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**Materializing post-colonial geographies: examining the textural landscapes of
migration in the South Asian home.**

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This paper considers the role of visual cultures in understanding the value of landscape to post-colonial migrants living in Britain. The paper also considers these visual cultures as prismatic devices which refract lived landscapes of South Asia and East Africa into British domestic scene. The visual cultures are investigated using a materialist lens. They are positioned as materials that allow embodied connections to landscapes experienced pre-migration, including sensory connections with past homes, natures and family life. These then become artefacts symbolising relationships with past landscapes, made meaningful in their presence in Britain homes. Using this materialist lens, visual cultures in the British Asian home, such as photographs, pictures, and paintings, are given meaning and value beyond their textual content.

This paper is an exercise in reading visual cultures in the everyday through a materialist lens which allows for an examination of their place in the process of ‘making home’ for South Asian women in Britain. In particular, objects *presence* the migratory experience of the South Asian community, importing ‘other’ landscapes (previously shaped by colonial governance) into Britain, and help to shape environmental values, landscape imaginaries and South Asian landscapes of belonging in the post-colonial period.

Keywords: Material Cultures, Visual Cultures, home, South Asian women, landscape.

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1. Introduction

In this paper I consider the role and value of visual cultures in figuring British Asian identifications with landscape. Landscape is positioned here as a material signifier of identification with land, territory and environments which contribute towards with formal and informal connectedness with national cultures and citizenship. British Asian citizenship is figured through the experience of their residence in colonial territories within South Asia (including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) and East Africa (including Kenya, Uganda, and Malawi). The South Asian experience of these lived landscapes and their particular political status within colonial territories influences their connection with landscapes in Britain and 'Britishness'. This research explores the presence of landscapes, which are represented, refracted and memorialised in the form of visual cultures within the British Asian home. Visual cultures of landscape which are situated within the South Asian home are examined in this paper as critical modes of securing a sense of being and belonging within Britain, for this group of post-colonial migrants. I also argue that visual cultures, in the British Asian home, such as photographs, fabrics, pictures, and paintings, have meaning and value beyond their textual content. This research is an exercise in reading visual cultures through a materialist lens, which allows for an examination of their place in the embodied practices of making 'home' in Britain. The objects of visual culture considered here, *presence* the landscapes of South Asian migration, thus importing 'other' landscapes, previously shaped by colonial governance (Drayton 2000) into a British context. There is a movement and

circulation of landscape imagery, which reflects post-colonial experiences of living in colonial landscapes in East Africa and South Asia. The presence of these landscapes in visual and material cultures shape South Asian domestic spaces and illustrate the value of landscape to post-colonial residents within Britain.

There is a need within cultural geography to attend to the materiality of the visual cultures that we engage with. This research demonstrates the value of investigating this material dimension, through the process of researching domestic landscapes of the post-colonial migrant. These visual cultures refract, represent, and are metonymical signifiers of other environments and landscapes. They also refract sensory engagements with other places, landscapes and natures. Shards of other environments are enclosed in these visual cultures. In the domestic space a collage of other environments is produced through the display and collection of visual cultures in the home. They are significant in their material presence in that they ground identification in tangible and textural engagements. Their materiality of the visual is an extension of anthropological interests in the biography of material cultures, and the nature of domestic cultures in connecting across temporal and spatial axes of lived experience (Appadurai, 1986). If the materiality of the visual is an additional register of the text, then we need to extend research on the way that material cultures operate on the scale of the visual; the sighting of material textures are as valuable as their being situated within a spatial matrix (Holt and Barlow, 2000; Tolia-Kelly, 2001). The aesthetics of the material cultures in the home form part of their sensory vocabulary, which in turn needs some attention.

Material and visual cultures are positioned here as active shapers of post-colonial identification with landscape. Their active place in the imagination of

geographical relationships is examined through the following examples. However, their power is not limited to the domestic sphere. For almost all of the women in the study, the landscapes they had engaged with prior to migration have sustained relevance in their current lives. The presence of these visual landscapes translates the experience of African, Indian and other Asian experiences of landscapes into creating a set of familiar textures in this new domestic scene. Britishness and British homes are changing as a result of the migration of peoples and their landscape imaginaries.

Visual Cultures allow for an empowered citizenship to evolve in the process of making home. As Parkin (1999) has argued, once migrants have experienced loss or forced expulsion, they continue to bear the fear of displacement. This fear in an era where racism continues and exclusionary politics are evident in national media and public cultures, migrant communities use their connections with *multiple provenances* to strengthen their foundations of residency here in Britain. Their domestic sphere becomes an archive of these multiple sites, sounds, and sensory textures of enfranchisement and belonging. The visual cultures which shape these new textures of home are shot through with memory of ‘other’ spaces of being. These ensure that material landscapes in Britain are continually remade through the aesthetics and textures of post-colonial landscapes in East Africa and Asia.

Interpreting these visual cultures requires a grounded understanding of post-colonial identity and citizenship. Their interpretation and de-coding are problematic, as they are locked into the biographical imaginary of the women. Some of these values and interpretations have been shared through the interview process, but there is a need to extend the interpretive tools necessary for effective visual analysis when

working with post-colonial migrants. This is because, as writers like Appadurai (1996) have argued, hegemonic conventions of interpreting texts exist which are constrained to culturally specific interpretation. Readings of specific texts in socio-cultural contexts allows researchers to incorporate an inclusive strategy necessary for understanding mobile, and dynamic, post-colonial visual vocabularies and cultures. This research evidences a move towards developing an inclusive, culturally situated visual methodology that allows for the examination of post-colonial geographies refracted through visual and material cultures.

