

Title: A Colonial History of Displacement

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Bio:

Dr. Sarah Beaulieu is a Faculty Associate in the Community Health and Social Innovation Hub as well as an instructor of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of the Fraser Valley, in British Columbia. With a research focus on modern conflict anthropology, Dr. Beaulieu is the first to excavate WWI internment sites in Canada. Her research contributes new information toward the PoW lived experience within these Canadian camps. Artefacts from her research have been acquired by the Canadian Museum of History for two exhibits; the first in the Canadian History Hall and the second as part of the Civil Liberties Exhibit. Her research has been highlighted in the documentary “That Never Happened” which has received numerous international awards and was the "Official Selection" of the Permanent Mission of Canada to The United Nations, screening in Geneva, Switzerland on September 20th, 2018.

Dr. Beaulieu also uses Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) as a remote sensing method in her work as a modern conflict anthropologist. Training at the Canadian Forces Base Borden, she received her certification in 2016 and initially began using radar to search for the lost footprints of Canada’s WWI internment sites as well as in search of unmarked PoW graves. With Dr. Beaulieu’s anthropological background, she has developed a reputation for being able to interpret radar scans in a way that is both culturally sensitive and follows traditional cultural protocols. Through this work she has liaised with the RCMP in search of clandestine graves, surveyed city cemeteries, and worked for First Nations communities to survey both Indigenous cemeteries and search for the missing children from Canada’s residential school burial sites.

Dr. Beaulieu's research in modern conflict anthropology is diverse but what ties it all together is her interest in applying an anthropological lens to the contemporary past in an effort to bring to light the stories of, and give voice to, the disenfranchised groups that have been overlooked in the historical record.

Abstract:

British colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent was driven by an ideology set on creating and maintaining a sense of social and racial inferiority for its Indian subjects. The results included economic exploitation, poverty, malnutrition, disease, and significant cultural upheaval. Further divisions based on religious and ethnic lines were encouraged by the British, increasing both self- and group-consciousness, often with disastrous outcomes. My paternal ancestry originates in the northwestern region of India, and as a direct result of colonial rule, numerous family members were not only uprooted but also separated multiple times through displacement, indentured labour, and forced migration. This chapter follows the journey of six generations of my family from India to Kenya, Uganda, Pakistan, and England, prior to their permanent settlement in Canada. Through the lens of my father, Munawar Sabir, I explore the struggle for identity when subjugation prevents a person from calling any single place home.

Key Words:

Colonialism, India, Indentured Labour, Forced Migration, Displacement, Identity

Introduction

British Crown rule of the Indian subcontinent took place from 1858 to 1947, when Partition divided British India based on sectarian lines into two independent dominion states: India and Pakistan (Fisher-Tine & Mann 2004). However, India's history of colonization begins much earlier, with the East India Company taking control a century prior. My family's ancestry was rooted in the northwestern region of India, until Partition forced a mass exodus into the newly created East and West Pakistan. Displacement, however, was not new to my family. While owning land in Jalandhar, an ancient city in the northern Indian state of Punjab, they had also lived and worked in East Africa prior to Partition, voyaging back and forth between these continents over a period of 60 years. This chapter examines the historical movement of six generations of my family — resulting from colonialism through displacement, indentured labour, forced migration, and eventually immigration — to shed light on how my father arrived and began life anew in Canada. While my paternal roots begin in India, my family's incredible journey traversed four continents and five countries, between India, Kenya, Uganda, Pakistan, and England, before they finally settled in the heart of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia, Canada.

A Brief History of India's Colonial Period

India's colonial history is extensive, beginning with European seafaring powers (Dutch Republic, England, France, and Denmark-Norway) establishing trading posts in the early 1600s, while the Mughal Empire was at its peak (Robb 2011). However, the collapse of the Mughal Empire in the 1720s, along with the weakened state of the Maratha Empire caused by the third battle of Panipat in 1721 led to significant instability amongst newly created Indian states and

independent rulers, leaving them vulnerable to European manipulation and subsequent colonial rule (Rawlinson 2006). Great Britain and France continued to vie for dominance over India during the 18th century through both proxy Indian rulers and direct military intervention (Robb 2011). However, the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, who was allied with the French, weakened France's position (Hasan 2005). This allowed Britain's swift expansion over the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century, and to its both direct and indirect control over most of India by the mid-19th century. British India contained the most populous and valuable parts of the British Empire, with access to raw materials, trade routes, and cheap labour, becoming known as the "jewel in the British crown" (Reid 2016).

The East India company (EIC), established in the 1600s, monopolized over half of the international trade market during the mid 1700s and early 1800s (Robins 2012). In 1757, the company governed the early stages of the British Empire in India, presiding over large areas of land with an independent army composed of both British troops and native soldiers (Robins 2012). The military arm of the EIC, initially formed to protect the company's workforce and assets, quickly evolved into a private corporate military organization used to gain geopolitical power to aid in commercial expansion. As a result, the EIC became the most powerful military force in the Indian subcontinent, exercising continuous power until the Indian Rebellion of 1857–58.

For numerous political, economic, social, and religious reasons that included British social reforms and harsh land taxes, tensions had been mounting for decades between Indian citizens and the EIC, with the latter remaining oblivious to the impending insurrection. The mutiny lasted

more than a year and was finally violently suppressed when Britain sent reinforcements to India. Following this event, the British Crown commenced its colonial reign over India, bringing the East India Company to an end (McNamara 2018).

