7 “Killing with kindness”

Political icons, socio-cultural victims: visual coloniality of the Siddis of Karnataka, India

Sayan Dey

Introduction

“Look at the black ugly man! Look at his skin, it’s so dirty! Look at his hair, it’s so burnt!”

(Lost Tribe of Africa 2018)

This is how Ramnath Siddi, a social activist from the Siddi community, who belongs to the Karwar district of Karnataka, is habitually ridiculed by the local passersby when he leaves his village and goes to the city for work. Juje Jackie Harnodkar Siddi, who also belongs to the Siddi community of Karwar district and is a central government worker in Mumbai, undergoes a similar experience on a daily basis. He says, ‘If I go 50 km from here I am as good as a foreigner. I am branded a tourist. When I travel in trains and buses I encounter a lot of racism’ (*Siddis: In It For The Long Run* 2016). These racial abuses are underpinned with captioned photographs and documentaries that portray them through the colonial lens as ‘savages, slaves and barbarians’ (Conklin 1997: 13–14). On the one hand, these documentaries and photographs have ‘scientific pretensions informed by the well-ingrained dictum of bourgeoisie culture that somehow “photos don’t lie”’ (Gordon 1997: 6) and on the other hand, the captions successfully reproduce the epistemic values of British colonisation. It gets thoroughly reflected through the ways in which the Siddi people are documented, photographed and captioned in the contemporary era. For instance, let us look into Figure 7.2.

In the above collage, C.L. Kamat has tried to project the Siddi people of Karnataka as “exotic and pristine primitives” (Gordon 3) through specifically focusing (except Figures 7.1 and 7.2) on the facial structures, the facial expressions and the hair patterns of the Siddi people of Karnataka and stereotypically captioning them as “Indians of African Origin”. In another image, Kamat once again focuses on the facial structure and the hair pattern of a middle-aged Siddi woman and captions the photograph as “Hardworking Siddi Woman”. Let us look into Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.1 Political icons, socio-cultural victims. Copyright: Sayan Dey.

Figure 7.2 Indians of African origin. Copyright: C.L. Kamat.

Figure 7.3 Hardworking Siddi woman. Copyright: C.L. Kamat.

Apparently, the appearance of this picture does not convey any aspect of her being hardworking, but the caption suggests what should be ‘attended and in what light this aspect ... is to be seen’ (Goffman 1979: 14). Captions impregnate a photograph with ‘a culture, morality and an imagination’ (Barthes 1985: 54). This is how a visual narrative is safeguarded by the colonially engineered colossus of “imagicides” and “ontocides”.¹ Imagicides and ontocides assist the photographers in ‘authenticating the truth claims made for individual photographs, especially within the emerging mass media’ like social networking sites, newspaper/tabloid/magazine articles and blog archives (Sekula 1992: 374). It can be prominently observed through the photographic projection of the Siddi community in India. With respect to these arguments, this chapter explores the intentions, processes and the impact of visual coloniality that the Siddi community of Karnataka and Gujarat habitually encounters in the contemporary era. This chapter also analyses the various initiatives that the Siddis have adopted to decolonise their visually colonised socio-cultural narratives.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section, ‘Socio-historical origin of the Siddi community in India: an overview’, reflects upon the origin of the Siddi community in India and due to lack of sufficient written documents, the socio-historical stories are mostly based on the oral narratives of the Siddis. The second section titled “Political icons/socio-cultural victims: the irony of the colonial gaze” argues how the individuals/institutions in collaboration with the mass media have systematically

curated an archive of social, cultural, political and racial segregation of the Siddi community through documentaries, photographs and captions. The third section, “Conclusion: decolonising the colonial gaze through a two-way resistance”, makes an effort to establish a framework of two-way resistance: “Visual Sovereignty” and “A Decolonial Archival Turn”, in order to dismantle the colonised and de-contextualised myopic vision of interpreting the Siddis in India and establish de-hierarchised, decolonised and pluriversalised hypermetropic spaces of analysing them within the contexts of their respective socio-historical experiences.

Socio-historical origin of the Siddi community in India: an overview

It is usually believed that the Siddis originated from the Bantu people of eastern Africa and they arrived in India over two phases. The first phase was during the seventh century when the Arabs brought them as slaves to Gujarat. The second phase of their arrival took place around sixteenth century when the Portuguese arrived in Goa from eastern Africa and brought the Siddi people as slaves (Harris 1971: 56). The etymological origin of the term ‘Siddi’ is highly argumentative in nature. According to Alice Albinia, the word ‘Siddi’ derives from the Arabic word ‘Sahibi’ and it is used as a mark of respect in East Africa (Albinia 2012: 74). Vijay Prashad argues that the term “Siddi” has been derived from the Arabic word “Sayyid” and this title was ‘borne by the captains of the Arab vessels that first brought Siddi settlers to India’ (2002: 108). With the passage of time, the term “Siddi” was also used to refer to a multiracial community in India that evolved through the amalgamation of Siddis, Indians and Portuguese people (Harris 1971: 58).

