

## **Sites of Resistance, Sites of Care: A Conversation with Sancintya Mohini Simpson**

**Also featuring Shiraz Bayjoo & Anna Arabindan-Kesson**

**Global Plantation Series**

**September 2020**

The Global Plantation Series presents artist-directed digital discussions featuring **Shiraz Bayjoo, Jasmine Togo-Brisby** and **Sancintya Mohini Simpson** developed by **Anna Arabindan-Kesson** and Shiraz in collaboration with **International Curators Forum** that contemplate the global forms and meanings of the plantation historically, and in our contemporary moment.

In this conversation, Anna and Shiraz speak with Brisbane-based artist and researcher Sancintya Mohini Simpson, a descendent of indentured labourers sent from India to South Africa to work on colonial sugar plantations, whose practice addresses gaps and silences in the colonial archive and is engaged in wider narratives surrounding the indenture diaspora community. This conversation takes up the plantation as a site of resistance and connection, and the history of migration as a continual one. Sancintya speaks about the poetics of memory and the impossibility of the archive, the latter of which is created both intentionally through strategies of care and respect and as a consequence of lost languages and histories. Refusing Western expectations around the archive, Sancintya and Shiraz draw attention to the complexity of memorialising the stories and images of indentured labourers and presenting histories of trauma to an audience.

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**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** Hello everybody and welcome to the third in our Global Plantation Series, co-presented with the International Curators Forum. I'm Anna Arabindan-Kesson, this is Shiraz Bayjoo and we're speaking with Brisbane-based artist Sancintya Mohini Simpson today. I should just note, before we go into our discussion and before I highlight Sancintya's bio and artworks, there'll be a conversation between Shiraz, Sancintya and Jasmine Togo-Brisby on September 26th, and you'll find all of the details about that on the International Curators Forum website.

So, I'm really excited to have this conversation. All three of us have heard of each other over the last couple of years, and this is the first time that we're virtually in one space together. So, let me begin just by reading out your bio Sancintya, and then we can go into more discussion about some of your artworks and your practice. Sancintya Mohini Simpson is an artist and researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. She's a descendant of indentured laborers sent to work from India to South Africa on

colonial sugar plantations and her work navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the colonial archive.

So, this is something that comes up in your work Shiraz and it comes up in Jasmine's work - Is that all three of you are multimedia artists so I hope that we'll be able to speak a little bit more about that in our conversation today. Sancintya's work moves between painting, video, poetry, and performance to develop narratives and rituals. Her practice is grounded in collaboration and community engagement, engaging in wider narratives surrounding the indenture diaspora community. You have a long list of exhibitions, but I think the most recent exhibition that you've had has been at the Museum of Brisbane and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. And last year you undertook a residency at 1Shantiroad in Bangalore, India, through the Asia Link Arts Creative Exchange.

So, I thought to begin Sancintya, you could tell us it's a little bit about where you are geographically and how location connects with your practice.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I am currently in me Meanjin, Brisbane, Australia, and it's sub-tropical here - so, we get mangoes, we get banana trees, we get eucalyptus, and we get sugarcane. And you'll see this similar landscape if you go to Fiji, Durbin, Bangalore (*inaudible*). And I think this connection in terms of the landscape and the land, is ultimately what also connects myself to these other histories such as Shiraz with the histories of Mauritius and Jasmine with the histories of South Sea Islanders in Queensland - this fact that people were taken to work where the land was fertile and they could grow certain crops, but they needed cheap labor.

So, there's this interesting thing where the climate creates a moisture in the air. I can feel it I'm wearing a jumper regrettably, but there is this thickness and there's this humidity. We have particular soil and we have a particular temperature, in which things can grow, such as sugar. So, that's what my particular interest is in sugar. I know yours is cotton, Anna, which also Queensland has a history of.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** Yes, it does. And actually, one of the things I found in my research when I started, I wanted it to be everything. And it's now got cut into a very, very short book. But a lot of planters from the South in the US during and after the civil war went to Queensland. And actually, they talked about Brisbane as a sort of New Orleans of the Southern hemisphere. So that's another geographical history that maybe...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** And I think there's connections between Louisiana and Queensland. And I also want to acknowledge the traditional owners of where I am (*inaudible*) and that I'm an uninvited guest here. So, I guess that's another part of my