Family History

The earliest documentation of my family's history begins in the eighth century, when the Khalifa of the Muslim empire at Baghdad dispatched Mohamed Bin Qasim, his son-in-law, to lead an offensive against the Raja of Debal in the coastal town of Sind. The Raja of Debal was obstructing the coastal trade routes of Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf to the Indian coast and Sri Lanka. After the Raja's defeat, Bin Qasim continued north along the Indus River, conquering all lands up to Multan. A contingent of shepherds and their flocks followed Bin Qasim's conquests and provided food for the military. For unknown reasons, the Khalifa in Baghdad lost faith in Bin Qasim and recalled him. To avert a revolt, Bin Qasim's devoted army of 3,000 was prevented from returning to Baghdad with their families. Consequently, the general's army and shepherds remained in the area around present-day Multan, and Multan's main occupation became sheep herding. The Arabic word for shepherd is rahi, which over time evolved into arain or Ariyan, my family's tribal name.

Just over a millennium later, territorial skirmishes began anew, with the Great Game between Russia and Britain over Afghanistan beginning in the 1830s and the Anglo-Sikh wars in the 1840s. At some point during this period, my great, great, great-grandfather moved his family, including my great, great grandfather, Akbar Shah (born in 1828) north-east to the land between the Doaba Satluj and Beas rivers. They first settled in Mahuwal, a small village on the Great

Trunk Road. However, somewhere between 1836 and 1846, Maharani Jindan, the youngest wife of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh, approached them to cultivate her jagir (freehold land) three miles from Mahuwal, between Nakodar and Noor Mahal. She would further entice them with the offer of additional land, which they accepted, and their new village became known as Nawa Pind Araian Da — more recently, Nawa Pind Shonkia Da, located in Nokodar, a tehsil (township) in the city of Jalandhar and the province of Punjab.

Prior to Partition, Nawa Pind would remain the only Muslim village in the surrounding area, with the majority of the villagers being Araian Muslims. After Partition, the entire village (with the exception of villagers residing in East Africa at the time) would be displaced to Pakistan. By the early 1900s, Nawa Pind was regarded as a very modern pind (village), even when compared to towns and cities established by British India. The majority of the buildings were brick with modern facilities, and the streets were also brick paved. Oral histories note that when Akbar Shah was nearing death, he travelled to the tomb of Nizam Uddin Ulia, a Sufi saint, in Delhi and spent his remaining life in prayer. When he passed, he was buried amongst the disciples of the saint at his graveside, still one of the most sacred Islamic sites in India.

Colonial Railway History

India's Railway

India's colonial railway construction began in the 1850s as a joint commercial and military undertaking and remained so until the end of Crown rule on the Indian subcontinent. The railways were built and owned by private companies and businessmen, supported by the British government. The railway lines acted as conduits to and from the ports, lowering the cost of

transportation and making raw materials such as cotton more accessible to English merchants. Conversely, British manufactured materials such as cotton textiles were then sold back into the Indian market.

The abundance of unskilled Indian manual labourers — men, women, and children as young as ten — enabled companies to maintain large profit margins. Often, entire families were employed. Families who specialized in construction labour, known as waddars, were used heavily by railway companies. These families would relocate, supported by the railway companies, as the railway line progressed (Satya 2008: 73). Between 1859 and 1900, an average of 180,000–220,000 labourers were employed per year, 125–155 persons per mile of track (Satya 2008: 73). Strikes were common, and resistance movements were directed at private companies who perpetuated low wages and oppressive working conditions. Colonizers' deep-seated racial prejudice and class system prevented unskilled labourers from moving outside the realm of manual labour into more skilled work and management positions.

East Africa's Railway

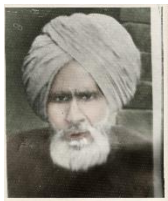
Following the colonial success of the railway in India, the focus shifted to East Africa, where the race to build a continuous rail line between southern and northern Africa was in full swing. The competition was fierce between Britain, France, Portugal, Germany, Spain, and Italy, and the scramble for control over the continent resulted in the invasion, occupation, division, and colonization of the majority of Africa. With this, formal European control of the continent increased 80% between 1870 and 1914 (Hill 1976). In 1896, the British were determined to construct the Kenya–Uganda railway, the objective being to connect the Port of Mombasa with

the east coast of Lake Victoria (Hill 1976). East African indigenous tribes were hostile, and the prospect of using local African labour to build the railway line did not seem promising.

Importing Indian labourers, now highly experienced in railway line construction, became the solution. Following the abolition of the slave trade in the early 1800s, British indentured servitude became a substitute and a means to transport Indian labour to British colonies until the 1920s. Beginning in 1896, Britain sent over 30,000 Indians to Kenya and Uganda. Known derogatively as “coolies,” Indian workers signed five-year contracts that guaranteed a small wage and promised a return passage home at the end of the contract (Hill 1976).

From India to Africa as an Indentured Labourer

Sharaf Din, Akbar Shah’s son, was born in 1858 in Nawa Pind, and the family continued to work as labourers, stone masons and in agriculture (Figure 1).



Sharaf Din. Source: Sabir Family personal collection

Sharaf Din went on to have four sons — Fazal Mohammed, Fateh Mohamed, Khushi Mohamed, and Ghulam Sabir (my grandfather) — and two daughters, Fatima and Aisha. As the story has been recounted, in 1896, Sharaf Din travelled into Nakodar, the administrative town for the locality, to answer a government summons. By nightfall, he had not returned to his village. He simply disappeared.

It emerged that Sharaf Din owed 2,000 rupees to moneylenders, who often took advantage of illiterate farmers, lending money at interest rates of 100–200%. Sixteen days after he had disappeared, his family received a postcard from Bombay. Sharaf Din wrote that through a recruitment drive taking place the day he was summoned to Nakodar, he was now heading to “a faraway land, in a country known as Africa.” He would work as a labourer, constructing the railway line between the Port of Mombasa and Nairobi. There was no mention of when he would return, but he was confident that he would be able to repay his debt to the moneylenders. As it turned out, his wife and small children were without him for five years, farming the land and living off the small sums he was able to send back home.

