BACK TO LIFE: MAKING ART TO RE-SEARCH MY ANGLO-INDIAN HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

In this text, I explore three themes which have surfaced and recurred in my art practice: the representation of mixed-race people, the presence of the colonial past in the neocolonial present, and how I understand my family history. As an artist, my investigation encompasses two key methods. The first is academic reading. The second is practice-based research, which involves developing ideas and making art in the studio. The discussion focuses on how these activities have complemented and extended pre-existing knowledge of my Anglo-Indian heritage. My intention is to open a critical dialogue with others about the representation of mixed-race people.

INTRODUCTION

In this text, I explore three themes which have surfaced and recurred in my art practice: the representation of mixed-race people, how I understand my family history, and the presence of the colonial past in the neo-colonial present. As an artist, my investigation encompasses two key methods. The first is "academic research", and includes reading, visiting archives, museums, and galleries, and liaising with curators, librarians, and historians. The second is practice-based research or studio enquiry, which involves developing ideas and making art in the studio, either alone or in collaboration with others. The discussion focuses on how practice-based research has complemented and extended pre-existing knowledge of my Anglo-Indian heritage and how that knowledge was acquired. Consideration is given to the knowledge produced by making art that may not have been accessible through other modes of enquiry. The

development arc of this work is also compared to parallel processes in my other profession as a trauma therapist. My intention is to open a critical dialogue with others about the representation of mixed-race people.

Before making art, I privileged knowledge derived from academic reading, intellectual conversation and reflection. Looking back, art practice was imagined as a one-way sequential process which involved first developing intellectual understanding, which then translated into ideas, which were then expressed in artwork. In practice though, the process of producing art is not linear at all and may best be described as dialogic. It demands a physical exploration, making with hands and paying attention to responses in a holistic way whilst lightly holding in mind intentions and ideas and remaining open to new possibilities. The latter requires an uncertain, inchoate, and dreamy state where threads and connections can glimmer, shift, or flash to the surface. This state is already familiar to me through practicing as a psychotherapist. In therapeutic work, the aim to create a safe space where neither therapist nor patient knows exactly what is going to happen next allows for a thoughtful reverie: a playful space. In addition there is a commitment to holding the other in mind or mentalization, described by Peter Fonagy as a "form of mostly preconscious imaginative mental activity [.....] because we have to imagine what other people might be feeling" (2006, p. 54). He goes on to say:

We suggest that a similar imaginative leap is required to understand one's own mental experience, particularly in relation to emotionally charged issues. (ibid.)

When this principle materialises in my art practice, I am in dialogue with myself. Being open to bodily sensations and emotions as well as cognitions enables the work to be guided by conscious and unconscious intimations. In re-searching my Anglo-Indian heritage, which includes the invisibility of being Anglo-Indian in the UK, attention is also brought to what has been there all along, but until now, has been somehow out of sight, forgotten, or overlooked.

THE REPRESENTATION OF MIXED-RACE PEOPLE

Race and sex were integrally related: sex was the means by which the biological and cultural purity of lineages, classes, races, and nations could be protected or threatened. (Peter Wade, 2017, p. 4)

There was a young lady named Starkey, Who got herself hitched to a darkie. The results of her sins, Was an eight-some of twins: 2 black, 2 white and 4 khaki. (Quoted in *Bhowani Junction*, John Masters, 1954, p. 170)

As a black person and a woman I don't read history for facts. I read it for clues. (Alice Walker, 1998, p. 199)

Throughout my life, I have explored my heritage as a UK-based, second-generation Anglo-Indian immigrant through family relationships, academic reading, political involvement, and personal reflection. These activities have often proved personally challenging. For instance, I felt a familiar sense of unease and dissatisfaction while studying nineteenth and twentieth century texts that either depicted the community through negative stereotypes, or failed to mention it at all. Consequently, I resolved not to expend energy documenting or refuting familiar pathological accounts of Anglo-Indians, though it was tempting to do so. As I focused on the practice of making art, Toni Morrison's (1975) words helped to clarify my priorities:

The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing. (P.2)

In *Midnight's Orphans*, a 2006 study of the literary portrayals of Anglo-Indians, Glenn D'Cruz contends that to favour the instinct to defend or champion one's people by proposing counterarguments is to fall into the trap of accepting "the binary logic of colonial discourse" (p. 26). He suggests it is more useful to consider how Anglo-Indian identities have been produced and have functioned. D'Cruz argues that any mixed-race group was demonised because it disturbed boundaries that separated the coloniser from the colonised. His stated aim, which I have adopted, is to *unsettle* these traditional accounts.