relationship to the land here and the landscape, I'm an uninvited guest, and where my family were born and my mother and my grandparents, they were also uninvited guests in Durban in South Africa, Zulu peoples, and they were brought there to work as well. So, I think that this is something we also all understand, in terms of movement of peoples and existing in spaces and existing between places or continually moving between those places and the story of migration being a continuum.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** Was it your art practice that led you to work through these questions? Or was it these questions that informed your artwork? Perhaps there's not really a way to separate it out, but I'm just interested in how art practice evolves in relationship to the...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I think something in my conversations with a lot of artists that comes up is that there's this blurring between artmaking or the production, the result, versus just like lived experience. And I think a lot of the artists that I talk to and myself, this work we are doing is just the work we are doing. And the end product, the art, is just something that happens, but it's not the final result. It's not the purpose of the making and the doing. So, for me, the story about how I became, I guess, obsessed - not obsessed - but it just became an all-consuming thing in terms of my practice and thinking about these legacies of indenture and the sugar industry, was because I was thinking about my place existing and my family's place here in Australia. And I guess these experiences of micro aggressions and racism, and being a mixed-race person, this idea of belonging. And at that time as well, I was thinking a lot about how things are inherited, not just objects but you can have mental illness, you can have trauma, you can have expectations. And I think, I was feeling a lot of these things and I was trying to make sense of all of these parallel experiences of myself, my mother and the woman before. Hearing what had happened to them and trying to make sense of it.

And so at the similar time that I was doing this, my mum was trying to apply for an overseas citizen of India identification document, for which you have to prove your Indian-ness, which as someone who gets questioned all the time for her Indian-ness was quite a strange sort of thing to have to do; especially in terms of information not being really accessible or really easy to find in South Africa. So, we ended up getting a copy of my uncle's birth certificate, which has on it 'free or indentured.' He was born in the later 50s, mum was born in 1954, but it says 'free or indentured' on it and had identification numbers, which corresponded to my grandmother and my Tata, my grandfather, and those numbers were basically numbers people were given when they were sent on ships. So, when they were taken as indentured peoples. And it's a history that we knew, but the fact that we had these ship lists and we could find badly written (*inaudible*) by the British - they really didn't care what they were

writing - but we could find and try to decipher villages, castes, they had castes written down, and names and regions where our family came from.

So, thinking about that, mum and I went throughout India on this like government bus, in the South, we went through, dropping off in China, I guess to understand and see these places and think about our connections to them, and produce the work from that. And I think for me that's where it really became a much deeper understanding of... I couldn't find a lot of information and I felt I needed to, because it was so hard to find in the beginning. And I felt like it was just that distance and that sense of loss in terms of access to that, or 'what could I find?' And that sense of urgency wanting to know more or wanting to be able to have it so that I could share it with my family and so that it wouldn't be lost. It's so hard to find anything and to be able to have access to that information. And that's what really started it for me, thinking about the women in my family and why we were a certain way and going back to this point in time and this trauma that happened, the experiences of women who were indentured and what they went through, really awful, awful things there.

And then this thing about these gaps and how do you fill them, but also how do you critically look at what information you have coming from this colonial white lens or pen. So, these images that I was looking at and the writing or anything that was documented, it's trying to look between for those voices of these women or actual representation. So, for me, I guess that's where that came from, which was a journey I didn't really realise it was happening and started much earlier than I actually remembered it did too. And it's just something that's ongoing, as well.

So, there's the family research and then there's the... and the research takes weird turns now. I go onto eBay and I put in search terms and I try to find images and things and I can show you one of them - this is one of the first images I found, because a lot of times the people who have these images are from the UK or Europe, and I don't know why they have them. You probably can't see with the light, but this was a magic glass slide. I can't see myself because I hid myself, but it's women and children sitting in front of a house. And so, my curiosity about why and who had these and who should take care of them? And are they being cared for and who has access to them? And more questions coming up.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** I'm going to share my screen so we can start looking at a bit more of your work, but Shiraz please jump in.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** It's lovely hearing you speak of this. It's very similar to how I research and how I feel about archive photographs and the individuals within them and the questions around that. It's really wonderful to hear you also speak about where you have a traced trauma within your own family and the questions that have become so important to then place into the centre of your practice.

