Sexuality in Shailja Patel's *Migritude.*

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Shailja Patel is a third-generation East African Asian who was born in Kenya, raised in Asia, educated in the UK, and then moved to the United States. Her work as an African diasporic woman writer could be read as one that engages with the violent and traumatic heritage of colonialism. She is an activist widely known through her work *Migritude,* a text based on her one-woman,performance-theater show, which was initially performed in Oakland, California in 2006 and was then turned into a written text in 2010. It is a work that follows Patel as she unpacks her trousseau of saris given to her by her mother and begins narrating her diasporic movements. These movements, as a South Asian African woman in Kenya, Britain, and the United States, allow her to engage with and at the same time challenge global processes of neocoloniality and the repression of migrants (especially of migrant women), giving space to those with invisible identities and non-linear, fragmented stories. *Migritude* is innovative because it combines prose and poetry, with elements of yoga and South Asian and modern dance. Alongside other migritude writers, Patel traces the journey of those who move from the Global South to the North. What is innovative in the approach of migritude writers is that they commence a phenomenology of borders that sheds light to what it means to move across borders both materially and through memory.The concept proves flexible, as in Patel's case it invokes the troubled racial and ethnic politics of migration in postcolonial contexts outside the North and subsequently complicates the invocation of négritude within migritude. It is crucial to move away from the neoliberal understandings of immigration that might reproduce anti-immigrant racism and lead to the perpetuation of structures of inequality.

Although more work is now being done on Shailja Patel, there are no book-length studies of migritude fiction except Christopher Ian Foster's *Conscripts of Migration* (2019). The genre remains relatively understudied as it is an emerging area of discourse that first appeared in Francophone African literary contexts, then in Anglophone and Italophone literature. Its suffix is derived from négritude, the concept of African diaspora that was first used in the Jamaican-American Claude McKay's novel *Banjo* (1929). This liberating focus on African roots was subsequently developed by authors such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Leon Damas and Aimé Césaire, who deconstructed the racism underwriting European imperialism which demoted black culture to nonbeing. In the same line of argument as "négritude" and Khal Torabully's "coolitude" (1992), migritude is similarly an affirmation of one's blackness and a "rooting oneself in oneself, and self-confirmation: confirmation of one's being" (Patel 27). Migritude literature refashions the cultural politics of anti-colonialism, blackness and antiracism of the négritude era to expose how migrant bodies are managed in the era of globalization. It describes the work of a disparate group of younger African authors born after independence in the 1960s, such as Fatou Diome, Alain Mabanckou, and AbdourahmanWaberi. These authors have lived in and outside Africa and have personally experienced the condition of migration during the era of globalization. They go beyond narrativizing the lives of the migrants as individuals to examine the conditions and structures of being a migrant.

The term migritude was conceived by the Francophone African literary scholar Jacques Chevrier, using the suffix from the term négritude, who claims that these authors create "a new identitarian space designat[ing] both the thematic of immigration that is at the heart of contemporary African works, but also the expatriate status of most writers" (Thomas 5). He defines migritude as "a third space, [a] simultaneous disengagement from both the culture of origin and the receiving culture" (Thomas 5). However, Chevrier's use of the notion "third space" is troubling because it privileges identity at the expense of the material realities of immigration. What makes the contribution of these authors significant is that they emphasize that "the past of immigration and conceptions of the immigrant are irreducibly entangled with the history of colonialism" (Foster 9).

Patel's work expands the definition of migritude to include South Asian migrations from the imperial period to contemporary neoliberal globalization and

beyond, from a working-class woman's perspective. As Perera has stated, "Too often, in literature and criticism alike, the working class is seen and represented as masculine, metropolitan, and revolutionary. Women's texts of nonrevolutionary socialism, however, present us with new figures and concepts for thinking unorganized resistance, everyday experience, and the shape of the ethical within globalization" (80). Patel uses the term migritude as an opportunity to women migrants to "speak unapologetically, fiercely, lyrically, for themselves" (143). In an interview, Patel confirms that she chose to employ the term because she "was looking for a word that captured migrant attitudes or the idea of migrants with attitude, a generation of migrants who don't feel the need to be silent to protect themselves" (Foster, "Introduction" 56). She describes migritude as "a play on Negritude and Migrant Attitude. It asserts the dignity of outsider status [while celebrating and revalorizing]immigrant/diaspora culture"; employing the "politics of intersectionality and global justice" (quoted in Monegato 2008: 237; see also Taylor 2014). Patel refashions négritude-era identity politics by challenging the structures of systemic violence that immigrants are subjected to under neoliberal globalization.