PishPash (2018) is a short film, made in collaboration with filmmaker Samina Bukhari, that forms part of a body of work called *MiscegeNation*. The idea for *PishPash* evolved after a particularly gruelling research session at an historic library. The title references

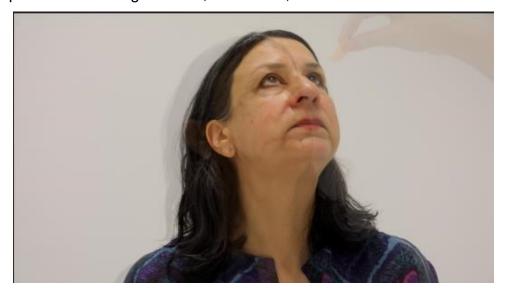
an Anglo-Indian dish characterised by rice that is cooked over a long period until it is "pish-pashy," like porridge and easily digested, and so more fitting for invalids or weaning infants. This name reflects a familiar and demanding process of rendering and taking in historically significant, but distasteful, cultural information. A typical example of such toxic material is the anonymous *Lady Named Starkie* limerick (quoted above) which appears in John Masters' 1954 novel *Bhowani Junction* (p. 170).

In the *PishPash* video (https://mishtioart.co.uk/video/), I am captured facing the viewer, chewing something with my mouth closed, which is fed to me by the anonymous hand of someone out of view. Drawing on the metaphorical dichotomy of feeding and eating, *PishPash* (still shown below) is a comment on the research experience itself and the unpalatable nature of much of the material that was involved. The idea of using feeding as an analogy for the control and transmission of information arose as I felt "starved of" and "hungrily sought" information that did not characterise Anglo-Indians as "bad" or "good". It is based on the premise that data is food that we are given and consume sometimes knowing that it will be unsatisfying, bitter, or toxic. Andrea Levy (2010), echoes this experience. Anticipating the process of researching slavery for her novel, *The Long Song*, she describes initial hesitation: "I would have to immerse myself in the weird world of European racism...and wasn't sure I would be able to stomach it" (p. 406).

The film begins in silence. The soundtrack starts after 10 seconds and cuts out without warning before the end of the film. The track gives auditory clues about the person out of shot, her footsteps, the jangle of her bracelets, and the clink of cutlery. The intermittent quality of the sound references the experience of sensory disruption and dissociation in shocking or emotionally demanding situations.

The food is chewed with mouth closed and the ingesting process is hidden from view. This reflects my upbringing with regard to "table manners". It also references the behaviour modelled by elders in my family and in the Anglo-Indian community in 1960s South West London which emphasised assimilation and stoicism, at least in front of the children. By exploring the process of swallowing and surviving toxic input, I am also reviewing times when it felt best to keep my mouth shut and head down, either because it was dangerous not to, or because no words for how to respond would come. Through

portraying a tongue tied, head down moment, *PishPash* paradoxically "speaks" about the experience of feeling silenced, vulnerable, or inarticulate.



The work *Why Not Double?* (2018) (below) involved partially repainting a mass-produced Georgian-style figurine, and staging it as a still-life, in collaboration with photographers Kyle Mayo and Josh Turner. This piece was influenced by a 1785 portrait, attributed to German painter Johann Zoffany, of Raj administrator, Major Palmer and "family", a category including his Indian wife, her sister, their children, and servants (bottom). In Zoffany's painting, Palmer is a central figure, clothed in scarlet and surrounded by an array of women and children. *Why Not Double?* responds by making the Asian woman the visual focus.

This leads to one consistent dilemma concerning exposition. The narratives referenced in the artwork cannot be taken as read, considering the general lack of knowledge about the colonial legacy of mixed-race people. Experience tells me not to underestimate how little is known or imagined about Anglo-Indians. When showing my work I am consistently asked for more contextual information to help the viewer. My quandary about how much background to provide echoes Morrison's caution about explaining too much. Hilary Mantel (2017) prefers to calibrate the level of information supplied to underfeed her readers and leave them wanting more:

You cannot give a complete account. A complete account is an exhausted thing. You are looking for the one detail that lights up the page, to perturb or challenge the reader, make him [sic] feel acknowledged, and yet estranged. The reader should be a welome guest in your house of invention, but he shouldn't put his feet up on the

furniture. Just when he's settling, you need to open the gap between them and us: just let in a flash of light, to show the gap is there. (Mantel, 2017 BBC Reith Lectures)





This complexity is alluded to by Grant Kester (1998) in proposing a critical framework for what he calls "littoral art". "Littoral" literally refers to a region lying near the shore. He uses the term to describe a meeting point or "in between space", which also

resonates with the concept of hybridity. He outlines a process whereby viewers engage in an open-ended collaborative encounter with an artwork that produces new meaning, which he calls "dialogical indeterminance" (Kester, 1998). This phrase also echoes Fonagy's depiction of the "imaginative leap" mentalizing requires as one enters a dialogue with oneself. In my situation this involves making art to produce new insights about my own experience (Fonagy, 2006, p. 54). Kester's notion of dialogical indeterminance seems applicable to my aim of not giving an exhaustive account of Anglo-Indian history, despite the community's traditional anonymity.