Jackson's (2000) call for a renewed engagement with materiality is in some ways arguing for a varied figure of matter within geography. Here, I have privileged the (cultural) materialist approach to understanding post-colonial geographies. This builds on the extensive body of work within geography that has been based on Williams' (1958; 1973) approach towards cultural texts, and other's treatment of landscape as material (Jackson, 1959; Lowenthal, 1979; 1985; 1988; Meinig, 1979; Sauer, 1925). I will suggest that material cultures signify the positioning of post-colonial identity within the context of Britishness and the British landscape. The complicatedness of geographies of post-colonial identity has been considered in recent geographical writing (Blunt, 2000; Blunt and McEwan, 2002). Here, post-colonial enfranchisement to a sense of belonging and citizenship is unravelled through an interrogation of visual and material cultures in the domestic sphere and migrant cultures. These cultures refract connections to landscapes of value and meaning, forming a body of material cultures in the home that are important to senses of cultural and individual identity.

The cultural value of landscape to an individual's sense of being and belonging is an essential component of my argument (see also Anderson, Carvalho and Tolia-Kelly, 2001). The role of landscape in supporting a sense of citizenship or a sense of identity has been discussed by geographers over many decades (Cosgrove, 1990; Jackson, 1979; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1979;). Additionally social and cultural geography has considered migratory groups' experience of exclusion in British landscapes (Agyeman, 1990; Agyeman, 1991; Kinsman, 1995; Malik, 1992; Sibley, 1995; 1998). Many of these academic studies incorporate arguments for inclusive landscapes and support an ethical, inclusive politics of appropriation, representation and belonging. This is because the experience of exclusion faced by migrants within British landscapes, are imbedded in regimes of racism, both institutional and social. By exploring the way in which migrant communities create a sense of 'home' we can see how this process incorporates a series of visual and material cultures, which refract connections with landscapes of enfranchisement and belonging. The presence of visual and material cultures in the homes of South Asians post-migration operate as counter weights to the experience of disenfranchisement in the British landscape and the experience of marginalisation.

Shazia "Ider mere swas bund hojata he, Pakistan me mere ghar koola tha"

"Here (in England) I feel suffocated, my breathing is constrained, in Pakistan my home was open"

Shazia makes his statement in the midst of talking about her life in England compared to her family life in Pakistan. Her suffocation is an expression of her feelings of being physically constrained, as a result of being an Asian woman isolated

in Britain without social networks, and without the mobility and freedom that she once had in Pakistan. Shazia's home is a store of connections to the social and cultural geography of Pakistan, it is a material site of respite from the hardness of living in a foreign country. For the women in the study such as Shazia, these home cultures ensure an inclusive engagement with a cultural nationalism, signified through domestic cultures. This is of a relational value to communities who are un-fixed from a seemingly coherent and exclusionary national culture. Stuart Hall (1990;1997; 2000; Hall and du Gay, 1996) has theorised cultural mechanisms through which post-colonial communities living in Britain are able to position themselves in a complex matrix of Britishness; visual and material cultures refract, signify and record these complex negotiations, uprootings, and resettlements.

The resourcefulness of migrant communities faced with uprooting and resettling has been the focus of many studies within sociology (Ahmed *et al* 2003) and social anthropology (Lovell, 1998). Some authors have attended to visual and material cultures as artefacts when communities such as Palestinians (Slymovic, 1998), or the black African community during apartheid (Lovell, 1998), were politically displaced. Most notable are those who have examined the mechanisms through which refugees and migrants affirm their citizenship in the domestic sphere [Mehta and Belk, 1991; Parkin, 1999] in relation to the experience of exclusion or marginality from their new social landscape. These cultural materials become operational as artefacts because they are remnants of a past social life and provide evidence of a social history that is now intangible. Within Britain the networks of migrant communities - significantly those migrating as a result of British Imperial labour requirements - have been conceptually framed as 'ethnic minorities',

‘immigrants’ and other such problematic terms (Samers, 1998). Here, British Asians are considered as a diasporic community situated within a variety of connections with landscapes and citizenships of settlement and migration. Such communities cannot be figured as a discrete racial, national or religious group. Instead they are defined through their dynamic history shaped by colonial economic, cultural and ‘orientalist’ regimes of definition and rule (see Brah, 1996; 1999; Gilroy, 1993a; 1993b; Said, 1978; 1993)

There is a growing need to investigate the material cultures of racialised communities within Britain, and their role in everyday cultural practices of these groups, within domestic landscapes. Although there has been much work that has addressed the problematic position of migrant communities within Britain and British citizenship [Brah, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1987; 1991; Safran, 1991; Vertovec, 1997; 1999] there is a need to examine the effect of an exclusionary British national identity on their environmental relationships with landscapes which are therefore critical in constituting post-colonial geographies of belonging and citizenship. Locating these geographies of post-colonial migrants can be achieved through the mechanism promoted in this paper; by interrogating value of visual and material cultures in the processes of identification (Tolia-Kelly, 2004). Miller’s (1995; 1998) work has been exemplary in the attention paid to intimate, grounded and located personal engagements with the materials in the everyday which matter carving an intellectual space through the development of an anthropological institution of research attending to ‘material cultures’. However this body of work, which represents a shift from Williams’ cultural materialism tends to map intimate cultural practices. However, social relationships with material cultures can uncover the