I remember when I was in my teens growing up in Mauritius, asking questions about generational trauma. I remember, things that I seemed to be thinking about a lot in those days and it is very empowering to see how much this conversation has come to the fore in contemporary research and language now. But is also not surprising that so many of us with these very particular histories and backgrounds have navigated towards these questions quite early on in our practices and trying to place ourselves within that language of racial hierarchy that has dominated and the transference of violence that that has created within, from gender as well. Because in my own family, I had grown up in a very big matriarch as well, very strong and incredible aunts and grandmothers and the men in my family have generally died young from either illness or alcoholism. And there are definitely traits within that where you see your emasculation through the colonial system and the transference of violence towards women as parts of that, and you see those cycles. And I think asking and having to ask those questions has been a big part of being able to create some sense of self-preservation as well.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** And it's that similar thing, the women having to look after all these families and just that survival thing, with the men getting ill or dying... it's a very complex thing. And you have this sense of the Western patriarchal, colonial culture being pushed on, but also just the lack of respect for cultural differences and giving space for that. And putting people in cramped quarters and the control mechanisms that they put on people, really caused a lot of this violence as well, by not considering non-conscious Christian marriage legal and using women as devices of control over the men. So, therefore the violence on the women, it's quite intense.

And I think what's really interesting and exciting is there's a generational shift where these artists coming out, making work, and I think there's a space between for me and my family thinking about it, that talking about indenture, talking about what happened and shame in terms of this trauma and shame in terms of that history, especially in terms of caste, these considerations as well. And I think that distance and that space has allowed... there's a certain privilege that I definitely have being born in Australia and having a lot of privileges here that other family haven't had, also being mixed race, there's definitely privileges there I really like to acknowledge.

So, I think there's also this sense of duty as well, being in this place of privilege, being in this place where I can tell their stories. I should because they couldn't, and they never had that access or that capability. So, to be in this place of privilege, there is a certain sense of duty and I think something really special about doing this work and being able to speak for your family, that I definitely don't take for granted and I'm very appreciative of. So, I think there's that as well, and I think that space in terms of acknowledging that trauma and that shame, we're able to do that and we're very

fortunate to be able to do that. And there's conversations opening up, which previously weren't happening. It's something really exciting and the sense of community that is coming through it, across oceans and across communities. And that's really exciting because I think that power in those stories being heard together is much stronger and the fact that people are now starting to acknowledge these histories, which really have been ignored and silenced and hidden. Especially in Queensland here, the fact that people were taken as slaves here. And there's a huge history of this in Queensland, and the fact that that really needs to be talked about, and people really don't know about it here in Australia.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** Yes, as we've heard. I wonder, just so we can also engage with some of your artworks, whether you could talk a little bit about how you see your artwork in a space, like the gallery, creating these moments for conversation, as well as excavation. But also, how you deal with this question of care. This came up with Jasmine too, and it's something that I know Shiraz thinks about as well. You were talking about these family histories and you're both telling these stories, but it's also a way of protecting and caring. And so, I'm interested in how that public private interchange takes place, especially in somewhere like the Institute of Modern Art, for example.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** So, this work *Kūlī nām dharāyā / they've give you the name 'coolie' (2020)*, I was very much thinking about the archive and this idea of the colonial archive and looking at it and thinking about the fact that there were all of these gaps within this archive. And if I were to really think about what has not been acknowledged or what's missing from this archive - how can I reimagine it? Or what is an archive? Here I created a structure, in a sense I wanted to create this idea of embodied living memory. So, how memory and oral histories and the fact that it doesn't have to be a photograph or it doesn't have to be a written piece of document, but it can be sound and smell, it can be sensorial, it could be the intangible, the fact that there can be something that is not concrete.

So, I was thinking about, in my research putting these pieces together as well, thinking about what could the archive be? But also, what are the experiences? Those who were indentured, what would they have smelled and heard? And when I do this research, I'm always thinking about, what would they have experienced being in these cramped barracks or the smells and the sounds and the songs the sung. So, for me, I wanted to create an experience that really took elements of this.

