THE JOURNAL OF
COMMONWEALTH
LITERATURE

Article

The Journal of Commonwealth Literature
2015, Vol. 50(2) 179–196

DOI: 10.1177/0021989414540910
jcl.sagepub.com
SAGE

Sartorial memories of a colonial past and a diasporic present in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*

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Abstract

The fictions of the South Asian diaspora in Britain have recurrently dramatized many of the sartorial confrontations, negotiations, and creative exchanges resulting from the interaction between Britons and South Asians on British soil. Some of them have also looked back to "clothing matters" (Tarlo, 1996) in colonial India, thus establishing a dialogue between the sartorial past and present of the protagonists. This is arguably nowhere more evident than in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972), a novel where the politics and poetics of dress in colonial India recur and haunt the sartorial present of the diasporic subject. Drawing on anthropological and sociological studies on dress, this article aims at reading the clothing subtext that Markandaya weaved into the fabric of this novel. The contribution argues that in *The Nowhere Man* the motif of clothing is used to connect the characters' diasporic present in Britain with their previous past in colonial India, showing how their diasporic experience is affected and haunted by the memories of a colonial past. History, argues Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2006), is often constructed out of archived memories, and in *The Nowhere Man* Srinivas' memories allow us to visit and revisit the historical archive of the sartorial relations between Indians and Britons over more than thirty years and across two different *loci*, India and Britain.

Keywords

Colonialism, diaspora, dress, Kamala Markandaya, memory, *The Nowhere Man*

The historical dynamics that have brought British and South Asian people into contact span over more than four hundred years. The history of this cultural encounter is a history of multiple dimensions or rather a history composed of multiple interrelated

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histories, whether they be social, political, cultural, religious, linguistic, or even sartorial. Although initially the sartorial dimension might seem the most trivial, the fact remains that, in many ways and to different extents, it reflects all the others. For, either in Britain or the Indian subcontinent, dressing choices and attitudes to distinct forms of dress have been affected by — and can therefore be said to bear testimony to — the social, political, and power synergies that have determined the interaction between Britons and South Asians over the course of history. As Nirad C. Chaudhuri put it in *Culture in the Vanity Bag*,

> clothing and adornment were and continue to be as much an expression of the nature of things Indian, *rerum Indicarum natura* as any other human activity, say, politics, social and economic life, culture as embodied in literature or art could be. (2009: ix)

Anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural studies practitioners have extensively studied the ways in which the dressed body[1] was used as a discursive weapon in the struggle between colonizers and colonized in India.[2] As Emma Tarlo (1996) has detailed in her exhaustive analysis of dress in India, dress became one of the means through which the British acted out imperial ideology and through which nationalist leaders contested it later on.

In their diasporic journeys to Britain, South Asians have brought with them their clothes and a myriad of sartorial memories from the Indian subcontinent: nostalgic memories of the "clothes people […] wor[e] on certain days" (Rushdie, 1992: 11) and of "women washing clothes, their heads covered by saris" (Chaudhuri, 1994: 89), but also bitter memories of "the robes of authority which were colored khaki. Khaki shorts, khaki bush-jacket, a khaki cap" (Markandaya, 1972/1973: 138),[3] and of the reluctance of the British to clad their bodies in Indian clothes, their determination to differentiate themselves from the native population leading Anglo-Indian women to keep "firmly to their corsets well into the twentieth century, even after they had passed out of fashion back in Britain" (Aslam, 2004: 48).[4] Already in Britain, South Asians have been confronted with the need to negotiate between the dressing conventions of the majority community and their own traditional dressing practices, occasionally encountering re-worked versions of the same sartorial controversies and prejudices that they once witnessed in the Indian subcontinent. For, as Bernard S. Cohn has suggested, current disputes over such pieces of clothing as the female veil on British soil can be regarded as a re-enactment of the "battle […] centered on heads and feet" that was previously fought in colonial India from the eighteenth to the twentieth century (1989: 345). Since the beginning of the South Asian presence in Britain back in the seventeenth century (Visram, 2002), South Asian clothes have been adding new layers of meaning to the sartorial map of Britain, sometimes arousing opposing reactions amongst the white British majority. Whereas the regalia of early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Asian travellers in Britain fascinated the white British population of the period,[5] the saris, turbans, and veils worn by later generations of South Asians living temporarily or permanently in post-war Britain were regarded with suspicion, often perceived as visible signs of the "threat" that the new waves of im/migrants were allegedly posing to the national myth of a homogeneous British culture (Cohn, 1989). The vicissitudes of history repeated these fluctuations in

sartorial attitudes during the last decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. While Asian fashions were fetishized in 1960s Britain and became fashionable commodities in the 1990s,[6] since September 11 South Asian clothes — and more particularly South Asian Muslim clothes — have provoked feelings of mistrust amongst those who see their wearers as suspicious-looking and threatening strangers.[7]