sometimes occluded, power of political identifications shaped through race, gender and sexuality. Visual and material cultures matter in these regimes of identification. In the process of collecting and displaying visual and material cultures, South Asians build a sense of a home place. The display of materials such as photographs and mementos connect individuals to people, places and landscapes in ways which inform the sense of self. For the South Asian population in Britain their connections include people, places and environments encountered before and during their migration routes. Domestic materials activate cultural flows for an imagined community formed through global networks, these are termed by Appadurai as *ethnoscapes* (Appadurai, 1996: 33). The experience of resettlement involves creating a space where history, heritage and identity are inscribed in those few home possessions either carried with them on the journey, or acquired since their arrival. Importantly visual and material cultures are prismatic devices which import 'other' landscapes into the British one, and thereby shift notions of Britishness, and British domestic landscapes.

Many geographers have argued for the reinscription of marginalised geographies (Philo, 1998; Rose, 1993; Sibley, 1995) including racialised communities, into academic literature. Their biographies and their voices have been marginal to academic research, their identity often being the object of research (Sharma *et al.* 1996). This is a project in the inscription of the knowledges and experiences of the marginalised to be included (McDowell, 1992; England, 1994). South Asian identity is figured here as dialectically linked to experiences of colonial landscapes, as memorialised in material cultures. British Asianess is figured as dynamically constituted through the co-ordinates of various environmental relationships. Visual and material cultures in the home signify identifications with

landscapes outside of Britain, but are valued relationally to their sighting and situation in Britain. South Asian identity is figured through being and living in the British landscapes of exclusionary and marginalising national culture (Brah, 1996; Gilroy, 1987).

2. Methods

The findings presented in this paper are based on group and individual interviews with British South Asian women recruited in the suburban London Borough of Harrow and the more socially deprived London borough of Brent (both in North-West London). I recruited women from two ready-made groups based at council funded Asian advice centres; both groups were women-only groups coordinated by the centres. My decision to limit the research group to women-only groups is not rooted in an explicit feminist politics, but one based on a political decision to privilege women's voices normally marginalised within and without the British Asian community. The research method and design is therefore grounded in the women's connections with other landscapes and environments as signified through visual cultures at home. I firstly recruited in-depth groups from an initial focus group on 'landscape and belonging' in which the women discussed their experiences of migration to Britain and their experiences of living here. I combined the use of the in-depth group method with a home tour where the women showed me valued visual cultures in their homes. This process effectively positioned the women as active in representing their own identification within a set of social and cultural spaces including their homes. The in-depth groups were successful in giving a social contextualisation to the statements made by the women. These contextualisations were aided in the group discussions and interviews through their reference to visual

and material cultures such as maps, pictures, objects and fabrics chosen by them to support their narrative. These moments gave substantive depth to their recorded and transcribed testimonies. Recording group and individual discussions within this context ensured that the transcripts represented a socially contextualised and situated set of understandings and values of British Asian women.

Feminist geographers have paved the way in conducting research with excluded members of society, by using reflexive and empowering research methods (Burgess, Limb et al. 1988a; Burgess, Limb et al. 1988b; Patai, 1991; Dwyer, 1993; England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Valentine, 1997; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999; Wilkinson, 1999). Mohammed (2001) extends the debate further by considering the role of Asian researcher, working with Asian women. As an Asian woman working with other Asian women, I do not set out to claim any primary authority in the research process, but acknowledge that this positioning has allowed me access, and a visualisation of research questions which were drawn from my own sense of South Asian identification. There were substantial differences within the group, based on language, religion, class and social networks. My ability to communicate in Hindi, Gujarati and English allowed me to gain a rapport; trust through communication was built up. Overall it is difficult to attribute my access and successful facilitation of Asian women's groups to any single factor mentioned, but my gender and language skills were equally valuable in achieving the group meetings as was my skin colour and biography. These countered difficulties that other researchers have faced when facilitating with Asian groups (Burgess, 1996).

There are political dimensions to my focus exclusively on South Asian women. Within society it is recognised that this group faces ‘triple oppression’ on the basis of their racialised identity, gender and marginalised positioning within community politics. This positioning has limited the recognition of their contribution to social heritage, history and community dynamics. Thus, situating geographical knowledge and values within their sites of active participation and living allowed me to record their thoughts, and intimate geographies not normally engaged with. However, there is a danger that situatedness can create *separate* and *essential* understandings of lives that are not linked dialectically to social systems of knowledge, power and lived experience (Harvey, 1992). In recognition of this fact, I was able to ground my discussions in a variety of social contexts thus offering a triangulation of methods. The one-to-one interview and tour of the women’s home was precisely designed to interview women within a socio-cultural space of their primary control and making. The grounding of this research at home offered the women opportunities to talk in a material context rather than in an abstract one. Prior to this ‘tour’ the ground had been prepared for the women to discuss their relationships with other places and environments outside Britain, that were signified in their homes in the material cultures situated there. The tour of the home led by the woman herself, was of the three or four of the most important visual cultures in her home that were important to her sense of belonging and ‘home’. The interview allowed women to extend their testimonies made in groups, to areas where they could reflect on material objects rather than abstract ideas. It was during these tours that it became clear that the women engaged with visual cultures in a similar way to materials that weren’t explicitly visual texts.

