

Title	Suitcase Aesthetics: The Making of Memory in Diaspora Art in Britain in the Later 1980s
Type	Article
URL	https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/11262/
Date	2017
Citation	Cherry, Deborah (2017) Suitcase Aesthetics: The Making of Memory in Diaspora Art in Britain in the Later 1980s. <i>Art History</i> , 40 (4). pp. 784-807. ISSN 01416790
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Suitcase Aesthetics:

The Making of Memory in Diaspora Art in Britain in the Later 1980s

Deborah Cherry

Sarat Maharaj's article on what he characterised as the 'Art in Britain of the Immigrations', published in *Third Text* in 1991, begins with a vivid, highly compressed image of a century's arrivals to Britain, the migrants and refugees accompanied by their luggage: 'On the wharfside tin trunks, some knocked about, dented. Heaped on them bags, scuffed suitcases, valises, portmanteaux'. In a compelling analysis of the art of the later 1970s and the 1980s, Maharaj elaborates a 'suitcase language or system of representation', investigating portmanteau words and images which he proposes are 'coined through squashing together regular, received words, images, concepts – telescoping them so that several dimensions of meaning and reference come to be triggered in one thrust.' This device, he elucidates, is 'geared to signify the clashing, colliding worlds of experience thrown together by the immigrations, compressed together concertina-fashion.'¹ Inspired by Maharaj's article, the term 'suitcase aesthetics' is explored here to consider memory's associations with dislocation and relocation, transit and settlement, by contrast to the more familiar associations of

memory with place.² Attention is given here to artworks made in Britain in the later 1980s that summon and actively construct memories of families whose histories were shaped by post-war global migrations and extended through relationships that cross oceans and continents. Set in motion by transnational migrations, the suitcase is a temporary container for a heterogeneity of contents that will be packed and repacked, taken out and re-assembled, re-purposed, re-used, exchanged or discarded. The suitcase becomes as much a potent sign for the displacements of migration as an aesthetic approach, a way of understanding an artistic practice of assembly in which, as Maharaj so acutely describes, ‘everything is pressed, strapped and squeezed in, as in a suitcase, up to bursting point’.³

Chila Kumari Burman’s *Convenience Not Love* (1986-7) and Zarina Bhimji’s *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* (1987) are two very different works among many by diaspora artists in the 1980s that imagine and reinvent individual and collective memory.⁴ In both, autobiography connects and collides with the histories of voluntary and forced migration in which widely diverse south Asian communities arrived in post-war Britain.⁵ The discussion in these pages follows Maharaj’s investigation of ‘an unhinged double movement of the immigrations’ which, he explains, captures both the migrant experience of dislocation and separation and the makings of a new life in a country: ‘On the one hand, the experience of a violating force, an uprooting

which rents and rips apart. On the other, a settling-in, a sense of having arrived, of beginning to belong.’⁶ *Convenience Not Love* and *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* propose distinct yet overlapping trajectories in the visual assembly of memory as well in as the inquiry into the ‘beginning to belong’. At the same time, both artworks reflect on the moment of entry, confront the power of the nation state and address the passport as a potent sign of a nation and its borders, citizenship and rights. The closing section of this essay reflects on the role of living memory in writing about works produced and first exhibited some thirty years ago.

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Chila Kumari Burman’s *Convenience not Love* (1986-87) is a diptych of two silk-screen and laser prints (*plate 1*). Following her graduation from the Slade School of Art in London (1980-82) and Leeds Metropolitan University (then Polytechnic, 1976-79), Burman established a strong reputation and over the decade she contributed a substantive body of artworks to numerous exhibitions within and outside London. *Convenience not Love* was first shown in 1988 at *Along the Lines of Resistance: An Exhibition of Contemporary Feminist Art*.⁷ Throughout her career the artist has favoured printmaking as ‘a democratic, versatile, colourful, creative, experimental, drawing and photographic medium’.⁸

The left hand panel of *Convenience not Love* is divided into three unequal sections (*plate 2*). To the right on a magnificent gold ground stands a cut-out figure of Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, dressed as John Bull, a nationalist personification of Great Britain, in front of an unfurled Union flag. Centre stage is an enlarged image of the old British passport, the official government document that certifies the right to settlement (also called ‘indefinite leave to remain’), citizenship and national identity. Lynda Nead points out that *Convenience Not Love* addresses ‘immigration laws and the virignity tests which determined the entry of [South] Asian women into Britain’.⁹ Advancing from the left like swarms of locusts are impressions from stamps of schematized heads in gas masks and police in riot gear carrying their shields, three small images of police in riot gear, their shields inscribed ‘Come TO Britain for JOBS’ (*plate 3*). Skeins of barbed wire encroach upon the gold ground. For Nead, the stamps are ‘a radical reminder and mimicry of the passport stamp as a sign of inclusion or exclusion’.¹⁰ They also make reference to the aggressive policing of Black communities and of anti-racist demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s and, as in several of the artist’s early works, to anti-nuclear protest. Burman explained that ‘the gas masks symbolize war and anti-nuke stuff’.¹¹ The artist was active in radical politics in the later 1970s and 1980s.¹² In an interview in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* in

1983 Burman stated: ‘Some of the most recent stuff is what you could say social, political, if you want to give it a label, ‘cos sometimes art should have a social and political function.’¹³ The pages showcased works for her *Riot Series* (1981-2, now in the collection of Tate). These 9 prints, including *Triptych No Nukes*, *If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Protest: Uprising* and *Militant Women* confirm the artist’s development of a radical practice of printmaking which channeled found images and texts to create an art committed to nuclear disarmament, anti-racism and feminist activism.¹⁴ As she wrote later of her artistic practice: ‘I would like to see my work as an inspiration and bringing about an awareness of what’s going on. It’s kinda social, political and real. Everything’s political really. The prints describe what I feel. Nasty things, anger, fear, suffering, madness.’¹⁵

In the print to the right, autobiography combines with post-war migration from South Asia to bring to the surface – and here through the artist’s seductive artistic techniques onto its surface – memories of global movements tied to histories of British colonialism (*plate 4*). Burman’s family is from the Punjab in the north of a subcontinent ripped apart by the brutality and violence of Partition; they were among the thousands of South Asians who travelled to Britain in the post-war years. Speaking of her familial history to the writer Meena Alexander, the artist signalled the significance of Partition:

“That’s why my dad left, isn’t it? ... and so I was born here.”¹⁶

In the 1950s, first the artist’s father and then her mother with her elder brother and sister moved to the UK where Chila was born in 1957.¹⁷ The artist’s father ran a successful ice-cream business which has inspired much of his daughter’s art. An intense racism characterized British society in the 1970s and 1980s with racist murders and street harassment; public deportations; and systemic discrimination in housing, education, policing and employment. The artist’s father understood the callous expediency of British dependence on migrant labour, the ‘convenience not love’ that greeted arrivant optimism (signalled perhaps by the gold ground) that is underscored by the title. His text written in Urdu is inserted into the paired windows (above for the passport number and below the bearer’s name) of the old British passport cover. It is translated as:

You allow us to come here

on false promises.

We come here full of hope and

destiny.

You have no mercy.

We will struggle and survive.

Long live. Long live. Long live.¹⁸

Close by, the lines in the bright green speech bubble read: ‘That if there’s any fear that it might be SWAMPED people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in’. The phrasing mimics an inflammatory statement about migration to Britain made by Margaret Thatcher in 1978, the year before her landslide election of 1979.¹⁹ Thatcher’s assertion, with its echoes of Enoch Powell’s notorious ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, contributed to a public rhetoric that has persistently cast migration in terms of inundation and deluge, taking up and yet at once disavowing the destructive force of water that has taken the lives of so many migrants and refugees. Countering this racist proclamation with its outspoken vilification is another text that gives voice to a determination to survive. Written in loud capitals to the side of an image of a man carrying two suitcases an ‘INDIAN PASSPORT’ and walking over a carpet emblazoned ‘WELCOME TO HEATHROW’ and multiple £ signs, is the proclamation: ‘HERE TO STAY!!’ (*plate 5*).

