift gaze from the East African world to the further horizons and Worlds of contemporary metropolitan cultures of Canada. By using un-translated words and statements in Hindu, Mohan and Nurdin Lalani attempt to reinvent and appropriate the streets of the 'master' making their presence disturb a previous order and in this way, enhance the rewriting of the urban social order and national authority. In N*o New land* Mohan uses English as an attempt by the marginal group to redeem and reconstitute their own identity based on the belief that identity is a proffered notion that earns one a sense of self-definition. The movement from the margin; Guyana to Canada involves a complex transformation. No recognition is given to an individual's ethnicity as migrants experience a sense of loss exacerbated by the surrounding social context yet, members of the Canadian Community , show little or no interest when interacting with the migrant Asians.

In a way, the absence of social networks created by earlier waves of immigrants deepens their sense of not belonging and exposes them as vulnerable and prone to mistrust hence healthy acculturation proves elusive for the South Asian immigrants both in East Africa and in Canada. This is demonstrated in the conversational complement between Hassan uncle and Kulsum in *The Gunny Sack*.

"Did you hear? Washed out!

Kulsum was at her sewing machine deep in thought

She simply looked at him

"Did you hear? Washed out I said we are washed out"

Washed out what brother?

"Are in which world do you all live? Haven't you heard?

Our buildings

Own property own houses,

All gone. Saaf! Clean! Nationalized

Mali ya uma. Property of the masses…" (242).

They realize that independence in East Africa meant the end of the South Asian community's domination of business enterprises as the new African political class has nationalized their premises in Dar es Salaam in the same breath, *No New Land* presents us with a stark reminder that times have changed. The political changes that swept through East Africa saw to the collapse of the British Empire and resulted in the South Asian community's loosing grip on land and property. For them colonization posed a grave danger to their social, political and economic history because they not only had to content with the alienating and dispossessing effects of independence but they also had to navigate and negotiate the frequently strenuous and vigorous exclusion and marginalization posed by a deeply entrenched structure of the mother countries to which they migrated as exemplified by Nurdin and Zera in *No New Land* who find it hard to adapt in Canada. Since their relocation was not entirely voluntary but was as a result of unfair post-independence policies in Tanzania that included the nationalization of all Asian rental premises, the use of Kiswahili as a medium of instruction in schools was detested because for them "English was one constant you could not deviate from" (26). For Nurdin Lalani, the unfair modes used in the awarding of promotions in his place of work in Tanzania, where Charles, an African, who was also his junior is made a manager, while he (Nurdin) is not promoted was reason enough for migration to Canada where, Nurdin doesn't make a conscious effort to integrate – at least not initially and when he does attempt, Canada proves too hostile a place to allow such accommodation. For one, Nurdin does not succeed in securing a job at the shoe shop department he is dismissed thanks to his lack of a 'Canadian experience'44).

His experience of racism at a personal level comes to reality when he finally gets a job at the Ontario addiction Centre (where) he is accused of sexually assaulting a white woman who seemed distressed and yet (he) had offered to help. Nurdin's ambivalence finds expression in his victimization. For him, independence in East Africa has left him with a past against which he rebels, but which nothing has replaced but, has created room for self re-discovery that justifies his deteriorialized identity. For Nurdin, the limitations are clear, there is neither dignity nor hope of finding a decent job in such a society that lacks opportunities. Despite these challenges, he would always fallback on the company of fellow Asians who took tea and samosas in a make shift A-T shop that reminded them the original A-T shop in Dar –es Salaam hence they would sit to chitchat. He realizes that it is a rendezvous to be found within the internal territories of the native's cultures on the parts of the metropolis they inhabit insofar as the taking of refuge in one's roots emerges as a contigent path of memories and histories that is capable of providing a home or identity. Yonge Street confronts him with an enigma that reflects back on what the South Asian community hope and fear to see. He faces a moral and cultural shock. He is lured to a peep show joint and he sees sexual scenes beyond his wildest imaginations, his morals hitting rock bottom and this leaves his conscience guilt- ridden. This reveals Toronto as a metropolis with a moral instability where immigrants lose their local identities to the 'corrupting' tangled undergrowth of a morally inhibitive society with 'no discernible moral boundaries' (Simatei, 2001). For one, Nurdin begins in open-eyed innocence internalizing the values of the West which is a microcosm for the desperate gesture of how the South Asian, who live on the fringes of a cosmopolitan society (can) only attract momentary promiscuity, petty excitement and lies.