3. Heterogeneity and South Asian women's identity

All the women in the groups defined themselves as 'Asian' however, through the process of mapping their biographies it became clear that the groups migratory routes included traversing twenty-two different countries; many had traversed more than two continents including Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia. At the same time as having varied biographies, the women considered themselves as being connected through cultural networks, which produced and revealed a community with a common identity. These are 'global ethnoscares' created through technological networks of satellite TV programming, Bollywood films (Gillespie, 1995) and music (Dudrah and Tyrell, 2001; Sharma, Hutnyk et al. 1996). Within this networked community, there are subsections of groupings marked through religion, language, regional identity (Modood, 1990; Dwyer, 1994; Modood, 1994; Dwyer, 2000). Within British India (prior to Independence in 1947) the group that I have worked with would have defined themselves as Indian, in relation to being British, however post-migration some of these women have considered themselves to be Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Indian. This is as a result of their identifying with other nations that they have lived in post-migration from India; in the case of East African Indians they have experienced double-migration (Bhachu, 1985) and have also identified themselves as Ugandan, Kenyan, and Tanzanian. Many of these definitions are activated as women define themselves in relation to experiencing exclusion from a sense of Britishness. The basis of these varied definitions can be spatially routed, and can be connected to cultural and familial alliances to various identities. These are complex identifications, yet are pertinent to the definition of Britishness and unravelling the genealogy of British heritage (Gregory, 1994; Clarke, 1990).

4. Placing the Visual

The value of researching the domestic visual cultures with this community is to examine the link between migration on the use of visual cultures in examining their role in identity formations; in making home; and creating a territory of belonging in Britain. I have outlined the significance of these cultures in the home post-migration; in this section I consider specific examples to examine their effect and use.

Whilst walking around their homes, women pointed out things that were explicitly visual cultures such as photographs, but also objects that were visually important to them (including fabrics, textiles, curios). During the process of examining their role in the home, it became clear to me that visual cultures were simultaneously effective in their visual and textural properties. The texture of a visual object such as a photograph, print, or fabric dynamically informs the viewers' interpretation of the image. The scent, touch, and the prismatic quality of the materials of culture were the primary texture of engagement with it, or certainly equal in value to that of the text. Essentially the material texture of the visual artefact had a critical significance.

For migrant populations that have traversed several landscapes to take up residency in Britain, the experience of migration from a previous home has meant the forced discarding of objects, photographs, clothes, documents and furniture, in the task of uprooting and re-rooting. For many of the women, the biography of the material cultures were themselves as significant as they had traversed these landscapes with them. On attaining secure accommodation post-migration, the value of those few objects preserved is enhanced in the process of their appropriation and display. Some of these items are purchased on trips back to Kenya, India or Pakistan,

as souvenirs which in turn are reconstructed through a lens of distance and loss. Social anthropologists (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Appadurai, 1986) and cultural geographers (Rose, 2000; 2003) have written on the value of material and visual cultures (including photographs) within the domestic sphere. All have contributed to the understanding of the way that these cultures are products of relations that extend beyond the home (Rose 2003:5). By attending to the textural value of visual cultures, my analysis aims to uncover how they operate as prismatic devices which refract migratory landscapes and biographical experiences into the contemporary scene of 'home'. The prismatic qualities of these visual cultures refract embodied memories and sensory relationships with lived landscapes. The values and meanings assigned to these visual cultures indicate the women's connection with these refracted landscapes of belonging, which are critical in securing an enfranchised space of 'home'. The material nature and biography of these visual cultures are considered here alongside the shift in their meaning in their new sites of display, post-migration. In the 'tour', the women are asked to choose visual materials which are important in securing their sense of belonging and home; these are dynamically figured through their current siting in domestic landscapes of South Asians in Britain.

5. The Photo-object

As a visual culture, photography operates in different ways in the social and cultural contexts of the home. As a media it engages with a different 'way of seeing' to other forms of visual media; gazing onto photographs is very different to viewing a film or a painting. My central concern here is the value of the photograph beyond the textual imprint imbedded in the photographic paper (Pinney, 1995; Ryan, 1997). In the context of South Asian post-colonial migration, the preservation of family

photographs is limited; often these types of materials are left behind or shipped. Often they are peripheral to other essential items needed in the process of resettlement. The effect of having a photograph in these circumstances enhances their social meaning and value. They record real moments and events, resonating with a memory of relationships in particular geographies. The photographs are fragments of real biographies. However, the photographs symbolise broader oral histories and personal relationships with people and place. They become symbolic of these places and the social histories in these places. The images discussed here are chosen by the women as being important texts in their homes. When expressing the values and meanings of photographs these can also be read as artefacts which trigger social histories of the life of South Asians prior to migration to Britain. Knappett (2002) describes photographs as simultaneously iconic and indexical: metaphor and image. Imagination and the text become conflated, imbuing the photograph with narratives beyond the image. Multi-sensory experiences are recalled through the text of a photo – the heat of the sun, the scent of the jasmine flower, the feel of the humid air, and other stories. The photograph also triggers memory from the imagination of other “texts” or textures; through it family narratives and recollections of a past life are evoked. In the home their effect is to re-connect with other landscapes and places of enfranchisement. Fragments of remembered landscapes are lodged in the image through symbols, aesthetics and textures. These photographs operate as metonymical devices which trigger memories of a nation, an intimate garden or a sense of self connected to oral narratives of the past. Over time these photographs themselves attain “relic” status; revered and treasured, this is exemplified in Sheetal’s relationship with a photograph of Tanzanian landscape below.