If the print on the left concerns the forces of the state and the second conjures the diasporic experiences of South Asian families and communities, both are equally about resistance, opposition and challenge. The bold tripartite divisions of the left hand panel are partnered by the assymetric and deceptively haphazard composition of the images arranged around the decisive line of passports. The singular figure of Thatcher is countered by myriad scenes, figures and objects, each entering

into conversations and juxtapositions with those around it. In many cases the figures face the viewer as they look forward or up, directly addressing the spectator who may be the merciless 'you' or the 'we' who come, who 'struggle and survive'. Counterpoised to the single British passport cover are four covers of passports issued by the South Asian nations of Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.²⁰

The artist has assembled a heterogenous montage in which family photographs share the space with a wealth of media illustrations gifted to her and snipped by her from print sources (*plate 6*). The artist explained this practice of making and assembly: 'I take my own photographs and collect others from magazines, books and the like for ideas and information'.²¹ Collage and photomontage were widely used in radical art and publications of the 1970s and 1980s, artists and designers consciously drawing on the avant-garde and modernist precedents and acknowledged political purpose of these art forms. Sophie Orlando affirms that 'lithography, etching and print[mak]ing predominate in [Burman's] work, techniques inherited from the artistic avant-garde, and the propaganda poster in Socialist Europe.'²² Montage offers Burman possibilities for deconstruction and reconfiguration, for mapping the geographies of personal and global histories, for elaborating cartographies and for setting up connections and juxtapositions that foreground the diversity of South Asian migrants to Britain.

~~to and~~ Burman archives her own history, signalling the transnational connections of feminist activism and inspirational figures and movements, past and present, in India and in Britain. Included are images of feminist protests on the subcontinent and of the renowned strike led by Jayaben Desai of mainly South Asian women workers at the Grunwick Film Processing Laboratory in North London, 1976-78 (*plate 7*). Burman is equally the archivist of family and collective memory: gathering, selecting, placing, reprising.²³ With their disjunctions of size and scale and brilliant colour, some figures shoot forward. Others recede as if puncturing or opening up the screen to spaces, times and places beyond the present of this collected and collated arrangement. Meena Alexander has written of the emotional disturbance engaged by revisiting the past: to 'return, even in memory, involves a certain violence, a disturbance not easily endured'. She explains that this is because '[t]raumatic memory, by bursting through the ordinary continuities of time, invests itself in a ceaseless present whose borders are mapped by sights and sounds that will never take leave of us precisely because we are forced to keep returning there, in our minds over and over again.²⁴ While Burman's montage conveys a recognition that arrival and settlement entail departure and separation, *Convenience Not Love* equally affirms presence and resilience, pleasures and memories shared across two continents.

These luminous large-scale prints are impressive from a distance. They hold the wall majestically, over 2.5 metres in length (see *plate 1*). To see the small-scale images, some set at an oblique angle, and to read the texts, viewers will seek proximity to look slowly and in detail. And they will decide whether to view the diptych from left to right, or right to left as Urdu is written, a direction which will change their dynamic of looking. Everyday images of the artist growing up, of her relatives and intimate domestic interiors cross a threshold of visibility alongside ~~to-abut~~-press photographs and media images drawn from a wide range of resources including newspapers, Black women's resource centres such as Southall Black Sisters (where the artist worked in these years), Indian comic books, and contemporary papers such as *Mukti*, a feminist magazine printed in Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu and English which was dedicated to giving South Asian women a voice and self-representation. Their first editorial of 1983 declared, 'We must start to write our own stories, create our own pictures, share our struggles and our triumphs'.²⁵ To the left of the right-hand print is an image of the Rani of Jhansi, facing women's protests and demonstrations in India and Britain sweeping through the space beneath the passports. Indian comic books celebrated the lives of renowned historical figures including martial queens and revolutionary women warriors known for their prowess in battle and their decisive leadership.²⁶ Rani

Lakshmibai (1828-58) was often depicted on horseback brandishing her sword. A heroine of Indian resistance to the British Raj, she is an enduring icon of defiance, rebellion, independence and courage. As Joyce Chapman Lebra explains, ‘Since her martyr’s death, the legend of the Rani has had a history and dynamism of its own’, becoming a pervasive and enduring sign of nationalist resistance and independence.²⁷ Rani Lakshmibai also inspired Burman’s contemporary print, *Jhansi-Ki Rani (Rebel without a Pause)* of 1988.²⁸

In *Convenience Not Love*, as in many works by diaspora artists of the 1980s, diverse historical moments jostle with one another. Chronological projections of linear time unravel spatially and temporally as the present looks back to, reflects upon and reactivates the past while projecting a future.

Convenience Not Love interlaces many distinct moments, places and protagonists – South Asian arrivants including Burman’s family in the 1950s, family life in the 1960s, Margaret Thatcher’s speech on migration in the year before her landslide election as Prime Minister in 1979, images of policing and enforcement in the 1980s, found images of women’s protest from the mid-nineteenth-century to now. Akin to the spirals of time in Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth* (2000), *Convenience Not Love* maps recursive, parallel and divergent moments and histories between South Asia and Britain to interlace the transnational connections between past, present and future,

genealogies and generations, spaces and movements that converge to make up the now. Laid out across the diptych is a multi-temporal, plurispatial image atlas of the convulsive uprooting of migration and the hostility of the host country, together with a visual mapping of the makings of a new life in a process that re-collects and recollects. The portable archive of family photographs that has travelled between the subcontinent and Britain, that has passed from hand to hand, across generations and that has been a capacious container for the fragility of memory, is re-assembled and augmented with a compendium of media images imprinted with significance by their inclusion. Burman's montage speaks eloquently of the transience and precarity of memory, giving visual form to its vulnerability, its kaleidoscopic combinations and palimpsest erasures. At the same time, this diptych vigorously addresses ~~of~~ ~~the~~ the relations of knowledge and power whether in the perpetuation of racist discourse or the enduring strength of feminist protest.

The artist continued her visual archaeology of her family album in a series of deeply investigative images in the following decade. In *Dad on Ship Coming to Britain* (1995), a photograph of the artist's father, posed at the bar of the ship on which he travelled to Britain, is overprinted with a text from inside a British passport. The dissected passport lays bare the entanglement of migrants and refugees with the power of the

state. Elsewhere family photographs are superimposed with skeletalized British currency notes. *Portrait of My Mother* (1995) is a triptych of three identical photographs of the artist's mother in which those to the left and right are overlaid with a British ten pound note (*plate 8*). The photograph captures a meditative yet guarded expression in which a smile seems to flicker and vanish from the gentle, thoughtful face of the artist's mother as she looks slightly aslant, her head and shoulders lightly covered with a dupatta. Like *Dad on Ship Coming to Britain* the image is delicately coloured, akin to a hand-tinted vintage photograph. Meena Alexandra perfectly characterizes the overprinting as a 'mark of sovereignty, as light as lace, as fierce as a metallic brand, over that beloved face'.²⁹

Burman's interrogation of her family archive culminates in *Body Weapons: Wild Women Beyond Two Cultures*, presented at *Transition of Riches* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 1993 (*plate 9*). This bravura installation that set up dynamic interactions between repurposed family photographs, images of her father's ice-cream van, laser-prints of South Asian women, a video textured from snapshots of her women relatives in Liverpool and India, a soundtrack mixed by the artist of Bhangra, Reggae, blues, punk, popular and folk music: 'the music we grew up with'.³⁰ Showcased as part of this installation were several of the artist's large-scale auto-portraits. Visitors was assailed by pulsating rhythms and sounds that

swirled around this room of images and seeped into what were then relatively quiet museum spaces, summoning them to a corporeal and sensory address as intense as the impact of the larger than life shape-shifting self-portraits with their over-written declarations. The installation's multi-sensory address prompts memories and reflection on the scattering and collecting together of family members and familial mementoes. It participates in what Annette Kuhn calls the 'memory work' of photography, generating a performative space in which these mnemonic images are enacted as public and national history.³¹

