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# *NATIVES AND NEWCOMERS, MARRIAGE AND BELONGING*

South Asian social networks of immigration,  
work and settlement in the Sheffield area  
during the early twentieth century

By:

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When history is written as it ought to be written, it is the moderation and long patience of the masses at which men will wonder, not their ferocity.

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938)

I brought them here to see the glories of the Empire, and all they think about is going on the dodgems.

Noël Coward, *This Happy Breed* (1944)

Speaking generally, the people of Sheffield are neither recognizably superior (as they are themselves inclined to believe) nor recognizably inferior (as those whom they call “foreigners” are inclined to allege) to those living elsewhere.

St. Philip’s Settlement, *The Equipment of the Workers* (1919)

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## *Abstract*

Apart from the port riots of 1919-20, historians have generally ascribed little significance to the presence of non-white immigrants in Britain before 1948. However, this thesis contends that the settlement 'bridgeheads' established by South Asian pioneers played a key role in aiding mass immigration to Britain after 1948, in the post-Partition, post-British Nationality Act, post-*Windrush* era. These bridgeheads were formed by alliances between white working-class natives and South Asians, mostly former seafarers, but including dedicated pedlars, through social networks of marriage and friendship, as workmates and neighbours. They formed nodes on a growing trans-imperial network which facilitated the further migration of Indian kin and countrymen.

Marriages took place across Britain, particularly in ports, but also inland, and a settlement of natives and newcomers, previously un-researched, developed in the Sheffield area after the First World War. Many of these men from British India (now Pakistan and Indian Punjab), married working-class women native to the city and raised families together. The men's original intention was a sojourning, economic migration, but their unions with white natives appear to have modified their adherence to a 'myth of return' to their family farms in colonial India. Indeed, they opted instead to remain in Britain with their new families.

Examining the nature of the immigrants' social networks, and using the experience of the Sheffield area as its focus, this thesis also examines the processes of cultural exchange and co-operation between (mainly white) natives and immigrant newcomers. Rather than adhere to a conflict-based historiography, this detailed analysis of early British immigration history situates the role of co-operative and ethnically-mixed social networks centrally in the non-white settlement of Britain. By doing so, the thesis aims to provide a nuanced assessment of the extent to which contemporary ideologies of Empire and race were internalised by natives, particularly within the working-class communities to which the South Asian newcomers belonged.

## Abbreviations

BISN	British India Steamship Navigation Company
BL	British Library
BMD	Births, marriages and deaths
BSHC	British Social Hygiene Council
CASO	Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925
CDC	(seaman's) Continuous Discharge Certificate (or 'nully')
CO	Colonial Office
GRO	General Register Office
HO	Home Office
IOL	India Office Library
MEPO	Metropolitan Police
MT	Ministry of Transport
NSFU	National Sailors' and Firemen's Union
NUS	National Union of Seamen
NAUL	National Amalgamated Union of Labour
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
P&O	Peninsula and Oriental Steamship Company
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
UAB	Unemployment Assistance Board

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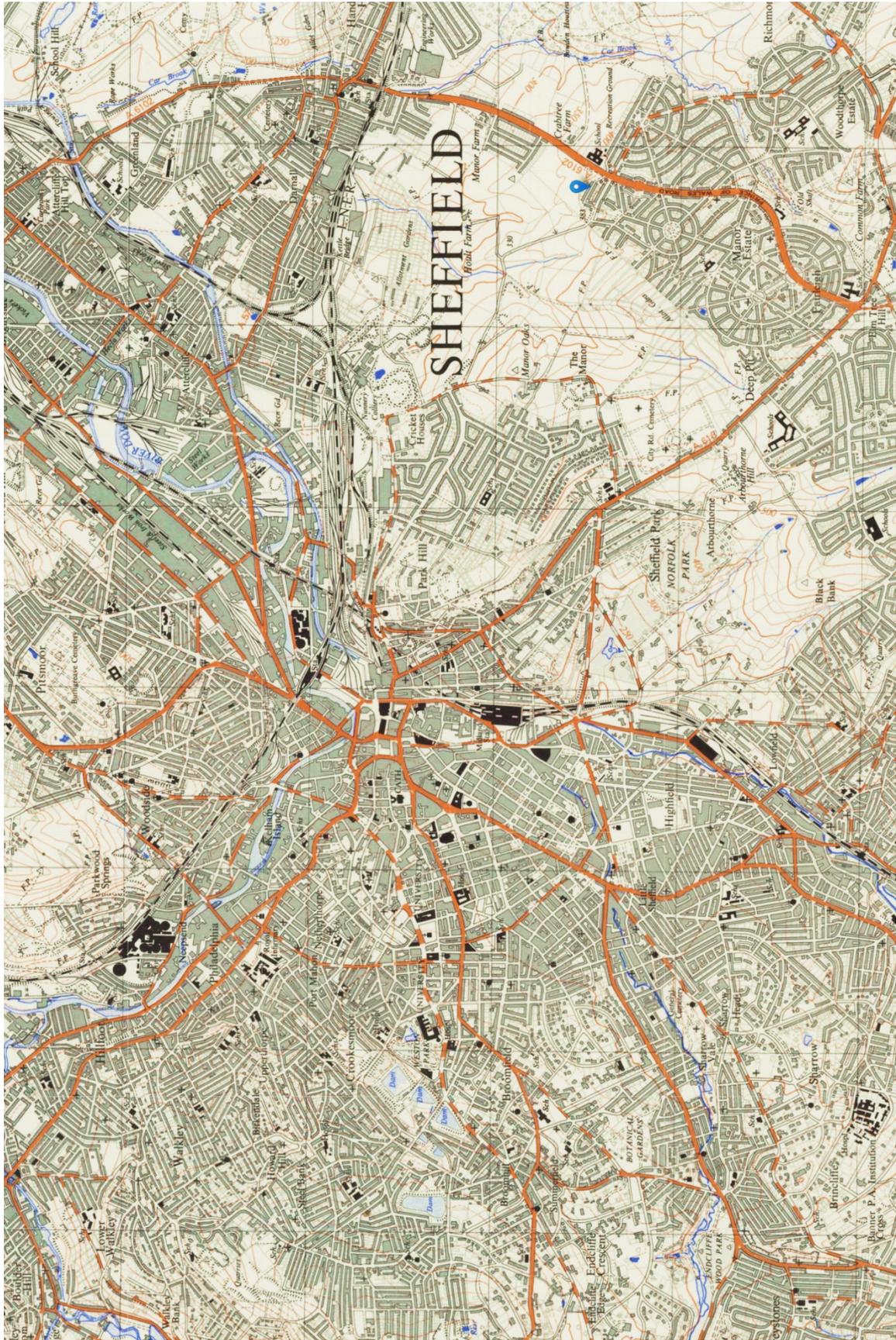


Figure 1.1 Sheffield circa 1939. The city centre lies at the centre of the map with Attercliffe, Darnall, the Don Valley, Rotherham and Doncaster (off map), lying to the north-east. The Manor Estate lies to the south-east and Chesterfield and north Derbyshire (off map) lies to the south.

## **Section 1**

### *Introduction, context, historiography and methodology*

#### **1.0 Introduction**

The first half of the twentieth century is frequently characterised as a period of economic, political and moral collapse among European nations. Widespread ultra-nationalism and fascism, racial and eugenic thinking, anti-Semitism, imperialism and world war, are all closely and inseparably linked with the period. Within this analysis, contemporary working-class Britons are historically characterised as having actively, if not enthusiastically, consumed a regular diet of jingoism and imperial pageantry, which nourished their deep hostility to anything, or anyone, considered alien. A combination of chauvinism, competition for jobs and even psychosexual inadequacy have all been posited as underlying causes for this supposedly generalised ‘white working-class’ antagonism to ‘foreignness’, especially when embodied by non-white male immigrants. Since the 1980s, the historical focus on this hostility, particularly on the anti-immigrant port riots of 1919-1920 between white mobs and non-white workers, is a case in point.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the attitude of the British working classes toward non-white workers who lived and worked within the boundaries of the British nation-state during the period has often been assessed by generalising from the particularities of these notable, but rare, events. In the period from the First World War, until Indian independence and partition in 1947, the vast majority of South Asian migrants to Britain were engaged in either proletarian waged-labour, or the petty-capitalism of the pedlar, while living in and among the neighbourhoods and communities of the (generally white) British working class. Despite these facts, the majority of migration histories have tended to set immigrants apart from this milieu. When interactions between white workers and non-white newcomers during the first half of the twentieth century have been examined, the historical view of the interwar period has

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<sup>1</sup> P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), pp. 298–315; J. Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool, 2008); J. Jenkinson, ‘Black Sailors on Red Clydeside: Rioting, Reactionary Trade Unionism and Conflicting Notions of “Britishness” Following the First World War’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 19:1 (2008), pp. 29–60; J. Jenkinson, ‘The Black Community of Salford and Hull 1919–21’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, 7:2 (July 1988), pp. 166–183.

been primarily through the lens of the 1919-1920 race riots. In contrast, this historical reconstruction takes an alternative approach by situating the lives and lived-experience of South Asian immigrants within the working-class neighbourhoods they joined.

The approach's findings, presented here, suggest that the frequently utilised lens of conflict has been a distorting one, obscuring as much as it brings in to focus. Within this thesis, I explore this alternative, strikingly different, perspective on the period – one which has remained largely unexamined by historians of Britain and the British Empire. Whilst fully acknowledging the riots, racism and imperialism and not wishing to elide or occlude their destructive violence, this thesis instead pays close attention to instances of constructive interaction between (mostly white) natives and non-white newcomers. Indeed, numerous working-class natives and newcomers – both white and non-white – came into regular contact with each other during the period either without incident or in a positive and constructive manner.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as Laura Tabili convincingly demonstrates in her ground-breaking study of South Shields, natives and newcomers, despite differences of skin colour, nationality or ethnicity were, for the most part, willing and able to live alongside each other. By doing so, many formed lasting relationships, often through marriage, family and other forms of domestic life. Although the riots of 1919-1920 have been attributed to the overwhelming public, particularly working-class, hostility to inter-racial mixing, mixed marriages continued throughout the period in question. As this thesis demonstrates, the working-classes of the Sheffield area, also rubbed along quite tolerably, despite their observable cultural, confessional or racial differences (what this thesis terms 'everyday tolerance').

Unfortunately for historians, this was very rarely expressed in the self-generated textual discourse or self-curated images of the historical actors involved, and only a small proportion preserved within oral history archives. In other words, the voices of the great majority of working-class people generally remained unrecorded or have been lost to us. While very little of this evidence has survived for examination, it is difficult, although not impossible (as suggested by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), for an authentic 'subaltern voice' to speak to scholars. This is in stark contrast to the multiplicity of preserved textual discourse and images through which the affluent and confidently literate middle-classes communicate to us through journals, novels, poetry and personal correspondence.<sup>3</sup> For example, Sumita Mukherjee and A. Martin Wainwright have each studied the writings of notable

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<sup>2</sup> Within this thesis, the racial signifiers 'white' and 'non-white' are used to identify individuals and populations in terms of how they were viewed and differentiated by British civil servants, the constabulary and local authorities both within the British nation state and within its colonies. Here, 'white' refers to Europeans, particularly the long-standing and indigenous population of Britain. Non-white refers generally to individuals and populations who fell outside the white grouping in the eyes of politicians, administrators and police. Within these broad populations fall those I term 'natives' and 'newcomers'. Unless otherwise stated, a 'native' is any individual, regardless of ethnicity, race, skin colour or parentage, who was born within the borders of the British nation state.

<sup>3</sup> G. Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Urbana, 1987), pp. 286–289.

Indians of the period.<sup>4</sup> We have consequently gained a much deeper insight into the experiences of elite or highly educated South Asians living, working and travelling in Britain than we do about those individuals one senior British civil servant dubbed 'illiterate Indians of limited means and of the agricultural class'.<sup>5</sup>

Within the historical record there exists a paucity of evidence to shed light on the thoughts, feelings and personal reflections of ordinary working people. This is particularly the case with how they responded on a personal level to the supposed cultural, confessional or racial divisions at the level of their neighbourhood, community, and to the rapidly changing world they inhabited. Taking these lacunae into consideration, it has proved fruitful to turn instead to evidence of their actions. While this approach has been used by Jacqueline Jenkinson in her exploration of official and press records of the criminal prosecution of rioters, it has been neglected in relation to evidence of constructive relationships such as marriage, cohabitation and co-operation.<sup>6</sup> As self-generated and autobiographical sources mentioning empire and race are scarce, we may turn to official documents that demonstrate with whom individuals chose to share their intimate personal spaces of hearth and home. Indeed, this approach is indirectly suggested by Stuart Hall's 'discursive approach' to research. In essence, Hall argued that textual sources, which reflect actions or cultural practices can speak as loudly as the words individuals uttered or the thoughts and worldview they did not see fit, or were not able, to record or preserve in diaries, letters or memoirs.<sup>7</sup>

Using this method, this thesis represents the first detailed academic study of non-white immigration to the Sheffield area in the period before Indian partition in 1947, the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* from the Caribbean in 1948 and the introduction of the British Nationality Act in the same year – events widely regarded as heralds of the post-war era of mass immigration. The thesis also presents the first systematic study of South Asian immigration and settlement in an inland city in the first half of the twentieth century. Supporting much of this thesis's argument are the many thousands of state and press records demonstrating the quotidian reactions of working-class men and women to perceived racial and ethnic difference. As these records demonstrate inter-marriage between natives and newcomers, in addition to racially heterogeneous social networks of family, friends, workmates, neighbours, co-residents and customers, they support my argument that the racial justifications for white supremacy over colonised non-whites within the British empire were not necessarily or uncritically imbibed by working-class people during this period. Moreover, the ideologies of race and empire were framed in such a way at grass-roots

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<sup>4</sup> S. Mukherjee, 'Herabai Tata and Sophia Duleep Singh: Suffragette Resistances for India and Britain, 1910-1920', in R. Ahmed and S. Mukherjee, eds., *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*, (London, 2011); A. M. Wainwright, *'The Better Class' of Indians* (Manchester, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406, Itinerant Indian Salesmen: grant of pedlars certificates to coloured seamen and Indians, 1934-1936.

<sup>6</sup> Jenkinson, *Black 1919*.

<sup>7</sup> S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London, 1997), p. 6.



Figure 1.2

'Lowest "Life in London" – Tom, Jerry and Logic among the unsophisticated Sons and Daughters of nature at "All Max" in the East', George Cruickshank (1823), British Library, 838.i.2  
British Library/public domain.

level that their consequences were uneven and often unexpected, especially when compared to the current historical narrative of unrelenting racism, sporadic outbursts of mass racial violence and the development of an isolated anti-racist resistance in the first half of the twentieth century. Panikos Panayi's emphatic statement that 'an iron girder of racism and xenophobia' has lain within Britain for the last 200 years, sums up this analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the understandable pessimism of historians of the twentieth century, the unexpected quantity of previously unexamined evidence, primarily related to actions rather than discourse, demonstrates that a more sanguine focus, sometimes critical of, but often complementing, the existing historiography, can offer valuable new perspectives on these early encounters between the white natives of Britain and non-white newcomers. Moreover, the new data, which utilises clear documentary evidence of intimate relationships between natives and newcomers, such as marriage, birth records and domestic arrangements contained in census data, can be employed to locate previously unidentified or un-researched early centres of immigration and settlement of populations sharing non-European names. In this instance, the research supporting this thesis has focused upon individual Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus present in the city of Sheffield and surrounding towns – a locality not previously recognised as a significant centre of pre-Partition, pre-Windrush, immigration and settlement.

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<sup>8</sup> P. Panayi, *An Immigration History of Modern Britain: Multicultural Racism Since 1800* (Harlow, 2010), p. 26.

With regard to textual descriptions of early encounters between white working-class natives and non-white newcomers in Britain, we might begin with Pierce Egan's semi-autobiographical and 'faithful Portraiture of High & Low Life' from the West End to the East End' of London, published in 1823. *Life in London* records, among other scenes of merrymaking, impressions of the widespread mixing among the working poor encountered in the sailortown districts of the East End (figure 1.1):

Every cove that put in an appearance was quite welcome, colour or country considered no obstacle ... The group was motley indeed – Lascars, blacks, jack-tars, coal-heavers, dustmen, women of colour, old and young, and a sprinkling of the remnants of once fine girls, and all jigging together.<sup>9</sup>

British writers of the early twentieth century also occasionally remarked on the frequent willingness of the working poor to intermingle, regardless of race or ethnic



Figure 1.3  
*Petticoat Lane Market, London, circa 1935, © General Photographic Agency/Getty Images*

origin. However, few, if any, appear to have been able to fully comprehend the presence of non-white men, their white wives, and their mixed-race children, within the metropolitan setting of British towns and cities. In the literary imagination, these individuals and families remained oddities, the objects of some wonderment and, frequently, a degree of disdain. For example, J.B. Priestley, visiting Liverpool during the early 1930s to research his travelogue *English Journey*, described a school classroom

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<sup>9</sup> P. Egan, *Life in London: Or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorne, Esq., and His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 286.

composed largely of the children of unions between white and non-white working-class natives and newcomers:

There cannot be a queerer class anywhere in the world. The woolly curls of the negro, the smooth brown skin of the Malay, the diagonal eye of the Chinese, they were all there, crazily combined with features that had arrived in Lancashire by way of half a dozen different European countries, from Scandinavia to Italy... we could see them down there, like a miniature League of Nations assembly gone mad.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently quite fascinated by the mixed-race children, Priestley compared them to 'the charming exotic fruits... of some profound anthropological experiment'. Nevertheless, he went on to disparage their parents as less than charming and as 'the riff-raff of the stokeholds and the slatterns of the slums...'<sup>11</sup> George Orwell, on a visit in the late 1920s, also betrayed his inability to comprehend the non-white presence in London's East End. In the district, he found 'it was interesting to watch the crowds... East London women are pretty (it is the mixture of blood, perhaps), and Limehouse was sprinkled with Orientals – Chinamen, Chittagonian lascars, Dravidians selling silk scarves, even a few Sikhs, come goodness knows how.'<sup>12</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, Welsh author Howard Spring, just twelve years of age, began work as an office boy. Running errands for his employers at a shipping office, Spring became somewhat familiar with the Cardiff sailortown district popularly known as 'Tiger Bay'. In his autobiography he recalled the scene in highly exoticised terms:

Chinks and Dagos, Lascars and Levatines, slipped about the faintly evil by-ways that ran off from Bute Street. The whole place was a warren of seamen's boarding-houses, dubious hotels, ships' chandlers smelling of rope and tarpaulin, shops full of hard flat ships' biscuits, dingy chemists shops stored with doubtful looking pills, herbs and the works of Aristotle. Children of the strangest colours, fruit of frightful misalliances, staggered half-naked about the streets; and the shop windows were decorated with names that were an epitome of all the clans and classes under the sun. The flags of all nations fluttered on the house fronts; and ever and anon the long bellowing moan of a ship coming to the docks or outward bound seemed the very voice of this meeting place of the seven seas. It was a dirty, smelly, rotten and romantic district, an offence and an inspiration, and I loved it.<sup>13</sup>

The popular entertainer Harry Secombe also recalled the cosmopolitan composition of his childhood hometown in South Wales during the inter-war period. In contrast to

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<sup>10</sup> J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1934), pp. 240–241.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>12</sup> G. Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London, 2013), p. 136.

<sup>13</sup> H. Spring, *Heaven Lies About Us* (London, 1945), pp. 29–30.

Spring's, Secombe's description is rather more quotidian in tone. 'In the dockland area of Swansea in which I was raised', he remembered, 'we were more familiar with Asian dialects than with the language of the Cymru.'<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary social investigators and moral entrepreneurs, such as social worker Muriel Fletcher and the mariner Captain F.E. Richardson, were not quite as sanguine in their attitude to Britain's non-white presence and inter-racial mixing. Although they considered the nascent super-diversity of nationalities and ethnicities to be restricted to the 'sailortown' districts of Britain's deep-water ports, in contrast to Spring and Secombe, they viewed these phenomena as deeply problematic.<sup>15</sup> My own research, in contrast, shows 'mixed marriages' not to be confined to the ports. During the first half of the twentieth century, mixed marriages – specifically those where one partner had a Muslim name – had a widespread distribution across Britain (figure 4.4). As one might expect for a migration originating primarily among seafarers, concentrations of such couples existed in deep-water ports such as London, Cardiff, South Shields and Liverpool, as highlighted by Fletcher and Richardson.<sup>16</sup> However, these littoral concentrations notwithstanding, clusters of BMD records are also located in towns and cities across Britain, many of which are inland.

This thesis takes as its central focus a pioneering South Asian immigration to one of these inland cities: the large English industrial city of Sheffield and its surrounding conurbation of south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire. By analysis of marriages, births and deaths, electoral registers, census returns, local press reports, family testimony and working-class memoirs it has located early arrivals of small groups of non-elite South Asians in the area from the First World War onwards, and educated individuals, such as students and medical practitioners, who were present from the beginning of the century.<sup>17</sup> The non-elite men worked in heavy industry or as door-to-door and street pedlars. In the 1930s, they were joined by Sikh men similarly employed in peddling as well as in the building trades. By the time of the Second World War, small numbers of Muslim men from the Yemen and the British Aden Protectorate also arrived in Sheffield. The South Asians and Yemenis joined

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<sup>14</sup> H. Secombe, *Goon Abroad* (London, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> The term 'super diversity' is borrowed from Steven Vertovec: S. Vertovec, 'Super-Diversity and Its Implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 30:6 (2007), pp. 1024–1029; M. Christian, 'The Fletcher Report 1930: A Historical Case Study of Contested Black Mixed Heritage Britishness', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21:2–3 (June 2008), pp. 217–226; TNA, MH 55/352, Captain F.A. Richardson - *Report Into The Social Conditions In Ports, 1935*, pp. 7–9.

<sup>16</sup> Such men, recruited as the key source of cheap, indentured labour for the British merchant marine, were known to the British as 'Lascars'. *Hobson Jobson*, the essential vocabular companion to the British imperialist at large on the subcontinent, gives the etymology of the term 'Lascar' as being '...a Portuguese corruption of the Persian lashkar - one who belongs to an army', and denoting: '(1) 'an inferior class of artilleryman ("gun-Lascar"); (2) a tent-pitcher, doing other work which the class are accustomed to do; (3) a sailor... the most common Anglo-Indian use, and has passed into the English language.' G. Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?: Indian Seafarers and World Shipping, c. 1870-1945* (New Delhi, 2012), pp. 124–125; H. Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Definitive Glossary of British India*, K. Teltscher, ed. (Oxford, 2013), p. 310.

<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of this study, 'non-elite' refers to those outside the professional classes, largely without formal education and whose origins were often small peasant farms.

other non-white individuals in the area who had originated in the various British colonial territories such as Chinese, African and African-Caribbean men who and arrived from the mid nineteenth century onwards.

Some South Asians, such as Ayaht Khan, Noor Mohammed and Ali Amidulla, settled down and raised families with their white working-class wives. Other working-class natives appear in records and testimony as in-laws, workmates, friends, co-lodgers, and neighbours to the immigrant men. Native in-laws and workmates provided them with accommodation, as did families running general lodging houses. Natives witnessed marriages and supported couples when they found themselves in difficulties, such as when harassed by the authorities with spurious challenges to their British subject status. In short, many immigrants present as remarkably embedded within the life of their neighbourhoods, rather than as alien interlopers. Most significantly, native-newcomer households aided new arrivals in Britain – often kinsmen of the husband – providing them with lodging and cultural orientation. They helped them find work and introduced them to broader social networks. Native-newcomer households also acted as anchor points for chains of kinship migration between India and Britain. This process, whereby mixed couples acted as agents of ongoing migration, was replicated in individual households across the country. When considered in aggregate, native-newcomer households made a vital contribution to successful immigration and settlement. They acted as nodes on social networks that sustained flows of migrants to Britain and beyond throughout the inter-war period, the Second World War and into the *Windrush* era of mass New Commonwealth immigration. In the testimony of pioneer migrants, a great many acknowledge the native-newcomer households, often based upon a couple in a mixed marriage, into which they were welcomed upon their arrival in Britain. Instances of belonging such as these, together with an exploration of migrant men's social networks, form central planks of the evidential base for this thesis.

This thesis necessarily uses the concept of the social network loosely. Its nodes and actors are those families and individuals who hosted newcomers, facilitating their migration, integration or settlement. The networks were not within a bounded community, but were open and exogamous, bringing new members, both native and newcomer, within their ambit through relationships of marriage, friendship and mutuality. The incompleteness of the surviving data means that only snapshots of the nodes on the network can be glimpsed, and the 1939 Register and the burgess rolls for 1945 are two such points in time. But, despite the fragmentary nature of documents, memories and artefacts, Matt Houlbrook has successfully demonstrated that an understanding, if not necessarily the precise detail, of historical social networks and the actors that constituted them can be recovered from these 'accumulated historical traces'.<sup>18</sup> This approach offers further analytical possibilities to assess the penetration of imperial racial ideologies among the native population of Britain and to add nuance to our understanding of the ways in which racial thinking and the ideologies underpinning British imperialism were framed by the working-class natives of

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<sup>18</sup> M. Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago, 2005), pp. 4–6.

Britain; in other words, who paid attention to these imperial perceptions of race and racial difference and how and when they did so.<sup>19</sup> While much of this will remain, for now, conjecture, the body of quantitative and qualitative evidence presented here adds a substantial source of new and previously unresearched data to support further research.

Originating in the work of John and Leatrice McDonald's studies of peasant migration from southern Italy to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anthropologists have, for many years, recognised that kinship-based 'chain' migration was also the central mechanism by which South Asians arrived in Britain in search of employment during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> They have also recognised that the pioneers of this immigration largely arrived in British home ports as lascar seamen in latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries.<sup>21</sup> This thesis builds upon these earlier studies of the members of migration chains, particularly those by Badr Dahya, Muhammad Anwar and Roger Ballard. It also builds on recent research including Gopalan Balachandran's work on Indian seafarers' experience in Britain, Vivek Bald's study of the social networks of South Asians in the United States and Tabili's work on relations between natives and newcomers in the northern English port of South Shields.<sup>22</sup> This thesis however, uses Sheffield and south Yorkshire as its geographical focus to present the first study of early South Asian immigration to Britain which argues that racially heterogeneous social networks, particularly 'mixed' or 'inter-racial' marriages between working-class British natives and non-white newcomers, played a central role in facilitating this pioneer migration before Partition and *Windrush*.

Unfortunately, this is a largely overlooked aspect of Britain's story of immigration and settlement by the peoples of its empire. As Tabili underlines, 'notorious episodes of conflict continue to capture scholars' imagination, to the neglect of community formation and internal dynamics, or even daily interactions between migrants and natives.' Moreover, she continues, 'scholarship has barely engaged why some native Britons, and which ones, attacked migrants at some times and not others.'<sup>23</sup> This, she suggests, may be due to a tendency to view British society as monolithic in its support for imperialism or in its attitudes to racial and ethnic

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<sup>19</sup> The imperialist *Weltanschauung*, described by Hannah Arendt in 1944 as 'race-thinking', held 'racism as the main justification of imperialist politics': H. Arendt, 'Race-Thinking Before Racism', *The Review of Politics*, 6:1 (January 1944), pp. 36–40.

<sup>20</sup> J. S. MacDonald and L. D. MacDonald, 'Chain Migration Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks', *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 42:1 (January 1964), p. 82; B. Dahya, 'Pakistanis in Britain: Transients or Settlers?', *Race & Class*, 14:3 (January 1973), p. 245; R. Ballard, ed., *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain* (London, 1994), pp. 10–12.

<sup>21</sup> Dahya, 'Pakistanis in Britain', 244; M. Anwar, *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 21–22; A. Shaw, *A Pakistani Community in Britain* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 23–25; R. Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', in R. Ballard, ed., *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, (London, 1994), pp. 5–6.

<sup>22</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*; V. Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, Mass, 2013); L. Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture: Natives and Newcomers in Provincial England, 1841-1939* (Basingstoke, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, 6–7.

difference during the first half of the twentieth century. This view has stressed 'barriers between rather than dialogue among' the people of Britain and 'has isolated migrants analytically from British society and history'.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, she continues:

While intolerance must be confronted, relying on conflict to detect migrants' presence has allowed the most xenophobic and racist of historical actors to stand for all Britons. Decontextualized focus on spectacular episodes of violence has represented migrants as perpetual victims, neglecting broader contexts and communities in which everyday relations occurred.

This thesis also questions decontextualised studies of violence within a supposedly



*Figure 1.4  
Graves of South Asian Muslims at Burngreave  
Cemetery, Sheffield*

monolithic culture of racial hostility and support for imperialism. The research underpinning this thesis goes some way to answering the question of what, if not unrelenting hostility, was the actuality of native-newcomer relations in the first half of the twentieth century. It does this by exploring an unusually early example of inland immigration and settlement while contextualising this Sheffield area study within the network of pioneering settlements of migration, work and marriage across Britain as a whole.

**1.1 Why the Sheffield area and why this period?**

My investigation of South Asian immigration to Britain began some years ago. As an undergraduate I participated in my university's research experience programme and my contribution was to conduct a small oral history survey of the experiences of migration and settlement of a number of Sheffield-based Pakistani men.<sup>25</sup> All my subjects arrived in Britain during the late 1950s and early 1960s – the period of large-scale immigration to the area, particularly from the former West Pakistan. During discussion with the group, one of the men's sons alerted me to the presence, in the city's Burngreave cemetery, of a small number of inter-war burials of South Asian Muslims (figure 1.4). Despite the focus of the project in hand on the second half of the twentieth century, I decided that this earlier South Asian presence in the city (the dates of the burials ranged from 1923 to 1931) was worthy of further attention. On locating a cluster of four Muslim graves, the epitaph on the headstone

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>25</sup> Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE), 2012.

of an infant particularly interested me. It reads: 'In loving memory of Souriya, beloved daughter of Ayaht and Hilda Khan, died July 30th 1929 aged 9 months (Mohammedan religion)', (figure 1.5). What is remarkable about this inscription is its commemoration of a child, born to a couple comprised of a native Briton and a South Asian newcomer, who during her short life in the late 1920s, was raised in the Muslim faith. Each of the other burials are also inscribed to commemorate a member of the 'Mohammedan religion' or of an 'Indian Mohammedan'.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the graves' somewhat neglected condition today, they lie in a superb, airy position in consecrated Christian ground on a hillside above the city. The alignment of the graves indicate that the bodies were interred perpendicular to the direction of Mecca to the south east. This corresponds with the contemporary



Figure 1.5

Grave of Souriya Khan: 'In loving memory of Souriya, beloved daughter of Ayaht and Hilda Khan, died July 30th 1929 aged 9 months (Mohammedan religion)'

description of the preferred burial position provided by the *Gazetteer of the Attock District*. The interment was performed in such a manner that the heads of the deceased could be turned to face toward the south-east and along the *Qibla* to Mecca.<sup>27</sup> The stone markers are simple and modestly ornamented but have been thoughtfully conceived and executed. Indeed, the graves and the associated burial record demonstrate that those who arranged the funerals were prepared to go to the time and expense to ensure that these individuals were laid to rest with ceremony and dignity. In short, the graves do not appear to be of marginalized individuals who met their fate among strangers, thousands of miles from home. On the contrary, they demonstrate that these individuals died among

<sup>26</sup> The graves in Burngreave cemetery, Sheffield, belong to Sultan Mohamed, also known as Sultan Mohammed, a colliery surface labourer (d. 16 July 1923), age 32; Souriya Khan (b. 1928, d. 30 July 1929), age 9 months; Ali Amidullah, also known as Gisalic or Ali Amidulla, a steelworks boiler firer (b. 1894, d. 12 Mar. 1931), age 37; Aloh Din, also known as Alabdin Khan, a steelworks boiler firer (d. 15 Feb. 1927), age 35 or 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazetteer of the Attock District*, 1930, vol. xxix-A (Lahore, 1932), pp. 142–143.

those who cared for them, had an understanding of their traditions and what was important to them.

This cluster of marked graves at Burngreave cemetery represents only a small fraction of the South Asians who arrived in the Sheffield area during the period of British rule in India that ended in August 1947. Indeed, further investigation revealed that Souriya was not a spatially and historically isolated example of a child born to a 'mixed marriage'. Rather, she is part of this study's cohort that currently comprises a immigrant men, their native wives and children – a minimum of 338 individuals.<sup>28</sup> All these individuals lived in and around an inland city with no previous claim to be a site of pioneering migration and settlement. The personal histories of the individuals interred here provide valuable insights into the nature of this migrant population and the social networks they relied upon for reasons of migration, employment and socio-cultural support. Moreover, they provide clues to the beginnings of a migration of South Asians inland, away from the ports, to find non-maritime employment.

In an inland city in which the South Asian population is generally viewed as having only begun to arrive in the early 1950s, Souriya's grave might today be viewed as a somewhat anachronistic curiosity. Nevertheless, further research into the circumstances of Souriya, Ayaht and Hilda Khan, as well as those of the individuals interred in the three remaining graves, revealed sufficient evidence to begin the process of historical reconstruction of their lives. The evidence while not, by any means, abundant has nevertheless been sufficient to historically reconstruct an almost entirely forgotten immigrant population in an inland city where no such population or settlement was expected by historians. While historians of immigration, such as the late Caroline Adams, have provided us with a hugely valuable resource of oral testimony gathered from early non-elite South Asian settlers, the link between the early arrivals of the inter-war period and those who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s remains to be firmly established. To do so would be to modify the historical view of the early migration of South Asians to Britain from an interesting, but unrelated, predecessor of the large-scale immigration of the 1950s and 1960s, to that of a pioneering settlement whose social networks survived the Second World War to facilitate the later, larger migration to Britain. This thesis provides evidence to support an argument for the latter proposition. Moreover, as the example of Souriya demonstrates, the Sheffield-area settlement also provides an important opportunity to examine the connections and relationships of South Asian newcomers to the native population during this pioneering period of immigration.

## **1.2 The Sheffield area: a national and global centre of working-class population**

Sheffield was, and remains, one of the United Kingdom's largest cities. Its population grew with remarkable rapidity during the nineteenth century to transform a small town reliant upon agriculture and small-scale manufacturing into a major British city at the heart of a booming heavy-industrial conurbation. Since the early twentieth century the city's population has remained, numerically, remarkably stable.

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<sup>28</sup> Currently the Sheffield cohort comprises approximately 148 male migrants, 79 women and 111 children.

According to the 1931 census its population was 511,742 while its population in 2011 was 551,800. The mainstays of the Sheffield economy were, until the 1980s, its world-renowned export industries of steelmaking and forging, cutlery and flatware manufacture, as well as coal mining. Adjacent Rotherham, Sheffield's smaller neighbour in the River Don valley, also counted steel making and coal mining among its principal activities. These two settlements form part of larger south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire conurbation within which the Sheffield area study is situated (appendix 1). The area covered by this study comprises the southern section of the former West Riding of Yorkshire that coincides with the modern English county of South Yorkshire (established in 1974). It also takes in those northern elements of the county of Derbyshire which are contiguous with South Yorkshire. A number of areas which currently lie within the city of Sheffield's boundaries to the south-east formed, until the 1950s and their incorporation during the city's suburban expansion, part of Derbyshire. The principal settlements of the area are the city of Sheffield and the towns of Barnsley, Chesterfield (in Derbyshire), Doncaster and Rotherham.

The river Don with its broad, flat-bottomed valley cuts through the centre of the district and provided the site for development of the large-scale steel and metalworking industries which connected Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster along its length. The lower Don valley also allowed communications via rail and canal links to the ports of Goole and Hull. Rail lines through the Pennine hills connected the area with markets in Manchester and to the docks at Salford, and Liverpool and Birkenhead. These links provided the Sheffield area with its early connections to the global and imperial markets that fuelled its expansion as part of the heavy-industrial heartland of the British Empire.

Sheffield and Rotherham were long-renowned for the scale and quality of their steel production – Sheffield sufficiently well-known as a producer of steel implements to be mentioned in *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>29</sup> Production innovations, such as those of Benjamin Huntsman in the second half of the eighteenth century and the introduction of the Bessemer process in 1858, allowed domination of domestic and world markets until the rise of serious competition from the United States and Germany in the late nineteenth century. Metalworking in the area ranged from the production of both high-quality and mass-market cutlery and flatware, machine and hand tools to the production of steel billets, wire and sheet metal rolling, castings, drop forging, gun barrel turning and the rolling of armour plate for battleships. These metal-working industries, particularly the huge works erected by major local employers, such as Firth, Brown Bayley, Vickers, Jessop, and Hadfield, employed many thousands of men and women. It was during this period that Sheffield established its reputation as the 'Steel City'. The Lower Don Valley, between Sheffield and Rotherham was, by the beginning of the twentieth century, a crowded jumble of steel makers, forges, foundries, rolling mills, engineering works, gas works and collieries. It was this scene

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<sup>29</sup> G. Chaucer, 'The Reeve's Tale', *Chaucer: Interlinear Translations of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, l. 3933, <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/rvt-par.htm>, accessed 5 April 2018.

which George Orwell viewed from the family home he visited in Sheffield's Parkwood Springs district during the winter of 1936:

Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World... And the stench! If at rare moments you stop smelling sulphur it is because you have begun smelling gas. Even the shallow river that runs through the town is usually bright yellow with some chemical or other. Once I halted in the street and counted the factory chimneys I could see; there were thirty-three of them, but there would have been far more if the air had not been obscured by smoke...an interminable vista of factory chimneys, chimney beyond chimney, fading away into a dim blackish haze...<sup>30</sup>

The level of air pollution in Sheffield's East End, which formed the epicentre of the city's steel production, was outlined by Napier Shaw and John Owens in 1925. Here 55 tons of soot and other solids fell on every square mile of the district per year as compared to 38 tons in London and 32 in nearby Manchester. This equated to eight ounces per square yard per year.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the metalworking in the immediate vicinity of Sheffield, the deep-mining of coal formed a central component of the industrial production of the Sheffield area covered by this study. From Chesterfield in the south to Barnsley in the north, collieries formed a fundamental part of all the major settlements in the area and many thousands of local people found employment in the industry.<sup>32</sup> The South Yorkshire Coalfield supplied the raw material for the area's numerous coking plants, which supplied the local furnaces, as well as for domestic use and coal gas production (and to which the 'stench' experienced by Orwell can be reliably attributed).

Orwell took in Sheffield and neighbouring Barnsley during his tour of northern England undertaken to gather research material for what would become *The Road to Wigan Pier*. For visiting social commentators, such as Orwell and J.B. Priestley, the towns of South Yorkshire epitomised the 'dirty North' and the stoicism and 'grit' of the northern working classes who, in demographic terms, dominated the region. Journeying through the Peak District before making the descent into Sheffield and Barnsley, Priestley, like Orwell, found the area a hellish place, possibly inhabited by troglodytes:

For one minute Sheffield, far below, looked like the interior of an active volcano. The road ran along a ridge. Down below, on the left, were rows and rows of little houses, acres of slanting and gleaming slates. We ran under the murky canopy and were in Sheffield. The smoke was so thick that it made a foggy twilight in the descending

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<sup>30</sup> G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, 2001), pp. 98–99.

<sup>31</sup> N. Shaw and J. S. Owens, *The Smoke Problem of Great Cities*, (London, 1925), pp. 90–91.

<sup>32</sup> B. E. Coates, 'The Geography of the Industrialisation and Urbanization of South Yorkshire, 18th Century to 20th Century', in C. Holmes and S. Pollard, eds., *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, (Barnsley, 1976), pp. 18–21.

streets, which appeared as if they would end in the steaming bowels of the earth.<sup>33</sup>

Economic historian Sidney Pollard noted that Sheffield had long been the 'largest proletarian city in the country'.<sup>34</sup> It is situated in the heart of England, a nation Ross McKibbin described as 'one of the most working-class countries in the world' during the period 1918-1951.<sup>35</sup> My own study has found the immigration of non-white men to the Sheffield area to have been motivated primarily by economic factors largely among non-elite Indian populations drawn to these labour-intensive industries, which employed many thousands of working-class men. Moreover, the population into which this group migrated should also be characterised as overwhelmingly working class in status.

Working-class attitudes toward racial and ethnic difference during the early inter-war period, particularly those of its menfolk, have very much been characterised as essentially hostile. Lucy Bland argues that:

In the years immediately after the war, a victorious but disillusioned and frequently psychically, if not physically damaged, army of white British working-class men returned home, initially to face unemployment, and, in Britain's main ports, the spectre of the racial 'other' courting 'their' women. White working-class masculinity, already battered by the inglorious nature of the war, including the emasculating conditions of trench warfare now came up against challenges to two main definers of British masculinity, namely the ability to work and the ability to attract the opposite sex.<sup>36</sup>

If we follow Bland's line of reasoning, the 'white working-class masculinity' of men who demobilised back to the Sheffield area after the First World War was also likely to have been impugned by the miscegenation of local women with non-white workers in the area. Nevertheless, despite evidence of a visible non-white presence in the area, no suggestion of this kind of racial tension has been identified.

Both Lucy Bland and Jacqueline Jenkinson have identified working-class hostility to the non-white workers in their midst as the cause of the disturbances. As we have seen, Bland locates this hostility in a psychosexual context. In contrast, Jenkinson, who has provided us with the most comprehensive collection of data and analysis of the 1919-1920 port riots to date, applies a more materialist analysis. She locates the violence within the intense competition for employment, primarily between white and non-white seafarers. For Jenkinson 'the trigger for the violence...was dissatisfaction among sections of Britain's working class at a range of unsatisfactory peacetime circumstances, the chief of which were severe post-war competition for

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<sup>33</sup> Priestley, *English Journey*, 154.

<sup>34</sup> S. Pollard, 'Labour', in C. Binfield et al., eds., *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Volume I: Politics*, vol. II: Society, (Sheffield, 1993), p. 260.

<sup>35</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 2000), p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> L. Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender & History*, 17:1 (2005), p. 37.

jobs, especially in the merchant navy, and local housing shortages.<sup>37</sup> The Sheffield area also experienced frequent instances of protest and disorder caused by large groups of unemployed workers and demobilised military personnel during the years around the end of the First World War. These peaked in 1921 as the city's previously booming industries entered a period of economic slump exacerbated by a surplus of labour.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, despite the heavily proletarian nature of the Sheffield area, the economic hardships faced by the native working-class population, or the presence of non-whites engaging in so-called 'miscegenation' (inter-racial sexual relations) with native women, none of the disturbances assumed the racial character witnessed in some of the ports during 1919-1920.

The discovery of a visible non-white presence and associated inter-racial sexual relations in the Sheffield area during these turbulent early years of the inter-war period demonstrates that the Sheffield area's experience runs counter to the situation described in the historiography. Moreover, it demonstrates that the analysis of Bland and Jenkinson, although useful, does not provide the complete picture of relations between non-white newcomers and the resident population of, predominantly white, working-class natives. This thesis, which situates the immigrant population firmly within a working-class milieu, concentrates on the dynamic of co-operation, rather than of conflict, as its primary source of data. It argues that that 'miscegenation' and the development of affinal relationships between natives and newcomers were significantly more prevalent and widespread than has previously been allowed for. Indeed, it suggests that the largely conflict-driven model of research for migration history has obscured or overlooked many thousands of instances of sustained mutuality and sociability between natives and newcomers. Therefore, in the light of existing historical analysis, which has focused on conflict between natives and newcomers, it has been one of the central tasks of this study to assess the attitudes of working-class natives toward these newcomers. To this end the thesis includes a provisional national picture of marriages between Muslim newcomers and natives of Britain in the period between 1916 and 1947.

The thesis argues from the perspective that the two world wars were periods of intense globalization of labour markets when the British Empire extensively recruited colonized non-white men for its armies and for a rapidly expanded labour force. As the thesis demonstrates, the First World War and the intensification of the British demand for labour within maritime, manufacturing and extractive industries drew in economic migrants from the Indian, African, Middle-Eastern and Caribbean colonies and should be viewed as the beginning of large scale immigration and settlement. While relatively small in scale, these early settlements were maintained and slowly developed by immigrants themselves during the interwar period. It was during the Second World War that the global movement of labour was regularized and laid the foundations for the rapid take off of mass-immigration in the post-Second World War era. The second half of the twentieth century, particularly those years between 1948 and 1962 – from the introduction of the British Nationality Act to the

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<sup>37</sup> Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> P. Warr, *Sheffield's Great War and Beyond* (Barnsley, 2015), pp. 194–198.

Commonwealth Immigrants Act – have been popularly characterised as the *Windrush* era – named after the S.S. *Empire Windrush*, which arrived at Tilbury Docks from the Caribbean in 1948. This arrival is widely considered as the symbolic beginning of mass migration from the Empire / Commonwealth to Britain. The end of the period of study is marked by the independence of India, its partition and the formation of Pakistan in August 1947. The early boundary of study has been a little less focused, however, and has been regulated by the availability of data. The BMD data was not at the time of study, readily available for compilation and analysis before 1916 and has been omitted. Nevertheless, other sources indicate that South Asian immigration to the Sheffield area did not begin until the latter years of the First World War, after 1916.

### **1.3 The Sheffield area: a centre of global immigration**

During the nineteenth century, the labour-intensive industries of the ‘steel capital of the world’, mostly fuelled by the abundant local reserves of coal, attracted migrant workers to the area in their thousands. While this migrant labour force helped propel the city ‘forward as one of the fastest growing industrial regions of the country, and the world’, it originated primarily in the surrounding rural districts of south Yorkshire and north Derbyshire and to a lesser extent Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.<sup>39</sup> By 1851, 36.3 per cent were born outside Sheffield’s boundaries and the population grew, in large part due to migration, from 60,095 in 1801 to 451,195 by 1901.<sup>40</sup> By the time of the 1931 Census the city’s population was 511,742.

By the mid-nineteenth century we can count increasing numbers of Irish among the population. However, the area did not experience the major influxes of Irish immigrants of the ports and cotton towns of Lancashire on the other side of the Pennines. By the time of the 1851 census, those born in Ireland comprised only 3.3 percent of Sheffield’s population and by 1901 only 1.6 per cent had been born in either Ireland or Scotland.<sup>41</sup> This compares with 16.6 per cent of Manchester’s population and 8.7 per cent of Salford’s in 1851.<sup>42</sup> The Irish largely settled in the tenements and cottages of the Crofts area of Sheffield surrounding Solly Street, just to the north of the city centre in the city’s Catholic parish of St Vincent’s.

With regard to the settlement of continental Europeans in Sheffield a number of nationalities arrived in the city from the mid-nineteenth century and some of whom made it their home. While historian Clyde Binfield stated that Italians began arriving in the city ‘from the 1940s’, Sheffield’s population of Italian origin dispute that assertion, claiming their pioneers arrived in the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, their own historical research clearly demonstrates that the pioneers of the Italian settlement arrived from as early as the 1850s and worked Sheffield’s streets as pedlars, ice cream

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<sup>39</sup> S. Pollard and C. Holmes, eds., *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Barnsley, 1976), pp. 4–5; D. Hey, ‘Continuities and Perceptions’, in C. Binfield et al., eds., *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Volume II: Society*, (1993), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Hey, ‘Continuities and Perceptions’, 14.

<sup>41</sup> S. Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield* (Liverpool, 1959), p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975), p. 424.

<sup>43</sup> C. Binfield, ‘Religion in Sheffield’, in C. Binfield et al., eds., *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Volume II: Society*, (1993), p. 428.

vendors and barrel-organ operators. Initially a migration of men, many of whom married Sheffield natives, they were later joined later by their womenfolk, and founded a 'Little Italy' in St. Vincent's alongside the Irish.<sup>44</sup> Germans began settling in the city during this same period although they comprised a relatively small group numbering 390 in 1911. As Panikos Panayi notes, although they were influential due to their enterprises in business, particularly in steel, at no point did the German-born exceed 400 in number.<sup>45</sup> Jews, many of whom arrived from eastern Europe, numbered around 600 at the turn of century and Binfield notes that, by 1930, 450 families contributed to the building of a new synagogue in the city.<sup>46</sup> During the First World War, a group of around 3000 Belgian refugees arrived in the city as part of the 250,000 who arrived in Britain. While this made them the largest non-English population in the city, theirs was a relatively brief migration. As Peter Warr notes 'more than 1,400 left in two trains on 28 January 1919 and others returned later.'<sup>47</sup> At the time of the trains' departure, the *Sheffield Daily Independent* reported that 'at least twenty Belgians took with them Sheffield girls as wives, whilst conversely a number of Belgian girls remain behind having married Sheffield men'.<sup>48</sup>

Although throughout most of the city's history, Sheffield had not been a centre for large-scale immigration from outside its immediate environs, after the Second World War it became a notable centre for the economic migration of non-white men from South Asia, the Caribbean, Aden Protectorate and Africa. As early as 1952 the *New Statesman and Nation* reported on 'Sheffield's Little Africa' and described the travails of Somalis, West Africans and Jamaicans living and working in the city, mostly in the Attercliffe district. The article described the existence of goodwill toward the migrants, but their experience was tainted by acute overcrowding and some discrimination throughout the city.<sup>49</sup> By March 1958, *The Star*, Sheffield published an article by its chief reporter Don Blackburn headlined 'A Mosque May Rise In Attercliffe'. Written as part of a series by Blackburn investigating 'Sheffield's colour problem', the piece outlined a situation in the city's East End characterised by overcrowding, colour-bars, and a sense of '*bewilderment, even fear*' (Blackburn's italics) on the part of many local residents. Blackburn described how Pakistanis and Arabs had 'virtually taken over whole rows of houses as their homes' and had 'their own shops, their own cafe and public-house meeting places', turning Attercliffe into '*the coloured quarter in Sheffield*'.<sup>50</sup> Of particular interest is Blackburn's surprise at a claim by one 'coloured man' who claimed to have made his home in Attercliffe just after the

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<sup>44</sup> There has been no detailed academic study of Sheffield's Italians. However, descendants of the pioneers have undertaken their own research and produced an excellent resource for further study: 'Early Settlers - West Bar Italians', <http://www.west-bar-italians.co.uk/#/early-settlers/4532707178>, accessed 13 April 2018.

<sup>45</sup> P. Panayi, 'Germans in Sheffield, 1914-1918: A National Story on a Local Scale', in C. Binfield et al., eds., *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993. Volume II: Society*, (1993), p. 251.

<sup>46</sup> Binfield, 'Religion in Sheffield', 428.

<sup>47</sup> Warr, *Sheffield's Great War and Beyond*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> *Sheffield Daily Independent*, 29 January 1919.

<sup>49</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, 4 October 1952.

<sup>50</sup> *The Star* (Sheffield), 19 March 1958, Blackburn's italics.

First World War. While Blackburn's response betrayed his scepticism at such a claim, the evidence uncovered during the research for this thesis strongly supports the man's account.

In 2018, South Asians, particularly those whose family origins lie in, what are today, Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, comprise by far the largest ethnic minority group in Sheffield and Rotherham. Judging by the last national census in 2011, at 21,990 individuals or 4% of the overall population, the 'Pakistani' ethnic group is the largest ethnic minority in the city.<sup>51</sup> Although the 2011 census format did not allow for a formalised level of national, regional or ethnic self-identification beyond 'Pakistani', various sources have estimated that a substantial minority – perhaps one quarter to one third of the current Sheffield Pakistani-identifying population – are from families that originated in Chhachh, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) or are Pashtun. Moreover, many of the families currently resident in Sheffield originate in the same villages as the pioneers of a century ago suggesting that the chains of migration they established endured for many years.<sup>52</sup>

Insofar as the South Asian migrants discussed in this thesis are argued to be the pioneers of a large and enduring settlement, they were not the first non-white migrants to arrive in the Sheffield area. Nor were they the sole non-white presence during their own time in the area. Sheffield and its surrounding towns played host to continuing and visible presence of non-white visitors and settlers. In addition to the high-profile visits of the abolitionists Olaudah Equiano (1790) and Frederick Douglass (1846, 1847, 1859 and 1860), small numbers of Africans, African-Americans and West Indians began to visit and settle in the Sheffield area from at least as early as the 1850s – their presence discovered in contemporary press reports and census returns. Much like the vast majority of white working-class people during the modern period, non-white individuals have been rendered almost invisible within the mass. They emerge from the historical shadows in instances when the local press reported their appearance at the local law courts. Court reporters, assiduous in recording what they considered as the remarkable skin colour (and occasionally the country of origin) of the defendants, left sufficient clues for historians of migration to begin to reconstruct details of these lives.