One way in which I attempt to resolve this dilemma is through the use of allusive titles. Why Not Double? is an example of experimental wordplay used to unsettle established language and phrases through context, juxtaposition, and re-appropriation. The title challenges the practice of describing mixed-race people as "half." Salena Godden (2016) writes eloquently about this usage:

But hang on a minute. Surely if I am from two colours, two races, I am two shades, and therefore not half-caste, not half anything, but whole, I am double caste. But half sounds shadier. Half is best because half means less. You lose. You are half a person. We don't want you getting all empowered, now do we. (Godden, 2016, p. 185)

Godden's words echo my title for a recycled and re-appropriated object of "historical" figures. Why Not Double? addresses the issue of "mass-produced" ideas about race. Rhett D'Costa (2016, p. 238), discussing Homi Bhabha's analysis of mimicry, focuses on the significance for Bhabha of the partial perspective of colonial discourse, which determines that colonial subjects can only be incompletely represented or recognised. The name Why Not Double? suggests a reaction to being described as "half" and questions customary terminology that exposes a lack of understanding or resistance to fully recognising hybrid identities.

RE-EXAMINING A FAMILY NARRATIVE

The decision to produce work in response to personal archives made space to reexamine the stories and events of my family history, which has led to the creation of distinctly autobiographical art. Returning to photos, documents, and other artefacts as visual and conceptual references has generated fresh meanings from familiar material. New thoughts and memories were triggered as I handled the objects laid out around me. Some of the memories first emerged as bodily sensations: a tightness in the shoulders, a sudden yawn, or heat coming to the neck and face. These responses were understood as somatic signposts. Whilst wondering what they pointed to, my experience as a therapist was evident as I recalled the title of Bessel Van der Kolk's influential 2014 book about trauma, *The Body Keeps the Score*. The kinesthetic aspect of this activity also evoked Cecile Elstein's description of an artist's life, in which "touch is seeing with our hands" and "making art involves acting, thinking, and feeling all at the same time" (Elstein, 2019). This process illustrates how my creative practice reveals aspects of Anglo-Indian history and culture that would not emerge using other means of enquiry.

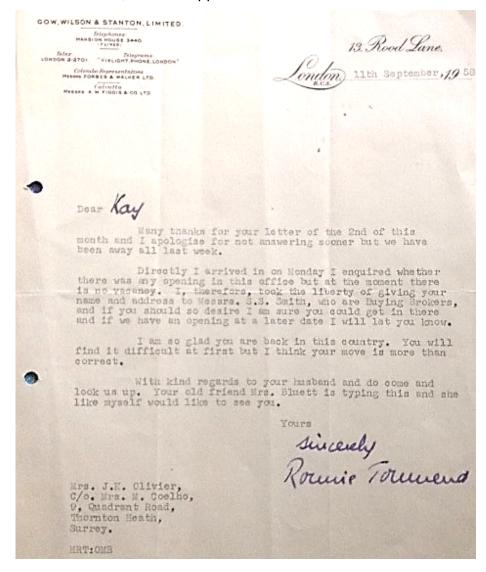
The title of the first experimental collage quotes a 1958 letter to my mother (below). The sender is an Anglo-Indian friend who had already arrived in the UK and transferred from the tea brokers' in Kolkata, where they had both worked, to the firm's London base: "I'm so glad you are back in this country. You will find it difficult at first, but I think your move is more than correct" (see below). The use of the word 'back' indicates the extent of Anglo-Indian identification with the UK as the 'mother country', or perhaps more accurately, "fatherland," as neither my mother nor her friend had ever left India before migrating.