South Asian diaspora fictions in Britain, with their often documentary (if not autobiographical) character, have recurrently dramatized many of the sartorial confrontations, negotiations, and creative exchanges resulting from the interaction between Britons and South Asians on British soil. Additionally, some of them have also looked back to "clothing matters" in colonial India (Tarlo, 1996), thus establishing a dialogue between the sartorial past and present of the protagonists. For, as some of the quotations cited in the foregoing paragraphs evince, the politics and poetics of dress in colonial India recur and haunt the sartorial present of the diasporic subject. This is probably nowhere more evident than in Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* (1972), a novel that Susheila Nasta has perceptively and significantly described as being both "historic and haunting" (2002: 182). Like other novels by Markandaya, such as, for instance, *Some Inner Fury* (1955) or *Possession* (1963), *The Nowhere Man* explores the "East-West encounter" (Banerji, 1990: 37) or, more precisely, the "India-Britain relationship" (Parameswaran, 2000: 196). Yet, unlike the rest of Markandaya's narratives, *The Nowhere Man* is the only one that focuses on the South Asian diasporic experience in Britain. It is the aim of this paper to read the clothing subtext that Markandaya once weaved into the fabric of the novel. The contribution argues that in *The Nowhere Man* the motif of clothing is used to connect the characters' diasporic present in Britain with their previous past in colonial India, showing how their diasporic experience is affected and haunted by the memories of their colonial past. History, argues Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2006), is often constructed out of archived memories, and in *The Nowhere Man* Srinivas' memories allow us to visit and revisit the historical archive of sartorial relations between Indians and Britons over more than thirty years and across two different *loci*, India and Britain. This study is part of a broader project — that seeks to demonstrate how South Asian diaspora fictions tend to include sartorial details in relation to social, cultural, religious, political, and ideological issues — and argument that I have already discussed and attempted to illustrate in an earlier article devoted to examining the politics of *hijab* in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (Pereira-Ares, 2013).

As a writer, Markandaya has frequently been pigeonholed into what K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar called "Indo-Anglian writing" (1962), side by side with other authors such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, G. V. Desani, or Attia Hosain.[8] While emphasizing Markandaya's literary contribution to a body of Indian national literature, critics have often overlooked the relevance that her novel *The Nowhere Man* has for a tradition of South Asian diasporic writing in Britain. In line with this, in her study of Markandaya's oeuvre, the Indo-Canadian writer and critic Uma Parameswaran claims that immediately after its publication *The Nowhere Man* fell victim of "a conspiracy of silence. No one wanted to draw attention to its disturbing theme of racial violence in Britain" (2000: 25). By the time the question of racism in post-war Britain began to be extensively problematized in fiction and directly addressed in critical *fora*, Markandaya's novel had been forgotten, relegated to a literary past which few critics looked back to, and which new

voices such as Salman Rushdie's or Hanif Kureishi's were somehow eclipsing. Engaging with *The Nowhere Man* implies, therefore, an archaeological endeavour. It implies digging Markandaya's novel out of the ground where it has recurrently been buried, and thus retrieving a fundamental link to any cartography of the literature of the South Asian diaspora in Britain.[9] For, together with Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985), *The Nowhere Man* is pioneering in offering one of the first fictionalized portrayals of the early twentieth-century South Asian diaspora in Britain.[10]

The Nowhere Man recounts the story of Srinivas, an old Indian man who has lived in Britain for thirty years. During this time, Srinivas loses one of his two sons (Seshu) to the horrors of the Second World War, goes through the death of his wife Vasantha a few years later, and witnesses how his eldest son Laxman grows more and more apart from him. In utter loneliness, Srinivas finds comfort in Mrs. Pickering, an empathetic Englishwoman who takes care of him until he dies at the hands of Fred Fletcher, a young man who embodies and enacts the racist attitudes and fabrications that circulated in 1960s Britain. Deploying Gérard Genette's (1980) narratological terminology, it can be said that the discourse-time in *The Nowhere Man* unfolds within a year, beginning in 1968. Yet, the story-time of the novel spans more than sixty years.[11] Through a series of analepses, not only does the third person narrator recount the trials of Srinivas during his thirty years in London, but also his previous life in India and his serendipitous involvement in certain revolutionary actions against Britain's colonial rule. Srinivas' life story in India plunges the reader into India's colonial history, and more particularly into the prelude to Independence. This allows Markandaya to connect the post-imperial scenario of 1968 Britain and India's colonial past, "show[ing] how the latter affects immigrants in Britain" (Ranasinha, 2007: 155). It is for this reason that Parameswaran proposes reading Markandaya's work both "as socio-literature that articulately and authentically record[s] life as lived during a significant and fascinating period of India's modern history, and as the beginning of what is now known as Diaspora literature" (2000: 15).

Markandaya's self-acknowledged "awareness of history" (Markandaya, 1976: 29) pervades *The Nowhere Man*, a novel that records such historical events as the Amritsar massacre of 1919, the Independence of India in 1947, or Britain's last-ditch effort to regain its imperial power during the Suez War of 1956. It is precisely when Srinivas hears "the reverberations of the Suez crisis" (97) in Britain that the spectres of his colonial past begin to return and haunt his diasporic present. In a clear example of how Markandaya uses the trope of dress to connect past and present, Srinivas imagines Egypt being occupied by the Union Jack and "men in khaki" (97), the same colour that dressed the body of those British officers who assaulted his house back in 1920s India:

> Eight, perhaps ten of them. It seemed more. They filled the room, towered over the occupants with their presence, the bulk of hobnailed boots, their buckled belts. Overwhelmed, in their uniforms. One forgot there were men under the khaki, as one was meant to do […] Men in command were always English, they had grown to expect that. A pink young man, such as he [Srinivas] had often seen playing polo on the maidan, in dusty breeches and shirt […] But a different being now. Contained within an aura, a glittering envelope of subtle intimidation, and invested in the robes of authority which were colored khaki. (138)

In this passage the officers are conspicuously depersonalized. Their portrayal, reduced to a series of sartorial details, shows them as quasi-automatons.[12] Their human side seems to have melted away under the khaki trappings of authority, probably as it was meant to. Their uniform, and especially their bulky boots and belts — items frequently charged with connotative meanings of aggression — intimidate those gathered in the house, whose bodies are metaphorically said to shrink out of fear, to such an extent that their garments no longer fit them, hanging "loosely on their abject frames" (138) instead. While revealing the power of dress to symbolize or even enact authority, the above quoted extract also evinces, in a sort of Fanonian (1952/1986) way, the negative effects that the colonial project had upon both colonizer and colonized.[13] For, when stripped of the robes of authority, the aforementioned officers are not faceless automatons, but rather "pink young m[e]n" who "play[…] polo on the maidan, in dusty breeches and shirt" (138). A similar appreciation was made by the nineteenth-century traveller and writer Lala Baijnath. In a travelogue recording his experiences in Britain, Baijnath commented on how the character of many returned Anglo-Indians had changed "after the official garb was laid aside" (1893: 39). As for Srinivas, his ordeals as a colonial subject have left traumatic memories in him, and the image of men attired in khaki has become a haunting ghost which, like Jacques Derrida's (1994) notion of the spectre, exhibits a liminal status as it exists in a space between absence and presence, past and present, India and Britain.