So, outside there is this corrugated structure with the dirt and ash, but inside the space, it's completely painted black and you get this smell of burnt cane, very smoky, as well as brunt sugar and molasses in this space. So, it's very overwhelming and you have the singing - I recorded my mother singing and she's singing a Bhojpuri song, which was actually a song sung during indenture, very early on. And it has Tamil

loanwords in it, because people spoke all different kinds of languages because they were taken from not one region and area. So, she's singing in the space and there this is sort of shaky panning across a sugarcane field, that's tinted red, acknowledging the hand colored photographs and these weird tourist kind of representations of people who were indentured and working. But thinking about them and their experiences in these kinds of ways.

So, for me, this work was trying to really acknowledge that this could be part of the archive as well. And how could I capture the intangible that really isn't in the archive I was interacting with in my research.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** That's really beautiful and I love the sensorial aspect, and also how you were describing this relationship to these 19th century hand tinted... because there's some really interesting work you had done on some of these tourist images and the ways that they shape seeing now, as well. And going back to what you were saying earlier about these tropical landscapes and just how much those colors and positions still shape our understanding of the tropics. I think it's also interesting the title that you used here when you were talking about the erasure of all of these... The heterogeneity of the people who were brought, forced to come to these different places and that title just kind of...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** So, [the title of the work] is the song that was sung - this is a line from it and that's the English transliteration. So, it's not translated in the space, people don't know what's been sung unless you speak Hindi or Bhojpuri, but it's this idea - I guess in terms of what audiences understand and experience of the work, they necessarily don't have to have everything given to them. But the song is about how people take you and you've got to do this work and they're going to change what you're called. It's kind of like a real tongue-in-cheek song, that's how I read it and that's how it's read that way. In terms of these conversations, there has been a lot of collecting of songs sung and these oral histories, trying to capture from these older people, their memories, because I think it says a lot or they tell a lot that we're missing or that we don't have. So, trying to understand that, I'm very interested in that. All the old people who know these stories are gone in my family, so it's a, it's an interesting thing and it's a difficult thing to navigate. And how you read those stories as well - what's true or not, and does that matter?

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** Does it play out that there are so many multiple readings that become so impossible to take a direct approach in the way that an archive, the formulism of an archive, that one has to experience it in different psychological spaces, different layers your senses are having to navigate your way, your emotional mapping through the work is a way of being able to start to get a sense of the magnitude of the complexity?

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** Especially this loss I'm feeling in terms of being able to talk with my grandparents, of being able to talk with family about this history, I think imagining or trying to find ways to connect with them through what they would have experienced, becomes kind of part of that for me. But was interesting. before we started recording, we mentioned a curator Imelda Miller, who works at the Queensland Museum, and for her going to the space, the smell and the structure was very reminiscent of her connections to this history of forced labor and Queensland and South Sea Islander peoples and her community.

So, I think everyone has a different experience. I think there are shared histories that are different but have these shared aspects that you can take away as well. So, I think in the work, you might take away one thing or you might take away something else. And particularly showing the work in Queensland, a lot of people are just thinking about that smell of that burnt sugarcane and that ash falling from the sky, which has now changed because the only place that does the burning of sugarcane in Australia is up in the Burdekin and Far North Queensland.

So how the relationship to the work is shifting as well, generationally, is something in terms of an archival memory, memory of smell and sound and how memory can shift or understanding of that. But when I was making the work, I think reflecting on it, I do write poetry as part of processing things - going back to Anna's earlier question - when dealing with personal histories of your family, there are things I can talk about and there's a lot of things that I can't, because it's not my place. It's about respect and care. So, poetry for me is a way of addressing things in ways and being able to talk about and move through my feelings with these stories that I've been told or experiences. And I think poetry has an interesting way of working because it's got visual descriptions and descriptions of sounds and smells that are layered upon to create an experience. So, I think in terms of creating this work, there are the layers of the sounds and the smells and the visuals to create that.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** And also, I think that that's important too and it comes up in Shiraz's work as well. And Jasmine's, I haven't seen Jasmine's work personally, but like looking at some of her early installations. I think working with these sensorial elements also reminds us that memory is more than just an archive or record. I think that memory is created in so many different ways and it's transferred in so many different ways. So, smell, cooking, taste - memory has its own poetics beyond that - I always think of archive boxes - but beyond that kind of...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I think it's about breaking down Western ideas of the archive and how we're taught to approach it in this very certain way of what we're expected to interact with and what is considered proper or academic or whatnot. But let's shift this idea of what an archive can be, and what spaces it should be in as