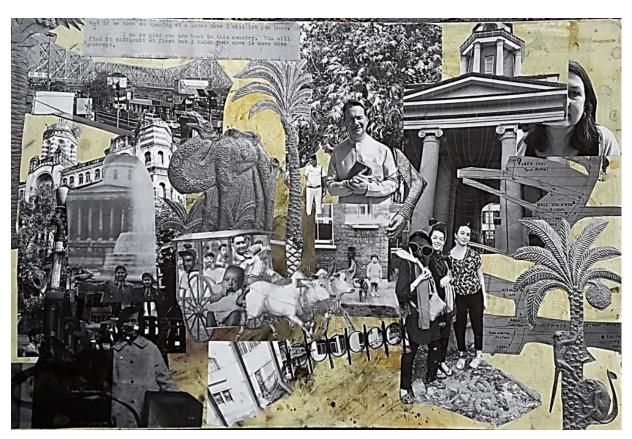
Sonal Khullar, writing about contemporary art from the sub-continent, makes observations that are also applicable to diasporic art (and lives):

The phrase "everyday partitions" encapsulates the way in which contemporary art from South Asia decentres Partition from a fixed historical and geographical location and recasts it as an incomplete process with resonances and reverberations in the present exemplified by extraordinary events such as [...]the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, the ordinary workings of the state and the comings and goings of citizens and non-citizens in maps and checkpoints, class rooms and museums, border crossings and bureaucratic forms. (Khullar, 2017, p. 361)

The title of the collage references this analysis. The "country" referred to is ambiguous and could refer to my parents' passage to England or my current family's visit to India on holiday. For the purpose of my travelling to India, my parents and grandparents were from "the right side" of lines drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe at India's Partition in 1947, differentiating India from Pakistan, and later also Bangladesh. Because they

were domiciled in what became independent India, obtaining visas was relatively straightforward. This contrasts with those born on "the wrong side" of Radcliffe's lines. A cousin, born in newly independent Pakistan in 1949, experienced this negatively when she found that she could not satisfy the exacting evidential requirements needed for an Indian visa in 2018, and her application was refused.





In *I'm So Glad,* visual references to India and England are intertwined. Kolkata's colonial architecture sits next to the comparable portico of London's National Gallery, in front of which my newly arrived cousins are feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square in 1949 (below left). Reviewing the work after its completion, realisation dawns that I have unconsciously juxtaposed an image from a 19th century satire in The Portico Library (Atkinson, 1911), which describes the "teeming" "piebald progeny" of an Englishman who marries an Indian woman with a similar picture of myself, aged 3 (below middle and below right).







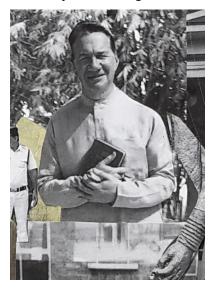
An image from a family holiday to India shows my daughters and me standing beside the overgrown grave of my grandmother and infant brother (below). One purpose of the trip was to find the site. As a result a headstone, which also says "Gone But Not Forgotten," was installed and a cousin declared this to be now "our family's footprint" in India.





I'm So Glad features Michael Portillo (detail below), presenter of the popular BBC series: "Great Indian Railway Journeys". In the series he guides the viewer with the aid of his trusted "1913 Bradshaw's Handbook of Indian, Foreign and Colonial Travel" [sic]. The documentary is relaxed, yet well-informed. Whilst historically accurate, its content is highly selective, echoing D'Costa's discussion of the limitations of colonial perspectives (2016, p. 238). Though the Raj is constantly referred to, there is little mention of the close connection between the Anglo-Indian community and the railways despite the fact that the association was so close that the term "railway man" signified "Anglo-Indian" during this period (Cassity, 1999). Kobena Mercer (2005, p. 126) has emphasised the perils of leaving unchallenged such historical distortions that still have currency. In his 2018 newspaper article "No I'm not Grateful for Colonialism, and Here's

Why", Nikesh Shukla expresses concern about the general lack of awareness of the impact of colonialism, and the expectation that those who were colonised and their descendants should be grateful. He describes giving a talk on this subject and being challenged by an audience member: "People always bring up the railways. The railways that were built to transport resources and soldiers. They weren't exactly built for tourism, for fun, or as a thank you for occupation" (2018). As an example of what Shukla and Mercer are contesting, Portillo's inclusion in *I'm So Glad* alludes to and challenges historical amnesia about colonisation by visually documenting the passage to England made by my family and many other Anglo-Indians.



The body of collages that developed after this work is called *MiscegeNation*. It comments on the prurient way in which Anglo-Indians are depicted, women especially, and reflects what H. L. Malchow calls the 'moral panic' that characterised British attitudes towards the community from the 19th century onwards. Investigating what he terms the "gothicisation of race", he states that "both [vampire and half-breed [sic]] are hidden threats – disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood" and argues that these beliefs were germane to the evolution of fictional characters, such as Dracula and Frankenstein's monster (1996, p. 168). *MiscegeNation* aims to illustrate the insidious effect of historical assumptions about hybridity in humans as corrupting, degenerate, and impure or hypodescent.

