REACHING FOR INTIMACY, ENTRENCHING INEQUALITY: RACE AND THE CULTURE OF SERVITUDE IN POSTCOLONIAL EAST AFRICA

by

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The first Swahili word I ever learned was *mwanainchi*, which means ‘citizen’ or ‘local’. Growing up, my mother often took me to Kenya, her birthplace and childhood home, and I distinctly remember watching her bargain at markets. The locals would call her a *mzungu,* a foreigner. In response, she would insist that she was a *mwanainchi;* she said she would not be swindled like a tourist and wanted the “*mwanainchi* price”. In our family, we used to joke that my mother should carry her Kenyan passport around, or better yet, wear a T-shirt with *mwanainchi* written in bold letters.

When my parents and grandparents tell me about their lives in East Africa, there is no shortage of nostalgic recollections – of the crisp smell of red Kenyan soil; the lingering taste of masala chai on the verandah; the silky residue of grease on fingertips from devouring fresh *bhagia* at Diamond Plaza.[1] But when describing the circumstances that led to their departure in the politically turbulent 1970s, the stories would turn more ominous and evasive. Was Africa a home they had left behind, or was it just a temporary dwelling place in which their families had lived for three generations? Could people of South Asian ancestry ever claim an African inheritance, or was their claim on the continent as tenuous as that of European colonial settlers?

Any attempt to narrate the story of South Asian communities in East Africa – Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania – inevitably involves a difficult reckoning with race, and triangulated racial identities. My own vantage point into this topic is through a lens of both familiarity and distance. For older generations of South Asians in Africa, black-brown animosity was a given, banal fact embedded into their everyday lives; it was an all-encompassing reality that colored their own racial attitudes. Born in Canada and raised in a multicultural climate, this deep-seated ethnic

[1] A common East African snack coming from India, bhagias are vegetables fried in a thick flour paste with spices.

animosity was alien to me, and antithetical to my values.[2] I found myself searching for a more nuanced history of black-brown relations in East Africa. [3] I was looking not just for a family history, but also for a history of interracial entanglement that included overlooked, often non-literate figures who did not write letters to the newspaper or deliver petitions to courts – women, servants, and children. This search led me to the private domain of the household, to the complexities and contradictions within intimate, individual relationships between employers and domestic servants.

After sending an email to a family friend, Anar, asking to interview her for a research project on brown employers and black domestic servants in East Africa, I received a rather curt response. Like my parents, Anar is a South Asian who was born and raised in Kenya but now lives in Canada. She wrote to me, “I'm not sure how much more I would be able to add… I'm sure you must have already spoken to several people who have been there much longer about their experiences growing up in East Africa. It just might possibly be more of the same for me.”[4] Five days later, without any further prompting from me, she sent me another email, this time containing several paragraphs. She explained,

> "Of course, hindsight is 20/20. I must say it was only when I moved to England after my high school that I realized how the rest of the civilized world lived… It was a bit of a cultural shock for me when I realized I had to shop, cook and clean up after

[2] I resonate with Guyanese-American writer Gaiutra Bahadur’s ambivalent attitude towards ethnic politics in Guyana, where tensions between people of South Asian and African heritage have sporadically exploded into violence. Bahadur writes: “I was the product of a multicultural education in post-Civil Rights Act America. I had grown up a minority in a city of minorities, subject to racism that connected me to black skins, rather than pitting me against them. How then could I locate myself in my homeland’s history of hate?” See Gaiutra Bahadur, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 11.

[3] I use the terms “brown” and “black” to refer to people of South Asian and African ancestry respectively, taking after the historian Sana Aiyar. Although sometimes anachronistic, these terms are separated from the contested “territorial affiliations and civilizational claims” (as Aiyar puts it) imbued in terms like “Asian” or “African.” Some scholars writing on South Asian communities settled in the region have recently espoused the term “East African Asians,” which I also use throughout this paper. However, most of the older writing on this diaspora uses the terms “Indians” or “Asians,” while referring to Black East Africans as merely “Africans.” I argue that separating the ethnic category of “Asian” from the nationality marker, “African,” perpetuates the mutual exclusivity with which these terms were invented and institutionalized during and after the colonial period.

[4] Anar, ‘Growing up in Kenya’, email, August 18, 2022.

> myself... This is when the realization sank in that we Asians as overlords saw our servants as our inferiors and exploited them without perhaps realizing it, since we knew no better… On the other hand, we (Asians) often considered ourselves 'subservient' or deferential to the white man (or 'dhorio') in the days of the British rule. We happily sat right in the middle, playing the role of the middleman in the social hierarchy… Our servants would give us their all, serving us day and night… They simply accepted their lot in life… They had no protections or anyone to look out for them, something we take for granted today."[5]

It is difficult to say with certainty what happened in the five days between her emails, but it seems that a sense of guilt compelled Anar to finally discuss a history that she was initially unwilling and even ashamed to talk about. When I brought up the topic of brown employer-black servant relations to other potential interviewees like Anar, several told me to "be careful" because it was a "sensitive" topic. Perhaps they were cautioning me against airing our community's dirty laundry. Or perhaps it is exactly Anar's trajectory that they have been avoiding; if prompted to think about their relationship with black East Africans for too long or too hard, some South Asians might be forced to confront harsh truths about their own biases and behaviors. They also may be forced to conjure up painful memories of displacement and loss, resentment and betrayal. Understandably, many do not desire to relive the trauma of leaving East Africa. It is not only guilt that is repressed, but also the pain of being uprooted from and unwanted by one's home country.

Though Anar acknowledged that servants "had no protections" and were highly exploited by "Asians," a term generally used for South Asians in East Africa, she still attempted to find some redemption in the last paragraph of her email. She stressed that, in her family's household in Kenya, "I can't say that we knowingly mistreated the servants." To attest to this, she highlighted, "Our house 'boy' ate what we ate, whether it be leftovers or something that had been

[5] Anar, 'Growing up in Kenya', email, August 23, 2022.

cooked that day. Our house 'boy' would even draw up a chair and watch TV with us… we considered him to be a legitimate part of our family."[6] Her urge to qualify her "house boy" as "part of the family," citing fond memories like watching TV together, demonstrates the challenge not only of admitting to perpetuating inequality, but also of acknowledging that inequality can exist alongside intimacy. Anar's competing desires to simultaneously own up to her guilt and redeem her relationship with her family's servant are also what make this topic so "sensitive" among South Asians from and in East Africa. The contradictory coexistence of exploitation and affection is difficult to confront and critically analyze, especially when it is so close to home.