The rail line that Sharaf Din would help construct was known as the “iron snake,” alluding to a prophecy attributed to the Masai and Kikuyu tribes of Kenya, and as the “lunatic line” by the British Parliament, due to the rising costs of construction and the numerous road blocks the engineers encountered along the way (Hill 1976). In contrast to India’s relatively flat geography, East Africa’s terrain ranged from coastlines and mangrove swamps to broad plains, hills, mountainous regions, and the Great Rift Valley. The region also brought hostile tribes, wild animals such as rhinos and elephants that sometimes charged the trains, man-eating lions, mosquitos, flies, and swarms of locusts and caterpillars that caused low railhead adhesion, or “wheel slip,” on the tracks (Hill 1976). Of the 31,983 “coolies” brought from India in 1896, 16,312 returned home at the end of their contract, 6,454 were severely injured, 2,494 died, and 6,724 remained in East Africa (Hill 1976).

The working conditions for the labourers on the lunatic line were treacherous, with injuries and deaths daily occurrences. It is said that four deaths occurred for every mile of track laid (Hill 1976). In addition to deaths from the back-breaking work came the Tsavo lions, two large man-eaters that stalked the railway camps over a period of nine months. It is estimated that the lions killed 135 workers; the exact number will never be known, since only the Indian deaths were accounted for (28); officials did not keep records for the local Africans working on the railway, who were regarded as lesser humans than their Indian counterparts (Hill 1976).

At the time of the attacks, construction had been underway on a railway bridge over the Tsavo river. Thousands of workers, mostly Indian, were spread out in camps over an eight-mile stretch of the rail line. The two lions stalked the camps in the evening, pulling sleeping labourers from their tents. As the months progressed, the lions became more brazen, entering the camps by day, evading thorn fences, traps, poisoned bait, and campfires. As the attacks increased, hundreds of men fled from the site, halting construction of the bridge. Lieutenant-Colonel Patterson, a British soldier hired to supervise the railway construction, eventually shot the two lions. The first lion, shot twice, measured nine feet eight inches from the tip of its nose to the tip of its tail and stood three feet nine inches high. Twenty days later, the second lion, shot six times over an eleven-day period, finally succumbed to its injuries. It measured nine feet six inches from nose to tail and stood three feet 11.5 inches tall.

In England, one of my great-uncles is the keeper of several of the first Tsavo lion's claws. As the story has been passed down, one evening, one of the two lions entered the train station, where the station master and signalman were located, and charged at my great-uncle. He barricaded

himself behind a desk and swung a knife at the lion each time the lion swiped at him. The lion eventually retreated into the thick brush, a few digits short. Lieutenant-Colonel Patterson did not believe my great-uncle when he recounted this event; however, when the first lion was shot several days later, he was found to be missing several of his claws.

Patterson tells a similar story in his book *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (Patterson 1907):

Some little time before the flight of the workmen, I had written to Mr. Whitehead, the District Officer, asking him to come up and assist me in my campaign against the lions, and to bring with him any of his *askaris* (native soldiers) that he could spare. He replied accepting the invitation, and told me to expect him about dinner-time on December 2, which turned out to be the day after the exodus. His train was due at Tsavo about six o'clock in the evening, so I sent my "boy" up to the station to meet him and to help in carrying his baggage to the camp. In a very short time, however, the "boy" rushed back trembling with terror, and informed me that there was no sign of the train or of the railway staff, but that an enormous lion was standing on the station platform. This extraordinary story I did not believe in the least, as by this time the coolies — never remarkable for bravery — were in such a state of fright that if they caught sight of a hyena or a baboon, or even a dog, in the bush, they were sure to imagine it was a lion; but I found out next day that it was an actual fact, and that both stationmaster and signalman had been obliged to take refuge from one of the man-eaters by locking themselves in the station building. (Patterson 1907, p. 48)

Further confirmation of this account comes from an article written in *The New York Times* in 1972: "Two lions on platform. Train approaching and signalman up water tank. Lions no let him down. I very nervously frightened and secure in office. Cannot give 'line clear' signal to

oncoming train. Please arrange matters own personal satisfaction and dispose of lions who greatly bane my existence” (Hollander 1972). It has always angered my family, as I’m sure it did many of the descendants of these Indian labourers, that the British continuously described them as cowardly. These men were forced, or at the very least coerced, into coming to Kenya to labour and were not provided with any means to protect themselves. I have no doubt that carrying a rifle, as the British did, would have considerably boosted their bravado.

Returning Home, Debt Repaid

My great-grandfather Sharaf Din, now in his fifties, returned home in 1901, paid off his debt to the moneylenders, and began cultivating his land again. At some point during his time as an indentured labourer in Kenya, he was promoted from coolie (paid 12 rupees per month) to stone mason (paid 45 rupees per month). Had he remained a coolie, it would have cost him 15 years of his life to pay off his debt. Coolies began applying for jobs as stone masons during the Tsavo bridge construction (Patterson 1907) and given that Sharaf Din was there at the same time as the man-eating lions, this is likely when he shifted labouring positions.

At the end of his five-year contract, Sharaf Din, no longer an indentured servant, continued traveling back and forth between the continents, taking independent railway contracts in Kenya, including the construction of the Nairobi Railway Station. Upon each return home, he would invest in additional farmland. With his profits, he was also able to send two of his sons, Fateh Mohamed and Ghulam Sabir, to university in India. Both eventually had successful careers with the Kenyan railways; upon retirement, Fateh Mohamed would receive the Queen’s medal of honour for his service. After the first generation of indentured labourers, the work on the African

railways became more profitable than remaining in India, and nearly every household in Nawa Pind had a family member who had migrated to East Africa. As the men returned home, they began making improvements to their households and also to the village proper — replacing mud plaster exterior walls with kiln-fired bricks or building entirely new structures. The kiln-fired bricks were a time-saving strategy that allowed them to spend more time on agriculture, increasing profits and enhancing the quality of life in the village.