Migritude builds on black antiracism and anti-colonial activism which conduce to the theorization of the policing of immigration. Patel calls for migrants with attitude, migrants who project their diasporic voices against the systemic national and international policing of movement of non-white population. She employs the term migritude as a "critique of imperial and neo-imperial modes of "measure," of a "citizen" over and against an "other" (Foster 7). White superiority under colonialism refracts into the twenty-first century as European and American anti-immigrant rhetoric and law, the former, producing anti-black practice and discourse justifying conquest, and the latter, symptomatic of differentiated citizenship or non-citizenship in the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Embodiment has a crucial role in terms of gendering and imperial mapping. Patel employs performativity because she believes that "theatre is relationship […] a body in front of other bodies. Unfiltered, unedited, unmanipulated. In real time" (Patel 85).

This article will analyze immigration in contemporary African literature through the trope of memory, looking at the condition and the structures that shape the African migrant's being and underwrite her materialization under racial capitalism. This affords a critique of recent machinations of global capital and global inequality but also prompts us to rethink colonialism in the way it regulates movement. It situates *Migritude* in relation to four spatial dimensions; the Global South and specifically her home-country Kenya, the Global North, more specifically the immigrants of the Global South to Northern nation-states such as the United States, the transnational in-between spaces such as airports where immigrants go through passport control and colonialism as a historical space that continues to leave its imprint on the twenty-first century immigrants. In *Migritude*, Patel traces South Asian diasporas in East Africa and her own movement from Africa to England and then from England to the United States.

In his introduction to the book, Vijay Prashad confirms that it is "not simply about migrants. It's about the condition of migration—of migritude. It is not a cultural anthropology of migrant lives, but rather a philosophical meditation on what it means to live with the concept of Migrant" (iv). Vanita Reddy has describes Patel's performance as the

> story of three cross-continental South Asian migrations: the early twentieth-century colonial migration of Indians to East Africa, the mass expulsion and political and economic disenfranchisement of East African Indians and their subsequent migrations to the global North in the 1970s, and Patel's own journey from Kenya to Britain to the United States in the 1990s (179–80).

Migritude is timely, as Patel carefully delineating colonial pasts to enhance our understanding of immigration in our postcolonial moment, showing how immigration is connected to othering.At the heart of *Migritude* lies a suitcase full of saris that Patel has inherited from her mother. By unpacking the trousseau of her saris in front of her audience, Patel exposes how the histories of South Asian migrants in Africa are disciplined by imperial structures, as well as how the South Asian postcolonial present is shaped by the management of the diasporic population in the imperial era. By revealing the saris only at the very end of the play, Patel establishes a new economy of worth, one in which affective labor and care underwrite its logic.

Colonial commodities and imperial violence

In the prelude entitled "How Ambi became Paisley," Patel depicts how imperial processes conscripted India's historical and migratory movements and broods over how British capitalism exported the production of textiles of Ambi to Scotland, particularly the town of Paisley. She thinks about "Imperialism. Armed with a switchblade, designed to slice out the heart of craft. To separate makers from the fruits of their labors" (Patel 5). The weavers of Paisley have been subjected to unprecedented violence, saying that they "learned how to churn out imitation Ambi, on imitation Kashmiri shawls, and [unlike South Asian workers under British rule], they got to keep their index fingers and thumbs" (Patel 5–7). In this passage, Patel refers to the brutal practice of chopping off the fingers of the weavers of Paisley if they did not learn the practice of weaving correctly. Patel exposes the colonial commodification of paisley to unsettle the colonial imprint of the British Empire. As Chomsky notes "Bengal was known for its fine cotton, now extinct, and for the excellence of its textiles, now imported" (16). Karl Marx wrote in the New York Tribune in 1853 that "it was the British intruder who broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning-wheel. England began with driving the Indian cottons from the European market; it then introduced twist into Hindostan, and in the end inundated the very mother country of cotton with cotton" (215).The British Empire's policies destabilized the Global South for the benefit of the northern industry.