well, and make something that works for us and our community and stories that we can hold and share.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** Can I ask, also, you were speaking a lot about the psychological space in which our ancestors and folks within those periods were experiencing. Because it's something that I often look at a lot in my own work in trying to find spaces that were originally inhabited by folks with things that they would have looked at - the forests, the stones, the plants - the things that would have potentially shifted the way that they felt or the way that they worked. Because the way the environment shifts, we shift around the environment, not necessarily the other way around. And it's really interesting how you've brought these physical elements and materials and smells directly into the space to bring the viewer directly back to those elements. Sorry, that was more of an observation rather than a question.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I think it comes from my distance as well. I didn't grow up in South Africa and there is a lot of distance there, in terms of my belonging or my authority or my ability to speak. So, that's why like this chair [in the installation], for example, is based on an image I saw of a woman sitting on a chair, but I didn't want to create it exactly - I painted a black because it's not the actual chair. I'm not trying to recreate something that does already exist. And that's why I painted a black inside as well, because it's just a fragmented imagining of that.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** That's really interesting. I suppose maybe in a similar way to the way you were describing using poetry as a way to speak of the violence and pain that is not just directly associated with your own ancestry or family history. And a way of [asking] what is the right place to be voicing personally, because I see even in my own work that the poetics is a really important driver of how one cuts through polemic and violent histories. So, is it in a similar way that, not being personally, physically present necessarily in these spaces, a way of being able to connect and voice in an inappropriate way?

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** So, I think the poetry for me is where that very personal - I talk about my mother and those particular stories that I can't talk about - but it's using metaphor and it's using these strategies that are more about evoking feeling or visual imagery rather than saying, 'Oh, this is this really awful thing that happened.' Because as audiences to work, we want to know everything, but we don't necessarily have the right to know everything. And I think that's something people quite often forget, they want you to tell everything and divulge everything, but as audience members, we don't have the right, or we necessarily shouldn't expect that privilege.

And I think when it's really traumatic histories as well, there's so much care you have to do and that's not my story to tell... I don't have the right to do that and that's not my place to do that.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** The dangers of creating spectacle around...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** ...Trauma. And people do love it. And what response do you want to elicit from it? So, for example, with those miniature paintings I do, to me it was about memorialising, the experiences of these women in a space where this form of painting was commissioned by the royalty or those who were well off. And they depicted fair skinned, privileged people, or religious stories. And so, I really wanted to flip that and show dark skinned, lower caste women working forms of labor. And not fully covering the wasli or the handmade paper and showing the paper, as well as a way of acknowledging the fact that all this information isn't there and the full picture, isn't there. And using that form to really shift, I guess.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** What's going on in this one - *Natal #2* (2018)?

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** So, some of them have really dark little corners in them. And some of them are quite intense (*inaudible*). I guess for me - reading these archives and reading this information, you do get confronted with really horrible stories. And I think for me, having these touches really acknowledge that the experiences of these women are complex and fragmented, and bits of what happened to them are in the work. It's that thing about spectacle as well, and not wanting to make a spectacle of it, what their position is in the landscape.

So, more recently when I was in Bangalore and I just showed the work recently, I've totally removed the landscape and I just have the women only in the paintings. And it was really thinking about their place in this archive, their place in this history. And really, we haven't, given space for their voices or their stories. But you can't bring that back or you can't revise - how do you acknowledge that? You can acknowledge it, but I think that's it. You can't go back and put that history back in there or put their voices in there as well. So, I think it's something I'm working through.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** I worked with a series of portraits that sounds similar to the way you're describing house servants and indentured labor women; it was from a colonial family archive. And I think similar to the way you were describing working and finding these photographs and these stories - that there is an act of memorialisation that takes place. And that there are lots of questions that perhaps we ask ourselves about how to work with that image, whether we should work with it at all, where the story of that individual's life lies - the hopes, the dreams, the pain - a life that at the time was so irrelevant that it would never have been written about.

