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Leaving Lusophone Countries: Migrants (Re)constructing Their Identities in
Destination Countries

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*«There's a word to sum it all up. The Portuguese, be they
Catholic, Muslims, or Hindus, are more familiar»:*
(Re)inventing a Lusophone Culture in UK



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Migratory history



→ Since the second half of the 19th century the Indian presence in Mozambique is closely linked with the socio-economic and political transformations of the Swahili coast, as well as with the migratory movements between India and Austral Africa, namely with the wave of British Gujarati “passengers” first to South Africa, later also to Mozambique. The migration of Portuguese Indians from Diu and Daman to the same territory also increased substantially, in particular after the implementation of the Liberal regime in Portugal in 1820.

→ While the majority of the Indians from Diu and Daman became employed in the construction of infrastructures, the main strategies of insertion for the British Indians (originated from Porbandar, Rajkot and Surat) lay in the diversification of trade transnational connections (from India to Japan, China, England, Portugal etc.) and in the construction of regional trade chains, consisting of one or more import/export firms and warehouses in urban areas to guarantee the regular supply of imported goods to multiple interior shops, which had to send produce for export to the urban firms.

→ A small number of these Indian families took advantage of the economic boom of the 1960s to expand their activities to the industrial sector (mainly in textiles). At the same time, a number of subgroups invested in the secondary and university education of the youngest generations, thus laying the foundations for a diversification of professional opportunities available to Mozambican Indians.

→ Mozambican Indians also belonged to a polynuclear spatial organization. The networks they maintained allowed the circulation of people, material goods, capital, information, etc. between their regions and groups of origin and the various groups of Gujarati Hindus and Muslims settled in the British colonies of East and South Africa.

→ Their relatively privileged socio-economic position within colonial society guaranteed the availability of resources for the reconstruction of social and religious organizations.

Migratory history (cont.)



→ The nationalisation process implemented in Mozambique, as well as the high political instability of the country and the civil war that broke out in the mid-1970s led to a peak in Indian emigration in the early 1980s.

→ Most of the Indian families chose Portugal as their destination. They enjoyed a rapid but not uniform process of socio-economic insertion. Men from Diu soon became active in construction, both in Portuguese firms and in firms owned by same-caste Indians; some families also invested in hawking (in street markets across the whole country), while other sub-groups became active in commerce, often in the same branch as previously. Many of those whose activity had extended to industry, banking or various learned professions were also able to resume their previous occupations.

→ The integration of Portugal in the European Community (in 1986) and the opportunities for professional improvement and the conditions for education and social assistance offered by the United Kingdom, significantly increased the number of Portuguese Indians settled in UK between 1998 and 2000. Since 2001, the migration continued at an even higher level thanks to the global context of economic crisis and labour market contraction, which effects were more marked in Portugal than in many EU countries.

→ The opportunities offered by the British market led many Portuguese Indians to jobs in factories and warehouses, or to the construction sector. These options were usually accompanied by investment in the education of the younger generations, and by the insertion of women in the job market outside the home, in full- or part-time employment. A number of these migrants were able to leave their salaried employment and invest their hard-earned savings in a small independent activity. Their dwellings, jobs and businesses tend to concentrate in certain areas (of Greater London, in Leicester, etc.) where many Gujarati Indians from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi or from India, have settled since the late 1960s and 1970s.

You ought to be like us: culturally hybrid and «cosmopolitan»

→ While recognising the ambivalent or even derogatory tone used by certain of their Muslim peers in UK when they refer to them - «You are like *baglás*», «you speak like *baglás*», «you live like *baglás*» [lit. as «*white*», «*too European*»], the Portuguese Muslims emphasise their cultural specificities associated to colonial and postcolonial lived experience in Mozambique and Portugal. Their narratives focus namely in areas of identity-related social presentation such as:

- language («we speak Portuguese to each other, while the majority of Muslim population of Indian origin speak Indian languages; we are able to speak Indian languages too, but we prefer to speak Portuguese»);
- clothing («we never dress the Muslim way; our women rarely use headscarves or *hijabs*»);
- eating («we daily consume Portuguese food and often go to Portuguese restaurants»);
- male-female relations («we don't have so much separation between men and women»);
- patterns of marriage (we present «much more marriages outside the community»);
- public sociabilities and degree of inter-ethnic openness («we really need to have people around, people of all styles and all religions»)
- general interest («we always follow Portuguese football», etc.);
- lived experience and communication of their religious «difference» in non-Muslim contexts («we are proud to say that we are Muslims, but this doesn't mean that we have to keep separate and neither do we have to constantly be restating that we are Muslims, the way they do»; «our women, they too are very religious, but they do not need to go around completely veiled»)
- auto-definition («we are a unique mixture», combining as no other diasporic Muslim group the best elements found in the traditions of our forefathers with all the best elements derived from a centuries-long contact with the Portuguese; we therefore brought together both ancestral and migratory repertoires, to multiple African references).