> Sex scenes beyond his wildest dreams, dirty deprived, exiting how much the flesh was capable of! It was enough to destabilize you for ever …145).

In an effort to justify his newly found identity through ambivalence that distinguishes him from his shared "Canadianess" he challenges factors that rooted him to East Africa by demystifying the eating of pork and taking of alcohol which he justifies their use by quoting the Quran "there is nothing wrong with tasting … only getting intoxicated is forbidden" (143-144).

The transformation in Nurdin is further enhanced by a family that despises him. Fatima his daughter regards him with contempt she considers him an unsophisticated, uneducated and a peon while Zera, his wife, denies him conjugal rights. This migrant family faces intricacies of a life that has been shut way from the world; with no freedom to make decisions of their own. Zera has repressed longings for marriage to an educated man which has resulted in her disguised dedication to Islam at the expense of her marital obligations. This family conflict noted provides

an insight into the frustration and disorientation of a particular generation of (Im) migrants caught between cultures that are struggling to define themselves on their own terms, according to their own choices and believes but soon they learn to take charge of their new found identity after realizing that Canada was not after all the Narvana they had always imagined it to be. Through Nurdin they learn to take an interest in their own affairs as demonstrated in his flirting with Sushila, a play mate in Dar and this is a pointer to the unfolding drama in an articulation of the bafflement the (Im)migrants face in an attempt to fit in a new culture,The coming of Missionary subtly juxtaposes the depiction of hope with scattered comments in racism, prejudice, deprivation and social inequality (Malak, 1993), it captures how Nurdin , like other immigrants of the South Asian origin manage to create for themselves a faint semblance of internal stability-fragile though it is –by clinging to certain traditional Islamic values and attitudes such as going to the Mosque every Friday. They reckon that they need to be liberated from the ghost of a perceived perfect Canada and the 'ideal' Dar es salaam symbolized by the photo of Nurdin's father hanging on the wall which operated 'like fate' (20) and deliverance is achieved by the coming of missionary to Canada who acts as an avatar. Zera looks up to missionary to offer spiritual guidance to his flock who seemingly have been over-buderned by the demands of the West.

> We are desparate for guidance, they said life is
>
> full of pitfalls. Children come home from school
>
> with questions we can't answer. And want to
>
> Celebrate chistmas. Please come. (68).

Nurdin realized he needs to open his heart to Missionary in order that he unbuderns and settles outstanding scores by making peace with his past so he could move forward and this, he achieves through the anticlimax as connoted in the symbolic depiction of the demystified imagery of the stern look of Nurdin's father's portrait being juxtaposed with the C N Tower that 'blinks un failing in the distance' (59). Despite missionary's role as a well versed religious and tradition keeper, he ironically translocates and settles rather permanently in Canada with no signs of returning to East Africa. For him, Canada was a veritable 'Anampur," the eternal city…this was the final stop' (198).

Even the well educated and materially successful (im) migrants such as Jamal who is in private practice in Toronto, habours an uncertain sense of national identity such as having a longing for

the life they left behind in Dar es salaam. A nostalgia that is symptomatic of certain larger discontents with life is exemplified by the sale of samosas by Jamal at the corner truck-shop. Although his marriage appears successful, there is a sense in which he (Jamal) experiences a vague disconnection from Nancy (Nasmin) his wife as noticed in his conversation with Nanji about the visit by the New York girls. His (Jamal) last attempt at having an affair with every attractive Indian (im)migrant girl he notices, is, in fact a clumsy attempt to re-connect with his memories of 'home' and his past: an attempt, which is fading away from him, leaving behind a feeling of loss, guilt and a reasserting of his autonomy over his life.

