
Re-locating memories: transnational and local narratives of Indian South Africans in Cape Town

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Abstract

This article plays on the word re-location to examine the memories of Indians in South Africa through oral histories about relocation as a result of the Group Areas Act, to memories of parents and grandparents relocating to South Africa from India as told to interviewees and to their own memories of journeys to India and back. The narratives of mobilities traverse time and national boundaries and are counter-posed by narratives of local mobilities as well as stasis. The article identifies ways of narrating, themes of narration and the meaning of memories while noting the re-location of memory construction against the backdrop of South Africa's democratic transition and the 150th commemoration of the arrival of indentured Indians to South Africa. It argues that the local and the national are important in narrations of transnational journeys, thus advancing a particular approach to transnational memory studies.

Introduction

In 2010 the Kalusta Karjiker Education Society (KKES) in Cape Town held a glittering banquet to mark its 80th anniversary and the hall foyer was dominated by an image of Kalusta village in India located within Ratnagiri District. There were many side panels with photographs of families, past and present, from Kalusta. A magazine commemorating the transnational links between Muslims in Cape Town and Kalusta was given to each attendee.¹ Its pages evoke the beauty of Kalusta through which the Washishti River flows and, mindful of the South African context, likens Kalusta to the scenic Knysna region in the Western Cape, which is blessed with forests, lakes and lagoons. The compilers devoted space to the memories of early migrants but also highlighted sites of significance in Kalusta, such as the Panona Primary School built by the flow of money from Cape Town migrants in the 1930s and the Haji Dawood Amien High School built in 1959 by Dawood Amien, one of the early Kaluskar migrants in Cape Town. Visual images celebrate the early migrants but also the generations born in Cape Town who gather annually for a Kalusta family fun day. The ships, *SS Kampala* and *SS Karanja*, secured some space, for they have come to acquire significance in the memories of Cape Town Indians as these ships linked their passengers to India and South Africa in their journeys across the Indian Ocean.

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