As the first group of Siddis arrived with Arab invaders at Bharuch Port, Gujarat, some of them escaped into the nearby forests of Gujarat and some of them crossed into the forest lands of Karnataka. Gradually, they established their settlements in these forests (Mitra 2018). Those Siddis who could not escape from enslavement served the Arabs in various capacities. Though, initially, they ‘were used as domestic slaves by wealthy Arab families’ (Padma 2019), but, with the passage of time, they were employed ‘as soldiers, palace guards [and] bodyguards’ (Sylviane A Diouf quoted in Vikas Pandey 2014) because they ‘were generally deemed more trustworthy than indigenous people to serve in those capacities’ (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 2011). Apart from these slaves, Mahmood Mamdani mentions that many Siddis also independently arrived in India as “traders” and “armed African sailors” (2013: 9). In the thirteenth century, many slaves successfully revolted against their masters, disentangled themselves from enslavement and rose through the ranks to become “generals, admirals and administrators” (Diouf quoted in Vikas Pandey 2014). For instance, an Abyssinian slave named Jamal-ud-Din Yakut, who served Razia Sultan (the

daughter and heir to Shams ud-Din Iltutmish of Mamluk Dynasty), was conferred with the title “Amir al-Umara” (Amir of Amirs), which was primarily reserved for Turkic nobles (Keay 2011: 141). He is believed to be the first Siddi to occupy a prominent position in India. In the sixteenth century, another Abyssinian slave named Malik Ambar (1548–1626) gained a reputation as a military tactician (Ali 2011). After he freed himself from captivity, he was widely celebrated among the other Siddi slaves, whom he motivated to join his army and resist the invasion of the Mughals in the Deccan. His fame and power was a major threat to the Mughal emperors.

Around the fifteenth century, Malik Ambar, along with his fellow, Sidi Ambar the Little (1621–1642), pushed ahead to establish a Siddi family dynasty in the nearby princely state of Janjira (McLeod 2008: 256) and placed Sidi Ambar on the throne. Around the nineteenth century, the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad, named Mahboob Ali Khan (1866–1911), recruited around 300 Siddis and founded the African Cavalry Guards (Haviland 2003). By the time when these Siddis have almost unshackled themselves from slavery and have reached significant socio-cultural positions in India, especially in Gujarat and Hyderabad, the second group of Siddi people was brought to India as slaves by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. According to Mark Pinto, an anthropologist based in Goa, ‘They were brought to work as domestic slaves in Goa from Mozambique in Africa, which was also a Portuguese colony at the time’ (as quoted in Bhat 2019). After slavery was abolished in all the Portuguese colonies across the world in 1869, the Siddis ‘migrated to the forest areas of Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra’ (Bhat 2019).

After India’s independence in the year 1947, certain caste and communal groups in India,² who experienced severe colonial exploitation, were granted “special privileges” [Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs)]. The special privileges led to the “validation” and “non-validation” of certain castes, sub-castes and communities, and their social, cultural, political and economic practices. In a similar manner, the Siddis were identified as Scheduled Tribes. Officially, they were granted reservations in education and job sectors across the country, but in reality they have been socio-culturally racialised, ghettoised and museumified.³ In spite of residing in India for several centuries, the Siddis are treated like socio-cultural outsiders. At present, the Siddis reside around the forest regions of Karnataka and Gujarat. As a result, most of them have hardly any access to schools, colleges and jobs. A few of them who manage to go to the city in search of education and jobs are regularly victimised by racial and cultural abuses. For instance, the habitual experiences of Ramnath Siddi and Juje Jackie Harnodkar Siddi which have already been shared at the beginning of this chapter. The “Siddis” are often referred to as “Hafsis” as well. The term “Hafsi” is a racial abuse which can be roughly translated as “half-humans” (Segal 2002: 84). Besides these challenges, the government and the media have been treating the community as a museum artifact. These, all

together, nurtured a pan-Indian project of systemic, epistemic and ontological assimilation/violation of the Siddis within the colonially indoctrinated storehouses of social, cultural and racial ideologies. The ideologies consistently manufacture frameworks of segregations. The storehouses are strictly monitored by the following components: distorted government reports, half-baked interpretations by media houses, misinterpretations through personal blogs and stereotyped, exoticised and captioned photographs, which iconise the community on the one side and victimises them on the other. With respect to the thematic relevance of this chapter, the following section will analyse how documentaries and photographs of the Siddis that are captured and captioned by the tourists (Indians as well as foreigners), non-Siddi locals, government officials and the media celebrate the racially conceptualised structures of the “colonial gaze” (Eeden 2004: 20).