Srinivas' self-fabricated vision of hordes of men marching over Egypt in khaki uniforms rekindles the memories of his life as a colonial subject in India, memories which had up until then remained dormant, but never altogether disappeared. Traumatic episodes such as the assault on his house in 1920s India have left an invisible scar on Srinivas' psyche, something similar to what Ricoeur calls the "affection-impression" trace — "the passive persistence of first impressions: an event has struck us, touched us, and the affective mark remains in our mind" (2006: 427). The fear and anguish that khaki-coloured clothes continue to instil in Srinivas result from the passive persistence of the traces left by the yoke of colonialism, just as Srinivas' traumatic memories stand for the wounds that afflict India's collective memory: "Blood which came down from generation to generation, holding in solution memories and truths as indestructibly as genes, as demonstrably as slowworms" (99). From Sigmund Freud (1914/1958) to contemporary trauma studies, the process of going through a traumatic experience is often said to recall the compulsion to repeat. In Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*, Mrs. Pickering detects this compulsive need in Srinivas' behaviour: "You keep harping on the past,' she said. 'It crops up time and again, I can always tell when it does because you become a different man. Your past […]'" (103). Srinivas becomes a different man when haunted by the past. He behaves differently, as when he ventures out of the house in his "bare feet" (101), remembering and repeating what he used to do in India. Srinivas' act of going out barefoot represents one of a series of sartorial motifs that serve Markandaya to connect the character's past and present. What is more, and in as much as it goes against British sartorial conventions, Srinivas' decision to walk along British streets without shoes can be interpreted as a symbolic act of defiance and disapproval *vis-à-vis* Britain's return "to peremptory imperial ways" (98) during the Suez crisis, an act that repeats his former revolutionary modes in colonial India. For, as Freud noted, the compulsion to repeat might not always manifest itself

through a verbal rendition of the traumatic event, but rather through attempts to "*act*[…] it out" (1914/1958: 150).

Drawing on Freud's (1914/1958) analysis of mourning, Ricoeur ponders the extent to which private and public expressions of trauma might help to substitute "acting out for the true recollection" (2006: 79), eventually leading to the reconciliation between past and present. In Markandaya's novel, Mrs. Pickering encourages Srinivas to share his past with her, telling him that "life can go rancid if one is haunted too long" (103). Throughout the following seven sections of the novel, the narrative voice takes the reader through Srinivas' life in India. Born in a relatively well-off Brahmin home, Srinivas' wish to pursue a university career in India was abridged when he and his father became timidly involved in revolutionary politics, mostly by association with the members of Vasantha's family. Embroiled in the Nationalist Movement, Vasantha's brothers (all of them lawyers) resigned from their posts as a means of inveighing against the introduction of internment without trial in the 1910s. More importantly for the purpose of the present study, the women of the family initiated a protest through their dressed bodies:

> The women of the family […] made their own small contribution. They kindled a bonfire and burned on it every article of what they thought to be British-manufactured […] Silks and cottons, doilies of Brussels lace and crepe de Chine bought from innocuous Chinese hawkers, were hurled on to the flames as one by one the camphor chests were opened and searched and almirahs ransacked wholesale […] their pretty clothes […] [were substituted for] the lumpish, coarse, off-white homespun they thenceforth wore. (114)

The burning of foreign cloth and Vasantha's embracement of homespun *khadi*[14] are plotted in the text as unequivocal allusions to the *swadeshi* movement of the first decade of the twentieth century, and to Mahatma Gandhi's subsequent defence of *khadi* as part of his non-cooperation politics during India's struggle for independence.[15] Originally, the *swadeshi* movement purported to give impetus to an Indian textile industry that had been destroyed by British self-serving trade policies. Yet, it soon became a political symbol of India's struggle for independence. Where British cloth had been the most conspicuously visible sign of Britain's political and economic domination, *khadi* became the most potent symbol of the idea of a politically and economically free India. "[T]he economics of cloth and the semiotics of cloth" became indissolubly intertwined in the figure of Gandhi who turned *khadi* into the "fabric of India independence" (Bean, 1989: 359), and his dressed body into a palimpsest which transcended "the limitations of language in multilingual and illiterate India" (Bean, 1989: 368). The nationalist leader was a man acutely aware of the communicative potential of dress. Gandhi's *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* records, *inter alia*, his early infatuation with Western clothes — what he once regarded as "the tinsels of 'civilization'" (2001: 117) — the intense debates sparked off by his wearing a turban in South Africa, and eventually the "birth of khadi" (2001: 439). During the struggle for independence, Gandhi did not simply dress his body in *khadi* — firstly in the form of a 45-inch *dhoti* and later on of a short *khadi* loincloth (Tarlo, 1996).[16] He also encouraged Indian people to boycott foreign clothes and adopt the "vow of *swadeshi*" (quoted in Tarlo, 1996: 87), a vow that Vasantha's family took and accepted as a "discipline" and with "accumulating grace"

(114). In contrast to mill-cloth, *khadi* was hand-spun from Indian indigenous yarn. Consequently, in order to clothe India in *khadi* the tradition of hand spinning had to be recuperated. Gandhi promoted the creation of training centres for spinning and weaving (Tarlo, 1996), some of which might have been attended by the character of Vasantha in Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*. For, indeed, Vasantha is said to have "learned to spin, as all patriotic little Indian girls obediently did" (114).

