

Moving material: (Un)making migration history through dance

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Abstract

In September 2015, two dancers of Indian heritage and the product of multiple diasporas, Sooraj Subramaniam and Shailesh Bahoran, premiered their collaborative dance venture, *Material Men*, at London's Southbank Centre. Wrapped in an orange-gold silk sari that was placenta, straitjacket, security blanket, and creative inspiration, these Siamese twins conjoined by history leapt, struggled, and contorted their bodies in a confrontation with themselves, their ancestors, their pasts, presents and futures—indeed time itself.

This material initiated a movement-dialogue between their respective dance styles—the Indian bharatanatyam for Subramaniam, and the Afro-diasporic hip-hop for Bahoran. For Bahoran, who lives in the Netherlands, this collaboration continued his dance interventions into the history of Indian labour migrations in the 19th century. In February 2015, I had viewed at the Hague his choreographic composition, *'Lalla Rookh'*, where Afro-diasporic street dance styles, Indian religious rituals, and, once again, the sari, together commemorated) the journey of the first Indian labourers to Surinam (Dutch Guyana) on the ship *Lalla Rookh* in (DATE).

My paper will analyse Bahoran's oeuvre to argue for an '(un) making' of history through dance, through which may be linked the African and Indian diasporas that empire and capitalism triggered in waves—the diasporas from the African continent instigated by slavery, and the subsequent diasporas from the Indian subcontinent instigated by indentured labour. Bahoran reveals the universal address of the language of hip-hop and creates new solidarities between diasporic cultures that, even though embedded in the same national and transnational spaces, don't often collaborate or dialogue—except through dance. Through the moving material of dance, aided by the sari as the female Indian migrant's 'shirt on his back', we experience a recuperative and rare meeting of histories, diasporas, gendered stories, and the Atlantic and Indian oceans.