Political icons/socio-cultural victims: the irony [of the colonial gaze]

In the documentary *The Siddis: India's Forgotten Africans* (2017), during a conversation with a media representative from the United Nations, Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, India's permanent representative to the United Nations, reveals that the Siddis of Gujarat have ‘access to education in a preferential manner. They also have access to jobs in a preferential manner’ (United Nations). But Imran Siddi argues: ‘We get help from the government, but the help does not reach us’ (United Nations). The documentary, through dresses, facial expressions, living standards and the body languages of the Siddis, makes an effort to show how the Siddis in Gujarat are prospering through various socio-economic initiatives of the Indian government which recognised them as a ‘special tribe and granted them individual rights’ (United Nations 2017). But, with respect to Imran's experiences, the application of the rights is highly questionable and most of the Siddis in Gujarat live in utter social, cultural and economic crisis. Another Siddi man from the Siddi community in Jamnagar, Gujarat argues that they are deprived of education. He says: ‘The only problem we are having is that kids are not getting access to education’ (visualpoet1, *Siddis of Jamnagar* 2018). The physically and socio-culturally isolated existence of the Siddi community also gets reflected in the Jambur village of Gujarat. They live in broken mud houses and have no access to education and job. According to a local activist from Jambur, the education status of the Siddi people is very poor (visualpoet1, *Jambur: The African Village* 2018). The Siddi community in Talala, another village in Gujarat, also undergoes an identical experience (visualpoet1, *The Siddis/Habshis (African Indian) community in TALALA* 2018). These experiences of the Siddis in different parts of Gujarat unfold the contradiction between the government assurances and its visual portrayal by the media on the one side and the habitual existential sufferings of the Siddis on the other.

In a similar manner, a documentary titled *RSTV Documentary – Siddis of Karnataka* (2017) socio-politically iconises the community on the side and culturally victimises the community on the other. In the documentary, R.V. Deshpande, In-charge District Minister, Government of Karnataka, proudly applauds the contributions of the central and state government toward the “development” and “welfare” of the Siddis in Karnataka. He says:

I am grateful to the government and state government that they have been declared scheduled tribes now. Many schemes are being implemented for them. *I am happy to tell you that most of them have their houses and they are going to schools and colleges.* Slowly we are also finding postgraduates and lawyers coming out of them. So, the state government is totally committed to the welfare of the Siddis. *The most important thing is that under the Government of India Tribal Act we are giving them forest rights so that they can cultivate the forest lands and all.*

[(my italics) Rajya Sabha TV]

Through a narrator from the media department of the Indian government, the documentary tries to authenticate a “false narrative” by showing how the Siddis as farmers, teachers and leaders wish to desert their indigenous lifestyles and aspire to be a part of the socio-cultural mainframe. The documentary also tries to project the supportiveness of the Siddis for the various development projects of the government by sharing how much they have “advanced” in tune with the “modern Indian society” (also read as Western/colonial/modern Indian society). I argue the portrayal of the Siddis in the documentary as a false narrative because the Siddi people, for whom these “developmental initiatives” are packaged and advertised, have different experiences to share. For instance, Ramnath Siddi reflects:

Although we live in the forest, Siddis have on-going disputes for land rights. Our local villagers are trying to force Siddis to move out. Even though we have government papers to prove land ownership, some of our neighbors do not want Siddis living near them. As a social worker, I fight to protect Siddis from land grabbing cases.

(National Geographic 2018)

The villagers believe that because the Government of India has initiated special housing schemes for the Siddis in Karnataka, they should move out of their natural habitat and hand it over to the encroaching villagers. Emmanuel Siddi, another social worker from the Siddi community of Wada district in Karnataka, unveils how the Siddis face caste, class, religious and economic marginalisation on a regular basis. He laments that in the contemporary era, their community is socio-culturally segregated through caste, religion and untouchability. ‘We have to stay like a frog in a well’ (Emmanuel Siddi, *African Indian*, visualpoet1 2018). Juje Siddi also observes

how on the one hand the central and the state governments have granted them rights to the forest lands and on the other hand how these rights are violated by the local villagers (101 India 2016). The headman of the Siddi village of Gadoli in Karnataka talks about the socio-economic crisis that they face today. He says: ‘We have been poor for the last 300 years and we are still poor’ (Nzwamba 2013).