Burman had long challenged the media stereotyping of South Asian women. With a dazzling technical virtuosity in which she reprises and resizes, paints over and reprints, the auto-portraits restlessly refashion her self-image. Some confront assumptions with over-written declarations such as 'This is Not Me'; others show the artist dressed in a sari performing movements in the Japanese martial art of Shotokan. As Tania Guha states: 'For this show Burman has expanded an existing collection of self-portraits in different guises. She resists the imposition of one-dimensional stereotypes by casting herself as a host of persons: from glamorous clubber to the Goddess Kali. In representing elements of the self, which are considered other by dominant systems of representation, Burman enacts a process of reclaiming, self-definition and empowerment.'³² Prefacing a series of artist artist's pages illustrated with self-portraits

including the dazzling *Self-Portrait of Fly Girl Reaching Heights and Watching the World* (1992), Burman explains:

The intention of the work is to challenge people's stereotyped assumptions of Asian women, and to make new radical forms of intellectual representation. These photo-painting-drawing-laser works use wild, spacy, trippy, mega-blast '90s means of representation; radical ecstatic vision, magical elements of pain, passion and pleasure, affirming me and my sisters are here to stay and express ourselves the way we feel like.³³

This statement confirms Burman's life-long commitment to artistic practice as an active force for challenge and change. In 1984, artist and film maker Pratibha Parmar asked: 'How do you represent in images the resistance and strength of Asian women in their daily struggles to survive the onslaught of racism?'³⁴ This question found many responses in numerous artworks and exhibitions of the decade.³⁵ Mumtaz Karimjee's artistic and curatorial project 'to make visible the strength of south Asian women both in history and today' was realized in her beautifully-composed exhibition *My Mothers, My Sisters, Myself* (1989) in which she placed her self-portraits beside archival and contemporary depictions of South Asian women.³⁶ Throughout the 1980s and beyond, Burman's art has offered an

imagery of resistance that has not only refuted media stereotypes but put into place radical new visual representations of South Asian women and families in artworks whose myriad artistic skills and technical virtuosity has the declarative force of 'here to stay'.

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She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence (1987) dates from Zarina Bhimji's years as a graduate student at the Slade School of Art in London (1987-89), years in which she was beginning to exhibit and establish a reputation. First shown in 1987, the work was soon acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.³⁷ Flight, crossing borders, rethinking place, making images that stage the memories of the past and construct new memories of a new country are all enwrapped in an installation that recalls the moment of entry, the estrangement of settlement. *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* is threaded through with material and sensory memories embedded in textiles and articles that recall a south Asian life in east Africa, mnemonic objects that point to scandalous historical events as well as treasured belongings.

Four double-sided panels are suspended from the ceiling on fine strands (*plate 10* and *plate 11*). Turmeric and chilli powders are scattered on the floor below. Between two pieces of roughly cut perspex are photographs laid on fine white muslin. In the fourth panel the fabric is loosely ruched and scrunched;

the artist's stitching secures several twists. On one side is laid a pair of surgical gloves; on the other a silk-screen print on muslin of two passport stamps. On one face of all four panels are short texts in blue and red dry transferable lettering, seen in reverse on the other side. The silver gelatin print photographs on bromide paper portray jewellery arranged on muslin, embroidered shoes and birds laid on grass. Writing in 1988, the artist explained:

This piece has four parts and each part in sequence has two photographs sandwiched in between perspex panels. In between the photographs is muslin cloth on which the text is printed in blue/red. In small parts the photographs are tinted with a faint pink. The panels are hung from the ceiling so that they are at eye level. Directly below on the floor is sprinkled murchi [red chilli pepper] and haldi [turmeric] powders.³⁸

Installed, the panels float in space, moving slightly perhaps as viewers move round them. Little folds and strands of muslin escape. Bordering and borderless, the panels frame but do not contain the photographs, fabric and gloves caught in-between. Muslin skims under perspex and paper, at times translucent, at others a filmy veil, a doubled screen. Transparency rivals gauzy opacity. Fabric is duplicitous, seen in itself and in its image. Photographs hover between clarity and ambiguity, intense detail

and irresolution. Perspex is contradictory: offering a window to what lies beneath, it is an enclosing boundary and a reflector of what lies beyond, namely, the room, its sources of light, the figures within it. It is a deceptively immaterial material, characterized by what Peter Gorsen calls a ‘magical ambivalence of impenetrability and transparency’, which ‘opens up possibilities for spatial design that were not there before, or only approximately, as in the case of glass’.³⁹ Perspex encases and exposes: it traps and reveals what is within. It is a surface and a reflective plane that can capture what lies beyond and outside it. This hovering between clarity and ambiguity, intense detail and irresolution asks viewers to reflect on what they see at the same time as they may watch themselves watching. The screens have a slight sheen, reflecting spectators back to themselves while bringing them into the installation—~~work~~ as participants (see *plate 10*). In this work, so concerned with boundaries as well as border-crossings, edges are ambiguous: slippers edge into the frame, fabric escapes, perspex beguiles. Varied components, each with distinct transnational traces, are sandwiched between the perspex, their compression speaking expressively of the containment of a suitcase aesthetic.

Incising the gallery space, the arrangement of the panels and splices forms a continuous line. Viewing from left to right the photographs portray jewellery resting on muslin, a bird lying on or in a net, a shoe and a small bird lying on grass, followed

by the panel with the surgical gloves. Walking anti-clockwise, the spectator encounters the passport stamps, then photographs of two slippers and a bird, a bird out of focus, and lastly, a bird on grass (*plates 12-17*). The images are close-ups seen from above. Suspended, the panels provoke disorientation to a sense of physical balance: an anklet, a small bird, and embroidered *juthis* defy gravity to hover in mid-air. There is a dynamic charge between the floor, the reflective surface of the panels, the undulations of the text, and the vertiginous perspective of the photographs, taken with a camera held to a face looking vertically down to the ground or at a slant. Writing in 1992 Mark Haworth-Booth remarked, 'the eye scanned them [the panels] as if they were on a film screen: as part of a surface rather than the contents of a frame'.⁴⁰ ~~Another analogy is the more recent practice of scanning suggests the practices of cultural translation that are at work here.~~ The liquid production of still photography – producing the image in light to set it on film and arrest it on paper – is here released back into motion. By hanging the works the artist makes a spatial gesture, completed by the performative scattering of the spices ~~that, with their streaked and layered horizontality, complete the work's spatiality~~ (*plate 20*). The interlacing swirls of spice echo the eddies of the fabric. The spices transform the surface of the floor bringing it into the work.⁴¹ They also set a ~~spatial~~ definition, since viewers are reluctant to tread on them.⁴²

She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence assembles a panoply of materials: white muslin distinctive to South Asia; shoes familiar in the sub-continent and in diaspora, and small birds, one a thrush, native to the British Isles; two spices customarily used in South Asian cooking. Texts and textiles, images and spices intimate a haunting theme of migration across borders and between cultures. The artist has explained the double diaspora of her heritage, the displacement of an earlier generation who migrated from Gujarat in India to settle and work in East Africa as well as the more recent expulsion of South Asian communities and her own family from Uganda:

In recent work I have used photographs of personal objects to explore the questions of identity and place. I want to create, communicate new meanings by bringing Indian language, objects, memory, dreams, conversations from East African and Indian backgrounds – as well as my experience of Western culture – to play in between two realities.⁴³

The spices have migrated across the globe: as valuable commodities they have been sought after by traders and merchants, fought over in imperial conquest. While they add pungency to many dishes produced in South Asia, both turmeric and chili are also exploited as additives and added flavourings in

the western food industry. But their uses go beyond the culinary. Bhimji drew attention to the haldi ceremony in which women friends and relatives rub the skin of the bride and the groom with turmeric paste before the wedding, a comment that suggests that the scattered spices point to a rite of passage. For the artist chilli ‘has numerous overtones – strong and passionate’ and she noted its use by South Asians in Britain to ward off street attackers: ‘it stings the eyes but does not injure’.⁴⁴ She later recalled that faced with far-right violent opposition to Asian settlement in Leicester, ‘we decided there had been enough “Paki bashing”’. We took the law into our own hands: in our defence we threw red chilli powder at the National Front.⁴⁵