The ironic positioning of the South Asian community in Toronto Canada however, transforms the fixity of maps by challenging dominant narratives that "elide complex realities and experiences to create homogenous identity for the nation and its people." (Chambers, 1994). Their settlement in sixty nine Rose cliffe, which is nevertheless, conceived as a segregated space for the under-privileged and still associated with stereotypes, myths of backwardness and social nonconformity, is exemplified by the smells that filter in.

> …whatever one thinks of the smells, it must be conceded that the inhabitants
>
> of sixty-nine eat well. Chapatti and rice, vegetable, potatoes and meat cuisines
>
> cooked the guan, Madrasi, Hyderabadi, Gujarati, and Bunjabi ways, Channa the Carebian way, fou-fou, the West African way …each group clings jealously to its
>
> own cuisines…(65).

This deliberate mixing of cuisines signifies a difference, a particular history and context, a sign of ethnicity understood not as a political entity but as a symbol that recognizes itself in terms of the resistance which it must wage against an engulfing racism. I read these narratives as violations of locationally rooted identities and histories and therefore, Sixty-nine Rose cliffe as much as it is still associated with stereotypes and myths of backwardness, its diversity, is marked and populated by migrants who have continually become a more settled and permanent population while this street has more recently been affected by rising consumerism and though still associated with social deprivation and poorly maintained housing estate with the inhabitants struggling to keep up with the boom in capitalist allure infiltrating nearby streets. Contrary to their expectation of a hospitable, urbane life, the South Asians suffer racism as

exemplified in the physical attack on Esmail at a railway sub-station. This marginalized group are jogged to the realization that they need to unite in voicing their dissatisfaction with the vast attacks and in a show of solidarity, and a signifier of their ethnicity, they wore 'Kaunda suits' an assertion of their cultural transformation as initiated by the (Im) migrants which enables them to produce new identities with the power to challenge hegemonic definitions of the national identity and open up the question of nationality to continual re-definition. They realized that their having been constantly in touch with their past has always been sustaining them as an ethnic community. Now that they are in Canada, they have lost touch with their past and hence this harsh reminder:

> Where have we come, what are we becoming …your time
>
> He comes and gone. 'The blacks fingered your assets and
>
> you let them …we will fight back…the immigrants
>
> we have to stay they could not simply go away (95, 103, 104).

The use of placards and notices in inviting people to demonstrate against the attack on Esmail, points to the dissociation of racial boundaries. For the South Asian community, to traverse the world without maps is to experience a 'dis-location' and at the same time to ignore the illusion of identity that inhibits movement (Greeta Kapur, 1991) hence, overlooking the obvious institutions of ethnicity. This is just but an example of the way in which the past returns to haunt the present and acts as a reminder to the postcolonial subject of a bitter past which in effect established and consolidated a sense of personal and collective identity. Yet, it is only through such memory that the South Asian community can trace an infinite variety of patterns of this identity as captured in *The gunny Sack*

> Memory Ji Bai said is this gunny sack… I can
>
> put it all back and shake it about churn it
>
> and start again, re order memory, draw a new
>
> set of lines through those blots, except that each
>
> of them is like a blank hole a doorway to a universe
>
> …it can last for ever, this game the past has no end

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but no, Shehrbanoo, you will not snare me like that

let it end today this your last night (266).

In *The Gunny Sack*, the South Asian community recognizes that over the years they have often traveled through different historical times and have always borne the tension between their particular inheritance and the contravened cultural boundaries as demonstrated by Kulsum's Philips radio that was such a powerful oracle "if anything worthwhile was in the air it would grab it from cape town to London, America to Bombay…the world powered in martial Urdu or sing song Hindi or BBC English Connie France or Alta Mangeshkar…(1116). This groving to multiple histories configured in a combinatory sound mix enables the south Asian community to deterritorialize as they struggle to piece together a history in the shifting interstices of the world. The adoption of alienation as a positive force rather than a problem to be erased underscores the South Asian community's believe in being East African Asians who can live anywhere on the globe with an ability to adjust and settle down with no particular loyalty to their roots and thus the decision to relocate to Europe by this community was informed by the seduction of the empire that surround myths formed and woven around London as the cultural centre of the world invoking yearnings of the soul to partake in. This is demonstrated by Sona *In The Gunny Sack* who celebrates the beauty of London if only for a few hours in a stop over enroute to America. We see a sense of determination on his part to remain in the metropolis even after his studies, not because London and America are particularly good to him or Dar is especially bad to him, but because he has to be where the glamour of the metropolis shines. Dhanji Govindji migrates to East Africa having been motivated by a desire to economically empower himself and the personal conviction that whoever went to Africa came back invariably rich, saw him define his identity a new; he sheds off anything that would otherwise have pinned him to his caste or religion.