Through these examples, the sufferings of the Siddi community in different parts of Gujarat and Karnataka reflect upon how they are politically “iconised” and socio-culturally “victimised” by the colonial gaze of authentic racialised, marginalised and exoticised visual templates of violence in post-colonial India. The visual templates of violence are systematically organised through documentaries and captioned photographs. Till now, in this section, I have explored a few documentaries and analysed the various ways through which the documentaries have been visually colonising the Siddi community in contemporary India. In the following part of this section, I will be analysing various captioned photographs of the Siddis and the roles that the photographs play toward preserving and promoting visual coloniality.

Prior to the analysis of the photographs, it is necessary to understand the socio-cultural, political and economic intentions behind the visual portrayals of the Siddi community through various media. Therefore, it is also crucial to locate the time period from which the history, society and culture of the Siddis in India were documented. The documentation process flagged off with the initiation of the Special Areas Games Project (from now on SAGP) in 1987, just two years before the general elections in India. During the late 1980s, as the general election was approaching, the central government of India came up with multiple development schemes for the socio-economically backward tribal communities in India and one of them was SAGP for the Siddis in Gujarat and Karnataka. This is why, before the 1980s, documentation and archives about the Siddi community in India cannot be found. The self-centred political and racial motives behind the conceptualisation and discontinuity of the SAGP scheme also objectify why the documentaries and captioned photographs falsely project the Siddis as a socio-economically advancing and a culturally prosperous community. So, before we look into the various photographs of the Siddi community that have been captured since the 1980s, let us briefly explore how the SAGP project was developed and under what circumstances it was shut down.

During the sports minister-ship of Margaret Alva, the SAGP was launched and was implemented in Karnataka and Gujarat. The Sports of Authority of India (from now on SAI) felt that ‘because of their African lineage, their natural athleticism could be used to win medals for India at world sports competitions’ (Plummer 2017). So, in 1988, Sunder Raju, the athletics coach, along with other officials from SAI travelled to Gujarat and Karnataka to scout young Siddis for trials and training. During the trials, several Siddi teenagers were selected and taken to different SAI training centres across the country (Menon 1988). The initiative started delivering prompt and

optimistic results as several Siddi athletes started proving their worth in different national, state and local competitions (101India 2016). But, in the year 1992, without any concrete reason, the project was surprisingly called off, hostels were shut down and all the Siddis were sent back. With the passage of time, it was realised that under the mask of “tribal development initiatives”, the SAGP was nothing more than a failed experiment with ‘genetic supremacy theory’ (Janardhan and Pathak 2013). In 2017, during an interview, Juje Siddi, who was a victim of this racially and genetically violent project, said that the ‘government started (this) as (a) trial...because many experiments were done’ during that time (as quoted in Maturkar 2017). Apparently, this project proved to be a complete failure. But, the central government’s colonially structured racialised schemes of “pseudo-development”, which was the original objective of this project, received further impetus through the visual catalogs of systemically and epistemically violent photographs. These photographs continue to racially stereotype and exoticise the community even today. For example, the book of photographs by Ketaki Sheth titled *A Certain Grace Sidi: The Indians of African Descent*, which claims to be a ‘fruitful journey of knowing them [the Siddis] and their lifestyle’ (Sheth quoted in IANS ‘Siddis: Little Known Indians’ 2013), captures and captions the Siddis of Karnataka and Gujarat in an exotic and stereotypical manner. Let us analyse some of those photographs:

Figure 7.4 Ramamma laughs when she is asked if she is pregnant with her first child. It is actually her fourth. Copyright: Ketaki Sheth/courtesy Photoink.

Figure 7.5 Indians of African descent. Image Copyright: Ketaki Sheth/courtesy Photoink.

Figure 7.6 A beautiful Siddi woman. Copyright: Ketaki Sheth/courtesy Photoink.

Figure 7.7 Siddi in India. Copyright: Ketaki Sheth/courtesy Photoink.

With respect to capturing the daily lifestyle of the Siddis, in Figure 7.4 Ketaki Sheth portrays a laughing Siddi woman from Gujarat who is pregnant. Figure 7.5 focuses on two smiling young Siddi women. Figure 7.6 shows a decked up Siddi woman. Figure 7.7 upholds two Siddi kids in a playful mood. All these photographs present the Siddis as a very joyful community that has successfully “mainstreamed” and “modernised” themselves within the socio-cultural mainframe of contemporary India. Apart from these photographs, Ketaki Sheth has captured and captioned several other photographs like Siddis dressed in modern/western attires, Siddi children playing with modern/western toys, etc. While sharing her experience with IANS, Sheth philosophised:

For me, it was an accidental discovery, there are many who don’t know about them. But, it is great to see *how beautifully they have embraced* the local language, drinks, food and religion, including Sufism, Hinduism and Christianity, without giving up their African traditions.