This essay draws on oral history interviews to investigate the culture of servitude in postcolonial East Africa. I explore how the widespread employment of black household help in Asian homes shaped black-brown relations; how it affected their perceptions of each other; and how cultural boundaries were transgressed and/or reinforced through it. I borrow the term "culture of servitude" from Seemin Qayum and Raka Ray, who use it to describe South Asian domestic labor practices in places as far apart as New York and Kolkata. For Qayum and Ray, the culture of servitude is based on three fundamental premises: "(1) Servants are essential to a well-run and well-kept household; (2) Servants are "part of the family" and bound to it by ties of affection, loyalty, and dependence; and (3) Servants comprise a category with distinctive lifestyles, desires, and habits."[7] These premises all hold strikingly true in postcolonial East Africa. However, the second premise—that servants are "part of the family"—is one that I would amend within this particular context. The common sentiment that servants are "part of the

[6] Anar, 'Growing up in Kenya'.
[7] Seemin Qayum and Raka Ray, "Traveling Cultures of Servitude" In *Intimate Labors* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2020), 102.

family" not only binds workers to the family by "ties of affection, loyalty, and dependence," but in East Africa, I argue that it also binds them to a fixed, race-based role within the brown family, which fundamentally impacts the way brown East Africans conceive of their relationships with black Africans writ large. The culture of servitude in East Africa institutionalized black Africans into brown families, but only to consign them to an obstinately unequal role within the family.

Black-Brown Entanglements in East Africa

In 1890, the construction of the British East African Railway brought tens of thousands of South Asians to East Africa as indentured laborers, and traders and merchants looking for economic opportunity followed suit.[8] Prominent among these traders and merchants were the Khojah Ismailis, a few of whom rose to a level of wealth and status that many native East Africans grew to bitterly associate with the South Asian migrant population at large.[9] Ismailism is a minority branch of Shia Islam defined by the following of a single Imam descended from the Prophet Muhammad. Tens of thousands of Khojah Ismailis in particular—former members of the Hindu Lohana caste who converted to Islam—migrated from India to East Africa starting in the early 20th century.[10] Encouraged by the Imam of the time, Khojah Ismailis left India to escape drought and the economic uncertainty of farming and petty trading to pursue the promise of a community-based trade economy in East Africa.[11] The early 1900s up to independence in the

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[8] Sana Aiyar. *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 5.
[9] Throughout this essay, I use the word "migrant" to refer to South Asians in East Africa rather than "settler" because in this context, settlers were so strongly associated with whiteness and colonialism, and South Asians were placed in a more complex position in the racial hierarchy.
[10] Ali S. Asani, "The Impact of Modernization on the Marriage Rites of the Khojah Ismailis of East Africa" In *Journal of Turkish Studies* 18:17 (1994), 17.
[11] Shirin Remtulla Walji, "A HISTORY OF THE ISMAILI COMMUNITY IN TANZANIA" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1974), 19. Additionally, Ali Asani points out that by the mid 1960s, there were over 50,000 Ismailis in East Africa with extensive internal networks of mosques, hospitals, schools, and more (see Asani's "The Impact of Modernization").

1960s in East Africa were characterized by confluence and conflict, with the British fanning the flames of interracial resentment.[12] Some successful East African Asian merchants, such as A.M. Jeevanjee and Alidina Visram (both Khojah Ismailis), had sub-imperialist motives in East Africa, positioning themselves as participants in the British colonial mission.[13] On the other hand, some brown East Africans like trade unionist Makhan Singh and freedom fighter Pio Gama Pinto, worked hand-in-hand with black Africans in an (ultimately unsuccessful) effort to create a unified anti-colonial movement.[14]

Sana Aiyar argues in *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* that interracial relations between brown and black East Africans in the 20th century were simultaneously defined by solidarity and friction.[15] As Indian-born Ugandan writer Mahmood Mamdani put it, "The success of colonialism lay not just in the colonial structure we lived in, but also in the corresponding consciousness we inherited. The majority of Asians believed they were inferior to the Europeans and superior to the Africans. Most Africans believed they were inferior to both Europeans and Asians."[16] Exacerbated by ethnocentric nationalism, racial tensions escalated after independence, leading to a mass exodus of most South Asians out of East Africa in the 1970s, driving my parents from Kenya to Canada, where I was born.[17]

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[12] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 7.
[13] See "From America of the Hindu to White Man's County" in Sana Aiyar's *Indians in Kenya* for more.
[14] See "Between Rebellion and Suppression" in Sana Aiyar's *Indians in Kenya* for more.
[15] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 13.
[16] Mahmood Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians Come to Britain* (Oxford: Pambazuka, 2011), 16.
[17] Informal exodus took place across East Africa (see Sana Aiyar's chapter, "Uhuru and Exodus" in *Indians in Kenya*), but the climactic and formal expulsion of East African Asians from Idi Amin's Uganda in 1972 is often framed as the defining event in the history of relations between brown and black East Africans. However, the story is not merely one of conflict and alienation culminating in exile. Exploring how these groups of people interacted on a personal and everyday basis can offer insight into the ways in which tension and conflict existed alongside friendship and intimacy.

Scholarship on interracial relations between brown and black East Africans tends to focus on two public arenas of encounter: politics and commerce.[18] It is in these highly visible spheres that the tropes of the cunning *dukawallah* and greedy "Asian" capitalist emerged and took hold.[19] Though domestic encounters were not as perceptible, they were certainly not insignificant in shaping racial relations. The employment of black men as domestic servants, derogatorily known as "house boys," in East African Asian households was ubiquitous throughout the mid-late 20th century and is still common today. Black servants are ever-present in accounts of East African Asian life in the early and mid-20th century, from colonial reports to memoirs to novels, often mentioned off-handedly. Yet there is a scarcity of both primary and secondary sources that dedicate attention to this specific domain of interracial interaction.

One reason why relationships between brown employers and black domestic servants remain difficult to surface in the archives could be because it was typically East African Asian women who spent the most time with servants in middle-and-upper-class brown households. The voices of brown women and working-class black servants are some of the most difficult to find in historical archives and literature.[20] Though excavating reliable historical information about private interracial relationships is a challenge, literary writers have been obsessed with the theme of taboo black-brown romantic and/or sexual relationships because of their explosive symbolic value, representing the possibility for and shortcomings of unity between black and brown East Africans.[21] Despite the deeply entrenched taboo that forbade social contact between brown

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[18] See "Ocean and Narration" in Gaurav Desai's *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India, and the Afrasian Imagination* and "From the America of the Hindu to White Man's Country" in Sana Aiyar's *Indians in Kenya*.
[19] The term *dukawallah* refers to a South Asian (male) shopkeeper/businessman.
[20] Language is a significant barrier in accessing stories of both brown women, who mostly spoke Indian languages like Gujarati or Kutchi, and black workers who spoke Kiswahili or tribal dialects.
[21] See Stephanie Jones's "The Politics of Love and History: Asian Women and African Men in East African Literature" in *Research in African Literatures* 42 (3): 166–86. From accounts of railway workers who married black East African women or took them as concubines in the early 20th century (see Cynthia Salvadori's *We Came in Dhows,* 1996) to novels set in the mid-late 1900s featuring romantic black-brown relationships (i.e. several of M.G.

women and black men, the domestic space was, intriguingly, the one place where these two types of people acceptably and consistently interacted. As one of the primary and most intimate realms of interracial interaction in postcolonial East Africa, the brown household was a crucial site for both identity and relationship formation, with lasting consequences beyond its walls. Thus, analyzing the daily intimacies fostered in the domestic space is, I argue, essential to constructing a fuller understanding of the complex history of black-brown entanglements in East Africa.