From such data we are not only able to contextualise native reactions to the South Asian arrivals, but also to bring to light the ethnic diversity of working-class life during this period. Here we find individuals such as the African-American Salvationist Gilbert Lenison – an iron and steel worker who lived in Rotherham with his white English wife Alice and their four children.<sup>53</sup> Although Alice hailed from

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<sup>51</sup> 'Data Viewer - Nomis - Official Labour Market Statistics: QS201EW - Sheffield by Ethnic Group, 2011', [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS201EW/view/1946157123?rows=c\\_ethnicid&cols=rural\\_urban](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/QS201EW/view/1946157123?rows=c_ethnicid&cols=rural_urban), accessed 13 April 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mohammed Iqbal, 12 July 2012; interview with Imam Sheik Mohammad Ismail, 14 Sept. 2016; NWFP was the predecessor of today's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

<sup>53</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 4 December 1880; TNA, England, Wales & Scotland Census 1881, Lenison household, RG11/4677/24, p.8.

Stilton in Huntingdonshire, they married in Sheffield in 1877.<sup>54</sup> In 1886. The *Sheffield Independent* reported that another Salvationist John Rogers, 'a black man', married his native wife Harriet in the nearby market town of Worksop:

The ceremony was performed at the Priory church, and the wedding party was escorted there and back by a large crowd, among whom were most of the members of the Army at Worksop. Rogers is an officer with the Salvation Army at Sheffield, and had paid frequent visits to Worksop in connection with the Army's work, and in this way he became acquainted with the lady.<sup>55</sup>

Rasool Khan's wife Elsie – a mixed-race Sheffielder whose African grandfather John Peters was born in the British colony of Natal in the first half of the nineteenth century – was also brought up within Salvationism. While the local Salvation Army's outlook appears to have been colour-blind toward the saved, Elsie's daughter remembered that they found Rasool's unwillingness to embrace Christianity an impediment to their tolerance and was the cause of her mother's departure from the movement.<sup>56</sup> John Peters worked as a bricklayer's labourer and he, his wife Julia and their four children arrived in Sheffield from Nottingham during the mid to late 1880s. Their children married among native Sheffielders, his machinist son Walter to Martha, a plasterer's daughter. Elsie was born to the couple in 1906.<sup>57</sup>

New recruits to the Sheffield area's industries augmented a non-white presence in the area that can be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century. Other individuals whose presence has been identified in newspaper archives are Arthur Wright a 'coloured miner' of Whinney Hill near Rotherham; and William Johnson a labourer, 'said to be a West Indian', arrested in Sheffield in 1916 after failing to present himself to the recruiting authorities in good time.<sup>58</sup>

According to the local press, the Chinese presence in the Sheffield area also began in the first decade of the twentieth century. In an article published in 1910 reporting on the second Chinese operated laundry to open in the city, a reporter for the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* asked whether Sheffield laundry proprietors would suffer from this new competition and claimed that, to them, the 'yellow peril' had become a reality in terms of business competition.<sup>59</sup> Remaining sceptical of any claims of an imminent 'Oriental invasion', the *Telegraph* reassured its readers that 'four Chinamen can scarcely be said to be a menace to an extensive industry'. However, the paper went on to present a native Sheffield laundry manager's caricature of the process of Chinese chain migration: 'it is the trail that counts', he insisted. 'Every Chinaman advancing Westward is the harbinger of a long line of cousins and other branches of an

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<sup>54</sup> Gilbert Lenison and Alice Hillam, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1877, vol. 9c, p. 728.

<sup>55</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 19 June 1886.

<sup>56</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Peters and Martha Suter, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1904, vol. 9c, p. 518.

<sup>58</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield), 21 December 1908, p. 5; *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield, 4 July 1916), p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (Sheffield), 29 April 1910, p. 9.

inexhaustible family tree.’ Apparently one Chinese laundryman, a former clerk from Canton, arrived in Britain by way of Liverpool via Boston, United States, where he had learned his new trade. By 1922 there were reported to be seven Chinese operated laundries in Sheffield, a phenomenon ‘sufficiently unusual... in inland towns for the fact to have caused frequent comment.’<sup>60</sup> A later report, written in 1938, described Sheffield’s Chinese-nationalist population and their support for their nation’s war against the imperial Japanese invasion. It estimated that there were about thirty Chinese residents of the city, including five women, and all were involved in the laundry trade.<sup>61</sup>

It was through sport – particularly athletics (or ‘pedestrianism’ as it was then known), football and boxing – that most journalistic references to non-white working-class men were made during this period. This presence included individuals such as Arthur Wharton, the Sierra Leonian athlete and goalkeeper, who achieved high status with both Rotherham Town and Sheffield United football clubs between 1889 and 1895. Wharton continued to live in the area, working as a coal miner and as the landlord of two public houses until his death in 1930.<sup>62</sup> The Jamaican ‘Young’ Sam McVea (Sheffield and Barnsley), and the ‘coloured’ boxer Billy Gordon (Sheffield) took to the ring in Sheffield in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Indeed a small number of individuals developed short, but high profile, careers in the north of England and it is the response of the local working-classes to these individuals which provide another insight into their attitudes.

The non-white presence in the Sheffield area included men from North America, the Caribbean and Africa who were employed as general labourers, particularly in munitions, and were a fairly common sight in the Sheffield area, particularly in the years during and immediately after the First World War. Arthur Wright, a ‘coloured miner’ who made his home in Rotherham can also be found in the early years of the twentieth century. The possibility of his African origins lies in the fact that his landlord was alleged to have accused him of being a ‘black Boer’!<sup>63</sup> Indeed, non-whites working in the collieries of the area appear to have not been an unusual occurrence during this period. In 1930, William Barclay, a ‘coloured man’ (origin unknown) with a wife and children in the area could be found working as a coal miner at Edlington near Doncaster. Andrew Hector (origin unknown), a black boxer fighting under the name ‘Darkie Langford’ was employed as a miner at South Hiendley, near Barnsley, in 1939.<sup>64</sup> Tom Abdul arrived in Sheffield sometime in 1917 and represents the first located record of a South Asian in the city. Abdul, born in India and then resident in Kennington, south London, volunteered for the British army in September 1915. Posted to a labour company of the Army Service Corps, he briefly served in France but was discharged in March 1916 for an assault upon a civilian in the barracks town of Aldershot. At the time of his death of natural causes in July 1919, aged thirty,

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<sup>60</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield), 18 September 1922, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield), 11 August 1938, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> P. Vasili, *The First Black Footballer: Arthur Wharton 1865-1930: An Absence of Memory* (London, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 21 December 1908.

<sup>64</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 11 June 1939.

he was employed at Firth-Brown's steelworks of Carlisle Street, Sheffield.<sup>65</sup> In 1917 George Ashley, a Sierra Leonian, was reported as resident at the Petre Street huts, Sheffield – a large cluster of temporary accommodation for munitions workers.<sup>66</sup> A group of young African-American men were also reported as being employed at a Sheffield munitions factory during 1918.<sup>67</sup> How these men arrived in Britain is unknown. Certainly the heavy, labour-intensive industries of the Sheffield area attracted unskilled and semi-skilled workers from all over the world. During the First World War, demand was such that arrangements were made for a work gang composed of 'black men' to work at Sheffield gas works as labourers (as we have seen, the role in which Shekh Aboo and Yah Mohamed were employed). However, accommodation was not arranged quickly enough and the men were 'snapped up by another district'. Nevertheless, the same report, dated 1917, acknowledged that 'a few coloured men (were), however, working in the Sheffield'.<sup>68</sup>

As with the other newcomers to the city we have discussed, relationships developed between themselves and natives. In 1918, Charles Bryan a native of Kingston, Jamaica, worked in a Sheffield munitions factory at the time of his marriage to Lottie Stancer of Neepsend, Sheffield. The Colonial Office's documentation surrounding the arrangement for Bryan's repatriation to Jamaica after the war included his new wife and child. Unfortunately, it appears that, upon arrival, Lottie discovered her husband was apparently maintaining a number of other wives in Jamaica. The record shows that, after her letters to the Colonial Office, the authorities agreed to provide for her return to Sheffield.<sup>69</sup> Although this native-newcomer relationship ended in failure following what might then have been considered the deeply transgressive act of 'miscegenation', Lottie's mother and father (a dustman with Sheffield Corporation) agreed to take in and provide for their daughter and mixed-race grandchild.

A press report from the neighbouring town of Chesterfield in 1916 shows Jack Price a 'coloured man', possibly from the United States, working in a local munitions factory.<sup>70</sup> His status as either a British subject or as an alien was questioned by the authorities. If Price was a British subject, he was obliged to register for military service. The court decided that, despite his protestations that he was born 'near Washington, USA', he was, in truth, a British subject and imprisoned him for failing to register for conscription. Nonetheless, Price's claim to be United States' citizen is given credence by a press report published in July 1918 that shows African-American men working in local munitions factories during the First World War. The article describes the prosecution by the Sheffield Munitions Court of four young African Americans. The

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<sup>65</sup> Tom Abdul - attestation and discharge certificates 1915-1916, TNA - British Army Service Records 1914-1920, WO 363, First World War Service Records, Burnt Documents, SS/17136; Tom Abdul, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.-Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 907.

<sup>66</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 20 November 1917.

<sup>67</sup> Sheffield Evening Telegraph, 18 July 1918.

<sup>68</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 13 October 1917.

<sup>69</sup> Charles C. Bryan and Lottie Stancer, m. cert.: GRO Sheffield District, Apr-Jun 1918, vol. 9c, p. 1135; Charles Bryan and Lottie Bryan, 1919, TNA, CO 318/352/11.

<sup>70</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield), 28 August 1916, p. 3.

men, employed as labourers in a city munitions factory, were discovered playing cards during working hours by the foreman.<sup>71</sup>

The number of non-white workers in Sheffield during and immediately after the First World War is unknown. However, sources such as those outlined here, indicate that centres of manufacturing, such as the Sheffield area, were compelled by wartime production targets to draw on as much un-conscripted heavy labour as possible, including from the colonised non-white populations of the British Empire and beyond to the United States. As the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* reported in October 1917, this was a strategy necessary to slow down wage inflation – and keep production at levels that supplied the dual demand from both military and civilian markets.<sup>72</sup> It was, as the *Sheffield Independent* reported, a strategy that collieries in Salford, just over the Pennines, had been implementing since June the previous year.<sup>73</sup> Within the Sheffield area, arrivals of non-whites, mostly men, continued throughout the inter-war period and throughout the Second World War, many to work, at least initially, in the heavy industries of the area.

#### 1.4 Methodology and historiography

As previously mentioned, and Tabili has underlined, the historiography of immigration to Britain, particularly that of non-white populations, has been largely driven by a conflict-centred model of investigation. The traditional base of sources, such as archived governmental documents and reports gleaned from the local, regional and national press, has provided much of the historical insight we have of the situation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This research was undertaken by historians who painstakingly trawled through physical archives of press reports and state documents that focused upon flashpoints of inter-racial tensions – the riots of 1919 and 1920 in particular. The work of Fryer and Jenkinson are two notable examples of historians who have used this approach to research.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the work of Fryer, Jenkinson, Panayi and Colin Holmes has been vital to our understanding of this aspect of British society and culture in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly with regard to social attitudes toward race, ethnicity and difference.<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, the historiography for pre-*Windrush*, pre-Partition, immigration to Britain shows that data has, for the small number of historians who have taken on the subject, been scant or unmanageable within the typical academic confines of time and funding. Nevertheless, scholars who have extensively used physical archives have made a huge contribution to this nascent field of study. Holmes, Panayi, Tabili, Wainwright, as well as Rozina Visram, Tony Lane, Gopalan Balachandran, Diane

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<sup>71</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield), 18 July 1918, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 13 October 1917.

<sup>73</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 26 June 1916.

<sup>74</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, 298–386; Jenkinson, 'Black Sailors on Red Clydeside'; Jenkinson, 'The Black Community of Salford and Hull 1919–21'.

<sup>75</sup> C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1988); P. Panayi, ed., *Racial Violence in Britain, 1840-1950* (Leicester, 1993).

Frost, Marika Sherwood, Sumita Mukherjee, and Carina Ray and have made significant additions to our understanding of immigration during the period.<sup>76</sup> Previous to their research, there had been an over-reliance on the pioneering studies of post-war sociologists and anthropologists such as Kenneth Little, Sheila Patterson and Anthony H. Richmond, Kathleen Hunter and Badr Dahya, with rather little investigation of other archival sources.<sup>77</sup> Additional and important contributions have also been made by social commentators, left-wing activists, journalists and popular historians, such as Peter Fryer, Ron Ramdin, Dilip Hiro, Kenan Malik and David Olusoga. They have produced a body of work which has informed much of our current understanding about the nature and significance of immigration to Britain.<sup>78</sup>

There are, additionally, a small number of later ethnographic studies of the development of South Asian settlements in Britain, which are also frequently cited as standard texts by scholars of immigration to Britain. These include studies by Muhammed Anwar, Alison Shaw and, most frequently, the anthropologist Roger Ballard's investigations of transnational immigration to Britain from Kashmir and the Punjab.<sup>79</sup> Ballard, although acknowledging pre-*Windrush*, pre-Partition settlement by 'a very small number' of South Asians, his account of migration to Britain from the Indian subcontinent on The National Archives' *Moving Here* website does not mention significant pre-1945 immigration for any South Asian group, apart from those few Punjabi Sikh and Muslim soldiers who, he claims, remained (or deserted their units) in Britain in 1918 rather than be demobilised in India.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London, 2002); Panayi, *Racial Violence in Britain, 1840-1950*; D. Frost, ed., *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the UK* (London, 1995); M. Sherwood, 'Race, Nationality and Employment among Lascar Seamen, 1660-1945', 17.2 (January 1991), Pp. 234-5', *New Community*, 17:2 (January 1991), pp. 229-244; L. Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice": Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, 1994); Mukherjee, 'Herabai Tata and Sophia Duleep Singh: Suffragette Resistances for India and Britain, 1910-1920'; C. E. Ray, "'The White Wife Problem": Sex, Race and the Contested Politics of Repatriation to Interwar British West Africa', *Gender & History*, 21:3 (2009), pp. 628-646; Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*; T. Lane, 'The Political Imperatives of Bureaucracy and Empire: The Case of the Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 13:2-3 (1994), pp. 104-129.

<sup>77</sup> K. Little, *Negroes in Great Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*. (London, 1972); A. H. Richmond, *The Colour Problem a Study of Racial Relations* (Harmondsworth, 1955); S. Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Study of West Indians in London* (Harmondsworth, 1965); K. Hunter, *History of Pakistanis in Britain*. (Norwich, 1963); B. Dahya, 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', in A. Cohen, ed., *Urban Ethnicity*, (London, 1974).

<sup>78</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*; R. Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (London, 2017); D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1991); K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: How the World Changed: The Satanic Verses to Charlie Hebdo* (London, 2010); K. Malik, 'Diversity and Immigration Are Not the Problem. Political Courage Is...', *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/05/multicultural-policies-people-boxes-climate-hatred-fear>, 2015, accessed 27 January 2018; D. Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London, 2016).

<sup>79</sup> Anwar, *Myth of Return*; Shaw, *A Pakistani Community in Britain*; R. Ballard, 'The South Asian Presence in Britain and Its Transnational Connections', (2003); Ballard, *Desh Pardesh*.

<sup>80</sup> R. Ballard, 'Settling - A Community of Communities', [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/asian/settling/community\\_4.htm](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/asian/settling/community_4.htm), accessed 17 December 2018.

Although the writers and historians detailed above approached the early history of non-white immigration from various perspectives, it is possible to summarise the general analysis of the period as being that early non-white immigration to Britain was usually transient in nature, comprised largely of students, professionals or, within the major port cities, of seafarers. Moreover, as many writers and scholars have tended to work within a 'race-relations' paradigm focused on the 'colour problem' within British cities, violence, hostility and their aftermath, such as the 1919-1920 riots in British ports, take by far the most prominent role in most of the accounts of early encounters between natives and non-white newcomers within the working-class milieu. This rather one-dimensional view, while highlighting injustice, is itself problematic. In this context Tabili views the race riots of 1919-1920 as an anomaly rather than the norm. Her work strongly suggests that relatively peaceful settlement may well have been replicated throughout UK maritime cities and, perhaps, inland too.

Moreover, as this thesis demonstrates, studies which pay close attention to instances of peaceful co-habitation and co-operation have the potential to add a neglected quantitative element to interwar immigration research and begin to overturn Visram's pessimistic conclusion back in 1986 that due of the lack of archival evidence available 'the history of Asians in Britain inevitably becomes more a study of a few individuals than of communities'.<sup>81</sup> It is the lack of statistical evidence for any weight of numbers during the pre-*Windrush*, pre-Partition, period that has allowed political critics of an updated and revised historiography of immigration and settlement by non-whites in domestic British history to portray individuals as isolated examples, therefore lacking in wider historical significance.<sup>82</sup> Paul Gilroy has argued that the consequence is that historical initiatives which seek to include Britain's early non-white presence are perceived as 'an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic national life that, prior to (the immigrants') arrival, was as stable and peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated'.<sup>83</sup>

Gilroy's point is reinforced by the cursory treatment of pre-*Windrush*, pre-Partition immigrants in many leading histories of Britain including: *The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series* on the British experience of empire which mentions early immigration but considers it of little significance; Peter Clarke's *Hope and Glory - Britain 1900-2000* mentions immigration in passing and not before 1945; David Cannadine's *Class in Britain*, which completely overlooks the immigrant component of class; and Robert Colls's *Identity of England* which only provides a brief mention of immigration over the course of its 409 pages.<sup>84</sup> Martin Pugh's social history

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<sup>81</sup> R. Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947*. (Abingdon, 2016), p. vii.

<sup>82</sup> 'Gove Faces War with Equality Activists as He Axes Labour's PC Curriculum That Dropped Greatest Figures from History Lessons', *Mail Online*, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2254705/Gove-faces-war-equality-activists-axes-Labours-PC-curriculum-dropped-greatest-figures-history-lessons-Leaked-drafts-new-history-curriculum-emerge.html>, 2012, accessed 17 December 2018.

<sup>83</sup> P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> A. Thompson, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series: Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*. (Oxford, 2011), pp. 122-123; P. Clarke, *Hope and Glory*:

of the interwar period *We Danced All Night* sums up the presence of colonised migrants with a comment that 'the Indian community in Britain comprised 7000-8000, many of them well educated professionals who spoke good English, adopted Western dress and took a keen interest in cricket.' The apparently more proletarian Indians, Africans, West Indians and Arabs were 'much less familiar, except in ports like Sunderland and Cardiff'. No sources for this information are provided.<sup>85</sup>

Rather, it was those with radical left-wing agendas, many of whom were writing in the 1970s and 1980s when formal and informal racism and racist violence were reaching a peak in Britain, who began to pay attention to the early history of non-white immigration. Commentators such as Chris Brazier, editor of the *New Internationalist*, instinctively highlighted instances of historic injustice to bolster the case for activism, in contrast to those of co-operation and co-existence. These, activists considered, might feed a smugly complacent liberal view of 'British tolerance'.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the activist essence of such revisionist histories was captured by the journalist Peter Fryer in the epigram for his own frequently cited volume *Staying Power*. Extracted from the text of *The Black Jacobins*, Fryer's fellow Trotskyist C.L.R. James makes a stirring call to arms to anti-racists: 'The blacks will know as friends only those whites who are fighting in the ranks beside them. And whites will be there.'<sup>87</sup> This epigram well emphasises the solidarity and the sense of moral and political purpose of the period. Indeed, an uncompromisingly political approach and activist stance was no doubt necessary during a period of often open hostility from many elements within Britain's white population towards immigrants, especially non-white immigrants.

The moral imperative to challenge injustice notwithstanding, one of the unintended consequences of this radical activist historiography is that it has unfortunately, over time, tended to occlude the possibilities for a rounded and nuanced historical assessment of immigration and settlement, co-existence and hostility. Robert Bickers, whose historical specialism is British communities within the formal and informal empire, reminds us that both 'ideological hostility to colonialism, or a nostalgic sympathy towards it distort an understanding of the ordinariness of colonial realities', and that 'critics look for and find only violent imperialists' and 'the nostalgic see upper class, public spirited, public servants'. Both of these images, he says, 'have their place, but both are too narrow'.<sup>88</sup> While this thesis also focuses on the lived experience of settlers within the British Empire, at its heart lies an unusually early example of what Roger Ballard calls 'reverse colonisation', or the settlement of the imperial metropole by the peoples of its colonies and former colonies.<sup>89</sup> However,

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*Britain 1900-2000* (London, 2004), pp. 321-329; D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London, 2000); R. Colls, *The Identity of England* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> M. Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London, 2009), pp. 395-396.

<sup>86</sup> C. Brazier, 'The White Problem', *New Internationalist*, <https://newint.org/features/1985/03/05/keynote>, 1985, accessed 5 January 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, xv.

<sup>88</sup> R. Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London, 2004), p. 36.

<sup>89</sup> Ballard, 'The South Asian Presence in Britain and Its Transnational Connections', 198.

it is with Bickers's caution to avoid the tendency to distort the 'ordinariness of colonial realities' very much in mind, that this study has been undertaken.

A large majority of the cohort inhabited a working-class milieu and have been located primarily by means of the digitised records of births, marriages and deaths of the General Register Office (GRO), the burgess (electoral) rolls for key districts of Sheffield and the 1939 Register (released in 2015).<sup>90</sup> Of these, the great majority of the men had Muslim names and the children a Muslim component to theirs. The thesis concentrates on immigrants with names of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu heritage who worked or married in the Sheffield area, although other immigrants and migrations of European and non-European origin are discussed to provide context. The cohort of approximately 338 men, women and children is the bare minimum of those present in the area as the study is, in large part, reliant on state documentation to establish the presence of South Asian migrants. The thesis has therefore made a reasonable working assumption that the majority of men neither married, died or fathered children in the area and thus were not recorded by local state officials. The Sheffield area represents both the largest and earliest inland settlement of South Asians to be subjected to detailed academic study. As such, the area pre-dates by a number of years what we might today consider to be the defining centres of large-scale South Asian immigration and settlement such as Bradford, Leicester, Nottingham and Birmingham.

The methodology of this study emerged from my dissatisfaction with the existing, largely conflict-centred, historiography of non-white immigration to Britain, and its inability to adequately explain the apparent closeness of relationships between natives and newcomers, like that between Ayaht Khan and his wife Hilda. Much of the current historiography largely draws from a range of governmental and media sources that were created with an almost entirely hostile attitude toward the non-white newcomers to Britain, irrespective of their status as British subjects. Perhaps inevitably, the influence exerted by this source-base has been to foster a generally pessimistic view among historians of early encounters between newcomers and natives within Britain. As the administrators drawing up the documents in question were often actively involved in varying degrees of racially-motivated discrimination, this is an entirely reasonable conclusion for observers to reach. This is even more the case if the experience of the port riots of 1919-1920 are weighed in the argument. Nevertheless, the evidence presented within this thesis demonstrates outside the confines of governmental and elite textual discourse and the brief, but violent and destructive, disturbances during immediate aftermath of the First World War, there is another aspect to relations between natives and newcomers. While still paying close attention to governmental and social attitudes toward perceived racial difference, this thesis refrains from focusing on the textually-expressed thoughts and emotional responses of the more educated and literate classes toward perceived racial difference and has searched for alternative sources. While textual discourse analysis is no doubt an effective approach to assessing these social strata, it has proved woefully

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<sup>90</sup> See: D. Holland, 'The 1939 Register', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27:4 (2016), pp. 643–646.

inadequate when used to assess the attitudes, thoughts and emotional responses of the overwhelming majority of the population of Britain – its working classes – who have left historians little in the way of textual discourse.

In order to address this problem, this thesis takes what might be called an ‘actions speak louder than (or at least as loud as) words’ approach to studying native-newcomer relations within the British imperial metropole. By primarily examining the marriages between people of different cultures, of different faiths and of different skin colours, the coming together of (primarily, but not exclusively) white natives and the colonised ‘Other’ is used as a starting point in reassessing the nature of native-newcomer relations and the social networks that existed among them. As the study has considered it of prime importance to firmly situate these mixed couples within the often working-class milieu in which they participated, their relations with family, neighbours, friends and workmates are also examined.

The nature of the populations in question, and the conditions under which they met, has necessitated that this thesis draw on a wide range of historical sources. Many, such as newspaper repositories, census and BMD data, have been transformed by their digitisation over the past two decades by, often commercial, organisations such as Ancestry, Findmypast, Free BMD and the British Newspaper Archive.<sup>91</sup> They are now sufficiently developed to be digitally interrogated on a meaningful basis at a national level, or by drilling down to a household or individual level. The current process of digitisation is transforming the possibilities by which historians might approach the study of the past and this thesis has made extensive use of new opportunities for immigration research afforded by the new bodies of data that are now accessible, in practical terms, to the researcher. Now that official archives and commercial repositories offer much fuller access to the quotidian behaviour of the general population, not to mention the thoughts and actions of the various departments of the British state who governed them, it would be remiss of historians not to pay close attention to the nuances, paradoxes and contradictions in the attitudes of Britons revealed by this new data.

The evidential base for this thesis has been, necessarily, a rather eclectic one. However, by using the digitised GRO BMD as a starting point, its evidence has been developed and reinforced by the oral testimony of the native British descendants of the pioneer settlers, corroborated by more traditional sources. There follows a brief overview and discussion of the principal source types employed in the research. These can be categorised under seven main headings: General Register Office data (marriage births and deaths); governmental archives such as those of the Home Office; local, regional and national newspapers and periodicals; censuses (such as the 1939 Register) and electoral rolls; oral testimony (either gathered directly in fieldwork for this thesis or by other historians); autobiographical and literary sources; and contemporary, or near contemporary, sociological and anthropological studies. The

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Ancestry’, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>, accessed 17 April 2018; ‘Findmypast’, <https://www.findmypast.co.uk>, accessed 17 April 2018; ‘FreeBMD’, <https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>, accessed 18 April 2018; ‘British Newspaper Archive’, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>, accessed 17 April 2018.

thesis attempts to synthesise this wide range of source material from subjective first-person, sometimes emotionally-charged, accounts to quantitative empirical data, not only to analyse a forgotten native-newcomer population, but also to historically reconstruct the experience of the individuals who comprised it. Following Laura Tabili's work on South Shields, a guiding principle of the methodology employed has been to avoid analytically isolating the subjects of this study and to situate them within the host population – in this case the native working classes – as much as possible within the constraints of the data.<sup>92</sup>

At certain points, where data is missing or sketchy or the sources not reliable, reasonable working assumptions have been made in the analysis. However, such assumptions have not been required to bear the weight of conclusions, and corroborating evidence has been provided from other sources. The methodology may be novel in historical migration research, but the attempt to historically situate individuals and small populations within their milieu by means of often fragmentary evidence is not. Historians such as Jerry White and Andrew Davies in the study of working-class social history, and Matt Houlbrook and Helen Smith who studied men who sexually desired other men, have all laid the foundations for this study with their ground-breaking work.<sup>93</sup>

#### **1.4.1 General Register Office data for births, marriages and deaths (BMD)**

This thesis has extensively utilised the records of births, marriages and deaths systematically gathered during the first half of the twentieth century by the British state's General Register Offices (for England and Wales, and for Scotland) as its Civil Registration index. Prioritising this source has enabled gathering of quantitative data on the presence of South Asian immigrants within a geographically bounded population in what is the first study of its kind. National BMD data has long been available for research in the form of quarterly indexes compiled from district returns since July 1837. However, large-scale analysis of the disaggregated data has previously lain outside the bounds of practical possibility for historical immigration research. This state of affairs remained until the digitisation and online public release of BMD records by both commercial and not-for-profit organisations. The digitisation of the BMD records has allowed a mass of data to be reasonably accurately and systematically interrogated for the presence of distinctive names, which indicate the likely religious and ethnic origin or affiliation of individuals within a population. For the purposes of this study, the year for the early boundary of investigation was decided as 1916 due to it being the earliest date for the ready availability of consistent online data at the time of examination.

Concentrations of names associated with BMD data in a single geographical location, such as Sheffield, indicate the possibility of a settlement worthy of further investigation. In the case of Sheffield, these data were studied at district level by close

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<sup>92</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*.

<sup>93</sup> Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*"; J. White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887-1920* (London, 1980); A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-39* (Buckingham, 1992); Houlbrook, *Queer London*; H. Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (Basingstoke, 2015).

examination of the indexes for names of possibly South Asian heritage year by year between January 1916 and December 1947. As individuals were identified, further investigation took place into their marriage partners, the circumstances of their death (if it fell within the period of study) and any children born to the union. For a fee, the GRO provided the appropriate copy of the certificate for the individual's birth, marriage or death, each of which contained the further data that has been extensively utilised in this thesis. Using marriage certificates as an example, the Civil Registration index entry for the marriage of Rasool Khan shows his name, his spouse's maiden name 'Peters', the registration district 'Sheffield', the volume number '9c' and the page '1395'. While the Civil Registration index is useful for the initial location of an individual, their marriage certificate shows a far greater level of detail. The certificate includes exact date and place of marriage (the particular church or register office), the address of each party at the time of marriage, the occupations of the bride and groom (this was not usually completed for the bride in England and Wales before the Second World War), the names and occupations of the fathers of the bride and groom, and the names of two witnesses to the marriage. These data allow each individual immigrant groom and his bride to be situated within his social milieu. The social class within which the groom operated, can be defined by his occupation and address, as can the social class of his bride, as defined by her father's occupation (and her own, if recorded), and her address. The milieu of the groom in his land of origin can also be surmised from the occupation of his father. Indeed, many of the South Asian grooms indicated that their fathers were farmers. The names of the witnesses to the marriage can be used to identify the linkages between the couple and their social network, whether this be among natives, newcomers, or both. The significance of each element of these data will be drawn out in much greater detail over the course of this thesis.

With regard to concerns of research ethics, individual privacy and confidential data, the personal details contained in certificates of birth, marriage and death are all

1927. Marriage solemnized at <i>The Register office</i> in the District of <i>Sheffield</i> in the County of <i>Sheffield</i>								
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
1	<i>Twenty seventh December 1927</i>	<i>Ayah Khan</i>	<i>25</i> years	<i>Bachelor</i>	<i>Solicitor at Steelworks</i>	<i>100 Barnwell Road Sheffield</i>	<i>Sadar Khan (Deceased)</i>	<i>Farmer</i>
		<i>Hilda May Davis</i>	<i>15</i> years	<i>Spinster</i>		<i>98 Barnwell Road Sheffield</i>	<i>Walter John Davis</i>	<i>Ball Pharmaceuan</i>
Married in the <i>Register office</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Church of England</i> by <i>virtu</i> before me,								
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<i>Ayah Khan</i>	in the Presence of us,		<i>Beatrice Davis</i>	<i>W.D. Thornhill Register</i>		
		<i>Hilda May Davis</i>			<i>Dennis Swain</i>	<i>W.D. Thornhill Register</i>		

Figure 1.6  
Marriage certificate of Ayah(t) Khan and Hilda May Davis  
GRO/Public domain

in the public domain and part of the public record. They are all freely available to family and researchers alike. Nevertheless, in undertaking this study, the decision was made to omit the names of the children and grandchildren of unions between natives and newcomers unless family permission had been granted to use this personal data, or the individuals in question would be over one hundred years of age (in line with

the so-called 'one hundred year secrecy rule' for United Kingdom census data).<sup>94</sup> This decision was made with regard to the sensitivity of the subject matter and with regard to the privacy of the families discussed within this thesis.

#### 1.4.2 State archives

The records of the British Home Office inform this study throughout, namely its attempts to exclude British Indians from living and working in Britain, despite their formal entitlement to do so, as full British subjects of the King-Emperor. The records accumulated within the archive demonstrate the lengths that various departments of state were willing to go to prevent free movement and employment without making a formal public declaration that non-elite Indians were not welcome. The intelligence state officials gathered, particularly that by civil servants and police officers, provides us with a valuable insight into the outlook of the Home Office. There cannot be said to be a single outlook that might be termed the 'official mind' as, within the various departments of state, there existed numerous rivalries and, often contradictory, concerns. For example, the Home Office, in collusion with local officials, went to great lengths to exclude non-white seafarers from British sea ports in direct contravention of their British subject status.

To this end, in 1925 the Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks ordered a further extension to the Aliens Act 1919 known as the CASO or the Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order (1925). This measure targeted all non-white working men, first at a selected number of British ports, then in ports across the country, with the aim of restricting their employment in the merchant shipping industry and from shipping out from British home ports. However, the enforcement of the Order by local police among British colonial subjects, even to the extent of targeting non-seafarers, led the Colonial Office and India Office to protest that such blatantly discriminatory measures might lead to disturbances in the already restive colonies. Not only do the documents surrounding the implementation of CASO demonstrate the shifting and contingent nature of imperially motivated racial thinking and the active racial discrimination meted out to non-white British subjects, the interaction between the authorities and non-white immigrants is also apparent. Many men caught up in the implementation of CASO were required to prove that they were British subjects and to acquire a Special Certificate of Identity and Nationality, a process which, in the case of British Indians, involved much correspondence between local police officers, the Home Office, the India Office and various Indian colonial officials at district level and village level, in order to verify a man's identity. Much of this process, not to mention the frustration of many of the concerned parties, are captured within the surviving documents, as are the efforts of immigrant men to evade surveillance by the authorities. It is among these documents that much evidence of the migration networks of South Asians is located.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lord Chancellor's Instrument no.12 (1966), S.5 (1) of the Public Records Act 1958.

<sup>95</sup> TNA, HO 45, Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen).

One further strand to the official documentation of non-white British subjects concerns the arrival in Britain of increasing numbers of pedlars from the subcontinent during the inter-war period. These documents, drawn up by the Home Office and the Metropolitan Police, again document their attempts to stifle the flow of immigration and to restrict British Indians from engaging within this licensed and legitimate trade within Britain. The investigations into the development of the Indian pedlar trade, undertaken by a small number of civil servants carried out on behalf of the Home Office, have proved particularly useful. They demonstrate that a second form of migration was taking place which, although possibly established by former lascar seamen who had deserted in Britain, then took the form of ticket-paid passenger travel. This form of migration in order to take up work in Britain closely resembles the migration to Britain of South Asians in the post-Second World War era and is discussed in detail in Section 3.

### **1.4.3 Newspapers and periodicals**

The press at local, regional and national level have been a valuable resource in bringing to light a significant number of individuals not recorded by BMD or Home Office records. While some of the research into particular incidents (such as the death of the collier Sultan Mohamed) was undertaken using the microfiche-based local newspaper archive in Sheffield's Local Studies Library, the majority of new data has been uncovered thanks to newly digitised press repositories, particularly that of the British Newspaper Archive. Titles of particular interest have been Sheffield's *Star*, *Evening Telegraph* and *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sheffield Independent*, Hull's *Daily Mail*, the *Yorkshire Post*, and *Leeds Intelligencer*. The ability to focus on one particular geographically bounded area has been of great assistance in the search for early non-white and South Asian arrivals.

Many of the located reports are problematic in the sense that the contemporary press largely recorded criminal activity and the resulting court cases more than any other activity undertaken by South Asians (or other non-whites individuals) in the area. This gives the impression that this population was particularly susceptible to criminality. In part this focus simply demonstrates the press standards of the period and reflects the disregard of the contemporary press for the activities of working-class individuals, apart from those taking place within the criminal courts.<sup>96</sup> Insofar that the court reporters could usually be relied upon to note when the defendant in the dock was not white, it should be borne in mind that this was not always the case. Indeed, the subjects of press reports in the Sheffield area were sometimes not identified in this way at all, with only their names identifying them as South Asian in origin.

### **1.4.4 The 1939 Register, census and electoral roll data**

Four weeks after the 1939 declaration of war on Germany, the British state surveyed the entire population of the United Kingdom. The resulting Register, compiled according to the provisions of the National Registration Act 1939, was intended to

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<sup>96</sup> One notable exception to this was local press interest in the conjuring show of Rasool Khan during 1939.

enable a national system of identity cards. Although not officially a census, the 1939 Register was compulsory and covered 41 million individuals across the United Kingdom. On the evening of 29 September 1939, 'National Registration Day', heads of household completed the details of every individual who spent the night on their premises, 'whether as members, visitors, boarders or servants'. Collected by one of 65,000 enumerators, each registration form was transcribed into one of the Register's 7000 volumes. In anticipation of a total war against Nazi Germany, the 1939 Register provided a bureaucratic foundation for the direction of human resources. Its data formed the basis for planned rationing, labour and conscription.

For historians of twentieth century Britain, the early release of the 1939 Register came as a very welcome surprise, having been prepared for the long wait for access to the 1921 census, scheduled for release in 2022. The Register functions today as a means of filling the gap between the, yet to be released, 1921 and 1951 censuses: the 1931 census was completely destroyed by an accidental fire in 1942 and the scheduled 1941 census was not undertaken due to the war. Thankfully, November 2015 saw the commercial public release of the portion of the 1939 Register by Findmypast covering England and Wales. There lies within much historically significant data, rich in possibilities for enhancing or transforming our understanding of this transitional period in British history. This is particularly the case for historians of colonial immigration and settlement. The population data collected in 1939, although not as comprehensive as previous censuses, includes the type of premises or residence such as private dwelling or commercial boarding house, full names of individuals, their date of birth, sex, marital status, precise occupation (although not place of work) and whether a member of the forces, reserves, auxiliaries or civil defence. Unfortunately, for immigration historians, unlike British national censuses dating back to 1851, the 1939 Register did not require a respondent's place of birth to be recorded. This is perhaps surprising considering the circumstances in which the Register was compiled. However, this may have been to ensure the participation of respondents classified as aliens or those who might not have been able to prove their British subject status (British Indians for example), in the era before the widespread use of passports.

Despite this omission, the Register's available data allows us to examine the type and composition of each household. In my examination of data for the three Ridings of Yorkshire the presence of a number of multi-occupancy dwellings inhabited by Indians - both Sikh and Muslim - was noted. Additionally, households formed by marriages between native, mostly white, British women and non-white, predominantly Muslim, newcomers is a significant feature displayed by the 1939 Register. The data also allows the location of native/newcomer unions and their offspring and provides additional and unique glimpses into household organisation and the role of native-newcomer families as nodes on networks of migration from British India to the imperial metropole. The majority of these households feature a white British woman, either as the wife of the head of household or as the head of household herself. The register also shows other mixed households containing a mixed couple of white native and South Asian newcomer who provided lodgings for another South Asian migrant, possibly a kinsman of the husband. This pattern of mixing across lines of ethnicity within working-class neighbourhoods is repeated wherever non-European names appear. These phenomena are reflected in the

settlement patterns of men with names of Muslim heritage within the three Ridings of Yorkshire. Additionally, the data provided by the 1939 Register show the continuing presence in the Sheffield area of native-newcomer couples who married as early as 1919. Still together in 1939 they are testament to the enduring character of many of these unions.

Technically, there are a number of problems which the researcher may encounter whilst using the 1939 Register. These lie mainly in the quite frequent errors made in transcription from the physical volumes of the Register to the digital database. These range from simple keying errors to what sometimes appear to be a level of carelessness in transcribing perhaps unfamiliar or archaic names and occupations. Within the Yorkshire area investigated for this review, a number of census districts had also been incorrectly recorded. Nevertheless, these errors can be corrected online at subscriber level and the digital record will, by interaction with its many users, become a much truer and more accurate record of the actual 1939 Register. Considering the significance of the data and not wishing to appear churlish, it is important to stress that these are fairly minor and, hopefully, short lived errors. The release of the 1939 Register by Findmypast in late 2015 was a significant moment for historians of immigration to Britain from its colonies, especially considering there are no household-level census data available for study after 1911.<sup>97</sup>

An additional source for household-level data has been Sheffield's burgess rolls for 1945 preserved in Sheffield City Council's Local Studies Library. This municipal level electoral roll contains much useful data for those individuals who met the qualifications for voting in local council elections. Here, those British subjects resident in the city, over the age of twenty-one and registered to vote are listed on a household by household basis. The burgess rolls for the working-class steel-making districts of Attercliffe and Darnall for 1945 have been particularly fruitful sources in demonstrating the ethnic composition of both households and neighbourhoods.

#### **1.4.5 Oral testimony**

Oral testimony adds human warmth to the cold data of the BMD statistics, not to mention providing the 'subaltern voice' of those who were subject to scrutiny and censure by government departments, local constabularies and moral entrepreneurs, due to their perceived racial or moral characteristics, those of their marriage partner or parent. Indeed, this thesis makes extensive use of the oral testimony of pioneer immigrants and that of their families. Although the following discussion focuses on the testimony of Doreen Bahudur, the points apply to that of the other interviewees.<sup>98</sup> By paying close attention to the spoken life narratives of individuals interviewed as part of this study, or those interviewed by social historians in previous decades (such as Caroline Adams and Jeffrey Green), it has been possible to successfully add a

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<sup>97</sup> Holland, 'The 1939 Register'.

<sup>98</sup> Recorded conversation between Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan, 2004

grassroots dimension of both directly lived experience and narrative family history to British immigration history.<sup>99</sup>

The British state's own records, concerned as they are with maintaining hierarchies of class and race, are necessarily skewed toward a top-down narrative and partial analysis of contemporary events and should be critically read as such. To counter this skewing of sources the inclusion of immigrant family histories, particularly oral narratives such as that by Rasool and Elsie Khan's daughter Doreen, together with the memories of surviving relatives, their photographs, journals and other cultural artifacts, may significantly add, in both a quantitative and a qualitative sense, to the sum of historical sources available for new research into pre-*Windrush*, pre-Partition immigration and settlement. According to Paul Thompson, a pioneer of oral history practice, the problem of the paucity of sources for certain populations, those 'hidden from history' (to borrow Sheila Rowbotham's phrase), might effectively be addressed by the creation of new sources by means of oral history interviewing.<sup>100</sup> Thompson suggested that historians should 'imagine what evidence is needed, seek it out' and, if it can be located, 'capture it' by means of interview.<sup>101</sup> Eric Hobsbawm echoed this point as well as drawing out the nature of sources and the historian's relationship to them, suggesting that 'we cannot be positivists, believing that the questions and the answers arise naturally out of the study of the material'.<sup>102</sup> As the process of investigation and research that preceded the discovery of Doreen's testimony strongly suggests, 'there is generally no material until our questions have revealed it'.<sup>103</sup> While of huge personal and family significance to the Khans, the interview segment discussed here was not regarded as a historical source for the study of migration, imperialism and racialised difference until it was accorded this value by historical research into these topics. Moreover, Raphael Samuel noted in 1970, in the early days of the oral history method, that 'the collector of the spoken word - of oral memory... is in a privileged position' being 'the creator, in some sort, of his own archives' and whose role should be concerned with 'retrieving and storing priceless information which would otherwise be lost'.<sup>104</sup> Samuel's analysis is indeed borne out by the recordings of Doreen Bahadur.

Doreen's account of her family's real and metaphorical journey, rather than being a definitive account of a historical period, is a personal view mediated by time and by her ongoing emotional and intellectual experience. She tells not just her own story, but those of her mother, father and her wider family, many details of which can only have been passed down to her by word of mouth. Doreen's father Rasool, although an intelligent and resourceful man, like many of his migrant peers could

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<sup>99</sup> C. Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylhetti Settlers in Britain* (London, 1987); J. P. Green, 'Beef Pie with a Suet Crust: A Black Childhood in Wigan (1906–20)', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 11:3 (1984), pp. 291–298.

<sup>100</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London, 1992).

<sup>101</sup> P. Thompson and J. Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York, NY, 2017), p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1998), p. 271.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> R. Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript', *Oral History*, 1:2 (1972), pp. 19–22.

neither read nor write either in his native Pashto or in English. Rasool's own Pashtun oral tradition of storytelling is, perhaps, evident in Doreen's entertaining and engaging narrative. However, we should still bear in mind Alessandro Portelli's caution that memory is not 'a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings'.<sup>105</sup> Hobsbawm, similarly concerned about the use of personal memory, considered it to be 'a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts... a selective mechanism' which, within limits, constantly changes the selection.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Portelli reassures us that this should not 'imply that oral history has no factual validity'. Rather, oral testimony has the potential to reveal 'unknown events or unknown aspects of known events', shedding 'new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes'.<sup>107</sup>

The 'non-hegemonic classes' in question here are those colonised, colonial migrants who, aided by their kinship networks and an unwitting colonial infrastructure, made their way to Sheffield and other British cities. Doreen's narrative does indeed shed new light on this process and, by mapping her narrative onto verifiable, more traditionally empirical source material, we can begin to synthesise a historical analysis of the experience of colonised people and their families living within imperial Britain. When compared to other source material such as state archives, of which she would not have had prior knowledge, Doreen's recall is remarkably accurate. Her accounts of her father's life in London in the mid-1920s, immediately after his arrival tallies closely with Home Office surveillance records for 'Coloured Alien Seamen' and confirm the names of his contacts and associates in the city.<sup>108</sup>

The insights provided by Portelli and Luisa Passerini about the changing meaning of memory also allow the historian to assess the changing values ascribed by interviewees to various events, such as instances of racial prejudice or mutual toleration.<sup>109</sup> Sixty years after the event, Doreen ascribed little meaning to the racial epithet 'Topsy' which she recalls being used by strangers she met in the streets of Sheffield as a girl.<sup>110</sup> She put this down to Sheffield folk being unaccustomed to seeing people of colour in the flesh, rather than them harbouring any deeper racial animus. A similar experience was recounted by Kashmiri elders who were interviewed as part of my research. They too described the city in the 1950s and 1960s as, generally, a friendly and tolerant place. Whether these memories of Sheffield's tolerance are filtered through a contemporary desire to promote ethnic harmony in the wider community, thus erasing incidents of racism from the narrative is worthy of further investigation. This might well reveal the ongoing process of valuation and colouring

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<sup>105</sup> A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, N.Y, 1991), pp. 52–53.

<sup>106</sup> Hobsbawm, *On History*, 273.

<sup>107</sup> Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, 53.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, HO 45/13189, Nationality and naturalisation (Including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Rasool Khan, 1928, 524286.

<sup>109</sup> L. Passerini, 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism', *History Workshop*, 8 (1979), pp. 82–108.

<sup>110</sup> A reference to the character in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

of stories as they are told and retold, especially where the memories of ordinary 'non-hegemonic' people are at odds with official histories and narratives. This process has been illustrated by Luisa Passerini's interviews in the 1970s with socialist Italian workers who had lived under the Mussolini regime.

This phenomenon of personal memory being at odds with other available evidential source material is demonstrated in Doreen's statement that there were only about 'half a dozen' Indian men in Sheffield during the period up to the end of the Second World War. This element of her account is called into question because it is contradicted by the documentary evidence available for Sheffield, particularly the numerous birth, marriage and death certificates for Indian men in the city at this time. The variance of Doreen's account from the other more privileged sources of the state archive, (which form a significant element of my own research) is problematic and could easily be attributed to simply being an error of recall on her part; the memory being after all 'a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts'. Nonetheless, the variance should be explained rather than dismissed and it may well shed further light on this population who have so far been 'hidden from history'. It is possible that as a young girl Doreen was excluded from some of the social activities and contact with the other settlers due to her age and her gender; for her they did not exist because they were outside her experience. Another explanation is that the migrant's social network was diffuse and they seldom congregated due to the state surveillance of migrants witnessed in some British ports. Whatever the explanation for this dislocation between narrative and document, it nevertheless exists and remains a source of tension between the two historical sources: the oral narrative and the state archive.

In summary, the construction of an insightful historical analysis of the migration and settlement of colonised people would be composed of many elements and viewpoints including the testimony of oral history subjects, as well as official documents, photographs and the wider social, political, economic and cultural historiography. For the historian, one of the great values in recorded oral testimony is its provision of the alternative perspective of ordinary people to events and eras, places and culture, distinct from that of social and political elites engaged in constructing their own written, rather than spoken, historical narrative. However, while the process of recalling memories should be considered problematic, neither should memory be considered to be so prone to distortion and error that it can be discounted entirely; Doreen's testimony when compared against other historical sources is remarkably accurate and insightful. The areas where she and other interview subjects' recollections are at variance from other historical sources should be approached as further avenues of investigation possibly leading to greater insight into the people, place and period. The process of recording the memories, thoughts and feelings of Portelli's 'non-hegemonic classes' forms a valuable component of a larger toolbox of approaches to historical sources.

#### **1.4.6 Autobiographical and literary sources**

Complementary to the oral testimony discussed above are autobiographical and literary sources and take three main forms. The first are those written by working-class memoirists, sometimes locally or privately published and, and while not directly related to the study of immigration, provide contextual descriptions of social relations,

local economies and neighbourhoods of the working-class milieu. Such first-hand accounts of life in working-class Britain during the first half of the twentieth century have been invaluable in assessing the thoughts, feelings, hopes and fears of ordinary people – particularly with regard to their attitudes to perceived racial, religious and gendered difference or moral and behavioural transgression. Notable scholarly examples of this form are Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* and Robert Roberts's *The Classic Slum*.<sup>111</sup> Other examples used by this study are those, often locally printed, volumes by amateur authors that are sometimes disparagingly dismissed as 'local history'. These immensely evocative and unique sources include Alfred Green's, *Growing up in Attercliffe* and Patrick McGeown's *Heat the furnace seven times more*.<sup>112</sup>

The second form of memoir is that by one of the individuals with either direct experience of migration or by the close relative of an immigrant. The most notable example of this form is the autobiography of the former lascar seaman and labour activist Dada Amir Haider Khan.<sup>113</sup> The first volume of Haider Khan's memoir deals with his experiences as a lascar working for the British merchant marine between India, the Middle East, the United States and Europe. His account, remarkable not least for the extent to which it has been overlooked by scholars, forms perhaps the most detailed single first-hand account of lascar seafaring. Other examples of this form include R.L. Lee's *The Town That Died!*, an account of growing up as the mixed-race son of a Chinese laundryman within a Welsh working-class family, and Choudry Mohammed Walayat's memoir of migration and settlement in Sheffield – *Made in England*.<sup>114</sup>

The third category of literary source is that produced by contemporary novelists, playwrights and journalistic social commentators. These include works by George Orwell and J.B. Priestley, Howard Spring and Howard Clewes and provide the observational insights of outsiders visiting working-class districts which they found sufficiently remarkable to record for their audience.<sup>115</sup> These sources are often much less matter-of-fact than the memoirs produced by working-class authors and frequently assume the orientalist tone of the civilised explorer reporting back from previously uncharted territory. Nevertheless, they remain useful, not only as records of the early non-white presence, but also of the attitudes of the educated middle-class observer toward that presence within Britain.

#### 1.4.7 Contemporary anthropological and sociological studies

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<sup>111</sup> R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments* (London, 1957); R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (Harmondsworth, 1974).

<sup>112</sup> A. Green, *Growing up in Attercliffe: Honey with a Ladle - Vinegar with a Teaspoon* (Sheffield, 1981); P. McGeown, *Heat the Furnace Seven Times More* (London, 1967).

<sup>113</sup> D. A. H. Khan, *Chains to Lose, Life and Struggles of a Revolutionary: Memoirs of Dada Amir Haider Khan*, 2 vols (Karachi, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> R. L. Lee, *The Town That Died!* (London, 1975); D. C. M. Walayat MBE and J. Cornwell, *Made in England: The Memoirs of Dr. Choudry Mohammed Walayat MBE* (Sheffield, 2008).