The photographs of *juthis* and jewellery offer enlarged images of treasured possessions, small enough to pack into suitcases. The belongings, property, funds and businesses of Asians leaving Uganda were seized or confiscated. Meera Dattani remembered that: ‘At the airport, jewellery had to be hidden, tucked into clothes and cases with the skill of a smuggler. Wedding rings and even radios could be forcibly removed.’⁴⁶ In Bhimji’s installation the shoes on the grass delicately point to dislocation, transit and relocation.⁴⁷ Transnational objects that have crossed continents in personal luggage or shipping containers, the shoes are both reminders of ‘home’ and markers of a new life, mnemonic reminders that

activate personal and collective memory, conjuring home and longing that characterizes diasporan experience. Avtah Brah has emphasized that ‘the homing of diaspora, the diasporising of home’ is often premised on the intersections of memory and desire, recollections and rememory, a conceptualising of heritage that is based on rethinking the past to reimagine a future.⁴⁸ The emptiness of the shoes is intriguing: are they attendants of daily life or reserved for special use, relics of a departure or death, *lieux de memoire* that recall a life departed or a lost way of life? For Alice Correia ‘images of abandoned shoes resonate with a presence now transposed or vanished...the abandoned shoes in *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* become fragments of unspoken testimony available to us in the form of tentative evidence.’⁴⁹ Bhimji’s ability to invest the ordinary with traumatic resonance is also revealed in ‘Then I woke up’, a double-page spread for *Polareyes: A Journal by and about Black Women Working in Photography* (issue 1, 1987). Photographs of forsaken tiny belongings accompany a text testifying to violence in Uganda and Britain, rape, death, police brutality, state terror.

In *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* the birds hint at the precarity of flight and passage, their death intensifying the installation’s concerns with mortality, loss and the forgettings that are central to the practice of memory. This installation can be perceived as an elegiac mourning marking the passage from

the air she loved to breathe to the silence of death, a deafening void when speech and the distinctive sound of a voice are no more. The title is both part of the work and apart from it, a border and a threshold. The first part may comprise an epitaph of memory for one departed, recalling perhaps a distinctive preference of she who ‘loved to breathe’ or the ~~precarity of a~~ vanishing of a way of life that is at the heart of migration and exile, or as Maharaj puts it so eloquently, ‘an unhinged double movement of the immigrations’.⁵⁰ If ‘pure’ silence can be understood as a state of inner tranquility, it may also find correlation with the condition of whiteout in which there are no visible markers, leaving the individual with no orientation to find their bearings. Silence has so many potential resonances: from the absence of sound or audible noise, to a willed or forced abstention from speech, an inability to communicate in the prevailing language, an avoidance, refutation or refusal.⁵¹ *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* offers poignant testimony to the predicament of migrants in a new country, in a state of liminality, to draw once again on Maharaj, that may be [a] ‘borderline identity, belonging to both sides and to neither’.⁵²

Haunted by death and disappearance, Bhimji’s early works are characterized by their fragile and vulnerable materials and the recurrence of relics, residues, remnants and salvaged possessions that bear marks of trauma and transformation. In an illuminating conversation with the artist Sonia Boyce published

in the catalogue for Bhimji's exhibition, *I Will Always Be Here* (Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1992), Bhimji spoke of the sensory pleasures and memories evoked by fabric: 'textiles do recur as a motif. I do take pleasure in them – the feel of pure silk or cotton, almost like skin'. She admitted a predilection for deterioration: 'The language I use is related to vulnerability. Many of the elements are transparent: the shirts, the paper dresses, things easily destroyed.' Bhimji continued that she 'would like people to feel uncomfortable with my work. I am exploring the possibility of deep layers of anger and how important anger is.' When Boyce responded, 'there is a contradiction here, as you use such beautiful, almost seductive materials', Bhimji replied 'I do not choose the materials for their sensual qualities. I am attracted more to their vulnerability, the possibility of decay.'⁵³ But of course, in pain, in anger, there often coexists an intense pleasure – the contradiction exists'.⁵⁴ Fine muslin returns time and again in itself and in photographs that for Mark Haworth-Booth test the properties of materials.⁵⁵

The fourth panel interrupts the installation's sequence. On one side are a pair of surgical gloves with cuffs overlapping the palms and fingers outstretched, tucked into muslin which is ruched, scrunched and twisted, its redoublings secured with the artist's stitching. On the reverse appears an enlarged replication of a passport stamp which states: 'The time limit on the holder's leave to enter the United Kingdom is hereby removed/ for

Secretary of State, Home Office, dated 7 November 1975' (see *plate 15* and *plate 16*). *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* is thus a historical work. Although the photographs were taken in London in March 1985 and Leicester in March 1987,⁵⁶ the work also refers to the precise moment 12 years earlier when Bhimji was granted official permission to settle in the United Kingdom. The artist's family left Uganda following General Idi Amin's declaration of the expulsion of the South Asian population.⁵⁷ After 'two years of living behind closed curtains while civil war raged outside',⁵⁸ Bhimji arrived in Britain 'with two dresses, a cardigan and speaking no English'.⁵⁹ Although many had British passports this document did not automatically confer residency in the United Kingdom. While migration increased after 1945, prompted by invitation, decolonisation and independence, legislation increasingly restricted rights of settlement and fewer than 30,000 South Asians from Uganda were admitted.⁶⁰

The surgical gloves recall a notorious immigration policy that specifically targeted South Asian women. Those seeking entry into Britain were subjected to gynecological examinations, undertaken by British government agencies at Heathrow and on the sub-continent. In the artist's file at the Victoria and Albert Museum are her notes made from contemporary reports in *The Guardian* newspaper.⁶¹ More recent analysis of British Home Office papers concludes that these invasive procedures 'were among the gravest abuses of the discretionary powers held by

immigration control officers in British immigration history'.⁶²

When viewing the passport stamps, the gloves are visible in reverse as ghostly shadows that cannot be overlooked, leaving no gap for incomprehension (*plate 21*).

She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence does not make a sound, yet it is filled with voices. Above the hand tinted prints are bold letter-set texts in red and blue lettering. To read the words, spectators will pause, slow down the pace of gallery-looking. The lines dip and fall, seeming to echo inflections of speech and timbres of voice. Mark Haworth-Booth wrote evocatively in 1992: 'The words followed the weave and stretch of the threads, like the undulation of something being spoken'.⁶³ The words slip and slither, legible only with a patient regard that also discloses a small insertion inscribed *aapri bheno* or 'our sisters' in Gujarati (see *plate 15*). In 1988 the artist affirmed the significance of text to her work of these years: 'When text is used, it is carefully considered as an image and treated as a vehicle through which meanings are suggested'.⁶⁴ From left to right the texts read (see *plates 12-15*):

SLOWLY SHE RAISED HER ARM, THIN DARK
BROWN IN THE SUN-HAZE CIRCLED BY TWO
HEAVY GOLD BANGLES. THIS HAD COME FROM
HOME – EVERY ISMAILI GIRL WORE FROM BIRTH

THE ANGER TURNED IN-WARD, WHERE COULD IT
GO EXCEPT TO MAKE PAIN? IT FLOWED INTO ME
WITH HER MILK.

IT WAS THE MOTHER AND OTHERS, AS THEY
WERE ALIKE – THOSE WATCHFUL, WRATHFUL
WOMEN WHOSE EYES SEARED – LAID BARE
THOSE TONGUES THAT LASHED THE WORLD IN
UNREMITTING DISTRUST

EACH MORNING AT 5:00 a.m. THEY SCRUBBED
THE FLOOR – SOME ONE OFFERED HER A DAY’S
WORK. SOMETIMES THESE WHITE PEOPLE ON
THE WAY TO WORK LAUGHED AT THEIR
INDIANESS SHOUTED PAKI: *AAPRI BHENO*,
SUCKED THEIR TEETH, DISMISSING THEM
..