As positions became more and more irreconcilable and Britain's outrages against Indians more and more flagrant, the young Srinivas timidly sided with the revolutionary cause. Paralleling Vasantha's symbolic attempt to banish the British presence from India by burning British-manufactured clothes, Srinivas returned the medal awarded to him in recognition of his brilliant academic results. For, albeit seemingly insignificant in terms of politics, the medal's inscription — "*Georgius V Dei Gra: Britt: Omn: Rex Fid: Def: Ind: Imp*" (116) — bore the mark of "the imperial presence which [was] haunt[ing] them all" (116). Like Srinivas, his father Narayan also made his particular contribution to the nationalist struggle, in his case through "the language of clothes" (Lurie, 1981). For a day, he laid aside the decreed college uniform — consisting of "white duck trousers and black alpaca coat" (126) — and dressed his body in Gandhian clothes: "Khaddar shirt, khaddar dhoti, khaddar cap" (126). Narayan's "revolutionary regalia" (127) was a sporadic sartorial gesture in favour of the nationalist enterprise. Yet, it meant a significant challenge to Narayan himself, a man who had so far put up with manifold affronts on the part of his British colleagues at the Government College: neither were the invitations to the principal's home ever extended to him, nor were his professional merits duly recognized. Consequently, Narayan's turn to *khadi*, however frugal it might have been, did not simply represent a political declaration articulated through his dressed body. In a certain way, it also served the character to redeem his previous pusillanimous attitude. By dressing his body in *khadi*, Srinivas' father was, *silently* and for the first time, making a multilayered statement, a statement as much intended to vindicate India's freedom from colonialism as to advocate social equality. Narayan's and Vasantha's sartorial manoeuvres highlight the political currency of clothes during this particular period of India's history. And Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* proves to be an important source of historical evidence in this respect, following and simultaneously complementing previous fictions that, like Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), also deployed *khadi* as a central motif.[17]

Almost outlaws in colonial India as a result of their revolutionary deeds, Srinivas and Vasantha flee to Britain in the 1930s. Once in the heart of the metropolis, they develop different ways of facing life in the diaspora. Srinivas comes to consider himself "a naturalized Briton" (97–8). He often dresses his body "in the same [presumably Western-style] blue suit" (91), although sometimes he also sports Indian pyjama trousers — "[a] thin body, wearing tight white trousers and a black coat — the tunic-and-tights uniform" (4). Many critics, such as Sunita Rani (2010), for instance, have stated that Srinivas' diasporic experience is dominated by the character's attempts to assimilate into British culture. Of course, Srinivas follows an assimilationist pattern in many respects. Yet, I consider that, in her portrayal of Srinivas, Markandaya goes beyond both the rhetoric of assimilation and the rhetoric of atavism. Adumbrating the now voguish discourses of transculturalism and cosmopolitanism, Srinivas is said to have "los[t] the fetters which tied him to any one country. He was a human being, and as such felt he belonged to a

wider citizenship" (40).[18] He partakes of both his Indian and British background, exceeding the "either/or" in favour not just of a "both", but of a global cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, as we shall see later on, in Markanadaya's novel Srinivas's cosmopolitan vision becomes a frugal utopia. And, characteristic of many early migrant narratives, in Marandaya's *The Nowhere Man* the characters end up irremediably trapped in an either/or discourse.

Unlike Srinivas, Vasantha shies away from any potential identification with Britain, let alone British sartorial mores: "She would, she felt, merely look ridiculous if she painted her face and put on a shirt and stockings, and only a widow, which thankfully she wasn't, would lop off her hair" (35).[19] Srinivas' wife, as the narrator informs us, goes "uncompromised to the day of her death in nine yards of sari and sandals irredeemably Indian in style and cut" (243). Deploying Derrida's notion of the trace,[20] it can be argued that, for Vasantha, her Indian clothes constitute a *trace* of her past, a *trace* that paradoxically makes the past *present* while underlining its unavoidable *absence*. Unlike Srinivas, Vasantha struggles to recreate a lost India "in alien surroundings" (21). Yet, the India she imagines and attempts to recreate is reduced to sartorial *traces, traces* of a *past* that was never *present* as such.[21] Like the Derridean *trace*, Vasantha's Indian dress acts as a "simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself" (Derrida, 1982: 24).

Vasantha's attempt to create and recreate what Salman Rushdie calls "imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (1992: 10) clashes with her son's vehement denial of his Indian background. The novel recurrently emphasizes Laxman's distancing from, and even embarrassment at, his mother whose dressed body becomes an unwanted visible reminder of the Indian "presence/absence" (Hall, 2003: 241) that he seeks to erase from his identity record:

> Laxman could not help looking askance at his […] provincial parents […] and his mother with her bund. And her clothes, like the robes Jesus Christ wore, only worse with the cardigan […] he could not say exactly what he wanted of his mother. But something: anything that she could do that would sink her indistinguishably into England, instead of sticking out like a sore thumb. (35)

Born and bred in Britain, Laxman yearns to be considered British without reservation, and, in his rationale, being British implies a strict compliance with mainstream society.[22] Unsurprisingly therefore, Laxman struggles to make his "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1990)[23] unquestionably British: "His voice, syllables, accent, syntax, *the clothes he wore*, his manners, his style — all would proclaim him to be the same" (269–70; emphasis added). He shows an utter contempt for Indian sartorial conventions, and dresses his body in the latest London fashion: "pointed shoes […] Savile Row suit, and [a] hat from Lock's" (278).[24] In this way, *The Nowhere Man* brings to the fore the generational gap that affects the mutual understanding between different generations that coexist in the same "diaspora space" (Brah, 1996: 204).[25] And, like many other South Asian diaspora fictions — from Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) to Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Ravinder Randhawa's *Hari-Jan* (1992), Meera Syal's *Anita and* Me (1996), or Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003/2007) — Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* uses dress to signal differences between first-and second-generation migrant characters.