<sup>115</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*; Priestley, *English Journey*; Spring, *Heaven Lies About Us*; H. Clewes, *Sailor Comes Home* (New York, 1939).

While not making social science studies (nor those hostile texts purporting to be 'scientific'), central to this thesis, I draw on these sources in order to briefly contextualise contemporary cultural attitudes to race and inter-racial relationships. Many of these sources, although examined in some detail by a number of other, relatively recent, studies of early immigration, provide a window onto the pre-occupations of intellectual and educated middle-class activists – often those whose politically influential views were informed by eugenic theory. The so-called, 'Fletcher report' – correctly titled the *Report on an investigation into the colour problem in Liverpool and other ports* (1930) is a good example of the type, as is Captain F.A. Richardson's *Report Into The Social Conditions In Ports*.<sup>116</sup> Both studies appear to have problematised non-white immigrants and inter-racial marriages and reached their conclusions long before any data was collected.

Nevertheless, studies such as the *Report on condition of life of coloured population in Stepney* (1944) by Phyllis Young, although still betraying many *a priori* racial assumptions, still contain much useful fine detail of the situation on the ground as they appeared to researchers.<sup>117</sup> Kenneth Little's *Negroes in Britain* (1947) and Sydney Collins's *Coloured Minorities in Britain* (1957) can both be reasonably considered true social-science investigations.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, a substantial proportion of these pioneering studies' fieldwork was conducted within inter-racial populations formed during the period covered by this thesis by researchers with a genuine interest in disinterested research – Little into the 'coloured' and mixed population of Bute Town, Cardiff, and Collins into a number of early non-white port settlements, with particular emphasis on 'mixed marriages'. These studies allow us, arguably, our most rounded contemporary insights into the everyday life and development of racially mixed communities, their successes, as well as their problems, immediately after the Second World War.

The St Philip's Settlement's study *The Equipment of the Workers* (1919) has also been a useful primary source for this thesis.<sup>119</sup> Compiled after extensive work by a socialist group close to Edward Carpenter, the study used social scientific methods to systematically survey the cultural, economic and political outlook and aspirations of 816 working-class men and women who resided in a Sheffield industrial district which included the neighbourhoods of Lower Walkley, Uppertorpe, Philadelphia and Shalesmoor. The interview subjects were categorised by the St. Philip's group according to how well 'equipped' workers were to deal with the, soon to extended,

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<sup>116</sup> M. E. Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports* (Liverpool, 1930); 'TNA, MH 55/352, Captain F.A. Richardson - Report Into The Social Conditions In Ports'.

<sup>117</sup> P. Young, 'TNA, MT 9/3952, Seamen's Welfare (Code 124): Report on Condition of Life of Coloured Population in Stepney and Comments on General Conditions of Seamen, White and Coloured', 1944.

<sup>118</sup> Little, *Negroes in Great Britain*; S. Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain - Studies in British Race Relations Based on African, West Indian, and Asiatic Immigrants* (London, 1957); S. Collins, 'The Social Position of White and "Half-Caste" Women in Colored Groupings in Britain', *American Sociological Review*, 16 (1951), pp. 796–802.

<sup>119</sup> St Philip's Settlement Education and Economics Research Society, *The Equipment of the Workers: An Enquiry* (London, 1919).

franchise. Although the *The Equipment of the Workers* is permeated with the aspirations (and prejudices) of largely middle-class socialist activists, the study provides a unique snapshot of the attitudes of skilled and unskilled working-class people occupied in manual trades, within a central district of Sheffield at the beginning of the inter-war period.

### 1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis is organised thematically. Each section, divided by subsections, examines in turn key aspects of the Sheffield experience and addresses major questions within the historiography of non-white immigration to Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. The following section examines the social networks of South Asian immigrants to the Sheffield area. It begins with an exploration of the origins and reasons for migration of the Pashtuns of Chhachh in northern Punjab. This ethnic group was the first and most numerically dominant South Asian migration to the area during the period. The section also examines the crucial primary role of the *biradari* (clan) in facilitating and sponsoring the pioneering migration from within the villages of Punjab, NWFP and Kashmir. Through the more cosmopolitan environment of employment aboard British merchant ships as lascar seamen, the kinship-based networks supporting migration were bolstered by contact with those outside the *biradari*. Pioneering immigrants were thus able to establish contacts ashore in Britain. The section argues that these early links, which included white natives within the working-class milieu, were crucial in aiding the establishment of successful early South Asian immigration and settlement, not only in the Sheffield area, but in towns and cities across Britain.

By tracking the experience of non-elite South Asians from peasant farmers to lascar seamen, waged labourers and petty traders, Section 3 examines their remarkably creative working lives. It also situates the South Asian experience of waged labour within that of other non-white immigrant labourers who worked and settled in the Sheffield area as well as that of the proletarian population of the area. Focusing locally, but drawing conclusions for Britain as a whole, the section argues that the current historiography incorrectly draws the conclusion that the creative fluidity of the South Asian men's working lives was a necessary response to structural discrimination within the British labour market. In contrast, this section argues that many of these individuals maintained their own agenda for economic independence from employers. Moreover, fluidity in their working lives was also reflected in the endeavours of similarly motivated working-class natives when presented with periods of economic precarity. It is therefore, the section argues, not a reliable indicator of structural discrimination within Britain. Additionally, the new evidence presented here supports the section's argument that economic migration of South Asians was frequently self or *biradari* financed in order for individuals to specifically to take up self-employment within the peddling trade in Britain. This also calls into question the claim that peddling was an unwanted and imposed form of precarity among non-elite South Asians. As fare-paying passengers, as opposed to lascar seamen deserting their ships in Britain, the growing numbers of these peddlars during the 1930s closely resembled the economic migration of the post-*Windrush*, post-Partition era. This, the section argues, supports an argument that the forms and

networks of immigration were created prior to, and survived, the Second World War, rather than being a product of the post-war era.

The phenomenon of the inter-racial or 'mixed marriage' should be, Section 4 argues, central to any discussion of South Asian immigration to Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. The section examines the new data collated by this study and argues that the both role and widespread distribution of mixed marriages, not only in the Sheffield area, but across Britain as a whole have been neglected by scholars. The section explores the backgrounds and social position of women who entered into relationships with South Asian men and questions Priestley's statement that mixed working-class couples were formed from 'the riff-raff of the stokeholds and the slatterns of the slums'. Couples in mixed marriages have also been presented as isolated from the neighbourhoods they inhabited. This section, however, argues that these couples were often thoroughly integrated into their neighbourhoods and maintained frequent contact, not just with close friends, but also with blood relations, in-laws and neighbours. Additionally, these marriages and the families and households they formed, Section 4 argues, played a significant, if not crucial, role in acting as anchor points in enduring chains of migration spanning the inter-war period and into the post-*Windrush*, post-Partition era.

Section 5, in addition to concluding the thesis, contains an exploration of why the Sheffield area settlement (as well as those located by BMD data in other British towns) has remained largely unnoticed by scholars and problematises a historiography which begins from an *a priori* assumption that the presence of non-white immigrants in an area can always be located by remarkable instances of resistance by state institutions and the general population. It argues that evidence of the everyday lived-experience of natives and newcomers who inhabited the same neighbourhoods and workplaces without conflict points to a non-ideologically-aligned phenomenon, here described as 'everyday tolerance', which existed within many working-class communities. Fostered by values of 'getting by' and 'mucking in', and of bonds of family, work and neighbourhood, communities were able to accept the inward migration and inter-marriage of non-white newcomers without the hostility and violence displayed during the port riots of 1919-1920.

## Section 2

### *The migration networks of South Asian immigrants in the Sheffield area*

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The broad mass of data collected by this study (although by no means its exclusive focus) concerns those men of Pashtun ethnicity who originated in the Chhachh district of the northern Punjab and in the North West Frontier Province. As the kinship-based social networks to which settled Pashtuns belonged have broad similarities with those of other populations either in, or adjacent to, Punjab (such as Punjabi Muslims from the Jhelum valley, Sikhs, and Kashmiris from the area surrounding Mirpur), the discussion will remain focused on the Pashtun experience. However, when other populations had markedly different experiences related to migration, this will be clearly stated.

The sub-section 2.1 will first present a brief overview of the portion of the Attock District of Punjab known locally as Chhachh, its relationship to its neighbouring districts, as well as its predominantly ethnic Pashtun population. Using the Punjabi district of Chhachh as its focus, sub-section 2.2 will examine local factors which encouraged young men to migrate to Britain (and elsewhere). Section 2.3 will examine the fundamental role of the social and kinship network, particularly that of *biradari* in the phenomenon of chain migration. It will firmly situate this migratory process within the context of South Asians journeying to Britain in search of employment, both before and after Partition in 1947. Immigrant kinship and compatriot networks within Britain will be examined in sub-section 2.4. Particular emphasis will be given to their role in the diffusion of immigrants away from the ports to Britain's heavy industrial heartland and the inland city of Sheffield. The final sub-section will explore the social networks forged between natives and newcomers. It will present evidence to support an argument that native working-class men, rather than simply being as the principal source of racial animus toward immigrant newcomers (as frequently viewed by scholars), were also capable of forming social bonds with them as workmates, neighbours and friends.

## 2.1 Pashtuns of Chhachh

Of this study's cohort, certainly the earliest arrivals in the Sheffield area, and perhaps a majority of the men overall, have one factor in common: their origins in a small area situated either side of the Indus river which comprised a portion of Attock District in northern Punjab and a neighbouring portion of the NWFP (figure 2.1). The small district of Chhachh, twenty miles long and less than ten miles wide, lies on the south



Figure 2.1  
British India circa 1900 showing the location of Chhachh

bank of the Indus and is the principal area of origin for the pioneers of South Asian migration to the Sheffield area. Surrounded by rocky hills and land of low fertility, bordered along its northern edge by the Indus and watered by runoff from the enclosing hillsides, Chhachh stands in stark contrast. Indeed, as Attock District Gazetteer highlighted, 'the fertile Chhachh maintains a population as dense as that of almost any congested district in the Punjab... the district contains one cantonment, seven towns and 612 villages.'<sup>120</sup> Malcolm Lyall Darling, Assistant Commissioner of the Punjab, thought highly of this agricultural district. Noting in 1925 the low productivity of agriculture in the surrounding areas, Darling praised neighbouring Chhachh:

Yet, even in the heart of this primitive (Attock) district – so full of contrast is Indian life – is the small fertile plain of the Chhachh, twenty miles long and not ten miles broad, locked in by the hills and the Indus, and containing a population of Pathans, Maliars and Awans as industrious and enterprising as any in the Punjab. It recalls the richest and most intensively cultivated strip in Europe, the country along the Bay of Naples, where a family can be maintained on 2½ acres. The soil

<sup>120</sup> *Gazetteer of the Attock District, 1930*, xxix-A:57–58.

is a rich loam deposited by hill torrents and is abundantly watered by wells. Wheat, maize, sugar-cane, vegetables, and tobacco are the chief crops, and snuff tobacco the most valuable... So good is the farming that the average yield of 100 acres of land is 188 acres of crops, and, where special crops are grown, from 1 to 1¼ acres is considered all that a man can possibly cultivate. The late settlement officer describes how he found a family consisting of an old man, a grown-up son, two women, three small children, a buffalo, and a donkey subsisting on less than half an acre.<sup>121</sup>

The prodigious fertility of the Chhachh is perhaps just as well. As late as the early 1970s, Badr Dahya noted that the majority of Chhachhi immigrants living in the Yorkshire city of Bradford possessed a meagre one and one quarter to one and one half acres of farmland in their villages of origin.<sup>122</sup>

During the first half of the century, the commonly-held prejudice among civil servants and social investigators was that such men made the journey to Britain in order to escape their poverty-stricken existence in India. Moreover, as we shall see in the following section *Working lives*, South Asian arrivals in Britain were assumed to be 'impecunious Indians of the agricultural class' in the eyes of Home Office officials.<sup>123</sup> Similarly, the Church-funded social investigator Phyllis Young concluded that the Indian seafarers resident in Stepney 'come from the poorest strata of their society and many of them can neither read nor write.'<sup>124</sup> It is certainly true that many non-elite British Indians were illiterate in their own language, not to mention English, as has been widely confirmed by the numerous South Asian subjects of oral history surveys. Indeed, most attributed this to the chronic under-provision of elementary education for children of the Indian peasantry. It may also explain the paucity of first person narratives by such individuals that can be utilised as primary sources by historians. However, it was not, by any means, true that the men came from the 'poorest strata of their society'. As Dahya cautioned:

While the landholdings of a majority of the immigrants may appear to be meagre, the immigrants cannot be identified...with the landless category in their society of origin. One has only to witness the plight and the depressed status of the landless category in Pakistan (and, indeed, in the subcontinent as a whole) in order to appreciate the socio-economic significance of ownership of even small landholdings such as the immigrants and their families possess.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> M. L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (Bombay, 1947), pp. 79–80.

<sup>122</sup> Dahya, 'Pakistanis in Britain', 245.

<sup>123</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>124</sup> TNA, MT 9/3952, *Seamen's Welfare (Code 124): Report on condition of life of coloured population in Stepney and comments on general conditions of seamen, white and coloured*, 1944.

<sup>125</sup> Dahya, 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', 81.

Dahya argued that ties to land ownership, regardless of how small the plot, were a significant factor in the relative prosperity and social standing of immigrant men. Scholars such as Mukulika Banerjee have emphasised that land ownership was crucial to their sense of being Pashtun and the strong regard for ethnic identity and economic independence that this entailed.<sup>126</sup> Pashtun culture was, and continues to be, bound together by what Akbar Ahmed identifies as essentially a code of conduct and honour known as *Pukhtunwali* or *Pashtunwali* (according to the two major Pashtun dialects).<sup>127</sup> 'Doing Pashto' is, according to Fredrik Barth, a means by which Pashtuns conceive their sense of self, the Pashtun community and their place within it.<sup>128</sup> Banerjee explains that this honour code was fundamentally linked to *daftar* – the land conquered or colonised by Pashtuns and collectively owned by the men of each tribe. Each Pashtun man was allocated a parcel of land and became a *daftari* or shareholder. Under the system of *wesh*, land shares were regularly redistributed among members of the tribe. *Wesh* helped to maintain 'some semblance of equitable distribution' of land and prevented 'particular groups or individuals from benefiting from the best land in perpetuity.' The system, which was enacted every five to thirty years, 'underpinned and reflected the ideology of egalitarianism and honour which was central to the ideas of *Pukhtunwali*.'<sup>129</sup>

With the conquest of Punjab (including the region that was to become the NWFP) by the Mughals, the Sikhs and, latterly, by the British, each successive administration actively undermined the *wesh* system for the purposes of tribute and tax collection. Thus, influential men were elevated above their tribal peers by means of exemption from revenue payment and 'grace and favour' rights over additional land.<sup>130</sup> The British colonial administration's preference was for the development of individual private property to underpin their vision of a nascent capitalism combined with a semi-feudal social relation between something akin to a 'squirearchy' and their peasant tenants. Accordingly, Pashtun tribal collectivism was undermined by the promotion of favoured, loyal individuals to a powerful class of *zamindars* – landowners with exclusive rights over land (*zamin*) and over an increasingly disenfranchised peasantry. The newly elevated position of such men was lent a veneer of tradition by the bestowal of the traditional honorific title of *khan*. Under British rule, the title *khan*, meaning leader or chief, could also indicate that the holder was an agent of the British according to the classic, colonial model of indirect rule.<sup>131</sup>

This social stratum, however, has been conceptualised as being comprised of both big and small *khans*. Big *khans* owned vast estates and were co-opted by the British colonial administration. They became, as Banerjee describes, a 'substantial

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<sup>126</sup> M. Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed: Opposition and Memory in the North-West Frontier* (Oxford, 2004), p. 30.

<sup>127</sup> A. S. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy And Society: Traditional Structure And Economic Development In A Tribal Society*, International Library Of Anthropology (London, 1980), p. 91.

<sup>128</sup> F. Barth, *Features of Person and Society in Swat: Collected Essays on Pathans* (London, 1981), p. 105.

<sup>129</sup> Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 30.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–31.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

landed aristocracy who had been designated by the colonial authorities as “natural leaders” of the people.’ Provided with ‘extensive privileges, such that they typically owned thousands of acres, had substantial wealth and status and exercised great influence over the villages in their domain’, these men were, she continues, ‘loyalist linchpins of British rule in the Frontier.’<sup>132</sup>

According to Darling, beneath these loyalists were placed the small *khans*. Also landowners, their holdings varied from a few acres to entire villages and were analogous to a English country squire.<sup>133</sup> The stratum of small *khans* also included those peasant proprietors we have previously discussed, who made their living from minute holdings of less than two acres. These men, according to the feudal model promoted by the British colonial administration, were analogous to the sturdy and independent yeoman farmer of the English rural scene.<sup>134</sup> It is this latter group to whom many of the Muslim men who married in the Sheffield area are linked, being smallholders themselves or the younger sons of smallholders.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, their choice to use the honorific ‘Khan’ as a surname in their encounter with British officialdom’s requirement for fixed, preferably patrilineal, surnames (such as on their marriage certificate), was likely made to indicate their relative prestige as the sons of landholders and perhaps even their ethnicity as Pashtuns.

## 2.2 Reasons to migrate

If the land around Chhachh was so fertile, what was the motivation for young men to migrate? The answer to this question can be partly located in contemporary commentary by British colonial administrators. As noted by Darling’s work *The Punjab Peasant* (1925), a major factor causing excess pressure on the land in Chhachh, as in much of Punjab and NWFP, was not simply the result of an increasing birth rate, but the increasing fragmentation of land holdings. Without a tradition of primogeniture, a landowner willed his assets among each of his sons, with perhaps a slightly larger portion allotted to the eldest for the upkeep of the farmstead compound’s buildings.<sup>136</sup> This fragmentation, Darling highlighted, was further compounded by a widespread tradition that required the small plots each son received to be split up into as many fragments as there were different soils in the village, ‘so that all may get an equal share of every kind of land – good, bad and indifferent’. According to the *Gazetteer of the Attock District* (1930), the tradition lay in the fact that in a good deal of the Chhachh the land nearer the Indus is much inferior to that further away. Indeed, under the tradition of *wesh*, the apportioned, collectively owned land was divided accordingly among the families as very long, narrow strips – a distinctive cultivation pattern which may still be seen today.<sup>137</sup> By 1930, a further

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, 94, 99.

<sup>134</sup> Wainwright, ‘*The Better Class of Indians*’, 137–138.

<sup>135</sup> The occupation of the father of the groom was recorded as ‘farmer’. The men with the surname ‘Khan’ make up a much larger proportion of the overall cohort.

<sup>136</sup> Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, xxix, 28.

<sup>137</sup> *Gazetteer of the Attock District*, 1930, xxix-A:246.

sub-division had taken place, 'always length-wise' into *thals* or strips 'nearly half a mile long and only 20 or 30 yards wide, each with a large number of shares in it.'<sup>138</sup> Unsurprisingly, such fragmentation negatively affected the productivity of holdings. Those farmers who wished to increase their incomes by diversifying into cash crops, such as fine tobacco for the production of snuff, found they needed capital for well building, renting extra land, paying labourers and buying in supplies of animal manure. Not only this but a fundamental element of *Pashtunwali*, and the social standing among peers that flowed from 'doing Pashto', was to provide *melmastia* or hospitality. *Melmastia* is both the offering of generous hospitality and the honourable use of material goods. Extending such hospitality, even if the guest is an enemy, is an obligatory component of Pashtun life, even if the requirements of *melmastia* could lead families to be burdened by debt.<sup>139</sup> The anthropologist André Singer observed the pressures of hospitality in the NWFP in 1982. 'The more a Pashtun man acquired', he observed, 'the more it is incumbent upon him to give.' Although Singer's host was 'a prominent tribal elder...he had to live up to the standards that status demanded.' Bound by *melmastia*, 'he spent far more on hospitality than did his fellow-villagers—far more, in fact, than he could easily afford.'<sup>140</sup> Banerjee argues that the instability wrought among Pashtuns in the NWFP by the erosion of traditional land tenure and tribal egalitarianism meant that 'many Pathans felt increasingly unable to live up to the classical demands of honour and Pukhtunwali'. 'Many', she continues, 'ended up living habitually beyond their means to sustain the appropriate status and levels of hospitality which were necessary for prestige and marriage negotiations, and eventually ended up in chronic debt, dropping irrevocably down the rural social hierarchy.'<sup>141</sup>

In Chhachh Darling noted that landowners considered it 'derogatory to work as a coolie' (i.e. to labour for another man for wages) and were 'apt to turn to the moneylender for help.'<sup>142</sup> Consequently, landowners ran the risk of accumulating unserviceable debt and losing land to moneylenders who charged interest rates of around 25 percent on loans. This scenario held the prospect of disaster as dispossession from one's land was, for a Pashtun, a form of social death. According to Banerjee:

A man who ceased to be a *daftari* lost not only land but the right to be called a Pathan at all, becoming instead a *faqir*, labouring for other people and without a voice in the village or the tribal councils. Thus, besides full tribal members, Pathan villages consisted of such dependent cultivators, village servants, menials and artisans, some of

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 29.

<sup>140</sup> A. Singer, *Guardians of the North-West Frontier: The Pathans* (Amsterdam, 1982), p. 112.

<sup>141</sup> Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 34.

<sup>142</sup> Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, 81.

whom would be of non-Pathan ethnicity, brought home as prisoners from wars and raids.<sup>143</sup>

With the prospect of a loss of family assets and prestige at stake, a tradition developed of younger sons seeking employment away from the district in order to avoid the risk of default and to accumulate enough capital to secure the family farm. As we shall see in the following section, young Chhachhi men sought employment in the stokeholds of British merchant steamships. The Gazetteer of the Attock District noted that 'families of small holders not infrequently send one of their members to seek employment in Peshawar, Bannu, Kohat or Rawalpindi: and at the first sign of scarcity the numbers increase.'<sup>144</sup> Darling similarly noted that:

To the enterprising...coolie labour is not the only opening... If there is more than one bread-winner-here...one will emigrate to China, Australia, Cape Colony, East Africa, or New Zealand; or, like the men of Gujar Khan, take service on board some steamer sailing from Karachi or Bombay. Though most of these emigrants are illiterate, they can usually earn Rs. 500 a year abroad, and on their return home are able to build *pukka* houses, buy better clothes, add butter and meat to their frugal diet, and find the capital required for the cultivation of snuff. Their chief extravagance is the funeral feast. Upon this they spare no expense and the whole village, whatever its size, is entertained : but this matters little for, if debt results, a trip abroad soon clears it off.<sup>145</sup>

Indeed the wages paid abroad, even the meagre sums offered for signing on as lascar seafarers, were far higher than those earned by *faqirs* – the landless labourers. Thus, the sons of small landowners could labour abroad and earn sufficient to either pay day labourers on their family farms – even to temporarily rent out farmland to tenants at will. As the testimony of the Sikh former pedlar Anant Ram makes clear, economic and social benefits of sojourning in Britain were, at a family level, substantial. Those who had made the trip were looked upon as a source of inspiration and admiration:

There was no one from our village in England then. However, from the neighbouring village of Jhungian, there were three or four Muslims who had made a fortune by spending some time in England. They inspired me. From our village there was no one who had gone to a foreign country, but from a nearby village, Jhungian, there were some Muslims who had. Amongst these, I knew Nihal particularly well. As the only person who could read or write a letter in these two villages, I used to read letters sent by Muslims from England to their relatives behind. They would often come to

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<sup>143</sup> Banerjee, *The Pathan Unarmed*, 30.

<sup>144</sup> *Gazetteer of the Attock District, 1930*, xxix-A:61.

<sup>145</sup> Darling, *The Punjab Peasant*, 81.

our village to buy things more frequently when they received money-orders from England. Everyone in the village was impressed by their wealthy relations abroad. The Muslims would usually stay in England for two years and then return to the village. They would have about one hundred pounds with them. This money was a great amount in those days. Nihal and his fellows would spend this lavishly, organising feasts and then would travel back to England.<sup>146</sup>

Young men such as Anant Ram witnessed a new-found affluence among members of their peer group and were no doubt regaled with glamorised tales of adventure abroad. A culture of migration and aspiration to migrate, partly imbued by a spirit of adventure and prestige, appears to have developed among certain districts of Punjab NWFP and Bengal. As the author of the *Gazetteer for the Attock District* noticed, 'a good deal of the cultivation' was being done by tenants, rather than land-owners, 'due to the increasing readiness of the Pathan to leave his home and go abroad in search of new experiences'.<sup>147</sup>

In addition to the destinations noted on Darling's list above, we might add the British colonies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika to which Indian petty traders travelled until colonial governments legislated to restrict their activities in the mid-1930s. This was a particular blow for South Asians in Africa as they had previously also been barred from holding agricultural land in Britain's East African colonies.<sup>148</sup> Canada, an imperial dominion of the British Empire, also attempted to prevent the immigration of British Indian subjects by issuing the Continuous Journey Regulations of 1908-1910. The intention was confirmed when Punjabi migrants aboard the chartered vessel *Komagata Maru* were refused entry to Canada in 1914.<sup>149</sup>

Vivek Bald's study of Bengali, Punjabi and Pashtun migration to the United States illustrates that, although of a predominantly sojourning nature, such traders established 'a wide-ranging presence in the United States', moving 'in and out of the country, year after year, for more than three decades.' The pedlars' success, he argues, was due to their reliance on a transnational social network within which they 'shaped, structured, and coordinated their activities to ensure that people, information, money, and goods continued to flow across borders, even as conditions on the ground changed.'<sup>150</sup> Similar to the experience of immigrants to Britain discussed in this thesis, (and which remained a feature of South Asian immigration to Britain until early 1970s), group households and boarding houses provided accommodation and support to member of the social network – both to kinsmen and compatriots.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> A. Ram and D. S. Tatla, 'This Is Our Home Now: Reminiscences of a Panjabi Migrant in Coventry – an Interview with Anant Ram', *Oral History*, 21:1 (1993), p. 69.

<sup>147</sup> *Gazetteer of the Attock District, 1930*, xxix-A:92.

<sup>148</sup> *The Times*, London, 5 July 1935.

<sup>149</sup> R. L. Almy, "'More Hateful Because of Its Hypocrisy'": Indians, Britain and Canadian Law in the Komagata Maru Incident of 1914', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (February 2018), pp. 1–5, DOI: 10.1080/03086534.2018.1438964

<sup>150</sup> Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 41.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Pashtuns, Punjabis and Bengalis also travelled and settled in California. Leonard's pioneering study of the Punjabi settlement of California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century demonstrates that, if farmland was available to South Asians abroad, a proportion of their number took up the opportunity to purchase or lease it, opting to settle and cultivate, rather than engage in waged labour or petty trade.<sup>152</sup> However, despite the agrarian origins of most of the cohort discussed in this thesis, no records have been identified of attempts to lease or purchase farmland in Britain. The British working-class pastime of allotment cultivation, although with a distinctly

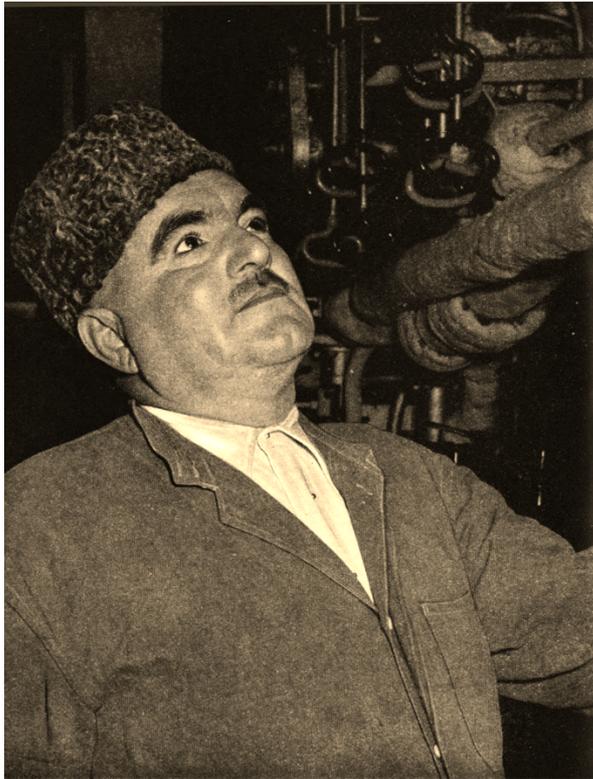


Figure 2.2  
Sarfaraz Khan, Chief Engine-Room Serang  
(Image courtesy of P&O Heritage Collection)

(at the time) South Asian emphasis on onions, coriander and garlic, appears to have been the extent of such activity in the Sheffield area.<sup>153</sup>

Although, for the sake of context, the above summary demonstrates the extent of South Asian social networks in the West, for the purposes of this study the focus is necessarily on those men who made their way to the Sheffield area. The pioneers of this migration were those recruited into the British merchant marine to work in the engine rooms and stokeholds of steam ships. Shipping lines, particularly the British India Steam Navigation (BISN) and the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O), actively recruited men from districts of the NWFP as well as Chhachh, Jhelum, and Mirpur in the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir from the late nineteenth century until at least the 1960s, as this P&O magazine advertisement from 1955 demonstrates:

Up from Karachi the message travels .... up through the arid plains of Pakistan and the district of Mardan .... on to the village of Zarobi and the house of the Chief Serang - to the shrewd eyes of Sarfaraz Khan himself. ...the news is good and there is thinking to be done. The job is a big one. He will choose fifty-six men from the village to go with him. He will choose wisely; the honour of Zarobi and Sarfaraz Khan is at stake. Sarfaraz Khan is Chief Engine-Room Serang aboard "ARCADIA" ..... a veteran of 36 years experience in

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<sup>152</sup> K. Isaksen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 17–36.

<sup>153</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

the service of the company .... a man with 17 relatives on P&O ships.  
He's as big as his job, and that's big.<sup>154</sup>

It is unclear whether Sarfaraz Khan was a fictionalised representation of a *serang* or an actual person. Nevertheless, the advertisement's copy presents P&O recruitment among Pashtuns in a manner which appears to have remained unchanged for decades. The settlement of Zarobi exists and lies within the NWFP opposite Chhachh on the northern side of the Indus. It is approximately nine miles distant, as the crow flies, from Chhachh's principal town of Hazro. The copy also demonstrates the process whereby a *serang* (ship's boatswain) would be responsible for the engine room or stokehold crew that was to work under him. The *Serang* recruitment system operated under a system of patronage among the *biradari* (extended kinship group) of the *serang*. A kinsman of the *serang* was more likely to be recruited (and much less likely to desert) than a stranger, as was publicly acknowledged by the P&O in this advertisement. It is, however, important to note that the utilisation of kinship networks by companies of British merchant marine played an important, although not exclusive, role in providing South Asian crews for British merchant ships. G. Balachandran cautions that while kinship networks played a part in recruitment practices, the true extent of kinship ties among Indian crews remains to be established and the homogeneity of crews should not be over-emphasised. Moreover, he highlights the fact that unrelated men from different districts populated the boarding houses and docksides of Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta, in addition to working alongside each other aboard ship.<sup>155</sup>

In these conditions, friendships and other non-kinship alliances were forged and which served, to some extent, to circumvent kinship recruitment. If a man's social network included a *serang*, he might recommend, along with a financial inducement, a friend for recruitment to the crew. We can see both processes at work in the memoir of Dada Amir Haider Khan. Kinship connections enabled this Punjabi smallholder's son from the Jhelum district, to gain his first post aboard a British ship at the age of fourteen. However, to sign on with his second ship, he utilised the non-kinship elements of his social network in the port of Bombay to gain employment as a coal passer aboard the 'S.S. *Newbia Hall*' (likely the Ellerman Line's *Newby Hall*).<sup>156</sup> The intricacies of personal connections and the division of bribes are best described in Haider Khan's own words:

...a junior Sarong (*serang*) approached me through a companion, a young fireman named Moula Dad, but whom we called Molu, with a proposal that we loan him some money which he would spread around to various officials in the Shipping Master's office enabling

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<sup>154</sup> Taken from the 'Men of the Ships' advertising campaign: no. 25, 'The shrewd eyes of Sarfaraz Khan'. All featured 'personalities' who served in the company's ships, and which appeared in the British national press between August 1955 and February 1958, (Copyright P&O, 1960. Used by permission of P&O Heritage Collection).

<sup>155</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 95–96.

<sup>156</sup> 'Ellerman - Hall Line', <http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/ellerman5.shtml>, accessed 21 March 2018.

him to get an appointment on the ship quickly. He would then take us along and pay back our money. My friend knew that I had some money left with me from my previous year's earnings and insisted that I loan it to the Sarong so that we could be on our way immediately rather than wasting time and money. The Sarong, who came from his village, would be grateful for the loan and, besides, a few old hands wandering the streets of Bombay would gain employment... I handed 90 over to Molu for the Sarong. A few days later the Sarong was nominated to hire a crew for the S.S. Newbia Hall...Accordingly the Sarong collected his crew and we were taken to the Shipping Master's office to sign aboard. As usual we were given a month's pay in advance, most of which went to the Sarong's collection.<sup>157</sup>

### **2.3 *Biradari*, chain migration and the journey to Britain**

The research underpinning this study suggests that small groups of Pashtuns from the Chhachh and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) employed similar social networks to Haider Khan, including those of kinship, to facilitate their chain migration from the colonial periphery to the heavy-industrial heartland of the imperial metropole. Thus, by building their own social networks they also facilitated the migration of their kin and compatriots in search of enhanced income, increased social standing at home, adventure and, sometimes, to settle. This fits closely with social anthropologists John and Leatrice MacDonald's original definition of 'chain migration' as 'that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants'.<sup>158</sup> In line with this definition, Ballard identifies these 'primary social relationships' among early settlers as constituting the initial chains of migration and 'bridgeheads' that allowed significant numbers of kinsmen to follow in their wake after the Second World War.<sup>159</sup> Central to understanding chain migration in a specifically South Asian context is the cultural practice of *biradari*.<sup>160</sup> In his studies of Pakistani migration to Britain in the post-Second World War period, the anthropologist Muhammad Anwar described *biradari* as 'a set of ties socially recognized as existing between persons because of their genealogical connections.' *Biradari*, Anwar notes, also includes 'affinal relations created by marriage as well as those of descent.' Within the concept, kinship refers 'to both real or supposed descent and affinal relations of the kinship networks...'<sup>161</sup>

As the examples provided throughout this thesis demonstrate, kinship networks provided the mutual aid necessary for successful immigration. As Anwar noted, *biradari* was central in providing 'supportive functions related to

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<sup>157</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 97.

<sup>158</sup> MacDonald and MacDonald, 'Chain Migration Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks', 82–83.

<sup>159</sup> Roger Ballard's term 'bridgehead' referred to the earliest settlements of South Asians in British home ports: Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 11.

<sup>160</sup> G. D. Frick et al., eds., *Key Concepts in Modern Indian Studies* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 30–31.

<sup>161</sup> Anwar, *Myth of Return*, 50.

accommodation, job and general settlement in the new situation.<sup>162</sup> As Alison Shaw explains, *biradari* literally means 'brotherhood', and denotes male relatives 'who know each other well, can demonstrate their relatedness and live in the same place.' *Biradari*, she continues, 'describes everyone with whom there is an assumed kinship link, known or not.'<sup>163</sup> The centrality of *biradari* to migration networks can be demonstrated by this passage from Shaw's study of Pakistani settlement in Britain:

When a man first arrived in Britain, he generally went to a place where he had relatives, friends or fellow-villagers. A brother would join a brother, a son would join his father, a nephew would join an uncle, a villager would join a member of his wider kinship in migrants' accounts of their arrival in Britain...Pakistani settlements in various British towns and cities therefore developed in relation to local work opportunities on the one hand and along the distinctive lines of kinship and village on the other...<sup>164</sup>

The process of 'chain migration', described here by Shaw, explains not only the process of kinship-based chain migration, but the reasons why Pakistani settlement in Britain closely reflects ties to villages of origin. Settlements, such as in the Sheffield area, were founded by pioneers who established kinship-based chains of migration between villages in Chhachh, NWFP and Mirpur in Kashmir and Britain. The very geographically specific nature of the migration was amplified by the perception of villagers that those families with a son working abroad reaped the benefits of a regular income stream from overseas remittances.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the family prestige accrued by a son who worked abroad is a phenomenon clearly described by Anant Ram as his motivation for migration to Britain.

Even if a pioneer only supported a single kinsman in his migration to Britain, as long as that kinsman sponsored another *biradari* member in turn, the chain would be maintained. As demonstrated by one of Shaw's subjects from the Mirpur district in Kashmir, the process might take a few years to become established, but could go on to become the foundational chain connecting a particular village with a British town for many years:

The first man in a chain that developed from several adjacent villages in Mirpur was Sadiq, a seaman who had deserted from a merchant ship in 1937. He lodged with several fellow Mirpuri seamen in a Welsh household in Cardiff for a number of years, and worked as a labourer. During this time, he heard via a fellow seaman living in Cardiff who had relatives in Newcastle that a cousin and an old friend from his village, both also ex-seamen, were

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>163</sup> A. Shaw, 'Kinship, Cultural Preference and Immigration: Consanguineous Marriage Among British Pakistanis', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 7:2 (June 2001), p. 322.

<sup>164</sup> A. Shaw, *Kinship and Continuity: Pakistani Families in Britain* (Abingdon, 2000), pp. 38–39.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

together trying to make a living from door-to-door peddling in Newcastle. Sadiq wrote to this cousin and all three agreed to try their luck southwards and inland. They came to Oxford in the late 1940s, but were unable to make a living from door-to-door peddling and Sadiq's friend returned to relatives in Newcastle. The cousins remained in Oxford, living with an Irish family, and in 1955 Sadiq obtained work with the City of Oxford Motor Services, who were employing New Commonwealth immigrants as conductors and cleaners from about that time. This enabled Sadiq to finance the migration of his brother in 1956 and in 1957 the three men bought a house in Osney in west Oxford. This house became the first stop for five other close relatives whose migration Sadiq and his cousins had sponsored, and also for fellow villagers. One of these fellow villagers was another ex-serviceman who wrote to Sadiq in 1957, arrived in Oxford in 1959, lodged in Osney, found work, with Sadiq's help, with British Rail, bought his own house in Osney in 1961 and sponsored the migration of several of his relatives.<sup>166</sup>

All the elements of the migration of non-elite South Asian men to Britain are present in this passage and mirror the experience of the Sheffield area settlement. The pioneer arrived as a deserting lascar seafarer during the inter-war period. While accommodated as a lodger, along with his compatriots, in a boarding house run by Welsh natives he engaged in waged labour. Furthermore, as Balachandran has emphasised, by living and working among shipmates recruited from different districts and kinship groups, the social networks of South Asian seafarers became increasingly heterogeneous and transcended the confines of *biradari*. This individual's expanded social network, which apparently stretched across Britain, thus allowed him to access and utilise information and goodwill from a non-*biradari* member. On deciding to take up peddling with kinsmen, and utilising the support of Irish settlers, he further extended the network of kin into the new area of Oxford. There he established not only a migration chain of his own kin, but also assisted in establishing that of a co-villager. Additionally, this man's story provides convincing evidence of a continuity between inter-war immigration and that of the post-Partition, post-*Windrush* era, unbroken by the Second World War. Indeed, the social networks established during the inter-war period supported chains of migration that spanned well into the second half of the twentieth century.

#### **2.4 Kinship and compatriot networks within Britain**

A similar example to that given above can be found in the account by Angela Khan, granddaughter of Shazreen Khan, one of the first Pashtun men to marry in Sheffield.<sup>167</sup> Shazreen, a ship's lascar fireman, jumped ship in Glasgow sometime before 1920. In May 1920, he married Florrie Macaloney, the daughter of a Scots-Irish steelwork's

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 29–30.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Angela Khan, 2 Sept. 2014.

labourer of Greenock, near Glasgow.<sup>168</sup> The couple had, however, moved to Sheffield's Attercliffe steelmaking district before their marriage where Shazreen had found employment as a boiler firer. Their wedding took place at nearby Christ Church, Attercliffe in Sheffield. In Sheffield, Shazreen and Florrie lived amid the steelworks in a working-class neighbourhood close to a number of Shazreen's fellow Pashtuns, some of whom had also married native Britons. Whether they may have eloped together is not known, but Shazreen's membership of a compatriot/kinship network sharing knowledge of opportunities within labour-markets is a likely reason the couple chose Sheffield as their destination when they left Greenock. Shazreen and Florrie shared an address in Heppenstall Lane, Attercliffe. Sultan Mohamed, a Pashtun from Rangoo village in Chhachh who worked as a collier in Sheffield lived across the street.<sup>169</sup> In the next street lived Noah Mahammed a boiler firer and his wife Lucy who married in June 1920.<sup>170</sup> Also nearby on Attercliffe Road lived another Pashtun Ahmed Wosman and his native wife Constance. This couple wed the previous year and were probably the first couple comprised of native Briton and South Asian newcomer to marry in the city.<sup>171</sup>

By 1923 Shazreen and Florrie had returned to Greenock for the birth of their first child and to join Florrie's sister Clara (who, in 1921, also married a former lascar seafarer employed as a stoker in the shipyards).<sup>172</sup> Around this time, the Inspector of Immigration for Glasgow reported that the twenty Indian men in the city (of whom he was aware) had deserted ships at various ports across Britain including Bristol, Liverpool, London and Glasgow. He noted that 'the Lascars who came here first give shelter and protection to subsequent deserters, take them to mining districts where they obtain employment in mines and ironworks, and when they learn English, they apply for a pedlar's certificate'. While the Inspector appears to have substantially underestimated the number of Indian men in the city at that time, he was correct in his analysis of the process of chain migration occurring in the district, as in the Sheffield area.<sup>173</sup>

By 1930, Shazreen is recorded as employed as a pedlar in the valuation rolls for Glasgow.<sup>174</sup> But, by 1932, six months after the birth of Sydney their third child, Florrie and Shazreen separated. The children were left in the custody of Shazreen, at the time employed as a ship's fireman.<sup>175</sup> Hard times followed for Shazreen and the

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<sup>168</sup> Shazreen Khan and Florrie Macaloney, marriage certificate (hereafter m. cert.): GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 1296.

<sup>169</sup> Sultan Mohamed, death certificate (hereafter d. cert.): Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1923, vol. 9c, p. 425; BL, IOR, L/E/7/1321, File 4570, Workman's Compensation Act 1906: as payment to India (on behalf of a private concern) of compensation in regard to an Indian subject who was killed in the course of his employment in Sheffield.

<sup>170</sup> Noah Mahammed and Lucy Gomer Sheffield m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 1686.

<sup>171</sup> Ahamed Wosman and Constance Goodwin, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield Jan.–Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 885.

<sup>172</sup> Summander Khan and Clara Macaloney, m. cert.: Scottish Register of Marriages, Greenock East, Mar. 1921, 564/010056.

<sup>173</sup> BL IOR HO 45/12314 (476761/41), September 1925.

<sup>174</sup> Shahzreen Khan, Valuation roll, Glasgow, 1930-31, VR102/1461/84.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Angela Khan.

children and, at this point, the Scottish end of his social network does not appear to have provided the necessary support for his young family. His granddaughter Angela recalled her aunt recounting how, with their father's living being at sea, the children were placed in the care of neglectful neighbours, forcing the aunt to shoulder responsibility for her younger siblings and scavenge the neighbourhood for food. By 1945, however, Shazreen was resident in the Yorkshire city of Bradford. This strongly suggests that he was one of the pioneers of the Bradford Pakistani settlement described by Dahya's 1973 study. Indeed, Shazreen's presence in the city at this time corresponds with the process he outlined where respondents told of a group of thirty to forty Indian Muslim men from several towns (including Sheffield) who moved to the city during wartime to take up jobs in engineering.<sup>176</sup> While we have no record of him acting as an 'anchor point' for a chain of migration during the 1930s, we know that Shazreen and the children returned to Sheffield before arriving in Bradford sometime before 1945.<sup>177</sup> Documentary evidence and oral testimony suggest he played something of a pivotal role in building the nascent Bradford settlement during the 1940s. The electoral rolls for Bradford for the period 1945 to 1951 shows Shazreen hosting a number of South Asian men at his William Street address.<sup>178</sup> Perhaps the most significant of these for Shazreen was Dost Mohamed who arrived in 1949 and married Shazreen's and Florrie's daughter Marie in 1961.<sup>179</sup> After Shazreen's death in 1951, the house was taken over by Baziz Khan, a kinsman of Shazreen who continued to host newcomers to the city. The 1954 electoral roll shows six South Asian men resident at the address.<sup>180</sup>

In another example of mixed and extended social networks, Sultan Mohamed, a Pashtun man who lived in the same Sheffield neighbourhood as Florrie and Shazreen, was employed at Sheffield's Beighton Colliery when he died in an industrial accident in July 1923.<sup>181</sup> Like the majority of immigrant workers described by Anwar, Ballard and Shaw, and also according to his workmates, Sultan regularly remitted a proportion of his wages to his family. Correspondence between the Sheffield Coal Company, branch officials of the National Amalgamated Union of Labour (NAUL), the County Court at Sheffield, the India Office and Sultan's father Mir Ahmad regarding Sultan's death, shows not only that his family was compensated fully, but the extent of the social network around him. The 32 year old Sultan was survived by a wife Said Jan (aged thirty years) and two young sons, Fuzal Ahmed (aged 5 years) and Atter Mohamed (aged two years). His elderly parents were also dependent upon Sultan, Mir Ahmed being ninety years of age and his mother sixty.<sup>182</sup> It seems likely that this personal data, given in support of his trade union's claim for compensation, came from Sultan's workmates, which included among their number his countryman

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<sup>176</sup> Dahya, 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', 84–85, 95–96.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Angela Khan.

<sup>178</sup> Shazreen Khan, 5 William Street, Electoral rolls, Bradford, 1945, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51.

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Angela Khan.

<sup>180</sup> Baziz Khan, 5 William Street, Electoral rolls, Bradford, 1952, 53.

<sup>181</sup> *The Star* (Sheffield), Wednesday 18 July 1923, p. 3.

<sup>182</sup> BL, IOR, L/E/7/1321, File 4570.

Carumeli Khan who arranged for Sultan's funeral and associated expenses.<sup>183</sup> Here again we see evidence of engagement with broader support networks outside those



Figure 2.3  
Grave of Sultan Mohamed, 'Indian Mohammedan who was killed at work at Beighton Colliery, July 17th, 1923, aged 32 years'

of the village-based *biradari*. Affinal bonds and those of consanguinity were here supplemented by bonds associated with those of class commonality and solidarity with the trade union. Where such bonds existed they extended the social networks of South Asian migrants beyond the confines of *biradari* to include native workmates. However, as is apparent in the documentation around his posthumous case for compensation, Sultan's link to his village of origin and his kinship relationship with its inhabitants remained the primary element of his social network and upon which all other considerations rested.

At the time of his death, unlike a number of his fellow Pashtuns in the Sheffield area, Sultan did not have a native wife or children in Britain. His commitment was therefore, like the majority of South Asian migrant workers, very likely to have been to the myth of return. While we have already briefly discussed this commonly held social narrative, it is worthwhile examining its role with regard to the *biradari*. For Dahya, the myth was central to the migration of Pakistanis to Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. For Dahya, it could not be 'overemphasized that the immigrants came to Britain with the firm intention of earning and saving money and eventually returning to their homeland. They did not come in order to enjoy a comfortable life here.'<sup>184</sup> Shaw, summarising Anwar, explains the centrality of the myth for Pakistani immigrants:

The expectation that the central purpose of migration was not to achieve permanent settlement in Britain, but to accumulate sufficient wealth to make possible an eventual return to Pakistan.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Dahya, 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', 99.

In that context, retention of social and economic links with their home villages, as well as repeated return visits, could all be seen as part of a longer-term strategy to resist all changes which might impede their eventual return. It follows that if Pakistani settlers' commitment to the myth were ever to weaken, then the religious and cultural values whereby they organised their lives would — so the theory implies — become much more open to Western influence.<sup>185</sup>

This passage illustrates the role of the myth of return in reinforcing the *biradari* in men's social networks. Shaw suggests that the myth was a form of resistance to cultural or economic influences which might prevent a return to life within the *biradari* and the social responsibilities which that entailed. Shaw acknowledged that, at the time of writing (1994), it was 'increasingly clear that the myth of return has almost ceased to be a central feature of British Pakistanis' perceptions and ideologies.'



Figure 2.4

TNA, BT 350, 341235, Laitifoolla Nairoolla, also known as Naqibullah Nairoolla. Taken from his seaman's discharge certificate, circa 1919.

However, for men discussed in this thesis, that is those who married in Britain, to native Britons, and brought up children in Britain, it is open to question whether the influence of the myth of return was as strong as suggested by Dahya. We know that some individuals, such as Munshi Khan (husband of Eva) and Somander Khan (husband of Adeline) left their wives and returned to their villages of origin. Nevertheless, men such as Rasool Khan (husband of Elsie), Warris Khan (husband of Iris) and Naqibullah Nairoolla (husband of Katherine), resisted return and died in Britain. Furthermore, we know that despite remaining in Britain, Rasool

Khan continued to remit money to his family in the Chhachhi village of Nartopa. Naqibullah died in the London borough of Stepney in 1957 and bequeathed the substantial sum of £9230 to Katherine and their son Ramtulla Nairulla a postman (also

<sup>185</sup> A. Shaw, 'The Pakistani Community In Oxford', in R. Ballard, ed., *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, (London, 1994), p. 35.

known as Ramsey Neville).<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, it is likely that a far greater proportion of non-elite South Asian men who arrived in Britain, and in the Sheffield area in particular, did subscribe to the myth sufficiently to return home. This issue of the influence of the myth of return will be discussed further in the following sections.

Naqibullah Nairoolla, or 'Nairolla' as he was sometimes recorded, operated a boarding house for Indian seamen at 49 High Street, Poplar with his wife Katherine, a British Jew (figure 2.4).<sup>187</sup> The couple are mentioned in T.G. Segrave's committee into conditions of boarding houses catering to lascar seafarers and men's desertion. After visiting several establishments, and interviewing 'Mrs Nairolla', Segrave noted that not only were men such as her husband providing accommodation for men, they were also acting as agents, visiting ships, encouraging them to desert before aiding them in signing on to ships under English rather than Asiatic articles.<sup>188</sup> This is a crucial point as the Nairoollas and their boarding house formed a key node in a social network of Pashtun lascar seafarers who jumped ship in order to work in Britain or out of British ports. As we have seen in the previous section, the boarding house allowed men, mostly Pashtuns, to join kinship and compatriot networks within Britain and which appear to have stretched from Glasgow to Liverpool, Cardiff and Hull, as well as taking in inland centres of employment – particularly the Sheffield area. The Nairoolla's boarding-house was apparently 'very much frequented by Pathan (Pashtun) sailors, Peshawaris, Chhachhis, and Bangashes.' Naqibullah's own origins, it was said, lay in the Pashtun Bomba *khel* (clan) in the Mansehra District of the NWFP. His home village of Dhodial is situated approximately one hundred miles northeast Hazro – the principal town of Chhachh.<sup>189</sup>

Naqibullah appears in records variously as Nairolla, Nakiboola, Nagi Bulla, Laitifoolla Nairoolla and Naki Boola and was a decorated former merchant seaman.<sup>190</sup> The boarding house was established circa 1919 at 49 High Street, Poplar and numerous references to it survive in records pertaining to the police enforcement of CASO. The address also appears to have often been a first port of call for police officers attempting to trace the whereabouts and movements of men registered or targeted by the exclusionary and racially-motivated CASO, or for investigations into the back-stories of Indian migrants claiming British subject status. Kinship links are apparent among many of the immigrant men who used the Nairoollas' boarding house, which

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<sup>186</sup> Laitifoolla Nairoolla, Manifests of Aliens Granted Temporary Admission at El Paso, Texas, ca. July 1924-1954, 1757/61-0883; Naqibullah Nairulla, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), England & Wales, 1958, N.O.P., p.2.