The words of Annie Grant, an Anglo-Indian character in *A Rising Man*, Abir Mukherjee's 2016 novel set in 1919 Bengal, indicate the historical uneasiness, disgust, and sense of 'un-whole-someness' projected onto mixed-race people:

A hundred years ago there was nothing wrong with Englishmen marrying Indian women. Now we're just an embarrassment; a visual reminder to the British that they didn't always think of themselves as superior to the natives...[] and as for the Indians... we're a symbol of their precious Indian womanhood abandoning its culture and purity...[] And we [Anglo-Indians] are as bad as the rest of them. Why? Because we're terrified of what will happen to us when the British do leave. (P.117.)

The subversion of such stereotypes is explored in *MiscegeNation*'s collages, some of which reinterpret photographs from family archives through using magazine and newspaper cuttings. The series includes *After Midnight*, *Picnic*, and *What's Wrong with Using a Little Lipstick?* The original photographs behind *After Midnight* and *Picnic* are contemporaneous (below left and right respectively), the first taken in Kolkata on New Year's Eve 1949-50 and the latter, months later, in a Manchester park.





The images show separate branches of my family and the community divided between the subcontinent and the UK after Partition/Independence. The time consuming and intricate making process evoked a rich affective response in me. Reviewing the small well-worn, well-travelled monochrome photographs, and the handwritten legends on the reverse sides registered their significance as objects used to maintain family ties. They informed family members of meaningful events, such as marriages and christenings, where the distances involved meant that important absences on such occasions were keenly felt. For example, the original for *Picnic* was sent 5000 miles from Manchester to Kolkata and then repatriated when my parents brought it back to the UK when they emigrated in 1958. This understanding was amplified at the 2017

symposium "To Draw the Line" in Liverpool marking the 70th anniversary of Partition/Independence where Raminder Kaur, in her talk "Partition, Memory and Migration Overseas" referred to those affected by the displacements of that time as "everyday heroes in the wrinkles of high history" (2017).

On closer inspection, the collages display apparently crudely cut and stuck "Frankenstein"-esque figures, pieced together in an obviously mismatching way to parody and undermine the primitive fears than underlie theories about preserving so-called racial purity. A discussion with art historian Alice Correia led me to the collages of Romare Bearden, who became a key influence. Mercer analyses Bearden's work in semiotic terms as "the purposive selection of signifying elements, found or taken from disparate sources, that are combined in unexpected juxtapositions to create something new" (Mercer, 2005, p. 126). His words could also suggest biological reproduction. He goes on to say that Beardon's "meaning is identical with his method" arguing that the cutting or formal violence inherent in the collage process betokens the way the artist disrupts and reshapes traditional representations of race.

Another influence was Bharti Kher's *This Breathing House* (2016) exhibition. Kher's installation: *The Intermediaries* (2016) comprises clay figures reconstituted from dismembered statuettes. Their grotesque appearance suggested ways to express the trope of mixed-race people as aberrant and biologically unnatural.

After Midnight, (below) evokes Jawaharlal Nehru's much quoted 1947 Independence speech which referred to India's birth "at the stroke of the midnight hour". It also references Leonardo Da Vinci's Last Supper (1495-1498). The golden cardboard crowns signify the unreliable and transient privileges that Anglo-Indians had enjoyed. The party is over and they are surrounded by half-empty bottles and paper decorations. Their future is uncertain. Whilst making the piece, becoming aware of paying particular attention to the detail on the right that included my late parents (bottom left), I felt sad and registered what I can only describe as "a girlish longing" that my mother would have liked the green halterneck dress and diamante handbag I have given her (bottom right).



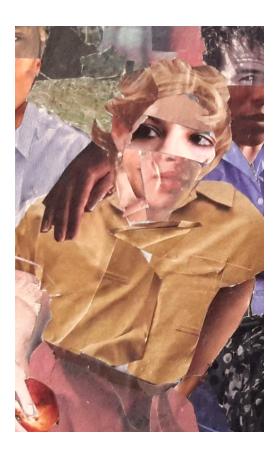




The second collage *Picnic* (below) recalls *Manet's Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass) (1863) and shows my aunt and cousins, as newly arrived immigrants,

with English friends and partners. The positioning of their bodies suggests physical affection and intimacy and an English woman holds an apple evoking a secularised Eve (bottom). *Picnic* references the prurient scrutiny and assumptions brought to mixed-race relationships, at the same time as celebrating the loving and lasting unions which were formed. Their blue-collar life contrasts with the bling of *After Midnight* and the wealthy men in Manet's original painting. The disparity between the settings emphasises the distance or personal partitions that already existed between the UK based branch of the family and those left behind in India.