Due to the privacy of domestic work and limited archival records of subaltern, non-English speakers, this essay turns to oral histories as a critical source of unearthed insight to learn more about domestic interracial relationships. Over the course of July 2022 to December 2022, I interviewed eleven, mostly female East African Asians born between 1940-1960 about their domestic lives in the 60s and 70s, and particularly their relationships with servants. All but two of my interviewees left East Africa for Canada in the 70s, with the wave of East African Asians leaving the region. Most of my interviewees were from Kenya and notably, all were Ismailis. I particularly looked for underrepresented voices in East African Asian literature: *women* born in the mid 20th century, preceding the generations that have begun writing about this history. Including the likes of M.G. Vassanji, Peter Nazareth, and Bahadur Tejani, the writers who have been most vocal about the East African Asian experience in anglophone literature came of age during the postcolonial period and left East Africa for Europe and North America in childhood or young adulthood. It is not surprising that this generation was the first to write extensively about their family history and experience, given the growth of English education during this time, as well as the emergence of a literary market for books on themes of diaspora and migration.[22] The

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Vassanji's books including *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall, Uhuru Street,* and *The Magic of Saida*), interracial romances are a very common and even obsessive topic of focus.

[22] A notable exception is Cynthia Salvadori's three-volume anthology, *We Came in Dhows (1996),* largely made up of the author's interviews with South Asians about their lives and their family members' lives in East Africa in the

voices of East African Asian women such as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Neera Kapur-Dromson have only begun to noticeably emerge in the past couple of decades, challenging the historically gendered construction of "the East African Asian," which has been largely defined by male writers and male experiences.[23]

While I personally conducted interviews with brown employers, including some of my own family members, I also enlisted a few student research assistants in Nairobi to conduct interviews with black domestic workers in Kenya who have been employed by brown families in the past few decades, from the 1980s to the present. Together, the eight black interviewees' experiences, which are situated closer to the present, and the eleven brown ones, which lean more towards the past, provide a look at the continuum of brown employer-black servant relations in the postcolonial era.[24]

The Essentialization of Racial Difference in the Household

When asked if he considered himself African in the early independence era, one of my East African Asian interviewees, Anil, who emigrated from Kenya in 1975, explained, "We had Indian blood in us, Indian ways of living, Indian culture. We had so much *Indian* rather than African… And then of course, to say African meant that we were supposed to be black."[25] Known by various, often conflated terms over the last century, from "Hindus" to "Indians" to "Asians," brown migrants' claims to "African" identity have long been contested, even though

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late 19th and 20th centuries. In addition to segments of interviews, Salvadori also includes written testimonies from the countless people to whom she reached out and other artifacts that they offered her, including photographs, passports, land deeds, and recommendation letters. What stands out is the unconventionality of these kinds of sources, as they are left out of traditional, Euro-centric archives.

[23] Felicity Hand, "Impossible Burdens: East African Asian Women's Memoirs," *Research in African Literatures* (Indiana University Press, 2011), 101.

[24] See Appendix for detailed list of interviewees.

[25] Anil, interview by Kiana Rawji, July 2022.

generations of brown families were born and raised there, and tens of thousands of brown hands labored to build the British East African Railway as well as the region's economy thereafter.[26] The exclusion was two-sided; as Africanness became very closely associated with blackness in the second half of the 20th century, not only did black African society largely reject brown migrants, but brown communities also intentionally separated themselves from it. The sense of immutable*,* blood-based difference between "Indians" and "Africans" that Anil cited was reinforced by several factors including segregationist colonial policies as well as endogamous cultural practices and attitudes within diasporic South Asian communities.

Discussing the racial attitudes that South Asians brought with them to East Africa, a brown Kenyan interviewee described, "If you go back in history, the Indians have always considered black negatively."[27] East African Asian self-segregation through endogamous practices was not only an incidental form of racism, but also vital to the strength and survival of their diasporic community. Not only did strong kinship ties allow brown migrants in East Africa to preserve their culture and build support systems for themselves in new, uncertain territory, but these networks were also essential to creating and growing wealth.[28] Many migrants left poverty in India, seeking to build better lives for themselves and their families in Africa, and maintaining ingroup networks allowed many to develop the wealth essential to this pursuit.

Certainly, larger social, economic, and political systems in the public sphere served to separate "Indians" from "Africans," but distinctions between them were also largely forged on a daily basis behind closed doors, in brown households. Commenting on white employers and black domestic servants in Zambia from 1900-1985, Karen Hansen posits that domestic service

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[26] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 5.
[27] Pari, interview by Kiana Rawji, July 2022. Note: Despite their religious difference from Hindus, Ismailis were not immune to the cultural and psychological legacies of caste and colorism in India.
[28] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 74.

"can only operate smoothly in situations where servants and employers are considered different from each other" and that these differences, "construed and informed by essentialist notions of race, culture, sexuality and class," create the perception that both parties belong to diametrically "different worlds."[29] Since brown and black East Africans were divided in most other realms of society, what happened in brown households was positioned to fundamentally influence how the two groups came to perceive and define each other. As one brown interviewee from Nairobi put it, "We only knew them as servants."[30]

In my conversations about domestic servants with brown employers, the theme of theft emerged as a common fixation. Most employers recounted stories of "inside jobs" – of domestic servants stealing from them or others they knew, ranging from petty thefts of food and jewelry to larger, organized robberies involving weapons and the threat of murder. It is not surprising that many double-diasporic East African Asians would fixate on something as symbolically resonant as theft, especially in the intimate context of the home and domestic labor, as it reflects the betrayal, violation, and loss that many felt when forced out of their homes across East Africa.[31] Whether due to actual frequency of thefts or exacerbated fears of theft, many brown employers in the postcolonial period anxiously prepared themselves for the possibility of domestic robberies. For instance, Seema, a brown interviewee currently living in Kenya, used to keep an envelope labelled *pesa chor* ("money for thieves") in an accessible drawer in case she needed to