By the mid-1920s, Sharaf Din, his four sons, and his daughter Fatima were well established in Kenya. His daughter Aisha, now married, remained in India. No longer regarded as indentured labourers, railway workers were allotted three months off and permitted to return to India every four years, where they would invest in more land and visit with the family left behind. My grandfather, Ghulam Sabir, born in 1907, migrated to Kenya in 1927. By the 1920s, the British government had divided Nairobi into three sections: the British on one side of the river and the Indians and Africans in separate locales on the other side. After this division, my grandfather and his three brothers purchased an acre of land and built six stone houses in the Indian section of the town, four on the front street and two on the back street. The family resided in one of the homes and rented the remaining five, with the monies earned from rent divided monthly between the brothers and their families. Only one residence was ever needed between the four brothers, since most often at least three and their families were travelling with the railway as construction continued through to Uganda. During these long stays, they were provided with railway quarters, similar to army barracks.

My grandfather Ghulam Sabir began with the British railway as a clerk, and with his university education was able to move up into management, human resources, and finally, an accounting position. He was soon promoted to bursar and would travel by train, provided with his own bogie and guards to protect the coffers, visiting each station and paying the labourers lined up on payday. He went back to India around 1930 to marry my grandmother, Sardaran Khanum. They then returned to Kenya, where they would remain until my grandfather retired around 1958–59. Ghulam and Sardaran had four children, all born in Nairobi: Hamida (1931), Anwar (1932), Munawar (my father 1935), and Sureya (1939).

Ghulam's career meant that he and his family traveled continuously around Kenya and Uganda. In 1938–39, when my father was three, they lived in Jinja, Uganda for a year, where Ghulam was responsible for the construction of the railway bridge. Then toward the end of 1939, the family travelled to their home in India for a visit. Working together as they had done in Nairobi, the four brothers (Ghulam, Fazal, Fateh, and Khushi) built a similar compound with red bricks, containing four homes around a central courtyard. Sharaf Din lived in a home nearby, while both Fatima and Aisha lived with their spouses and children on the same street.

As they reached Nawa Pind, World War II broke out, and since Ghulam was considered an essential service worker for the railway, he was immediately sent back to Kenya. My father, siblings, and grandmother would remain in Nawa Pind for nine months, awaiting safe passage back to Nairobi. During his time in Nawa Pind, one of my father's fondest memories was following his older siblings and cousins to school. Sitting outside under a bodhi tree, he would learn his multiplication tables through song and recitation in Urdu and Punjabi. Although only

four years old during this trip, he can still remember the melody that accompanied his mathematics recitation. By the time he entered kindergarten, known as Substandard 1 and 2 in Kenya, he was already ahead of his class. Before the age of six, when he first began to learn English, he was fluent in the Indian and Arab languages of Punjabi, Urdu, and Arabic, as well as the native Kenyan languages of Swahili and Kikuyu.

In 1940, with safe passage finally arranged, the family silently set sail home to Nairobi, accompanied by two British destroyers, protection against the German U Boats. During this passage, my Uncle Anwar, then seven, was playing recklessly by the ship's railing and almost fell overboard. My father remembers the cries for help and commotion when a group of passengers found him hanging from the railing, seconds away from being engulfed by the sea, and quickly pulled him to safety.

WWII would leave an imprint on my father's childhood. With British Kenya, concerned about an advancing Italian army, flying bombers over Nairobi, the family dug a bomb shelter in their front yard and covered it with a mbati (Swahili for tin roof) for protection. My father also recollects trading rationed food items, such as butter and sugar, snuck from the family food stores, for wooden carved toy soldiers that Italian PoWs were excited to trade. The memory that likely left the deepest imprint, however, was when his maternal grandfather disappeared in 1945 on a return journey to India. The hushed whispers of concern in the family home discussed how he had set sail on a dhow, since steamships were occupied by the war effort. One evening, a family friend, who was a radio broadcaster from Nairobi and also a soothsayer, came to visit. As the family was recounting their concerns, the man placed soot into a dish, mixed it with oil, and began to

say a prayer. He then asked my father to look into the dish and describe what he could see, but my father, not able to focus, did not see anything. His older brother then tried and described seeing their grandfather sitting under a palm tree on an island. Of course, this did not make any sense to the family, and thus the activity ceased. A few months later, the family received a second visit from the same soothsayer, and the activity was repeated. My uncle then saw his grandfather looking out the window of a train. Four days later, the family received a telegram from Nawa Pind, stating that their grandfather had been shipwrecked on the island of Socotra in Yemen and had had to wait several months for another ship to take him back to India. The train on which my uncle had seen his grandfather during that second visit was the one from Bombay to Jalandhar. He had been missing for six months.

By the time WWII ended in 1945, my father and his family were residing in Eldoret, and the school marked the end of the war by the principal raising the Union Jack flag. They remained in Eldoret for two years before relocating to Mombasa in 1947. Mombasa remains a key entry point for shipping cargo into Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania and the present port's construction began in 1896, under the British Protectorate, to discharge railway line construction materials (Kenya Ports Authority, n.d.). Looking out the window from the top floor of his classroom, my father had a clear view of the ocean, where he often spotted large shark fins cutting through the port's waterways — but this didn't stop him from sneaking down to swim with the fish in the corals.

Although the war was over, life would only remain uneventful for a few short years. At the beginning of 1947, their parents left my father and his older brother with their Uncle Fateh Mohamed and travelled back to India, leaving in January and returning in April. The chaos of

Partition had begun. Numerous extended family members voyaging to India around the same time would become stuck and unable to leave, witnessing the horrors and bloodshed, eventually becoming lost in refugee camps and not able to return until after the storms of Partition had subsided.

Background to Partition

Partition was not a sudden event but one instigated and fueled by more than a hundred years of British colonialism. The British encouraged the division of colonial subjects based on religion and ethnicity. Separate bathrooms were provided for Muslims and Hindus at railway stations, and separate electorates for different religious communities began in 1909, increasing self- and group-consciousness along with rigid boundaries (Brass 2003).