When making *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence*, Bhimji
visited Heathrow Airport, for many the site of entry to Britain.
She talked to South Asian women working at the airport and
living nearby, drawing on her memories of these conversations
for the script on the panels. According to Kellie Jones: ‘Many of
her texts are extracted from diaries she kept over the years’.⁶⁵
Undervalued in the labour market, South Asian women were

channelled into semi-skilled, unskilled and low-paid work in the manufacturing and service sectors where they encountered persistent unemployment, discrimination and exclusion.⁶⁶ This work was often temporary, unprotected, and insecure: ‘some one offered her a day’s work’. In a contemporaneous analysis of women in the global economy Swasti Mitter highlighted the operations of transnational corporations and the increasing casualisation of labour.⁶⁷

The lines surge with emotions. They switch register between the inner speech and outspoken declaration. They recall extracts from a diary, snatches from memory, reportage, fragments overhead, murmured thoughts, and emphatic utterances. ~~spoken declarations.~~ At moments, the voices are close-up, akin to the intensity and intimacy of the photographic detail, poised between audible speech and visible writing. Like the vertiginous perspective of the photographs, the texts inscribe positions: the observer of the ‘watchful, wrathful women’ or ‘these white people’; the listener who hears the sharp intake of breath. If silence can suggest tranquillity, the absence of sound or an absorbing quietude, it may also evoke an active force of unhearing, or of making speechless; a refusal or denial of communication, a failure in translation, an epistemic break. The two words in Gujarati insert a shared experience and language, and a reminder: that it is ‘our sisters’, South Asian women who are being spoken about, racially abused, offered precarious

work, and who at this same airport were subjected to gynaecological examinations. Bhimji's engagement with contemporary migration was underlined in the *Terms and Conditions* of the acquisition of *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* which noted that: 'The Artist would like to include a brief statement about nationality history – this would be read as part of the work.' And in her 'Artist's statement' she declared: 'The work is not just about virginity tests – that is simply one example and a reminder of what life can be outside gallery walls.'⁶⁸

The gloves introduce a violating touch, countered by the remembered touch, taste and scent of the haldi ceremony. Touch is central to the making of the work: in the assembly of its constituent parts, in the stretching and stitching of the fabric, in the pressure that seals the letters to the surface or sandwiches the elements of the panels together. Laid out as swirling patterns of colour, the spices invite looking; recognized as spices, they incite and tease the senses of smell, touch and taste. While some odours intensify with decomposition, the scent of the dried and ground spices in *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* dissipates from the moment they are released into the air.⁶⁹ Yet though their aroma disappears almost immediately, their colour remains; if the dried spices are suspended in liquid their savour may revive. The aromatic evanescence of the spices parallels the disappearance of speech into the air the moment it is uttered,

remembered in memory or captured in the after-text of words in letters pressed onto muslin.⁷⁰ Invocations of aromas and tastes, touches and sounds, are characteristic of many diaspora art works of the 1980s. Here, to paraphrase Jacques Rancière, sense and sensation make sense. Rancière has written extensively of the intersections between *sense* as the sensory responses and encounters of the body, and *sense* as a regime of meaning and interpretation, arguing for an aesthetics in which ‘a repartition of the sensible ... brings together manners of making or doing, forms of visibility and manners of speaking’.⁷¹ Rancière’s thinking highlights how sensory works by diaspora artists offer sensations and meanings that are oppositional and resistant to mainstream cultures.

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In the 1980s diaspora artists drew on family archives and personal collections of photography to assemble counter histories of diaspora and migration and to connect personal stories and family journeys to global histories. Snapshots were displaced from the family album into the public arenas of artistic practice and exhibition displays. Above the exhibits in Lubaina Himid’s landmark exhibition *The Thin Black Line* (Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1985), staged not in the main galleries but in the ground floor corridor leading to the stairs, was a ‘thin black line’ of archival, found, family, personal and media photographs that stretched the length of the long wall.

Lubaina Himid has recollected that ‘we wanted to bring our “community” “heroines” “sisters” into the space with us for company and to provide the context and the “soundtrack” for the show. Everyone brought images and we installed them on the “photo” wall together.’⁷² The assembly of images past and present, personal and public powerfully inscribed the visibility of black histories and the collation of memory (*plate 22*).

Intimate Distance at The Photographers’ Gallery in London in 1989 (UK tour 1990-91) explored the themes of migration and dislocation through a focus on photography.⁷³ Ingrid Pollard’s *Oceans Apart* (1989, Tate, London) draws on photographs from her family album accompanied by two historical engravings to ‘articulate the historical significance of the coastline as the frontier of slavery, migration and displacement for black peoples’. Pollard stated, ‘I have drawn on the family album as a record of events, and as a continuing link in the journey’ in which ‘three generations of my family criss-cross the Atlantic three times.’⁷⁴ Bhimji’s *Live for Sharam and Die for Izzat* (1989) presented fourteen wall-mounted small black and white photo-text panels with seven larger transparencies sandwiched between perspex. Slipped in between a sequence of body parts is an image of a supine unclothed figure laid out on muslin and scattered with hair, body deeply still, eyes wide open. This deeply troubling visual sequence was likened by Gilane Tawardros to a ‘series of images as indistinct and incoherent as

memories or dreams'.⁷⁵ Its title referring to concepts of modesty, shame and honour in Muslim communities, the images intimate domestic abuse and familial violence.⁷⁶ *Intimate Distance* also included Mona Hatoum's renowned *Measures of Distance* (1988, Tate, London) and Maxine Walker's series of exquisite monochrome photographs caught between portraits and documentary.

In the far gallery, Sutapa Biswas installed *Infestations of the Aorta – Shrine to A Distant Relative (plate 23)*. Three free-hanging panels each contain large-scale negative transparencies printed on lithographic film of a photograph of a woman dressed in a sari holding up a child. Each is contained by a double border whose density and depth surrounds this haunting, translucent negative of a photograph of the artist's aunt taken at the naming ceremony of her daughter, the artist's cousin.⁷⁷

Tawadros describes this image appearing 'as a trace of an absent original perhaps an old family-~~photography~~ photograph which has been lost or misplaced'.⁷⁸ The panels were placed approximately three feet from the wall to allow, according to the artist, 'enough space for viewers to pass between, their own shadows becoming part of the dynamics of the piece'.⁷⁹

Carefully lit in a room with low light levels, the panels cast mesmerizing patterns of light and shadow that reinscribe the space, inviting corporeal and sensory connections to their extended line and the spaces beyond, teasing viewers's

perceptions of a lustrous image of a Buddha's mouth on the far wall. In her artist's statement Biswas emphasized the significance of repetition and the 'rhythm of patterns and structures'. She confirmed the 'personal echoes' in a work that 'explores the relationship between two people (mother and daughter/niece and aunt) separated by distance'.⁸⁰ As one reviewer noted, 'the technique is ravishing'.⁸¹ A variant installation in *Sacred Space* (1990), Biswas's MA show at the Slade School of Art in London in 1990, included a poetic text written by the artist which speaks of separation across a distance that is both temporal and geographic, a haunting absence and presence.⁸² While the opening segment of the title refers to a parasitic infestation of the body's main artery, suggestive of the physical as well as psychic damage of loss, its rejoinder sharpens the intensity of this installation as memorial, a space of remembrance.

These artworks shared in an aesthetics of assembly characteristic of diaspora art in the 1980s. This art of collection and recollection gathers traces, c(l)ues, relics and remnants scattered in diaspora and migration, marking, as Jane Beckett has written, 'the precariousness of historical survival, as well as the pluralities and insecurities entailed in the processes of historical interpretation.'⁸³ Highly varied across the diversity of artistic practices and media, this inventive and experimental artistic process was accompanied by new critical writings and

aesthetic theories that foregrounded issues such as transnational citation, assembly and recoding.⁸⁴ This art of assembly was as much about compression as conjunction and confluence. Images and objects are packed together in layers; texts are pushed into confined spaces; one stratum overprints many others. Times, spaces and connections are twisted irregularly together.

Convenience not Love and *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* exemplify the explosive force of a suitcase aesthetics ‘in which everything is pressed, strapped and squeezed in, ... up to bursting point’⁸⁵ as the assembled elements are held in a dynamic, uncertain tension.

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The works considered here were produced and first exhibited some thirty years ago. Embedded in the art historical study of an individual work may be memories of where and how the work has been installed and displayed, its conversations with other works and its material condition. The passage through diverse spaces from the artist’s studio to exhibitions, collections, museums, conservation studios, across borders for international display and acquisition, in and out of the market, through variant installations, on websites and in print publications constitute what may be called a work of art’s ‘social life’.⁸⁶ An artwork also acquires a mnemonic history. In speaking and writing about these works, whether in the 1980s or more recently, the artist articulates anew memories of making, giving voice to the

vanished moment in which the work was created and initially displayed; the art historian may well revisit varied moments of encounter, some of which may have left no documentary trace.