<sup>187</sup> Latifoolla Nairoolla and Katherine Solomons, m. cert.: Whitechapel, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 1c, p. 348.

<sup>188</sup> BL, IOR, L/E/7/1152, Inspection report by T.E. Segrave, 1 December 1922.

<sup>189</sup> G. Morgenstierne and A. Lloyd-James, 'Notes on the Pronunciation of Pashto (Dialect of the Hazara District)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, 5:1 (1928), p. 53.

<sup>190</sup> TNA, BT, 351/1/103118 - Medal Card of Latifoolla Nairoolla, 1919.

continued to operate until the late 1930s when it was demolished as part of slum clearance and development of Poplar undertaken by London County Council.<sup>191</sup>

## 2.5 Native-newcomer social networks

As we will discuss in Section 4, perhaps the single most significant native-newcomer relationship was an affinal one. Perhaps the relationships that are most neglected (or misunderstood) by historians are those between natives and newcomers that existed in the quotidian spaces of work and community that brought non-white newcomers into regular contact with natives of Britain. Marriage certificates reveal newcomers to have actively engaged in building social networks. This was not simply a case of socially isolated couples struggling to maintain themselves in an environment hostile to their existence. Marriage certificates show a network of contacts in the names of both their native wives and the witnesses whom they chose and, just as importantly, who agreed to validate relationships that straddled the racial, religious and cultural divide. The names of witnesses show the migrants drawing 'outsiders' into their social networks, not only by marrying outside their religious, ethnic and kinship groups, but as part of a much broader network of friends, neighbours, workmates and colleagues.

Moreover, many of the men in this study were employed in proletarian waged labour on a regular basis in industries which required close interaction between natives and newcomers on the shop floor. Social networks extended beyond *biradari* to embrace the shared experience of waged labour first experienced in the stokeholds of merchant ships. After translating an ocean-going skillset of working the stokehold to land-based work, such as boiler firing in factories and steelworks, men such as Sultan Mohamed and Carumeli Khan joined the social network of workplace solidarity embodied in trade union membership. For those men who went back to sea, such as Warris Khan, Shazreen Khan and Abdul Gunni, seafaring under European articles put them in close contact with natives as part of racially mixed crews. This is a stark contrast to their work as lascars when the racial division of labour between European and Asian crew members was a structural element of maritime recruitment in the Indian subcontinent. For example, Abdul Gunni worked as a trawlerman for a number of years before being recorded as the Second Engineer among the thirteen-man crew of the Fleetwood trawler *Alvis*.<sup>192</sup>

Even if we temporarily set aside the experience of the men who married natives, taking into account the long hours spent at work and shared accommodation that mixed natives and newcomers, it is likely that even many single South Asian immigrant men spent at least as much time with natives as they did with their countrymen. For example, data gleaned from the 1939 Register and Sheffield's electoral rolls for 1945 show a number of premises – large commercial hotels and lodging houses with a diverse occupancy – that demonstrate a lack of racial segregation within at least some commercial accommodation during the period.

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<sup>191</sup> British History Online, 'Poplar High Street: Public Housing', in Survey of London, xliii–iv (London, 1994), 90–7, at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp90974> (accessed 20 Feb. 2017).

<sup>192</sup> Fleetwood *Chronicle*, 22 September 1939.

Perhaps of greater significance is the private sphere of hearth and home and the presence within the historical record of working-class family households that accommodated a single lodger with a name of South Asian or Muslim heritage. These lodgers are often of the same occupation type as the household's male head, possibly indicating they were, or had been, workmates.<sup>193</sup> Additionally, the 1939 Register shows a small number of examples where the dynamic of native-newcomer interaction is reversed and where we have white lodgers in working-class households where the male head is of South Asian or Muslim origin.<sup>194</sup> Mixing at this level within the intimate private space of hearth and home when 'lodgers, like boarders, often ate at the family table' indicates a significant degree of mutual trust and acceptance. Such evidence contradicts current assumptions that almost insurmountable barriers of race, religion and culture existed between working-class natives and non-white newcomers. It also supports the claim that the increasing number of migrants living in the homes of Britain's working-class natives during the twentieth century should, in Tabili's words, 'modify any view of British society as culturally static, closed and homogeneous, and of British working people as intolerant and inward-looking.'<sup>195</sup> While this element of research is perhaps the least developed, and the evidence to support such claims often elusive, it is important that further work should be undertaken to evaluate the extent to which the social networks of South Asians (and other non-white populations) extended into the native population.

Many immigrant men, such as Ayaht Khan, passed through boarding houses that specialised in the accommodation and support of South Asian and other non-white seafarers. Of particular significance to the Sheffield area pioneers, was the establishment owned and operated by the Nairoollas. In aiding newly arrived men to find their feet in Britain and to find employment, primarily in shipping, but also on land, the Nairoollas formed a connection from the ports of the London area to the Sheffield area for Pashtun men from Chhachh and NWFP. In Sheffield, another boarding house situated on Washford Road in Sheffield's Attercliffe district, accommodated some of the earliest of the pioneer arrivals, all apparently Pashtun in origin. This small establishment operated from the home of Julia Peters, the English widow of an African man, and who had both arrived in Sheffield from Nottingham in the 1890s. Here, Jimmy Badlow (also known as Mohammed Noor) stayed until his marriage to Ivy Swain in January 1920. Julia obviously approved of the young Pashtun

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<sup>193</sup> For example: TNA, 1939 Register, Davis household, Sheffield, RG101/3551A/005/3-KIRV; burgess roll for Sheffield, Attercliffe Division (C), Oct. 1945: Mary MacMillan and Abdo Mohamed, 18 Attercliffe Common; George Windle and Abul Hamid, 24 Attercliffe Common; Elizabeth Jennings, Henry Jennings Muckbil Said and George Grayson, 143 Attercliffe Common; Thomas O'Connor and Sultan Nugli, 6 Clay Street; Ernest Brownhill, Clara Brownhill and Ali Mohamed, 30 Ebury Street; Rose Perry and Ali Ahmed, 35 Ebury Street.

<sup>194</sup> For example, TNA, 1939 Register, Wosman household, Sheffield, RG101/3565I/008/39-KIXC; Khan household, Sheffield, RG101/3562E/002/6-KIWA.

<sup>195</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, 114.

men lodged with her as Somander Khan married Julia's daughter Adeline in August 1923 and her granddaughter Elsie married Rasool Khan in May 1928.<sup>196</sup>

Establishments, such as that of the Nairoollas, or of the Peters, formed nodes on the social network through which a high number of further social connections were made through everyday contact and through introductions by the proprietors. Through these introductions and connections, commercial boarding houses and their proprietors played crucial roles in the immigration process as central nodes between individuals on migrants' social networks.<sup>197</sup> On arrival in Sheffield, men might also be accommodated as lodgers in the homes of natives (such as Hawas Khan) or, more likely, in the homes of kin or compatriots and their native wives. Once settled, a migrant man might set up on his own and accommodate further newcomers. For example, by the time of his return to Pakistan in 1954, Hawas Khan, recorded as a steelworks' boiler firer in 1939, was recorded as 'hotelier' at the same Sheffield address. This would indicate he had, increased the centrality of his function as a node in the network by combining his social capital and property to provide accommodation services to the strongly increased flow of new arrivals in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>198</sup>

Gisalic Amidulla (known as Ali), another Pashtun, also worked as a steelworks boiler firer. After suffering a fatal heart attack at work at the nearby Brown-Bayley steelworks, Ali was buried in 1931 alongside Ayaht and Hilda's daughter Souriya.<sup>199</sup> Like Ayaht, Ali married a Sheffield native, Margaret (Maggie) Windle, with whom he was raising three children at the time of his death, and who was also pregnant with their fifth child.<sup>200</sup> Ayaht's wife Hilda was the daughter of a Sheffield steelworks' furnaceman who, at the time of his daughter's marriage in December 1927, lived next door to his son-in-law Ayaht.<sup>201</sup> Hilda's occupation is not known, although it is likely that, like many working-class Sheffield women, both married and single, she was employed in the city's extensive cutlery and flatware industry. In the 1920s and 1930s buffing (polishing) cutlery and flatware was one of the main occupations for women

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<sup>196</sup> Jim Badloe and Ivy Swain, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 778; Somander Khan and Adeline Peters, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, July–Sept. 1923, vol. 9c, p. 984; Rasool Khan and Elsie Peters, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1928, vol. 9c, p. 1395.

<sup>197</sup> S. P. Borgatti, M. G. Everett, and J. C. Johnson, *Analyzing Social Networks* (London, 2018), pp. 35–36.

<sup>198</sup> TNA, BT 27 Passenger Lists leaving UK 1890-1960, Hawas Khan, 16 Nov. 1954, S.S. *Batory*, Southampton–Karachi.

<sup>199</sup> Gisalic Amidulla, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1931, vol. 9c, p. 842. The names of many of the individuals in this study vary in spelling across a range of official documentation, including census returns and birth, marriage and death certificates. I spell personal names as they appear on the relevant certificate.

<sup>200</sup> Ali and Maggie's first child was born prematurely and died in October 1920, seven months after their marriage. Amidulla children, birth certificates (hereafter b. cert(s)): GRO, Births, Sheffield, July–Sept. 1922, vol. 9c, p. 1148; July–Sept. 1924, vol. 9c, p. 1085; Oct.–Dec. 1927, vol. 9c, p. 786; Gisalic Amidulla, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1931, vol. 9c, p. 936; Gisalic Amidulla and Maggie Windle, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 787.

<sup>201</sup> Ayah Khan and Hilda Davis, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1927, vol. 9c, p. 1411.

and girls in Sheffield; 'in nearly every house there was a buffer', one worker recalled.<sup>202</sup> Such was the global reputation of the city's metalworking industries that cutlers Mappin and Webb hosted King Amanullah and Queen Soraya (spelled 'Souriya' by the British press) of Afghanistan as part of their royal tour of Europe during 1927-1928.<sup>203</sup> The monarch and his queen were, like Ayaht Khan, both Pashtuns and their widely reported visit to Sheffield most likely inspired the couple to name their daughter after the Afghan queen.

The 1939 Register shows that eleven years later Hilda and Ayaht were living on the Manor estate, a newly-built municipal social housing project with their two children (they would have five children together).<sup>204</sup> Here they took in Vina Brown as a lodger. Vina was a young Sheffielder employed as an emery glazer (one of the roles



THE VISIT OF AFGHANISTAN'S KING AND QUEEN TO SHEFFIELD.

*Keen interest in Western methods of manufacture was displayed by their Majesties the King and Queen of Afghanistan when recently visiting Messrs. Mappin & Webb's manufactory at Sheffield. They were particularly impressed by the way each article was scrutinised at every stage of manufacture, so that it should be worthy of the firm whose name has stood for so many years for all that is best in silverware, plate and cutlery. In our picture His Majesty is seen inspecting various beautiful products of the famous works.*

Figure 2.5

*The visit of the King and Queen of Afghanistan to Sheffield, 1928.*

performed by the female workers colloquially known as 'buffer girls or lasses'). Also of interest is the record of Hilda's parents' provision of lodgings to Hawas Khan, another Pashtun migrant who, like both Ayaht and his Sheffield father-in-law Walter Davis, was employed as a steelworker.<sup>205</sup> Such domestic arrangements demonstrate that the networks and everyday connections between natives and newcomers could be far more embedded into the day-to-day life of the native working class than we might currently allow for. Moreover, ongoing research into the relationships established between natives and newcomers is

beginning to reveal that the composition of the South Asian newcomers' social and migration networks comprised not only kinsmen and compatriots such as Hawas Khan, but also native wives and families such as wife Hilda and in-laws Walter and Beatrice, friends, not to mention neighbours and workmates such as Vina Brown the Khan's lodger. Consequently, this thesis argues that these wider, racially or ethnically-mixed social networks, made up of both newcomers and natives, played a central role in the pioneering settlement of South Asian men, not only in the Sheffield area, but perhaps in Britain as a whole.

<sup>202</sup> G. Booth, *Diamonds in Brown Paper: The Colourful Lives and Hard Times of Sheffield's Famous Buffer Lasses* (Sheffield, 1988), p. 33.

<sup>203</sup> Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 26 March 1928; Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News (London), 14 April 1928.

<sup>204</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Sheffield, RG 101/3562F/002/43-KIWB.

<sup>205</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Davis household, Sheffield, RG 101/3551A/005/3-KIRV.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In this section we have examined the factors influencing the migration of young South Asian men to Britain. These men were not landless wage labourers but, frequently, the sons of small landholders who left their farms to work in the cash economies of the West to develop their landholdings at home and the social capital of themselves and their families. A myth of return informed their desire for migration as a temporary condition to be endured until sufficient capital was accumulated for the desired improvements in standing. However, the creative, sometimes opportunistic, and often entrepreneurial aspects of their employment strategies led the men into alliances of co-operation, mutuality and sociability with individuals outside the *biradari* structure. These expanding social networks, although rooted within rural British India, broadened to include non-kinship relationships with other South Asian seafarers on the docksides and lodging houses of Indian ports, as well as in the stokeholds and crew quarters of the ships they worked aboard. Their networks then broadened further to include native Britons as wives, in-laws, friends, neighbours and workmates. The identification of early South Asian immigrants as temporary visitors with peripatetic lifestyles, isolated from wider British society, has not only neglected inland migration and settlement, but also the many relationships formed with native Britons.

In this section we have examined a number of examples of native–newcomer relationships that acted as ‘bridgeheads’ for immigration and settlement.<sup>206</sup> The households and long-term relationships established, reduced the cultural influence of the myth of return among a significant proportion of men, with them committing to lives as settlers, husbands and fathers, rather than as sojourners. These individuals played a key role in facilitating chains of migration from the Indian subcontinent to the imperial metropole, including inland to the Sheffield area. Moreover, I have argued that the foundations of mass-immigration were laid during the inter-war period by these racially-mixed social networks. Such networks and migration chains developed to span across the inter-war period, through the trans-imperial labour migrations of the Second War, into the era of large-scale immigration associated with the later, post-Partition, post-*Windrush*, era. This phenomenon occurred across England, Scotland and Wales, both in the ports and here, as described in this thesis, inland, away from maritime employment, and involved men such as Ayaht Khan, Hawas Khan and Ali Amidulla, who travelled at least nine thousand miles by land and sea from their villages to Britain.

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<sup>206</sup> Ballard, ‘Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh’, 11.

## Section 3

### *Working lives*

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The migration of Indian men to Britain in the first half of the twentieth century was a movement largely facilitated by seafaring employment within the British merchant marine. Not only did men arrive as seafarers who continued to work out of British home ports, migration to Britain afforded men opportunities to compete in non-seafaring industrial labour markets in the West. Demand within Britain's munitions, engineering, metal trades and coal working industries, increased dramatically when markets were denuded of traditional local sources of labour by military conscription during the course of two world wars.

Indian workers arrived in Britain as pioneers in small but significant numbers during the First World War. This immigration occurred despite the parliamentary statement in 1916 of the Secretary of State for the Colonies that 'no decision had yet been reached with regard to the employment of coloured labour in this country'. This was also despite the further reassurance given by David Lloyd George to trades union leaders in 1917 that, although the needs of the nation in wartime would always take precedence, there were no plans for employment of non-white workers in the manufacturing and heavy industries at this time.<sup>207</sup> It appears, however, that despite these statements, recruitment was already underway as an ad hoc response by employers to a combination of factors, such as the shortage of 'heavy workers' after conscription had begun, and the need to ramp up wartime production after the 'shell crisis' of May 1915. For instance, by June 1916 the *Sheffield Independent* reported that 'coloured men' were being employed in some Manchester collieries on the opposite side of the Pennines.<sup>208</sup>

These two periods of twentieth century global warfare accelerated a process of small-scale immigration of individual Indian men to Britain, present since the early nineteenth century.<sup>209</sup> Indeed, Tom Abdul the earliest Indian arrival recorded in Sheffield, in the city since at least 1917, found employment at Firth-Brown's

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<sup>207</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield), 28 November 1916, p. 5; *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield), 1 February 1917, p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield), 26 June 1916, p. 5.

<sup>209</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 31–33.

steelworks of Carlisle Street – a major armaments manufacturer and employer of a number of the men in this study.<sup>210</sup>

As we have seen in the previous section, the movement over great distances of Indians in search of work was driven by two principal factors. The first of these lay in the increasing economic pressures brought about by land reform in the Punjab, by debt and by inheritance-driven shortages of land available to maintain growing populations. The pressures that pushed young men away from their family farms in search of cash wages coincided with the second factor – the demand of British industry, primarily its merchant shipping sector, for cheap labour. Thus, by signing on as so-called ‘lascar’ seafarers, the sons of peasant farmers were drawn into the global transport system servicing and maintaining the British Empire. As we shall see in the following subsection, these two principal factors were supplemented by a further migration of fare-paid passenger migration of men intending to work as self-employed petty traders. This component of the overall migration of non-elite Indians to Britain largely built on the experiences of pioneer former lascar seafarers and the infrastructure they established in Britain.

This section will examine the experience of those directly involved in a movement of male labour that connected the peasant farms of Punjab, NWFP and Mirpur in the north-west, and Bengal in the east, to the imperial metropole. In the case of all, except the Bengalis, it brought them to the Sheffield area – Britain’s metalworking, coal-mining heartland. The section will also examine in some detail the strategies the men devised to make a living and survive in the frequently harsh economic climate of the period in question which covers the inter-war years of economic slump in the industrial north of Britain. At the core of this section will lie the experiences Rasool Khan (born 1906 – died 1955), some of his friends and his compatriots. The personal history of Rasool, a Punjabi man of Pashtun ethnicity, sheds much light upon the often multifarious and highly creative nature of employment for former lascar seafarers.<sup>211</sup> While the range and extent of his activities are unusual for a single individual, they clearly demonstrate the range of economic activity available during the period for non-elite non-white migrants who possessed little or no formal schooling. Much of the fine detail of the economic life of Rasool and his immediate peers has been reconstructed from the testimony of daughters Doreen and Glenda, son Derek and other descendants of the Sheffield area’s pioneer South Asian settlers. These oral sources have been corroborated, wherever possible, by a range of sources including GRO and census data, press reports and electoral rolls.

This young man first exercised his right as a British subject to live at the heart of the Empire sometime around 1925. Arriving as part of the lascar stokehold crew of a British merchant steamer, he deserted the ‘Asiatic’ articles to which he was bound and jumped ship at Tilbury docks on the outskirts of London. His ‘nully’, (or seafarer’s Continuous Certificate of Discharge), issued in 1932 shows that he worked, as he

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<sup>210</sup> Tom Abdul - attestation and discharge certificates 1915-1916, TNA - British Army Service Records 1914-1920, WO 363, First World War Service Records, Burnt Documents, SS/17136; Tom Abdul, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 907.

<sup>211</sup> Rasool Khan, d. cert., GRO, Deaths, Newton-le-Willows, Jan.–Mar. 1955, vol. 10f, p. 32.

mostly likely did in 1925, as a ship's fireman responsible for fuelling and servicing the boilers of the ubiquitous British merchantman of the latter half of the nineteenth, and first half the twentieth, centuries. The work was arduous, the conditions poor and the wages a fraction of those seamen working out of British home ports. Rasool's daughter Doreen told of how he deserted one night by evading the attention of both his *serang* (lascar boatswain) and the dockyard security patrols, and made his way by following the Thames upstream the twenty or so miles to the East London district of Poplar.<sup>212</sup> According to his family, since leaving his Chhachhi village of Nartopa, Rasool carried the London address of fellow Pashtun, Naqibullah Nairoolla.

In partnership with Katherine his Jewish-English wife, Naqibullah operated a boarding house which catered for Indian seamen, particularly those of Pashtun ethnicity.<sup>213</sup> Their further specialism, beyond that of running the 'Indian Boarding House' at 49 High Street, Poplar, was the assistance of lascars deserting their ships to escape the highly exploitative terms of the Asiatic articles.<sup>214</sup> As we have seen, this secondary activity extended to actively encouraging desertion in Britain – a point freely admitted by Katherine Nairoolla to representatives of a Parliamentary investigative committee on Indian seamen's boarding houses.<sup>215</sup> Indeed, rather than his daughter's account of him having left his village pre-armed with the knowledge and intention of deserting, his first knowledge of the Nairoollas' boarding house may well have been through one of their agents on board his ship while moored at Tilbury. Regardless of the actual circumstances in which Rasool jumped ship, he made his way to the ethnically-mixed couple's boarding house – a central node which supported a trans-imperial social network of South Asian immigrants. Via the merchant shipping routes, this network traversed vast spaces and linked agrarian populations in rural South Asia with urban labour markets at the heart of the British Empire and beyond.

In this way, Rasool and other Pashtuns, such as Maharamed Sha and Noorden Khan, made their way to the Sheffield area after jumping ship.<sup>216</sup> Arriving in the imperial ports of Cardiff, the Port of London, Tilbury, Liverpool, Leith, Glasgow, South Shields or Kingston Upon Hull, they made their way inland, in ones and twos, in search of work in the metalworking and coal related industries of northern England, and southern Scotland. Throughout the inter-war period in the Sheffield area, the earliest pioneers from Punjab and NWFP were followed by migrating compatriots and kinsmen who used and further developed their trans-imperial social networks of work and trade. Additionally, from the mid to late 1930s, as the British economy moved to a war footing and the North experienced something of an industrial revival, the pioneers were joined by other migrants including Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims from Kashmir's Mirpur district. During the Second World War, migrants and settlers in the

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<sup>212</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

<sup>213</sup> G. Morgenstierne and A. Lloyd-James, 'Notes on the Pronunciation of Pashto', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 5.1 (1928), p. 53.

<sup>214</sup> The London telephone directory for 1924 lists Nairoolla Laitfoolla (Indian Boarding Ho) 49 High St. E.14: General Post Office Telephone Directory (London, 1924).

<sup>215</sup> BL, India Office Records, L/E/7/1152: Inspection Report by T. G. Segrave, 1 Dec. 1922.

<sup>216</sup> For example: 'Maharamed Sha and Noorden Khan', *Evening Telegraph*, (Sheffield), 27 August 1919, p. 5.

Sheffield area were also joined by seafarers from Yemen. Apart from the Sikhs who arrived in Britain as fare-paying passengers to work as petty traders and manual workers, often in the building trade, many Muslim men shared the common experience of being recruited to work as lascar seafarers by the British merchant marine in British imperial ports east of Suez such as Aden, Karachi, Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>217</sup>

While many continued to work as seafarers after deserting their Lascar articles, they instead worked out of British ports and under standard European articles at vastly improved rates of pay and conditions. Some settled in deep-water port towns such as London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Cardiff, South Shields and (Kingston Upon) Hull to join well-known and highly cosmopolitan communities of seafarers, such as Liverpool 8, Poplar in London's East End and, of course, Cardiff's Bute Town – otherwise known as 'Tiger Bay'. Others were more creative in their employment strategies and moved further inland, away from maritime employment, to work as waged-labourers in the heavy industries. Others chose self-employment in petty trade and took up the peripatetic occupation of peddling.<sup>218</sup> These petty traders sold fabric, clothes, and other domestic items, including confectionery, in the street, from market stalls and door-to-door across the length and breadth of Britain and Ireland. Indeed, the character of the 'Indian toffee man' is an often-documented figure in working-class childhood memory during the period.<sup>219</sup>

The evidence for immigrants in Yorkshire and the north of England during the period from the First World War up until Indian independence and partition in 1947 demonstrates that non-elite male Indians developed creative employment strategies that encompassed a wide range of employment types either commensurate with, or exceeding, their individual levels of education. Men found employment in a wide variety of manual trades and industrial occupations including steel making and armaments manufacture and construction, in gas works, oil mills and coal mines, as labourers, fitters, machinists, fabricators, boiler firers and furnacemen.<sup>220</sup> While a significant proportion of South Asian immigrants were occupied as door-to-door petty traders, as scholars have underlined, this does not necessarily demonstrate non-elite, non-white immigrants' exclusion from the mainstream labour market. Peddling has been presented as often the only viable employment opportunity available to these men beyond a return home or to seafaring under Lascar articles. Indeed, this historical conception of South Asian immigrants as predominantly itinerant workers has become very much entwined with the characterisation of their status as victims of

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<sup>217</sup> The 1939 Register provided numerous examples of Sikh men employed as either pedlars and 'travelling drapers' or as builder's labourers. For example, the residents of 18 William Street, Bradford: TNA, 1939 Register, Lal household, Bradford, R 39/3332I/004/11-KBBR.

<sup>218</sup> For example: 'SY/546/C3/4, Bundle of Pedlars' Certificates', 1947 1936, 546/C3/4, Rotherham Archives.

<sup>219</sup> For example: B. Kops, *The World Is a Wedding* (London, 1963), p. 27; R. Kray and P. Gerrard, *Reggie Kray's East End Stories: The Lost Memoirs of the Gangland Legend* (London, 2011), p. 77.

<sup>220</sup> The Indian elite, as defined here, was composed of aristocracy – including the *zamindars* or big landholders, indigenous industrialists and members of either the professional classes or their future members in Britain as students).

the structural racism inherent within Britain. Moreover, the immigrants' frequent status as 'pedlar' in official records has, for migration scholars such as Roger Ballard and Laura Tabili, served as an indicator of their exclusion from mainstream employment.<sup>221</sup> While this may be true to some extent, such an analysis certainly does not illuminate the entirety of the experience of employment for non-elite South Asian men during the period and may also serve to distort the picture somewhat. With this in mind, this section argues that peddling and street trading were just one of several components in a migrant's overall strategy to make a living in Britain, either by self-employment or as an employee. Moreover, this section will argue that the flexible strategy of non-elite South Asians to employment, does not necessarily serve as an indicator of their racial exclusion. Rather, if contextualised within the experience of the indigenous working class, this 'economy of makeshift' corresponded closely with that proportion of white workers who also responded with equal flexibility to unemployment, layoffs and short-time working.<sup>222</sup>

The section will examine, in depth, the different components of migrant South Asian men's working lives, beginning with their employment with the British merchant marine. It will explore the nature of their relationship with waged seafaring labour while employed under Lascar or Asiatic articles and how this became, for increasing numbers of men, their motivation for jumping ship in ports around the world using what Jonathan Hyslop has called 'the multivalent web of transoceanic connections', which 'made it possible for workers to slip around or through the grids employers and officials set up to contain them.'<sup>223</sup> This section will also draw from the memoirs of 'Dada' Amir Haider Khan, a former lascar seafarer and communist whose lengthy autobiography is invaluable for its detailed first-hand accounts of the experiences and motivations of South Asian seamen during the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>224</sup> The remainder of the section will examine the men's land-based employment and the strategies they devised to survive in inter-war Britain. Their experiences as petty traders will be discussed, as will the independent spirit which drove their entrepreneurial endeavours - which often originated in the necessities of life aboard ship. The men's experiences of life as proletarian waged-labourers in the heavy industries of the Sheffield area will also be examined and situated within the context of working-class life in Britain. Key to the section will be the social networks the men joined, developed and which helped facilitate and sustain their creative and flexible responses to the challenges they faced. For most, these included the legalised and institutional racism of the British merchant marine's recruitment and employment practices, and the hostility and surveillance of the Home Office in its attempts to and exclude British subjects of South Asian origin from the domestic British labour market. For all the men, their endeavours in attempting to resist and

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<sup>221</sup> R. Ballard, 'Differentiation And Disjunction Among The Sikhs', in R. Ballard, ed., *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*, (London, 1994), p. 93; L. Tabili, 'Ghulam Rasul's Travels: Migration, Recolonization and Resistance in Inter-War Britain', in R. Ahmed and S. Mukherjee, eds., *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947*, (London, 2011), p. 61.

<sup>222</sup> Tabili, 'Ghulam Rasul's Travels', 61.

<sup>223</sup> J. Hyslop, 'Steamship Empire', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 44:1 (2009), p. 64.

<sup>224</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*.

overcome the negative effects of the trade cycle and the structural weaknesses of the British economy remained a common factor for the men in this study.

### 3.1 From lascars to seamen

Rasool Khan, like many of the subjects of this study, was employed during parts of his varied working life in the maintenance of the head of steam powering machinery at the heart of the Don Valley's extensive iron, steel, metal-working and coal industries. As an Indian shipping out from an Asian port, he would have been recruited by a British shipping company such as the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) or the British-India Steam Navigation Company (BISN) as a lascar seafarer to work under 'Asiatic' articles. And, like most other non-white workers who arrived in Britain, he would have originally been recruited to work among the 'black gang' as a ship's fireman or coal trimmer aboard a British merchant steamship.<sup>225</sup> Although not primarily intended as a racial epithet (this term applied equally to white crews), South Asian men were recruited by the British merchant marine under the highly racialized Lascar or Asiatic articles of employment, as codified by section 125 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.<sup>226</sup> Although their European counterparts laboured under notoriously poor conditions and low wages, lascar seafarers were remunerated with approximately one sixth of even these paltry wages, not to mention significantly poorer conditions.<sup>227</sup> British colonised India was the source of recruits, not only for the army, navy and merchant marine, but also of indentured 'coolie' labour for British colonial projects throughout the Empire. Recruitment took place among men from those ethnic groups that were deemed most racially suitable for certain martial, agricultural and maritime roles. Pashtuns from the northern Punjab and North West Frontier Province, Mirpuris from Kashmir and Sylhetis from Bengal were considered particularly adaptable to the mechanised rigours of labour as lascars aboard steamships.<sup>228</sup>

Despite the straightforward interpretation of 'lascar' by *Hobson Jobson* as a synonym for an Indian seafarer in common English parlance, Balachandran notes that the word was also in use in British India to describe porters and unskilled manual workers, as well as seafarers recruited under the restrictive 'lascar' or 'Asiatic' articles. It is in this sense – a worker employed on a highly restrictive and exploitative contract, often indentured for a fixed period – that was understood by the British to be the seaborne equivalent of the 'common coolie' - and a class of worker closely related to the type of Asian sweated/indentured labourers used by the British as a substitute for colonial slave labour after abolition in 1833.<sup>229</sup> Additionally, Ahuja stresses that, over

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<sup>225</sup> The 'black gang' was a universal term for the stokehold crew of firemen and coal trimmers who were almost always coated in coal dust while at work. For a first-hand account see: E. Carpenter, 'The Black Gang', in R. Hope, ed., *The Seaman's World: Merchant Seamen's Reminiscences*, (London, 1982), pp. 13–15; R. P. De Kerbrech, *Down Amongst the Black Gang: The World And Workplace Of RMS Titanic's Stokers* (Stroud, 2014), p. 10.

<sup>226</sup> Merchant Shipping Act, 1894 -

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1894/60/pdfs/ukpga\\_18940060\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1894/60/pdfs/ukpga_18940060_en.pdf) (Accessed 31 March 2017).

<sup>227</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 124–125.

<sup>228</sup> Hyslop, 'Steamship Empire', 56.

<sup>229</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 28–29.

the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the designation transformed into a category which socially and economically isolated these men from their European counterparts. Lascars were no longer seamen, but a legally defined category of ship-borne indentured labourer whose significantly lower status was reflected in their pay, working and living conditions.<sup>230</sup> Balachandran argues that the designations 'lascar' and 'coolie' were interchangeable in the thinking of most employers and officials. Many European seamen 'used the term "coolie" to cultivate an air of superiority over Indian seamen and underline their own "difference" as workers'. Moreover, British seafarers' unions frequently deployed this terminology as an exclusionary device to reinforce the legitimacy of their claims for recognition.<sup>231</sup>

As the codification of the racialized differentiation of Indian seafarers, the Asiatic articles insulated British shipping companies against foreign competition. Thus, higher profit margins flowed from cheap labour, lower requirements for capital investment, not to mention a usefully segregated and non-unionised segment of the maritime workforce. Asiatic articles meant that lascars, while on-board ship, received only a fraction of the wages allotted to their, already badly paid, white counterparts, not to mention being allotted significantly smaller crew quarters. Additionally, in order to reduce costs, rations were skimped by companies and ship's masters and proved to be frequently rotten, rancid and nutritionally deficient. Malnutrition, as well as scurvy and beriberi, both diseases caused by inadequate basic nutrition, were a constant risk to lascar crews.<sup>232</sup> By 1935, the economic consequences of this race-based differentiation between the white-European seafarer and his South Asian counterpart led the Conservative Member for Hull East to raise the issue in Parliament and argue that white-British seafarers' livelihoods were being undermined by cheap lascar labour. He emphasised that 'the rate of pay to Lascars was 27s a month, while the National Maritime Board's rate of wages for white men was not less than £8 6s a month'.<sup>233</sup>

The implication was clear: the British mercantile marine was profiteering, not only at the direct expense of Indian seafarers, but by racially dividing its labour force. It thus maintained a steady downward pressure on the wages of seafarers employed on European articles with the implied threat that they could easily be replaced by cheap and more tractable lascar crews. Moreover, Asiatic articles legally required shipping companies to discharge and pay off lascar seamen only in Indian ports. In so doing, the Asiatic articles partially isolated British merchant shipping from free competition on the globalized market for maritime labour. As mentioned above, this provided a significant economic advantage for British shipping companies over foreign rivals who did not have free access to the distorted labour markets of colonized India. Combined, such practices enabled the shipping lines of the British

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<sup>230</sup> R. Ahuja, 'Mobility and Containment: The Voyages of South Asian Seamen, c.1900-1960', *International Review of Social History*, 51:14 (2006), pp. 117-118.

<sup>231</sup> G. Balachandran, 'Making Coolies, (Un)Making Workers: "Globalizing" Labour in the Late-19th and Early-20th Centuries', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 24:3 (2011), p. 271.

<sup>232</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 124-125.

<sup>233</sup> *Daily Mail* (Hull), 27 March 1935, p. 9.

Merchant Navy to maintain their competitive positions despite diminishing rates of profit in a depressed market and highly contested world shipping market.

By 1940, lascars were, in the words of Dinkar Desai, Joint General Secretary of the Bombay Seamen's Union, 'the most exploited vagabonds of the sea'.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, ships' masters considered Indian crews tractable, docile, sober and willing to work under the harshest conditions for little reward. Such assumptions were also useful as weapons deployed by shipping companies against white seafarers. The lascar was held up as the ideal seafarer not susceptible to the moral deficiencies of drunkenness, insubordination and inefficiency found in his European counterpart. This idealised view of lascars is reflected by Jan De Hartog in his seafaring memoir. Apparently, as long as they were not provoked by 'half-witted megalomaniacs among the white sailors', lascars were 'placid, kind and totally unapproachable as turtles in a northern pond'.<sup>235</sup> The reality was, however, rather less than benignly paternalistic. The Home Office, the Board of Trade and the India Office conspired to manipulate colonised labour, to the benefit of British trade, particularly that of shipping companies such as the P&O and the BISN. Balachandran argues that these companies utilised the labour of land-holding peasants because they were almost self-sufficient and needed waged employment only sporadically. They were employed in preference to fully proletarian labour, to which the shipping companies would have been obliged to pay wages at the market rate and sufficient to bear the cost of the reproduction of that labour force. By these means, elements of the British merchant marine reduced their labour costs substantially and sustained their competitive edge. Direct recruitment from inland villages using *ghat serangs* (local agents) able to utilise local kinship networks allowed companies to effectively bypass and undermine increasingly organised and unionised proletarian labour in the great port cities of Karachi, Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>236</sup>

Balachandran suggests that such men, who went to sea with companies such as P&O and BISN were 'neither peasants nor proletarians... distant stragglers after the neat categories that frame our social imaginations'.<sup>237</sup> His analysis throws light on the limitations of narrowly academic-Marxist or overly structuralist models of analysis when examining the experience of members of a cohort who developed such extraordinarily fluid and creative economic lives. However, this should not lead us to the conclusion that once lascars left the areas of employment they were allowed to occupy while on board, they continued to inhabit such a no man's land after desertion in Britain. Rather, as the evidence presented by this study suggests, their independently-minded approaches to employment and self-employment allowed these men to move beyond the marginal occupational role ascribed them by British imperial economics. When necessary, they appeared to have been fully able and willing to inhabit proletarian spaces together with those of the petty trader and the entrepreneur.

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<sup>234</sup> D. Desai, *Maritime Labour in India* (Bombay, 1940), p. 18.

<sup>235</sup> J. 1914-2002. De Hartog, *A Sailor's Life, Etc.* (London, 1956), p. 83.

<sup>236</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 63.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Similarly, Badr Dahya argued in the early 1970s that most post-Partition migrants from Pakistan occupied a similar kind of liminal, in-between, space while in Britain. Although his subjects were mostly employed in typically working-class occupations, Dahya noted they did not consider themselves to be proletarian in outlook or aspiration. Their aim, he observed, was to live as cheaply as possible, work as long and as hard as possible in order to accumulate the cash to pay off family debts, build tube wells on the family farm, extend family landholdings, buildings and thus status, then to return home as quickly as possible.<sup>238</sup> Their outlook did not, he stressed, overlap with their white working-class neighbours and, by means of the myth of return, retained a distinctly peasant outlook.<sup>239</sup> As Shaw suggests, the myth required relatively frequent visits back to the village of origin in order to maintain it. While pre-1948 Indian migrants did return to their villages for visits, due to the problems we have seen with employment as a lascar, the high cost of a return ticket by steamship, or the obstructive attitude of the British Home Office toward the immigration of British-Indian subjects, this would not have been a journey to be undertaken lightly, especially for a man with a native-British wife and family.

Dahya's analysis may well hold for migrants who sojourned in Britain relatively briefly before returning to their villages to resume an agrarian way of life. However, it is less useful when applied to those men, particularly those in this study, who stayed on in Britain for longer periods while employed in typical working-class occupations, who may have joined trades unions, lived in working-class neighbourhoods or began businesses. It holds even less true for those men who married and settled down with native, mostly working-class, women to raise their families. Here it is arguable that their maintenance of native-British families, not to mention the everyday necessities of life and work (regardless of whether they were proletarians or petty traders), weakened the bonds of kinship which tied them to ties of inheritance and *biradari* in their villages of origin and thus loosened the cultural imperative of the myth of return. Consequently during the period covered by this thesis, Indian settlers in Britain may well have identified more strongly on a day to day basis with the outlook of the social stratum they inhabited. This is not to argue that they lost all sense of themselves as members of a specific ethnicity, religion or kinship group with origins on the Indian subcontinent, but that economically, their outlook became sufficiently modified to enable them to successfully engage with their British surroundings. This is an argument to which we will return in the following section, when the question of native-newcomer marriages is considered.

### **3.2 From ship to shore**

With regard to the economic issues, Balachandran's analysis of 'neither peasant nor proletarian', while true for lascar seamen, fails to sum up the migrants' economic and social experience once they had jumped ship. The evidence collected and assessed by this Sheffield area study suggests that Indian immigrants were at various points peasants, lascars, seamen on European articles, pedlars, petty entrepreneurs and land-

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<sup>238</sup> Dahya, 'Pakistanis in Britain', 245.

<sup>239</sup> Dahya, 'The Nature of Pakistani Ethnicity in Industrial Cities in Britain', 82-83.

dwelling proletarians. While some remained in one category, others appear to have moved fluidly between these occupations contingent not only on external social and material factors, but also on their own terms as the expression of their own agency. Indeed, an immigrant's self-employment as a market trader, shop keeper or door-to-door salesman would suggest the expression of individual economic creativity by means of petty entrepreneurship; Roger Ballard has gone so far as to suggest that the act of migration itself was a speculative, entrepreneurial activity.<sup>240</sup>

In contrast, an immigrant's membership of a trade union in the years before widespread trade union-employer 'closed-shop' arrangements of the post-Second World War settlement, suggests the expression of a degree of conscious, collective working-class belonging among those who became trades unionists. Moreover, lascars, and those Indian seafarers who worked on European seamen's articles, expressed their individual and collective agency in creative and subversive ways, despite the racially charged and Orientalist views often held of them, particularly by those in positions of authority over them. The act of deserting their ships and gaining employment on the same or similar terms to their white counterparts demonstrates, as Tabili, Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee conceptualise it, the 'resistances', or 'acts of self-decolonization' of South Asians, beyond the frontiers of the sub-continent.<sup>241</sup>

Moreover, rather than succumbing to the role ascribed to them by the racial logic of the British Empire, some non-elite men, such as Haider Khan, appear to have used the British merchant marine not only as a source of employment but as a means of personal transport throughout the British Empire and beyond. Haider Khan recalled his astonishment that, on first arriving in New York, he discovered that, rather than work for thirty-five rupees per month as an oiler on a British merchant ship, he could earn \$60 per month working as a fireman on an American ship. It is perhaps unsurprising that he jumped ship in New York at the first opportunity and took up United States citizenship. This enabled Haider Khan to work in factories in the United States during the last year of the First World War, and to ship out again as a United States merchant seaman.<sup>242</sup> Similarly, a number of men were able to sidestep the Merchant Shipping Act, in its application toward British Indians, by using lascar employment as a means to fulfil their desire for mobility or adventure - even enabling some to perform the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca<sup>243</sup>. Sheffield's Warris Khan arrived in Britain as a lascar in the 1920s. Presumably after jumping ship in Britain, he was periodically re-employed under standard articles to work the Atlantic routes out of home ports, such as Barry and Birkenhead.<sup>244</sup> Laitifoolla (Naqibullah) Nairoollah was recorded having crossed the border to the United States from Mexico at El Paso, Texas

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<sup>240</sup> Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 9.

<sup>241</sup> R. Ahmed, ed., *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858-1947* (London ; New York, 2011), pp. xxi-xxii; Tabili, 'Ghulam Rasul's Travels', 54-55.

<sup>242</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 135-140.

<sup>243</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 179-180.

<sup>244</sup> TNA, Britain, Merchant Seamen, 1918-1941, BT349/CR1/ R 110210, Warris Khan; TNA, Britain, Merchant Seamen, 1918-1941, BT348/CR2/ R 110210, Warris Khan; *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 17 December 1934), p. 1.

in December 1924. The London boarding-house keeper's occupation was recorded by the Immigration Service as 'seaman', his place of birth 'Dhudial, Punjab, India', his nationality 'British subject', his 'race' as 'East Indian', and his nearest relative as 'Catherine Nairoola' of London, England.<sup>245</sup>

As we have seen, the British reliance on South Asian labour provided a small, but significant, number of lascar seamen with opportunities for work, travel and for generally bettering their lot – consequences largely unforeseen and unwanted by the British state and shipping lines. Making the choice to desert their ships, and the Asiatic articles which bound them, provided these men of limited financial means the opportunity of travelling to seek employment on better terms in the cash economies of the West. Moreover, shovelling coal into the fireboxes of steamships proved invaluable industrial experience for these sons of small-holding peasant farmers. The experience of working in the stokehold was, apart from the pitch and roll of the ship, much more akin to that of shore-based industrial workers than that of seamen who worked on deck. As W.E. Gordon, writing on conditions of maritime labour, noted in 1896:

The stokehold is the only place afloat in which it is not obvious, at first glance, that one is on board a ship. Standing on the flagged floor, and looking at the boiler faces... it seems as though one had strayed into the boiler room of some factory or colliery on a foggy day.<sup>246</sup>

We can also add to this picture the ceaseless gonging of Kilroy's Stoking Indicator in the stokeholds of the bigger coal-fired ships. This device for the regulation of the quantity of coal shovelled into each boiler's three fireboxes was described by one observer as the 'remorseless electromechanical equivalent of the man who used to beat the time to which the slaves rowed the ancient galleys'.<sup>247</sup> The indicator could be adjusted to increase the frequency of its gongs and therefore, if the stokehold crew were sufficiently disciplined, the amount of steam generated. Even without Kilroy's Stoking Indicator, the *serang* or boatswain in charge of the stokehold imposed similar time discipline among the black gang of ship's firemen and coal trimmers. This was undoubtedly a tough and remorseless induction to the concept of industrial time and work discipline for men who spent their formative years as peasant farmers, unregulated by timepieces. Here, suggested E.P. Thompson, lay a significant cultural difference between the outlook and experience of individuals from modern industrial and pre-modern agrarian societies. Through the imposition of industrial time and work discipline by means of 'the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings... new labour habits

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<sup>245</sup> Laitifoolla Nairoolla, Manifests of Aliens Granted Temporary Admission at El Paso, Texas, ca. July 1924-1954, 1757/61-0883.

<sup>246</sup> W. J. Gordon, *The Way of the World At Sea* (London, 1896), pp. 55–56.

<sup>247</sup> <http://www.barrymerchantseamen.org.uk/articles/BMSfiretrim.html> (accessed 2 April 2017).

were formed, and a new time-discipline was imposed.<sup>248</sup> What is perhaps remarkable is the rapidity with which the cultural and social differences between modern industrial labour and that of pre-modern agrarian societies were negotiated by South Asian seafarers.

It was under precisely these conditions, (as in 'the boiler rooms of factories or collieries' suggested by W.E. Gordon), that many of these men would spend at least part of their working lives while in Britain, effectively adapting their maritime experience to a non-maritime setting. Moreover, in the period of economic and social uncertainty after the First World War, their particular experience of highly-disciplined maritime-industrial labour may have proved the crucial factor that enabled former seafarers to gain employment in a non-maritime economy, such as that of the Sheffield area. That opportunities for work existed, at the same rates of pay as their white-British counterparts, was a major incentive for lascars to forfeit their accumulated wages and to desert or 'jump ship' in British ports such as London, Liverpool, Hull, Glasgow, South Shields and Cardiff.

As Balachandran notes, it is surprising that more men did not jump ship in Britain.<sup>249</sup> But, while mass desertions did occur, such as described by Haider Khan, these occurred due to crew dissatisfaction, were dealt with accordingly by the authorities, and the men involved returned to their ship, sometimes with their demands met, or partially met, by the ship's master.<sup>250</sup> Rather, the evidence provided by Home Office reports and the testimony of former lascars show that long-duration desertions tended to be of a small scale, opportunist nature, involving men in ones or twos, rather than in larger, and more easily apprehended, groups. This can be seen from the police and Home Office documentation of the cases of men staying with the Nairoollahs.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, as Balachandran underlines, it appears from the evidence, not least from the numbers of men working as lascars and whose ships docked in Britain, that most did not desert, and that the system of crew management and the policing of lascars by their *serangs* or Indian boatswains, proved to be fairly effective.<sup>252</sup> As the P&O advertisement illustrates (figure 2.2), the crew's *serang* was often a co-villager, kinsman or member of the same *biradari* (clan) as members of the South Asian crew. Despite its probably fictional, and certainly idealised, content, this advertisement supplies us with a useful illustration of nepotism in recruitment and the social networks of clan, kinship and mutual dependence that existed among lascar seafarers. The advertisement also indirectly highlights the role of *izzat* (personal and family honour) as the social glue that ensured the bonds and responsibilities of *biradari* membership were effectively maintained.<sup>253</sup> Also evident from this piece of company

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<sup>248</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 90–97.

<sup>249</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 177–179.

<sup>250</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 103–108.

<sup>251</sup> TNA, HO 45/13781, Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Alli Kadir or Afssar Khan and Shar Khan.

<sup>252</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 176–178.

<sup>253</sup> Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 14.

marketing is the P&O's decision to humanise post-Independence South Asian seafarers. In this advertisement the company has chosen, in public relations terms, to distance itself from view that their stokehold crews were the nameless, mostly unseen, and certainly unheard, lascars who toiled away below deck.

Despite the rosy presentation of the *serang* in post-war era marketing, before the rise of trade unions capable of effectively representing South Asian seafarers, crew or their families were often in debt to these men due to a widespread system of bribes paid to secure a post aboard ship.<sup>254</sup> As the former lascar Haider Khan recalled, the lascar crewmen were each advanced a month's pay to enable their purchase of essentials, such as tobacco, soap and working clothes, upon signing on. After the formalities had been completed:

...we all had to gather in a shade down on the dock where the Sarong made his collection. The old hands were required to pay about one-third of their advance while all of what the newcomers had received from the Shipping Master was exacted. Thereafter, they were forced to take out loans from moneylenders who made such transactions with seafaring men who needed to purchase a few necessities for their voyage. The loan was to be paid back on one's return. Thus, for the first month the newly-hired seafarers, without any money, worked like anonymous slaves in the ship's boiler rooms and coal bunkers, using whatever they had, forced to accept the cheapest food, a few ounces per head of rice, onions, lentils and potatoes which were supplied free for their diet.<sup>255</sup>

Balachandran also draws our attention to the fact that the practice of receiving or extracting bribes, or *dasturi*, from the *serangs*, in return for employment, was also prevalent among sections of the white officers.<sup>256</sup> The system of bribery therefore reached up the racial hierarchy to those European crew responsible for recruitment and the *serangs* were not themselves immune from this extortion. Evidence for this practice is provided by Haider Khan's testimony who remembered the necessity for *serangs* to bribe British officers with cash or bottles of whisky from the money they had extracted from their own subordinates:

In order to be selected a Sarong had to get into the good books of the Shipping Master's staff. He would be required, on appointment, to give costly presents and at times even cash bribes to the officers in charge. Since the *Sarong's* salary was only about fifty to sixty rupees per month he was forced to elicit from those he had recruited in order to satisfy his parasitic superiors.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 73–74.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–73.

<sup>256</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?* pp. 68–70.

<sup>257</sup> Khan, *Chains*, pp. 93–94.

The *serang* could also threaten a potential deserter with holding a seaman's family responsible for any debts or promises owing to them.<sup>258</sup> Ravi Ahuja notes that the men also had to escape the 'informal might' of direct or implied physical threats from the *serang* when crew members 'asserted their freedom of movement'. The interviews Caroline Adams conducted in the 1980s with former lascars clearly demonstrate this point. One man described the *serang's* threat of 'afraiding things' if he were caught deserting the ship.<sup>259</sup> In contrast, one of Yousuf Choudhury's interviewees (from a similar cohort to Adams's) suggested that intimidation or bullying by a *serang* (or *sarong*) could also reverse the intended effect by encouraging desertion:

Our Sarong was called Ahmed of Balaganj, and he was very bossy with me. The Sarong put me on a very bad cleaning job. I did as he ordered, but became determined to desert the ship. Next day Elais Miah of Indeswar and I went to the Sarong and told him that we were going to visit another ship to meet a friend. In fact we did so, but as soon as we reached Tilbury station, we changed our direction. We saw the Sarong's son-in-law who also was a Tellwallah (engine-room greaser) on our ship. We hid in a public toilet until he left, then we caught a bus for Canning Town, as our destination was 32 Victoria Dock Road where Ali had his seamen's boarding house.<sup>260</sup>

The interviews conducted by Adams and Choudhury demonstrate that the men fully understood the earning potential of employment in Britain or by sailing under European articles. These benefits often far exceeded the risks of financial or physical penalties imposed by either the *serangs* or the Asiatic articles and were the obvious incentive for desertion.<sup>261</sup>

Sometimes aided by former *serangs* (men with large and widespread social networks who had also deserted their ships to open seamen's boarding houses), deserting lascars became early links in chains of migration formed between Britain and its South Asian colonial possessions. Some men planned long in advance to jump ship, as the testimony of Rasool Khan's daughter Doreen suggests. Others, however, deserted without any significant degree of prior preparation, sometimes on the spur of the moment. Haider Khan exemplifies this type of desertion and jumped ship at New York shortly after talking to the friendly American proprietor of a small waterfront store.<sup>262</sup> Other men's desertions were even more haphazard. In 1929 while researching for his article 'The Spike' (later to be incorporated into *Down and Out in Paris and London*) George Orwell recalled 'a little Chittagonian lascar, barefoot and starving'. The seafarer, who had likely deserted his ship, 'had wandered for days through London, so vague and helpless that he did not even know the name of the

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<sup>258</sup> Ahuja, 'Mobility', p.135.

<sup>259</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 96.

<sup>260</sup> Y. Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire: Oral History from the Bangladeshi Seamen Who Served on British Ships during the 1939-45 War* (Birmingham, 1995), pp. 3-4.

<sup>261</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 46-47, 76-77, 139.