In 1885, the Indian National Congress (INC), dominated by a Hindu majority, was formed, spearheading the Indian Independence Movement. When Britain attempted to divide the state of Bengal (1905) along sectarian lines, the INC protested, and the Muslim League was formed (1906) in an effort to ensure the rights of Muslims during future independence negotiations (Khan 2017); the INC supported a unified India, since Hindus, being the larger population, would have held control over any democratic form of government. The Muslim League's primary interest was avoiding the risk of Muslim marginalization in an independent Hindu-Muslim state. Given these opposing views of what independence should look like, the British colonial government attempted to pit the groups against the other and create further division. However, both groups remained united in favour of independence from Britain (Brass 2003).

During WWI, the INC and the Muslim League supported sending one million Indian volunteer troops to fight on Britain's behalf. Both groups felt this support would lead to independence from Britain after the war had ended, but this never came to fruition (Khan 2017). Pro-independence protests continued to intensify after WWI, and in April 1919, the British army entered Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar and opened fire on unarmed protestors, killing more than a thousand. As news of the Amritsar massacre reached the farthest points of India, previously apolitical citizens came to support the INC, the Muslim League, and independence (Brass 2003).

Indian Independence Act of 1947

WWII served as a catalyst for India's fight for independence. The British Raj had contributed 2.5 million volunteer soldiers to the Allied campaign, and by the time the war had finished, Great Britain was bankrupt and unable to maintain its colonies across the empire. By February 1947, with the British government's changeover from Winston Churchill's Tories to the Labour Party, a proposal was made to grant India independence by June 1948. Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of British India, encouraged the Muslim and Hindu leaders to form a united country, but with the country falling into further chaos, Mountbatten understood this would never be possible. Hence, he agreed to the formation of two separate states (Khan 2017). With the provinces of Baluchistan and Sindh already having Muslim majorities, Mountbatten proposed that this would become the new state of Pakistan, while the two disputed provinces of Bengal and Punjab would be divided, creating both a Hindu Bengal and Punjab as well as a Muslim Bengal and Punjab on the eastern and western borders of India. When both the Muslim League and the INC agreed to the proposal, the date for independence was moved up from June 1948 to August 15, 1947 (Brass 2003).

The Radcliffe Line

The next phase, delineating a border between the two states, was a nearly impossible task, with Muslims occupying two northern regions on opposite sides of the country and a Hindu majority occupying the region in between. To further convolute matters, within the northern regions, members of both Hindu and Muslim communities were mixed together, along with other minority groups: Sikhs and Christians. Sikhs had appealed for a nation of their own but were denied. The Punjab region was fertile and wealthy and contained equal populations of Hindus and Muslims; with neither group willing to surrender this valuable land, religious hatred intensified (Chatterji 1999).

Mountbatten appointed Cyril Radcliffe, a British judge, to delineate the border separating the two countries. He had been chosen because he was regarded as nonpartisan and thus could be neutral; however, he had little understanding of the regional tensions, nor did he have experience with adjudicating such disputes. In addition to these drawbacks, he was given only five weeks to set the border. The rough border plan was presented on August 14, 1947, and by August 17, the Radcliffe Line had been officially published. Mountbatten favoured expediency over precision and focused his attention on protecting British interests rather than on the state of lawlessness that was about to ensue. The lack of a clear strategy for a safe transition of people resulted in property loss, death, and destruction (Chatterji 1999).

Numerous issues contributed to confusion over the new border. Very few had access to the Radcliffe Line publication, and illiteracy would in any case have prevented many from understanding it. Within a matter of weeks, 14 million were displaced from their homes, and the subcontinent quickly descended into riots and violence. Partition triggered one of the bloodiest

upheavals in human history. Hindus and Sikhs fled Pakistan while Muslims fled India, and the “blood trains” carrying refugees between the two states were attacked by militant and mobs along the route, arriving laden with corpses (Chatterji 1999).

My Family’s Experience through Partition

At the time of Partition, my father’s grandfather, Sharaf Din, along with aunts, uncles, cousins, and a sister, were residing in Nawa Pind. As mentioned above, there was much confusion over where the border would change. Nawa Pind was a small Muslim village encircled by three Sikh villages within a three-mile radius, and the family mistakenly thought they were now a part of Pakistan. With limited outside communication, each individual locality had to gauge the severity of their precarious situation. In the two months before Independence Day, the horrors of Partition escalated, with one majority district or neighbouring village attacking another of the opposing religion. The villagers remained locked indoors, and at night, village patrols guarded the narrow streets and shouted at each other to stay awake and vigilant. The shouts, meant to scare their adversaries, would also notify fellow villagers that they were still alive.

One evening, a group of Sharaf Din’s Sikh friends and tenants from Uppal came to warn the family that Nawa Pind was going to be attacked the following day; they were unable to help, as this was an outside militia group intending to burn Muslim villages. Hence, the family gathered their valuables and any material memories of a life about to be quickly erased, hastily packed everything into ox carts, and fled to a refugee camp in Jalandhar, 20 miles away. Although fortunate not to have been attacked en route to Jalandhar, many family members still experienced the horrors of seeing the mutilated remains of dead Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs lying on the

roadsides as they traveled by foot or by train, seeking refuge (Chatterji 1999). One of my uncles, now in his seventies, only recently identified his trauma as PTSD, something that continues to affect him today. At the camps, numerous refugees succumbed to the plague, typhoid, and cholera, my father's cousin dying of the third. The family remained in the refugee camp, which came under attack by militias, but then were rescued by Maswood, Fateh Mohammed's son. He had brought with him the British army to take them over the border to the safety of the Lahore refugee camp in the Dominion State of Pakistan.