Through the phenomenology of the movement of colonial objects like the Paisley workers, the global processes of commodification and circulation woven into the fabric of contemporary capitalism are revealed. This section is completed with the revelation that "Kashmiri became cashmere. Mosuleen became muslin. Ambi became paisley / And a hundred and fifty years later, chai became a beverage invented in California" highlighting the effect of colonization (Patel 7). Drawing upon her own background, Patel notes that "Idi Amin, military dictator of Uganda, expelled the country's entire Asian population. I was born and raised in Kenya, Third-generation East African Asian" (Patel 10). She continues sharing her personal past by noting that "Secret documents, declassified in 2001, show that Britain, Israel, and the United States instigated and backed Idi Amin's military coup, which overthrew Uganda's democratically elected government. What followed were eight years of terror that devastated Uganda, left hundreds of thousands dead. British Foreign Office documents describe Idi Amin as a man we can trust" (Patel 10–11).

Patel explicitly states that children are not taught about this part of history at school because this discourse is silenced and does not appear in the media or in national discussions. This concern has also been expressed by Ngũgĩ WaThiong'o in his novel Grain of Wheat the same concern as Patel about the silencing of the past by the colonial machination. Patel states "this is the history we didn't learn. From 1952 to 1960, the people of Kenya mounted a fierce guerrilla struggle, the Mau Mau uprising, to reclaim their land and freedom from the British. The British incarcerated, tortured, and murdered approximately 25,000 Kenyans. Men, women, and children. More than a million Kenyans were detained for over eight years in concentration camps—barbed wire villages where forced labor, starvation, and death were routine" (Patel 17). The connection between voicing violence and the creation of systems of solidarity lies at the forefront of Patel's poetry. The violence witnessed subsequently turned into poetry creates an awareness of death and the need for women to fight against oppression.

Diasporic connectivities through memory

The sari, apiece of cloth, binds continents and families" (Prashad iii–iv). It is a garment through which the violence of colonialism in East Africa and Asia is exposed and also the complexities of the mobility of immigrant bodies during the twenty-first century. The sari constitutes a link between Patel and her female ancestors. These females are dialogically and materially connecting, sharing history. The saris are materially graspabletraces of Patel's family, objects for acts of remembrance. They constitute objects of memory and history. They are the material evidence of both the geographical and imaginary travels of immigrant bodies. They emerge as an archive or repertoire for the memories of migrant bodies yet it also exposes the trauma occurred by systemic violence.

By unfolding the saris Patel "reveals an inheritance of emotions, of histories bound up in journeys from India to Kenya to the United States, and contributes to an already existing discourse on the semiotics of dress that question and deconstruct the conflation of women's clothing with patriarchical demands. Patel subverts the dialectic of violence by reconstructing the sari as an emotional marker for resistance. By unfolding her saris in front of an audience, Patel forms a reciprocal relationship with her readership. She creates a communal sense of making and unmaking. The sari

could be viewed as not only textual and material medium but also as a visual medium and an affective medium of transmitting and challenging memory.

What becomes clear is that clothingcan be viewed as “a self-making practice that is steeped in notions of placeand belonging both in the geographical sense of the word as well as in the interpersonal” (Leetsch 696).Through the saris, memories are kept alive. The material of the sari is ready to be “re-animated with life, story, and sensuous materiality” (Sylvanus 2). Storing the saris for all those years becomes a way of engaging with them. Patel decides to unpack her trunk of colorful, bejeweled saris across the stage only at the end of her performance because during this particular stage the audience has earned the right to view them. At that particular moment, Patel reflects the dreams that her mother had for her and how they have impacted her on a personal and professional level. Patel’s care economy prioritizes those mostly affected by state power women migrants of color, bodies considered disposable by neo-liberal politics.