[29] Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Distant Companions: Servants and Employers in Zambia, 1900–1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 7.
[30] Salima, interview by Kiana Rawji, August 2022.
[31] This greater, symbolic sense of theft and betrayal, which only fosters more interracial resentment, went both ways; both brown and black East Africans likely felt that the other had stolen something from them. For East African Asians, it was the theft of their properties, businesses, and homes. Meanwhile, many black Africans felt that the "Asians" stole wealth and opportunities from them in the first place. Additionally, this obsession with theft is not unlike the way East African Asian literature tends to fixate on sexual assault, which is similarly symbolic of transgression, betrayal, and violation, illustrating the resentment that tainted brown perceptions of black Africans.

bribe any intruders.[32] Zubeda from Tanzania explained how she would test new servants' trustworthiness by leaving pieces of jewelry or money lying around the house as bait.[33] This test was not uncommon, as some of my domestic worker interviewees were aware of it, and careful not to fall into the trap. Other workers admitted to stealing bits of soap, cooking oil, or food every now and then, typically out of necessity and desperation as they came from very poor backgrounds.

However, to many employers, this tendency to steal was attributed not to servants' poverty, but instead, to their *blackness*. The reality and frequency of servant theft within brown homes contributed to an essentialized perception of black Africans as naturally predisposed to thievery in most East African Asian minds. Pari, a resident of Nairobi since her birth in 1949, recalled that Gujarati-speakers in the 70s often referred to black Africans in conversation using the term, *aloko*, literally meaning "these people."[34] She highlighted the common phrase, *aloko chor*, meaning "these people are thieves" and reflected, "you'll find amongst all the Asians, [many use] that terminology… you can't call a whole race thieves. I mean, the Indians steal. We don't call them [thieves]."[35] This is just one example of how the accumulation of common experiences in the domestic space led to a larger generalization that only thickened the invisible line between an imagined "them" and an imagined "us" in many brown minds.

Since brown East Africans mostly interacted with black Africans as servants – people with low social and economic capital – and since race and class were so closely intertwined, black Africans also became associated with poverty and economic immobility in the minds of many

[32] Seema, interview by Kiana Rawji, October 2022.
[33] Zubeda, interview by Kiana Rawji, August 2022.
[34] Pari, interview.
[35] Pari, interview.

East African Asians.[36] If blackness was inextricable from Africanness, and servants came to represent the character and nature of "Africans" in the brown imagination, this is all the more reason that many brown families would have not wanted to identify as "African," themselves. To do so might mean associating with servants – with poor, uneducated thieves – and thus, undercutting their own progress. For an already insecure community of migrants looking to improve their social and economic standing in society, identifying with people beneath them in the socio-economic hierarchy was likely unappealing. The ambition to improve their position in a new society may have also led anxious brown migrants to distinguish between Indianness and Africanness and believe, like Anil did, that something in "Indian blood" would keep them permanently apart from what Janet Bujra calls the "serving class."[37]

On the other side of the employer-servant relationship, black workers also often attributed characteristics – sometimes even moral character – of their employers to their Indianness. George, who was born in 1987 Kenya and worked for brown employers in the 2000s, was verbally abused by his employers, called "boy" rather than his real name, and only fed measly leftovers. Based on his experience as well as stories he heard from other workers, George asserted, "I don't think you can work for an Indian, and they treat you well... Generally, what is known everywhere is that Indians are not good people."[38] Similarly, Henry, a domestic worker in Kenya since the 90s, used his personal experiences with employers to inform his understanding of qualities inherent to Indians. When explaining how one employer had been calling him by the wrong name for over two decades, Henry explained, "that's their nature, [they] can't pronounce

[36] Nabeela, interview by Kiana Rawji, December 2022 and Salima, interview.
[37] Janet M. Bujra, *Serving Class: Masculinity and the Feminisation of Domestic Service in Tanzania*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, London, 2000), 3.
[38] George, interview by Trezer Were, September 2022.

our names properly."[39] Henry also noted, "Indians shout a lot… if they shout, get in there and fix whatever is wrong. When they call you, smile a bit… We normally joke, saying, 'let me go and work for my shouting Indian.'"[40]

Evidently, pervasive experiences on both sides were quickly translated into racialized expectations – whether that be the expectation that brown people are naturally aggressive and verbally abusive, or that black people are thieves. Moreover, Henry's instinct to "smile a bit" in the face of aggression underlines a fundamental power imbalance; whereas employers could fire or punish their servants for theft or other transgressions, servants were forced to simply put up with employers' aggression or lose their livelihoods.

Perceptions fostered in brown households were influenced by broader political tensions; the boundary between public and private was a porous one, with greater political debates infiltrating domestic life and vice versa. In the post-independence era, black politicians "positioned Indians as a hangover from the colonial past in both origin and attitude, situating them as onerous to the nation."[41] Politicians not only emphasized East African Asians' diasporic origins, but also pointed to "the racist, colonial-era attitudes of Indian businessmen in refusing to deracialize their ventures," and the juxtaposition of their material wealth and occupation of skilled professions with the unskilled black labor force and enduring African poverty.[42] Politicized stereotypes of "Asians" as greedy, wealthy, and racist neo-colonizers in the public sphere made their way into private, everyday life in the 70s, and have lasted to this day.[43] Eve, a

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[39] Henry, interview by Gloria Cheptoo, September 2022.
[40] Henry, interview.
[41] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 269.
[42] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 269.
[43] Yasmin Ladha's *Lion's Granddaughter and Other Stories* (1992) is a striking illustration of how the political realm influenced daily, domestic interactions and vice versa. Set in postcolonial Tanzania, her short stories explore the dynamics between three archetypical characters: a mixed-race child protagonist and narrator, Aisha, her brown Grandmother, and their black servant, Juma. In some stories, nationalist speeches of black politicians on the radio seep into Grandmother's home and have a direct impact on her relationship with Juma, causing her to lash out in

black domestic worker since 1984, described her current work "for a rich [Indian] employer who despises Africans very much."[44] She declared, "Indians, they have real money! They look down upon Africans though. We are not allowed to use their cups and plates. We have our cups, plates, and spoons. Their cutlery is only used by them… these people are colonists."[45] Belinda, a domestic worker in Kisumu, recounted a recent story about a worker who "got pregnant working for an Indian" and reflected, "the Indians have money and big businesses in Kisumu, you cannot even start putting up a fight with someone like that."[46] It is no coincidence that some black workers' descriptions of "Indians" based on their experiences in brown homes echo those made on political battlefields. In a vicious cycle of interracial resentment, the lived experiences of brown employers and black domestic workers remain entangled with discourses that played out in public, politicized spaces.