<sup>262</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 135.

city he was in – he thought it was Liverpool, until I told him.’<sup>263</sup> In contrast to Orwell’s anecdote, stories of other deserters in the 1930s often demonstrate that they were usually able to locate their countrymen relatively easily, or they were at least pointed in the right direction by native Britons.<sup>264</sup>

Nevertheless, the often hellish conditions of work in the stokehold may have caused a degree of distress and disorientation among some of its crew members. This may have also played a significant role in impromptu desertions, such as of Orwell’s ‘Chittagonian lascar’, and even suicide by jumping overboard. Haider Khan witnessed such a scenario while performing impromptu maintenance in the Red Sea:

This was very hot and dirty work and when, on one occasion, one of the coal-passers working in the combustion chambers came out for some breeze he was scolded by the water-tender supervising the job. The coal-passer then proceeded to walk up to the deck and throw himself overboard out of desperation and disgust. There were many people on the deck at the time and they immediately rescued him with the help of a boat. The captain, standing on the upper deck, observed the whole scene but never bothered to inquire why the man had attempted suicide, though this should have been his job. He simply instructed the *Sarong* not to beat him anymore. Such incidents were not rare among Indian seafaring men, though the British masters were not particularly concerned as long as their ships were kept running. The ship had to go on and we were here to provide steam at all costs.<sup>265</sup>

While ship’s masters may not have shown concern, as Alston Kennerley highlights, the shipping authorities monitoring the health of merchant seamen gave firemen’s deaths particular attention in the official returns. Death rates, particularly those of lascars, were indeed significantly higher than those for other crew in steamers. Indeed, an official commentary on the statistics for 1908 questioned the dominant view of the merchant marine that Indians were racially suited to the punishingly high temperatures of the stokehold. It noted that ‘how far the abnormal tendency towards suicide amongst firemen is owing to racial characteristics, and how far to the pressure of hard work and high temperature on demoralized and debilitated frames, is still a matter of speculation.’ Despite the high rates of suicide for all stokehold crew, Kennerley’s collated data for the period between 1907 and 1914 indicate that while European stokehold crew were ‘four times as prone to suicide or unexplained disappearance as other engine room personnel and three times as prone as all other crew in steamships,’ for lascars ‘the rate was four and five times, respectively.’<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, 170.

<sup>264</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 74–75.

<sup>265</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 101.

<sup>266</sup> Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 1910, LXXXI, 103; 1911, LXXII, 205; 1913/1914, LXVI, 661 and LXXVI, 755; 1914, LXX, 17; and 1920, XL, 921 – cited in A. Kennerley, ‘Stoking the Boilers: Firemen and Trimmers in British Merchant Ships, 1850–1950’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 20:1 (June 2008), pp. 217–219.

### 3.3 From transnational traders to pedlars

During the period of this study, lascars could always be found in Britain's deep-water home ports – a familiar part of everyday life in these towns. Most were between voyages and waiting to ship out again, possibly back to an Indian port where they were legally permitted to be paid off. A minority had, like Rasool Khan, decided to forfeit their wages, desert and take their chances in Britain. For both these groups, boarding houses and cafes operated by South Asians, such as that of the Nairoollas, were often their primary destination. Balachandran has noted that some lascar crews due to spend an extended spell in London or other British ports were lodged by shipping companies in boarding houses. There, 'they had relative freedom and opportunity to explore their surroundings, acquire or deepen new experiences, and consolidate old relationships and make new ones.'<sup>267</sup> Time spent in shore-based social spaces enabled new arrivals to develop a rudimentary working knowledge of the requirements and restrictions imposed by the authorities, where to locate potential work or opportunities for petty trade and the various likely responses of British natives to them. Haider Khan recalled he and his lascar comrades being mocked by some 'civilized' Londoners while dressed in their 'scant Punjabi attire'. In West Hartlepool in the north-east of England, however, they found a more hospitable atmosphere:

The next evening we went into town to purchase some soap and other essentials and have a look around. The town, I recall, was neat and tidy, and the people seemed healthy and amiable. The attendants at the stores were mostly women, as all able bodied men were either serving with the fighting forces or working in industry. The shop attendants were polite and courteous, a refreshing change from the less-than-gracious Londoners. We would point out to the attendants what seemed to be what we were looking for, and they would bring the items to us for our approval or rejection, since we did not know enough English to tell them what we wanted.<sup>268</sup>

The forays of lascar seafarers into the districts surrounding the immediate dockside provided them with invaluable intercultural experience beyond that represented by their exploitation in the stokehold. As some pioneers, like Haider Khan and Naqibullah Nairoolla, jumped ship during their forays, they were well positioned to contribute to the early development of a rudimentary cultural infrastructure, which included the provision and preparation of suitable foodstuffs and spaces for prayer. This afforded later sojourners greater opportunity to make their way successfully in Britain and provided them with the opportunity to extend their stay, even to the point of facilitating long-term settlement in Britain. For example, in 1909, a 'human-interest' article in the *Hull Daily Mail* described an incident when 'a couple of Lascars... arrived... at the slaughter-house of J. Fisher, Sewer-lane' in the city. The men, from a vessel moored in the city's Alexandra Dock, were there to purchase and to slaughter

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<sup>267</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 149–150.

<sup>268</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 108–109.

sheep according to Islamic rites for consumption by the Muslim crew. After the *halal* slaughter was concluded the carcasses were taken to the ship, 'there to be cut up, mixed with rice, and made into Oriental hotch-potch.'<sup>269</sup> No doubt, once such knowledge of obtaining livestock in Britain, and the means to slaughter it, had been obtained by lascars, it was a relatively straightforward step, upon desertion, to supply *halal* meat as an independent petty trader in Britain. For business-minded South Asians, the step from responsibility for helping provision a lascar-crewed ship, docked in Hull or London, to provisioning a small but growing community of their compatriots and kinsmen may have been simply a matter of sufficient acumen and a decision of when, and where, to desert. Twenty years later, the popular weekly magazine *John Bull* published an article which, although sensationalist in tone, referred to 'Moslems' secret cellar slaughter houses'. These were apparently ad hoc facilities housed in the cellars of boarding houses for 'Asiatic seamen'. Here, the article claimed, the unlicensed slaughter of beasts was performed according to Islamic rites in unsanitary conditions to supply the demand for halal meat from Muslim seafarers. Notwithstanding the tone of this report, the article, clipped and filed by a civil servant of the India Office in Whitehall, provides us with a clue that the development of a basic Muslim cultural infrastructure, capable of supporting further immigration, was underway by the inter-war period.<sup>270</sup>

Others lascars planned their desertion and had prepared for that moment financially. In the accumulation of cash by means of petty trade in their ports of call, they developed a skillset that aided their transition from lascar seafarer to sojourning worker or trader. Reports and letters in the newspapers of Britain's empire-facing home ports demonstrate that the trading activities of serving lascars, together with a small number of their former colleagues, had been established well before the First World War. This is underscored by the 1911 census which records Joe Abdula, a 52 year old single man boarding in Campbell Street, Kingston-Upon-Hull, a couple of hundred yards from the city's Albert Docks.<sup>271</sup> His occupation is noted as 'fisherman - hawker' and his birthplace as Calcutta. Abdula was a particularly early settler, but from the few details the census furnishes, we can reasonably infer the reason he appears at this time and place. Born in Calcutta he had most probably signed on as a lascar under Asiatic articles. After learning his trade he had at some point decided to jump ship at a British port and continued to work as a seafarer out of Hull with its, then booming, fishing industry. He lodged with Arthur McCailey, a seaman, his wife Fanny and their daughter, just off the Hessle Road, the centre of Hull's trawling community. His lodgings were also a short walk away from St Andrew's Dock, the centre of the city's fish trade. However, Abdula's occupation is additionally listed as 'hawker' and his employer as a fish merchants. It therefore appears that he was flexible in his approach toward his principal occupation of fishing. Like many of the

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<sup>269</sup> *Daily Mail* (Hull), 22 April 1909, p.7.

<sup>270</sup> *John Bull* (London), 28 September 1929, filed within BL IOR: L/E/953/350 – Treatment by Home Office of Coloured Seamen as Aliens.

<sup>271</sup> TNA, 1911 Census For England & Wales, McCailey household, 1 Wilberforce Terrace, Campbell St., Kingston Upon Hull.

South Asian men in this study, he undertook one of many possible shore-based occupations when seafaring work was either unavailable or unappealing.

While Joe Abdula either fished or hawked his wares on the streets of Hull as a resident, other Indian traders were visible on the streets of Yorkshire's imperial port as visitors. These individuals have been traced through local press reports of lascars activity and, through the types of goods for sale on British streets during this early period, it is possible to piece together the development of this important strand in Indian men's employment strategies. As an example of this nascent trade, the letters page of an August 1887 edition of the *Hull Daily Mail* featured a reader's letter complaining that he frequently witnessed 'lascars in Hull streets offering for sale bottles of currie [sic] powder and such like stuff, without interference of the police'.<sup>272</sup>

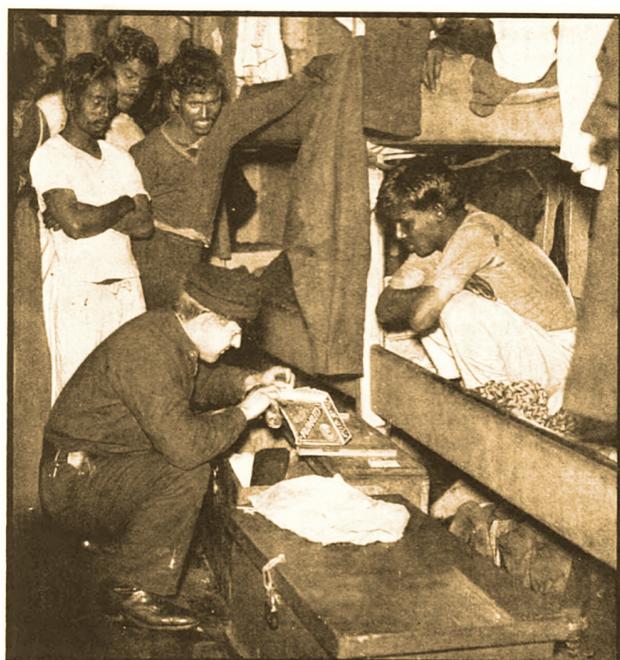


Figure 3.1  
Lascar seamen are searched in their quarters by Port of  
London officials  
© Mary Evans Picture Library

The following year, the same paper report a trial of 'five Lascars and four Panjaubees', part of the crew of the recently docked vessel *Knight Errant* on charges of causing disorder and obstruction on the city's Hedon Road. The men apparently became victims of their own success as street traders when they attracted 'a vast concourse of people' due to their 'striking and attractive character'. According to the report they left the ship carrying a 'large quantity of sticks, fans, and feathers, which they endeavoured to dispose of...'. Through the services of an interpreter the men explained to the magistrate that this was their first visit to England and 'knew nothing of the laws of the country, but it was their custom when in port to endeavour to

sell articles so as earn little more than their pay from the ship, which was very small.<sup>273</sup> Such activities were commonplace among lascars endeavouring to make their seafaring labours more profitable. Many items, including contraband, from tobacco to monkeys, parrots, snakes and wild birds to spices, coral, carpets, cannabis resin and 'native curios' are all mentioned in reports from across Britain. The *Glasgow Evening Post* even reported a thriving trade in Indian mongooses. These were, according to the paper, happily supplied by lascars to enable grateful Glaswegians to control their troublesome rat population.<sup>274</sup>

A useful insight into the trading activities of lascars was provided by Haider Khan who recalled his time working the stokehold of a British troopship stationed

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<sup>272</sup> *Daily Mail* (Hull), 10 August 1887, p.3.

<sup>273</sup> *Daily Mail* (Hull), 3 December 1888, p.3.

<sup>274</sup> *Evening Post* (Glasgow), 23 November, 1901, p.5.

near Basra during the First World War. Here, a number of the men regularly ‘exercised their entrepreneurial skills’, some becoming ‘quite successful traders.’ Obtaining leave from the *serang* they would use small rowing boats to travel to the city to purchase goods, including fresh foodstuffs, such as grapes and oranges, pomegranates, dates and raisins – all items that newly-arrived troops, many also from the subcontinent, had little or no access to. Positioning themselves mid-river, the lascar traders would greet incoming troop ships with their wares. Haider Khan estimated that men on their days off could make a profit of thirty to forty rupees in this manner. However, he also noted that the *serang* would extract a cut of this profit and he, in his turn, ‘would occasionally present bottles of whisky to the Chief Engineer, who had become habituated to such bribes and (who) would unnecessarily harass the whole crew if he did not receive them.’<sup>275</sup>



Figure 3.2 'The lascar in Glasgow', *Evening Post* (Glasgow), 23 November, 1901

Trading between ports *en route* to their destination was not only a common means of supplementing meagre wages, it also allowed men to build up sufficient reserves of cash to support their successful desertion in Britain. A reserve of cash was essential in preventing destitution for the earliest pioneers – those for whom the social and cultural infrastructure of migration and settlement had not yet been developed. Lascar seamen deserting their ships in later years were able to rely on cash loans and other forms of credit such as food and accommodation provided by kinsmen, fellow *biradari* members, or countrymen, often boarding house keepers and cafe proprietors.

Trading activity while still engaged in seafaring also allowed the accumulation of sufficient capital to invest in a pedlar’s licence and a small stock of goods to be peddled on the streets of Britain. The following sub-sections will examine the British-based phenomenon of the South Asian pedlar in further detail.

### 3.4 From entrepreneurs to illusionists

As a consequence of jumping ship and deserting his articles of employment as a lascar seafarer, Rasool arrived in London with little or no money. However, like many other proprietors of boarding houses and cafes catering for non-white seafarers and migrants, the Nairoollahs extended enough cash on credit to him to enable his entrance into the life of a street pedlar. With the 5/- loaned, Rasool purchased a batch of pocket handkerchiefs wholesale and proceeded to successfully retail them on the streets of the East End. When these were sold, he reinvested his profit, repaid the Nairoolla’s original loan and continued to accumulate a little capital.<sup>276</sup> It is unknown whether Rasool secured a pedlar’s licence to undertake this trade legally, however,

<sup>275</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 84–85.

<sup>276</sup> D. Bahadur and P. Khan, *Conversation between*, 2004.

the records of a number of such applications by South Asians to engage in street trade have been preserved in local archive collections, such as those at Rotherham.<sup>277</sup>

J.B. Priestley vividly described his encounter with South Asian street pedlars in the 1920s. Here, opportunities for trade, legal or otherwise, no doubt abounded among the frenetic bustle, the 'commerce turned into pandemonium' of London's street markets such as Petticoat Lane.<sup>278</sup> Orwell also encountered these men and, like Priestley, revealed his surprise at the presence of these South Asian men amidst an English street scene. In contrast to his contemporary's straightforward prose, Priestley produced an altogether more florid account. 'Half fascinated, half repelled' he produced a rather self-consciously Dickensian narrative sketch, inhabited by cast of grotesques.<sup>279</sup> In contrast to Priestley's experience in Petticoat Lane, however, the South Asian pedlars who worked the street or 'door trades', all remembered a somewhat different scene, as did their customers.<sup>280</sup> Accounts of street peddling stress the need, as for all effective street traders, for dialogue with potential customers, whether through prepared patter or through songs and ditties. For these men, 'standing silently and motionless' – as Priestley described them – was not an option. Moreover, Rasool Khan, a tall man with a striking physical presence and a practised ability for conjuring tricks (which he would employ in later years to great acclaim), would certainly not fit into Priestley's vision of inscrutable and immobile South Asian street traders.

Staying at the Nairoollas' boarding house put Rasool at the centre of a network of former lascars who, rather than continue as seafarers, turned to land-based trade. A few years after Rasool's initial stay, a Home Office (Aliens Department) report on the South Asian pedlar trade located the Nairoollas' address as the base of Noor Mohammed Tanda, an apparently well-established wholesaler of 'artificial silk wearing apparel'. At the time of the report, Tanda was 'travelling in Scotland and Ireland for the purpose of collecting debts from pedlars.' The report describes how, during his absence, 'as many as fifteen letters a day (had) been received for him, which (were) orders and dealt with by a deputy...' Apparently, Tanda, and his colleague Niaz Ali of 176 High Street, Poplar, employed British Indians as pedlars and itinerant traders 'until such time as they (were) in a position to purchase stock for themselves and commence business on their own.' In turn, Ali purchased his own stock from the Jewish wholesaling businesses Witkower and Katz in Whitechapel and Bronowski and Flatto in Commercial Street.<sup>281</sup>

Despite selling sufficient handkerchiefs to repay the Nairoollas' loan capital, Rasool, the young newcomer to Britain, considered a life of street-trade in the capital to be untenable at this time. Moving northward to Yorkshire's West Riding, Rasool joined his kinsmen Hawas Khan and Warris Khan, both working as boiler firers in the

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<sup>277</sup> 'Roth, SY/546/C3/4'.

<sup>278</sup> J. B. Priestley, *The Works of J.B. Priestley: Self-Selected Essays* (London, 1932), pp. 26–28.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>280</sup> See Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 45, 77, 151; G. Cunningham, *By George! My Childhood in Sheffield* (Sheffield, 1994), p. 48.

<sup>281</sup> The Polish-Jewish proprietors Bronowski and Flatto were the parents of mathematician and historian Joseph Bronowski and the grandparents of the late Professor Lisa Jardine.

Sheffield area's steel industry. Rasool's daughter Doreen explained that regular work in the steel industry was difficult for her father to secure upon his arrival, but the evidence presented above suggests that, by the time he settled in Sheffield, Rasool could draw upon a network of contacts within the trade networks operating from and around the Nairoollas' premises. Indeed, by 1936, these networks had spread northwards and become sufficiently established to come to the attention of the authorities. The Chief Constable of the Yorkshire city of Bradford reported to his London-based colleagues that he was aware of 'a little colony of eight Indians' operating in the city, assisted by the same South Asian wholesale agents in London.<sup>282</sup>

Beyond peddling the ready-made garments and fabric which the South Asian agents in London specialised, Doreen recounted in some detail her father's numerous economic activities, particularly those surrounding his self-employment. The certificate issued by the Sheffield Registry Office shows that, at the time of his marriage to Elsie Peters in 1928, Rasool was continuing his work as a 'general hawker' (pedlar) in the Sheffield area.<sup>283</sup> In this same month, he decided to legitimise his settler status in Britain with the authorities (and quite possibly to reassure his bride, whose own citizenship would have been jeopardised if her husband's British subject status had been rejected) by applying for a Special Certificate of Nationality and Identity. Such certificates were issued in lieu of a passport, to confirm the British subject status of South Asians in Britain. The reluctance to issue full passports to South Asian men likely to travel to or stay in Britain grew in a period when the Home Office became increasingly hostile to non-whites, particularly seamen, who were considered to be of low social status and often as 'coloured aliens'.<sup>284</sup> The documentation surrounding Rasool's application for the certificate (issued to him within days of his marriage) notes his address as the Nairoollas' boarding house in Poplar.<sup>285</sup> This would indicate that he was still in transition between the capital and a permanent address in Sheffield, no doubt availing himself of the expertise of the Nairoollas in securing identity papers from the, often hostile, authorities. Once in possession of a Certificate of Nationality and a fixed address, Rasool no doubt found the process of securing a pedlar's or hawker's certificate from the local Chief Constable much more straightforward.

Although we do not know the exact details of Rasool's trade at the time of his marriage to Elsie, Doreen remembered how, when a young child, the family used to sit at the kitchen table constructing toy kites from tissue paper, split cane and glue, of the type popular in many parts of Asia - particularly the *gudiparan* fighting kites of the Pashtun areas of Punjab, NWFP and Afghanistan.<sup>286</sup> In Sheffield's summertime, rather

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<sup>282</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>283</sup> Rasool Khan and Elsie Peters, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1928, vol. 9c, p. 1395.

<sup>284</sup> L. Tabili, 'The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, 1925', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:1 (1994), pp. 54–57.

<sup>285</sup> TNA, HO 45/13189: Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Rasool Khan.

<sup>286</sup> The Pashtuns' love of kite flying, especially the sport of kite fighting, has come to most attention in the West through the 2003 novel *The Kite Runner*: K. Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (London, 2011).

than be engaged in battle, these kites would be sold by the Khans to families in the busier of the city's parks.

Doreen's earliest shared memory of her father was of him manufacturing a type of candy that he sold around the streets of Sheffield. This sugar confection, related to candy floss, was made from sugar, butter and water, a little cream of tartar (to prevent crystallisation) and perhaps with the additions of a colouring agent (Doreen remembered yellow and green) and flavouring, such as vanilla essence. The sugar mixture was slowly heated on the kitchen gas ring until it boiled. Away from the heat



Figure 3.3  
The 'Indian Silky Toffee Man' by George  
Cunningham.  
Image used by kind permission.

the mixture, thickening as it cooled, was poured into a buttered metal tray to further harden before the still malleable block was divided into fist-sized lumps. While still warm, the warm candy lump was formed into a doughnut shape and dredged in cornflour to prevent sticking. The 'doughnut' was turned and fed through the hands, while gently pulled, to become a much larger, steering-wheel sized, band of cornflour-coated, pliable sugar candy. The band was twisted once in the middle and folded over to double it to two strands and gently stretched again with the cornflour ensuring the strands stayed separate. This process was repeated fifteen or so times, with the number of strands doubling with each twist and fold. The result - many thousands of strands of fine spun-sugar in a wool-like hank - was correctly known as *pashmak*, but to the Doreen Khan and the children of Sheffield it was 'silky' or 'Indian' toffee. The finished product was stored in a zinc box fitted with leather shoulder straps and transported around the streets by her father, who wore a white apron with pockets for small change.<sup>287</sup>

Street-based pedlars, stall holders and musicians of varied nationalities and ethnicities were an integral part of Britain's urban street scene during the latter half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Published memoirs and oral testimony demonstrate these characters entered the consciousness of many working-class Britons who grew up in the inter-war period. The popular Sheffield artist and former cutlery worker George Cunningham grew up in the Sheffield neighbourhood of Broomhall. His memory of an Indian 'silky-toffee man' (see figure 3.2) may well have been of Rasool Khan who would likely have traded in this working-class district:

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<sup>287</sup> The zinc box protected the delicate *pashmak* from the humidity of the damp British climate, to which it was particularly susceptible.

Summer was in full bloom and one magical Friday afternoon we streamed out of school freed from our shackles for a whole month. Day after day the sun shone, glinting on the cobbles and making doorsteps warm enough to sit on without a cushion. The Indian Silky Toffee Man, tall and dignified in his turban made his appearance, heralded by his cry of “tara-ra-ra!” We clustered round his majestic figure whilst he bestowed the silken strands of Eastern delight in little paper bags from the silver box suspended in front of him. His dark impassive face sometimes broke into a smile as he gravely accepted the ha’pennies from our grubby paws, then with a few quiet words of thanks he raised a hand in farewell and stalked solemnly away.<sup>288</sup>

‘Indian charah! ha’penny a bag!’ is how Doreen remembered her father’s call as he walked the streets, drumming up trade. The children in these areas, she recalled, referred to her father as the ‘charah man’.<sup>289</sup>

In a programme for BBC Radio in 1962, the broadcaster Peter Lawson remembered his childhood in the working-class district of Fulham, West London. He recalled many of the traders who added excitement to the day by selling penny treats to children from barrows and trays. In Lawson’s memory the ‘hokey pokey’ man was ‘always Italian, swarthy and fiercely moustached’:

... he trundled a decorated barrow with a cylindrical container packed around with crushed ice and freezing salt. His cry was “hokey pokey penny a lump”. And the kids used to cap it with “the more you eat the more you jump”. And if we had any money we’d rush to buy. I don’t know what it was made from, or why it was called “okey pokey”, but it was some kind of ice cream made in small squares about half an inch thick... half the square white and half pink... like the coconut ice which was my favourite sweet. For a ha’penny, the hokey pokey man would cut a square diagonally, so that you got a bit of both colours.<sup>290</sup>

Lawson also remembered ‘the man with the pickles and soda cart would give you a piece of Spanish wood from a jar... It was a greeny-yellow stalk with a peculiar bitter taste... and why it was so popular with children I can’t imagine.’<sup>291</sup> Into this rich milieu of children’s play and ‘colourful street characters’, often European immigrants, arrived the ‘Indian toffee man’ with his penn’orth paper twists of distinctive sugar candy. The impression imprinted itself on the imaginations of inner-city children sufficiently to be recalled fondly, many years later. For Lawson, there was a ‘peculiar Indian’ who sold sweets from a tray. Continuing his attempt to recall the childhood

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<sup>288</sup> Cunningham, *By George! My Childhood in Sheffield*, 48.

<sup>289</sup> Bahadur and Khan, Conversation between.

<sup>290</sup> P. Lawson, *The Hokey Pokey Man*, In the South East (London, 1962), Reference: 27256 (1), BBC Archive.

<sup>291</sup> Liquorice root. The name northern English working-class children gave liquorice confectionery was ‘Spanish’, until the late twentieth century; *Ibid*.

image he clarified: 'an Indian Indian I mean, with a turban - not the kind that go with cowboys. He had a sweet sing-song voice. And he would lure us out with his cry of "sweeties, sweeties, they must delight you, they must not dismay you."' <sup>292</sup>

Among the many traders who came to her street in the East End of London, Lucy Collard remembered thinking that the 'Indian toffee man... must have been a Sikh, because the Indian toffee man always wore a turban.' Whether this street vendor was actually a Sikh, or a Muslim, wore a turban due to cultural or religious tradition, or was playing to British notions of what an Indian should look like is unknown, but this study has yet to discover any mention of Sikhs involved in the selling of 'Indian toffee'. The type of 'toffee', sold by these South Asian hawkers, Lucy Collard continued, 'was very much like candy floss'. The hawker 'had this tin box he carried in front of him, it was already made up and he would just put a stick in and twirl it around this stick.'<sup>293</sup> Similarly, the playwright and novelist Bernard Kops (born 1926) remembered how London's East End was 'full of characters, full of people crying their wares...' He recalled the ditty of the Indian toffee man: 'Indian toffee, good for the belly, ask your mummy for a penny, and buy some Indian toffee!'<sup>294</sup> A similar image was recalled by Shah Abdul Majid Qureshi, a Sylheti former lascar who arrived in London around 1936. His compatriots, all seafarers, regarded such peddling as strictly a last resort undertaken due to the slump in the labour market. Shah Abdul remembered that 'in the street they used to ring a small bell they used to attract the schoolchildren, and they used to utter a few words - 'Indian taffee, ask your mummy to give you a penny.'<sup>295</sup> Likewise, Ali Kadir, a Pashtun ex-lascar, also found himself out of work and relying on toffee selling while staying at the Nairoollas' boarding house.<sup>296</sup> Rather than continue this occupation in London, he, like Rasool, left London. Departing sometime in 1924, his social network of Pashtuns opened up further opportunities for employment and he joined his brother Warris Khan in Sheffield.

The image of the toffee seller, his sugary wares, and his ability to fire the child's imagination with sleight of hand and conjuring tricks was a persistent one - especially for Bernard Kops. The Indian toffee man appeared once again in his 1969 novel *By the Waters of Whitechapel*. Here, the child protagonist's fevered imagination was populated by the, now distorted, highly exoticised characters of Kops's own Jewish East End childhood.<sup>297</sup> Gangland boss Reggie Kray's memories, more prosaic than the febrile imagination of the fictional Aubrey, still retain a keen clarity. Kray described the childhood temptation of wanting to pray for a 'new bicycle or a mountain of Indian toffee'.<sup>298</sup> His memoir of a 1940s East End childhood explained that 'Black and Asian people were a rare sight in the forties, and we'd stare in fascination when a figure in

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> H. Salisbury, *The War on Our Doorstep - London's East End and How the Blitz Changed It Forever* (London, 2012), p. 19.

<sup>294</sup> Kops, *The World Is a Wedding*, 27.

<sup>295</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 151.

<sup>296</sup> TNA, HO 45/13781, Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Alli Kadir or Afssar Khan and Shar Khan.

<sup>297</sup> B. Kops, *By the Waters of Whitechapel* (New York, 1970), pp. 40-41.

<sup>298</sup> Kray and Gerrard, *Reggie Kray's East End Stories*, 54.



Figure 3.4  
The 'Rag 'n' Tag at Sheffield's Sheaf Market, circa 1960, © Picture Sheffield

a turban turned up on the doorstep.' Kray recalled that 'in broken English' the pedlar 'would try and sell Mum bright silk ties, headscarves and things to hang on the wall.'<sup>299</sup> Notwithstanding the young Reggie's fascination with the unknown, his sweet tooth led his attention away from the Indian man on the doorstep: 'We kids were more interested in what the other black man sold

because he was the Indian Toffee Man. Whether the name came from the confection or from his place of birth I've no idea, but Indian Toffee was something like candy floss.'<sup>300</sup> For Kray, like Lawson, it was the street, and door-to-door, pedlars that gave the streets of working-class London the 'colour' he remembered so vividly. Street corner bookmakers, street musicians and dancers, traders, with trays, carts, bicycles or packs, such as the muffin man, the Italian organ grinder, the knife grinder, miniature horse-drawn fairground-type rides for children and vendors of everything from shrimps, winkles and watercress to ice cream and salt, mustard, vinegar to coal and even fly papers, all populated the streets of working-class neighbourhoods.<sup>301</sup> It was in a similar, northern English, milieu within which Doreen remembered she and her father plying their trade. Neighbourhoods where working-class children (their chief customer base) played out in the street were more profitable for this father-daughter trade partnership than middle-class districts where the children were kept out of the street by their parents.<sup>302</sup>

Due to the ubiquity of toffee hawking among South Asian migrants such as Ali Kadir during the period, it is a distinct possibility that boarding houses for former lascars operated by South Asians trained men, often with little experience of food preparation, in the manufacture of *pashmak*. If so, this formed part of a 'toolkit' of survival skills and services offered by these essential nodes in the men's social network. As we have seen, these services included credit and informal banking facilities, geographical orientation and a degree of acculturation to their new surroundings, introductions to employers and training in the means of making a living when waged labour was not readily available. The outbreak of war in 1939 was likely the reason for the end of this confectionery-based street trade. With increasing isolation from sources of supply, sugar along with many other items, was rationed by

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 76–77.

<sup>301</sup> Lawson, *The Hokey Pokey Man*; Salisbury, *The War on Our Doorstep*, chap. 2; Kray and Gerrard, *Reggie Kray's East End Stories*, 76.

<sup>302</sup> Bahadur and Khan, Conversation between.

the state from January 1940 and sweets in July 1942.<sup>303</sup> A very limited allowance of coupons which allowed each adult to purchase a meagre eight ounces of sugar per week no doubt had a severe effect upon the manufacture and sales of 'Indian toffee'.

In addition to her recollections of her father's activities as a manufacturer and retailer of 'Indian toffee', Doreen also recounted the other commercial activities to which he and the family devoted themselves during the years of her childhood and youth. Rasool developed a trade in the manufacture of home-made perfume which he sold, along with the costume jewellery he also manufactured from gold-coloured wire and beads at the kitchen table. These items were sold on a stall at the 'Rag 'n' Tag' section of Sheffield's popular Sheaf Market (figure 3.4). Some of the men interviewed by Caroline Adams, also became - as part of their multi-faceted working lives - 'Indian perfumers'. According to Adams, the "'oriental fragrances" they concocted were in great demand from young ladies, keen on cut-price luxury.'<sup>304</sup> The trade developed and became quite widespread in its efforts to profit from the demand for 'luxury' during the period of wartime austerity. An article in *The People* in April 1945 reported that Abdoo Mohammed, a 'British Indian', had been prosecuted and fined £250 for 'wrongfully manufacturing perfume and £100 for being in possession of methylated spirit'. Although Mahomed, of Attercliffe Common, Sheffield (who the electoral roll recorded as living with a British native partner and living next door to another native-newcomer households), had his fines reduced on appeal, the prosecuting lawyer emphasised that the man's supplies of a gallon of industrial alcohol and perfume essence were sufficient to return around £128.<sup>305</sup> The use of a highly controlled substance explains why the case was regarded by the authorities as 'serious'. It also reflected the fact that 'there had been a great deal of scent manufacture going on in Sheffield', a city regarded by the authorities as a centre of such production.<sup>306</sup> The illicit trade built upon a combination of the high degree of state control that alcohol was subjected to and to the demand that persisted throughout the years of shortage, especially from young working women with plenty of disposable cash available to them.

'Indian' perfumes, or goods scented with Indian herbs, had enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the inter-war years. Periodicals aimed at a middle-class readership such as *The Bystander* advertised Eastern-themed perfumes such as 'Shem El Nessim, the Scent of Araby', 'Phul-Nana, the Fascinating Indian Perfume' and 'Wana-Ranee, the Perfume of Ceylon'.<sup>307</sup> At the more popular end of the market appeared 'Amo-Del' a 'rare Indian perfume... a fragrant memory of the flowers of India', whose offices were situated in slightly less fragrant Blackpool, Lancashire.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 18, 35.

<sup>304</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 45.

<sup>305</sup> Burgess roll, Sheffield, Attercliffe Division (C), Oct. 1945: Mary MacMillan and Abdo Mohamed, 18 Attercliffe Common; George Windle and Abul Hamid, 20 Attercliffe Common; Margaret Shah, 24 Attercliffe Common.

<sup>306</sup> *The People* (London, 8 April 1945), p.3.

<sup>307</sup> *The Bystander* (London, 8 September 1920), p49; *The Illustrated London News* (London, 13 November 1920), p23.

<sup>308</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post* (Preston), 1 April 1920, p4.

Periodically, throughout the inter-war period, Sheffield department stores also indulged their customers' fascination for India, and Indian handicrafts, with the display of 'tableaux', often featuring the spectacle of the 'Indian village' for marketing purposes. For their 'Easter Fayre' in 1926, Atkinson's, 'the shrine of fashion' featured, among other daily attractions, 'A Vision of the Orient' to display Asian-themed merchandise including 'the original Indian perfume' – "The Shrine of the East."<sup>309</sup> In February 1933, their Sheffield rivals T. & J. Roberts developed the concept further by staging an 'amazing spectacle' - the 'Indian Village'. This in-store display ambitiously claimed to feature, among other things: a demonstration of 'Indian manners and customs of village life; lectures on how to cook 'delicious Indian dishes'; 'Indian beauty preparations'; baffling feats of Indian magic' including 'a girl floating in air' and the intriguingly-named 'human gas man'; an 'Indian Nautch dance'; folk songs; and arts and crafts; and even an 'Indian prayer room'. An 'Indian lunch' featuring 'delicious Indian dishes' was also served in the store's café on Saturdays.<sup>310</sup> By March, owing to the 'great demand' of the public to view the 'village', the store advertised it was to remain open until 10pm on Wednesdays. The show, presented by a group of seventeen South Asians, both men and women, led by 'Hassan' toured the department stores and civic halls of England, appearing as far afield as Bristol, Norwich, Canterbury and Nottingham. Ahmed Hassan Khan, the manager of the exhibit, welcomed local dignitaries and the 'hundreds of people' who arrived for the opening at T. & J. Roberts's Sheffield store. Hassan was at pains to stress the educational element of the programme, rather than being seen solely as entertainment. He explained that 'there was a very wrong misconception in England of the ways and manners of the Indian people.' He then went on to dispel the stereotype of the 'lazy' way of life in India 'where all they had to do was sit on a mat, eat curry and sleep.' India, he emphasised, 'had its lazy and industrious people just as in any country.' In response, Alderman Turner congratulated the store for 'bringing before Sheffield people something they would remember of village life in India.' Moreover, he emphasised that although 'England had to govern that great continent of over 350,000,000 people', he regretted that 'the ordinary citizen of England had little conception of the lives of the Indian people.'<sup>311</sup>

Something You Must Not Miss!

AT  
**T. & J. ROBERTS LTD.**  
 MOORHEAD, SHEFFIELD.

AN AMAZING SPECTACLE—THE  
**INDIAN VILLAGE**  
 GRAND OFFICIAL OPENING TO-MORROW (SATURDAY)  
 AT 2 P.M.

The following Scenes and Tableaux will be produced and varied from day to day:

1—Interesting demonstration of Indian manners and customs of village life.	6—Indian jungle scene.
2—Lectures on how to cook delicious Indian dishes.	7—A girl floating in air.
3—An Indian drawing-room.	8—Indian Nautch Dance by the Dancing Girl.
4—Indian beauty preparations.	9—The Human Gas Man.
5—Baffling feats of Indian magic.	10—Indian Prayer House.
	11—Indian Folk Songs.
	12—Indian Arts and Crafts.

BAFFLING FEATS OF MAGIC, SINGING, DANCING

INDIAN LUNCH served in the Cafe on Saturday  
 Delicious Indian Dishes.

EXHIBITION OF INDIAN ART & CRAFTS  
 CUSTOMS & MANNERS

2/6

COME EARLY AND COME AGAIN

Admission: 2d.

Figure 3.5 The travelling spectacle of the 'Indian Village', *Sheffield Independent*, 3 February, 1933

Whether Sheffield-based South Asians, such as Rasool Khan, were involved in this retail spectacle is unknown. However, the popularity (and regularity) of such events cannot have remained unnoticed by those men among them with a flair for

<sup>309</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 7 March 1933), p.10.

<sup>310</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 3 February 1933), p.1

<sup>311</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (6 February 1933), p. 4.

trade and self-promotion. Indeed, South Asian petty entrepreneurs resident in Britain well understood this demand for goods evocative (at least in the imaginations of native Britons) of the sensual pleasures of the 'mystic East'. The obvious example of this development is that of the Indian restaurant, as demonstrated by Lizzie Collingham in her scholarly study *Curry – a biography*.<sup>312</sup> Indeed, many of the staff of these pioneering restaurants during the inter-war period were Sylheti former-lascars. Moreover, the emergence of the phenomenon of the South Asian kitchen-table perfumer is also evidence of South Asian newcomers coming to understand the tastes fads and fancies of natives, profitably catering to such demand, particularly during wartime.

Rasool's own business was successful enough during the 1930s to purchase a motor cycle which transported him, and his home-manufactured wares, around the markets of the North.<sup>313</sup> However, these forays into petty capitalism, do not appear to have always provided sufficient income to both maintain the growing family and accumulate enough capital to expand the business. Thus, the income from peddling required the supplement of regular waged-labour from time to time. A new seaman's Certificate of Discharge issued to Rasool in 1932 shows that he shipped out as a fireman aboard the tramp steamer SS. *Beechpark* from Barry Docks<sup>314</sup> The date of his return from this voyage is not known and tramp steamers were known for their global peregrinations, with crews sometimes circumnavigating the earth in a single voyage.<sup>315</sup> We can, nevertheless, reasonably assume that the more reliable childhood memories of Doreen (born in June 1929) of her father's presence extended back to the mid-1930s, and that he returned to non-maritime employment during these years. Her five siblings were born between September 1930 and September 1942: Anman (born Sep. 1930), Derek (born Dec. 1932), Raymond (born Dec. 1938), Rawshun (born Mar. 1941), and Glenda (born Sep. 1942).<sup>316</sup> The six year gap in births between December 1932 and December 1938 might indicate a long period at working at sea. However, Doreen also stated that, when she was young, her father was arrested in Sheffield for deserting his ship. He was, she said, returned to India according to the legal terms of the Lascar articles he was still bound by.<sup>317</sup> This was entirely possible as the P&O and the BISN sailed regularly between the Indian subcontinent and British home ports and had a preference for recruiting among the Pashtuns of Chhachh and the NWFP.

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<sup>312</sup> L. Collingham, *Curry: A Biography* (London, 2005), chap. 9.

<sup>313</sup> Bahadur and Khan, Conversation between.

<sup>314</sup> Seaman's Continuous Certificate of Discharge, Rasool Khan, 1932, used by permission of Glenda Munro; [http://mariners-list.com/site\\_pages.php?section=Shipping+Companies&category=Scottish&page\\_name=Denholm+Line+Steamers](http://mariners-list.com/site_pages.php?section=Shipping+Companies&category=Scottish&page_name=Denholm+Line+Steamers), accessed 19 Mar. 2017.

<sup>315</sup> C. Lee, *Eight Bells & Top Masts: Diaries from a Tramp Steamer* (London, 2001); Khan, *Chains to Lose*, chap. 5.

<sup>316</sup> Doreen Khan, birth certificate (hereafter b. cert.): GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1929, vol. 9c, p. 946; Anman Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1930, vol. 9c, p. 886; Derek Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1932, vol. 9c, p. 827; Raymond Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1938, vol. 9c, p. 657; Rawshun Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1941, vol. 9c, p. 1097; Glenda Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1932, vol. 9c, p. 709.

<sup>317</sup> Bahadur and Khan, Conversation between. TNA, HO 213/1406.

Moreover, these two companies were, unlike other merchant shipping lines, well known for pursuing deserters, both through the courts, the police and by private means.<sup>318</sup> If Doreen was correct, her father paid the penalty for jumping ship at Tilbury during the mid-1920s, having to work his way back to Britain under lascar articles to, once again, jump ship in Britain.

Notwithstanding these work-related absences from his Sheffield family, Rasool continued to indulge his enthusiasm for conjuring tricks, perhaps building on the visual flourishes, manual dexterity and patter he developed as a street trader. These theatrical elements, essential to the successful street trader, were held in common with the stage illusionist. By the mid to late 1930s Rasool was confident enough to take his act to the stages of Sheffield's pubs, working men's clubs and miners' institutes. Here, he drew on the traditions of the South Asian *jaduwallah* in his latest commercial venture.<sup>319</sup> During the 1930s, at the end of the so-called 'golden era of British magic', Rasool's South Asian contemporaries (and their native-British copyists), would have been well known in the theatres and music halls of Britain.<sup>320</sup> Rasool would have been influenced by illusionists such as Linga Singh 'Indian Fakir', Ahmad Hussain and, most significantly, Gogia Pasha 'World's Greatest Magician', who performed at the Regent theatre, Sheffield in 1937, and Kuda Bux, a young Kashmiri who, with his 'X-ray eyes' act, performed at the nearby Chesterfield Hippodrome in 1939. In the early days of Rasool's act, his wife Elsie played the role of assistant, as did their friend and fellow Pashtun Jim Badloe. A photograph, taken in the summer of 1939, probably by the Sheffield *Telegraph & Independent* newspaper (although never published), shows the family and Jim in their costumes, ready to perform at the city's six-day long Abbeydale Gala (figure 3.6). The act's copious use of artificial silk fabric, no doubt acquired through Rasool's social network of traders, is apparent in their ornate costumes. Also present are their two young sons Anman and Derek, together with Jim Badloe, who is also suitably attired for the act complete with a decorated fez, sword and small *tabla* drum. Rasool here, as in other promotional shots, is seen wearing a version of the Pashtun turban or *lungee*.

As Doreen grew older she was also recruited to the act as 'Zahreena'. Along with her brothers Derek and Raymond, she assisted with her father's take on classic illusions, including pulling a long string of flags from his mouth, the 'Indian basket trick' and the 'Indian rope trick'.<sup>321</sup> An early promotional poster blank for the act featured a smiling Rasool sporting an elaborate *lungee* featuring an integral fan-shaped fabric crest and tail. It advertised 'Super Scientific Miracle – Rasool Khan – Royal Indian Illusionist'. It promised, along with 'glamorous oriental costumes from Far-East', that audiences would witness a 'unique act' which, over the course of a

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<sup>318</sup> J. Hyslop, "'Ghostlike" Seafarers and Sailing Ship Nostalgia: The Figure of the Steamship Lascar in the British Imagination, c. 1880–1960', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 16:2 (2014), pp. 220–221.

<sup>319</sup> A street magician also known to British travellers and seafarers as the 'gully-gully man'.

<sup>320</sup> S. Dadswell, 'Jugglers, Fakirs, and Jaduwallahs- Indian Magicians and the British Stage', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 23:1 (February 2007), pp. 15–19.

<sup>321</sup> Bahadur and Khan, *Conversation between; Interview with the family of Rasool Khan*, 2012. Interview with Glenda Munro, 2015.

show of up to two hours, kept 'audiences spellbound from start to finish'.<sup>322</sup> Numerous local newspaper articles from the summer of 1939 describe Rasool's act, 'an immense favourite' and as a 'genuine North-West Indian fakir and illusionist' touring the fetes and galas of south Yorkshire, performing to apparently rapt audiences of children and adults.<sup>323</sup>

One 1939 advertisement for a Sheffield working men's club sports ground promised 'entertainment by Rasool Khan in sensational illusions.'



Figure 3.6

*The Family of Rasool Khan (far right) with friend Jim Badlow, between performances at Abbeydale Gala, August 1939. Used by kind permission*

It also informed revellers they could witness him 'playing the Indian Rhabarb (sic), as played by him in the famous film: "The Drum"' (figure 3.7).<sup>324</sup> Rasool's playing of the *rubab*, the traditional Pashtun plucked string-instrument can indeed be seen in the Korda brothers' imperial epic of frontier rebellion.<sup>325</sup> Featuring stars Sabu, Roger Livesay and Valerie Hobson, *The Drum* is notable, among other things, for its early use of colour for a

British feature film and for employing large numbers of British-resident South Asians as extras - 'a cast of 3000' boasted the film's posters. Many of the scenes representing the NWFP were shot in Snowdonia, North Wales (as were 'frontier' scenes in its 1968



Figure 3.7

*One of Rasool Khan's many engagements in 1939, Telegraph and Independent (Sheffield), August 1939*

spoof *Carry On... Up the Khyber*) and at Denham Studios in Buckinghamshire.<sup>326</sup> With the Korda brothers' success came an increased demand for authenticity in films set in the Empire. With increasing numbers of South Asians in Britain available for work as extras during the inter-war

<sup>322</sup> Promotional poster for Rasool Khan, illusionist, used by permission of Glenda Munro.

<sup>323</sup> For example: *Telegraph and Independent* (Sheffield, 19 June 1939), p.6 and 19 August 1939, p.12.

<sup>324</sup> *The Star* (Sheffield), 25 August 1939, p.3.

<sup>325</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0030082/> (accessed 20 March 2017).

<sup>326</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062782/> (accessed 20 March 2017).

period, Surat Alley, the trades union activist and secretary of the Colonial Seaman's Association, established the Oriental Film Artistes' Union in 1938, to represent them.<sup>327</sup> A promotional photograph for the *The Drum* shows its star Sabu surrounded by fellow Indian cast members, including dancers, musicians and Rasool with his *rubab* (figure 3.8).



Figure 3.8  
Rasool Khan (seated, third from right) with the South Asian member of the cast,  
including Sabu (centre, seated), at Denham Studios, 1938  
Used by kind permission

Despite his early brush with celebrity, by September 1939, Rasool was again employed in regular waged labour as a boiler-firer.<sup>328</sup> This return to steady employment occurred during the upturn in the fortunes of northern heavy industry as Britain moved to a war footing in the latter half of the 1930s. During this time, Sheffield's steel and armaments industries offered regular incomes in protected occupations, with as much overtime as required. Such jobs were no doubt a boon to a growing family who had been accustomed to the vagaries of self-employment during the 1930s. The steady income that conscription into the armed forces provided was, however, declined by Rasool who was placed on the Register of Conscientious Objectors with the condition that he remained in his occupation as a boiler firer.<sup>329</sup> Perhaps the plan was to save enough to invest in fixed business premises while Rasool was in regular employment. This may well have been the case as, by 1944, the Khan family took over a small draper's shop from Mark Franks, a Jewish tailor and draper who has come to the Sheffield in an earlier wave of Russian immigration.<sup>330</sup> Rasool and Elsie's new business on Attercliffe Common, situated on the main thoroughfare of this predominantly working-class steelmaking neighbourhood, was one of the first South Asian shops in Yorkshire. Also around this time, according to the memoirs of

<sup>327</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 259.

<sup>328</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Sheffield, RG 101/35511/003/11-KISB.

<sup>329</sup> Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer (Leeds), 12 October 1940, p. 8.

<sup>330</sup> TNA, HO 144/10464, "Nationality and Naturalisation: Zwang, Marks, from Russia. Resident in Sheffield. Certificate 17191 issued 14 May 1929.

Choudry Mohammed Walayat, a Kashmiri had also established a shop in Attercliffe.<sup>331</sup> Karam Dad, 'the first Mirpur man to come to Sheffield', arrived in Yorkshire sometime before 1939. Although the type, date of establishment and exact location of his shop has not yet been established, we do know that in 1947 Karam Dad founded the Pakistan Muslim Welfare Association 'to help new migrants from Mirpur and to encourage others to come.'<sup>332</sup>

### **3.5 Rasool Khan and the pedlars' networks of the Sheffield area and beyond**

Not only did Rasool's new business venture reflect his ongoing interest in a life independent of employers and the labour market, like many non-elite South Asians, it also demonstrated the continuing entrepreneurial drive he exhibited since his arrival in Britain. As Ballard noted in 1992, the basis of this outlook was situated in peasant origins:

...whether Punjabi, Gujarati or Sylheti, the majority of settlers are from peasant farming families. Not only did this mean that they were people who had proudly and autonomously owned and cultivated the land from which they made their living, but the sense of psychological and financial independence which this status gave them has proved crucial to their success both as migrants and settlers.<sup>333</sup>

The evidence presented by this study of the many South Asians involved in trade in the Sheffield area, demonstrates that Ballard's analysis of an independence of spirit holds equally true for those men who arrived in the inter-years.

In terms of their own business and their new shop, after many years of supporting themselves by means of street and market trading, Rasool and Elsie may have fixed their horizons beyond a regular neighbourhood walk-in trade and also looked to wholesaling. Although there is a degree of speculation here, judging by the number of South Asians engaged in peddling in the Sheffield area, it would be unlikely that a draper with the experience, imagination and business acumen of Rasool would not exploit the potential of his own social network of traders. If this was the case it would coincide with Visram's observation that nationally, several other successful South Asian pedlars had already opened their own draper's shops.<sup>334</sup> The opportunities for supplying other hawkers and pedlars with fabric, particularly 'artificial silk', pins, needles, buttons, thread and the other essentials of the pedlar's trade would have been as obvious to him as to the other men who made the transition from pedlar to wholesaler. Interviews undertaken in the 1970s, with Punjabi pioneers working out of Bradford and Leeds during the 1930s, demonstrate the process in northern England. According to Catherine and Roger Ballard, many of these pedlars co-operated to gain the benefits of buying in bulk from local factories warehouses,

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<sup>331</sup> Walayat MBE and Cornwell, *Made in England*, 56.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 10.

<sup>334</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 262.

especially in the early days of their peddling in Britain. But, they explained, as some individuals were more successful than others at this sub-wholesaling activity they asserted themselves to gain a commercial advantage over the group.<sup>335</sup> A scenario where one individual assumes financial dominance could, however, lead to internal group tensions. The report of a Sheffield court hearing in June 1939 describes an assault on Moula Bakhsh, 'a wholesale dealer to coloured men, mainly pedlars', by Kapoor Singh, a pedlar and fellow lodger at a 'boarding house for coloured men' over an honour-related issue.<sup>336</sup> By September, Kapoor Singh had left the house and the 1939 Register shows the dwelling continued to accommodate the wholesaler Bakhsh (hawker of drapery), the head of household Asmail Mohammed (hawker of drapery), his wife Ethel (unpaid domestic duties), Fazzle Mohammed (a bricklayer) and Hussain Mohammed (cook). Although attributed to religious differences by Kapoor Singh, the assault on Moula Bakhsh does not appear to have irreparably damaged Sikh-Muslim relations within the household as Hari Singh (another hawker of drapery) remained resident there.<sup>337</sup>

Bashir Maan has described in some detail the development of pedlars' networks in Scotland during the 1920s and 1930s. He identified a single pioneer, a former lascar named Nathoo Mohammed, as responsible for the foundation of Scottish pedlars' networks and who acted as 'anchor and the mentor of the small Indian community in Scotland in the 1920s'.<sup>338</sup> Nathoo Mohammed began as a pedlar, but invited a number of his countrymen to Glasgow from Punjab, mentoring them in the techniques and methods of the successful door-to-door pedlar. During the 1920s, as his confidence as a trader grew, so did the group of men around him. He then branched out into small-scale wholesaling, supplying his fellow Punjabis with the commodities of their stock-in trade. Maan also outlined the crucial nature of credit in the relationship between Nathoo and his customers. Such a credit relationship between wholesaler and retail pedlar was essential for newcomers who lacked the capital necessary to start out in the 'door trade'.<sup>339</sup> Even for more established pedlars, credit from the wholesaler on goods allowed them to extend their own lines of credit to their working-class customers, themselves of very limited means. For these customers credit, whether extended 'on tick' by the corner shop, or on loans against property deposited with the local pawnbroker, was essential in the maintenance of daily life. Pedlars, able to offer their own terms, sold fabric, garments and household small-wares to working-class women who often struggled to manage the tight weekly budgets of their households. Jerry White has demonstrated the popularity of buying 'on the doorstep' among the London working class from the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>340</sup> Indeed, the popularity of buying goods from pedlars on the doorstep was

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<sup>335</sup> R. Ballard and C. Ballard, 'The Sikhs', in J. L. Watson, ed., *Between Two Cultures - Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 28–29.