One might wonder how an Indian was able to summon the British army to rescue his family. As a young boy in Kenya, Maswood was swiftly recognized as an academic. His uncles, including my grandfather, pooled their resources to send him to Kings College in London. When WWII broke out, he served with the British army and was part of the evacuation of Dunkirk. He had also fought in North Africa, and when in Egypt, he worked for British intelligence. He arrested an Egyptian soldier secreting national intelligence to the Germans, who turned out to be Anwar Sadat, later the president of Egypt. After all of this success, Maswood was finally considered fit for commissioned service and was sent to India to be trained. He became a second lieutenant in the Indian army, and as WWII came to an end, he was promoted. As captain of India's Eighth Regiment, his first task in 1947 was to locate the family patriarch, Sharaf Din, the remaining family, as well as the Eighth Army Regiment's families. He was permitted to take 100 army trucks and a company of armed soldiers to scour the various refugee camps, bringing each family to safety in the newly vacated lands in the Dominion of Pakistan.

My grandparents would eventually return to Nairobi in 1952. The academic year in Kenya consisted of cycles of three months of schooling followed by one month of vacation. My father and his brother would spend the holidays with their parents, wherever Ghulam's railway job had taken him. His children were provided free second-class train passes, and sometimes even first-class tickets, to visit their parents and extended family residing in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

Childhood Memories of Africa

The holiday trips and schooling years brought many adventures, and my father fondly recalls a number of his boyhood escapades. When he was five, he was sent to stay with his first cousin and his wife, who were living in a surveyor's tent in the Kijabe countryside of Kenya. As a surveyor for the British railway, his cousin was tasked with straightening a particularly windy and troublesome portion of the rail line. Although Kijabe had a beautiful hot spring, my father's favourite childhood experience was at Lake Kikuyu, now named Ondiri Swamp and unfortunately severely polluted since the time of the British protectorate. The lake was covered with reeds floating on peat that could hold the weight of a person, and he remembers being able to "walk on water" as he and many others, even the local cattle, crossed the lake. Today, children cut the peat and swim underneath Kenya's only quaking bog, mindful not to lose sight of the light above lest they drown (LARMAT, 2016).

At the age of 12 in Nakuru, my father and his brother would pack a picnic of Kraft cheese sandwiches and Coca-Cola and bike to Lake Nakuru, ten miles from their home. On one of these

picnics, as they were cycling down the red dirt path toward the lake, my father noticed a large log in the middle of the path that began to move. Distracted, he fell off of his bike just meters from it, and by the time he righted himself it had fortunately disappeared. He was extremely lucky, since pythons were known to swallow young children whole in Kenya.

During these formative years, he was also privileged to attend several guest lectures at his school by Louis Leakey, the prominent paleoanthropologist and archaeologist renowned for his important discoveries at Olduvai Gorge. Then in his final years of schooling, he joined his class to climb Mount Kenya in Grade 11 (1951) and Mount Kilimanjaro in Grade 12 (1952). His first cousin Saed, an aeronautical student in England, along with his friend John Busing, an experienced mountaineer from New Zealand, had travelled to Kenya to climb Mount Kenya. My father's teacher, seizing the opportunity to ascend with an experienced climber, had his class of students join the expedition. With 80 shillings provided by his anxious parents, my father purchased the required gear — an old military uniform, including warm coat, socks, cobbles for his hiking shoes, and a rucksack onto which his mother had sewn a strap — while John Busing taught the class how to knit their own wool gloves for the journey. The trip took three weeks, with the main food staples being baked beans and other tinned foods. Condensed milk mixed with cold stream water became their refreshing liquid sustenance. The climb, although challenging, took place without incident, but the most frightening moment transpired during their descent, when a herd of elephants crossed just yards in front of them. They stood very still, hoping to avoid a charge. As the elephants moved on, oblivious to the shaking schoolboys, the class took a collective sigh of relief. The climb up Mount Kenya was so successful that the class then ascended Mount Kilimanjaro in another three-week trek, the following year.

The Mau Mau Uprising and the Kenyan Africanization Plan

Disruption would hit once again during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya between 1952 and 1960, the most violent and protracted insurrection against colonialism. Some of the world's richest agricultural soils were located in Kenya and thus were coveted by the British. However, settler success was largely based on the availability of land, cheap labour, and capital. This led to the economic marginalization of the Kikuyu tribe as settler expansion continued to reduce their landholdings, and their attempts to gain political rights and land reform through government channels were unsuccessful. The arrests of Mau Mau suspects often took place behind my father's home, mere yards from their house.

In 1963, Kenya became independent from Britain; Indians, along with Europeans, were given two years to become Kenyan citizens and surrender their British passports. Then, on the heels of the Kenyan Africanization Plan in 1964, the government began to replace non-citizens with citizens in key areas of the economy (Wa-Githumo 1991). Hence, if you were not an essential service worker in the years leading up to 1964, you were likely to be out of work. My grandfather had been the last immediate family member to leave Kenya, in 1958, and it was becoming difficult to rent out the houses on the family compound, since the majority of Indians, and now Pakistanis, were leaving. Eventually, the compound was sold for 100,000 shillings, a fraction of its value only a few years earlier. In addition, the monies from the sale of the compound were withheld in a Kenyan bank for many years before Ghulam and his brothers were finally able to receive their payment.

Early University Years

My grandfather Ghullam Sabir could only afford to send one of his sons to university in England but could afford to send both sons to university in Pakistan. Hence, upon graduating Grade 12, my father was uprooted to Saiwal, Pakistan in April 1953. After the modern village in Nawa Pind, his grandfather and uncles were now residing in a village without electricity and only a hand pump to access water. My father would never feel at home in this new village, so vastly different from his childhood upbringing in Kenya. After living with his grandfather for a few weeks, he travelled to King Edward Medical College and roomed with his cousin. There he would study first-year courses independently before registering in September for second-year studies at Government College in Lahore, skipping first-year university altogether (Figure 3).