**«We were even accused of being anti-Islamic »:
you ought to be like us, «moderate» and «liberal»**



The Portuguese Muslims are self- (and hetero-) characterised:

- as «moderate» Muslims;
 - largely uninterested in «factional rivalries»;
 - as «being against radicals»;
 - by the specific way in which they articulate their cultural, national, and religious identity, and how they present it to others;
 - as being different in the way they emphasise the specificity of their identity as Portuguese Muslims
- From a religious point a view, Portuguese Muslims clearly differentiated themselves
- from the *Indian Muslims* (among which, from their Gujarati *surti* peers who came directly from India), who are self- and hetero-defined as those «who most practice religion as a way of life» and «are more careful in observing all religious laws and values»;
 - from the *Pakistanis* (in particular the older generations) who condense «their religious, national, linguistic and cultural identity into one».
 - and finally, from a significant percentage of *East African Muslims* who, despite sharing a number of cultural references, have been emphasizing their Muslim identity.

«Our problem is that you're always trying to prove you're superior to other Hindus»: You ought to be like us, «caste no longer matters»

→ The Portuguese Hindus also emphasise their cultural specificities recognising that these were established during the colonial and postcolonial periods (in Diu, Mozambique and Portugal). Reacting to the current negative evaluations of several British Hindus about them, they often turn the accusation into a *positive trait* (of religious tradition or of their diasporic identity).

→ «We eat meat, yes; but that is not an argument for being pictured as less pure and of an inferior status». Portuguese Hindu Women are more likely to counter this accusation by giving personal examples of how faithful and observant Hindus (respectful of the *dharma*) may, according to tradition, eat meat, or quoting sacred texts in the attempt to prove that meat-eating regimes are not necessarily equivalent to inferiority and impurity.

→ «We drink alcoholic beverages, yes. Who has ever heard of a Portuguese or a Mozambican not having a beer when they get home from work in the evening?» Men justify this, appealing both to colonial and postcolonial history.

→ «We reject discriminatory practices based on *jati* (caste). Hierarchising idioms based on the caste system are «old-fashioned», «backwards», and «non-European» ideas, that are used to British-Gujarati Hindus because «they're always trying to prove they're superior to other Hindus»;

→ «We got many things from the Portuguese, as they got from the British. We are still Hindus but also Portuguese, more authentic, more open, more familiar.» We (as *Portuguese*) invest in a family-based view of social relations while they (as *British*) give an obsessive attention to economic progress, competition and social hierarchisation.

You ought to be like us: hierarchical alterity is a mere illusion

→ The Portuguese Hindus are mobilised in the construction of a different interpretation of power relations, evoking a series of typically Hindu beliefs regarding the incorporative, metamorphic and structurally porous nature of all beings, as well as the fluid, mutable, and reversible relations between them.

- «We believe that *Ma* (the Hindu Goddess) can appear in human form and perform miracles». Our faith has nothing to do with belonging to an inferior caste, or with age, sex, socio-economic position or educational qualifications.

- «We refuse any rigid distinction between the popular Little Tradition and the Brahmanic Great Tradition. «Even those who say they do not believe in *Mataji avé*, they are Hindus after all, and Hindus believe that any human can be a god, and that any god can have a human form.»

- «We believe in *jadu* (black magic). If they (The British Hindus) don't believe, then why is it that the magazines are full of *Pandits Maharajes* offering their services to cut black magic and evil spirits, or Professors *Gadhiá* and such, who have healing powers?»

«There's a word to sum it all up. The Portuguese, be they Catholic, Muslims, or Hindus, are more familiar»: reinventing a Lusophone Culture in UK

→ In both Hindu and Muslim narratives, the colonial past in Mozambique becomes a source of idioms for the (re)construction of a Lusophone culture in UK.

→ Their narratives do not deny the existence of pay gaps in the salary of specialised or semi-specialised professionals based on race (Indian or white), nor the exclusion of small and medium entrepreneurs from their sector on the grounds of skin colour, nor the many restrictions imposed to the employment of Indians in banks and the civil service, nor even discrimination in access to education and academic evaluations. However, they are frequently contrasted with the 'racism' that existed in British India, or in Uganda and Kenya, and especially in South Africa.

→ This shared reinterpretation of Portuguese and British colonialism is closely related to two different systems of values: one, associated with the «way of being » of the Portuguese colonisers, which favoured familiarising interactions and the affective personalisation of inter-ethnic relations; over another, regarded as the «way of being» of the British colonisers - which stimulated technical and economic progress, competition and excessive social hierarchisation, racial and religious segregation.

→ The effects of this difference, as they add, still structure postcolonial lived experiences and the current management of power dynamics in UK.

Postcolonial cosmopolitan options: «We are going to mix, to show people here, that we have a different way of life. And we are going to speak Portuguese.»

→ Their emphasis upon a «Lusophone» specificity – as an orientation to engage with the «other» which results in a special enjoyment of inter-personal contact which contravened supposed (religious, gender, cultural, etc.) frontiers - can be also read as a wider strategy of «construction of of admirable exemplarity». A strategy which answers both the cosmopolitan colonial models of the Portuguese and the British (which were themselves considerably different), and the post-colonial options of involvement with cultural diversity, which are displayed both by their current «hosts», and their Muslim and Hindu peers.

«We are trying to organise a Portuguese club, (...) for Catholics, Hindus, Muslims, atheists, it doesn't matter. We are setting up a first meeting. We are going to get women and men together in the same room, serve some olives, cod cakes, Portuguese cheese, samosas, and shrimp, and we already contacted some boys who are going to sing fado. Imans here forbid music, but we are going to have music, they insist upon the separation of men and women, but we are going to get everyone together at the same table. Against religious sectarianism, we are going to get together Catholics, Hindus, and Muslims. We are going to mix, to show people here, that we have a different way of life. And we are going to speak Portuguese.»