Affective witnessing of the wounds; unfolding the sari

Patel’s work resembles that of other transnational and queer feminist theorists on care and precarity, including Pratt and Rosner’s “communities of care” (2006) and Judith Butler’s theorization of “precarious life” (2006). Pratt, Rosner and Butler have argued that subjects in neoliberal economy are valued according to their productivity however; they make the point of the necessity of their experience to be theorized in terms of precarity and vulnerability. In the same line of arguing, Patel argues that female migrants’ lives are not rendered grievable in the context of neoliberalism, even though their everyday experiences are underwritten by violence. Patel challenges the neoliberal discourse of non-grievability by placing attention to the necessity of existence of economies of care for the assessment of these female subjects. She offers an alternative to existing neoliberal constructions of human worth, proposing a migrant economy underwritten by the discourse of care, not based on suppositions of privilege but a discourse in which meaning must be earned before it can be claimed. She states

> we were born to a law that states before we claim a word, we steep it in
> terror and shit, in hope and joy and grief, in labour, endurance, vision
> costed out in decades of our lives. We have to sweat and curse it, pray

> and keen it, crawl and bleed it. With the very marrow of our bones we have to earn its meaning (Patel 62–63).

The audience is required to psychically invest in the sari in the same way that neoliberalist logic demands the economic investment of the subject to its structures.

The sari's multiple meanings are interconnected with the discourse of neoliberal production of gendered systems of human value in global capitalism and expose the cost of oppression of women. At the same time, they expose the counter-logics and the necessity of feminist activism. At the end of the play, Patel confronts her mother:

> "Mother. I will never live the cocoon of safety you dreamed of for your daughters. Do you see? I will always be called to stride across danger zones, to shout forbidden words to other fugitives. […] The wealth this woman took when she left the home of her parents. The deep, hard, complex beauty that unfurls when saris speak" (61–62).

She explains how imperialism situates gendered populations of color as disposable parts. Those especially affected are the migrants with attitude. Therefore, as Theresa Kulbaga argues, the presentation of the saris conduces to community building, enacted via performance.

> "As the sari weaves through the various stories of human rights abuses voiced in *Migritude*–forced displacement, rape warfare, labor camps, the killings of civilians in US wars on "terror"–it collects increasingly complex associations and affects, shaking off Orientalist stereotypes and taking the shape of women's bodies that can run, battle, and labor" (80).

The sari produces spaces of encounter while linking and differentiating the past and the present. By spreading the saris across the stage and showing them to the audience, Patel creates a textile connection between those who have been weaving the textile in nineteenth century India, those who have been expelled from their homes in Uganda under Amin, those who survived colonial violence and the audience of the present.

Venita Reddy notes that *Migritude*'s approach to "racial subordination through a *longue durée* reminds us that we ought to remain wary of seeing this moment as historically discontinuous with earlier histories of state-sponsored racism and immigrant baiting" (68).The audience is engaged physically and emotionally through viewing the embroidered cloth of the sari being spread on stage. It "evoke[s]

emotions, speak[s] for itself and for others" (Sylvanus 15). The interactive nature of the exposition of saris on stage, highlights that this process is not self-contained or one-directional. What is remarkable about Patel's work is that she has initiated the formation of an intimate community, enforcing a sense of connectivity and interactions in the quest for representation of the subaltern who has been excluded from the dominant discourse.

Conclusion

The text and stage performance of *Migritude* are different narrativizations of the same story which conduce to a migritudinal global poetics, following Patel's own diasporic movements.It is important to examine ideological histories of immigrationalong with individual stories. The movements of individuals are intricately linked to history because discursive categories police migration, so it is important to consider the timely contributions of migritude's cultural production and activism that challenge immigration and its relationship to new forms of global apartheid. By calling migrants to speak out against the policing of their movements, Patel's work as a writer, activist and performer, can thus be situated within the ongoing literary conversation that revolves around the possibilities and limitations of human rights, in order to foster equality for non-Western women of color.