<sup>336</sup> *Telegraph and Independent* (Sheffield, 29 June 1939), p. 4.

<sup>337</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Asmail household, Sheffield, RG 101/3587D/017/40-KKCU.

<sup>338</sup> B. Maan, *The New Scots - The Story of Asians in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 105.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>340</sup> White, *Rothschild Buildings*, 245–248.

widespread and was part of a long European tradition of itinerant traders.<sup>341</sup> The numerous pedlar's certificates, issued to both natives and South Asian newcomers in the Sheffield area, are testament to this.<sup>342</sup> Under the headline 'Troops of Pedlars', the Sheffield *Independent* noted that the number of pedlars had been 'gradually increasing in Sheffield for some time'. The paper went on to report that during 1922, 1200 pedlar's licences had been issued by the city Police, four times the number issued before the war.<sup>343</sup>

The Rotherham pedlars' certificates are some of the few extant records demonstrating the economic activity of South Asians not only in the West Riding of Yorkshire before 1948, but nationally. The bundle contains a selected number of certificates issued to both natives and South Asian newcomers who applied to the local Chief Constable of Rotherham to legally carry on business as a door-to-door trader. Within it are also a smaller number of pedlars' certificates issued from other jurisdictions and surrendered by applicants to the Rotherham Chief Constable upon their expiry. Making up part of the bundle are testimonials provided in evidence of the good character of applicants, thus allowing us some insight into applicants' personal circumstances. Unfortunately, while none of these supporting documents survive for Rotherham's South Asian applicants, we can nevertheless reasonably assume that those men making consecutive annual applications in the same district, or surrendering expired certificates issued in other towns, were professional traders,

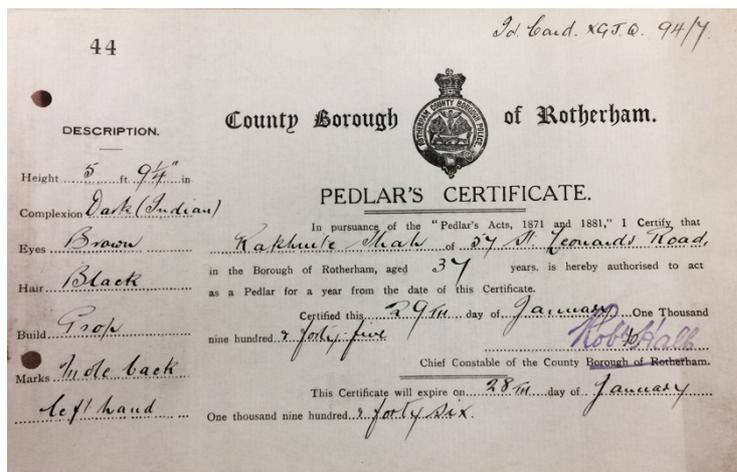


Figure 3.9 Pedlar's certificate for Rakhmte Shah, issued 1945.  
Rotherham Archives, SY/546/C3/4

rather than those men who had fallen on hard times, or who were simply trying their luck.<sup>344</sup> The data recorded on the certificates provides the bearer's home address at the time of registration (applicants were required to have been resident in the district for at least one month), their age, height, complexion, eye and hair colour, build and the presence of any distinguishing marks (figure 3.9). The bearer's

description was the subjective impression of the Rotherham Chief Constable who described the South Asian men as 'swarthy' or 'dark'. The section recording distinguishing marks was used by the Chief Constable as a means of indicating that the bearer was either a 'native of India', a 'Hindoo' or, in one case, a 'native of Mirphur' (Mirpur in today's Pakistan occupied Kashmir).

<sup>341</sup> L. Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe* (Durham, NC., 1996), pp. 1–6.

<sup>342</sup> 'Roth, SY/546/C3/4'.

<sup>343</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 20 April 1923), p. 6.

<sup>344</sup> 'Roth, SY/546/C3/4'.

Combined, these data, although limited in their scope, are useful in helping establish the social networks of the men described, and to cross-reference these data with those from marriage certificates and the 1939 Register entries in the Sheffield area.<sup>345</sup> For instance, Ali Hedar, first came to the attention of the Rotherham police in May 1937 when he applied for his pedlar's certificate. His registered address was a semi-detached house in 57 St Leonards Road near the centre of the town (figure 3.10). In 1938 another certificate was issued to him at an address in Effingham Street, central Rotherham, registered in September 1939 to Walter Gould a coal miner and his wife Violetta.<sup>346</sup> It is possible that Ali Hedar lodged with the couple until - according to further certificates issued in 1942 and 1943 - he relocated back to 57 St Leonards Road.<sup>347</sup> This address appears in September 1939 as the family home of Willy and Hilda Khan (née Johnson) and their seven children.<sup>348</sup> The couple – Hilda the Sheffield native and Willy the Pashtun newcomer – had married in Sheffield in July 1927 and it



Figure 3.10  
57 St. Leonard's Rd, Rotherham in 2018

is likely that they accommodated Ali at various times, as was the pattern with other mixed couples in the area.<sup>349</sup> Indeed, the 1939 Register, compiled in September of that year, shows nine individuals resident at that address, five of whose records remain officially closed under the 100 year ruling for census data (the Register's records are slowly being opened as the years progress).<sup>350</sup> It is possible that, with the evacuation of children away from the strategically important Don Valley during wartime, space became available for Ali in the home of a fellow South Asian Muslim and his English wife. Indeed, the same address is present on the pedlar's certificates for Abdul Creame (registered 1936 and 1937) and Rakhnite Shah (registered 1945 and previously registered in Birmingham). Also, at a different address in St Leonards Road, lived Mohammed Ali who lodged with William Gray a coal miner and his wife Frances.<sup>351</sup> However, the 57 St Leonards Road address was recorded as the home of Phyllis Pearson at the time of her marriage in 1935, to Mohammad Ali a 'silk merchant' of Broomhall, Sheffield.<sup>352</sup> It is possible that Mohammad and Phyllis parted company and that with the departure of his wife, Mohammad allowed his friends Willy (a

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Gould household, Rotherham, RG 101/3504B/015/4-KHDA.

<sup>347</sup> 'SY/546/C3/4, Bundle of Pedlars' Certificates, Ali Hedar (1937)', 1947 1936, SY/546/C3/4, Rotherham Archives.

<sup>348</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Rotherham, RG 101/3503A/023/25-KHCT.

<sup>349</sup> Willy Khan and Hilda Johnson, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1927, vol. 9c, p. 1155.

<sup>350</sup> Holland, 'The 1939 Register'.

<sup>351</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Gray household, Rotherham, RG101/3503A/024/4-KHCT.

<sup>352</sup> Mohammad Ali and Phyllis Pearson, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1935, vol. 9c, p. 1765.

witness at his marriage to Phyllis), Hilda and their growing family to take on the property, while he moved in with his neighbours down the road.

As a silk merchant, Mohammad Ali was also well placed within the network of South Asian pedlars to supply them with goods, although more likely to have been 'artificial silk' - a synthetic product manufactured from viscose rayon yarn. This fabric proved particularly popular when made up as mufflers and ties for men and shawls for women. In larger amounts, it could be used as a fabric for home-dressmaking in a period when younger working-class women began to emulate the glamorous styles seen on the screen at the cinema and in the society pages of popular newspapers and periodicals.

The Rotherham bundle also contains certificates of men who had arrived in the area from other towns including Birmingham, Bradford and Liverpool. Unfortunately, there is no record of the method used to archive these pedlars' certificates and whether they represent a random, but representative, selection of documents, or the true sequence.

Catherine and Roger Ballard have argued that 'the secret of success' of pedlars seems to have lain in their skilful manipulation of prices and credit. One of their interviewees explained, 'We were always ready to knock a few pennies off the price, because we always put it up beforehand. We always sold on credit too, "a bob now, love, and the rest next month"'. That way we had a chance to come back and sell something else.'<sup>353</sup> By these means, pedlars extended essential lines of credit to those living on very limited incomes in both urban neighbourhoods and rural communities. As Ross McKibbin commented, 'before 1939 working-class life without access to credit was almost impossible'.<sup>354</sup> Despite the benefit to working-class households of being able to purchase garments and fabric, the *Glasgow Weekly Record* presented a rather different perspective and alerted housewives to the dangers of the 'Indian Pedlar Menace' who exploited the 'atmosphere of romance about the sea and sailors that sways sentimental folk'. Even 'hard-headed' Scottish housewives, the article's author 'Flying Squadsman' warned, were being 'duped by oily tongued, suave individuals – mostly Arabs and Indians – who go around posing as contrabandists with rich wares to sell at rock-bottom prices'. The article went on to suggest that the truth of the matter was rather more prosaic and that these goods were not in fact contraband, having been supplied by 'the same Manchester or London warehouses as the people who, at the weekends, sell all sorts of things from stalls at the town and country market places'.<sup>355</sup>

Sometimes, the interaction between trader and customer could be a hazardous one and pedlars offering credit to cash-strapped customers could find themselves chasing unpaid debts. Court reports from the period give an insight into this tension and the financial risks inherent in the relationship. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* reported that Natho Hasham of Dundee unsuccessfully petitioned the court for the

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<sup>353</sup> Ballard and Ballard, 'Between Two Cultures', 28.

<sup>354</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 126.

<sup>355</sup> BL, IOR, L/E/9/953, Treatment by Home Office of lascars as aliens; registration under Special Restriction (Coloured Alien Seamen - ) Order 1925 when without proof of identity, Mar. 1925-1942.

payment of £1 8s for goods supplied to a Mrs J. Wilson, of St Andrews. Describing himself as a 'credit draper', Nathoo Hasham travelled the Dundee and St Andrews area 'selling goods and accepting small deposits and thereafter instalment payments.' After running into difficulty receiving the balance of the payments from Mrs Wilson, the pedlar 'went into the house and the husband tried to put him out'. According to the report, 'a bit of trouble' ensued. The court found in favour of Wilson, who denied she received any more than three shillings' worth of goods, and awarded her costs.<sup>356</sup> Violence could sometimes result from disputes over unpaid debts. A 'back street affray' in Ashington, Northumberland involved a variety of 'weapons of offence and defence' such as a coal bucket, broomstick and clothes prop. Here, Dasondha Singh a Sikh pedlar of scarves and ties and resident in Newcastle, was assaulted by a customer owing him money for goods supplied. The pedlar told the court, which found in his favour, that whenever he called he was told that there was no money for him and that for five months he was 'put off with excuses.'<sup>357</sup> In circumstances when there were too many pedlars chasing too few customers, Maan suggested that a temptation developed among pedlars to gain a competitive advantage over competitors by extending more favourable credit terms to customers. This could, he noted, encourage customers to take on more debt than they could afford, with default and conflict as the result.<sup>358</sup>

Maan interviewed many of the Punjabi pioneers in Scotland, most of whom worked as pedlars in the 1920s and 1930s. His work captured valuable insights into the experience of this group of men and described a situation of increasing demand for wholesale goods from the growing number of pedlars. Initially, men in Scotland ordered their goods from wholesalers in London. However, due to the lack of wholesaler responsiveness to prices, the problems of ordering and delivery lead-times involved in doing business over this distance, coupled with the 'language limitations' of both sides of the exchange, meant that more South Asian wholesaling businesses were established in Glasgow during the 1930s. Consequently, Maan concluded that 'the tradition of Indo-Pakistanis going into the textile / drapery and grocery businesses started in the mid-thirties.'<sup>359</sup> As we will see, some of these men were sufficiently successful to offer goods and services on credit to fellow pedlars – both new and established. Others were even able to sponsor the migration of prospective inductees into the peddling trade.

By August 1930 *The Scotsman* reported that four hundred pedlar's certificates had been issued to Indians in Glasgow that year. The article also stated that although, in the opinion of the authorities, Indian pedlars were not more numerous than in previous years, there were over 1500 in the city and district.<sup>360</sup> How this total was calculated is unknown and, according to the Pedlars Act 1871, pedlars could trade anywhere in the United Kingdom for the twelve months the certificate was valid. The figure may have therefore included those who registered in Glasgow and worked

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<sup>356</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), 27 July 1939, p. 3.

<sup>357</sup> *The Herald* (Morpeh), 13 Oct. 1939, p. 6.

<sup>358</sup> Maan, *The New Scots*, 122.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>360</sup> *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), 30 Aug. 1930, p. 9.

elsewhere, or vice-versa.<sup>361</sup> Nevertheless, even based upon the four hundred certificates issued to South Asian men working as pedlars in the city, opening a wholesale outlet to service this trade was very much a viable business proposition. Moreover, the increasing extent of such pedlars' networks during the 1930s, not to mention the associated growth in the numbers of South Asian operated wholesale businesses supporting them, was not limited to Scotland. The evidence Maan provides closely coincides with intelligence reports filed, in the 1930s, by police and Home Office officials on what they perceived to be the problem of Indian pedlars. Viewed by the Metropolitan Police, the contents of the dispatch book of Hashmatrai Rewachand, a dealer in artificial silk and hosiery, trading from 94 High Street, Poplar (the same street as the Nairoollas' boarding house), reveal a distribution network of goods that spread across much of the Britain. Goods were dispatched from London to towns as far afield as Torquay and Norwich, Inverness and Ramsgate.<sup>362</sup> Perhaps these men simply built upon those trade routes described by the missionary Joseph Salter. As early as 1873, 'about 250 Asiatics ... were constantly visiting the provincial towns...', and Salter described how 'these disciples of the prophet of Mecca wander(ed) from Plymouth to Ben Lomond and from Aberdeen to Hastings.'<sup>363</sup>

Rozina Visram has also noted that records of South Asian wholesale businesses reveal the extensive nature of these pedlar networks.<sup>364</sup> While it was initially alleged by the Metropolitan Police that Rewachand actively encouraged the desertion of lascars to further his own business interests, their investigation revealed that he was, however, sponsoring men's passage to Britain by paying their fares as regular passengers, an activity which cost him £16-£18 per man.<sup>365</sup> The Ballards' study suggested that although this was the case for the majority of Sikh settlements to be found at the end of the Second World War, 'Moslem and Gujerati settlements of the same period were largely composed of ex-seamen...'<sup>366</sup> However, Maan's interviews with, mainly Muslim, former pedlars revealed that, once the first wave of pioneering ex-lascars had become established, increasing numbers of Muslim South Asian men came as fare-paying passengers sponsored by kinship networks.<sup>367</sup> Although there was a similarity in the types of heavy labour and petty trade undertaken by men upon their arrival in Britain, their form of passage-paid migration stands in direct contrast to those men who sweated their way to Britain working in the stokehold of merchant ships. It does, however, bear close comparison with the same populations' *biradari*-assisted passenger migration to Britain after 1947. Here, as we observed in Section 2, there was a definite continuity of migration, both in the networks involved and the means of migration both before and after the Second World War.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> <http://www.northants.police.uk/page/pedlars-licence> (accessed 21 March 2017).

<sup>362</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>363</sup> J. Salter, *The Asiatic in England: Sketches of Sixteen Years' Work among Orientals* (London, 1873), p. 221.

<sup>364</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 262.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> Ballard and Ballard, 'Between Two Cultures', 29.

<sup>367</sup> Maan, *The New Scots*, 121-122.

<sup>368</sup> Corroborating evidence for Maan's study can be found in TNA, HO 213/1406.

During the mid-1930s officials of various agencies, including the Scottish Office, New Scotland Yard and various regional constabularies, investigated the phenomenon of Indian pedlars in Britain. Considering their presence to be a cause for concern, the Home Office called upon the Government of India to prevent the issue of passports to 'illiterate Indians of limited means and of the agricultural class who may be suspected of the intention of petty trade.' The authorities involved rightly understood that once passports had been issued, the holders had every right, as Indian subjects of the King-Emperor, to live and work in Britain. The enquiry into South Asian pedlars appears to have been motivated by the desire of several departments of the state to exclude, by bureaucratic or informal methods, Indian subjects 'of limited means' who were often regarded as 'aliens'. Also of interest is that while some of the correspondence, reports and circulars contained in the file suggested that these South Asians were considered a potential burden on the public purse, they presented no substantive evidence to show destitute South Asians as the actuality of the situation. The file, especially a memo summarising the issues raised by investigations and interviews with pedlars and wholesalers, is worth discussing in some detail. Although this should be considered as a source hostile to its subjects, it contains several useful insights into the phenomenon of the development of South Asian operated business during the inter-war period, involved in petty trade.

One of the reports concerns an interview between Fazal Mohammed of Canton Street, Poplar, East London and an unknown state official. A wholesaler and former pedlar, Fazal Mohammed was described as an 'agent for silk goods' who also supplied 'silk scarves, shawls, etc., to Indian pedlars for sale in market places throughout the country.' In his former peddling career he had visited the towns of the Midlands and the North, including Leicester, Bradford and Burnley. Asked about the status of three South Asian pedlars, whose right to trade had been questioned, Fazal Mohammed explained in some detail the trade relationship between himself and these men. The prospective pedlars were to secure certificates, to sell the silk goods they purchased from himself, their period of employment was 'indefinite' and depended 'upon the success or otherwise of their trading.' Fazal Mohammed also explained that no contract had been entered into and that the men received no salary from him - they were to live 'solely on the profits made through the sale of their goods.' Although no arrangements had been made for the men's return to India, the wholesaler described how he had deposited £25 with the travel agency Thomas Cook to cover the fares of the men from Marseilles to England. Fazal Mohammed was obviously carrying on a profitable business in London as he informed the interviewer of his intention to 'go to India in a few days' time for a holiday of about three months' duration'. While he was away his business affairs were to be tended to by his brother, Shah Din of Grundy Street, Poplar.<sup>369</sup> We can see here a description of a well organised, profitable wholesale business looking to future expansion in Britain. It engaged in actively expanding its customer base of pedlars by advancing newcomers the necessary capital to establish themselves. There also existed an obvious ethnic, and perhaps kinship, component to the business as Fazal Mohammed was bringing over fellow South Asian

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<sup>369</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

Muslims to work in Britain, as in the case of Glasgow's Nathoo Mohammed, we discussed earlier.

This 1935 report compiled by the Home Office official T.B. Williamson and titled simply 'Pedlars', not only allows us an insight into the methods of South Asian pedlars during the 1930s, but also into an 'official mind' which collectively considered them a problem to be managed. The report outlines that Williamson viewed the increased numbers of South Asian pedlars as issuing from the implementation of the CASO in 1925. This extension to the Aliens Act, 1920 required non-white men, resident in a number of Britain's key home ports, and who were viewed by the authorities as 'coloured alien seamen', to be registered with the local police. However, the majority of the men targeted by police in the port areas of Glamorgan, Hull, South Shields and Liverpool were in fact either British subjects or British Protected Persons and had every legal right to be in Britain. As we have seen, most seafarers were not issued with passports at this time and proving British subject status without such documentation could be difficult. The Order reduced the ability of non-white seafarers, regardless of their citizenship, to sign on to British ships in British home ports and instilled in them a fear of possible deportation.<sup>370</sup> While Williamson did not question the legality, of CASO, he identified its implementation as driving non-white seafarers away from the ports in search of work inland. This, Williamson considered, combined with the increasing numbers of lascar seafarers jumping ship, was the reason for the increase in demand for pedlar's certificates. He noted that, under these conditions, a vicious cycle had previously been established wherein the ease with which pedlar's certificates could be obtained from certain chief constables was in turn driving lascar desertions. Williamson supported the suggestion of the Chief Constable of Liverpool in 1930 that if there was any suspicion that the applicant for a pedlar's certificate was a deserter from a British ship, the applicant could not be deemed 'of good character'. Therefore, he argued, the applicant did not meet this qualifying requirement as he would have made an 'irregular entry into the country.' Williamson also noted that, the Board of Trade had reported that, as of March 1935, that the number of lascar desertions were 'negligible' and that Glasgow police made 'every endeavour' to 'prevent Indian seamen settling in this country' including 'closely interrogating them as to their previous history' and refusing licences 'where at all possible.'<sup>371</sup>

Williamson's report also argued that pedlar numbers were declining due to over-competition and that 'inducements to desert' were 'much less tempting'. However, Maan has claimed that although the rapid increase in numbers of men seeking work 'caused serious problems in the peddling fraternity' in Glasgow, the over-competition which ensued, rather than suppressing trade, acted as a push factor for the further onward migration of newcomers. Thus, what he termed 'the more desperate but adventurous ones', journeyed to Edinburgh, then onto Dundee, Aberdeen and beyond, to the highlands and islands.<sup>372</sup> Like Joseph Salter's observations in the nineteenth century, Williamson noted that South Asian pedlars

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<sup>370</sup> Tabili, 'The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain', 56–58.

<sup>371</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>372</sup> Maan, *The New Scots*, 122–132.

had located in 'districts as far apart as Cornwall, Londonderry and the Orkneys.' The competition caused by the steadily increasing number of pedlars does not appear to have stifled the development of the South Asian 'door trade' or provide a disincentive for migration to Britain. Rather, it prompted the spread, throughout the British Isles, of a group of entrepreneurially-minded individuals with a growing kinship-based and business-oriented social network to support their enterprises.<sup>373</sup>

The findings of Williamson's report undermine the claim that, apart from the Sikhs, South Asian Muslims arrived, almost exclusively, as lascar seamen rather than as passengers.<sup>374</sup> Williamson considered the 'pedlars' problem' to be 'almost exclusively concerned with British Indians, mostly of the agricultural class, who (had) and (were) still arriving in alarming numbers as fare-paying passengers in possession of British passports.' He also usefully provided details of the route and methods used by British Indians of low social-status to enter the United Kingdom as passport-holding British subjects. He described 'impecunious Indians' arriving in Britain, 'direct from India or one of the colonies (e.g. Kenya) via Marseilles and Dieppe' and further confirmed that they had their fares paid for by 'established Indian pedlars'. That these men decided to take an indirect route to Britain suggests that, even though they were British passport holders, they did not anticipate the co-operation of British immigration officers if they arrived directly from the subcontinent.<sup>375</sup>

Although acknowledging that 'details are scanty' Ballard also hazarded a guess that the pioneers of the group of Punjabi Sikh immigrants present in Britain during the inter-war period were former soldiers of the British Indian Army who had 'fought in France during the First World War, and stayed on in Britain instead of boarding the troopships back to India.'<sup>376</sup> This scenario seems unlikely in a number of respects. Firstly, the infantry divisions of the Indian Army fought in France only in the first two years of the war and were withdrawn to fight in Mesopotamia in 1916. While Sikh cavalry regiments saw continued service in France, they too had been withdrawn by February 1918 to fight in Palestine.<sup>377</sup> Secondly, injured Indian troops were hospitalised at the Brighton Pavilion and other facilities on the south coast, rather than remaining near their units. And, as Visram has described, they were kept under strict surveillance during their stay at these facilities.<sup>378</sup> Any soldier who took it upon himself to 'stay on' in Britain, rather than re-join his unit, would have been considered by the military authorities to be a deserter. Not only would such an individual have been hunted down by the civilian and military police and severely dealt with by a court martial, desertion would likely have been considered *beizzati* (without honour) by the man's comrades and kin. A similar arrival narrative to that of Ballard appears to be held today by some Pashtuns in the Sheffield area. The enlistment of

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<sup>373</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>374</sup> Ballard and Ballard, 'Between Two Cultures', 29.

<sup>375</sup> TNA, HO 213/1406.

<sup>376</sup> Ballard, 'Differentiation And Disjunction Among The Sikhs', 93.

<sup>377</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 171; D. Omissi, 'Europe Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914-1918', *The English Historical Review*, 122:496 (2007), p. 374.

<sup>378</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 185-191.

grandfathers and great grandfathers in the Indian Army is without doubt a statement of fact, often accompanied by documentation and photographic evidence, as is their combat experience on the Western Front. Nevertheless, it is much more likely that, once demobilised in India, Sheffield-Pashtun families' ancestors came to Britain at the war's end as lascars, or as the evidence above demonstrates, as passengers arriving to begin work as pedlars. While Tom Abdul, the discharged Indian soldier, remained in Britain and moved to Sheffield during the war, he had originally enlisted in Britain with an English regiment and was therefore discharged in England unlike the South Asian men who enlisted into regiments of the Indian Army.<sup>379</sup>

### **3.6 The Second World War, trade, rationing and the rise of the black market**

The second outbreak of war with Germany saw the introduction of the rationing of food in Britain from January 1940, and clothing from June 1941. The rationing system placed severe restrictions upon the purchase of clothing and no doubt affected the 'door trade', including those South Asians who were dependent upon it for their livelihood. This was particularly the case for the pedlars of clothing who tended to specialise in non-essential items such as ties, silk scarves, shawls and ladies' stockings. For any item of clothing purchased, the retail customer was required to present, along with the normal payment, a number of ration book coupons in the amount specified by the Board of Trade. Each type of clothing was allocated a value in coupons or points reflecting the yardage of fabric required for its production.<sup>380</sup> Beginning with a value of 66 coupons, the number of coupons issued to adults steadily declined throughout the course of the war to 36 then, between September 1945 and the end of April 1946 the allowance dropped to a meagre 24 coupons per adult per year. Rationing of clothing generally rose slowly in the years of peace until it was abandoned in 1949.<sup>381</sup> As the replacement of a threadbare winter coat could make a sizable impact on an individual's allowance, the main impediment to trade was often a consumer's lack of coupons. In this situation, the temptation to trade on the black market was high for any retail concern, particularly those who traded on an informal basis when demand for morale-boosting little luxuries increased with the full employment of the wartime years. During the war Nawab Ali, one of Caroline Adams's interviewees, worked in a Coventry aircraft factory. There, he recalled:

I used to do some other business there, when I wasn't working, you know. They used to have coupons for everything, money wasn't a problem, but coupons were. So we used to go to the ships, Tilbury, Cardiff and Liverpool and buy coupons from sailors, they didn't need them, and then get sweets. Chocolates, clothes and sell them in the factories around the Midlands – black market.... After the war I was a

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<sup>379</sup> Tom Abdul - attestation and discharge certificates 1915-1916, TNA - British Army Service Records 1914-1920, WO 363, First World War Service Records, Burnt Documents, SS/17136;

<sup>380</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain*, 48.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–52.

pedlar in the markets, all around England. I was a long time in Plymouth, opened a restaurant there, but that is a later story.<sup>382</sup>

Here we see an individual's exploitation of his social network, which included seafarers, to meet the demand for luxuries during wartime. Also, we can see the accumulation of capital sufficient to leave waged labour and invest in business at war's end, first as a pedlar, then as a restaurateur. Abdul Malik's experience was similar in his exploitation of the black market in ration books. He recalled how he traded with Indian seamen who had been given clothing coupons by the British Board of Trade to enable them to renew their gear if necessary:

I used to go to Liverpool, Tilbury, and buy the coupons from them. I bought them for ten shillings, and sold them for five pounds. Well, ten shillings was a lot of money for them – they could buy three or four suits in Pakistan with that. Then I became a pedlar businessman.<sup>383</sup>

A report in the *Liverpool Echo* from May 1944 shows that Malik's practice was likely to have been commonplace in the deep-water ports. After being observed stopping merchant seamen outside the Board of Trade offices in Park Lane, Liverpool by a police officer, Sher Mohamed admitted buying coupons from a merchant seamen for £6 10s. Discovered in possession of a merchant navy clothing book containing 90 clothing coupons, 40 loose merchant navy coupons and a number of civilian clothing coupons, he was fined £2 for being 'concerned in the illegal transfer of clothing coupons.' Mohamed also had in his possession three receipts from a wholesale warehouse in Glasgow for clothing to the value of 114 coupons and more than £96 in cash.<sup>384</sup> Although such black marketeering pedlars sometimes sold clothing to their customers without requiring the necessary coupons in return, the pedlars often needed coupons themselves to buy fabric to make up their stock of garments. They may also have sold the necessary coupons to doorstep customers without the necessary coupons to enable what appeared to be a 'legitimate' sale. In selling coupons to other pedlars Abdul Malik estimated he had made 'five thousand pounds, very easy'. By 1948 or 1949 he was ready to go home. 'I didn't want to stay any more... five thousand pounds was a great deal of money... I got what I came for and I wanted to go back and make business over there – why should I stay here and take another man's job? I had enough money.'<sup>385</sup> Here, in addition to the lucrative nature of the trade, we see the effect of the 'myth of return'. Abdul Malik felt he had completed his time successfully in Britain and wished to return home (he had, however, settled in Britain by 1959). His comment about 'taking another man's job' also implied that, at the time, there was someone else waiting to replace him in the migration chain.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 77.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>384</sup> *Echo* (Liverpool, 31 May 1944). p. 3.

<sup>385</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 118.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Press reports of the period suggest that although the black market in clothing was by no means restricted to South Asian pedlars, a significant minority may have been involved in this, potentially, highly profitable activity. For instance, in 1942 the *Nottingham Evening Post* reported that a lawyer for the prosecution had stated that his client (the Board of Trade) faced 'considerable difficulty with these Indian pedlars'. They were said to have an unregulated source of supply in Nottingham which the authorities had not been able to trace. The pedlar concerned, Jethisal Boolchard Kewalram of Nottingham, was fined £5 for having sold, without the surrender of coupons, a pair of stockings in a Grantham public house. A plain clothes police officer testified that the pedlar was openly offering for sale silk scarves, ties and stockings from his case. Witnesses testified that they saw him sell two pairs of silk stockings for 5s. 6d., a scarf for the same amount and a tie for 2s. 6d. Apparently, no coupons were exchanged as the necessary quantity was likely included in the price of the item.<sup>387</sup> An article in the *Newcastle Journal* in 1943, racially punning on the term 'black market' in relation to the ethnicity of the defendant, outlined a similar case of coupon-free trading. Mohammed Sherif and his wife Grace Fletcher of Carver Street, Sheffield were both prosecuted and imprisoned for selling goods in these circumstances. Sherrif, formerly a seaman, travelled regularly to London to meet his contact Mohammed Ali Mardan. A letter of introduction to Mardan and other correspondence indicated that the business included the trade in shirts, ladies' underwear, stockings and spirit for the manufacture of perfume. It was alleged that in two months, transactions with a value of £190 had been conducted. In court Sherrif stated that he obtained his goods from seamen visiting Britain. In addition to the custodial sentences handed down to Sherriff and his wife (the mother of his three children), nineteen women - Fletcher's former workmates - all pled guilty to 'acquiring rationed goods' from the couple and fined £5 each.<sup>388</sup> In 1944 in Antrim, Northern Ireland, another pedlar Nasir Singh was fined £300 for being in possession of 4000 clothing coupons. These were discovered in a parcel he was carrying when he left the London train, along with nearly £300 in notes. Also at his lodgings police found a safe containing £1400.<sup>389</sup> Also in 1944, a group of five South Asian men were charged with being in possession of forged coupons allegedly linked to the black market. All received fines and prison sentences.<sup>390</sup>

The cases presented here reflect the long-standing trading activities of South Asian seafarers, both as lascars and those who sailed under standard seafarer's articles. From the latter half of the nineteenth century seafarers, particularly those of South Asian origin, would supplement their wages by buying goods in one port where they were plentiful and cheap, then trading them in others where there was scarcity and demand. Seafarers who sailed to ports where commodities were plentiful, had a ready market in those former seafarers who had taken to peddling and trading these goods illicitly in austerity Britain. The existence of social networks which facilitated

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<sup>387</sup> Nottingham Evening Post, 9 June 1942, p. 4.

<sup>388</sup> *The Birmingham Mail*, 9 March 1943, p. 4; *Newcastle Journal and North Mail* (Newcastle upon Tyne), 10 March 1943, p. 4.

<sup>389</sup> *Northern Whig* (Antrim), 12 January 1944, p3.

<sup>390</sup> *Daily Gazette* (Birmingham), 15 November 1944, p. 1.

the continuance of transnational and trans-imperial trade is evident here and it appears that with conditions of shortage this informal trade came into its own within the black market. Bashir Maan's account of inter-war migration to Scotland, despite heavily concentrating on the experience of pedlars, generally elides this black market activity, merely commenting that:

The peddling trade did not cease altogether during the war years. There were people who had been able to 'dodge' both the draft and the factories, and they carried on the trade if and when they could get a little merchandise.<sup>391</sup>

To put this activity into perspective, however, Mark Roodhouse has noted that black marketeering was, during the years of rationing and shortage, a widespread practice among hawkers and pedlars of all backgrounds who sold 'goods and coupons in entertainment venues, workplaces, and from door to door in residential areas.' Roodhouse also notes that this was 'especially true of the trade in clothing and household goods, much of which remained in the hands of door-to-door salesmen.' Moreover, the scale of the involvement by all pedlars is demonstrated by the fact that official bodies tasked with stamping out these practices, such as the North East Region Price Regulation Committee based at Leeds, 'spent nearly as much time tackling street traders as it did shopkeepers.'<sup>392</sup> During this period pedlars, regardless of origin, found it more difficult to obtain regular supplies of rationed goods from drapery wholesalers. Many, like Rasool Khan and the 'Indian toffee men' left, or reduced their involvement in, the business and took up employment as waged labourers in armaments factories, heavy industry or returned to the sea, generally leaving the peddling trade to those willing to trade at, or beyond, the margins of legitimacy.<sup>393</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the decline of street trading and the door-to-door peddling of goods due to wartime shortages and rationing, Rasool and Elsie Khan were able to utilise their social network of friends, neighbours and workmates and, around 1944, took on the existing business premises of a retail draper, complete with stock. Although trading for drapers was tough during the period of rationing, small shops could compete with the big high-street stores by offering much enhanced levels of service and individual customer attention that the big stores could not. Richard Hoggart in his memoir remembered the women's outfitters his Aunt Ethel opened close to the start of the Second World War. He concluded that the business was a success, not despite rationing, but because of it and their ability to add value to their business offer. Small shops survived because they were willing to work 'all hours God sends' to 'alter a dress or get something somewhere for a funeral or a wedding.' Hoggart also noted that specialist wholesalers offered exceptionally good service to the small businesses they depended upon. Recognising the essential qualities of the

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<sup>391</sup> Maan, *The New Scots*, 50.

<sup>392</sup> M. Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain: 1939-1955* (Oxford, 2013), p. 101.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

successful small business, especially those with a working-class customer base, he concluded:

They were also shrewd, bold and unabashed manipulators of the mark-up according to their sense of the length of the customer's purse, and the degree of gratitude due to them from each customer for the effort put into getting them as nearly as possible what they wanted, and on time. I enjoyed those whispered conversations in the back-room devoted to how much they could squeeze out of each client: "Of course she can afford that. They're doing very well, him and her; all that nightwork. Anyway, look at the trouble we had getting it and fitting her." The customers, more often than not large, working-class ladies, were grateful.<sup>394</sup>

Knowing one's customers well, having the business acumen to effectively manipulate prices and credit are, as we have seen, the mark of effective street and door-to-door traders – a business in which Rasool was already adept. To compete with the big stores required the offer of a bespoke product within the limited means (or with credit, slightly outside of the means) of their customers. This meant having an extensive social network on which to draw, as well as a working knowledge of the needs, difficulties and aspirations of the potential customers that constituted it. By opening their shop, Rasool and Elsie Khan utilised networks of native friends, neighbours and workmates in addition to the business contacts and friendships maintained among Rasool's compatriots in Britain. We know from the groom's 'rank or profession' section of marriage certificates that the South Asian members of Rasool's immediate social network included several fellow Pashtuns involved in the 'travelling draper' business (otherwise known as peddling), who would have been potential customers. For example, Munshi Khan married Eva Collins, a young woman from the mining village of Staveley, between Sheffield and the neighbouring town of Chesterfield. The marriage certificate states that Munshi worked as a 'draper's traveller'.<sup>395</sup> Additionally, the entry in the 1939 Register has him living with his family in Chesterfield and employed as a 'drapery salesman'.<sup>396</sup> His friend Ali Ahmed Khan's marriage certificate records him employed as an 'artificial silk salesman'.<sup>397</sup> Yousaff Aboo Khuresee, whose marriage Rasool witnessed, was a pedlar of 'small wares' (likely household essentials such as pins, needles and thread). Mohammed Ali, whose marriage to Phyllis in Rotherham was witnessed by Rasool's friend Willy Khan, was recorded as being a 'silk merchant' (figure 5.3).

Unfortunately, the Khan's Sheffield-based family business was only to operate for three or four years. Due to Rasool's failing health (he had suffered a stroke

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<sup>394</sup> R. Hoggart, *A Local Habitation* (London, 1988), pp. 60–61.

<sup>395</sup> Munshi Khan and Eva Collins, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Chesterfield, Oct.–Dec. 1937, vol. 7b, p. 2127.

<sup>396</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Chesterfield, RG 101/5900C/003/22-RBIL.

<sup>397</sup> Ali Ahmed Khan and Edna May Marshall, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1937, vol. 9c, p. 1484.

entailing a spell in the city's Royal Infirmary), by the late 1940s the family decided to leave Sheffield for Liverpool and the benefits of the relatively clean air of the west coast.



Figure 3.11 Programme for the cultural celebrations associated with the Summer Olympiad, Helsinki, 1952, showing the act of Rasool Hamza and Zareena (Rasool and Doreen Khan) - used by kind permission.

The family's enterprising spirit survived the move to Liverpool and they opened a pawnbroker's shop which operated until Rasool's untimely death in 1955 aged 49.<sup>398</sup> Rasool and the family also maintained their illusionist act - now styled 'Rasool Hamza's Pakistani Theatre' - and appeared in summer shows at Cleethorpes on the Lincolnshire coast, at Feldman's Theatre in Blackpool and in Helsinki as

part of the cultural celebrations for the 1952 Summer Olympiad (figure 3.11). Before Rasool's death he brought the act to national attention with a performance in July 1954 on the BBC's national television broadcast *Side Show*.<sup>399</sup>

The final group of South Asian petty entrepreneurs to be discussed here are the so-called 'Indian oculists' or 'Indian eye specialists'. These men plied their trade beyond the boundaries of Western medicine in Britain, and a number of these men had been prosecuted for practising medicine and performing surgery on patients' eyes without accreditation from the authorities. Although these practitioners of traditional Indian remedies were widely recognised within South Asia as respected *hakim* - bearers of ancestral healing knowledge - they were regarded by the medical profession in Britain as dangerous 'quacks'.<sup>400</sup> Operating regardless of the medical establishment's attempts at regulation, the 'Indian oculists' advertised widely and attracted a largely working-class clientele unable to afford the fees of most European-trained ophthalmologists. A. Martin Wainwright has argued that the trial of four Muslim Punjabi oculists at the Old Bailey in 1893 for engaging in unlicensed practice 'effectively ended the marketability of Indian techniques'.<sup>401</sup> However, both a marriage certificate issued near Sheffield and regular advertisements in local newspapers during the inter-war period indicate that, despite the prosecution of their colleagues, these men continued to trade openly as 'eye specialists'. The marriage certificate, issued in Thorne, near Doncaster in 1926, shows that Chirag Din Chohan

<sup>398</sup> Bahadur and Khan, Conversation between.

<sup>399</sup> The programme was broadcast, during peak viewing at 20.45, from Coney Beach Funfair, Porthcawl on Friday 23 July 1954, <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/797c5c3d96c54412bf6c35dae6b60b2e> (accessed 24 April 2017).

<sup>400</sup> Wainwright, *The Better Class' of Indians*, 110–111.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.



much more likely to have been the emergence of universal, free eye-care, delivered by the newly established National Health Service, that led to the demise of their occupation.

### 3.7 From pedlars to proletarians

As the opportunities for legitimately hawking and peddling Indian toffee and drapery products diminished due to rationing and the demands of the war effort, such employment opportunities were replaced by a resurgent labour market. The ongoing conscription of native workers to the armed forces within Britain steadily increased the openings available to South Asian immigrants. Many were able to find steady work at sea as merchant seamen on standard European articles, or engaged in regular waged-labour in the manufacturing industries, particularly armaments production. As we have seen previously, the men's introduction to the waged-labour market was made largely through signing on as lascars with British merchant steamships in South Asian ports. The experience of industrial time and work discipline, combined with the working environment of the stokehold', would certainly have acculturated men sufficiently to embark upon a proletarian working life in Britain. Occupational data, gleaned from marriage and death certificates, together with contemporary press reports and state documents, shows that a large proportion of the migrants were involved, for at least at some point during their time in the Sheffield area, in waged labour. However, this is somewhat at odds with the accounts of migration historians who put the figure of the pedlar at the centre of early South Asian employment within Britain. Moreover, while the experiences of South Asian pedlars have been explored to some degree by historians such as Tabili, Adams and by Maan's work on Scotland, the experiences of those who secured land-based waged labour, such as Rasool Khan, Sultan Mohammed and Maharramed Sha, have been examined much less thoroughly.<sup>407</sup> The fact that these individuals worked and lived alongside white natives can give many insights, not only into the world of work during the period, but also of the relationships and attachments they formed with natives of Britain. The following sub-section will attempt to rebalance the historical evidence somewhat by the exploring the occupations and experience of those men who spent at least some of their working lives involved in waged labour in the metalworking and extractive industries of the Sheffield area. This new data will also be contextualized with evidence from other areas and other studies.

As we have already seen, the 1939 Register shows Rasool employed as a boiler fireman by September of that year.<sup>408</sup> Boiler-firing – the job of coaling, firing and stoking boilers and raising a consistent steam pressure to power machinery, not to mention the sundry tasks of cleaning and otherwise maintaining the boilers, was as Alston Kennerley has described it, a 'narrowly-skilled' occupation not undertaken by workers without previous experience.<sup>409</sup> At sea the stokehold lascar needed to master the key skill of observation: how to 'judge the state of the fire from its colour in order

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<sup>407</sup> Tabili, 'Ghulam Rasul's Travels'; Adams, *Across Seven Seas*; Maan, *The New Scots*.

<sup>408</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Sheffield, RG 101/35511/003/11-KISB.

<sup>409</sup> Kennerley, 'Stoking the Boilers', 199.

to anticipate the fall in boiler pressure.' Once the temperature and state of the fire had been correctly assessed, other skills came into play involving 'a combination of judgment, physical strength and dexterity.' Additionally:

with furnaces in excess of eight feet in length, hand tools were of similar length, especially the slice and rake to tease out clinker, dislodge ash and then level and redistribute the fire. Throwing on fresh coal involved further judgment and dexterity to place the right amount suitably distributed over the grate. The final aspect was the removal and disposal of ash and clinker, generally using shovels and buckets; full buckets were hoisted above deck and the waste thrown overboard.<sup>410</sup>

This was hard physical work which, if carried out without skill or due diligence meant that crucial machinery operated inefficiently or even ground to a halt. As the majority of the South Asians arriving in Sheffield from the middle of the First World War onwards were former lascars and had developed such skills in the stokehold, they were ideally qualified for factory-based boiler firemen's jobs.

The death certificates of those who died in the Sheffield area, often at quite a young age, show the proletarian nature of their employment. For example, Shekh Aboo, one of the first South Asians to make his home in the Sheffield area, albeit briefly, worked with his countryman Yah Mohammed as a labourer at Grimsthorpe gas works before he fell victim to the influenza pandemic in November 1918.<sup>411</sup> The following year, in February 1919, Tom Abdul died from a ruptured aorta. A native of India, he had been resident in Kennington, London before volunteering for the labour section of the Army Service Corps in 1915. After service in France Abdul, awarded a disablement pension and, due to enlisting in Britain and serving in a British-based unit, discharged in Britain. He made his way to Sheffield and gained a job as a labourer at the John Brown and Company steelworks. The company are listed as paying for his unmarked plot in Sheffield's Burngreave Cemetery.<sup>412</sup> In July, 1923, Sultan Mohammed, a Pashtun from the Chhachh district, was killed in an accident at his work as a surface worker at a Sheffield colliery.<sup>413</sup> Alabdin Khan (also known as Aloh Din), a boiler-firer at an engineering works, died of bronchitis and heart disease in February 1927.<sup>414</sup> Ali Amidulla, another Pashtun man, died in March 1931 after he suffered a heart attack, dying at his post as a boiler firer at Sheffield's Brown Bayley steelworks.<sup>415</sup> In March 1944, Rasool's close friend and fellow Pashtun Jim Badloe (also

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<sup>410</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>411</sup> *Evening Telegraph* (Sheffield, 2 May 1918), p. 3; Shekh Aboo, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1918, vol. 9c, p. 1375.

<sup>412</sup> TNA, British Army Service Records 1914-1920, WO 363 - First World War Service Records 'Burnt Documents', SS/17136, Tom Abdul: attestation and discharge certificates, 1915-1916. Burial register, Burngreave Cemetery, Sheffield, Tom Abdul, 8 Feb. 1919, Section KK, Grave No. 1444.

<sup>413</sup> Sultan Mohammed, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, July–Sept. 1923, vol. 9c, p. 425.

<sup>414</sup> Alabdin Khan, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1927, vol. 9c, p. 859.

<sup>415</sup> Gisalic Amidulla, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1931, vol. 9c, p. 842.

known as Mohammed Noor), another steelworks' labourer, and sometime partner in his illusionist act, died of pneumonia.<sup>416</sup> Kuhafit Khan, another steelworks' labourer, died in 1944 after being hit by a tram, possibly a consequence of wartime blackout restrictions.<sup>417</sup> The death certificates of the children (mostly infants) of South Asian men and their native partners in the area also reveal the father's occupation. Souriya Khan, daughter of the Pashtun steelworks' labourer Ayaht Khan and his English wife Hilda, died of tuberculous meningitis in July 1929.<sup>418</sup> Also twins, born to Dora Deen and her husband Mohammed, a crane driver, died prematurely in late December 1940.<sup>419</sup>

Of the twenty-nine deaths of individuals with surnames of South Asian origin within the Sheffield registration district during the period between 1916 and 1947, fifteen were engaged in some kind of manual work, particularly labouring in local steelworks or boiler firing. Ten of the twenty-nine deaths were of children, of whom eight had fathers who were manual workers. As we can see from this brief survey of the deaths of individuals with names of South Asian and/or Muslim origin, by far the largest proportion were themselves manual workers or were the children of manual workers. Of those who died in the Sheffield area during the period, only Maula Bakhsh, who died in 1936 of tuberculosis, was involved in peddling.<sup>420</sup>

Marriage certificates issued in the Sheffield area also reveal the proletarian nature of the many of the grooms' employment. Of the sixty marriages registered by the GRO, twenty-eight were employed in occupations such as labourer, boiler-firer, machinist, fitter, metal caster, steel cutter, gauge maker and furnaceman. For instance, the Sheffield registrar recorded Ahamed Wosman as being employed as an 'engine fitter' at the time of his marriage in 1919 to Constance Goodwin.<sup>421</sup> Abdul Jilible was recorded as 'labourer' at the time of his marriage to Ethel May Clarke in 1920, as was Jim Badloe (Mohamed Noor) at his marriage to Ivy Swain, also in 1920.<sup>422</sup> Shazreen Khan (registered as Shahzeran Khan) was recorded as a 'fireman' (actually a boiler firer) when he married Florrie Macaloney in 1920, as was Carumeli Khan when he married Jessie Grant in 1923.<sup>423</sup>

As we see here, GRO marriage data show how early settlement in the Sheffield area began for South Asian migrants, particularly those who have been identified as Pashtun. As Jaqueline Jenkinson and other historians have concluded, the contraction of the shipping industry had the effect of drying up of the maritime labour market for

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<sup>416</sup> Mohamed Noor, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1944 9c, p. 634.

<sup>417</sup> Kuhafit Khan, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1943 9c, p. 439.

<sup>418</sup> Souriya Khan, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1929, 9c, p. 575.

<sup>419</sup> Mohamed R. Deen, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1940, 9c, p. 998; Mohamed S. Deen, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1940, 9c, p. 998.

<sup>420</sup> Not the Moula Bakhsh previously mentioned: Maula Bakhsh, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1936, 9c, p. 440.

<sup>421</sup> Ahamed Wosman and Constance Goodwin, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 885.

<sup>422</sup> Abdul Jilible and Ethel May Clarke, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 789; Jim Badloe and Ivy Swain, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 778.

<sup>423</sup> Shahzeran Khan and Florrie Macaloney, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1923, vol. 9c, p. 1220;

much of the inter-war period. This left many seafarers in Britain, both white and non-white, 'on the beach' or, in other words, unable to find work on ships departing from British home ports. It is likely that, under these conditions, many non-white seafarers decided to join their compatriots or kinsmen who had already given up the sea and were working in the non-maritime industries of munitions, iron and steel making and the extractive industries such as coal mining.

Of such pioneering early arrivals, Shekh Aboo, Yah Mohamed and another unnamed 'coloured man' worked at Sheffield's Grimesthorpe Gasworks in May 1918.<sup>424</sup> Aboo previously lived and worked in Leeds as a labourer in an oil mill. He married his English wife Agnes at St Mary's parish church Leeds in 1917. The newspaper report shows her attempting to act as a translator between the court and her husband. He had been assaulted by his South Asian workmate Yah Mohamed, a man the reporter considered spoke a different language to Aboo, although the ethnic background of either man is unknown at this time. The reporter also expressed his bafflement at how these men 'were in the position they occupied', presumably questioning how South Asian men had come to be in Sheffield and employed in a local industry.<sup>425</sup>

Another court report, published in August 1919, described the charges against Noorden Khan 'a native of Peshawar, now living in Attercliffe' and the theft of money from Maharamed Sha of Rotherham. Khan and Sha worked on the same ship, arriving in England in December, 1918.<sup>426</sup> On departing their ship, they moved inland, found shared lodgings in Hope Street, Rotherham and took up employment at the local steelmakers Steel, Pech and Tozer (colloquially known as 'Steelos').<sup>427</sup> However, the precise details of the account given by Khan and Sha should be read with some caution. It is likely that the men had both jumped ship in Britain and wished to conceal the precise details of their arrival from the court. Nevertheless, the report gives, in a nutshell, the process of arrival in Britain of South Asian men from the Pashtun areas in the northwest of British India. The men, employed as seamen, had the means to travel to Britain during wartime and, as the war ended, decide to take their chances in Britain. On leaving their ship in a British port they made their way inland, perhaps to join a kinsman such as Ahamed Wosman, Noah Mohammed, Jim Badloe or Ali Amidulla - all employed as steel workers around this time. It is also possible that they made their way to the home of Maherban Shah and Goolam Hassain, both boiler-firers, who may have already taken up residence at the address in Hope Street, Rotherham and which appears to have been a node on the social network of Pashtuns

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<sup>424</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Thursday 02 May 1918, p.3.

<sup>425</sup> Shekh Aboo and Agnes Robertson, m. cert., GRO Leeds District, Apr–Jun 1917, vol. 9b, p. 599.

<sup>426</sup> Noorden Khan is possibly the Nore Dean who married Eunice Williams in 1923 and who is recorded as Nore Dean Khan in the 1939 Register: Nore Dean and Eunice Williams, m. cert.: GRO Sheffield district, Apr. –Jun. 1923, 9c,p. 1144; TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Chesterfield, R39/5960G/002/11-RCRO.