[my italics] as quoted in ‘Siddis: Little Known Indians’ 2013]

This observation enfranchises the “colonial/racial ordering” of socio-cultural practices in which the indigenous Bantu associations of the Siddis are identified as a secondary component with respect to the conformist ideologies of the mainframe Indian social structure. It gets thoroughly reflected through the manner in which she has photographed the Siddis. Out of all

the photographs, very few portray the indigenous African practices and also they are limited to dance and music (Dhammam⁴). Most of her photographs reproduce the racial and cultural conventions, which were once practiced by the Arab and Portuguese colonisers against the Siddis. In addition to Sheth's project, several media articles and blogs also visually colonise the community in a similar pattern. It is very much evident in the article "India's African Keeps Ancient Customs Alive" (2013), which was e-paper named *Dawn*. Though the photographs⁵ in the article talks about the African cultures and traditions (specifically Bantu cultures and traditions of eastern Africa) that are practiced by the Siddis, yet the photographs appear to be completely out of context. In this way, these visual narratives of violence (documentaries and photographs), in the name of preserving and promoting the indigenous African identity of the Siddis, are "killing with kindness" and 'making icons of a people whom we see as more "organic" and "in touch with the earth"' (Hubbard 1994: 31). This can be thoroughly understood through these documentaries and photographs that have been organised in the form of definite 'cultural ideas and social contracts' (Ryan 1997: 65) to portray 'specific ideas and social values' (Mabry 2014: 1) in a biased manner.

But, the current Siddi residents are gradually becoming aware of distortion, polarisation and marginalisation of their society, history and culture through these captioned photographs and documentaries. They have also realised that decolonisation is not about 'grounding their identities and histories in victimhood' (Pedri-Spade 2016: 58) but to develop multiple initiatives to resist these visual colonial practices, which will be elaborated in the following section.

Conclusion: decolonising the colonial gaze through a two-way resistance

In this section, I will be discussing how the Siddis of Karnataka and Gujarat are recreating their social, cultural and historical memories by developing 'awareness of selfhood or identity' (Assman 2008: 109). The awareness of their Bantu identity and selfhood is generated by 'unsettling Eurocentric conceptions of what photographs are, their history, as well as the identities, histories, and experiences of those who are the subjects of the camera' (Bell 2008: 124). The process of unsettling to regenerate the Bantu memories of the Siddis and reclaim their memories and "cultural teachings" (Pedri-Spade 2016: 46) is practiced in the form of a two-way resistance which is as follows:

- a Visual Sovereignty: In the year 1984, the Siddis from Wada, Karwar and Gadoli districts of Karnataka came together to establish All Karnataka Siddi Development Association (from now on AKSDA). The central objective of the association was to foster development. With respect to fostering development, the central government-sponsored SAGP was

regarded as a prominent initiative. The AKSDA members collaborated with the government representatives in organising sports trials in their villages and assisted the Siddi children to get selected for training. But, after a certain period of time, the association realised that the government has only used them as an object of “racial and genetic experimentation”. Moreover, it was headed by a non-African Indian named Shivaji Poojari and as a result, most of the Siddi issues were left unattended. The organisation was also failing to resist the socio-historical distortion, racial marginalisation and cultural exoticisation of the community in the forms of documentaries and captioned photographs that were curated and archived by government institutions, newspaper reporters, NGOs and tourists from the late 1980s. As a result, the AKSDA was dissolved and was replaced by the Siddi Development Society (from now on SDS).

The SDS was established in 1995 and unlike AKSDA it was headed by a Siddi. At present, the SDS has 12 members and it represents all the Siddis of Karnataka. In order to overcome ‘cultural appropriation, racism, assimilation and misinterpretation’ (Alloula 2002: 520), the SDS is adopting various practices of “visual sovereignty” which ‘necessitates an indigenous community’s or individual’s right to visually create a space for self-definition and determination’ (Guffey 2016). In the process of self-defining, the Siddis have framed strict norms and conditions to prevent organisations/individuals to shoot documentaries and capture photographs in their localities without permission. For instance, prior to any kind of video/audio recording and photography, official permission of the SDS is mandatory. A proposal needs to be submitted to SDS which is strictly reviewed by the members, before permission is granted. One of the important parameters of granting permission is that the intentions behind photography and documentary making should be free from any form of social, cultural, historical and racial stereotyping. In other words, instead of racially stereotyping and culturally exoticising them, the visual narratives should make efforts to uphold the habitual existence of the Siddis as realistically as possible. So, in order to ensure it, the documentary film-makers and photographers are always assisted by a Siddi member who functions as a link between them and the Siddi locals. In this manner, they are trying to interrogate and dismantle the existing archives of the visually colonised narratives of Siddi society, history and culture.