Dhanji Govindji. How much lies buried in a

name …Dhan, wealth; Govindji, the Cowherd butter thief…

A name of Banya in its aspiration for wealth as

Hindu; yet gloriously, unabashedly, Muslim… But

Govidji, the elders will not tell yours is not a

family name- where is the attack…? (10).

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For him, neither of them mattered in his new environment premised on newness despite the community's outcry for the need to maintain 'purity' of caste and family identity yet for him, this adventure is a demystification of the myth circulating among Indians in India that Africa was one mass of forest and unconquered land teeming with economic potential waiting to be exploited.

> Dhanji Govindji had heard of Zanziba, had dreamt of
> Zanzibar as a boy, men returned from Zanzibar when
> they were invariably, rich… if one of these boys got into
> trouble, 'go to Africa' they told him. Go to jangbar-
> see what Amarsi Makan did for himself and he
> was no better then you…"
> from a loafer, to stowaway, to the Sultan's custom's
> master and the richest man on the Island; now there
> was a man (7).

He becomes an explorer whose personal desires constituted the most overt target that provides a more cultural drive for migration. The most stoke images of Dhanji's exploration is in itself testimony to the pervasiveness of such myths and forces me to consider the difficulty of attempting to free ethnicity representation from perceived influence from outside. This is at once a revealing depiction of a space conventionally shielded from the world's public gaze, and a somewhat fetishized portrait of Africa as already formed by orientalists and stereotypes that enables us capture the image of Africa as a continent that is large and more complicated than earlier projected. Africa was a world teeming with life which, to the ordinary South Asian was invisible but the relationship between Salim and Amina questions the idea of nationhood as an alienating force. Their having been in Dar es Salaam university portrays Dar as having an identity of its own which fuses divergent views and attitudes so that the religious and the secular the past and the present share the same world. Seen in this light, Dar is not experienced merely as a physical reality but as a sum total of its collective histories and memories, its value both socially and aesthetically derives its strength from its capacity as a point from which the South Asian community can always refers to as "home" and as a point of security and stability though not one to return to but, a sight of transit in a wider network of hybridization (Bhabha, 1990). As

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a site of new identity formation, Africans and Asians are seen as capable of breaking the "wall" that supposedly separates the two ethnicities and emphasizes the fact the new identity can be made possible through the reflection and positivization of their unique heritage. Amina, an African girl, symbolizes a gesture by the South Asian community to feel recognized not by a unified signifier (Bhabha, 1994) but by their flexible ability to fit in any nation or continent, in which they found themselves. The adaption of alienation as positive force rather than a problem to be erased underscores their ability to adjust and settle down with no particular loyalty to their roots. Hence, the relationship between Amina and Salim Juma though headed no where, allows him recognize that given identities have an adverse effect too, especially when they 'deform the self' and that national identity is a strategy which goes beyond the cultural texts and tradition. Vassanji's reconceptualization of national space shares resonance with what Homi Bhabha in a different context has called the 'third space' within which cultural elements encounter and transform one another in such a way that the negotiation becomes neither assimilation nor collaboration" (Bahbah,1996) but an opening up of a productive space that offers the possibilities of movement of meaning within the dominant cultures; an endeavour to dismantle these rigid markers of identity, constructs the nation as a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.

In T*he Gunny Sack* Dhanji Govindji opens up a new front in vouching for a new identity uninhibited by ethnic pursuits. He engages in trade thereby acting as a link between the East African interior and the external world and the intercourse between India, Africa and the West is symbolically realized in the birth of Huseni whose newly found identity would change the world's perception of Africa offering us an example of the drive to unveil the changing perception of this new product and provides us a genuine insight into the inaccessible world of the (im) migrant. By laying bare the genealogy of Dhanji Govindji, we realize that ethnicity causes a family to suffer natural anxiety which permeates every aspect of its life. The anxiety centers around Dhanji Govinji's marriage to Fatima who is of Asian origin and his first sexual liaison with an African slave girl Bibi Taratibu.