The Intimate but Unequal "Part of the Family"

Though animosity and resentment can be found in employer-servant relationships, so too can care and compassion. But, of course, that care and compassion is situated within a market context. Just as Henry forces himself to smile even when his employers shout at him, many domestic workers are often required to produce emotions like happiness and compassion as part of their job. Qayum and Ray point out that "the contradiction of work, done for a wage, within the privatized confines of a home" rests in the fact that "the home is not an emotionally neutral

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anger against the nationalization campaign that excludes Asians like her from the new nation. On the other side, Juma also lashes out against his employing family, invoking nationalist, anti-Asian vocabulary while sexually assaulting Aisha in a private assertion of power. Throughout *Lion's Granddaughter,* Ladha blurs the boundaries between public and private, revealing the insidious, cyclical nature of interracial tension, with one group's resentment only reinforcing the other's.

[44] Eve, interview by Gloria Cheptoo, July 2022.

[45] Eve, interview.

[46] Belinda, interview by Trezer Were, August 2022.

site—it is the site of love, trauma, and intimacy."[47] Eve, the same worker who called Indians "colonists" based on her current employers, described her previous brown employers with great warmth: "I never even thought of leaving them, I loved them so much. They took good care of me… These people loved me, and I loved them too. They would help me as I helped them too… they helped me educate my children… I built my house with a loan that they gave me… I still feel like I'm part of their family."[48]

In Eve's description, her relationship with her former employers was, in many ways, an interdependent and symbiotic one. Not only did brown families rely on workers like Eve, but workers also relied on their employers to essentially provide a form of welfare. In a country plagued by poverty and corruption, Eve's brown employers offered her a social and financial safety net. This kind of dependence runs the risk of permanently infantilizing the worker; the relationship that Eve describes as familial is comparable to the relationship between a parent and child. Yet, despite the fundamental power imbalance between parent and child, there can exist real love between them – after all, Eve herself used this word many times to describe her relationship with her former employers, and it would be presumptuous to discount her emotions as inauthentic or feigned. Moreover, it is imperative to note that any kind of love – whether platonic, romantic, or familial – between black and brown Africans marks a radical transgression of long-standing cultural, social, and political boundaries that inhibited intimacy between them.

The phrase, "part of the family" also came up in almost all my employer interviews. Recounting his family's relationship with Kenyan servants in the 60s, Anil explained, "I would say that the servants became kind of part of the family. The good servants, you know? Good-

[47] Qayum and Ray, "Traveling Cultures of Servitude," 114.
[48] Eve, interview.

hearted servants were very enjoyable people to have around you."[49] Anil's qualification highlights that familial rhetoric is reserved for the "good servants" – those who do their jobs well, do not complain too much, and put emotional labor into cultivating affection with their employers (i.e. by making themselves "enjoyable" to "have around") – and equally, the "good employers" – those who do not shout too much, provide ample food, pay, time off, and a kind of welfare beyond wages. Pari, who currently employs domestic staff in Nairobi, put it this way: "I'm a little more relaxed with their [hours], whereas I know some other Indian employers are not… [One of our workers] has been with us 40 years. [The other] has been with us 30 years. So, to me, they're family. And we help [them] out as much as we can, whenever we can, financially and otherwise."[50] As indicators of familial intimacy, Pari cites her leeway with labor rules through relaxed working hours – highlighting the complex entanglement of market labor and familial love – as well as her willingness to help workers out in other ways such as the kind of paternalistic welfare that Eve described.

While some employers who use familial language in reference to their servants are aware of their market role as employers, the rhetoric of family tends to erase this capital-labor relationship all together. When describing her family's houseboy, Zubeda said, "He was just like a family member to us… like we didn't even think he was a servant."[51] This kind of statement is, in part, an expression of genuine affection and yearning for intimacy. Many employers like Zubeda and even Anar who feel affection towards their workers would like to think their workers are more than mere employees, and vice versa. Further, Zubeda also seems to be reaching for a sense of equality, implying that she treated her "house boy" as she would treat any other family member.

[49] Anil, interview.
[50] Pari, interview.
[51] Zubeda, interview.

However, by placing the work outside the realm of the market and into the realm of the family, her erasure of the worker's very status as a "servant" obscures the inequality inherent in domestic labor. As Qayum and Ray aptly put it, the "rhetoric of love" enables systemic inequalities to be "perceived on an entirely different register," wherein employer-servant relationships are defined "in terms of mutuality based on affection, dependency, and loyalty."[52] This rhetoric creates the perception that it is not a labor contract, but rather familial affection and loyalty that primarily binds employers and employees. As such, the language of family and love dangerously sets up any invocation of that contract (for instance if a domestic worker asks for a raise or even decides to quit) as an intimate betrayal rather than a reasonable workplace negotiation. This dynamic is intricate because it "both hides exploitation and makes it more bearable for some employers and, indeed, for some servants."[53]

Though many employers like Zubeda invoke the phrase, "part of the family," to suggest that they treated their servants with compassion and equality, I argue that black domestic servants *have* become part of the East African Asian family, though not in the egalitarian way that some employers would like to believe. Black servants became so ubiquitous in brown households in the postcolonial period that servants have essentially become institutionalized into the East African Asian family. But the family is a hierarchical unit, and intimacy does not necessarily mean equality, though many brown employers may mistake the former for the latter. The black African is consigned to a role at the very bottom of the brown familial structure in East Africa, a perpetual child denied mobility within the family.[54] Some servants even ate with brown children

[52] Qayum and Ray, "Traveling Cultures of Servitude", 105
[53] Qayum and Ray, "Traveling Cultures of Servitude", 105.
[54] Though many black domestic workers looked after brown children, those children eventually grew into greater power within the family (while servants stayed in the same position in the familial hierarchy), sometimes even taking over as the primary employers of the very people who raised them. It is also important to note the use of the infantilizing word, "boy" in the common term, "house boy." Several of my brown interviewees even recounted simply calling their workers by "boy" instead of by their names.

at the "kids' table," but whereas brown kids eventually grew up and out of this position, servants would stay at the kids' table, or were consigned to eat in another, separate space from the rest of the family, often outside.[55] Many of the same brown East Africans willing to call black servants part of their families would not be comfortable with black Africans entering their families at any other level in the hierarchy, such as through marriage. Anil, who called his domestic servants "part of the family," also said, "We didn't want to marry our girls to any African, non-Ismaili people. If you look at it, 99% of our women and boys married in our religion, married in our culture. The farthest we would go would be to marry an Indian woman, Hindu woman, maybe, but not an African woman."[56]

With the culture of servitude cementing the role of the black African within the brown East African family as a servant and a servant alone*,* a black child in-law was made even more unimaginable and unacceptable. Rather than breaking down walls between brown and black Africans, the rhetoric of "part of the family" thus only entrenched inequality and black immobility within the brown East African family as a hierarchal social unit.