To achieve “visual sovereignty”, they are also recreating their African socio-cultural practices in the forms of dance, music and food habits and sharing it with tourists, photographers and documentary film-makers. In addition to SDS, the Siddi Foundation in Gujarat (from now on TSF), which was established in 2017, has developed identical forms of social, cultural and historical initiatives to challenge the “colonial meanings” of the existing visual archives of the Siddis and decolonise it

(Lydon and Wanhalla 2018: 214). The efforts toward systemic and epistemic decolonisation of the colonially structured archives by the Siddis of Karnataka and Gujarat will be elaborated in the following part of this section.

- b A Decolonial Archival Turn: The process of decolonising the colonially structured archive involves a thorough investigation of the ‘practices of collecting, collating, and classifying photographs’ (Lydon and Wanhalla 2018: 213). This is how the Siddis of Karnataka and Gujarat are undergoing decolonial archival turn in the contemporary era. Through reviving and documenting their indigenous Bantu forms of dance, music and food habits, they are providing ‘a new perspective on past and present by revealing marginal experiences, asserting indigenous capacity and addressing the losses and fractures of a historical process such as assimilation’ (Lydon and Wanhalla 214). For instance, the Siddis of Karnataka perform “call-and-response singing” and Goma music and dance ‘which can be traced back to the Ngoma style of East Africa’ (Asha Stuart quoted in Heather Brady’s “How This African Film-maker” 2018). Figure 7.8 documents a Siddi child from Karnataka who is playing a “Goma” drum, which is almost identical to “Ngoma” drum as used by the Bantus:

The Siddis of Gujarat document their indigenous dance patterns, which imitate the body languages and lifestyles of the ‘disappearing species of the Asiatic lions’ (United Nations 2017). In the process of

Figure 7.8 Siddi boy with a painted face playing the Ngoma drum. Copyright: Asha Stuart.

telling the stories of these lions, they dance to the drum beats and patterns that are almost identical to the Bantu people. They not only dance and document these practices among themselves but also share it with tourists, researchers, documentary film-makers and photographers.

Apart from these individual efforts, TSF in Gujarat also organises Siddi music and dance festivals across the year and they are attended by people from different corners of the country. In this way, different aspects of their cultural practices are gaining public attention. Their indigenous cultural practices function as a medium of earning as well. As Imran Siddi reveals: 'We play in hotels for about 1500 rupees or 25 US dollars. We go to the hotel to dance for the tourists during the prime season' (United Nations). This form of dance and music, on the one side, enables them to preserve their indigenous Bantu socio-cultural associations, and on the other side, it allows them to remain disassociated from the economic practices of the mainstream Indian society. Besides music and dance, the documentation and promotion of their food practices is another way through which they are dismantling the colonially structured archives and shaping decolonial socio-cultural archives. The food habits of the Siddis of Karnataka are very close to that of the Bantus. Instead of relying on the artificially packaged protein, vitamin and energy or on the chemically toxic vegetables as found in the city markets, they live on fresh honeycombs, red ant chutney,⁶ mud crabs, fruits and murdis⁷ (101 India 2017).

This is how through collective revival and public exposure of their social, cultural and historical practices the Siddis of Karnataka and Gujarat are systemically and epistemically plundering the visual narrative tools of the colonial masters, disassembling the masters' houses and re-assembling de-hierarchised, de-polarised, de-compartmentalised, de-racialised, decolonised and pluriversalised visual archives of indigenous knowledge, which will neither let the masters' tools nor their houses to exist.

Notes

- 1 Imagicides' refers to the killing of the social, cultural, political and racial images of a community through stereotyping and exoticising it in the forms of documentaries, photographs and captions. This process of imagicides in turn leads to 'ontocides' or killing of the nature of being.
- 2 Here, it is important to note that though caste and communal divisions in India are a precolonial phenomenon, yet the divisions were further widened and politicised during the colonial era (especially at the time of British colonisation) in India. In order to systematise the colonial ethics of 'divide and rule', the colonisers entrusted high office ranks to the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas (all high caste communities), whereas the Sudras (outcastes) and the Muslims were mostly subjects of physical and psychological abuse.
- 3 A community that is being treated like a museum artifact.

- 4 'Dhammam' is a music and dance form which is close to Ngoma style of the Bantu people of East Africa and is practiced by the Siddis in India.
- 5 The author could not showcase the photos in this book chapter because he was not granted copyrights permission by the newspaper.
- 6 Chutney originated in India and is referred to a spicy mixture. The red ant chutney is prepared by stone grounding red ants, coconut, onions, garlic, chilies and turmeric.
- 7 Murdi is a leafy vegetable which is found in the forests of Karnataka and is regularly consumed by the Siddis.