When Vasantha dies, Mrs. Pickering moves in with Srinivas, initiating him into many British customs, including "the ways of stockings, which Vasantha […] never wor[e]" (52). Evincing that some form of cultural racism circulates around Indian dress, Srinivas' neighbours welcome the presence of Mrs. Pickering, the woman who, after all, has "redeemed […] [Vasantha's] oddities of dress" (73). In many ways, Mrs. Pickering is, like Srinivas himself, a dispossessed character. Having no relatives and "no particular home to go to" (58), she occupies a marginal position within society. With the death of her husband, not only does she lose the only family she had, but "the money too" (58). For Srinivas, the "tattered condition" (52) of her stockings becomes an irrefutable proof of her pecuniary state, as also does her lemon yellow straw hat. Once an expensive accessory, Mrs. Pickering's lemon straw is disintegrating, as Srinivas notices on seeing the "stalks of straw which had become unravelled from the main weave" (52). Notwithstanding its tattered and worn appearance, Mrs. Pickering clings to her hat desperately, remembering, through the act of wearing it, those days when she too could indulge in "[e]xpensive hats and gloves and shoes" (57). To a certain extent, the lemon straw hat is for Mrs. Pickering what Indian clothes were for Vasantha: a *trace* of the past. But in *The Nowhere Man* no character is even afforded the mere pleasure of living on illusions. Reality is always lurking, waiting for the right moment to inflict a mortal blow. Accordingly, Mrs. Pickering loses her self-construed link to a previous affluent past when her cherished hat is crushed by a group of idle youngsters dressed in a Mod-Rocker style — "brown leather jacket and winkle-picker shoes" (56). Mrs. Pickering becomes the target of some youths' idleness, something which metaphorically evokes her powerlessness, and anticipates what is going to happen to Srinivas himself later on in the narrative.

By the time the novel moves to its late 1960s context, Srinivas has already begun to question his idea of a cosmopolitan citizenship, as well as his previous assertion that Britain has become his adopted country — "'This is my country now' he said" (60). He then remembers the words of his friend Abdul when he once told Srinivas that the British would never let him in: "'[…] First thing that goes wrong it'll [always] be *their* country, and you go back, nigger, to *yours*, to where you came from […]'" (78; emphasis in original). Setting the novel in the 1960s allows Markandaya to dramatize the institutionalized racism of the period as well as its subsequent materialization in the streets. In *The Nowhere Man* Fred Fletcher's racist acts are conspicuously presented and represented as popular materializations of the inflammatory rhetoric that, as Peter Fryer noted, was "institutionalized, legitimatized, and nationalized" (1985: 381) by the State during the post-war period. Indeed, Fred's racist crusade is sparked off when a friend of his blames Britain's immigrant population for the country's economic decline and the rise of unemployment in a passage that recalls the bigoted discourses of such contemporary figures as Duncan Sandy or Enoch Powell:

> One day he found out, from a mate of his who had had it straight from the mouth of his councilor. The blacks were responsible. They came in hordes, occupied all the houses, filled up the hospital beds and their offspring took all the places in schools […] The blacks, of course: but his mate had also spoken of different habits and alien characteristics, so that he had the confused impression that what he had to look out for was a species of ape with black faces. (171)

Using the rhetoric of the so-called "new racism" (Barker, 1981),[26] Fred's friend (who presumably reproduces the words of his councillor) articulates racism along cultural, social, and economic lines. Immigrants are held responsible for swamping the country with "alien" customs, as well as for causing innumerable problems to Britain's social, economic, and health systems. Markandaya's novel emphasizes the way in which the economic difficulties faced by Britain at the time contributed to exacerbating the racial conflict. Unable to secure decent jobs, young men such as Fred, Mike, Joe, and Bill blame immigrants for their misfortunes, harbouring strong feelings of blind hatred that eventually result in violent racist acts. Living on their parents' allowance (as Fred does), these characters turn even more resentful when they observe that many immigrants have managed to make it in Britain: "It's these people… These immigrants […] One day they're poor, living off the rates, the next they could buy us all up" (207).

Commodities reveal differences in affluence, and in *The Nowhere Man* Srinivas' neighbours become all the more jealous when Abdul parks his expensive car at Srinivas' or when Laxman walks around in his stylish clothes. Whereas Laxman sports Savile Row suits, Fred cannot afford to buy a coat in Carnaby Street — one of the epicentres of fashion in 1960s London. While planning what is to become his final attack on Srinivas' house, Fred decides to buy a coat that can visually add to his metamorphosis into "Britain's saviour". Having previously asked his mother for money, he heads to Carnaby Street. Once there, he disappointedly realizes that Carnaby Street has little to offer in exchange for his mother's mean allowance. In his thoughts, Fred sees "nothing for honest citizens like himself, though plenty […] for the foreigners who jammed the place" (288). Meandering through an open-air market in Soho, he finally spots a coat that suits his pocket: "Scarlet, and gold, with loops, and lanyards, and braid, and a broad white buckskin crossbelt" (288). This brightly coloured coat attracts Fred, mostly because, to his mind, it exudes a touch of authority — "It could have been the regimentals of a trooper" (288). The whole incident of Fred in Carnaby Street does not simply establish a contrast between the purchasing power of Fred and Laxman. It also serves to call the reader's attention to Fred's coat, a garment that regains centre stage at the end of the narrative and symbolically connects Srinivas' past and present. That Fred's newly acquired coat exudes authority is reminiscent of "the robes of authority" worn by the British officers who burst into Srinivas' house back in 1920s India. And, indeed, as the latter did, Fred also assaults Srinivas' house (now in Britain), setting the whole building on fire. In an act of poetic justice, Fred is engulfed by the raging flames and dies in the fire. Paradoxically, his coat, initially aimed at protecting and even hardening Fred's persona, becomes the cause of his death as it gets caught in an old boiler and prevents Fred from running away.