A unique story narrated to me by Rabia, a Ugandan Asian who now lives in Canada, demonstrates how the impact of the culture of servitude on brown families' attitudes towards black Africans extended beyond domestic labor. In the early 1960s, when Rabia was a child growing up in Uganda, her brown family adopted a black boy named Musumbi. She explains, "We called him [Salman], but he was not really [Salman]. We made him an Ismaili and he played with my aunt, everybody grew up together."[57] Rabia suggests that Musumbi was well-incorporated into her family, growing up with all the other kids. However, at a certain point, he

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[55] Bujra, *Serving Class,* 20.
[56] Anil, interview.
[57] Rabia, interview by Kiana Rawji, August 2022.

hit a ceiling; he could not continue to grow up with the others. Rabia explains that Musumbi eventually became interested in brown girls in the neighborhood. She recounts,

> "So now he [was] looking at the girls and saying, 'I like Roshan, I like Sheida,' and suddenly he was getting romantic feelings for these girls. My uncle took him outside one day and said, 'Look, these fathers are never going to give their daughters to you. And the reason is that you are black'… My uncle said, 'the best thing for you is to go [back] to your village, find a girl that you like and get married and settle down.'"[58]

After this incident, Musumbi "left the family" and "left the faith," and Rabia's family never saw him again.[59] Musumbi was essentially kicked out of the family as soon as he attempted to cross an impenetrable boundary—to graduate from the status of a perpetual, desexualized child at the bottom of the familial hierarchy by getting married, as most boys do when they grew older. Musumbi could enter an brown East African family as a *boy*, but not as a son-in-law or generally, as a *man*.[60] The culture of servitude in the East African Asian household thus creates a self-reinforcing cycle wherein public and private power structures simultaneously influence and perpetuate one another.[61] Though this culture put two highly segregated races into intimate quarters, affording a transgressive and unprecedented level of interracial intimacy at times, it ultimately reinforced colonial legacies of racial hierarchy and racialized resentment both within and outside of the home. The degree to which racialized domestic labor became so thoroughly embedded into the East African Asian family made the possibility of racial equality

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[58] Rabia, interview.
[59] Rabia, interview.
[60] The infantilization of "house boys" may be linked to East African Asians' desire to also desexualize then, not just for the sake of maintaining endogamy, but also to quash the stereotypical (but not entirely unfounded) fear of black men as sexual aggressors against brown women and girls. This de-sexualization was perhaps psychologically necessary for brown families to allow black male servants to be in such close quarters with brown girls and women every day in the home. Some of my brown female interviewees recounted real, traumatic stories of sexual assault at the hands of black male domestic workers, and others who did not experience sexual abuse first-hand expressed fear of it. For instance, Rabia remembers her mother warning her never to be in the same room as her family's "house boy," especially when he was cleaning her bedroom.
[61] Qayum and Ray assert that the culture of servitude merges the public and private spheres, making "domesticity a public phenomenon by its incorporation of structural inequalities and difference—fundamentally those of class, gender, and national origin, but also race/ethnicity, especially" ("Traveling Cultures of Servitude," 102).

on a larger, public scale significantly slimmer. Decades after decolonization and the exodus of many South Asians from Africa, this culture of servitude remains largely intact in East Africa, despite marginal changes. What would it take for brown and black East Africans to see each other as equals, within and beyond the home?

The Moment of Departure

In searching for an answer to this question about the future, strangely enough, it can be productive to turn to the past – to one historical moment in particular: a moment of departure. The mass exodus of brown migrants out of East Africa in the 1970s, fueled by ethnocentric nationalism, was one of the most consequential and perhaps traumatic events in the shaping of the East African Asian diaspora in the 20th century, effectively creating a 'double diaspora', dispersed across the United Kingdom, Canada, India, and Pakistan.[62] It was only when forced to leave that many brown East Africans finally treated their domestic staff "like family" – or rather, like *equals within* the family. In her memoir, *The Settler's Cookbook,* Yasmin Alibhai-Brown points out that, in their final days before fleeing Uganda in 1972, some brown employers "invited their servants to eat and drink with them at their tables. Never happened before."[63] Alibhai-Brown points to a fundamental cultural change that seemed to suddenly occur in the event of departure: an unspoken and unbroken rule of the culture of servitude – which necessarily segregated brown and black dinner tables – was shattered.

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[62] Many East African Asians flocked out of East Africa to the United Kingdom, which, in response, attempted to restrict their immigration. The mass exodus sparked debates about citizenship, immigration, and belonging in East Africa but also in the UK, where discourse ensued on what the British nation owed to its former colonial subjects as well as xenophobia. See "Uhuru and Exodus" in Sana Aiyar's *Indians in Kenya* for more information on the reception (or lack thereof) and implications of East African Asian migrants to the UK in the 70s.
[63] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook,* 231.

When asked why East African Asian families typically did not eat with their servants, Nabeela explained, "I think if we lived side-by-side with them, I wouldn't mind them coming and eating with me. Because they were very educated, they were very well-mannered… And I think they fit in, socially, [with] etiquette, what not… But when we had servants, I think it was a different ballgame."[64] Despite the many realms of overlap demonstrating to her that brown and black Africans were perfectly capable of socializing as equals, Nabeela implies that black Africans were seen as fundamentally *other* simply because they were domestic servants. The culture of servitude created "a different ballgame" with different rules for interracial relations because it erected an immovable barrier between black and brown. Living "side-by-side," it seems, was less about physical distance (as many servants actually did live-in with their brown employers, although neighborhoods were still largely segregated by race) and more about social distance – that is, about otherness and equality. Living side-by-side means existing in the same world, but as Hansen, Qayum and Ray all argue, a culture of servitude relies on the assumption that employers and servants occupy different realms of being, belonging to different "categories" with "distinctive lifestyles, desires, and habits."[65] To eat together, side-by-side, was to threaten the notion of essentialized difference, and thus, to shake the foundations of the East African culture of servitude.