And yet we are here 200 years later, 150 years later, loosely related to that history, potentially to that individual. And we create that act of memorialising and placing it into the public space for others too. And it's a huge responsibility, right. And it's a

hugely loaded and complex piece to navigate. But it's very assuring to hear you speak about it in this way as well.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** Yeah, it's complex. And different people have written about it differently in terms of looking for resistance within that, where women resisted. And some people see suicide as resistance, and I don't, but there are different readings of it. Re-readings of these histories under a different guise... because that's the thing, you can read accounts and you could read things through a particular lens, but what happens when you shift that way of thinking or that way of digesting, approaching? There are some people who are doing some quite interesting work there, but I myself, I'm not there at that point.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** It takes time to process, I think also. When I was doing my initial work in Mauritius a few years back, all I could see during that period was the violence in the landscape. And I couldn't see beyond it for a number of years, really until I had processed that work and re-found a position again, where...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I think that was my immediate response as well to this. And in terms of thinking about intergenerational trauma, there is that violence implicitly that you're seeking clear answers and questions to.

So, I think as you go on, just more questions happen and different points where you start thinking about and landing on. I think what I'm quite interested in now is looking at how descendants are creating this shift - this is my current research - how they're creating this sort of shift in terms of the colonial archive and how it represented these women or this history, versus how descendants are choosing to represent the family and their stories as a form of resistance. I think that's something that's very exciting in terms of how do we keep moving or how do we shift that?

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** It's something that's become really very much the focus in Mauritius right now, because the creole language and the creole identity is something that was formed on the Island, and it was such a huge symbol of shame. So even indentured communities would have resisted having any connection to a creole identity, even though in the 19th century people were inter-marrying and intermixing, so it's a false statement and very clearly showed that sense of shame related to any kind of indentured or subjugated history. And yet today, finally, the fight to have the language taught in schools becomes now the image of resistance that we will no longer be ashamed of our enslaved and indentured ancestors, because that is the great-grandmother that survived.

We are the embodiment of survival. We are the embodiment of strength. And so, the music that is associated with the language has become (*inaudible*). So, it's really interesting to hear you speak of that as well.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** I'll have to send you this beautiful essay I found on Caribbean, Indo Caribbean music and resistance in terms of the instruments they made. But yes, how these forms of resistance that are coming through. Because like my mother grew up in apartheid, where English was forced and then they were taught Africans in school. They went to a full Indian school, but everyone spoke English. There were a lot of different Indian languages, but my mom has so much regret, (*inaudible*) saying to her 'speak to me in English.' And the fact that language wasn't passed down because they wanted their children to have a better chance, so they wanted their children to speak English and they didn't teach them these languages. It's so sad. So, in terms of assimilating and being mimic men and wearing suits and speaking English, this is what happened.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** Absolutely, proximities to whiteness.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** [Yeah, and the generation now I think we're saying, Oh, why weren't we taught this? Or why didn't we...'] There's a sense of understanding and a sadness about a lot of those things that haven't been taught. But I think in South Africa, there is a lot of pride in the Indian community where they wear traditional dress and they eat their bunny chow, and it's very much part of culture and part of being South African Indian there. But for me and my family, it was the language one - and some families taught their children their languages, like Gujarati or whatever - but we didn't learn Telugu or Tamil, and it's just a thing that happened.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** And I suppose how hybridity becomes also that form of resistance.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** And also, the idea of bad Hindi, when it's its own thing. And there's an amazing thing that happens there. And the linguist Rajend Mesthrie has written this great essay about a lot of these loanwords or words that were made up during indenture, because there were people from all the South and then people from Bihar and Kolkata, so there's just this sort of mesh of people speaking all these languages, plus Zulu and English - and how were they going to communicate? So, there's a really interesting mix of words that were used - and where they came from or how they existed. And there are words that came from French Mauritius creole...

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** Because it also gives an insight into the psychological space of which people also were operating in. Because the words that are perhaps directly associated today in contemporary language, were not necessarily the most obvious words used in everyday practice. So, in Mauritius, we use the word 'rode' as the

word to look, but really in French that means to forage, but that is the everyday word for looking. And how these shifts of...

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** It's so interesting. And I think that's why sometimes I try and use these words in my work because they may mean something different in India but in that space, they meant something else. I think it's very interesting.