Munawar Sabir, early University years. Source: Sabir family personal collection

During his third year, he transferred to Forman Christian College receiving his first degree, majoring in zoology, chemistry, and English, followed by a five-year medical program at Nishtar

Medical College in Multan (Figure 4). With his parents continuing to reside in Nairobi, he would spend his holidays in Saiwal with his grandfather Sharaf Din, and his uncles and cousins.



Figure 4

Munawar Sabir, President of the Speers Chemical Society. Forman Christian College, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, first row, center. Source: Sabir family personal collection

England

Immediately upon graduating from medical school, he left for England on December 3, 1961. Something I did not know about my family history until writing this chapter was that my family never had a last name. It was not part of our culture and not necessary until my father was required to apply for a passport to travel to London. At this point, he took my grandfather's name "Sabir" as a surname. In England, he remained in a Pakistani hostel for six weeks while applying for residency positions and was invited to six interviews. However, he only attended the three interviews that were along a train route: in Scunthorpe (gynecology and obstetrics), South Shields (gynecology and obstetrics), and Carlisle (general surgery). The pay was similar for each of these positions (20 pounds per month), and he eventually settled in South Shields, as the resident quarters seemed most appealing to him. The position was for six months, and he received one night off per week, along with every third weekend. He remained in South Shields for another year after receiving a job as junior house surgeon in general surgery, and then senior house surgeon. He next moved to Lewisham and took a job as registrar at St. John's Hospital, after which he became the resident surgical officer at the same hospital.

In 1963, when Kenya received independence from Britain, my father was forced to give up his Kenyan citizenship, as he was now living and working in England. Loss of citizenship in the country where he was born and raised, and that holds his fondest childhood memories, was a painful example of identity erasure, rooted in a deep colonial history. During the same year, he met and married his first wife, Pat. Ironically, prior to meeting my father, Pat had worked as a nurse in India, personally treating Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Pat and my father moved to Hereford in Muchbitch, where he took an assistantship, eventually moving to Wolverhampton to become an orthopaedic registrar. At this point, tiring of the training jobs and feeling well experienced, he began working in family practice in Edmonton, London, where he remained for six years while also working as a clinical assistant in orthopedic surgery at Barnett General Hospital. During this time, they purchased their first home, in Enfield.

Meeting the Queen

Likely stemming from the historical racism and inequity experienced by my father and his family, he joined the Human Rights Commission, initially as a committee member, and later was nominated chairman of the commission's Employment and Housing section. Between 1969 and 1973, he challenged discriminatory practices in the workforce, within universities, as well as in the rental housing market. During this same period, he also received a call from the British Home Secretary, as he had been recommended to the Liquor Licensing Commission in 1970. Both of these commissions were extremely prestigious, with notable names on the committees: Lord Errol, Graham Hill (a two-time Formula One world champion), Lord Shepherd (former Governor of Hong Kong), Simon Phipps (Bishop of Horsham), Sheila Black, James John (Headmaster of Harrow), and Professor Prest, from the London School of Economics. Following his seat on this

commission, he wrote a ground-breaking paper on alcoholism and legislation. Through his work on both of these committees, he was invited to two of the Queen's Buckingham Palace Garden Parties (1971 and 1972), where she recognized and rewarded individuals for their public service. On each occasion, he stood in line to be personally thanked by Queen Elizabeth. This was not, though, his first time seeing her. In 1952, Queen Elizabeth had visited Nairobi as Princess Elizabeth and was staying at the famous Treehouse Hotel when she received the news that her father, King George VI, had died. My father's class was sent, as loyal subjects to the Crown, to wave the Union Jack flag at the Nairobi airport upon her arrival in Kenya. I cannot help but think that he must have held many conflicting feelings when attending these events. On the one hand, he would have felt so much pride at being acknowledged for the important work he had done; attending the Garden Party was a great honour. On the other hand, here was the woman whose bloodline was responsible for all of his family's colonial oppression and suffering.

Moving to Canada

On a visit to Toronto, Ontario in 1972, my father fell in love with Canada, and he and Pat decided to relocate with their children. He applied for immigration and a family practice position, and an opportunity to purchase a practice in the Ukrainian town of Hafford, Saskatchewan presented itself. The family arrived on November 23, 1973, ready to begin their new adventure, but tragedy struck on November 29. After attending a farewell dinner for the departing doctor, the family was driving back to their hotel in a blizzard when they were struck by an oncoming vehicle. My father's life changed forever — in a split second, his wife and children were gone.

My father continued to work in Hafford, and in 1975, he met my mother, a young nurse of Ukrainian, French, Irish, and German ancestry. A skydiving accident in Prince George, British Columbia had caused her to be in a full leg cast for many weeks and forced her to move back home to heal. However, never one to sit still, she approached the matron at the Hafford hospital, looking for nursing work. There, they serendipitously met and then eventually married. In 1978, they moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba when he accepted a residency position to specialize in orthopedics and began working at the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre, St. Boniface Hospital, as well as the Children's Hospital, while my mother worked at the Misericordia Health Centre. By then, they had four young daughters: Shamma, me, Roxanna, and Laila (Figure 5).



Ghulam Sabir and Sardaran visit Munawar and Eva Sabir in Canada in 1983 (Backrow left to right: Sureya (Munawar's sister) and husband, Eva Sabir, Ghulam and Sardaran Sabir. Front row: Roxanna, Laila, Shamma and Sarah (Munawar and Eva's children). Source: Sabir family personal collection

When my father completed his residency in orthopedics in Winnipeg and flew to Vancouver for his graduation, he became immediately excited that B.C. was not snow covered, remaining green even in the dead of winter. Having grown up by the equator, he was not fond of the cold Saskatchewan and Manitoba winters, so they decided to move to B.C. In 1982, we arrived in Abbotsford, where we have remained since. At the time, my parents were only one of two biracial couples in the Fraser Valley, something that drew many a curious glance and whispers. My father's practice grew immediately, as he spoke numerous languages and drew Punjabi- and Urdu-speaking patients from over a hundred miles away. In 1988, my parents fell in love with an acreage with rolling hills that reminded my father of his home in Kenya; they christened it Ngong Hills, after the peaks in a ridge along the Rift Valley, southwest of Nairobi. After all of the places my father had lived, it was Africa that continued to tug at his heart.