5.1 A piece of my heart.

Figure 1 – Bismarck Rocks, Tanzania

Sheetal brings with her a photograph that she describes as *Dil no Tuklo*, ‘a piece of my heart’. The photograph is not a representation of this landscape, but a part of her core identity. Sheetal was brought up in Tanzania throughout the 60s and 70s. Her grandfathers’ family had travelled there as a response to the incentives offered to Indians by the British colonial government in India to develop the economic landscape of the East African protectorate. Sheetal, like many Asians in East Africa, moved to Britain in 1972 and now lives in an extensive family home in Harrow. Sheetal’s reverence of this photograph was so intense that I did not, as I had wanted, take the photograph away to get copied. It would have been unethical to risk losing the photograph in transit, it would have had the effect of mutilation. Her relationship with the photo demonstrates some of the real, imaginary and symbolic values that are imbued in the material of the photograph. The text itself is an image of the *Bismarck Rocks* (later named *Mwanza Rocks*) found alongside the lakefront on Lake Victoria. This image is intimately connected to her sense of self, which is dependent on this piece being in place, in her place of home.

“This is from my home town in Mwanza. This has been our focal point. .all my family and almost everybody from Mwanza has this place as their memoir. . . Yeah loads of memories. And everybody had their special thing with Mwanza rocks. . .you know something connects. Yeah central to almost anybody if you ask from Mwanza, they will have something to talk about. Where the rocks were, it was intriguing every time we went there. . The rocks are perched so delicately on each other . . . This was a place of leisure where the whole family would travel there to have a picnic and watch the

sunset. . This has been our focal point.. .all my family and almost everybody from Mwanza has this place as a memoir.” (Sheetal)

The photograph is preserved in a plastic covering. In her home it is displayed in the intimate space of her bedroom. The plastic covering indicates that it is not fixed in situ. There is an incongruity between the reverence Sheetal has for it and the flimsy covering of shiny plastic which obscures the scene. At the sight of the photograph Sheetal recalls the social life of her family having picnics at Lake Victoria. Along with visualising this scene she remembers the heat of the summer, the scents and sounds of food cooking, children playing and the rush of the water. Inscribed within her recollection are sensory textures which add dimension to her minds eye image of this past landscape, but which also operate as an embodied memory; experienced as a sensory recollection. This memory is fixed in a sensory experience in a particular space-time (Edgerton 1995; Sutton 2000). The recall of a physical memory is that of an experience beyond the formal documentation of the past. The textures recalled are beyond the parameters of the photograph; they are operative as independent triggers of the memory of this scene. The refracted memories are given co-ordinates through these biographical landmarks, which assist the interpretation of events, thoughts, and sensations from the past, in the contemporary sphere. These are a material store of sensory experiences not part of a linear geographical route, but a collage of sensory of identifications (Tolia-Kelly, 2001).

The photograph transports Sheetal to being at the rocks, the text takes her to the memory of *Bismark rocks*, to a place where she is able to “connect” and explore her own mental and emotional imaginary. This was a place that allowed her to

contemplate and wonder; there is a sense of freedom imbued in her narrative linked both to her adolescence and to her distance from Tanzania. This was the place where she had her first dates, her first kiss, and also the place where family relationships were strengthened through doing group activities. The activity, through memory, gets polished and embellished with positive events; the memory is airbrushed, smooth and shiny. Symbolic of a rose-tinted adolescence, family life and a place of connection and belonging, East Africa is symbolised through the image of Bismark rock.

“This is like families would go down there. Couples would sit down there. There’s my dad and mum with their friends, and there was numerous hours of fun and talk. Shanti (peace). Five o’clock you would go there and not finish until it went dark. There are three or four good hours. Akho time nikali jai. (All time would pass away).” (Sheetal)

The photograph becomes a means of ‘being’ within this powerful place in Sheetal’s memory. The experience of migration changes this from a vital memory of this experience to a memoir, a place that is active only as a memory of these feelings of connection and an embodied wholeness. The photograph becomes a store of social history rather than a place which is vital and present which can be reconnected with. These, in the context of Sheetal’s description, resonate with her belief that there is no chance of returning to Tanzania to live there again as a permanent citizen. The memories of this social life are also engaged with in the practices of making home here and her social life. This image is displayed in Sheetal’s home-space, here the domestic landscape in Britain is contextualised through Tanzania; real moments of lived experience in Britain are figured through her nostalgia and this symbol of a past landscape.

5.2 Family frames.

Figure. 2 Kajal's Family

Figure 2, shows a photo of Kajal as a young girl with her brother and his new wife. At the sight of the photograph, Kajal was in tears. She hasn't seen her brother or her nieces and nephews in years, as she has not been back to Bangladesh in years. The photograph refracts the memories of the landscape in Kajal's village *Balishastra* (its nearest town is Molobibazaar) as it was pre-migration. Kajal is a British citizen who is intimately connected with the landscape of Bangladesh, her migration to Britain situates her in-between a belonging to a now imagined landscape of Bangladesh and a lived experience of living in Harlesden in Brent. Through distance the photograph become symbolic of a pre-migratory landscape of home, which reminds her of her loneliness and marginality in Britain. Through time this image has become a symbol of Kajal's intimate emotional relationship with this place. The picture itself is very formal; the backdrop is a classic iconographical landscape in a photographer's studio. There is a river or lake in the foreground and palms to the right. There are flowers and clouds annotating the classic scene. This type of luscious scenery as backdrop is not uncommon in Indian studio photography as it conforms to a very particular set of rules (Pinney 1997); the formality of the sitters is in tune with the formality of the backdrop. The colours in the photograph are intensified and the forms are defined heavily by the brightness and solidity of the colours worn. There is a hyper-intensity that is imbued in the image through aesthetics. The photograph has been sent to her by her brother and sits in her living room, next to images of the Islamic site of *haaj* (pilgrimage), Medina. The proximity of the two indicates the value reverence she has

for this photograph. The image of Medina also indicates her alternative cultural identification with the landscapes of Islam.