A rapid succession of exhibitions in the 1980s curated by artists including Sutapa Biswas, Chila Kumari Burman, Lubaina Himid, Marlene Smith, and Maud Sulter showcased diaspora and international artists.⁸⁷ Since then, works of art (and artists) have moved in and out of public visibility; while some have been acquired by public collections, others have been purchased by private buyers; some have remained in the artist's studio, while others have been destroyed.⁸⁸ Acquisition by and management within a museum, its 'musealization' as Hanna Hölling nicely puts it, distinctively shapes an art work's social life, documentation and visibility.⁸⁹ Wherever their location, surviving pieces frequently assume the default condition of much contemporary and historical art – storage. Often requiring the complex assembly of many constituent parts, installation art makes particular demands; Tatja Scholte emphasises that an installation 'only comes into being as a work of art through the process of being installed'.⁹⁰ Outside the exhibition or gallery or within a closed collection, the artwork on display remains a memory, and often a contested memory. Over the course of its social life, its installation may be captured erratically and unevenly in photographs (always historically specific and staged within the visual rhetorics of their period and occasion) and in

any surviving documentation from published accounts to conservation records, certificates, method statements, curatorial notes, artist's files. An installation created *in situ* such as Burman's *Body Weapons: Wild Women Beyond Two Cultures* is known today only through photographs and relatively sparse documentation (see *plate 9*). Julie Reiss maintains that archival photographs, along with eyewitness reports and documentation, allow for the reconstruction of temporary and ephemeral pieces.⁹¹ Yet what remains, and what has entered the catalogue and the archive and thus domain of public memory and visibility so essential to an artwork's continued survival, may be photographs of constituent parts rather than a representation of the whole. The spatial and sensory complexity of an installation will evade photographic, digital and written documentation, leaving a record that may be partial or incomplete.⁹²

Surviving photographs record variant installations. Only one panel of *Convenience Not Love* was included in *No Colour Bar: Black British Art In Action 1960-1990* (Guildhall Art Gallery, London, 2015-16), an exhibition with a curatorial focus on the radical practice and oppositionality of Black art (*plate 24*). The two were reunited in *Thinking Back: A Montage of Black Art in Britain*, part of *De Jaren 80: Begin van het nu?/ The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?* at the van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in 2016 (see *plate 1*) and at *The Place is Here* at Nottingham Contemporary in 2017. To what extent does the

display of a single panel or variant vertical installation (*plate 25*) shape perception of this complex work? While the lighter frames in which the prints will now be presented allows the diptych to float on the wall and expand into the gallery space, the deeper, mahogany-coloured frames (see *plate 24*) gave a definite edge that tends to compress and so intensify the compression of the composition.

Most print illustrations of *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence* show individual panels, breaking the connections between them, the gallery space and the spice carpet below. A double page spread in *Aperture* (1988) offers images of six of the eight panels together with a detail of the scattered spices (*plate 26*). The accompanying text notes that ‘In the installation version of this work, piles of spices are placed in front of each panel’, calling attention to ‘the mounds of brightly colored spices that appear beneath the images’, a layout that has not been recorded in surviving photographs.⁹³ Most print publications, including *Zarina Bhimji* (2012), use colour transparencies of the panels made not long after the work was made, thus not recording its current state. When making the work Bhimji selected a new pair of latex surgical gloves, then pale cream in colour (see *plate 15*). Over time, the gloves have embrittled, discoloured and fragmented, scattering particles into the muslin’s folds, and partially staining the white fabric rusty red (*plate 27*).⁹⁴ The staining and discoloration of the fourth

panel has subtly altered the work's initial colour scheme with its crisp contrasts between red, blue and white countering the pink hand-tinting to the prints (which may still be discerned),⁹⁵ the blue of the silk-screen print, the cool yellow-cream of the gloves (now vanished) and the red and yellow ochre spices. An installation's material change over time, as much as the potential variations and versions of its installation and photography, prompts questions on the role of memory in art historical writing. To what extent does interpretation rest on the early state of *She Loved to Breathe – Pure Silence*, recoverable from memory and the photographic archive? Can an enquiry into what Martin Barnes has identified as this work's 'evident deterioration' augment or change art historical study of this work?⁹⁶ If the gloves once represented (post)colonial power as time has passed, latex, like the authority of empire, has declined and dissipated. Today the violation of internal examination is highlighted by the unevenly stained muslin, uncomfortably suggestive of blood perhaps, corrosion, or contamination, enabling parallels between the decay of materials and the decline and mutation ~~decay~~ of the relations of power that supported these practices.

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This article has been written during the migration and humanitarian crises of 2015-16, addressed by many international artists today.⁹⁷ These emergencies accompanied the lead-up to a

referendum which has set the United Kingdom on course to leave the European Union. Among the debates there has been a recourse to a toxic rhetoric that construes migration in terms of inundation and deluge and consciously echoes many disturbing post-war precedents.⁹⁸ Assessing the ‘Art of the Immigrations’ in the early 1990s Sarat Maharaj analysed how the ‘flooding image’ was central to highly-charged debates and controversies over what were seen as ‘threats “to swamp and submerge” long-standing notions of “Britishness” and ideas of national identity’.⁹⁹ Today a revived language of swamping and submerging accompanies a renewed interest in national icons and symbols; a call for the return of the old ‘British’ passport has a currency in one version of national memory that can be pugnacious, xenophobic and nostalgic. In 1991 Maharaj proposed ‘quite another inflection’ for the ‘flooding image’. Gathering together art that answered back to official narratives of Britishness, Maharaj offered a meticulous and complex account of a resistant aesthetics that politically and artistically challenged and answered back to mainstream narratives of Britishness. The art works considered here undertake profound enquiries into individual, collective and national memory, revealing that memory on micro and macro levels is fragile and unstable, dynamically and unevenly textured by the myriad transnational encounters and intersections that connect the global north to the global south.

Notes

This essay is dedicated to the inspirational legacy of Swasti Mitter. I am deeply indebted to Susan Catcher, Hanna Hölling, Tatje Scholte, Mark Haworth-Booth, Elea Himmelsbach, Ingrid Pollard, Lubaina Himid and Martin Barnes for discussing aspects of this research with me and kindly granting access to relevant documentation. I have benefitted from the resources of the Stuart Hall Library in London. My warmest thanks go to Chila Kumari Burman, Zarina Bhimji and Sutapa Biswas for so generously talking about their work with me and for granting its reproduction.

¹ Sarat Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis: Art in Britain of the Immigrations', *Third Text*, 5:15, 1991, 77, 81.

² \for example, Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, New York, 1996. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Forget*, Cambridge, 2009.

³ Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis', 80.

⁴ The term diaspora artists follows the website diaspora-artists.net initiated by Eddie Chambers as 'an innovative online research and reference facility centred on visual arts practice by artists from a plurality of diasporic backgrounds'. For discussions of Black art see David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce, eds, *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, Durham, NC, 2005; Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History Since the 1950s*, London, 2014;

Sophie Orlando, *British Black Art: Debates on Western Art History*, Paris, 2016.

⁵ Juginder Lamba and Amal Ghosh, eds, *Beyond Frontiers: Contemporary British Art by Artists of South Asian Descent*, London, 2001, point out that for some South Asian artists, 'their links with the Subcontinent remain present and immediate; for others, they are a barely perceptible trace, filtered through generations of exile and migration'.

⁶ Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis', 80.

⁷ Curated by Sutapa Biswas, Sarah-Jane Edge and Claire Slattery for the Cooper Art Gallery, Barnsley, 7 December 1988 - 22 January 1989.

⁸ Quoted in Lynda Nead, *Chila Kumari Burman: Beyond Two Cultures*, London, 1995, 28. On this artist see also Rina Arya, *Chila Kumari Burman: Shakti, Sexuality and Bindi Girls*, London, 2013.

⁹ Nead, *Beyond Two Cultures*, 28.

¹⁰ Nead, *Beyond Two Cultures*, 28.

¹¹ Chila Kumari Burman, 'Don't Rush Me...Hiya Sisters and Hey Mr Big Stuff', in *Maud Sulter, Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity*, Hebden Bridge, 1990, 55.