Strictly speaking, Srinivas does not die during the fire. Aided by Dr. Radcliffe and Constable Kent, his son Laxman manages to rescue him from the flames. Yet, Srinivas dies shortly afterwards, presumably as a result of the deep shock he undergoes. At the time of his death, Srinivas' physical and psychological condition had deteriorated dramatically. Most notably, he had contracted leprosy, a disease that, as Nasta (2002) has pointed out, metaphorically stands for the damage that British racism had been inflicting on him during his last years.[27] For, before setting his house on fire, Fred torments Srinivas in various ways: he places faeces and a dead mouse on Srinivas' doorstep, and he

repeatedly abuses and beats the old man. Confronted with the fact that, "at the end of [all] these assimilating years", he continues to be considered "an alien" (241), Srinivas makes a powerful sartorial statement some time before dying. He searches for "the thin white mull dhoti" that his mother once slipped in his suitcase, and ties it about him, deftly "arrang[ing] its fluffy white folds" (241–2). Dressing his body in the most Gandhian garb he still preserves, Srinivas reverts to his Indian identity as never before in Britain. Srinivas feels that his previous sartorial attempts to visually mingle with the white British majority have been a mistake. They have distanced him from his Indian past, without allowing him the benefit of being unreservedly considered part of Britain either: "'It was my mistake to imagine. They will not, except physically […] have me enter. I am to be driven outside […] An outsider in England. In actual fact I am, of course, an Indian'" (242–3). In a certain way, it is as if by donning his old dhoti, Srinivas were striving not to become "the nowhere man" of the novel's title. Indeed, at this particular point Srinivas recalls his wife Vasantha and the way in which she always found comfort in a strong, even atavistic, sense of Indian identity.

From another perspective, Srinivas' distinctive appearance can also be interpreted as an act of defiance. For, precisely at the time when racism becomes more rampant, the protagonist of Markandaya's novel decides to make his Indianness all the more visible, without fearing or minding the potential consequences. In fact, Srinivas disregards Mrs. Pickering's warning not to go outside wearing a dhoti — "[i]t is asking for trouble" she adds (244). Mrs. Pickering's commentary suggests that the wearing of Eastern-style clothes might make Srinivas more likely to be racially abused in the heated context of the novel, and ostensibly in the actual period in which the text is set. Speaking from a post-9/11 and post-7/7 context, it might be worth establishing a comparison between the 1960s present of Markandaya's novel and what, in relation to the time setting of the text, constitutes the future. Similarly to what occurs in *The Nowhere Man*, many post-9/11 and post-7/7 diasporic narratives portray characters for whom the wearing of South Asian clothes has turned into a perilous undertaking, given the generalized suspiciousness developed after September 11. Some female characters wearing the *hijab* become the target of "many hostile looks" (Kureishi, 2009: 481); others, out of fear, relinquish their Muslim clothes — "Sorupa's daughter was the first, but not the only one. Walking in the street […] she had her hijab pulled off" (Ali, 2003/2007: 368); and others, resembling what Srinivas does at the end of *The Nowhere Man*, change their previous appearance in order to make their cultural and/or religious identity more visible — "I [Changez] had not shaved my two-week-old beard. It was, perhaps, a form of protest on my part, a symbol of my identity" (Hamid, 2007: 148).

Going back to *The Nowhere Man*, it is almost impossible to overlook the parallelism that Markandaya draws between Srinivas' act of wearing a dhoti in the postcolonial context of 1960s Britain and Narayan's revolutionary manoeuvre of donning *khadi* in colonial India, a parallelism that clearly illustrates how the sartorial subtext in *The Nowhere Man* connects the past and the present of the characters. Albeit in different *chronotopoi*, these two men, who once believed in the possibility of an "and", are forced to stick to one part of the either/or binary. Srinivas' and Narayan's turn to characteristically Indian clothes might be interpreted as a liberating act in as much as it frees the characters from the trappings of assimilation. Notwithstanding, Narayan and, more particularly, Srinivas

give the impression of feeling as much liberated as regretful, regretful because their Indian and British backgrounds have become, or have been made to become, irreconcilable. Srinivas fled from India thinking that in Britain the grudges forged by colonialism would become a matter of the past. But in Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* history repeats itself, bringing the past to the present and, with it, "specters of dread" (304). In tune with other early post-war migrant narratives such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), or Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985), in Markandaya's novel the attempts of the migrant characters to live in the host society are constantly boycotted, and their prospects are reduced either to a return to their original homeland, to an existence doomed to alienation, or ultimately, as happens in the case of Srinivas, to death.

Deploying a lexicon of haunting and spectrality, Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* offers a bleak portrayal of the migrant experience, where the postcolonial repeats the colonial, where the diasporic present of the characters is haunted by the memories of their colonial past. The clothing subtext of the novel plays, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the foregoing lines, a central role in articulating this haunting and spectral side of the novel. In *The Nowhere Man* Markandaya threads a network of sartorial associations into an almost symbolic system that connects the past and the present, the colonial and the postcolonial, India and Britain. Srinivas' bitter memories of khaki garments in colonial India return when he envisions hordes of men in khaki marching over Egypt; the trooper-looking coat that Fred sports when he assaults Srinivas house in Britain is reminiscent of the clothes of authority worn by the British officers that burst into Srinivas' home in India; and Narayan's act of dressing his body in *khadi* in colonial India is similarly re-enacted by his son Srinivas in postcolonial Britain. While providing a fictional, yet historically well-informed, account of sartorial matters in colonial India and postcolonial Britain, Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* invites us to reflect upon the ways in which the past repeats itself in the present, as well as upon the ways in which the present can affect the perception of the past. It invites us to consider Edward Said's words when he stated that drawing connections "between the past and the present, between imperializer and imperialized, between culture and imperialism" conveys "a more urgent sense of the interdependence between things" (1994: 72).