What's Wrong with Using a Little Lipstick? (detail below) of the same series, is inspired by the true story of Diana Hayden, an Anglo-Indian beauty queen who became Miss India (and then Miss World) in 1997 and Satyajit Ray's 1962 film drama, Mahanagar, (The Big City). The composition of Lipstick is inspired by Sandro Botticelli's Birth of Venus. Venus, like Hayden, is also the winner of a beauty competition: the mythological Judgement of Paris.



Hayden's victory sparked a public row twenty-one years later when a senior Indian politician described her as unrepresentative of "true" and traditional ideals of Indian beauty, such as Hindu goddesses Laxmi and Saraswati (Shah, 2018). These comments echo obsessive questions, highlighted by D'Cruz, of "legitimacy and classification" that pervade discourses about mixed-race people (1996, p. 72). They also signify increasing popular support for Hindu nationalism and state-sanctioned discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in India, referred to as the "saffron terror" (Ali, 2018). Compared with the limitations of England as one potential "mother country" available to Anglo-Indians to go "back" to, the alternative possibility of India seems just as fraught and evokes Zehra Jumabhoy's description of *Bharat Mata* or "Mother India", (in her lecture *Mother Dearest: The Body of the Indian Nation*) as "the kind of mother that has favourites" (Jumabhoy, 2017).

Mahanagar's protagonist Aroti challenges social constraints by becoming her family's breadwinner. At work she befriends an Anglo-Indian colleague, Edith, whose financial situation is similarly precarious. A key moment of cultural exchange occurs when Edith gives Aroti a red lipstick. Sensing Aroti's initial hesitation, Edith says, "What's wrong

with using a little lipstick? You use red here, red here - why not here?" whilst pointing to her hair parting, forehead, then lips (Ray, 1962). A still of this encounter in the film is incorporated as a silvery mirrored "bubble" into *Lipstick's* design. In the film, Edith is later unfairly dismissed by their bigoted employer, when he speculates that she has been sexually active with her fiancé whilst pretending to be sick. Aroti's lipstick wearing is questioned by her husband to whom it signifies a threat to traditional, i.e. chaste, expectations of respectable Bengali women. His objections evoke the historical representation of courtesans, recognisable by their red, paan-stained lips. In *Lipstick?* as in *Mahanagar*, an introduction to the use of lipstick reflects Malchow's assertion that mixed-race people, especially women, have been seen as embodying the threat of biological, sexual, moral, and cultural pollution (1996, p. 168).

Another influence is the geometric forms and rich colours of traditional Mughal miniatures and Jill Ricci's intricate collages, which she describes as "modern hieroglyphics" (2018). In *Lipstick* these principles of display translate to repeated imagery of painted lips, visible through small kaleidoscopic apertures (below).





The process of making collages parallels my professional development as a psychotherapist. My earliest clinical training emphasised emotional, cognitive, and analytic processes. Now, decades later, my work is more inclusive of using the body and somatic sensations, reflecting new ways of working with trauma. It is a common

and creative response to cut off and disconnect from traumatic experiences. Looking back, this is evident in what was modelled in my family, who employed a "least said, soonest mended" strategy to cope with the upheavals and losses of life and migration. This façade was fractured on one memorable occasion when I shockingly glimpsed my father's sudden distress, triggered by a tv documentary, when he recalled living through the communal rioting in Kolkata in 1947. Spending time with family archives and revisiting significant themes and events through making art, has enabled me to gain insights and make new meanings about past events that had been anaesthetised and not talked about. The gift of thinking time and space that these activities deliver allows my understanding of past experiences to grow and reconfigure into a more inclusive and integrated narrative.

Estelle Barratt contends that it is problematic to evaluate such personal and subjective research methods in terms of traditional, scholarly modes of enquiry. She proposes that the strength of arts practice as research lies in its unique potential to produce personally situated knowledge that reveals "philosophical, social and cultural contexts" and also the process by which such knowledge is acquired (Barratt, 2010, p. 2). She writes:

Since creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge. An innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view particularities that reflect new social and other realities either marginalised or not yet recognised in established social practices and discourses....[Tacit knowledge] refers to embodied knowledge or "skill" developed and applied in practice and apprehended intuitively. (Barratt, 2010, p. 4)

Working alone at home at the kitchen table, I find myself in the presence of my family and elders sifting through old photographs and documents. This exercise creates space to picture what was happening at the time the photographs were taken, just before my birth. The intuitive process I am engaged in strongly echoes Barrett's analysis. With hindsight, the impact on that generation of leaving India, and the lasting trauma of some of those transitions, becomes more evident and imaginable. This recognition is sometimes painful, but like blood coming back to a limb that has gone to sleep, it is also enlivening and illuminating.