Returning Home

In 2012, we travelled to Kenya as a family — my parents, my sisters, two sons-in-law, and my three-month-old son. Throughout my childhood, Father had told us his many adventures and longed for the red earth where he was born. We visited many of the places he had lived and travelled to before leaving Kenya permanently at the age of 17, including a childhood school and the train station where my grandfather and other family members had worked. And although Nairobi had changed considerably during the almost 60 years since he had departed, in an incredible feat, he found his way back to his childhood home. He stood in front of the gate and knocked, and when the owner arrived at the gate, he explained that he and his siblings had been born in their house. They welcomed him back into the home to look around. This was a moving moment for my entire family. Until now, Kenya had been this far-off place in oral history, and

now, here we were, standing in front of the stone house that my great-uncles had built and where my father had been born, a place where my family had ended up through indentured labour and back-breaking work. I now understood a part of myself like never before.

During this same trip, my father also visited his childhood friend Mukhtar, who had travelled to England for medical school but then returned to his home in Kenya for work. They spoke for hours after not seeing each other for many years, and at the end of the evening, my father walked with him out of the hotel where we were staying. They walked so slowly, side by side, arms behind their backs, still talking and reminiscing. How much they had to say after so many years, and in the end, they promised to see each other again. As I watched them walk down the path, two old and very dear friends, I wondered whether they ever would, but it was not meant to be, as Mukhtar passed away in 2020, before another visit could be had.

Returning to Ancestral Roots

In 2020, at the age of 85, my father decided that it was time to visit his ancestral roots in India. He had not returned since his first visit at the age of four. My parents toured around most of India, during the time of Donald Trump's visit. Here in Canada, watching the news and reading about all of the ethnic conflict taking place once again in a country so divided, we were becoming more concerned for their safety by the day. My father was trying to locate the village of Nawa Pind without any idea of how to get there, carrying with him only fleeting childhood memories and the knowledge that it was somewhere between Nakodar and Jalandhar.

They hired a taxi, and on the way to Jalandhar, he described the location to the driver as best he could. The taxi driver stopped every few blocks, exiting the car to inquire with anyone on the street who might know something about Nawa Pind's location. Then, as they rounded a corner, arriving at a Sufi shrine, the driver jumped out and inquired once again of three people on motorbikes. They responded with excitement that my parents had arrived and then jumped onto their bikes and asked the taxi to follow, guiding them the few hundred metres into the village. They brought them to a gurdwara, and my father suddenly remembered that there had been a mosque in the same location. One of the men stated that this gurdwara had previously been the mosque and that his father was now the granthi (ceremonial reader of the holy text). They then invited my parents into the temple, where they visited and had tea. During the conversation, my father described a large bodhi tree, where he remembered having mathematics lessons as a four-year-old. They then drove him to the tree, the largest of its kind in the village. As he stood there under his childhood tree, he commented to another man, also standing there, that it would be an ideal spot for a treehouse. The man, a Sikh engineer, told him that he was in fact in the process of constructing a tree house for his grandchildren. During this conversation, my father told him how he used to sit under this tree when he went to school, and the man asked him where his house was located. My father turned around and pointed across the street to where his family home had been. Stunned, the man told him that he now owned the house and immediately invited my parents back to visit. At the house, nothing had been altered with the exception of updated paint. As he stood in the courtyard of his childhood home, reminiscing and still in shock at this chance meeting, the man's wife came out of the house. After hearing who they were and why they were there, she said, "But I thought that the people who owned this house before Partition

were Muslim,” and my father answered, “Yes, we were.” She immediately opened her arms and embraced him.

My mother had recorded this chance meeting on her phone and immediately played it for us children when they returned. Watching my father’s serendipitous journey home through the lens of the camera almost felt like we had taken the journey with them. More incredible was watching all of the people in the village who embraced my parents. There may have been conflicts in other parts of India, but here, in this village, Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus were not just coexisting, they were friends, as they had been prior to British meddling. My father said that he has never felt so at home as he did in that moment, standing on the same ground where his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and so on had stood.

Conclusion

Although we share a common ancestry from the Middle East to India, the descendants of Akbar Shah are now citizens of Pakistan, Kenya, Britain, Germany, Spain, the United States, and Canada. Today, my immediate and extended family, along with the friends they grew up with in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda — comprising Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu faiths, and each following their own exceptional journey — have serendipitously ended up together again in the Fraser Valley. I and my sisters, the first generation born in Canada, have been fortunate to remain part of such a close-knit community whose historical ties run so deep. Much upheaval occurred and many sacrifices were made so that each subsequent generation could have a better life.

Colonialism caused racial divisions, ethnic conflicts, and a class system that not only uprooted my family but also separated them many times over. Indentured labour sent my great-grandfather to an unknown land to complete arduous labour to pay off a debt that should never have been. Colonial greed and the looting of India resulted in poor working conditions and poverty, forcing many in my family to continue working in East Africa. Partition caused further upheaval in one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent history. Kenyan independence forced my father to choose between Kenyan and British citizenship, knowing that ethnically he would never be either. What role does identity play when there isn't a single place that one can ever truly call home? The Kenya of my father's childhood was no longer, India's ancestral roots were erased by Partition, and Pakistan, a place allotted to Muslims by the British, did not hold any familial history. Perhaps it is in such moments of upheaval that one decides to form new roots.

As I conclude this chapter, I reflect upon the many times that my family has been asked *What are you?* or *Where do you come from?* "Have a seat," I answer, "it's going to be a long story."

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