Funding

This contribution is part of a broader study that seeks to examine representations of the dressed body in the literature of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. The study has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education (FPU, AP2010-4490).

Notes

1. My use of the term "dressed body" is taken from the work of sociologist Joanne Entwistle (2000; 2001) who has strongly advocated the need to study body and dress as an integrated whole.
2. See, for instance, Bernard S. Cohn (1989), Susan S. Bean (1989), Emma Tarlo (1996), C. A. Bayly (1986), or Nira Wickramasinghe (2003).
3. This is an allusion to the uniform worn by British military officers at the time. In 1848 Sir Harry Bunett Lumsden introduced khaki as the new colour for military uniforms. Etymologically

from the Hindustani word for dust, khaki began to substitute red as the official colour for the British Army uniform. For more information, see Major Donovan Jackson (1940) or Byron Farwell (1989). All subsequent references are to the 1973 edition of *The Nowhere Man* and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

4. This quotation taken from Nadeem Aslam's (2004) *Maps for Lost Lovers* evokes a highly documented sartorial phenomenon. Once imperial ideology began to be established in colonial India, the British enforced rigid codes of dress to differentiate themselves from, and establish authority over, the native population. As Emma Tarlo explains, by the nineteenth century "[t]he fact that some Indian men were coming to look increasingly like Europeans actually had the effect of encouraging the British to make their own sense of sartorial correctness more rigid. In so doing they continually made their clothes and their accompanying rituals less accessible to the Indian élite. They were trying to escape 'imitation'" (1996: 39).
5. Certain eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century South Asian sojourners in Britain left for posterity written accounts of an invaluable — yet highly disregarded — interest. Some of the most well-known are probably S. D. Mahomet's *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794), T. N. Mukharji's *A Visit to Europe* (1889) or B. M. Malabari's *The Indian Eye on English Life* (1893), although the list is much longer. In these accounts, these travellers documented their permanent or transient stays in Britain and they recorded, almost invariably, how their Eastern attires became a source of fascination to the Britons. To give just some examples, Jehangeer Nowrojee and Hirjeebhoy Merwanjee noted that their "Eastern costume[s] created quite a sensation" (1841: 91); and Bhagvat Sinh Jee confided that "it was pleasing to be told that the peculiarity of my dress made me for a time the cynosure of all eyes" (1886: 29).
6. For more information, see Jennifer Craik (1994), Sandra Niessen, Ann Marie Leshkowich and Carla Jones (2003), or Parminder Bhachu (2004).
7. In this respect, see Saied Reza Ameli and Arzu Merali (2006) as well as Emma Tarlo (2010). Tarlo, for instance, has signalled that, in post-9/11 Britain, "the frequency of incidents of verbal and physical abuse directed at Muslim women in Britain is directly linked to the degree to which they cover, with those wearing face veils reporting high levels of regular abuse" (2010: 10).
8. See, for instance, Madhusudan Prasad (1984), Niroj Banerji (1990), Prem Kumar (1987), John Peter Joseph (2009), Sunita Rani (2010), or G. N. Parthasarthi (2013).
9. Uma Parameswaran's *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: Kamala Markandaya* (2000), Susheila Nasta's *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in* Britain (2002), and Ruvani Ranasinha's *South Asian Writers in Twentieth-Century Britain: Culture in Translation* (2007) are arguably some of the critical works that have more significantly contributed to re-locating Markandaya's oeuvre — and in particular her novel *The Nowhere Man* — within a genealogy of South Asian diaspora writers in Britain.
10. Note that earlier novels such as, for instance, George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) or Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) are, strictly speaking, not focused on the South Asian diasporic experience, but rather on the Caribbean diaspora.
11. In *Writers of the Indian Diaspora: Kamala Markandaya*, Uma Parameswaran provides a detailed account of the time setting in Kamala's *The Nowhere Man*: "The novel starts in 1968 and ends a year or so later. Srinivas born 1900; Vasantha born 1907; Police search house for Vasudev [in colonial India] […] circa 1920; Srinivas and Vasantha marry: 1920 or 1921; Srinivas leaves for England, Vasantha follows; Laxman born 1922 or 1923; Seshu born 1923 or 1924; Vasantha dies 1948 or 1949; Srinivas meets Mrs. Pickering four months later; Mrs. Pickering moves in circa 1950; they sublet first and second floors in 1965" (2000: 189).
12. It is worth mentioning that this motif of depersonalizing the aggressors is also deployed in a number of diaspora fictions that portray racist attacks perpetrated by certain post-war

British subcultures such as the Teddy Boys or Skinheads. To give just some examples, in V. S. Naipaul's *Half a Life* the allusion to some "mock-Edwardian clothes" (2002: 109) is metonymically used to evoke a group of Teddy Boys (without them being literally mentioned or described); and at a given point in Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* the character of Tania suggests that verbal abuses might be as painful as "a well-aimed Doc Marten" (2000: 145), a reference to the Skinheads' characteristic footwear in the 1960s. As occurs in Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*, in these novels the aggressors are depersonalized, and the emphasis on their clothes is suggestive of the fear that the mere sight of their dressed bodies might have instilled in those who used to be their victims.

13. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, first published in 1952, Frantz Fanon provided a detailed exploration of the psychological effects of colonialism. Although mainly focusing on the plight of the colonized, Fanon's work showed how cruel and dehumanizing the colonial encounter was for both sides involved. As Fanon suggested, in one way or another, both the colonizer and the colonized became slaves to the colonial project: "The Negro enslaved by his [complex of] inferiority, the white man enslaved by his [complex of] superiority" (1952/1986: 43).
14. *Khadi*, also known as *khaddar*, refers to hand-spun, hand-woven cloth made out of indigenous Indian yarn.
15. For a detailed discussion of the *swadeshi* movement and Gandhi's defence of *khadi*, see C. A. Bayly (1986), Susan S. Bean (1989), Bernard S. Cohn (1989), Emma Tarlo (1996), Lisa Trevedi (2003), or Peter Gonsalves (2010; 2012), amongst others.
16. Gandhi sported a loincloth when Winston Churchill referred to him as "a half-naked fakir", an epithet recalled by the character of Mr. Kumar in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996/1997: 180) and Dev in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1985/1999: 164).
17. Meeta Chatterjee has carried out an interesting analysis of Rao's exploration of *khadi* in "Khadi: The Fabric of the Nation in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*" (2000).
18. Note the parallelism between this quotation and Mikhail Epstein's words on "transculture": "Too many people who leave the geographical location of their culture nevertheless remain, for the rest of their lives, prisoners of its language and traditions. Other migrants, having turned their back on their past, become prisoners of a newly acquired culture. Only a small number of people, when acceding to two or several cultures, succeed in integrating them and thus are able to keep their freedom from any of them" (2009: 330).
19. In Markandaya's novel the sartorial differences between Srinivas and Vasantha seem to stem from the characters' distinct identity positionings. Yet, we cannot disregard the fact that gender might play an important part in their different approaches to clothing. As scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (1993) have noted, South Asian women (especially from the older generations) tend to experience more difficulties when it comes to fluctuating between Eastern and Western sartorial paradigms, mostly as a result of patriarchal pressures and ideas. South Asian diaspora fictions have frequently dramatized this issue. To give just some examples, in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), Jeeta wears a *salwaar kameez*, whereas her husband Anwar alternates between the wearing of Asian clothes at home, and the donning of Western-style suits when in the public sphere; and in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003/2007) Nazneen and Chanu repeat Jeeta's and Anwar's sartorial behaviours, respectively.
20. In works such as *Of Grammatology* (1976) Derrida uses the notion of "trace" to envisage a way out of the enclosure imposed by the metaphysics of presence. Derrida does not provide a precise definition of the concept of "trace". What is more, he denies the possibility of such a project. Notwithstanding, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in the preface to *Of Grammatology*, it could be said that Derrida deploys the notion of "trace" to refer to "the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present" (1976: xvii).

21. In a letter to Ruvani Ranasinha, Meera Syal comments that first-generation migrants are often "over-anxious to preserve what they remember as the homeland", becoming "more traditional than their counterparts at 'home'" (quoted in Ranasinha, 2007: 224); and in her screenplay *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), this temporal and spatial disruption is sagely dramatized when Rekha, an Indian woman on a visit to Britain, confronts the other female characters for clinging to outdated sartorial versions of India: "'Home? What home? When was the last time you went home? Look at you, your clothes, the way you think […] You're all twenty years out of date'" (quoted in Ranasinha, 2007: 225).
22. Contrarily — and evidencing the changes in a pattern of South Asian diaspora writing in Britain — later novels such as Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) or Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) feature second-generation migrant characters who, in one way or another, reconcile their Indian and British backgrounds. What is more, not only do these characters pose a challenge to the either/or paradigm, but they also envisage and vindicate new forms of being British and Asian. Moving forward in time, in other narratives such as Atima Srivastava's *Looking for Maya* (1999) or Nirphal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism* (2006), the move from an "or" to an "and" has already been accomplished, to the extent that the characters' British-Asian identity is no longer problematized.
23. Pierre Bourdieu defines the concept of the "habitus" as "a system of durable, transportable dispositions" (1990: 53), which include gestures, postures, and certainly ways of dressing.
24. Both Laxman's Savile Row suit and Lock's hat are designed by traditional British brands. The history of Lock's hats goes as far back as the seventeenth century. As for the tailors of Savile Row, they were for a long time "the traditional, typically conservative arbiters of British upper-class, male dress style" (Polhemus, 1994: 33), and during the 1950s and 1960s their lines of menswear became extremely popular amongst certain sections of Britain's young population.
25. Avtar Brah uses the notion of "diaspora space" to allude to the space inhabited "not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous" (1996: 209).
26. The term "new racism" was coined by Martin Barker (1981) to refer to a particular form of racism that emerged in 1960s Britain, following the success of Powellism (from Enoch Powell) and its later institutionalization through the politics of Margaret Thatcher. The new racism disavowed the idea of biological superiority or inferiority on which previous forms of racism had been based, deploying cultural differences as the basis for excluding outsiders. To a certain extent, Barker's notion of "new racism" bears comparison to what Etienne Balibar calls "*differentialist* racism", that is, "a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences" (1991: 21; emphasis in original); or to what Tariq Modood refers to as "cultural racism" *vis-à-vis* "biological racism" (2000).
27. Having his hands covered by the marks of leprosy, Srinivas tries to hide them under a pair of "[l]emon-yellow" gloves (203). Srinivas' lemon-yellow gloves establish a symbolic connection with Mrs. Pickering's straw hat, which was also lemon coloured. Both Mrs. Pickering and Srinivas use these two pieces of clothing to disguise something — poverty in Mrs. Pickering's case and leprosy in Srinivas'. Yet, the bright colour of these items only serves to highlight what the characters try to hide.

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