One of my favourite photographs, captured in 1953, depicts eight friends of my mother and has provided a continual source of inspiration (below). Working with this image has belatedly given me some time at the kitchen table with my aunties, who have been missed due to my mother's premature death. Originally titled "Aunties", the series was renamed when my recent rereading of *Bhowani Junction* (Masters, 1954) reminded me that "8 annas" is a synonym for "half-caste," providing an opportunity to subvert the meaning of uses, such as the one below found in *Hobson-Jobson, The Anglo-Indian Dictionary*:

Anna: the 16th part of a rupee. [...] The term is also applied colloquially to persons of mixt parentage: 'Such a one has at least 2 Annas of dark blood.' This may be compared with the Scotch expression that a person of deficient intellect 'wants two pence in the shilling'. (Yule & Burnell, 1886, p. 31)



The renaming exemplifies experimentation with wordplay, and my wish to unsettle established language through contextual placement, and re-model its meaning. The accidental mis-registration of two monoprints in early studies of the image echoes an experience of being unseen or perceived in a partial or distorted way (below).





The portrayal of Anglo-Indian women as sexually "impure" and "contaminating" and as "gold-diggers" contrasts with the earlier period when the British East India Company needed Indian women to be sexually active to produce the mixed-race community that would support their colonial enterprise, when the pagoda (gold coin) was paid for unions *legitimated* by Anglican marriage (Anderson, 2015, p. 267).

In this regard, Daniel Jewesbury's exploration of the community's predicament in his experimental film *No Special Place* (2007) and related book *Of Lives Between Lines* (2001) was influential. Using Masters' 1954 novel *Bhowani Junction* and the subsequent Hollywood film of the same name (Cukor & Berman, 1956), Jewesbury's work draws attention to the depiction of Anglo-Indian women's sexuality as emplified by protagonist Victoria Jones. In a reproduced page from the original book Jones describes an affair thus: "he never pretended he would marry me. He thought because he was a British officer and I was a cheechee girl I'd do anything." In the margin, Jewesbury notes: "Something cheap (taken for free)" which reflects the theme of monetary value being ascribed to the sexual and reproductive status of women and the concept of marrying strategically to improve one's social standing (Jewesbury, 2001, p. 18).

In her analysis *Identity in Motion: Bhowani Junction Reconsidered* (in *Of Lives Between Lines*) Kathleen Cassity observes:

The stereotypes of the Anglo-Indian woman as "loose" and "immoral," as well as the controversy regarding the extent to which the Anglo-Indian community is originally of "legitimate" or "illegitimate" paternity, have made the community understandably sensitive to issues surrounding the perceived virtues of its women. (Cassity, 1999, p.59)

Cassity considers significant alterations made in the film. In the book Jones opts to remain in India and chooses as her mate the hot-tempered Anglo-Indian "contender" Patrick Taylor (Masters, 1954). In the film Taylor is killed off and the story ends with Jones poised to settle in independent India with a British officer (Cukor & Berman, 1956). The process of reviewing the book and film after many years, at the same time as reading the work of Jewesbury and Cassity, led to a re-collection of personal resonances with Masters' original 1954 work. Like Jones, my mother was in the Women's Auxilliary Corps (India) or WAC(I), like Jones' father, male family members worked on the railways, and like Taylor, my father had a Norton motorbike, which he also drove rather recklessly by all accounts. The jog to my memory recovered yet another layer: about a family story that my mother had refused a British soldier, who had proposed (marriage) during the second world war, on the grounds that she did not want to leave India. She later chose to marry my father, another Anglo-Indian, reflecting the choice made by Jones in Masters' original narrative. If this memory can be relied upon, my mother's decision, like Jones', strikes a contrast with the notion of "the cheechee girl who will do anything" and illustrates her self-determination in a social context where lower value was ascribed to Anglo-Indian men as husbands.

THE PRESENCE OF THE COLONIAL PAST IN THE POST-COLONIAL PRESENT

The defensive, patriotic narrative of empire has become a drug. Like all addicts, those hooked on it cannot stomach critique. (Afua Hirsch, 2018, p. 1)

[Empire is] an <u>inside</u> part of Englishness. . . It's not a question of: Are you nice to us? It's a question of: We are part of you. (Stuart Hall, 2000, p.5)

Far noh mattah wat dey say, Come what may, we are here to stay Inna Inglan inna disya time yah (Linton Kwesi Johnson, 1978, p.1)

During a holiday in Italy, I found myself contemplating gilded Medieval and Renaissance paintings depicting biblical scenes and the lives of saints. The idea of using gold to represent the heroic developed from this experience and coincided with the breaking of the Windrush scandal. (The Windrush scandal is a British political scandal that emerged in 2018 concerning people with Commonwealth ancestry, who are denied legal rights and wrongly deported from the UK). This news provided a context in which to consider my aunties' uncertain predicament and vulnerability

immediately after Indian Independence. The Windrush narrative exposed another dormant memory: Auntie Iris, standing fourth from the left in 8 Annas, is my father's cousin, whom he married to protect from deportation after her English fiancé died. The resulting mixed-media piece is 8 Annas: Are you Thinking What We're Thinking? (below) the title of which references the 2005 UK Conservative Party election manifesto slogan, intended to foster support for immigration control.