<sup>427</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, Wednesday 27 August 1919, p.5.

arriving in the area.<sup>428</sup> Or perhaps, these men were pioneers who arrived on a purely speculative visit to a city known as an abundant source of work for those possessing boiler-firing skills.

Press reports from the Sheffield area, such as these, provide some of the earliest glimpses of the presence of non-white migrant workers and the phenomenon of inland migration, away from the ports, maritime labour and towards more settled employment. No matter how they discovered Sheffield, an inland city with no direct access to the sea (unlike Manchester and its ship canal), men like Maharamed Sha and Noorden Khan managed to secure work in the area on similar terms to their white counterparts. Reports from 1923 demonstrate that the South Asian presence in the Sheffield area's waged-labour market persisted well beyond the wartime era. And,



Figure 3.13 One of a number of local reports on the official inquest into the death of Sultan Mohamed *The Star* (Sheffield), 18 July, 1923

that men involved in the kind of heavy labour associated with the metal-working and extractive industries tended to live in Sheffield's steelmaking East End along the Don valley. For instance, Shah Ladah aged twenty-one and Shagdad Dadad aged twenty-five of Heppenstall Lane, Attercliffe, were, like Yah Mohamed and Noorden Khan before them, working at Steel, Peech and Tozer that year.<sup>429</sup> Another Pashtun boiler firer, Shazreen Khan, had from 1920, also lived in this street with his wife Florrie.<sup>430</sup> Around the corner in Hoban Street, lived another steelworks' boiler firer, Noah Mahammed and his wife Lucy.<sup>431</sup> Additionally, Sultan Mohammed, a Pashtun man who lived in the same neighbourhood and employed as a surface worker at Sheffield's Beighton Colliery was reported to have been killed at work in July 1923. According to the local press reporting from Sultan's inquest his workmate, the colliery's blacksmith, described him as a 'a willing man' who had fallen while trying to free a jammed coal bucket on the overhead ropeway. It was also revealed that Sultan regularly sent money to his wife and two sons in India.<sup>432</sup>

The economic connection shown here, between a migrant worker in Sheffield and his family in India by means of monetary remittances, is an unusually early example of a key feature of the chain migration described by Dahya and Ballard between the 1960s and the 1990s. In this instance, we also see the phenomenon of a

<sup>428</sup> Goolam Hassain and Florence May Lawley, m. cert.: GRO Rotherham District, Apr–Jun 1923, vol. 9c, p. 1389; Meherban Shah and Annie Dunn, m. cert.: GRO Rotherham District, Apr–Jun 1924, vol. 9c, p. 1360a.

<sup>429</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 22 February 1923), p. 7.

<sup>430</sup> Shahzeran Khan and Florrie Macaloney, m. cert.: GRO Sheffield district, Apr. –Jun. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 1296.

<sup>431</sup> Noah Mahammed and Lucy Gomer, m. cert.: GRO Sheffield district, Apr. –Jun. 1920, 9c, p. 1686.

<sup>432</sup> *The Star* (Sheffield, Wednesday 18 July 1923), p. 3.

British subject of South Asian origin travelling thousands of miles to secure waged labour in Britain - a clearly favourable alternative to the lascar system of sweated labour at sea. Like the Rochdale-based Pakistani immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s described by Muhammad Anwar, Sultan may have planned to work in Britain for five

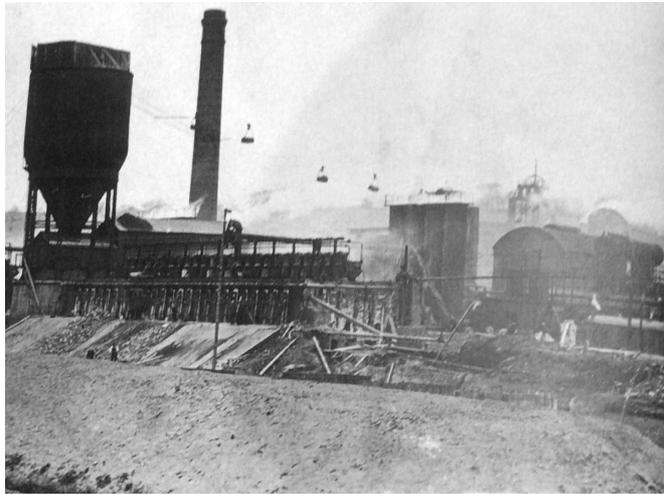


Figure 3.14 The aerial ropeway connecting the pit-head and the coke ovens at Beighton Colliery, circa 1930.

years or so. Thus, we might reasonably assume that he, like them, intended to return to his village when he had accumulated enough cash to enhance the family farm. Archived documents surrounding the compensation paid by his employers to Sultan's family show that he originated in the Pashtun dominated district of Chhachh. And that the compensation money was directed by the Sheffield court to be paid out at the family's local post office at Rangoo in the heart of the district.<sup>433</sup>

This was most likely the post office to which Sultan mailed postal-order remittances to his family with a proportion of his wages – as it would for a number of the other Sheffield immigrants who originated in the Chhachh district. The evidence presented here indicates that British industry, particularly in the Sheffield area, still regarded the employment of South Asians as a viable strategy well after the end of the war and the demobilisation of troops.

### 3.8 Making ends meet: Indian immigration and work during the Great Depression

With regard to work and unemployment in Britain during the Great Depression, the contemporary discussions of officials and 'experts' on the motives or aspirations of non-white immigrants arriving in Britain ran along lines still familiar today. While the NSFU had been campaigning to stop shipping companies employing 'Asiatic' labour and taking the jobs of white seafarers, Captain F.A. Richardson's 1935 report *Social Conditions in Ports* argued the opposite – that South Asia immigrants were attracted not by work but by British welfare provision. Writing on behalf of the British Social Hygiene Council, Richardson was troubled that 'the number of Indians' was 'increasing weekly, attracted by the possibility of an easy life of idleness and the comparative wealth that is presented to them by the money obtainable from unemployment benefit relief.'<sup>434</sup> Without referencing substantive data, the report confirmed the prejudices of the imperial elite about the inherent fecklessness of non-whites, if not closely supervised by the authorities. Despite analysing data from

<sup>433</sup> BL IOR/L/E/7/1321, File 4570, Workman's Compensation Act 1906: as payment to India (on behalf of a private concern) of compensation in regard to an Indian subject who was killed in the course of his employment in Sheffield.

<sup>434</sup> TNA MH 55/352, Social conditions in ports. Report of survey by Capt. F. A. Richardson, p.7.

hundreds of sources, most hostile to the presence of non-white workers in Britain, this study has only found the instance of one individual - one of Adams's Sylheti interviewees, in London during 1937-1938 - who briefly conformed to Richardson's characterization of immigrants as without work, due to idleness. Recalling a situation when he considered the wages available to him were less than even the benefit offered by the 'dole', he explained '...who going to work for fifteen a week? Better to lie in bed and enjoy yourself with seventeen a week. Many people told me, "Why don't you work?" I said, "No". Then after about a year, they stopped the labour money. Then I got a job in South Kensington, Earls Court Road...'<sup>435</sup>

Despite the attitudes of some social investigators during the 1930s, by the Second World War another report came to very different conclusions. Phyllis Young's Church of England-backed *Investigation Into Conditions of the Coloured Population in a Stepney Area*, although sharing many of Richardson's negative cultural assumptions, did reflect the author's excellent access to data from local employers and those who controlled Stepney's welfare provision.<sup>436</sup> The data the report provides shows that Richardson's widely circulated and publicised argument about the popularity of claiming benefits, when work was available, was a gross generalisation. Young emphasised that state or charitable welfare institutions were 'little used by the coloured men in the area,' going on to suggest that:

...the fact that these charitable and other sources have been so little drawn upon by the coloured men does not mean that few of the men have passed through difficult times. They dislike applying for official help and generally prefer to borrow from friends or to take light work in connection with the cafes until they can take full employment again.<sup>437</sup>

Apart from hinting at the social networks and horizontal bonds and social linkages that sustained men and their families during times of hardship, the summarised data also gives us a useful snapshot of working life for South Asians and other non-whites in Stepney. The report estimated that eighty per cent of 'coloured men' resident in the district were either seamen or 'working in connection with local cafes run for the coloured population.' The remaining twenty per cent, it estimated, were employed 'chiefly in the building trade, in the (Beckton) gas works, in tailoring or as stokers in factories.'<sup>438</sup> This observation of the non-maritime employment of non-whites closely resembles the experience of immigrant workers in the Sheffield area during the same period.

Nevertheless, some South Asians did draw on unemployment relief between periods of employment as Gladys Gibson, an Unemployment Assistance Board (UAB)

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<sup>435</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 101.

<sup>436</sup> TNA MT 9/3952, *Seamen's Welfare (Code 124): Report on condition of life of coloured population in Stepney and comments on general conditions of seamen, white and coloured (1944)*.

<sup>437</sup> TNA MT 9/3952, *Seamen's Welfare*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>438</sup> TNA MT 9/3952, *Seamen's Welfare*, pp. 4-5.

worker during the 1930s, explained to oral historian Nigel Gray. The worker also recalled that in her East End district, which included Stepney:

The men went into the poorest property and rooms were turned into dormitories, hardly an inch to spare between the beds. The tenant was usually a compatriot who made a good thing out of letting... We in the U.A.B. were chiefly connected with Indians who settled in poor property in or near Cable Street and Commercial Road. One narrow alley was entirely occupied by Indians.<sup>439</sup>

Here, we have a clear, contemporary, but non-hostile observation of the presence of growing numbers of South Asians in Britain during the inter-war period. This testimony also reveals the fact that, even during this early period, a small number of men had already begun to acquire their own property. Nevertheless, for most South Asian immigrants - particularly those who intended to return to the subcontinent within a couple of years - the ability to live as tenants or lodgers remained crucial in the low-wage economy and chronic housing shortage of the inter-war years.

For example, Ali Amidulla married Sheffield native Maggie in 1920. By the time of his early death in 1931, the growing Amidulla family had taken up residence on Sheffield's Manor estate - a social housing development built by the city as part of its extensive plans for modernisation and slum clearance.<sup>440</sup> George Orwell, visiting the 'The Manor' in 1935, as research for *The Road to Wigan Pier*, described the housing stock as being 'considered (a) superior type of Corporation house... rather more ornate than most' and only available to those with weekly incomes in excess of £3.<sup>441</sup> Based on the wage of a former ship's stoker turned boiler-firer in Manchester, Ali's income as a boiler-firer was likely to have been around forty-five to fifty shillings per week (£2 5s - £2 10s) without overtime.<sup>442</sup> Therefore, it was probably the further income provided by a lodger that enabled his family to escape the ever-present dust, smoke and din of the Don valley where they married. Moving up the Pennine hillside to 'The Manor', the family escaped one of the Britain's most industrially polluted areas, to reside in the clean air of this new municipal suburbia.

In the inter-war years of economic depression for northern Britain, the maintenance of an income capable of supporting life's bare necessities, such as an adequate roof over one's head, would have been both a source of anxiety and a strong motivating factor for all the immigrants. The consequences of failure to achieve this bare minimum can perhaps be seen in the death certificate for boiler firer Alabdin Khan (also known as Aloh Din), which noted that he died of 'chronic bronchitis and

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<sup>439</sup> N. Gray, *The Worst of Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in Britain* (London, 1985), pp. 73-74.

<sup>440</sup> Gisalic Amidulla, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Jan.-Mar. 1931, vol. 9c, p. 842.

<sup>441</sup> George Orwell, Notes and narrative on population, health, employment, housing, miners in Wigan, Barnsley and Sheffield, 1935-1936, London University: University College London Special Collections, pp.39-40.

<sup>442</sup> Gray, *The Worst of Times*, 25.

myocarditis' in Sheffield's workhouse hospital.<sup>443</sup> This is testament to the fact that the struggle for survival could be relentlessly tough during this period. Alabdin resided in a caravan in a local example of one of the damp shanties that existed in many northern towns during the inter-war period and this can have done little to ease the bronchitis that caused his death. By no means restricted to South Asians, these makeshift settlements were thrown up on many pieces of waste ground, in and

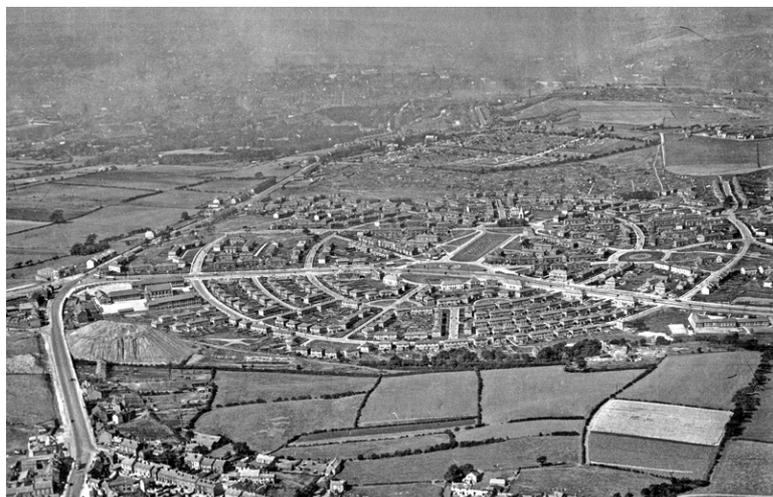


Figure 3.15 Sheffield's Manor Estate circa 1925. This social housing project was built on farmland to the south-east of the city centre. The smoke-filled atmosphere of the Don Valley's steelworks can be seen at the top of the picture. © Picture Sheffield

around Britain's larger towns and cities, as a response to the shortages of working-class housing in Britain, particularly for young couples, during the inter-war years. Orwell commented that the squalid conditions in similar dwellings outside Wigan '(had) to be seen to be grasped'.<sup>444</sup> In Manchester's Ancoats district, Patrick McGeown remembered unemployed and widowed steelworkers living in shacks built on their allotment

gardens.<sup>445</sup> Press reports also show the existence of several of these encampments around the Sheffield area, all without connection to gas, electricity, fresh water or main drains. Some were comprised of one or two 'vans', often the converted bodies of old buses, railway carriages or trucks, around farms or on waste ground at the fringes of the urban environment. At their worst, they could be improvised from canvas or even in animal enclosures.<sup>446</sup> A small number of South Asians reduced to van dwelling have been discovered by this study. These include not only Alabdin Khan, but also Lascar Hearn (likely a mis-transliteration of 'Lascar Khan') occupier of a caravan at Kitling Croft farm in Sheffield's Owlerton district. This was either in or adjacent to Sheffield's largest encampment of, perhaps, two hundred or so caravans on the city's Cambridge Grounds.<sup>447</sup> Similarly, Mucorrem Khan a man originating from the NWFP in July 1930 lived care of 'the van' in Smithfield Road, Gleadless, a village in Derbyshire, on the edge of Sheffield.<sup>448</sup>

<sup>443</sup> Alabdin Khan, d. cert.: GRO Sheffield district, March 1927, Volume 9c, p. 859.

<sup>444</sup> George Orwell, 'Notes and Narrative on Population, Health, Employment, Housing, Miners in Wigan, Barnsley and Sheffield, 1935-1936': University College London, Special Collections, p.5.

<sup>445</sup> McGeown, *Heat the Furnace Seven Times More*, 107.

<sup>446</sup> Couple living in a pig sty: *Daily Independent*, (Sheffield), 29 January 1923, p. 5.

<sup>447</sup> *Daily Independent* (Sheffield, 29 December 1931), p. 3; *Independent* (Sheffield, 3 February 1931), p. 6.

<sup>448</sup> TNA, HO 45/13880, Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Mucorrem (or Muccoran, or Mucorrem) Khan.

Children were born under these grim conditions. The BMD register shows that, in one of these makeshift homes, a son was born to Nore Dean and his wife Eunice at their van, off Poole Road, Darnall in 1924. Nore and Eunice wed the previous year and their marriage certificate shows Nore resident at a 'van' on Staniforth Road. Apart from their lack of a proper dwelling, the couple fit well the typical profile of Sheffield



Figure 3.16 Warris Khan circa 1935

native and South Asian newcomer.<sup>449</sup> Nore, a farmer's son, recorded as a 'ship's stoker (merchant service)' on his marriage certificate had, by the time of the birth of his child, taken up settled employment at a steelworks. Although Eunice's occupation at the time of her marriage is unknown, her family, headed by her engineer's fitter father, lived in the adjacent district of Attercliffe in Sheffield's East End and was of typical Sheffield working-class stock. By 1939, however, the couple are recorded as having escaped van dwelling and were living in a bungalow, also on Smithfield Road in Gleadless.<sup>450</sup>

### 3.9 Warris Khan: steelworker, seaman, entrepreneur

Another pioneering South Asian individual, and one of the first to make Sheffield his home, was Warris Khan. This man, a Pashtun, came from Behbudi, a village lying adjacent to his friend Rasool Khan's village of Nartopa in the Chhachh district of Punjab.<sup>451</sup> His personal history, like Rasool's, throws light on the working lives of the earliest South Asian settlers in the Sheffield area. Arriving in Sheffield, probably around the end of the First World War after service as a lascar, Warris Khan found work as a boiler firer at Brown Bayley's steelworks.<sup>452</sup> He stayed in employment there for at least ten years and, although he remained unmarried for many years, he became a central node on the social network of Pashtuns living and working in the area. Acting as witness to the marriages of friends, compatriots and fellow Pashtuns to natives of Sheffield, Warris also officiated, on occasion, as imam at Muslim funeral services.<sup>453</sup> While lodging in Sheffield's East End with Mrs Ann Winterbottom, not far from the Brown Bayley steelworks, Warris led the prayers at the funeral of fellow Pashtun and Brown Bayley boiler firer Ali Amidulla in March 1931. In 1932, probably due to the dwindling of the steel trade during the Great Depression, he returned to

<sup>449</sup> Nore Dean and Eunice Williams, m. cert.: GRO Sheffield district, Apr. -Jun. 1923, 9c,p. 1144.

<sup>450</sup> Nore Dean and Eunice are recorded with the surname 'Khan' in 1939. Their address in Gleadless now lies within the city of Sheffield: TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Chesterfield, R39/5960G/002/11-RCRO.

<sup>451</sup> Interview with Imam Sheik Mohammad Ismail, 2 February 2017.

<sup>452</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 17 December 1934), p. 1.

<sup>453</sup> Ali Amidullah, burial record, at

<[http://sheffieldindexers.com/BurialRecordsSearch.php?place\\_death=7%20Ravencar%20RD%20Manor%20Estate&forename=&surname=&current\\_page=1%22](http://sheffieldindexers.com/BurialRecordsSearch.php?place_death=7%20Ravencar%20RD%20Manor%20Estate&forename=&surname=&current_page=1%22)> (accessed 21 Feb. 2017).

sea as a merchant seaman along with his friend Rasool Khan. Employed under standard, rather than Asiatic, articles, Warris Khan's Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC or nully) shows the pair discharged from the tramp steamer SS *Beechpark* at Hull in February 1933.<sup>454</sup> However, while Rasool appears to have returned to Sheffield, Warris's nully shows that he returned to sea, again as a fireman, aboard the another tramp – the SS *Usworth*.<sup>455</sup> Press reports from December 1934 describe how this vessel was overwhelmed and foundered in hurricane force winds and heavy seas after leaving Montreal for Queenstown (Cobh), Ireland, with a cargo of grain.<sup>456</sup> After beginning to list, the crew abandoned ship and attempted to reach two vessels which arrived to give assistance. Due to the conditions, seventeen crew were lost, including two rescuers. However, Warris Khan was among the nine crew saved and he ensured that Mrs Winterbottom, his Sheffield landlady, was the first to be informed by telegram, that he had survived.<sup>457</sup>

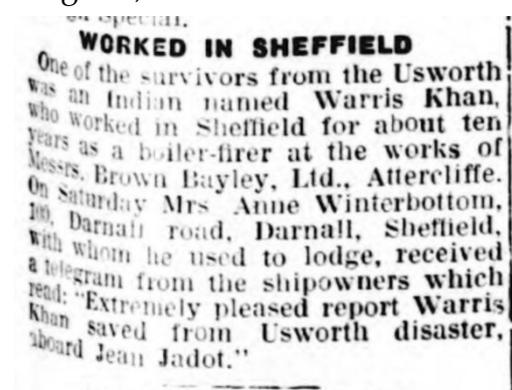


Figure 3.17  
Sheffield Independent, 17 December 1934

In 1936, the first child was born to Warris and his partner Iris Bradbury.<sup>458</sup> Another child followed in 1938 and, by 1939, he was again recorded as working as a boiler firer in a steelworks.<sup>459</sup> The couple cohabited a lock-up shop premises, on Darnall Road - the same road as his former landlady – and shared with Haslam Khan, a colliery boiler firer, and his wife, Iris. More children followed in 1940, 1942, 1943 and 1944.<sup>460</sup> In April 1946 Iris and Warris made their partnership official at Sheffield's register office and later that year their seventh

and final child was born.<sup>461</sup> The couple's marriage certificate shows them living at the same address as in 1939 and Warris still employed as a boiler firer. At some point in the next few years, after Rasool and family moved west to Liverpool, Warris, Iris and the children left Sheffield to head east and take on their own business – a fish and chip shop in Kingston upon Hull.<sup>462</sup> Like Liverpool, the Yorkshire port had, since the late nineteenth century become home to a population of South Asians, Arabs and other non-white seafarers and former seafarers and was a place with which Warris was

<sup>454</sup> TNA, Britain, Merchant Seamen, 1918-1941, BT349/CR1/ R 110210, Warris Khan.

<sup>455</sup> TNA, BT348/CR2/ R 110210, Warris Khan.

<sup>456</sup> <http://www.plimsoll.org/resources/SCCLibraries/WreckReports/14094.asp> (accessed 13 February 2017).

<sup>457</sup> *Sheffield Independent* (Sheffield, 17 December 1934), p. 1.

<sup>458</sup> Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1936, vol. 9c, p. 821.

<sup>459</sup> Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1938, vol. 9c, p. 751; TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Sheffield, RG101/3550H/006/42-KIRT.

<sup>460</sup> Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1940, vol. 9c, p. 1087; Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1942, vol. 9c, p. 798; Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1943, vol. 9c, p. 724; Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1944, vol. 9c, p. 866.

<sup>461</sup> Warris Khan and Iris Bradbury, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1946, vol. 9c, p. 1328; Khan, b. cert.: GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1946, vol. 9c, p. 885.

<sup>462</sup> Interview with Derek Khan, Glenda Munro and family, 12 December 2012.

familiar from his own seafaring days. Many of these settlers had, like Warris, Rasool and other men discussed in this section, arrived during the inter-war years.

As demonstrated by the examples of Warris Khan and Rasool Khan, a number of South Asians in Sheffield, even some of those men who appear to have been most settled, particularly those who had previously worked as lascars, appear to have maintained some ties to the sea. Abdul Ghani (also known as Abdul Gunni) from Jhelum, Punjab also typifies the multifarious working lives of many South Asians in Britain. Abdul wished to confirm his British subject status after some harassment from the local police who considered him to be an alien. The report compiled by police constable Frank Tunstall for the Home Office neatly sums up Abdul's background:

At 3 p.m. on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1930, I report that Abdul Gunni, age 29 years, a ship's engineer (coloured seaman) native of Jellum, Punjab, India, and now residing at 40, Cop Lane, Fleetwood, and his wife, Winifred Gunni, age 23 years, native of Sheffield, Yorkshire, of same address, called at this Office and stated that they wished to become registered as they were uncertain as to their nationality. Abdul Gunni is not a registered alien. He arrived in England at the port of Liverpool in 1919, then coming from New York, U.S.A., He worked in Liverpool at a Sugar Factory for a short time and came to Fleetwood in 1920. He has sailed out of Fleetwood for the past 10 years, as a ship's engineer on various Steam Trawlers, and is at present employed by Messrs. Taylor and Tomlinson, Limited, Fleetwood, as an engineer on Steam Trawler "Agnes Wickfield". On 8th May 1930, he married Winifred Jones, a barmaid of the Railway Hotel, Talbot Road, Blackpool, at the Kirkham Registry Office, and he produced Marriage Certificate, copy attached, together with original. Gunni is writing to the India Office at London and also to his home for his papers.<sup>463</sup>

After enquiries in India, Abdul's status as a British subject with the accompanying entitlement to live and work in Britain was confirmed. He continued to work as a fisherman for a number of years before being recorded as the Second Engineer of the Fleetwood trawler *Alvis* in September 1939. This vessel, with him aboard, is notable for being involved in one of the first maritime exchanges of the Second World War after being briefly captured, then released, by the German submarine U-35 in the north Atlantic.<sup>464</sup>

Tabili has argued that the fluidity of the working lives of South Asian immigrants was a response to 'discrimination in the British labour market exacerbated by inter-war shipping depression' and that 'many jobs available to colonized workers in Britain arguably constituted an occupational ghetto facilitating their super-

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<sup>463</sup> TNA, HO 45/15183, Nationality and naturalisation (Including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Abdul Gunni, 1933.

<sup>464</sup> *Chronicle* (Fleetwood), 22 September 1939); <http://www.u-35.com/ALVIS/>, accessed 19 April 2017.

exploitation in Britain as in the colonies.' Moreover, this discrimination, she continued, 'compelled men to adopt an economy of makeshift, shifting from one town to another in search of work.' With regard to those immigrants who took up peddling 'an insecure and financially tenuous but entrepreneurial occupation', Tabili has suggested that this relieved them of 'competing in a hostile labour market.'<sup>465</sup> The hostility South Asian and other non-white workers faced is not in doubt during the sporadic campaigns of the national seamen's unions against the employment of non-white labour on British merchant ships, not to mention those instances of race-rioting during 1919-1920 at the major ports. However, the evidence presented here suggests that, during the period as a whole, this line of argument does not necessarily hold, particularly for those individuals who travelled inland, away from the imperial dockside. Rather than being simply an 'economy of makeshift' necessarily undertaken due to the hostility of native workers and the institutions of the British state, the economic lives of non-elite South Asians in Britain can be characterized as being very much in line with the responses of many native workers to the hardships imposed by a faltering economy during the inter-war years, particularly in the industrial north of Britain. When South Asians were engaged in proletarian employment, as many in this study did, they do not appear to have been placed in an 'occupational ghetto' by employers in non-maritime industries. Neither do employers appear to have 'facilitated the super-exploitation, that is, under-compensation, of colonized workers in Britain as in the colonies.'

At this point in British labour history, colonial social relations had not yet been imported into the domestic labour market. South Asian immigrants do not appear to have been restricted to 'jobs which indigenous workers might reject', or that 'employers or other elites could both obscure and justify migrants' structural function as cheap labour.' While many were employed in the manual trades, this was entirely commensurate with their skills and was not, at this time, considered to be an occupation beneath the social status of similarly-skilled native workers. Those men who were employed as boiler firers were engaged in an activity crucial for the smooth running of works' machinery. Although not an occupation requiring the worker to have served an apprenticeship, boiler firing required a degree of skill accumulated only through experience. In the case of South Asian workers, this had been gained by maintaining the boilers and the head of steam in the stokeholds of merchant ships. Again, this occupation cannot be categorised as a marginal activity reserved for 'super-exploited' migrants.<sup>466</sup> Moreover, while not rejecting Tabili's assertion that employers 'play(ed) off migrants against local or native workers', enabling them to 'minimize remuneration for both groups', this does not appear to have been greatly utilised as a strategy outside the shipping industry during the period covered by this study.

Strategies of flexibility and creativity in employment enabled workers to diversify, either permanently or temporarily, away from what have often been viewed as the traditional post-war employment pattern of engagement within a single trade

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<sup>465</sup> Tabili, 'Ghulam Rasul's Travels', 61.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

over the working-lifetime of an individual. However, the ability to have a flexible employment strategy appears as a common thread running throughout the lives of many working-class people before the post-1945 boom. As a newcomer to depressed British domestic labour market, a South Asian man's strategy of makeshift was, like his native-British counterparts, based upon his ability to successfully maintain and develop a social network. Such a network could enable re-engagement in former occupations, as well as an ability to maximize opportunities for engaging in new ones. This strategy of makeshift might also be summed up in working-class vernacular as 'making your own luck' or having 'more than one iron in the fire'. This does not necessarily indicate an institutional discrimination which prevented free competition between South Asian immigrants and natives in the mainstream labour market, as suggested.

Rather, this creativity in the terms and types of employment was a strategy employed out of necessity by many working-class natives during the inter-war years. Alfred Green, a working-class memoirist and former resident of Sheffield's Attercliffe district recalled, 'many men were permanently unemployed, while others were subject to seasonal unemployment meant, strikes and lock-outs were not uncommon, and most people in regular work feared that they too might soon be jobless.'<sup>467</sup> Patrick McGeown's memoir of his life as a Manchester steelworker clearly demonstrates the response to the economic climate which pervaded much of the British working class during the inter-war years. Commenting on the endeavour of a friend in supporting his family during a period of short-time working and unemployment from the steelworks, McGeown found that:

This sort of self-sacrificing was awesome to me, and he intensified it when his children were born. He spent spare hours on the market gardens planting and harvesting celery and lettuce. In between signing on the Labour Exchange, he washed windows, delivered coal, clipped hedges, and concreted paths... I was never half so energetic as that, but the slack times were sharply separating thriving men from the dullards and there was something I had to do about it. So I went into business on Warrington Market with a fellow named Wally Stewart who was a furnaceman on the (same) shift as myself.<sup>468</sup>

One of Nigel Gray's interviewees – a man that had gone through a long period of unemployment in Manchester during the 1930s – came to the similar conclusion. 'You'd always get that type of person who would rise above the others and try to make a bob or two', he recalled.<sup>469</sup> In this spirit, McGeown and his friend obtained pedlar's certificates and, dressed in Santa Claus costumes run up by Stewart's wife, successfully sold children's toys from a sack at two pence a 'dip'. With half the profits from this seasonal venture they branched out into market trading, selling small wares

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<sup>467</sup> Green, *Growing up in Attercliffe*, 31.

<sup>468</sup> McGeown, *Heat the Furnace Seven Times More*, 112.

<sup>469</sup> Gray, *The Worst of Times*, 82.

(known as 'swag stuff' to the trade). They operated on their weeks off in towns up to thirty miles away and managed to make two pounds a day in good weather. McGeown stated that although their motivation was financial, petty trade also provided them with entertainment and stimulation as well as a degree of independence from what they both considered the more arduous and dispiriting jobs such as potato picking, delivering coal and concreting paths.<sup>470</sup>

McGeown's experience of makeshift was remarkably similar to the activities of the South Asian men examined in this section. At one point in the 1920s he even took up a small ice cream franchise from a Manchester-Italian neighbour. He pushed a handcart, 'complete with biscuits and utensils', through the streets of Ancoats, where almost all his customers were children.<sup>471</sup> Peddling was also an activity undertaken by many natives who had been laid off from their waged employment. The vast majority of the pedlar certificates preserved by the Rotherham Archives were issued to individuals in such circumstances. Some of the accompanying testimonials and employers' references show a range of previous occupations for this group including an ex-time keeper/clerk, a picture-house worker, a woman who had demonstrated Ewbank washing machines, and a fireman. Although many were individuals applying for pedlar's certificates to make ends meet in the short term, others, both men and women, had been peddling over a longer period. Many applicants were resident in the Sheffield area, living in regular houses, others occupied lodging houses and a smaller number occupied van dwellings of the type previously described. These were situated among the existing clusters of vans at the Feast Ground, Owlerton (also known as the Cambridge Grounds), at Sheffield's Blonk Steet fairground site and Old Sheffield Road on the edge of Rotherham.<sup>472</sup>

As we have seen in the case of Rasool Khan, musical entertainment was also an activity undertaken by the unemployed or underemployed during the inter-war years. McGeown remembered groups of ex-servicemen, some of whom were disabled, singing in the street for pennies, while others remembered the so-called 'tommy talker' bands. These bands of men, some in fancy dress played popular tunes of the day on kazoos. They were a regular feature of street life in and around Sheffield and the West Riding. As Alfred Green described it:

At any time of the morning or afternoon of a week day, one was liable to drop across the band of tired, dispirited, ex-servicemen, simulating a gaiety they did not feel, and trying to "knock up" a few coppers for themselves. Anything from a dozen to twenty-odd of them would turn out, and in the course of a couple of weeks, they would cover the whole area of Attercliffe. Dressed in tatty, pathetic fancy dress, each was provided with a "tommy-talker", which was inserted into some contraption devised by the owner, often remotely representing a musical instrument. For this purpose any old horn-shaped, or tubular

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<sup>470</sup> McGeown, *Heat the Furnace Seven Times More*, 112–113.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>472</sup> 'Roth, SY/546/C3/4'.

tin-can or bit of scrap iron was used. The ensemble produced an effect to which only a Rouault, or perhaps Lowry could have given a sympathetic representation, and the sound they produced was horrific. They limited their itinerary to Attercliffe, begging only from their own kind.<sup>473</sup>

Gladys Gibson, the UAB investigator, recalled an out of work silversmith who traded in 'anything he could afford to buy, from skipping ropes to fly papers.'<sup>474</sup> Another man remembered his twice weekly visits to the Labour Exchange and running the gauntlet of unlicensed hawkers: 'It were like something out of a play—a queue of blokes down each side of the road with trays and they'd got razor blades on and French letters, all kinds of things. Anything to make a bit of money.' With similar insight to McGeown, the man considered some individuals to have adapted more flexibly and creatively to the challenge of unemployment than others. In the following statement it becomes clear that an 'economy of makeshift', an *ad hoc* mix of waged labour, peddling and the manufacture of fancy goods, operating largely within, but sometimes without, the law, was a phenomenon which crossed ethnic boundaries across the British working-class during this period. Moreover, the economic activities of South Asian newcomers described in this section, as for native Britons in the inter-war years, can be summed up by this contemporary observer's analysis of contemporary economic survival:

Some people couldn't pay the rent and they just went to the workhouse. But there would be that type even then that had a bit of go in them. They'd build a little stock up and go round knocking on people's doors. They'd have nothing, only cuff links and collar studs, boot laces and candles. You wouldn't have give a pound for all that was there. I suppose the idea was to flog as many as they could and go and get some more and make a bob or two each time.<sup>475</sup>

### 3.10 Conclusion

Ballard underlines that the success of South Asian immigrants stemmed from their peasant culture as small-holding farmers.<sup>476</sup> While this cannot be said to hold true for Britain's indigenous industrial proletariat, there was a segment of workers whose creative response to periodic unemployment, short-time working and lay-offs was also defined by a 'psychological and financial independence'. From this comparison, we may conclude that the factor which defined the distinct nature of the employment strategies of South Asian immigrants was not its development as primarily a response to racial exclusion, but the remarkable transnational, trans-imperial character of the social networks they built. Originally based upon ties of direct kinship, *biradari* and

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<sup>473</sup> Green, *Growing up in Attercliffe*, 39. A refined version of the tommy talker band can be seen in Humphrey Jennings's short documentary film *Spare Time*, shot on location in Sheffield, Bolton, Manchester and Pontypridd.

<sup>474</sup> Gray, *The Worst of Times*, 55.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>476</sup> Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 10.

ethnicity, these networks became much more heterogeneous with the active inclusion of British working-class natives within them as wives, in-laws, neighbours, friends and workmates. Such networks connected peasant farms in the north-west of British India with the Sheffield area and many other towns and cities in Britain and facilitated not only immigration, but the settlement and gainful employment of their members. Many of the non-elite South Asian immigrants arriving in the Sheffield area had used their social networks, including those of kinship, to facilitate their recruitment as lascar seafarers. Their social networks also enabled newcomers to find employment in Britain as seafarers sailing on standard European articles out of British home ports at greatly enhanced rates of pay. The networks led men inland, away from the ports, to find employment in non-maritime occupations in industrial cities such as Sheffield.

We have also seen that, although these men's origins were in an agrarian, peasant economy with most lacking literacy or an elementary education, they demonstrated great facility in gaining employment in diverse occupations, from the traditionally proletarian, to petty trading and entrepreneurship. The flexible nature of the employment strategies of the men is demonstrated by their involvement in occupations as diverse as seafaring, boiler-firing, working in steelworks and collieries and selling toffee, fabric, clothing and small wares from trays, stalls in the street and door-to-door, and the fluidity with which many moved between the occupations of peasant farmer, lascar seafarer, proletarian, petty trader and entrepreneur. In terms of petty trade, we have observed that this could mean, particularly in times of war and shortage, working at the margins of, and sometimes beyond, the law.

In this section I have argued that a small but historically significant number of lascars moved beyond the marginal spaces ascribed to them by British imperialism of being 'neither peasant nor proletarian', as described by Balachandran. Rather, a number of South Asian immigrant men, particularly those who married natives and raised native families in Britain, were able to sufficiently release their grasp on the 'myth of return' to fully inhabit the roles they chose to assume within Britain. The section has also argued that the factor which defined the distinct nature of the employment strategies of South Asian migrants did not necessarily arise as primarily a response to racial exclusion – the 'economy of makeshift' argued by Tabili. Rather, they bear a distinct similarity to the highly creative responses to unemployment and underemployment among a significant number of indigenous workers during the Great Depression. The conclusion is therefore that it was the remarkable transnational, trans-imperial character of the social networks South Asian migrants built, that supported, facilitated and defined their working lives in Britain. Workers attracted to the Sheffield area not only utilised their existing social networks to make their way there but, as we shall see in Section 4, the newcomers further augmented them by their relations with natives as workmates, neighbours, friends and marriage partners.

## Section 4

### *Marriage and belonging*

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This section examines relationships between natives and newcomers by making full use of the opportunities for new research presented by the digitisation of source material, such as the GRO's BMD data and the 1939 Register. While focusing on the Sheffield area, it will situate what are variously termed 'inter-racial', 'ethnically-mixed' or 'mixed marriages', spatially within a regional and national context. In addition, the cultural, social, political and moral contexts within which these marriages took place will also be examined. The identities of the women who married South Asian newcomers will be explored, as will the day to day functioning of their unions; their role in their husband's acculturation to life in Britain; their adaptations to the cultural and religious preferences of their husbands, including how their children were raised; and their involvement as either assistant to, or equal partner with, their husbands in petty trade or in dealings with the authorities. The section will argue that, despite being the object of resistance by eugenicists, moral entrepreneurs, elements of the press, and functionaries within the local and national state, mixed-marriages persisted throughout the period. Moreover, by forming nodes within ethnically heterogeneous social networks, and anchor points for the British side of kinship-based chains of migration networks, this section will build on the argument of the thesis that mixed-marriages constituted a crucial element in the successful immigration of non-elite South Asian men to Britain, throughout the first half of the twentieth century and into the second half.

Little is known of the mixed marriages that occurred in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century. Even less is known of the overwhelming majority of them – those which took place among the British working classes. Despite some pioneering anthropological research by Sydney Collins in the 1950s, the historiography remained largely silent until the 1990s, when Laura Tabili began her analysis of labour and racial difference in late imperial Britain.<sup>477</sup> Her ground-breaking monograph on the intersection between race and class began the work of uncovering the role of the working-class women who 'not only sustained Britain's interracial settlements, but were critical participants in the breakdown of racial barriers.'<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*".

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

However, factual, empirical detail is still scant within the historiography and scholars remain heavily reliant on hostile sources, which must be read against the grain to in order to grasp a sense of the lived experience of racially-mixed couples. In 2005, Lucy Bland acknowledged that ‘largely missing’ from her account of ‘miscegenation fears in Britain after the Great War’ were the voices of ‘white working-class women and men of colour – women and men who negotiated their personal and sexual relationships in the face of a barrage of both official and cultural hostility.’ Bland argued that the experience of these couples and ‘the impact of prejudice upon them, and their strategies of survival and support, are areas of research both difficult to undertake but also essential for a fuller and richer picture of interracial relationships in the years after World War I.’<sup>479</sup> To this end, Carina E. Ray explored the difficulties faced by the English woman Ena Parker, her husband John ‘Akok’ Parker a native of the Gold Coast colony, and other native-newcomer couples. Ray has demonstrated that such couples frequently faced problems at the hands of the Home, India and Colonial offices of the British state.<sup>480</sup> Ray, Tabili and Tony Lane have all highlighted official interpretations of ‘race’ and citizenship which were often inconsistent and expedient, being largely contingent upon shifting rivalries between civil servants and their departments.<sup>481</sup> The couples often endured troublesome long-term dealings with the relevant departments of the state, not to mention the various social reformers and moral entrepreneurs who sought to reduce the incidence of ‘half-caste’ births among the working classes. Mark Christian’s close reading and analysis of the notorious so-called ‘Fletcher Report’ for the Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children has also been useful in picking out the very unscientific social and racial prejudices informing some ‘social-scientific’ investigations of the period.<sup>482</sup> Similarly, Simon Jenkins has analysed the authorities’ racialised anxieties about the ‘predatory sexuality’ of non-white men and its supposed links to high levels of prostitution and ‘miscegenation’ in the ports.<sup>483</sup>

Such historical work, particularly that of Chamion Cabbalero and Peter Aspinall, has gone some way toward creating the ‘fuller and richer picture’ called for by Bland.<sup>484</sup> However, while the vertical relationship of couples to the state has been examined in further depth, particularly in the archive-based work of Tabili, further research into the horizontal relationships between couples, their families and their neighbourhoods is required to add nuance and texture to the quotidian lived-experience of native–newcomer couples.<sup>485</sup> Aside from brief fragments in the archives of the Home Office and Colonial Office, such as the records of Ena Parker’s and

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<sup>479</sup> Bland, ‘White Women and Men of Colour’, 52.

<sup>480</sup> Ray, “‘The White Wife Problem’”.

<sup>481</sup> Lane, ‘The Political Imperatives of Bureaucracy and Empire’; L. Tabili, ‘Empire Is the Enemy of Love: Edith Noor’s Progress and Other Stories’, *Gender & History*, 17:1 (2005), pp. 5–28.

<sup>482</sup> Christian, ‘The Fletcher Report 1930’; Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports*.

<sup>483</sup> S. Jenkins, ‘Aliens and Predators: Miscegenation, Prostitution and Racial Identities in Cardiff, 1927–47’, *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4 (December 2014), pp. 575–596.

<sup>484</sup> C. Caballero and P. J. Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 2018.

<sup>485</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*.

Winnifred Gunni's interventions on behalf of their husbands, the voices of working-class women in mixed marriages are largely absent from the historical record. Moreover, while recognising the 'close personal, sociable, life-sustaining relationships that the colonial working poor in Britain and the local working poor were capable of forming', Balachandran argues that, due to the dearth of source material available, historians are forced to study this relationship through the eyes of those most hostile to it.<sup>486</sup> 'The social and spiritual world of racially and culturally mixed communities of Britain's urban working poor', he continues, 'only become available to us through the prurient gaze of middle-class observers peering through lenses clouded by class, racial, gender, sexual, and political anxieties.'<sup>487</sup> Balachandran's observation regarding these sources is useful in highlighting the nature of the hostility inter-racial couples faced and, significantly, from where it emanated. However, his pessimism regarding the availability of sources should, to some extent, be treated with caution. This thesis, for example, demonstrates the possibilities available to historians by the growing mass of newly digitised sources. These sources often lay outside the traditional archive, and population data, such as that provided by the GRO's records of marriages and births for the Sheffield area, are of particular interest. Once located, ordinary lives and everyday experience can, to some extent, be reconstructed from the fragments that remain in the historical records or within family history. Indeed, this has been a central project of this thesis.

#### **4.1 'His father is a blackguard, his mother a whore'**

Some of the sojourning men who arrived in Britain with the intention of finding employment before their return home formed the basis for a much longer-lived settlement. Perhaps the majority of South Asian men during this period, having deserted their ships and the Asiatic articles that bound them, continued seafaring under standard articles of employment. They inhabited the sailortowns of British home ports such as London's East End, Liverpool, Hull and Cardiff. As part of the itinerant nature of seafaring, many of these men would have resided only temporarily in these ports, probably availing themselves of the recreational facilities that sailortowns provided, and were vividly described by Stan Hugill.<sup>488</sup> Prostitution figured largely in sailortowns: the waterfront settlements whose economies were built on servicing the ships that docked – and the seafarers who crewed them. It is prostitution that self-consciously respectable social commentators characterised as the primary means of contact between non-white seafarers and non-seafaring natives. Described as 'plague spots of Oriental vice' by Anglican missionary Joseph Salter in 1873, the sailortown districts of British ports acquired distinctive reputations as being, in their strangeness, not quite British.<sup>489</sup> This marginality can be viewed in the littoral sense of being at the edge of the nation, facing out to sea, but also in the ability of the

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<sup>486</sup> G. Balachandran, 'Subaltern Cosmopolitanism in the Imperial Metropole Notes towards a Prehistory of Racism and Multiculturalism?', *Working Papers in International History*, 8 (2011), p. 8.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>488</sup> S. Hugill, *Sailortown*, (1967), pp. 95–113.

<sup>489</sup> Salter, *The Asiatic in England*, 13–18.



Figure 4.1  
*Amidst the music and comedy of Charlot's Revue, a dramatic sketch featured a blacked-up and coal-smudged Peter Haddon in the role of a 'menacing lascar drug trafficker'. © Mary Evans Picture Library*

shore leave. Not apparently hostile to the existence of such children, Priestley viewed in them a 'glimpse of the world of 2433, by which time the various root races, now all members of a great world state, may have largely inter-married and interbred'. Nevertheless, he defined their parents entirely by his far more narrow conception of working-class life and social relations within the nation's major ports. The children had, he imagined, 'mostly been begotten, born and reared in the most pitifully sordid circumstances'. Priestley found that although 'unusually attractive in appearance', this belied the fact that 'the riff-raff of the stokeholds and the slatterns of the slums... had served as their parents.'<sup>491</sup>

Like Priestley, the views outsiders held of waterfront communities were often of fascination or repulsion. In 'middlebrow' entertainments, aimed at an educated middle class, the lascar seafarer represented an embodiment of the potential to lure credulous women, weak of character or morally ambivalent, into a life of vice, which lead inevitably to social death. For example, by 1921, the stereotype was sufficiently ingrained for the famed theatrical impresario André Charlot to feature the character of a 'lascar drug trafficker' in *Charlot's Revue* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, in

sailortowns' display of louche cosmopolitan sociability to consistently outrage those whose conceptions of Britishness included a marked sense of racial order. On his visit to Liverpool, J.B. Priestley composed a pen portrait of the city's sprawling sailortown around the city's numerous docks. The district, formerly home to ship's masters and well-to-do merchants, presented him with a declinist vision of fading grandeur: 'the owners lived here no longer; the crew had taken possession. These were all slum tenements.'<sup>490</sup> Moreover, for Priestley, there was no doubt that the parentage of the many 'half caste' children he met at a local school were born of brief liaisons between prostitutes and their seafaring 'Johns' on

<sup>490</sup> Priestley, *English Journey*, 239.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

London's West End.<sup>492</sup> (Figure 4.1). Charlot would later introduce a musical sketch entitled *Limehouse Blues*, which featured the song written by Braham and Furber, and sung by Gertrude Lawrence & Jack Buchanan, in both the West End and on Broadway.<sup>493</sup> The lyrics portray the sadness of the hostess of a dancehall fronting a Chinese brothel in London's Limehouse district. The motif of the feckless or ingenuous white girl, inevitably entering the same world of moral degradation 'that the rest of them did', is clearly implied in the lyrics. In this way it draws on the sensation and moral panic that surrounded the case of Brilliant Chang and the fatal drug overdose of Freda Kempton in 1922.<sup>494</sup>

In Limehouse  
 Where yellow Chinkies love to play  
 In Limehouse  
 Where you can hear those blues all day  
 And they seem all around  
 Like a long, long sigh  
 Queer sob sound  
 Oh Honey Lamb they seem to cry  
 Oh! Limehouse kid  
 Oh! Oh! Oh! Limehouse kid  
 Going the way that the rest of them did  
 Poor broken blossom  
 And nobody's child  
 Haunting and taunting  
 You're just kind of wild  
 Oh! Oh! Oh! Limehouse blues  
 I've the real Limehouse blues  
 Learned from the Chinkies  
 Those sad China blues  
 Rings on your fingers  
 And tears for your crown  
 That is the story  
 Of old Chinatown<sup>495</sup>

Later in the inter-war period, the lascar seafarer as lover was deployed by Howard Clewes in the novel *Sailor Comes Home* (1938). His social-realist portrayal of a Welsh working-class family employed the lascar motif as a means to examine the attraction of the exotic racial Other for young women disillusioned with the staid dreariness of

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<sup>492</sup> Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News (London), 11 October 1921.

<sup>493</sup> S. Green, *Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre: An Updated Reference Guide to over 2000 Performers, Writers, Directors, Productions, and Songs of the Musical Stage, Both in New York and London* (New York, 1980), p. 253.

<sup>494</sup> Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', 44–46.

<sup>495</sup> *Limehouse Blues*, Philip Braham (music) and Douglas Furber (lyrics), 1922, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Limehouse\\_Blues](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Limehouse_Blues), accessed 6 March 2018.

British working-class life. The lascar seafarer, however, remains anonymous throughout the novel – an undeveloped character, no more than a plot device to emphasise the novel’s declinist mood of economic, moral and social decay.<sup>496</sup>

A sense of decadence accompanying population diversity and a clash of cultures also features in Howard Spring’s autobiographical *Heaven Lies About Us*. His lurid recollection of the Cardiff’s Bute Town district, (better known as ‘Tiger Bay’) at the beginning of the twentieth century demonstrates his sense of the otherness of inhabitants.<sup>497</sup> While Spring’s account of the Cardiff sailortown smacks of a combination of the child’s fascination and the novelist’s prejudices combined for literary effect, his description provides a sense of what Steven Vertovec has today termed ‘super diversity’. In Spring’s memory, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese, Indians, Arabs, and their families, all populated this small district. While Vertovec theorises that such diversity of population is an entirely new and dramatic change to the British population, ‘super diverse’ communities are clearly described by observers within Britain, from at least as early the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>498</sup> Pat O’Mara’s memoir of his early years in the slum tenements surrounding Liverpool docks also describes, what might be called, its ‘super diverse’ population. Here, ‘Negroes, Chinese, Mulattoes, Filipinos, almost every nationality under the sun, most of them boasting white wives and large half-caste families’, were O’Mara’s neighbours.<sup>499</sup> In his idiosyncratic description, laden with racialised language, he described some of the mixing within the local population.

The Negroes, many of whom were firemen and trimmers on the Elder Dempster “Monkey” boats, had their headquarters on Gore Street and Stanhope Street, at the foot of which, into the Coburg Dock, the Monkey boats used to come from sea. Not only were these ugly, tribal-scarred fellows from the West Coast of Africa accepted by white women as equals; many times they were considered the white man’s superior. The main reason, of course, was economic - they made far better pater familiae. Some families, like my mother’s, abhorred the practice of intermarriage, but it was so prevalent that they had to keep their beliefs to themselves. There were others who had great pride in our coloured neighbours...<sup>500</sup>

There is no doubt that prostitution formed part of the economic and social fabric of sailortowns, nor that non-white seafarers made up a proportion of prostitutes’ clientele. Nevertheless, despite O’Mara’s somewhat disapproving tone, the relations between the men and women he describes are that of husband and wife, not of prostitute and customer.

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<sup>496</sup> Clewes, *Sailor Comes Home*.

<sup>497</sup> Spring, *Heaven Lies About Us*, 29–30.

<sup>498</sup> Vertovec, ‘Super-Diversity and Its Implications’, 1024–1028.