Kajal describes Balishastra, and her family which are framed within the photograph, with emotion. The picture is a memorialisation of her family, not just those within the frame, but also those excluded. Through it Kajal talks through her family history and their current residences. The term for taking a photo in Gujarati and Hindi is to '*ketch*' - this means to take or to draw. When translated it seems that there is a sense of taking something away from the scene and set in the material of the photograph. The image has drawn from the sitters, but also from the landscape of Bangladesh. Pinney (1995) describes how, within this belief system, the photograph is revered actively as an icon of the life of the person. As individual portraits are made (funerals, weddings, birth) these portraits become the story of that person, and encompass the being of that person. On prayer after death, there are rituals and rites performed on the photograph of the person in the same way as rites and rituals are performed on chromolithographs of religious icons. Pinney argues that amongst Indians

“most have a number of old images which continue to accrue potency as they become accreted with marks of repeated devotion – vermilion tilaks placed on the forehead of deities, the ash from incense sticks, smoke stains from burning camphor.” (Pinney, 1995:111)

For Kajal this image is a direct tracing of a significant and material moment. The physicality of photography is exactly that, it is a tracing of the light reflected on

the solid materials in the frame. The family image is taken from that reflection in the lens. This photo is given a reverence because of the tracings of that moment, but also because it has been elevated from that moment, made potent through the reverence that Kajal gives it. This reverence in the everyday imbues the photo with a value beyond a sentimental record. Pinney describes this process as giving the photo “breath”, the photo evolves its own life through the context of display, but is imbued with a “soul” through the reverential way in which it is treated by Kajal. These photos are singular, they are not numerous and therefore made more precious. For Kajal, this is a piece of her family “taken” from them, and watched over by her. Her relationship with the image is about the recording of a past moment, but more crucially to keep this moment alive through making it potent in the practices of living in the everyday in Britain.

The photograph is a social record of the fads of that time. The clothes, carpeted floor, lush, green fertile surroundings also indicate wealth and prosperity. The backdrop exists to ensure a statement about position and success is encompassed but also to record a moment in a fixed way. The formality is deliberate. The family members do not show emotion: they are there to record their history and social connections. This purpose has been played out in Kajal’s relationship with the photo. Her own sadness is a reminder of her brother’s distancing, but also of her own marriage break-up. Her family has been broken and she has been failed by the promises of the perfect framing of families within this genre. The photograph is symbolic of family networks and moral living, at the same time as being symbolic of Bangladesh and the ecology of Bangladesh. Through gazing at the image she is reminded of her very real blood relations, which are superimposed with imaginary narratives about nation, family and marriage. The image is symbolic and is a record of

an event; it captures a way of life in Bangladesh. In the group discussions, Kajal describes the summers of fear when tigers threatened villagers; she describes the density of the forests and the vulnerability of the village to heavy rainfall, leading to risks in crop harvesting. She also describes the nature of the surrounding forest. The picture holds a relational importance to living in Britain. It links Kajal to Bangladesh and her past citizenship there. This relational identity is constantly affirmed in Britain in the processes of applying for state benefits and public housing, as a single parent, in all of these official documents she is asked to state her country of origin, and her first language, all of which link her to back to her Bangladeshi origins.

5.3 African dioramas

Fig 3. Zebra by *David Shepherd*

Like Sheetal, many of the women in the group had arrived in the U.K. from East Africa. For some of them the visual cultures that they engage with resonate with iconographical landscapes of the African Rift Valley and the animals classically represented within it. In the visual cultures of these women African animals such as the Elephant, Lion, Cheetah and Zebra appear consistently. They are in living room clock faces, coasters, batiks, carvings and other curios. These images are engaged with beyond the image represented. When talking through their value, many of the group describe the scents and smells and sounds of the jungle and the texture of the animals skins. Here is a conversation inspired by the African image

“Where we used to go driving, we used to go through a kind of jungle. Where I am saying was always a weird smell, before we entered the drive-in side.” (Manjula)

“You could hear the animals ... because of the National Parks ... and once a herd of elephants must have come out of the National Park and obviously you could hear ah ... the noises.” (Anju)

“These people from Africa, as the fashion progresses, their stories will get wilder and wilder! “(laughing) ... (Shazia)