I am particularly concerned with the ambiguity surrounding the genealogy of a marginalized motherhood that has Bibi Tartibu as its embodiment and how this is perceived as a betrayal and contamination of the south Asian 'pure' parentage. Instead of a straight forward family tree, there are a series of lacunae, as social events are reproduced down the 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' lines of the family that ultimately depicts a South Asian family that is unable to come to terms with the fact that its racial heritage is not as pure as it would ideologically like it to be and that this new hybrid genealogy is constantly repressessed in daily life. Salim Juma

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epitomizes this new (de) ethicized identity which cannot be pinpointed to a particular nationality as shown by the way he baffles his teacher Mrs. Schwering and uncle Goa during his first day of registration at school

> " Grandfather's name first," Said the application form as uncle Goa asked me.
>
> "Huseni," I said, naming my renegade half-cast ancestor and become
>
> Huseni Salim Juma for ever after. The rest of my family ignored the whole
>
> question and became Dhanji … a name invoking wealth and respect, while
>
> I, under the auspices of uncle Goa and Mrs. Schwering's glaring eye, became;
>
> anybody. No trace of tribe, caste, colour, even continent of origin (108).

In the same vein, Salim regards himself as identified with the birth of a new identity but in seeking to straighten this identity, the image of a new future emerging from a tainted past is seductively powerful yet Salim is never completely certain that this is a viable possibility. This is demonstrated in the newly found friendship between Salim and Amina which I read as a celebrarion of the understanding that both Asians and Africans have a common debt to pay for historical injustices of slavery and slave trade and this, seemingly balances off the prejudiced perception by Africans who regard Asians as a favoured group at their expense. In effect, Juma and Amina learn that their differences can create new ways of appreciating each other.

> "why do you call me "Indian?" I too am African.
>
> I was born here"
>
> "My father was born here-even my grandfather!
>
> 'And then? Beyond? What did they come to do,
>
> these ancestors of yours? Can you tell me?
>
> Perhaps you forgot they financed the slave trade!
>
> …and what of your Swahili ancestors
>
> Amina?

If mine financed slave trade, yours ran it.

It was your people who took guns and whips

and burnt villages in the interior who brought

back boys and girls in chains to Bagamoyo(211).

In fact towards the end of the novel, Amina is detained for conspiring to overthrow the government and Salim also is being sort after by the state machinery. Faced with such overwhelming insecurity, Salim had to flee the country for the West. The tendency to run away is secreted into all aspects of the novel and is an extended metaphor for the south Asian community's search for an identity. Through his characters, Vassanji points to the fact that the purpose for which these journeys are made is to attain a sense of 'wholing' and 'healing' (Anita Desai; 1995) that can only be feasible once this community appreciates the fact that they can settle anywhere on the globe, their unique identities not withstanding.

De-mapping in this paper is a strategic meeting point of highly heterogeneous ethnicities and this violates the notions held about ethnic purity. In this paper we analyze how the diasporic community has managed to map themselves in a third space that bridges the gap between the natives (hosts)and the (Im)migrant population giving a whole new political meaning to narratives on migrancy and nationhood migrancy and nationhood. Ji Bai in *The Gunny Sack* captures this new identity given her childhood experience in Bujapur in India, coupled with her migration to East Africa underscores the tension between her first memory of India and her distill experiences through contact with (her)life in East Africa and this reconstructs her perception of her ethnicity. This is also a display of the effort being made by this community to maintain a semblance of self-awareness bearing in mind their multiple continental travels that has resulted in their adoption of new life styles while maintaining certain aspects of their ethnic identity. Through the journey motif, the nation's geographical space, is contravened and a new negotiation takes place between the migrant and the native nationals hence defying nationhood as defined by nationalist ideologies. I read the fusion of history and literature into a notion of cultural syncretism which for me, is an effort by this community at possessing meaning between the fixed points of India, East Africa and Canada.

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