Works cited

- A beautiful Siddi woman* 2013, image, Akatasia, 24 June, viewed 30 October 2017, <http://akatasia.com/2013/06/24/new-book-a-certain-grace-the-sidi-indians-of-african-descent-by-ketaki-sheth/>.
- African Indian, Siddis of Wada. Karnataka, India* 2018, YouTube video, added by visualpoet1 [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gct82p8pfYo> [Accessed 8 November 2019].
- Albinia, Alice 2012, *Empires of the Indus: The story of a river*, Hachette, London.
- Ali, Omar H. 2011, 'Malik Ambar: The Legacy of an Ethiopian Ruler in India', *The Reporter*, 20 August, viewed 17 October 2018, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/Living-and-The-Arts/malik-ambar-the-legacy-of-an-ethiopian-ruler-in-india.html>.
- Alloula, M. 2002, 'From the colonial harem', in N. Mirzoeff (ed.), *The visual culture reader*, Routledge, New York, pp. 519–524.
- Assman, J. 2008, 'Cultural memory studies', in A. Erlil & A. Nunning (eds.), *An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., Berlin, pp. 109–118.
- Barthes, Roland 1985, *The grain of the voice*, Hill and Wang, New York.
- Bell, J. A. 2008, 'Promiscuous things: Perspectives on the cultural property through photographs in the Purari Delta of Papua New Guinea', *International Journal of Cultural Property*, vol. 15, pp. 123–139.
- Bhat, Prajwal 2019, 'Racing for a better future: The African-origin tribe in K'taka that's turning to sports', *The News Minute*, 31 March, viewed 11 November 2019, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/racing-better-future-african-origin-tribe-k-taka-s-turning-sports-99255>.
- Brady, Heather 2018, 'How this African-American filmmaker was inspired by African Indians', *National Geographic*, 13 April, viewed on 23 November 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/04/siddi-people-africa-india-tribe-culture/>.
- Conklin, Alice L. 1997, *A mission to civilize: The Republican idea of empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Eeden, Jeanne Van 2004, 'The colonial gaze: Imperialism, myths and south African popular culture', *Design Issues*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 18–33.
- Goffman, Erving 1979, *Gender advertisements*, Harper, New York.
- Gordon, Robert J. 1997, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African expedition of 1925*, Ohio University Press, Athens.
- Guffey, Darcy 2016, 'Visual sovereignty', *Prezi*, 9 January, viewed 23 November 2019, <https://prezi.com/qz-cjqz3w0c/visual-sovereignty/>.
- Hardworking Siddi Woman* 2019, image, Kamat's Potpourri, 6 June, viewed 5 October 2019, <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/people/afro-indians/11830.htm>.

- Harris, Joseph E. 1971, *The African presence in Asia: Consequences of the Eastern African slave trade*, Northwest University Press, Evanston.
- Haviland, Charles 2003, 'Hyderabad's African old guard', *BBC*, 4 August, 21 January 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3116817.stm.
- Hubbard, Sue 1994, *Everything begins with the skin*, Enitharmon Press, London.
- IANs 2013, 'Siddis: little known Indians of East African descent', *The Pioneer*, 20 September, viewed 28 September 2017, <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2013/india-abroad/siddis-little-known-indians-of-east-african-descent.html>.
- IANs 2018, 'Discovering little known African tribe', *Business Standard*, 25 February, viewed 25 February 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/discovering-india-s-little-known-african-tribe-118022500131_1.html.
- Indians of African Descent* 2016, image, Design Indaba, 22 January, viewed 30 October 2017, <https://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/and-what-african-diaspora-india>.
- Indians of African Origin* 2019, image, Kamat's Potpourri, 6 June, viewed 5 October 2019, <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/people/siddi.htm>.
- Jambur: The African village or little Africa in Gujarat* 2018, YouTube video, added by visualpoet1 [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPNzZqQxwjK> [Accessed 12 November 2019].
- Janardhan, Arun & Pathak, Maulik 2013, 'Genetics: The race to a better life', *Live Mint*, 7 September, viewed 1 January 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/hFhfljk0kGRXGr9YAiLGP/Genetics--The-race-to-a-better-life.html>.
- Keay, John 2011, *India: A history*, Grove/Atlantic, New York.
- Lost Tribe of Africa* 2018, YouTube video, added by National Geographic [Online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_a1WS5ncDk [Accessed 9 November 2019].
- Lydon, Jane & Wanhalla, Angela (eds.) 2018, 'Editorial', *History of photography*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 213–216.
- Mabry, Hannah 2014, 'Photography, Colonialism and Racism', *International Affairs Review*, Fall Issue, pp. 1–7.
- Mamdani, Mahmood 2013, 'The Sidi: An Introduction', in Ketaki Sheth (ed.), *A certain Grace the Siddi. Indians of African descent*, Photoink, New Delhi.
- Maturkar, Varun 2017, 'Why Indian Siddis have little hope from this sports scheme for their empowerment', *Youth Ki Awaz*, viewed on 17 April 2018, <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2018/05/siddi-tribe-community-special-area-games-racism/>.
- McLeod, John 2008, 'Marriage and identity among the Siddis of Janjira and Sachin', in J.C. Hawley (ed.), *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Menon, Amarnath K. 1988, 'Special areas games programme launched to groom sports talent', *India Today*, 31 May, viewed 21 December 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19880531-special-areas-games-programme-launched-to-groom-sports-talent-797325-1988-05-31>.
- Mitra, Joydip 2018, 'Pushed to the margins', *Fountain Ink*, 12 September, viewed 4 August 2019, <https://fountainink.in/photostory/pushed-to-the-margins>.
- Padma, Anisha 2019, 'The multiple pasts and presents of Siddis in India', *Sahapedia*, 18 July, viewed 20 August 2019, https://www.sahapedia.org/multiple-pasts-and-presents-siddis-india#_edn11.
- Pandey, Vikas 2014, 'Africans in India: From slaves to reformers and rulers', *BBC*, 19 December, viewed 11 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30391686>.