**Shiraz Bayjoo:** And you were speaking about the Bhojpuri song in your video work with your mother. In Mauritius, we have Bhojpuri Segga - Segga music is the Island music that came from the slave camps. It's a very similar rhythm to reggae and Calypso and Bhojpuri Segga is really a very huge and very direct example of Afro-Indo hybridity, of people coming together. And that Segga rhythm and drumming was then linked to Bhojpuri songs. And when you have a moment look up Bhojpuri Segga, especially the eighties and nineties videos, they are quite brilliant.

**Sancintya Mohini Simpson:** Fantastic. There is this group that are doing this really interesting stuff in terms archiving these Bhojpuri songs, which were talking about people leaving. So, talking from the other perspective, which are quite beautiful, songs of loss or longing for people who have left. So, it's quite interesting when you're looking in between these spaces, what you can find that tells something that hasn't been really addressed or isn't visible.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson:** I'm going to have to wrap up, I'm afraid. This has been wonderful, and I think one of the most beautiful things about this is that we've hardly talked about the plantation. The plantation has sort of morphed into this site of resilience and connection. And I think in a sense that's really what was behind these conversations and the idea of the global plantation, is that these are conversations and vocabularies that connect us, as much as they have been tools of violence and genocide and exploitation. So, it's been really lovely to hear you to pick out these connections. And you have also so beautifully highlighted again, the impossibility of the archive in really giving us what we need, because of language or its lack of. And so, these other forms I think are really... it was really wonderful and I'm so sorry that we have to end it, but I hope that these conversations will continue in a few weeks time. And maybe there'll be questions that might highlight some of those. And maybe you both could send some links to the music so that people could listen.

So, thank you all very much for joining us. I hope that you'll join Shiraz and Sancintya and Jasmine again in a few weeks time. And you can ask them your questions live.

Disclaimer: Due to disruptions in the audio recording of the conversation there may be slight discrepancies in this transcription.

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**Sancintya Mohini Simpson** is an artist and researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. She is a descendent of indentured labourers sent to work, from India to South Africa, on colonial sugar plantations. Her work navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the colonial archive. Simpson's work moves between painting, video, poetry and performance to develop narratives and rituals. Her practice is grounded in collaboration and community engagement, engaging in wider narratives surrounding the indenture diaspora community. Simpson's recent solo exhibitions include *New Old Archives*, Milani Gallery, Brisbane (2020); *Kūlī nām dharāyā/ they've given you the name 'coolie'*, Institute of Modern Art Belltower, Brisbane (2020); *Echoes Over Oceans* (with Shivanjani Lal), Firstdraft, Sydney (2020); *Remnants of my ancestors*, Boxcopy (Hobiennale), Hobart (2019); *Natal's Coolie Women*, CARPARK, Milani Gallery, Brisbane (2019); and *Bloodlines* at Metro Arts, Brisbane and Blak Dot Gallery (Next Wave Festival), Melbourne (2018). Her work has been exhibited and performed at a number of institutions, most recently at the Museum of Brisbane (2020); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2019); and QUT Art Museum, Brisbane (2018). In 2019 she undertook a residency at 1Shanthiroad in Bangalore, India, awarded through Asialink Arts Creative Exchange. Simpson is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

**Shiraz Bayjoo** studied Painting at the University of Wales, Institute Cardiff, and was artist in residence at Whitechapel Gallery during 2011. He has exhibited at Tate Britain and the Institute of International Visual Arts, London; 14th Biennale of Sharjah; 13th Biennale of Dakar; 21st Biennale of Sydney; and is a recipient of the Gasworks Fellowship and the Arts Council of England. His work is represented in the Sharjah Foundation collection, UK Government collection, and French National collection, as well as private collections both in Europe and Asia. Born in Mauritius, Bayjoo's work focuses on the Indian Ocean and the European historical legacies that have shaped the region. Bayjoo has been a visiting lecturer and critic at universities both in Europe and the USA, most notably the Courtauld Institute, Central St. Martin's college of Art, MONASH university Australia, and Princeton University (forthcoming) USA. Bayjoo is participating in the Diaspora Pavilion 2 programme.

**Anna Arabindan-Kesson** is an art historian and writer, who is jointly appointed as an Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora Art in the departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. She has lived and studied in Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand and England and prior to completing her PhD in African American Studies and Art History in the United States, Anna was a Registered Nurse. Her personal and professional background inflect her academic and curatorial work which focuses on the relationship of vision and visibility to histories of race, empire, and migration.