The paradise garden they stand in represents pleasure, abundance, and in the Judeo-Christian tradition, temptation, sin, and danger. The pink-red form in the upper left of the composition stands again for Eve's apple and the traditional double standards applied to Anglo-Indian women, which associate their sexuality with sin. This reflects childhood memories of cryptic hints to "be careful" received as gendered advice from my mother, grandmother, and aunties on how to act and dress. Looking back, such coded comments are understood as guidance on how not to look like "a cheechee girl who will do anything" and so avoid sexual attention or exploitation (Jewesbury, 2001, p. 18). By imitating the iconography of many religions, (including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism), which depicts holy or noble figures with haloes, *8 Annas* gives each auntie a golden corona, asserting their heroic status.



The production of this work and the Windrush scandal triggered thoughts about of my father's 1971 application for registration as a UK citizen, and the palpable anxiety at home awaiting confirmation. (Ironically this coincided with family members applying for Irish citizenship in the wake of the Brexit vote). My father's original registration document and the archived letter with the words "I'm so glad you are back in this country" were used to generate cyanotype prints (below) on which the Radcliffe lines are superimposed in gold. This work was influenced by kintsugi, the 15th century Japanese art of fixing broken ceramics with gold resin to make a feature of its blemishes, which translates as "golden repair". Kintsugi's philosophical standpoint is that when an object breaks, it doesn't cease to be useful. Paradoxically it can accrue more worth as a result of its repaired fractures and visible scars. This translates into a concept for people surviving traumatic events with resilience and being disposed to treasure their capacity to do so (Carnazzi, 2019). The use of gold Radcliffe lines in these prints represents the continuing impact of Partition over 70 years later, in the current climate of public debate about who belongs in the UK, following the Brexit vote and the Windrush scandal.





BACK TO LIFE: CONCLUSION

It is clear that an underlying factor in the work concerns my personal history. In my twenties, reading to fill gaps in my knowledge of Anglo-Indian history fell into the false dichotomy of either peddling or denying the stereotypes. This information was partial and thus unreliable, but at that time, better than nothing. At a mature age, making art has given me the opportunity to *re-search* my heritage. Just like therapy, making art can be about reshaping a narrative: one that can be more inclusive and coherent. Three and a half decades after my original reading, there is access to a new generation of academic studies and artwork which consider diasporic, mixed-race communities in the context of developed neo-colonial discourses and also attest the value of practice-based research. The new knowledge, combined with my psychotherapy background, has enhanced my understanding of early life events and revealed more clearly how the impact of personal losses was compounded by communal separations and displacements.

The medium of collage requires a symbolic violence and reassembling of fragmented elements. Using it and the Japanese philosophy of *kintsugi* to represent visually trauma and the disruption of mixed-race people's sense of continuity and belonging, creates a dynamic between method and meaning. To date, my work has involved reconnecting with my family history and using the available remnants of our archive to fashion a new

understanding. The memories that surfaced were allowed to do so because the most frequently used methods, painting, and collage, impose a measured pace. The practice of cutting and sticking and waiting for glue and paint to dry, slows down the making process, providing crucial time for an internal dialogue, reflection, and *re-collected* fragments of memories to appear. The sensations that emerge stir me up, bringing hidden aspects of what is known back to life and create insights that then feed into the work.

Exploring my ancestry through making art has led to a body of work that critically responds to the in-between, obscure, indeterminate, and littoral position historically occupied by Anglo-Indians. This undertaking has combined traditional modes of enquiry with creative arts research and resulted in the production of exact and tacit knowledge. The rich and nuanced learning made possible by the studio activity would not have been revealed if only empirical methods had been relied on. This process resonates with Elstein's description of the healing and revelatory properties of creative practice:

Art illuminates our experience[...] we gather on the shore of the once wild sea, [and] our stories evoke untold histories[...]to communicate is our legacy. (Elstein, 2019)

The mode of producing art that I have described here has unearthed archival material that has a palpable and contemporary resonance, in the light of how Anglo-Indian identity and history exists today. I hope that this work will open a critical dialogue with others about the representation of mixed-race people.

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