This image is owned by Shanta. It is framed and placed centrally in the main family room. For Shanta, incorporated within this one image is a connection to her biographical route to Britain, her first home in Kenya and her subsequent settlement in Malawi. Through gazing at the image Shanta describes the scents sounds and tastes of picnicking near Lake Naivasha in Kenya, seeing Zebra on the journey to Lake Malawi; for her the landscape of two nations conflate into a singular iconography of hypereal animals, jungle, flamingos, and the dry dusty savannah. Her family has several of these photographs by *David Shepherd*. David Shepherd is a wildlife artist (painting and portraiture) whose work started in Kenya. He is well known for his photographs of the African savannah. Shepherd’s images represent an iconography of ‘African’ landscapes and nature and he has contributed to a singular vision of African landscape being about wild animals and native people, resonant of a colonial lens. David Shepherd has been an active environmentalist and holds an O.B.E. for his services to wildlife conservation in Africa. He is also an honorary Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. These images are hung up in the Shanta’s living room, bedrooms and dinning room. They are placed there as fragments of East Africa reflecting into the home personal histories of East African living. The images

presence an African aesthetic and incorporate the narratives of East African life into the day-to-day living space through their aesthetics and imagery. There is a collaging of ‘English’ and ‘African’ aesthetics, lace, modern fittings, pastel walls, over laid with zebra, giraffe, and elephants from the savannah. These materials together reflect the varied connections that Shanta and her family have with the landscape of East Africa as encountered in the London suburb of Harrow. The seeming incongruity reflects the multiplicity of cultural connections that reflect Shantas’ migratory experiences, these resonate in her home reflecting her culture of being a post-colonial migrant settled within the leafy avenues of a suburban Pinner.

My positioning of these visual cultures as *image-objects* has been informed by an interest in the workings of visual texts beyond the frame. Writers within the field of visual culture, including Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998; 2000), argue for the acknowledgement of the material nature of visual texts. Photographic cultures resonate with aesthetics and textures of location. Temporal and spatial contexts of display influence the location of the text. The multisensory nature of visual cultures is crucial in their role in negotiating connections with landscapes within the frame in the site of living in Britain. Understanding of these cultures in a post colonial context draws on theorizations of hybridity (Bhabha, 1990), in-betweenness, and double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1994). Each of these theorisations considers the post-colonial experience as a cultural identity which is a non-located identity in flux. Shibani describes her identity positioning as ‘being neither here nor there’; neither Indian, Kenyan, or English. Expressive cultures therefore are a means of interrogating this positioning of doubleness, or in-betweenness. Parkin (1999), describes this multiple sense of citizenry as *multiple* provenances where “‘home’ and ‘origin’ refer to many

places and not one fixed locus, perhaps similar to undeniably contestable and yet fluid boundaries of ethnicity and even nationality ” (p309) Gilroy’s (1993a) term ‘antiphony’ demonstrates how a social memory of sound resonates with a slave memory of the African diaspora, an aural texture that triggers the historical past and a means of re-connecting to an oral history of oppression and subjugation. Here I would argue that visual cultures in the South Asian home reflect landscapes and they refract a multisensory connection to the landscapes of East Africa and Asia which create a textural landscape of belonging, home and are significant in their citizenship here.

6. Textual, Textural and Material

In the examples so far, I have tried to show how the material elements of photographs and images are as much part of their meaning as the texts within the frame. Often these are treasured because of the biographical journey that the image has made, or the memories of landscapes which they refract. Sometimes the photographs are locked in cupboards, sometimes secured within trunks within these cupboards - a sign of their irreplaceability. The images that they held did not always fit a classic iconography of ‘other’ places. My next image exemplifies how the images included other genres and styles. This image shows how the women’s engagements with texts are triggered through a variety of textures and aesthetics.

Figure 4 – Boy Fishing

Here is an image entitled *Boy Fishing*. This was pointed out by Shilpa in a tour of her home. It is hung up in the entrance hall to her flat. It has pride of place where every visitor can see it. It’s a surprising sugar sweet greeting-card image of a

rural idyll, a childhood idyll in fact, certainly aesthetically situated in a European or English landscape. At the sight of this image Shilpa is reminded of her uncle's home in Uganda, along the river. She describes the freshness of the scents, the rippling of the river and the pleasure of being free to roam in this landscape. She recalls the games they used to play and how safe she felt in the area. For Shilpa this image is made meaningful in her flat in Harlesden. It is positioned in Britain as a testament to the landscape of dreamy childhood days in Uganda- of a luxurious home, a luscious countryside and the pleasure of free roaming. The aesthetics of the image are *chocolate-box* pastel, a saccharin ode to a fantasy of a sentimental picturesque scene, incongruously located in Uganda in Shilpa's narration. This image highlights the meanings that material cultures have beyond their text as well as the nature of the circulation of landscape meanings in colonial history. The image of an English pastoral in this story is cross-cultural; it is translated as an aspiration toward a picturesque scene, which embodies pleasure, peace and a sense of innocent childhood pastimes. However the image is a familiar one and in the tradition of landscape representation, is not ideologically neutral (Birmingham, 1994). It embodies a vision of English landscape that is seemingly benign and nostalgic; the image re-iterates a culture of being based on a fantasy of nature and childhood. What it occludes is the social politics of the icon of a white playful child in England, a representation that is an impossibility for Shilpa's own child now living in England. *Boy Fishing* also evidences the power of the English pastoral in the South Asian imaginary, a legacy of living within a British colonial state and culture prior to migration.