The boundary between black and brown eating spaces was not the only one that began to dissolve when East African Asians were largely leaving the region. In addition to eating with their servants in 1972, Alibhai-Brown adds that "departing Asians gave their Janes and Johnnies

[64] Nabeela, interview. Note that food taboos have long been crucial to conceptions of purity and pollution in South Asian culture. For example, some brown East Africans, especially those still deeply entrenched in the logic of the Indian caste system, feared black Africans contaminating their food so kept them out of the kitchen all together. Other brown women had their black servants cook with them, but never eat with them. For more on food, race, and purity, see Dan Ojwang's "Gastropolitics and Diasporic Self-Writing" in *Reading Migration and Culture in Context: The World of East African Indian Literature*, 2012.
[65] Qayum and Ray, "Traveling Cultures of Servitude", 102.

clothes, cars, furniture and cash."[66] In the wake of exodus, some of my interviewees described radical and unprecedented acts of giving, gestures of equality. My interviewee from Uganda recounted a similar story, though not with her family's black servants, but instead, with their adopted child, Musumbi. Despite having previously kicked Musumbi out of their family, Rabia's family decided to "leave *everything*" to him in 1972, including their house (and everything in it, from furniture to photo albums) and family business.[67] Other interviewees even mentioned giving pieces of jewelry to their servants upon leaving East Africa. Acts like these were far more transgressive and profound than they may appear. Not only are belongings like family businesses and jewelry significant heirlooms that would only go to "real" family members, but their transfer also symbolizes upward movement within the familial hierarchy. Girls inherited their mothers' and grandmothers' jewelry as they grew into women, old enough to wear and cherish it. Boys took over their fathers' businesses as they became men, maturing into decision-making adults. Having been consigned to the role of the perpetual infant as "part of the family," it was all the more unusual for domestic servants or black Africans like Musumbi to be entrusted with brown family heirlooms and symbols of mobility, to which they would never have otherwise been entitled. These transfers perhaps signify, finally, the prospect of a more egalitarian incorporation of black Africans into the East African Asian family.

Alibhai-Brown asserts that, while some East African Asians forced out of Uganda in 1972 were "filled with renewed racism against blacks" or "broken-hearted and overcome with self-pity," there was a small segment of the population for whom "fear and pain brought on an awakening, a reckoning with history, quasi-religious contrition."[68] But why was it that, in the

[66] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook,* 231.
[67] Rabia, interview.
[68] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook,* 231.

event of departure (and not of the British, but of the South Asians out of East Africa), a once-immutable wall began to crumble, and the smooth operation of the culture of servitude was most threatened? What was it about this historical moment – defined, in fact, by racialized resentment and anger directed at East African Asians – that allowed for a "reckoning" and even a glimmer of interracial equality to shine through the cracks?

When brown East Africans left their homes en masse, brown-black relationships of servitude were literally threatened, forced to end by the departure of employers. The essentialized *otherness* that Hansen positioned as vital to the daily operation of domestic servitude was no longer a necessity. Moreover, as the boundaries of "home" were dissolved for many East African Asians, so too were boundaries and norms *within* the home, namely those that kept black Africans immobile and unequal within the brown family. With brown employers' worlds turned upside down, a window opened, however briefly, through which a new, optimistic future could be envisioned.[69] It is also possible that the exodus served as an "awakening" for brown migrants who were forcibly shaken out of the dreamy slumber of the British imperial model. Communities of East African Asian merchants and traders (Ismailis, Dawddi Bohra Muslims, Zoroastrians, and Hindu merchants of the *bania* caste) did not typically arrive in Africa as indentured laborers contracted to build the British East African railway but as free agents looking to benefit from the business prospects provided by the railway and the colonial project at large. Forced exodus in the 70s was thus an awakening from the delusion that they could reap the benefits of colonialism without consequence; a realization that, despite their efforts to distinguish themselves from black Africans and work their way up to the status of white colonists, they, too,

[69] Ismailis in particular had nowhere to return, as many had left Gujarat, India before partition; after 1947, the riot-prone Gujarat of the 1970s was no longer an appealing destination for Muslims, and Pakistan was foreign to these East African Asians. Thus, everything ahead for Ismailis was, to a great extent, brand new—the upturning of their lives as they knew them may have provided a context ripe for re-evaluation and new perspectives on old ways.

were victims of colonialism and its legacies. British rule created the complex positionality of South Asians in the East African social system – as neither settler nor native, as indisputably foreign yet undeniably imperative to the economic fabric – which had lasting consequences on how brown and black East Africans see and relate to one another. The negative economic effects of colonialism on postcolonial East Africa also hurt brown migrants, who ended up becoming scapegoated by black African politicians for the failure of newly independent economies.[70]

For some brown employers, in the wake of this realization that both black and brown East Africans were trapped in and harmed by the colonial system came a reckoning – an acknowledgement of guilt, maybe even an apology. Alibhai-Brown describes, "Browns and blacks apologized to each other, one side for years of racial exploitation, the other for Amin's ethnic cleansing. They cried. It was too late."[71] But is it still too late? Can this slice of the past also provide a glimpse into a more egalitarian future? Is it possible that the moment of East African Asians' departure was not only a revelation of *what could have been* but also a vision of *what could be?*

To this day, virtually any brown household in East Africa contains one or more black domestic workers. Some aspects of domestic labor in the region have changed. For instance, more black women now fill these roles, workers are no longer called "servants," and fewer of them live in with their employers, allowing more personal freedom. Today, there is more awareness and progressivism around domestic workers' rights, as well as a larger African middle class and more interracial marriage in East Africa.[72] However, some things have not changed.

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[70] In "Uhuru and Exodus" in *Indians in Kenya*, Sana Aiyar discusses how Indians were scapegoats in many ways, blamed for the failures of nation-building and shortcomings of post-independence governments (see pp. 267, 271).
[71] Alibhai-Brown, *The Settler's Cookbook,* 231.
[72] Statistics or other quantitative data on the rise of interracial relationships over time is difficult to come by, however, in my personal impression from travel in East Africa and discussion with people living in the region, it seems that interracial marriage is still not a norm. While brown East Africans have become slightly more open to it, the social and cultural taboo around black-brown marriages in the brown community remains largely intact.

Legacies of racialized colonial class structures live on, and the culture of servitude, to a great extent, persists. While there are now black households with black domestic staff, it would still be unimaginable to see a brown household with brown domestic staff. In fact, employing multiple workers as cooks, cleaners, drivers, nannies, and more is so ingrained in the brown lifestyle in East Africa that some East African Asian family friends I spoke with cited having domestic staff as a primary motivator of their moving back to Kenya in recent decades.

Seema's daughter-in-law, Alya, who lives in Nairobi, stressed the continuation of servant mistreatment in contemporary Kenya: "Even in our generation," she said, "we have friends who can't keep their staff and you wonder why. No, you don't wonder. You know why."[73] Another interviewee, Meena, who left east Africa in 1975, recalled that her family would call their servant "boy" instead of his name in the 60s (something George experienced, too, when working for a brown family in Kenya as recently as the early 2000s) and abused him verbally and physically; she recalls how she used to kick her family's servant to wake him up in the middle of the night to perform some small task.[74] The similarity between Meena's memories and George's aforementioned experience with his employers about 40 years later is striking. Meena even recalled when, during a visit to brown household in Kenya in 2004, she asked the domestic staff to sit beside her and they refused, only willing to sit at her feet. But Meena insisted they sit together. Later, the employer and woman in charge of the household scolded her, "'What is wrong [with you]? I thought you knew all these things, how servants *are* – their place, our place.'"[75] There *is* a place for black Africans within brown families in East Africa, but it is certainly not a privileged or equal one.