¹² Sophie Orlando, *British Black Art: Debates on Western Art History*, Paris, 2016, 101-5 emphasizes the many streams of activist politics from New Left to anarchism and punk in these years and Burman's engagement with radicalism.

¹³ Chila Kumari Burman, 'Hiya Sisters', *Spare Rib*, issue 128, March 1983, 54.

¹⁴ Several early prints were included in Chila Kumari Burman, *Beyond Pop*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 2017,

¹⁵ Burman, 'Don't Rush Me', 55.

¹⁶ Meena Alexander, 'Post-Colonial Theatre of Sense: The Art of Chila Kumari Burman', *n.paradoxa* online issue, no.14 February 2001, 5.

¹⁷ Chila Kumari Burman, 'Ask How I Feel/Automatic Rap/ My New Work', *Third Text*, 6:19, June 1992, 79.

¹⁸ Translation kindly provided by the artist. Exhibited with the left hand panel at *No Colour Bar: Black British Art In Action 1960-1990*, Guildhall Art Gallery, London, 2015-16.

¹⁹ In Granada TV's *World In Action*, 27 January 1978, Gordon Burns questioned Margaret Thatcher, then in opposition, on current immigration. In her reply she stated, 'Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.' <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485>, accessed 2 August 2016.

²⁰ Alice Correia examined a range of artists who have

interrogated citizenship and conditions of entry and settlement,
Questions of Identity in Contemporary British Art, PhD,
University of Sussex, 2006.

²¹ Burman, 'Don't Rush Me', 55

²² Orlando, *British Black Art*, 100. Orlando also identifies the wide range of artistic citation and inspiration in Burman's work.

²³ I am indebted to Partha Mitter's invaluable analysis of memory studies in 'Monuments and Memory for Our Times', *South Asian Studies*, 29: 1, 2013, 159-67.

²⁴ Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*, Ann Arbor, 2009, 9, 32.

²⁵ Quoted in Laurel Forster, *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*, London and New York, 2015, 118.

²⁶ Meena Alexander asked Burman about the Amar Chitra Katha comic book series 'Tales of Valiant Queens'. Familiar to Indian children, they were she said a 'sure fire way to learn of figures from history, the Rani of Jhansi set side by side with Draupadi, the literal past and the mythological past commingled as it enters into the child's imagination'. 'Post-Colonial Theatre', 10.

²⁷ Joyce Chapman Lebra, *Women Against the Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*. Singapore, 2008, 9.

²⁸ *Rebel without a Pause* was the first single released by hip-hop artists Public Enemy from their 1988 album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. The Rani and other inspirational

Indian women are celebrated in 'Automatic Rap', written with one of her brothers: 'Standing up tall & reaching new heights, show'em whatcha got ...rebel without a pause...'. Burman, 'Ask How I Feel', 81.

²⁹ Alexander, 'Post-Colonial Theatre', 6.

³⁰ Conversation between the artist and the author, 1998. The artist has a renowned and extensive music collection

³¹ Annette Kuhn, 'Photography and cultural memory: a methodological exploration', *Visual Studies*, 22:3, 2007, 284. See also Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London: Verso, 2002.

³² See Tania Guha, 'Transiton of Riches', *Third Text*, 7:25, 86.

³³ Burman, 'Ask How I Feel', 81. See also, John Holt, 'Chila Kumari Burman', *Third Text*, 11:41, 96-8.

³⁴ Pratibha Parmar, 'Hateful contraries: media images of Asian women' *Ten*:8, no. 16, 1984: 70-8.

³⁵ Alice Correia's talks on south Asian women artists in Britain track the numerous exhibitions showcasing their work in the 1980s and assess their self-portraits as acts of self-definition and empowerment. <http://salford.academia.edu/AliceCorreia>

³⁶ Quoted in Ferha Ferooqui, 'Two Recent Exhibitions by Asian Women', *Feminist Arts News*, 2:9, 1989, 15. *My Mothers, My Sisters, Myself* was shown at Sisterwrite Bookshop gallery in North London as part of the Spectrum Women's Photography Festival which Karimjee co-curated.

³⁷ Zarina Bhimji, Whitechapel Gallery and Ridinghouse in association with Kunstmuseum Bern and The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2012.

³⁸ Zarina Bhimji, 'She Loved to Breathe—Pure Silence', *Third Text*, 2:3/4, March 1988, 96.

³⁹ Quoted in Frederike Waentig, *Plastics in Art*, trans Michael Scuffil, Petersberg, 2008, 73, note 330.

⁴⁰ Mark Haworth-Booth, 'Introduction', *Zarina Bhimji: I Will Always Be Here*, Birmingham: Ikon Gallery, 1992, n.p.

⁴¹ In London, the floor joints were covered in transparent tape and the spices scattered directly onto the floor. The spices were not renewed during the display, although they were occasionally smoothed down after visitors stepped on them. Information from Paola Morison, Whitechapel, 2012.

⁴² A barrier was temporarily installed in London. Email from Paula Morison to the author, 20 August 2012. Martin Barnes underlined the health and safety aspects: 'the very practical reason of stopping members of the public walking into the hanging frames or into the spices ... and also as a precaution to protect the work.' Email from Martin Barnes to Zarina Bhimji, 15 February 2012, Artist's file, Victoria and Albert Museum. For the artist, the barrier was a 'barricade', a form of authority which contradicted the installation's delicate disclosure of power relations; she **contrasted** this obstruction to the 'quiet

poetry' of her art. Conversation between Zarina Bhimji and the author, August 2012.

⁴³ Bhimji, artist's statement in *The Image Employed*, Manchester, Cornerhouse, 1987, [22]. Bhimji, 'A Photo-Text', 96.

⁴⁴ Note of a phone call between Haworth-Booth and Bhimji, 24 November 1988, Artist's File, Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁴⁵ 'From Politics to poetry: Zarina Bhimji in conversation with Achim Borchardt-Hume and Katheleen Bühler, *Zarina Bhimji*, 33.

⁴⁶ Meera Dattani, 'Exiled by Idi Amin', *The Guardian* 2 January 2010.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jan/02/uganda-exile-idi-amin>

⁴⁷ Marina Warner notes the influence of Boltanski, 'Secret Ceremonies of Innocence', *Zarina Bhimji*, Cambridge, Kettle's Yard, 1995, n.p.

⁴⁸ Avtah Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contested Identities*, London, 1996. Bhimji's images of unfilled shoes contrast to her photograph of bare feet stepping into the frame and onto the edge of a tray set on a richly patterned carpet for her series *For the White Feminist: In Response to the F-Stops exhibition* (1986), copper-toned photographs with text, 1986, illustrated in *From Two Worlds*, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1986, 25. See

also Jyll Bradley, 'An Audience unto herself', *Women's Art*, no.

51, 1993, 23

⁴⁹ Alice Correia, 'Zarina Bhimji: Light, Time and Dislocation',

Third Text, 26:3, May 2012, 362.

⁵⁰ Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis', 78.

⁵¹ On distinctions between quiet and silence, see David Toop,

Haunted Weather: Music, Silence, and Memory, London, 2005,

44.

⁵² Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis', 80.

⁵³ 'Interview between Zarina Bhimji and Sonia Boyce', *I Will*

Always Be Here, n.p.

⁵⁴ 'Interview between Zarina Bhimji and Sonia Boyce', n.p.

⁵⁵ Haworth-Booth, 'Introduction', n.p.

⁵⁶ *Photograph Documentation Questionnaire*, Artist's file,

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁵⁷ Amin expelled a long-established South Asian community of

professionals, traders, working and business people—Bhimji's

father was a shopkeeper—which included Ismailis who had

migrated from Gujarat in the often forced intercontinental

movement of labour of the British colonial period. South Asians

were stripped of their histories, possessions, identities, and

residence in Amin's 'Africanisation' of Uganda and his regime

of persecution, imprisonment, terror, torture and murder.

Gijsbert Oonk, ed., *Global Indian Diasporas: Exploring*

Trajectories of Migration and Theory, Amsterdam, 2008. See

also Katharine Stout, *Zarina Bhimji: Out of Blue*, London: Tate Publications, 2003, n.p. and T.J.Demos, 'Zarina Bhimji: Cinema of Affect', in *Zarina Bhimji*, 2012, 11-29.