The scene like many others displayed in homes across Britain, is valued partially because it embodies a contrary scene to that of urban living, especially to the

inner London Borough of Brent where Shilpa is situated. It also becomes a respite from the struggles of resettling and bringing up a daughter single-handed after migration. Shilpa compares her life at her uncle's in comparison with her difficulties of finding employment in the U.K. She has a BSc in Chemistry from Mumbai University, but for the last two decades has been unemployed. In this context the image holds more than a scene of Ugandan pastoral, it also harbours a landscape of hope beyond the struggle of isolation and alienation experienced in her day-to-day life. Shilpa's visits to the women's centre are her sole source of access to a social network. Her engagement with *Boy Fishing* also shows how refractions of 'other' landscapes are not always triggered through an exotic African palette. As viewers we imbue images with socially and culturally specific visual vocabulary; we make meaning through our codes of reading, signifying and interpretation. The contexts of display are also critical in activating these textual meanings. The *Boy Fishing* denotes an English pastoral that is folded into a series of narratives about the nature of England and a visual iconography of Englishness. The image initially seems incongruous and unexpected. After talking through its value and resonance with Shilpa, it is clear that the text of the image is meaningful beyond the registers and visual vocabulary of the genre. The material of the image can be read through Shilpa's biography. The water in the image becomes equatorial: the grasses become savannah. The scents and sounds shift from a European textural space to a Ugandan one. In the context of Harlesden the matter of the image operates as a gateway into a past landscape of Uganda, but also into a social record of past landscape textures relevant in their absence or non-attainability. Lived landscapes, utopian landscapes and England are juxtaposed on the surface of her flat wall. The entrance hall in the Harlesden flat is sometimes synchronised with the landscape in Uganda, but made

meaningful in relation to being and living in Britain. Shilpa's narrative and embodied memories are imbued in the matter of the poster; the poster becomes a third space where Uganda, and England merge through a process of refraction, and reflection.

Sheetal's *Bismarck Rocks* displayed in her home in Harrow also starkly contrasts with the suburbanscape of public parks and semi-detached housing estates. The intensity of attachment is triggered through the tension between being here in Britain and the intensity of attachment to a life in Tanzania, which cannot be reclaimed, as living in Mwanza is not a possibility. The text's ability to transmit those textures into her home now, offers a form of suture. A piece of her very being is on display, ensuring that Northwood is given meaning through the presence of Lake Victoria; not just the image but the scents, tastes, touch of African living. These refractive textures from visual cultures on display combine to consolidate connections to other landscapes. Their new contexts of display give these cultures a new 'cultural vitality' (Gell 1986: 86). They inject scents, sounds and textures of other landscapes into the British home. Woven together these aesthetics represent a territory of culture, a territory collated together which supports a sense of belonging and being which makes sense of migratory journeying and telescopes these textures to create a place of settlement and roots. To some degree these cultures contribute to the memorialisation of 'other' people and places; they become artefacts of a biographical journey as well as a social history of the group. These visual markers are tokens, souvenir of another country, another landscape, which at the time of their lived experience was shaped by British colonial rule.

7. Conclusions

In this research visual representations of landscape have been shown to be valuable materials in the South Asian home, beyond the framed text. These are experienced in the everyday lived environments as essential nodes of connecting South Asian women to lived landscapes of the past, pre-migration. These visual representations of landscape are considered in the everyday spaces of living rooms, bedrooms and hallways. This is a shift away from considering landscape representations in the more formal sites of display. I have demonstrated that the texts of these non-elite representations, in the form of family photographs, prints and landscape photographs are meaningful beyond their textual representation. These visual cultures operate beyond the mode of the visual, incorporating embodied memories of past landscapes and relationships with pre-migratory lives in colonial territories. The matter of their form shifts their value and meaning in their context of display, because of the social and cultural life that they refract. The refractive nature of visual cultures allows for embodied engagements with these materials

For the South Asian women represented here, an enfranchising culture of citizenship is produced through collecting and displaying visual and material cultures. They form part of a sense of heritage that is created through the procurement of domestic objects, which are central to the sustenance of the self (Samuel 1994). These collections of photographs and images constitute the new non-localised constructions of ethnic identity (Appadurai 1996). These cultures situated in the home-space offer a sense of inclusion, which has aesthetic, sensual, and psycho-sociological dimensions. The landscapes refracted through these objects and texts of home embody the complex positioning of these women as being post-colonial migrants continually

traversing 'British' landscapes within and without Britain. They offer insights into what places are desired, safe and owned by this group which are points of enfranchisement, and through these cultures, ecological memories are woven into the women's residence in England. Through the incorporation of the materials of visual cultures in the South Asian home, the lived landscapes of the past assist the new configurations of identity in Britain. Here I have argued for the need to read beyond the visual representation of the text. A reading of visual cultures involves a consideration of the way that these texts are lived-with, and act as prismatic devices, refracting 'other' landscapes into the British scene. They are active in their ability to locate contemporary British Asian identity in context of post-colonial geographies of migration. Their textural meanings and values add to their being operative in the politics of making home and creating a new landscape of belonging, post-migration.

This research has been an early step in evaluating and examining the materiality of visual cultures as they are positioned in the South Asian home. There is however a need to take this further, to develop new conventions of textural interpretation are is necessary in any materialist approach to visual cultures. The biography, matter, and prismatic qualities of visual cultures open up occluded geographies of identification, citizenship and cultures of living. I have positioned these as post-colonial geographies, as these visual cultures refract landscape values constituted within colonial regimes of rule in Asia and East Africa, and are valued by migrants to the city which was at the heart of colonial rule – London. The identity positioning of post-colonial migrants such as South Asians is figured here within domestic, everyday, vernacular structures of living. The form and textures that their valued visual cultures refract offer additional dimensions to their mapping within

social and cultural geography. All of these cultures are valuable in locating post-colonial geographies as they are figured through identification with environments and social lives not encountered within the formal or popular representations of South Asian life and culture in the public sphere.

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Captions for Figures

Figure 1 *Bismarck Rocks, Tanzania*

Figure 2 *Kajal's Family*

Figure 3 *Zebra by David Shepherd*

Figure 4 *Boy Fishing*