[73] Seema, interview. Note: Alya was not an interviewee of mine, but rather made this remark while passing by during my interview with Seema.
[74] Meena, interview by Kiana Rawji, July 2022.
[75] Meena, interview.

Unlike Anar's second email to me, Meena's guilt was not tempered by a yearning for redemption. Meena expressed pure shame and regret about her family's treatment of their domestic staff. One explanation for this difference may simply be that Meena's family did treat their staff more harshly than Anar's. Another could be that Meena returned to East Africa to witness how stubborn the old ways – the culture of servitude – remained, whereas Anar left when she was young and has not been back since. Was Anar's search for some redemption amidst the guilt purely aspirational? Or could that brief window of possibility during the 1970s exodus provide a path forward from the lasting legacies of racial inequality? So long as a culture of servitude exists in East Africa, can those brief moments of individual change be translated to larger cultural change?

Postscript: The Things We Leave Behind

Let me return to the story of Rabia's family in Uganda and the boy they adopted, Musumbi, which did not conclude in 1972.

Over 20 years after her family's departure in 1972, Rabia returned to Uganda for the first time, with her husband and kids. She remembers getting into a car, and despite all the time that had passed, knowing exactly where she was. She directed the driver, instructing him to "go this way, go that way" until she arrived at the bakery her father used to own, which he had left to Musumbi. Upon entering the bakery, Rabia told the woman behind the counter that she was looking for Musumbi. Rabia described, "I wanted to let her understand who I was, and I was looking around and there was a photo of my father… after all these years. So, I pointed to my dad and said, 'That is my dad, I'm [his] daughter.'"[76] Rabia went on to recount the woman's

[76] Rabia, interview.

reaction: "You know what she did? She walked back from the counter to the front of the shop where I was, and then she went down on her knees, and took my hands and said… 'You have no idea what you've done for us and what you mean for us.'"[77] The woman, Musumbi's wife, called Musumbi down from upstairs, brought out some snacks and tea, and they sat down together with Rabia, her husband and children. The two families, black and brown, ate, chatted, and laughed while Rabia and Musumbi joyfully reminisced about their shared past.

Despite the trauma and loss Rabia and many others experienced when leaving home in Uganda, in this moment, decades later, something beautiful was gained. The photo of Rabia's father on the wall despite having left was an acknowledgement not just of his contribution to this particular bakery and Musumbi's family, but also of brown migrants' contributions to East Africa as a whole. There is profound meaning in recognizing and remembering how a people shape a place. Diasporas are invariably defined by absence and loss; in *Graves of Tarim,* Enseng Ho argues that "absence, rather than presence, everywhere shapes diasporic experience" because "mobility leaves in its wake a trail of absences," or as a friend of mine put it, a trail of "migrant-shaped holes."[78] However, Rabia's and Musumbi's story points us away from these migrant-shaped holes and towards diasporic *presences*, illustrating that diasporic mobility is also defined by the legacies it leaves behind and not only by absence and loss. In this case, it was not just businesses and economic development that East African Asians left behind, but also language, food, culture, and more. In his article, "What is Asia to Me?", Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o reflects on the presence of India in East Africa, particularly on how deeply Indian cuisine has infiltrated East African culture. He writes, "Even today, Christmas and feasts in

[77] Rabia, interview.
[78] Enseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (University of California Press, 2006), 4, 18.

Kenya mean plentiful *cabaci*, *thambutha*, and *mandathi*, our version of the Indian chapati, paratha, samosa. The spices, curry, hot pepper, all so very Indian, had become so central a part of Kenyan cuisine that I could have sworn that these dishes were truly indigenous."[79] He goes on to distinguish the Indian from the British colonial impact on local culture: "Whereas the Indian impact on African food culture was pervasive, there was hardly any equivalence from the English presence; baked white bread is the only contribution that readily comes to mind."[80]

When forced to leave Uganda, Rabia's family was told they did not belong and could never be "real" Africans. But upon returning and seeing her father recognized on the walls of local memory, Rabia felt a renewed sense of belonging. This very recognition is perhaps what would complete the other side of an interracial reckoning; it is not only brown East Africans who have yet to reckon with their complicity in perpetuating racial inequality, but also black Africans who have, by and large, yet to acknowledge that East African Asians were not mere passers-by, and that there is a place on the walls of East African history – and even its future – for them, too. Whether called settler or migrant, "African" or "Asian," *mwanainchi* or *mzungu,* what cannot be denied are the marks that East African Asians left and those they continue to leave on East Africa. Notably, it was only after both sides had made their own acknowledgements of each other that Rabia and Musumbi ate together, at the same table, side-by-side.

[79] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "What Is Asia to Me? Looking East from Africa" In *World Literature Today (*2012), 15.
[80] wa Thiong'o, "What Is Asia to Me?" 15.

APPENDIX: ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

(All first names have been anonymized and surnames excluded.)

Brown Employers

(All interviews conducted by Kiana Rawji in English in 2022)

Name	Gender (M/F)	Year of Birth	Country of Birth	Year of Departure (from East Africa)	Current Country of Residence
Meena	F	1941	Kenya	1975	Canada
Navid	M	1940	Tanzania	1975	Canada
Jamila	F	1941	Kenya	1972	Canada
Anil	M	1943	Kenya	1975	Canada
Nabeela	F	1944	Tanzania	1973	Canada
Zubeda	F	1944	Tanzania	1973	Canada
Seema	F	1945	Kenya	N/A (has not left)	Kenya
Pari	F	1949	Kenya	N/A (has not left)	Kenya
Rabia	F	1954	Uganda	1970	Canada
Azim	M	1959	Kenya	1980	Canada
Salima	F	1960	Kenya	1972	Canada

Black Domestic Workers

(Most interviews conducted in various Kenyan languages and translated to English by Gloria Cheptoo, Celine Onditi, and Trezer Were in 2022)

Name	Gender (M/F)	Year of Birth	Country of Residence	Year(s) working for Brown employers	Interviewer/ Translator
Henry	M	1958	Kenya	1995 - present	Gloria Cheptoo
Mary	F	1964	Kenya	1970s - present	Kiana Rawji
Eve	F	1964	Kenya	1984 - present	Gloria Cheptoo
Christina	F	1980	Kenya	2018 - 2020	Celine Onditi
George	M	1987	Kenya	Early 2000s	Trezer Were
Jenny	F	1988	Kenya	2019 - 2020	Celine Onditi
Belinda	F	1988	Kenya	2017	Trezer Were
Sara	F	1999	Kenya	2006	Trezer Were

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