⁵⁸ Paul Lashmar and Arlen Harris, 'Who wants to be a millionaire', *Independent*, 1 March 1997.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/who-wants-to-be-a-millionaire-1270338.html>

⁵⁹ Announcement of East Award to Zarina Bhimji, Norwich Gallery, Norwich, 2001.

⁶⁰ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain*, London, 2001, 72 passim. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London, 1996.

⁶¹ Typed extracts from *The Guardian* newspaper, with a handwritten note thanking the UK Passport Advisory Services for the quotations. Artist's statement. Artist's file, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁶² Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, 'Uncovering the 'virginity testing' controversy in the National Archives: the intersectionality of discrimination in British immigration history', *Gender & History*, 23:1, 2011, 161.

⁶³ Haworth-Booth, 'Introduction', n.p.

⁶⁴ Bhimji, 'A Photo-Text', 96.

⁶⁵ Kellie Jones, 'In their own image', *Art Forum*, November 1990, 138.

⁶⁶ Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 131-2.

⁶⁷ Swasti Mitter, *Common Fate, Common Bond: Women in the Global Economy*, London, 1986.

⁶⁸ ‘Terms and conditions’, undated, unsigned; ‘Artist’s statement’, Artist’s file, Victoria and Albert Museum.

⁶⁹ Email from Paula Morison to the author, 20 August 2012 confirmed that the spices ‘didn’t noticeably change colour ... but the smell did fade’.

⁷⁰ On the evanescence of speech and the gravity of writing, See J. Derrida, Jacques, *L’écriture et la différence*, trans. A. Bass as *Writing and Difference*, Chicago, 1978.

⁷¹ Jacques Rancière, ‘What Aesthetics can Mean’ in Peter Osborne, ed., *From An Aesthetic Point of View*, London, 2000, 17.

⁷² Email from Lubaina Himid to the author, July 2016. Himid also noted that ‘The images of these women related to us all’ rather than directly to the works on show beneath.’ Ingrid Pollard recalled bringing many of these images which she explained accounted for their density above her own exhibited works. Conversations with the author, November 2016. I am deeply indebted to Lubaina Himid and Ingrid Pollard for this information.

⁷³ *Intimate Distance*, 21 July-9 September 1989. The archives at The Photographers’ Gallery contain 35mm slides, now digitized, of the works installed and during installation at the gallery. I am

deeply indebted to Elea Himmelsbach for all her help in accessing the archive materials.

⁷⁴ Gilane Tawadros, 'Introduction'. Ingrid Pollard, artist's statement in the catalogue for *Intimate Distance*, London, The Photographers' Gallery, 1989, n.p.

⁷⁵ Tawadros, 'Introduction', n.p.

⁷⁶ On Sharam (the modest, chaste and deferential code of behaviour expected of Muslim women) and Izzat (honour) in relation to this work by Bhimji, see Arya, *Chila Kumari Burman*. Zarina Bhimji artist statement, *Intimate Distance*, n.p.

⁷⁷ Information kindly provided by the artist. The double framing may recall the nineteenth-century practice of sending black-bordered letters on the occasion of a death.

⁷⁸ Tawadros, 'Introduction', n.p.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Moira Roth, 'Reading Between the lines: the imprinted spaces of Sutapa Biswas', in Katy Deepwell, ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies*, Manchester, 1995, 38.

⁸⁰ Biswas, *Intimate Distance*, n.p.

⁸¹ 'New dimensions', *Independent*, 15 August 1989, 13.

⁸² This text was published in a double page spread contributed by Biswas to Maud Sulter's *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity*, together with a single image and an installation shot. 'Of memory, we change/ From one conversation to the next/ Always in search of/ the edge of the

surface/ And of textures/ There is pleasure/ and sometimes
none/ So thinking back to our space/ Marked only by fallen
clay/ There is both absence and presence/ Of violated
territories—/ You whose spirit is dull/ Brought me here/ To the
great mountain/ Whereupon, I died in the thinness of its air/
From violated territories/ Its boundaries/ With fierce eyes/ I
watch/ This sacred space.

Maud Sulter, ed., *Passion: Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity*, Hebden Bridge, 1990, 202-3. Space debars further discussion of these pages. On *Sacred Space* see also Griselda Pollock, 'Tracing Figures of Presence, naming ciphers of absence', in Lisa Bloom, ed., *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture*, Minneapolis, 1999, 213-36.

⁸³ Jane Beckett, "History (Maybe)," *History: The Mag Collection: Image-Based Art in Britain in the Late Twentieth Century*, Kingston upon Hull: Hull City Museums and Art Galleries, 1997, 139-41.

⁸⁴ Lubaina Himid's concepts of 'gathering and reusing' as characteristic of black women's art practice remains a classic formulation, 'Fragments', *Feminist Arts News*, 2:8, 1988, 8. Paul Gilroy has written extensively of the manifold ways in which black artists 'forged a compound culture from disparate sources' so creating an 'intermixture of a variety of distinct cultural forms', *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London, 1993, 15, 7.

⁸⁵ Maharaj, 'The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis', 80.

⁸⁶ The concept of a work's social life is drawn from Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction, commodities and the politics of value', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai, Cambridge, 1986.

⁸⁷ Melanie Keen and Elizabeth Ward, *Recordings: A Select Bibliography of Contemporary African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian British Art* London, 1996. The AHRC funded project, *British Artists and Modernism*, is undertaking research on how 'artists of African and Asian descent in Britain feature in the story of twentieth-century art'.

<http://www.blackartistsmodernism.co.uk/about/>

⁸⁸ See Marlene Smith, PhD in process, University of the Arts London, 'The Disappeared: Retrieving the Exhibition Practice of Women during the UK Black Arts Movement'.

⁸⁹ Hanna Hölling, *Paik's Virtual Archive: Time, Change, and Materiality in Media Art*, Oakland, 2017.

⁹⁰ Tatja Scholte, 'Introduction', *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks*, eds, Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton, Amsterdam, 2011, 11.

⁹¹ Julie Reiss, *From Center to Margin: The Spaces of Installation Art*, London and Cambridge, Mass, 1999, xvi.

⁹² On the wide range of image registration techniques recently developed for installation art, see Scholte and Wharton, *Inside Installations*.

⁹³ Gilane Tawadros, 'Other Britains, Other Britons', special issue on the exhibition, *British Photography: Towards a Bigger Picture*, *Aperture*, no. 113, winter 1988, 44-46. An installation photograph taken by the exhibition curator, Mark Haworth-Booth shows the panels, but not the floor or the splices.

⁹⁴ The decision to exhibit the work in 2012 initiated conservation by Susan Catcher, Senior Paper Conservator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Catcher made small adjustments and additions which included small clips to hold the panels together, and the insertion of a thin spacer bar along the lower edge of the fourth panel to arrest slippage, avert vertical loss and prevent fragments of degraded latex escaping. Email from Susan Catcher to the author, 15 August 2012. I am indebted to Susan Catcher for her generous assistance and for granting access to the conservation files.

⁹⁵ Reviewing the work's first outing at *The Devils Feast* exhibition at Chelsea College of Art and Design, Mark Currah notes the photographs are 'tinted sugar-pink', *City Limits*, 7-14 May 1987.

⁹⁶ 'For this show, we have taken the decision to show it as it is, rather than repair or remove the discoloured and decaying elements. Aside from its evident deterioration - which I see as part and parcel of the work, as does Zarina - the decision to lend the work in its rather fragile state I view as acceptable risk; especially in the context of a solo show on Zarina's work, and

this being one of her earliest important works.’ Email from Martin Barnes to the author, 22 November 2011.

⁹⁷ Artists foregrounding today’s migrant crises were considered in Gayatri Sinha’s lecture, ‘The Aesthetics of Toxicity’, Central Saint Martins, London, 9 November 2016.

⁹⁸ See more recently, Nick Squires and Justin Huggler, ‘Fears of a “Calais in Italy” as migrants keep flooding across the Mediterranean’, *Daily Telegraph*, 19 August 2016.

⁹⁹ Maharaj, ‘The Congo is Flooding The Acropolis’, 84.