- Pedri-Spade, Celeste 2016, 'Waasaabikizo: Our pictures are good medicine', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 45–70.
- Photograph by Asha Stuart 2018, image, National Geographic, 13 April, viewed 11 November 2019, <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2018/04/13/explorer-spotlight-asha-stuart-documenting-the-lost-tribes-of-africa/>.
- Plummer, Lucy 2017, "I met the Siddi people of India and it widened my perception of what it means to be 'Indian'", *The Better India*, 30 March, viewed 27 December 2018, <https://www.thebetterindia.com/93626/india-racism-siddi-african/>.
- Prashad, Vijay 2002, *Everybody was Kung Fu fighting: Afro-Asian connections and the myth of cultural purity*, Beacon Press, Boston.
- Ramzamma laughs when asked if she is pregnant in 2013, image, The Wall Street Journal, 24 March, viewed 30 October 2017, <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2013/03/24/uncovering-indias-siddi-community/>. Reaktion Books, London.
- RSTV Documentary – Siddis of Karnataka 2017, YouTube video, added by Rajya Sabha TV [Online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqgNnqb7_Z8 [Accessed 8 November 2019].
- Ryan, J. R. 1997, *Picturing empire: Photography and the visualization of the British Empire*.
- Segal, Ronald 2002, *Islam's black slaves: The other black diaspora*, Macmillan, London.
- Sekula, Allan 1992, 'The body and the archive', in R. Bolton (ed.), *The contest of meaning*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 365–391.
- Sheth, Ketaki 2013, *A certain grace Siddi: Indians of African descent*, Photoink, New Delhi.
- Siddis of Jamnagar (African Indian or Habshis): The spirituality (2018). YouTube video, added by visualpoet1 [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH7d3XlpiL0&t=55s> [Accessed 18 November 2019].
- Siddis: In It For The Long Run 2016, YouTube video, added by 101 India [Online]. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ped-u1lw_24&t=2s [Accessed on 16 January 2018].
- Sidi in India 2013, image, Akatasia, 24 June, viewed 30 October 2017, <http://akatasia.com/2013/06/24/new-book-a-certain-grace-the-sidi-indians-of-african-descent-by-ketaki-sheth/>.
- The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture 2011, 'The African diaspora in the Indian ocean world', *The New York Public Library*, viewed 12 November 2019, <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africansindianocean/essay-south-asia.php>.
- The Siddi, an African Community in India 2013, YouTube video, added by Nzwamba [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD7sp-L9IUk> [Accessed 26 July 2017].
- The Siddis of Karnataka: Part 1 2017, YouTube video, added by 101 India [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek4XEWXAD8s&t=1s> [Accessed on 16 January 2018].
- The Siddis/Habshis (African Indian) community in TALALA, Gujarat, India (2018). YouTube video, added by visualpoet1 [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-BAPzaF0SA> [Accessed 12 November 2019].
- The Siddis: India's Forgotten Tribes 2017. YouTube video, added by the United Nations [Online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4SNsgwXsys> [Accessed 18 November 2019].