<sup>499</sup> P. O’Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy* (Liverpool, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

Dada Amir Haider Khan, once free of his Lascar articles and working aboard United States' registered merchant ships, described how 'after a few drinks', when he and his shipmates were 'a bit inebriated', they would 'venture on the usual sailor's hunt'. Some seamen, he noted, visited prostitutes habitually and as frequently as possible, while other men abstained completely. Other men – presumably like himself – visited prostitutes only occasionally and preferably if 'facilities' were clean. This eventuality, Haider Khan made clear, was not to be encountered in Britain, where the trade in sex was illegal and women were not provided with regular health checks.<sup>501</sup> As Julia Laite notes, non-white seafarers' cafes and clubs often came under suspicion, or their proprietors were prosecuted for operating them as brothels, more-or-less covertly. However, she argues, these charges often reflected the authorities' anxieties and contempt for 'miscegenation'.<sup>502</sup> As I have underlined throughout this thesis, most of the sources available to researchers were generated by the authorities' surveillance and policing of dockland communities. As Simon Jenkins has cautioned, such material 'rarely provides a window for the historian to view the opinions and relationships of interwar multiracial communities, which are often obscured by stereotyping and generalizations.'<sup>503</sup> Nevertheless, what is clearer is that prostitution, although salient in the minds of those policing sailortowns, did not represent the defining relationship type between native women and non-white men within these communities.

Despite the reality of the situation in the ports, often in which slum dwellers eked out a subsistence at the margins of the nation, the authorities' fear of miscegenation and public immorality led to numerous and often eugenically inspired 'investigations' and campaigns to improve 'social hygiene'. With seafarers – particularly non-white seamen – men and women in mixed marriages and their 'half-caste' children as the target, the reports of such investigations were almost entirely hostile to the subjects of their enquiries. During this period, aspects of port-community life, particularly its working-class cosmopolitanism, although ostensibly viewed through the lens of the social and natural sciences, were judged according to *a priori* reasoning, according to set of preconceived standards of racial and moral propriety. Of these defects, it was the 'miscegenation' or 'race-mixing' by women of 'loose moral character' with non-white men that appeared as most salient to British social hygienists and eugenicists. This is a period in modern European history in which the anxieties of Western elites, regarding their claims to racial, moral and civilisational supremacy, came to the fore. Perceptions of Western cultural decadence and civilisational decline in the face of increasing claims to self-determination by colonised peoples, not to mention the fear of competing imperial aspirations among East Asian nations, were embodied in literature by the Fabian leftist H.G. Wells, philosopher Oswald Spengler, social commentator and novelist Jack London, and many writers of pulp and fantasy novels such as H.P. Lovecraft. Apart from the measured tones of Spengler's highly influential *The Decline of the West* (1918), all

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<sup>501</sup> Khan, *Chains to Lose*, 278.

<sup>502</sup> J. Laite, *Common Prostitutes and Ordinary Citizens: Commercial Sex in London, 1885-1960* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 138–140.

<sup>503</sup> Jenkins, 'Aliens and Predators', 577.

luridly described the resurgence of warlike 'Asiatic races' and the destruction of a fatally compromised Western civilisation.<sup>504</sup>

In the first half of the 20th century, and especially in the interwar period, the concerns about 'race-mixing' and 'race-decay' by elements of the British establishment became bound up with the enthusiasm of the middle-class and the intellectual elite for translating early genetic science theory into forthright eugenic social policy. Eugenic discourse was given a distinctly racial tone by publications such as the influential journal *Eugenics Review*. By 1920, its editor Leonard Darwin argued that 'race-crossing' (inter-marriage with the native population) as a consequence of eastern European (a euphemism for Jewish) and colonial immigration to Britain, was storing up unknown problems of heredity for future generations of 'Anglo-Saxons', perhaps even an unwitting 'race-suicide' as a consequence of failing to defend the nation's human genetic stock.<sup>505</sup> Among British eugenicists and racial ideologists, on both left and right of the political spectrum, it was of intense concern that the imperial British merchant fleet was bringing non-white seafarers and other immigrant groups to Britain in some numbers. These groups were considered to be undesirable populations, arriving in domestic ports with little regard for the potential consequences for the nation with the ensuing 'race-crossing' or miscegenation. In response, eugenicists argued for state intervention in the form of race-based restrictions on entry to the country. Non-white men, particularly African men, were considered uncivilised and incapable of assimilation due to their inherent racial inferiority. 'Miscegenation' with white women of low character would, they argued, lead to their unfortunate offspring to inherit both their father's racial traits and the moral delinquency their mothers.<sup>506</sup>

The influence these eugenic theories, particularly speculations on the meaning and extent of genetic 'racial' difference among human populations, were a major influence on those professionals, local state officials and moral entrepreneurs who concerned themselves with maintaining imperial standards of racial and moral propriety. Non-governmental organisations, such as the Eugenics Society, the British Social Hygiene Council (BSHC), and elements of the university settlement movement, particularly at Liverpool, generally saw themselves as performing the social mission of protecting society from the 'social evil' of 'miscegenation'. Journals and periodicals published regular reports that combined the prurient with the scientific and campaigned for state intervention into standards of policing and welfare. They described in detail their 'observations' on the 'frightful *misalliances*' of white women of a 'low type' and the 'coloured' men who populated British ports with their unfortunate 'half-caste' children. Moreover, they argued that the 'half-caste' children being born in Britain were clear evidence of the 'racial decay' occurring at the heart of the Empire.<sup>507</sup> Much source data on non-white immigration and settlement comes to us from the reports of eugenicist or 'socially concerned' non-governmental

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<sup>504</sup> H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London : New York, 1908); J. London, 'The Unparalleled Invasion', *McClure's Magazine*, 1910; O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York, 1927).

<sup>505</sup> *Eugenics Review*, January 1920 vol. 11, 4, pp. 210-215; April 1920, vol. 12, 1, pp. 38-40.

<sup>506</sup> Christian, 'The Fletcher Report 1930', 9-18.

<sup>507</sup> Fletcher, *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and Other Ports*, 10.

organisations, such as the BSHC, compiled during the inter-war period. Reports, such as Muriel Fletcher's *Report on an Investigation into the Colour Problem in Liverpool and other ports* for the Liverpool University Settlement; Captain F.A. Richardson's survey *Social Conditions in Ports* for the BSHC; and the 1944 local Church of England council report compiled by Phyllis Young - *Investigations Into Conditions of the Coloured Population in a Stepney Area*, all demonstrated a morally charged, frequently eugenic, racial intent that problematised non-white seafarers, their native wives and their children.<sup>508</sup> In the press, Captain Richardson expanded on the conclusions of his survey and dismissed an entire population within a port community, and in a manner which would have been unthinkable of European seafarers and their families:

Hundreds of Arabs and other coloured seamen have settled in the city... They come into intimate contact with white women, principally those who unfortunately are of loose moral character, with the result that a half-caste population is brought into the world. The half-caste girl is characteristically disinclined to discipline and routine work, and efforts made to encourage and train her have mostly met with failure.<sup>509</sup>

Here we see, clearly expressed, the antipathy of persons with social influence and moral authority toward couples in mixed marriages and the children of these unions. Mark Christian has gone further and suggests that Muriel Fletcher's investigation for the Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children was 'the pivotal stigmatising report to be published in the history of poor 'race relations' in Liverpool and 'can be regarded as a nadir in the Liverpool mixed heritage population's struggle to secure a positive social identity.'<sup>510</sup> This is a period in modern British history characterised by Chamion Caballero and Peter Aspinall as the 'era of moral condemnation'.<sup>511</sup>

Sheffield, as an inland city, lay outside the spotlight of, sometimes intense, scrutiny to which communities were subjected by campaigners, such as Fletcher.. Sheffield's press, however, did not refrain passing judgement on the 'problems' of 'half castes' and mixed marriages in other areas of the country. To this end, they occasionally published syndicated articles, columns, literary and theatrical reviews that questioned the inadvisability of women entering into marital relationships with 'coloured' men. Very occasionally, local public officials would make their views known regarding their resistance to the presence of non-whites in the city. A

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<sup>508</sup> Pauline M. H Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics, and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, Its Sources and Its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 34–35; Fletcher, *Colour Problem*; TNA, HO 213/308, Welfare in ports, 1935; TNA, MT 9/3952, Seamen's Welfare (Code 124): Seamen's Welfare (Code 124): Report on condition of life of coloured population in Stepney and comments on general conditions of seamen, white and coloured, 1944.

<sup>509</sup> *Western Mail*, (Cardiff), 9 July 1935.

<sup>510</sup> Christian, 'The Fletcher Report 1930', 218–219.

<sup>511</sup> Caballero and Aspinall, 'The era of moral condemnation: Mixed race people in Britain, 1920–1950', British Academy Small Grants Scheme 2006–2007, award number SG-47233; Caballero and Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 17–19.

newspaper feature from 1938 illuminates the paternalistic racism of the Superintendent Registrar for Sheffield. The registrar, Mr. W. Fergusson, candidly remarked to the *Daily Independent* that, as the officer responsible for marrying couples, he considered it a part of his duties 'to draw the parties aside and give certain advice', with the result that 'it has often happened that the English girl has withdrawn from her intention to marry a coloured man'.<sup>512</sup> Notwithstanding Fergusson's 'certain advice', we still have, however, records of sixty-one local couples who were prepared to defy the racial logic of local officials.

Generally speaking, the tone of the discourse in the press and periodicals is, that described by Cedric Dover, author of *Half Caste* (1937), in his biting critique of contemporary racial thinking. Dover highlighted what he viewed as the hypocritical assumptions about racial difference made by many contemporary liberal and progressive cultural figures. For Dover, 'the half-caste' was, more often than not, presented as 'an undersized, scheming and entirely degenerate bastard. His father is a blackguard, his mother a whore.'<sup>513</sup> He went on to suggest that

'it is not only the neo-literati who have been having such a hell of a good time... Eugenists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and politicians have joined in with zest. They have contributed a vast mass of pseudoscience to the more delicate technics of bastard baiting and bluffing, and to the creation of a consciousness of genetic guilt in the *sang mêlé*'<sup>514</sup>

Listing numerous texts, theatrical and cinematic productions of the period, by luminaries such as Noël Coward, Laurens van der Post and Eugene O'Neill, Dover summed up the prevailing attitude of much of the Western cultural elite toward 'miscegenation' and people of mixed race.

#### **4.2 The myth of return, first contacts and mixed marriage**

As Shaw noted, immigration to Britain from the Indian subcontinent was, until the 1970s, a largely male phenomenon – overwhelmingly so for those from the territory that became West Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.<sup>515</sup> This remained the case until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when women from the subcontinent began to arrive in number, during what she termed the years of 'family reunion'.<sup>516</sup> As an illustration of this fact, the summary data tables of the 1961 Census for Sheffield indicate that, of the 582 in the city born in Pakistan, only sixteen were female.<sup>517</sup> As we have seen in Section 3, the migration was also, primarily, an economically motivated phenomenon that comprised men sojourning abroad, working for a number of years, while remitting regular cash sums to support their families. With luck, a successful

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<sup>512</sup> Sheffield *Daily Independent*, 29 Oct. 1938.

<sup>513</sup> C. Dover, *Half-Caste* (London, 1937), p. 13.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>515</sup> Shaw, 'Kinship, Cultural Preference and Immigration', 322–323.

<sup>516</sup> Shaw, *Kinship and Continuity*, 37.

<sup>517</sup> For Indians, there were 136 males to 76 females: Census 1961: England and Wales, County Report, Yorkshire, West Riding (London, 1963), 54.

man might also accumulate a cash reserve to settle family debts, enhance landholdings, and embellish his own social capital upon return to homeland and kin. It is unlikely that many South Asian immigrant men harboured an ambitions that their British sojourning would extend to marriage. They were often committed to improving life back at home for their families and to return to them. As Indian subjects of the King-Emperor, they were also formally British subjects, therefore we should not view marriage to a native Briton as a necessary means to attain citizenship. Indeed, documentary evidence shows that a number of men, such as Sultan Mohamed, Abdul Sobhan and Abdul Rahman were in endogamous relationships with natives of the subcontinent when they arrived in the Sheffield area.<sup>518</sup> Nevertheless, a significant number did marry out of their ethnic group and *biradari*, cancelled, or indefinitely postponed, their permanent return home after partnering with a native British woman with whom they settled down – usually to raise a family together. For these men, arguably the key event transforming them from sojourning immigrant workers into settlers was their marriage to, or partnership with, a British-born woman, and particularly the birth of their children. It is relationships such as these, that comprise a central theme of this thesis.<sup>519</sup>

During the later period of ‘family reunion’ described by Shaw, men reunited in Britain with wives from pre-existing marriages or brought over brides married according to tradition within the broader kinship group or *biradari*.<sup>520</sup> Nevertheless, in the earlier phase of immigration during the first half of the twentieth century, it was highly unusual for a man to have a wife, born on the subcontinent, with him in Britain. Although in terms of culture and religion, South Asian origins still imparted a significant influence on settling men’s lives, marriage to a native woman and the arrival of children no doubt had a settling influence on young male immigrants. It recentred their attentions onto their new native family and away from their intended return to village life and blood relatives in the short, to medium, term.<sup>521</sup> A migrant’s new family reduced for him the influence the myth of return – the dominant social narrative among sojourners – encapsulated and reinforced their shared sense of purpose while away from their homeland. Dahya describes it thus:

Here, the myth enables the migrants to keep alive social relationships, the chain of communication and movements between the village and Britain, which in turn enable the migrant and his village-kin group to persist as a cohesive group for mutual aid, for mobilizing socioeconomic resources and for social control. Also, the myth is a

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<sup>518</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Jobar household, Sheffield, RG 101/3562C/009/12-KIVY; Wosman household, RG 101/3565I/008/39-KIXC; BL, IOR, L/E/7/1321, File 4570, Workman’s Compensation Act 1900.

<sup>519</sup> A term this thesis borrows to refer to formally constituted state registered unions, those formally constituted according to religious law but not state registered, and those informal, unregistered unions commonly known as ‘common law marriages’.

<sup>520</sup> Shaw, *Kinship and Continuity*, 55.

<sup>521</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 24–25.

means whereby the migrants are able to make a socio-psychological withdrawal from a commitment to the norms of the wider society.<sup>522</sup>

The myth of return undergirded the migration and employment strategy as discussed in the preceding sections. A man aimed to work in Britain for five years or so during which time,

... the migrant continue(d) to re-affirm his adherence to the myth of return because for him to do otherwise would be tantamount to renouncing his membership of the village community and the village-kin group in Britain-for these groups together form a single whole, and for a migrant to opt out of one means opting out of the other as well. The myth is an expression of one's intention to continue to remain a member of both of them...<sup>523</sup>

Notwithstanding the commitment to the village and kinship group the myth of return represented, evidence suggests that a number of men effectively subdued or terminated their adherence to it. As the testimony of settlers who arrived during the interwar period attests, a number of them indefinitely postponed a final return to their villages of origin or consciously decided to make their home in Britain – particularly the case for the men whose relationship resulted in children such as Rasool Khan.

With competing demands on loyalties and the finances to maintain obligations, marriage to a native, must also have meant some attenuation, or even termination, of remittances home. Rather than effecting a break in the chain of migration, however, marriage appears to have actually promoted further migration of a settler's kin, co-villagers and former shipmates. Moreover, many of these alliances with British-born women provided secure anchor-points for the kinship-based chains of migration that developed between Britain and the Indian subcontinent and would continue up until the period of mass immigration in the 1950s and early 1960s. This is borne out by the fact that most of today's Pakistani, Kashmiri and Bangladeshi migrants originate in the very same, highly distinct geographical districts, as the men who settled in the 1920s and 1930s. For example the men who applied to the Home Office and at India House for Special Certificates of British Nationality and Identity to be certified as British subjects, or British Protected Persons, originated in NWFP (today Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), northern Punjabi districts on the Jhelum and Indus rivers (particularly Chhachh near Attock), districts around the town of Mirpur in today's Pakistan administered 'Azad' Kashmir, and the area surrounding Sylhet in Bangladesh.<sup>524</sup>

This study has also located a number of native-newcomer households which, at the time of being recorded in official documents, hosted a lodger, possibly a

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<sup>522</sup> Dahya, 'Pakistanis in Britain', 268–269.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>524</sup> For example: TNA, HO 45/20432, Subkhana Deen from NWFP; PRO, HO 45/13781; Nadra Rasmal Ali from Jammu and Kashmir; R. Ballard, 'The Context and Consequences of Migration: Jullundur and Mirpur Compared', *New Community*, 11:1/2 (1983), pp. 117–136.

kinsman of the husband, from the subcontinent. For example, the marriage certificate for Rasool Khan and Elsie Peters shows that, at the time of his marriage, Rasool lived at Paulet Road on Sheffield's Manor estate. The previous year, this was recorded as the address of Hilda Johnson on her certificate of marriage to another newcomer, Willy Khan. Willy was himself accommodated at another address on the same estate. After Hilda and Willy's marriage it is likely that Rasool lodged with the couple until his marriage to Elsie Peters in June 1928. After Willy and Hilda moved to nearby Rotherham, the same house was home, in 1930, to Maria Cooke, who married Rasool's friend Yousaff Aboo Khuresee.<sup>525</sup> Their marriage certificate also provides an insight into the developing social network among natives and newcomers as the witnesses at the register office were Rasool and Ivy Badloe, the wife of his Pashtun friend Jim Badloe. The 1939 Register records that Jim, Ivy Badloe and their son Cyril hosted Dadoo Khan, a seafarer and boiler firer.<sup>526</sup> Jim (also known as Mohamed Noor), a steelworker (aged 45) and his spouse Ivy (aged 40) were married in Sheffield nineteen years earlier in 1920.<sup>527</sup> They appear to have been a very settled household by 1939, accommodated in modern, city-corporation built social housing with both Jim and Cyril employed at a local steel mill. Their lodger Dadoo Khan (aged 45) was, at the time the census enumerator visited, in transition from seafaring to land-based employment and his situation illustrates clearly the sojourning to settler immigration process.

Another early arrival in Sheffield, Ahmed Wosman (aged 55), a boiler firer, is recorded in the 1939 Register as hosting another immigrant man at his home on the Arbourthorne estate – another suburban municipal housing project adjacent to the Manor estate.<sup>528</sup> The Register, enumerated in September, does not record the fact that Constance, Ahmed's wife of twenty years, had died in childbirth in April of that year, along with their baby, also named Constance in memory of her mother.<sup>529</sup> However, two of the three surviving Wosman children were present in the household in September 1939, including Miriam (18) who worked as a machine filer. Also present were two lodgers – Thomas Green (27) a general labourer and Abdul Rahman (36) a 'variety artist'. The 1939 Register also shows Warris Khan (37) and his partner Iris (24) playing host to Haslam Khan (39), a boiler firer at a local colliery.<sup>530</sup> Also present at their home above a lock-up shop in the Darnall district of Sheffield were their two young children aged one and three years. Warris and Iris went on to formalise their

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<sup>525</sup> Yousaff Aboo Khuresee and Maria Gertrude Cooke, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1930, vol. 9c, p. 1155.

<sup>526</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Badloe household, Sheffield, RG101/3563A/021/42-KIWF.

<sup>527</sup> Jim Badloe and Ivy Swain, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan. – Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 778.

<sup>528</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Wosman household, Sheffield, RG101/3565I/008/39-KIXC.

<sup>529</sup> Ahamed Wosman and Constance Goodwin, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan. – Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 885; Constance Wosman, birth certificate (hereafter, b. cert.): GRO, Births, Sheffield, Apr. – Jun. 1939 9C 623; Constance Wosman, d. cert.: GRO, Deaths, Sheffield, Apr. – Jun. 1939 9C 446.

<sup>530</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Sheffield, RG101/3550H/006/42-KIRT.

relationship at the Sheffield register office in April 1946 around the time of the birth of their seventh child.<sup>531</sup>

Native-newcomer couples who provided hospitality and accommodation were recalled in the memories of many of the South Asian immigrants who arrived in Britain from the 1920s to the 1960s. For instance, Nawab Ali arrived in London from Sylhet in August 1939, after jumping ship at Cardiff. He at first stayed with a friend and his 'half-caste' wife. Then he was taken to London where he stayed at the house of another man and his English wife. He found casual work in catering until he found regular employment in Coventry.<sup>532</sup> Fazol Karim deserted his Clan Line ship at London in 1947 with the intention of making his way to his cousin Lala Miah and his white wife in Cardiff. Lala Miah worked as a seafarer under standard articles and Fazol Karim wished to gain the couple's aid in signing on with a new ship. However, in this case, he was prevented from leaving London by his cousins who disapproved of mixed marriages and who feared Fazol Karim would do the same. Nevertheless, he met an English woman in London who he eventually married and settled down with in Birmingham.<sup>533</sup> A settler in a Sheffield oral history survey recalled his first arrival in Bradford from Attock, on the edge of the Chhachh district in 1952. After being first looked after by the father of his friend's English wife, the native-newcomer couple provided him with a little money and some clothes before he made his way to Sheffield.<sup>534</sup> In 1945, Chand Miah arrived in Bradford after jumping ship at Tilbury. There he was accommodated at the house of a fellow Sylheti man, his white wife and their four young children. According to Chand Miah:

I could not speak English, so for the first few days I stayed indoors. His wife was very good... very good to me, she would get me whatever I needed. Still there was no rice available so we had to live on bread. She used to buy lots of fruit for me. Two of her children were under school age, so when she went out I used to look after those two for her.<sup>535</sup>

In this way, many single and married men, often kinsmen, but also co-villagers, countrymen or shipmates of the husband were assisted by couples in mixed marriages. The role native British wives played in the immigration of South Asian men extended to assisting or partnering their husbands in formal and informal commercial ventures which also aided new arrivals, such as lodging houses and cafes.

Social networks that straddled, and looked beyond, the racial categories imposed by empire, played an important role, not only in accommodation and the acculturation and orientation of newcomers, but also in the support of couples who endured the hostile attentions of state officials. As we have seen, despite his British subject status, Abdul Gunni, a ship's engineer hailing from Punjab and working

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<sup>531</sup> Warris Khan and Iris Bradbury, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr. – Jun. 1946, vol. 9c, p. 1328.

<sup>532</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 72–77.

<sup>533</sup> Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, 24–25.

<sup>534</sup> M. Iqbal, S. Ara, and R. Van Riel, *Just For Five Years* (Sheffield, 1990), pp. 1, 13–14.

<sup>535</sup> Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, 56.

trawlers out of Fleetwood, Lancashire, was registered by the local police under CASO and lived under police surveillance. Abdul's Sheffield-born wife, Winifred, with the encouragement and support of her friends, insisted on 'the necessity to establish his position as a British subject'. Her intervention and persistence in defending his British status eventually persuaded the Home Office to overturn their original ruling.<sup>536</sup> The case of the Gunnis provides an example not only of the role wives often played as advocates for their husbands, but also of a native friendship network that continued to support the couple, despite Winifred's marriage to (in the words of the police and the Home Office) a 'coloured alien'. Native British wives often played a significant role as day-to-day advocates for, and administrators of, their husband's business dealings and encounters with the various arms of the state. Collins observed that the Arab immigrants of Tyneside and Cardiff, like many of the South Asian men in the Sheffield study, were illiterate in their native language and also had great problems mastering spoken English sufficiently to make themselves understood to officials and those in authority. For them, he noted, the white wife acted as interpreter, a go-between with officialdom, and gave their husbands a 'sense of security' when talking to English speakers:

The effect of this relationship gives to the man a feeling of reliance on the woman. Her presence gives him a feeling of security. It is remarkable to observe the relief and relaxation that is shown by an Arab, when his wife enters into a conversation in progress between himself and another person speaking English.<sup>537</sup>

Many of the retired seafarers interviewed by Adams stated that their first destination after jumping ship was either a cafe or a boarding house run by a fellow migrant. These proprietors played a pivotal role in aiding the successful transition of the migrants from maritime to land-based employment in Britain. They helped find, or provided, employment, accommodation and often offered credit to men short on funds. Furthermore, they advised on how to acquire crucial documents such as the Special Certificate of Nationality and the seafarer's Continuous Discharge Certificate (CDC or 'nully') which allowed Indians to sign on with a British ship on European articles.<sup>538</sup> The 1939 Register shows an example of a native British wife's role in a commercial enterprise which aided the social network of her husband. Here, the couple Ahmed and Mary Ali accommodated Mohammed Ahmed, a ship's fireman. Mary's husband was also a seaman while she is recorded as being a cafe proprietor, probably catering to a seafaring clientele at the address in Hull's sailortown district.<sup>539</sup> Such cafes were essential nodes in the social networks of non-white seafarers and

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<sup>536</sup> TNA, HO 45/15183: Nationality and Naturalisation (including Certificates of British Origin): Special Certificate of Nationality (Coloured Seamen): Abdul Gunni, 1933.

<sup>537</sup> Collins, 'The Social Position of White and "Half-Caste" Women in Colored Groupings in Britain', 801.

<sup>538</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 150–151, 19, 209–210.

<sup>539</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Ali household, Hull, RG101 / 3163D / 003 / 11-JATR.

often one of the first points of contact for lascar seafarers after jumping ship. The Sylhetti seafarer Haji Kona Miah described how, after leaving his ship at Liverpool, he took the train to London where he could be certain to find his countrymen. He made his way to a cafe at 76 Commercial Street in the East End - a well-known meeting place for Bengalis, run by Ayub Ali. Here he linked up with settled men who could provide temporary accommodation and help find him employment. Ayub Ali also operated a lodging house at 13 Sandys Row, well known among Sylhetti seafarers as a first point of contact for those jumping ship or in need of assistance with documentation, employment, arranging the remittance of money back to families in Sylhet, and other welfare matters.<sup>540</sup> Indeed, informal arrangements for accommodation, such as boarding houses and shared rooms, remained a crucial element for the migration of men from the Indian subcontinent well into the second half of the twentieth century. For example many of the men interviewed by Iqbal, who arrived in Sheffield from West Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s, knew the address of a contact, often a kinsman, who could either provide, or point them in the direction of, temporary shared accommodation.<sup>541</sup> Ayub Ali advised Syed Ali on the process of successfully seeking employment in Britain and to move to Birmingham. There Syed met a fellow Sylheti and his white wife who advised him on how to secure a job at the Birmingham Small Arms factory in Small Heath some time in 1944. He recalled that 'most of the Sylheti expatriates married white wives. Eventually I too bought a house and got married to a local girl.'<sup>542</sup>

The 1939 Register and Home Office documents for the 1930s also indicate that the kind of informal lodgings and communal living arrangements – a notable feature of the 1950s and 1960s period of South Asian immigration to Britain – were in evidence during the interwar period. In Sheffield, in 1939, Asmail Mohammed and his wife Ethel accommodated a mixed household of five other Muslim and Sikh men, four of whom were engaged in the peddling trade. A similar, although much more crowded, situation was found by Choudhry Mohammed Walayat upon his arrival in Sheffield in 1961. His new home accommodated ten people, including a native-newcomer couple, in a three bedroom house.<sup>543</sup> This situation gives an indication of how crowded the informal lodging houses of Sheffield, such as that of Julia Peters, may have been during the inter-war period.

Marriages, whether or not validated by the state, provided secure, family-centred safe havens for new arrivals and anchor points for further kinship-based chain migration.<sup>544</sup> The continuity in the role of the native–newcomer family household in immigration and settlement is apparent in interviews with men who settled before, during and after the Second World War, and into the era of mass immigration. It is likely that South Asian men arriving in Britain were able to find accommodation with kinsmen or countrymen in native-newcomer marriages throughout the century, up

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<sup>540</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 42; Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, 96.

<sup>541</sup> Iqbal, Ara, and Van Riel, *Just For Five Years*.

<sup>542</sup> Choudhury, *Sons of the Empire*, 98.

<sup>543</sup> Walayat MBE and Cornwell, *Made in England*, 30.

<sup>544</sup> D. Holland, 'The Social Networks of South Asian Migrants in the Sheffield Area During the Early Twentieth Century', *Past & Present*, 236:1 (August 2017), pp. 265, 268.

until the period of 'family reunion' from the late 1960s onwards, as identified by Shaw.<sup>545</sup> Indeed, the role of native-newcomer marriages and native-British wives in the immigration process appears to have been crucial to the successful sojourning or settlement of South Asian men during the period. Ballard concludes that:

...only a tiny minority of newcomers arrived in Britain as lone adventurers with no prior contacts whatsoever. Of course the very earliest pioneers must indeed have done so long ago. But this phase did not last long. Having established themselves, each of these early pioneers soon became a bridgehead through which the entry of a whole stream of kinsmen and fellow villagers was facilitated.<sup>546</sup>

This thesis, while in agreement with Ballard's general conclusion, would add that the role of British natives, particularly native British women, largely from working-class backgrounds, played a highly significant, if not crucial, role in the successful establishment of the earliest pioneers. Indeed it was the family homes established, along with their South Asian husbands, that formed the 'bridgeheads' for the ongoing 'stream of kinsmen and fellow villagers' referred to by Ballard.

Rozina Visram and Caroline Adams have drawn similar conclusions about the role of natives in the successful settlement of South Asian newcomers. Visram highlights the role of 'the many white women, friends, wives and helpmates without whose support these migrants would not have been able to establish themselves so successfully'.<sup>547</sup> For Adams, many of the women who closely associated with South Asian migrants 'were loyal and generous' and that 'without [their] help and support the early pioneers would not have settled so successfully.'<sup>548</sup> Collins emphasised that some of the women who took in lodgers or managed boarding houses 'were relied on as confidantes and advisors to many men, not to mention the practical help that (was) given.' Moreover, he continued,

Young men arriving in Britain for the first time are sometimes taken under their care. Their homes provide centers in which men meet their male friends. They are highly esteemed by the community, and the men sometimes address them as "Missus"-a term of recognition among them of a woman of higher social position. Colored men in these groups believe that understanding and assistance can invariably be obtained from white women where the men are unsympathetic and unhelpful. One declared that the women are colored men's best friends in Britain. They have seldom failed to help when the men are in need. They often do this at the risk of suffering from men of their own race.

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<sup>545</sup> Shaw, *Kinship and Continuity*, 37.

<sup>546</sup> Ballard, 'Introduction - The Emergence Of Desh Pardesh', 11.

<sup>547</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 258.

<sup>548</sup> Adams, *Across Seven Seas*, 48.

He then asked, “What would happen to colored men in this country if it had not been for the women?”<sup>549</sup>

The lodging arrangements of many of the pioneer immigrants may well have been how they first came to meet their native-British brides. The addresses of single women appear as the given addresses of grooms on marriage certificates – both for their own marriage and for that of another couple. For instance, Adeline Peters and Somander Khan shared the same address at Washford Road in Sheffield’s Attercliffe district at the time of their marriage at the local Emmanuel Church in 1923. We know from Rasool Khan’s daughter’s testimony that her great grandmother Julia Peters took in lodgers at this address, and that Jim Badloe first stayed with them upon his arrival in Sheffield. The 1911 Census confirms that the detail of this testimony is correct and shows that both Julia Peters and daughter Adeline (then aged twelve), were both resident at this address and took in lodgers.<sup>550</sup> It is therefore likely that Adeline met Somander while he lodged with the family a few years later. Indeed, Rasool’s daughter stated that he met her mother Elsie Peters – Julia’s granddaughter – through his friend Jim Badloe, who kept in touch with the family at this address.<sup>551</sup> This small example also demonstrates the everyday interactions between natives and newcomers which began to embed the newcomers into Sheffield life and into close liaison with its natives through marriage ties. As Tabili points out, ‘relations between migrant lodgers and native landladies often did segue into the most common, or at least best-documented role native women played in migrants’ experience, that of wife’.<sup>552</sup>

Ali Amidulla and Maggie Windle likely met in similar circumstances. Although we do not know exactly when first met (most likely around the end of the First World War), we do know that they married in March 1920. Their marriage certificate shows they chose a Church of England ceremony at Christ Church, Attercliffe, in preference to the secular wedding offered by the city’s register office. The certificate also shows that the couple gave a shared address, 27 Eadon Road, Sheffield to the parish priest: Maggie’s family home just round the corner from the Brown Bayley steelworks.<sup>553</sup> The death of Maggie’s father in 1906 appears to have necessitated her mother’s decision to take in lodgers. The census return for 1911 shows her mother, Charity, accommodating herself, her three daughters and three lodgers: a tailoress, a coal miner and a steelworker.<sup>554</sup> That the Windle family home became a small boarding house makes it a distinct possibility that nine years later Ali, the young South Asian migrant, was himself the Windles’ lodger when Maggie formed her

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<sup>549</sup> Collins, ‘The Social Position of White and “Half-Caste” Women in Colored Groupings in Britain’, 801.

<sup>550</sup> TNA, Census Returns for England and Wales 1911, class RG 14/28001, Ct.2, 4 Washford Road, Sheffield.

<sup>551</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

<sup>552</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, 154.

<sup>553</sup> Gisalic Amidulla and Maggie Windle, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 787.

<sup>554</sup> TNA, Census Returns for England and Wales 1911, RG 14/28005, 27 Eadon Road, Sheffield.

attachment to him. If this was the case, it would reflect the experience of a number of other native–newcomer couples in this study.

In slightly different circumstances, Ali Ahmed Khan (aged thirty-eight) shared the same address as his wife Edna May Marshall at the time of their marriage in 1937. Further investigation shows that this was a private lodging house run by a Mrs Ethel Andrews who catered to a varied clientele of consisting manual workers, clerks and university students from British colonies.<sup>555</sup> Mrs Andrews, widowed during the war years, herself married one of her tenants in 1947, demonstrating that opportunity for close social contact between the sexes afforded by lodging houses was not an unusual occurrence.<sup>556</sup> Unfortunately, Edna May's occupation was not recorded on her marriage certificate but, at the ceremony, the registrar entered her groom's occupation as 'artificial silk salesman', indicating his involvement in the peddling trade. Sadly, however, their marriage was to be a brief one. During the Sheffield Blitz in December 1940, Edna May, at 22 years of age, was the youngest seventy people killed while sheltering in the cellars of the city's Marples Hotel on Fitzalan Square.<sup>557</sup> By this time, Ali was employed as a builder's labourer and shared a flat in the city's Broomhall district with his young wife, their infant daughter and next door to another South Asian – Bahram Khan, a variety artiste.<sup>558</sup>

#### 4.3 Everyday contact

Nor was it only natives and newcomers living in the close proximity of shared domestic spaces who developed romantic attachments. The modest prices and credit terms offered by South Asian pedlars allowed young working-class women to emulate the fashionable silk and satin garments of Hollywood and high society – the 'factory girls looking like actresses', as J.B. Priestley put it.<sup>559</sup> The intimate interaction between native and newcomer in purchasing garments and fabric directly on the doorstep or in the home was also quite possibly the means by which some of the pedlars in this study met their future wives. Anant Ram arrived in London in 1936 intending to sojourn as a pedlar. His account of his early days in Britain provides us with an unusually clear insight into the pedlar-customer relationship:

There were mostly clothes for women and ties for gentlemen. Women's clothes were fancy goods and stockings... Our round started at knocking from door to door, saying 'Hello, good morning, ladies. Want anything?' And beating a particular locality was our daily work. Some women, when they became familiar, would let us in to look at our fare. Unlike others, however, somehow I could not marshal the art of selling.

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<sup>555</sup> TNA,1939 Register, Andrews household, Sheffield, RG101/3506J/024/1-KIAR.

<sup>556</sup> Edna Andrews and Joseph Nuttall, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Camberwell, Jul.–Sep. 1947, vol. 5c, p. 646.

<sup>557</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Civilian War Dead, Khan, Edna May Ahmed, died 12/12/1940, <<https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/3158907/khan,-edna-may-ahmed/>> (accessed 2 March 2018).

<sup>558</sup> TNA,1939 Register, Andrews household, Sheffield, RG101/3506J/024/1-KIAR.

<sup>559</sup> Balachandran, *Globalizing Labour?*, 188–189; Priestley, *English Journey*, 401.

I was not good at it despite the fact that my friends gave me many amusing lessons on what to say and how to 'break the ice' on the door step. Over the weekend, my friends would discuss and compare their stories of successful salesmanship and exchange any particular feat of English language they had just acquired or try to decipher the meaning of new words heard from English women.<sup>560</sup>

Although, Anant Ram personally lacked the confidence to engage in effective doorstep 'patter' and repartee, as we can see here, such technique and commercial intelligence was constantly updated, refined and shared among practitioners. Of significance is that sufficient native women were sufficiently trusting of the pedlars to allow them into their private domestic space, and for men to prosper in the trade. By 1936 the travelling draper Abdul Razaq was living in Barnsley with his wife.<sup>561</sup> The following year, Munshi Khan, the friend of Ali Ahmed Khan and Rasool Khan, married Eva Collins at a Methodist Chapel in the Derbyshire pit village of Staveley, which lies twelve miles from Sheffield. Here, Munshi settled down with his new family. The 1939 Register shows Munshi settled with his family and employed as a 'drapery salesman'. Eva was present, as was Eva's mother and the couple's two children, born in 1938 and 1939.<sup>562</sup> In 1939, the travelling drapery salesman Abdul Karim was recorded as lodging with the Phillips family in Doncaster.<sup>563</sup> In 1941, Abdul and Gladys, the Phillips's twenty-four year-old daughter, married.<sup>564</sup>

But what of the everyday life of the neighbourhoods into which migrants entered, and within which a small but significant number settled? Both working-class memoirists and social historians such as Andrew Davies have described in detail a tight-knit northern working-class way of life, a product of overcrowded homes and scant disposable income.<sup>565</sup> Richard Hoggart's analysis of working-class life in Yorkshire suggested that, for better or for worse, 'home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living-room on to the street, and when you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening you become part of the life of the neighbourhood'.<sup>566</sup> For Ross McKibbin, a working-class neighbourhood of the period was defined by the street, which was 'not merely a thoroughfare; it was a crowded array of institutions designed for entertainment, sociability, and courting . . . street-life in an "urban village" was known for its colour and incident, its capacity to divert and fascinate. It was always remembered with affection. . .'.<sup>567</sup> Doreen Bahadur, recollecting her working-class childhood in the 1930s and 1940s, communicated a warm sense of the neighbourhood, the friendships forged in the tightly packed streets

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<sup>560</sup> Ram and Tatla, 'This Is Our Home Now', 70.

<sup>561</sup> Abdul Razaq and Janet Saxon, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Barnsley, Jul.-Sep. 1936, vol. 9c, p. 742.

<sup>562</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Khan household, Chesterfield, RG101/5900C/003/21-RBIL.

<sup>563</sup> TNA, 1939 Register, Phillips household, Doncaster, RG101/3387G/011/42-KDBT.

<sup>564</sup> Abdul Karim and Gladys Phillips, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Doncaster, Jan.-Mar. 1941, vol. 9c, p. 1787.

<sup>565</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 109-10.

<sup>566</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 51.

<sup>567</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 185.

and courtyards of Sheffield's East End, and the sense of her family's thorough integration into its everyday life.<sup>568</sup> Here, weather permitting, much of the neighbourhood's social life took place in the street. In this environment newcomers would inevitably have been in regular contact with native neighbours and the life of the street.

Thus, a working-class culture of the public space and street-based sociability likely played a large role in the process of integrating newcomers into the neighbourhoods they inhabited. Regular opportunities for social contact between men and women existed in Sheffield, a city with a tradition of women working in the cutlery and flatware industry alongside men.<sup>569</sup> Such social exchange between men and women was also significantly increased during both world wars when thousands of young working-class women were recruited into munitions work.<sup>570</sup> Despite immigrants having been raised in the cultures of the Indian subcontinent, which often enforced strict gender segregation (for example, *Pashtunwali*, the ethical code of the Pashtuns), the informality and directness of relations among young working-class men and women, noted by both McKibbin and Davies, facilitated interaction between natives and newcomers.<sup>571</sup> The GRO marriage records show that thirty-one couples lived in the same neighbourhood, in the same street or even next door to their future husbands. Examples include Jessie Grant and Carumeli Khan, married in 1923, who lived in two streets adjacent to the Sheffield United football ground; and Hilda Davis and Ayah (Ayaht) Khan who lived next door to each other on Darnall Road, Sheffield.<sup>572</sup> Ahmed Wosman and Constance Goodwin lived opposite each other on Attercliffe's main thoroughfare, while Annie Dunn and Maherban Shah lived only a couple of streets from each other in Rotherham. This proximity strongly supports the argument that the quotidian life of the neighbourhood played a large role in supporting positive native–newcomer relationships.<sup>573</sup>

Indeed, this simple factor of close proximity and increasing familiarity between native and newcomer may be a more convincing explanation than other possible scenarios, of their willingness to come together in marriage. Perhaps the most common of these has been the suggestion that, in the aftermath of the First World War, a shortage of marriageable young native men accounts for the frequency of mixed-marriages during the inter-war period. While individual women may have lost the men they were promised to during the conflict, the overall rate of marriage was rising throughout the first half of the twentieth century, from 267,721 in 1910 to 361,768 in 1938 and 401,210 in 1947. Despite the losses of the First World War, steadily increasing

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<sup>568</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

<sup>569</sup> Booth, *Diamonds in Brown Paper*, 3, 33–6.

<sup>570</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 109–11.

<sup>571</sup> J. W. Spain, *The Pathan Borderland* (The Hague, 1963), pp. 79–80; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 99–103; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 185.

<sup>572</sup> Carumeli Khan and Jessie Grant, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1923, vol. 9c, p. 1220, Ayah Khan and Hilda Davis, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1927, vol. 9c, p. 1411.

<sup>573</sup> Ahamed Wosman and Constance Goodwin, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 885; Maherban Shah and Annie Dunn, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1924, vol. 9c, p. 1360a.

numbers of men were either willing or financially able to support a wife and family. Indeed, per thousand, the number of men marrying also increased immediately after the war. After a period of decline in first few years of the twentieth century to a low point of forty-nine marriages per thousand men in 1909, the rate rose to a peak of 71.5 in 1920. After declining to fifty marriages per thousand men by 1926, the rate steadily rose, significantly increasing in magnitude from the mid-1930s to a peak in 1940 of 80.5. In effect, the numbers of marriageable men increased year on year throughout the inter-war period.<sup>574</sup>

#### **4.4 Who were the wives?**

The occupational type of the male immigrants in this study was, with few exceptions, non-elite and engaged in either proletarian waged labour or petty trade and self-employment. Previously established norms for recording the personal circumstances of the women who married South Asian newcomers meant that the registrar or priest did not normally record a bride's occupation, despite the long-standing tradition of female employment, both single and married, in the cutlery and flatware trades of Sheffield. This reluctance of parish priests and registrars to recognise women as economically active in their own right on their marriage certificates persisted throughout the First World War and the inter-war period. It was not until 1939, and the exigencies of a wartime economy, that women's occupations began to be recorded. As a consequence of this informal policy, we have only eleven (eighteen percent) of the bride's occupations. These range from an artist – a bride of elite South Asian origin who married an English fellow artist; a student at the University of Sheffield; two nurses, one who married an Indian medical doctor trained in Western medicine and one who married a self-employed Indian 'oculist'. Also present are a ladies' hairdresser, a shorthand typist, a cashier, a hotel maid and women employed in wartime occupations including a bus conductress, an aircraft assembler and two machinists. Nevertheless, for those whose occupation was not recorded, we can reasonably infer a bride's social class from the occupation of her father, her home addresses, and from a knowledge of the historical demography of the city, that the majority were from working-class families – the daughters of manual workers. Of the group of sixty-one marriages officially recorded in the Sheffield area between 1916 and 1947, six brides did not state the occupations of their fathers. Of these women, their social class has been inferred by their address at the time of marriage. Accordingly, four were from addresses in working-class streets and two from middle-class streets. The daughters of men in working-class occupations comprised seventy-nine percent of those who had their marriage registered in the Sheffield area. These women's fathers were engaged in occupations ranging from coal mining (the largest group at thirteen percent of the entire number of brides); working in the steel industry

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<sup>574</sup> ONS, Number of marriages, marriage rates and period of occurrence, <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/marriagecohabitationandcivilpartnerships/datasets/numberofmarriagesmarriageratesandperiodofoccurrence>> (accessed 2 March 2018).

as furnacemen, furnace bricklayers, boiler firers and labourers; engineering fitters and forge workers; also railwaymen, sundry trades and general labouring.

Those brides whose fathers had professional, managerial or higher status occupations made up twenty-one percent of the group. Occupation of fathers ranged from the professional and business oriented, including as company directors and medical practitioners, to the more supervisory and clerically based occupations such as insurance company managers, railway and colliery inspectors. These men's daughters all married at similar or higher social rank to themselves and took husbands who were university educated. For example, in 1933, Gretchen Sawyer, the daughter of a Sheffield colliery official married Mohammed Afzal Khan, a civil engineer and son of an Indian government official.<sup>575</sup> In 1920, Fanny Williams, daughter of an insurance company manager, married Asutosh Sinha a medical practitioner in Sheffield's Wincobank district.<sup>576</sup> Perhaps the highest ranking bride to marry in Sheffield, the only bride born in India and one of only two brides of South Asian heritage, was the artist Marjorie Singh.<sup>577</sup> Painting as Sushila Singh, she was the daughter of retired Indian Queen's Counsel Bawa Dhanwant Singh. She married fellow artist Arthur Andrews in 1930.

A phenomenon of particular interest among the middle-class group is that of working-class women who married men significantly, and unusually, higher than themselves in the social hierarchy of the period. For example, in 1934, Doris Jackson, the daughter of a Sheffield blacksmith's striker, married Saad Khalil Effat, an engineering student and son of a judge.<sup>578</sup> Emily Smith, the daughter of a railway labourer married Heera Choor Ghosh, medical student and son of an Indian land owner in 1936.<sup>579</sup> In 1940, Florence Carter the daughter of a furnace bricklayer, married medical practitioner Ahmed Abdulla Hamza.<sup>580</sup> As six of the nine medical practitioners in the cohort married working-class women it might be concluded that this reflects the relatively lowly status of non-white medical doctors in Britain. However, further investigation brings to light other similar marriages of high status young men to working-class women. These groom's fathers include an Egyptian army general, an Egyptian senator, two government officials, two judges, a barrister and a successful clothing merchant. How news of these unions was received by the grooms' families is not known. However, on her return to Edinburgh from her Khyber sojourn, author Morag Murray Abdullah condemned such marriages, believing predatory

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<sup>575</sup> Mohammed Afzal Khan Tarin and Gretchen Sawyer, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jul.–Sep. 1933, vol. 9c, p. 1091.

<sup>576</sup> Asutosh Sinha and Fanny Williams, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1920, vol. 9c, p. 1093.

<sup>577</sup> Arthur Henry Andrews and Marjorie Sheila Singh, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1930, vol. 9c, p. 1280.

<sup>578</sup> Saad Khalil Effat and Doris Jackson, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–Jun. 1934, vol. 9c, p. 1366.

<sup>579</sup> Heera Choor Ghosh and Emily Smith, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.–Mar. 1936, vol. 9c, p. 760.

<sup>580</sup> Ahmed Abdulla Hamza and Florence Carter, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Oct.–Dec. 1940, vol. 9c, p. 1562.

lower-class women brought disgrace upon the hapless husbands. For Abdullah, the primacy of the class hierarchy in 1934 displaced considerations of race:

Since returning home I have discovered that the trouble in connection with these East and West marriages often begins in England. Hundreds of Eastern students from good families come to our universities. The people whose duty it is to consider their welfare seldom realize the obligation they have, with the result that these strangers fall prey to a class they ought not to meet and would never know if they were introduced to the society they are perfectly capable of mixing with. Instead, however, they drift about, and the results have to be dealt with when the men return home qualified to take their places with any Westerner, but too often through an unfortunate Western marriage unable to do so. These instances happily are rare, but they exist.<sup>581</sup>

Despite Abdullah's comments, it is worth considering that these relationships between elite newcomers and working-class natives led to marriage, rather than the desertion of a pregnant single woman. It is therefore likely that such unions, regardless of their success or overall duration, were based upon genuine affection and loyalty and in defiance of prevailing sensibilities of clan, class, race or other endogamous considerations.

#### **4.5 Expectations of married life**

With regard to the expectations of young women for their married lives with men raised in Asian cultures, we have little knowledge. Some useful light is shed on the question by Saira Elizabeth Luiza MacKenzie. Her marriage to Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah, a Pashtun tribal leader's son, and journey to live with him in the Khyber region of Afghanistan, became a published memoir. MacKenzie, the child of a middle-class Edinburgh family met Shah while he studied medicine at Edinburgh University. Writing under the name Morag Murray Abdullah, her account of life among Pashtun tribes was published in 1934 as *My Khyber Marriage: Experiences of a Scotswoman as the Wife of a Pathan Chieftain's Son*. Despite her memoir's frequently romanticised account of her time in the Khyber, replete with orientalist prose, it provides useful insights into how the Pashtun ethnic group could be imagined during this period. As Terri A. Hasseler has noted, Abdulla's literary style employed a 'cinematic gaze' which reflected the early interwar cinema's fascination with the fictionalised encounters of white women with the harem and the abducting sheik. She employed these cinematic devices to draw her readers in and to titillate them, even when employing them as a contrast to the actuality of the situations she found herself.<sup>582</sup> Indeed, she frequently

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<sup>581</sup> M. M. Abdulla, *My Khyber Marriage: Experiences of a Scotswoman as the Wife of a Pathan Chieftain's Son* (London, 1990), pp. 268–269.

<sup>582</sup> T. A. Hasseler, 'Identity and Imperial/Cinematic Gazing in Morag Murray Abdullah's *My Khyber Marriage*', *NWSA Journal*, 12:2 (2000), pp. 80–82.

referred to images that owed much to Rudolph Valentino, even when attempting to debunk the popular image of 'The Sheik'.

The interwar cinema and the cheap novelette were hugely influential phenomena during the interwar period and the 'desert romance' genre, made so popular by E.M. Hull's novel *The Sheik* (1919) no doubt gave something of a sheen of 'Oriental mystique' to South Asian and Arab immigrants among some working-class women. As Karen Chow argues, young working women were active participants in leisure activities such as reading fiction and visiting the cinema:

In choosing to buy books like *The Sheik*, through which they could treat themselves to an erotic and emotional fantasy, women readers became active participants in a woman-made market of desire, exercising both economic and sexual freedoms. These lowbrow 'sex novels', as they were called, were written mostly by women, for women, and cheap enough to be enjoyed by lower-middle-class and working-class women.<sup>583</sup>

Although *The Sheik* retailed at 3s 6d when first published, through its enormous popularity and numerous reprints, the cover price fell as low as one shilling. Copies could also be borrowed from the local public library or the tuppenny subscription libraries, which tended to deal in popular 'lowbrow' fiction. In its original, novel, form, *The Sheik* provided readers with the titillation of an erotic thriller complete with, as Chow puts it, 'extramarital, nonprocreative sex with an exotic, 'native' lover without a care for the consequences'.<sup>584</sup> Indeed, *The Sheik* provided an alternative to the mundanity of quotidian life and ordinary men. Hull's Orientalist vision presented a sensualist East and the Muslim man as an exotic, racially different, primitive and sexually-dynamic fantasy. It also permitted the reader to imagine a racially-transgressive narrative where miscegenation was a mad, but liberating, outcome:

Her heart was given for all time to the fierce desert man who was so different from all other men whom she had met, a lawless savage who had taken her to satisfy a passing fancy and who had treated her with merciless cruelty. A brute, but she loved him, loved him for his very brutality and superb strength. And he was an Arab! A man of different race and colour, Aubrey would indiscriminately class him as a 'damned nigger.' She did not care. It made no difference. A year ago, a few weeks even, she would have shuddered with repulsion at the bare idea, the thought that a native could even touch her had been revolting, but all that was swept away and was nothing in the face of the love that filled her heart so completely. She did not care if he was an Arab, she

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<sup>583</sup> K. Chow, 'Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women's Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stopes's "Married Love" and E. M. Hull's "The Sheik"', *Feminist Review*, 63 (1999), p. 73.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

did not care what he was, he was the man she loved. She was deliriously, insanely happy.<sup>585</sup>

In Britain, *The Sheik* had run to 108 editions by 1923 and sales ‘surpassed those of all the contemporary best-sellers put together’.<sup>586</sup> E.M. Hull followed up her success with the sequel *The Sons of the Sheik* (1925). Both novels were adapted by major Hollywood studios (*The Sheik* in 1921 and *The Son of the Sheik* in 1926). Both films starred Rudolph Valentino and further extended the reach of Hull’s fantasy into the



Figure 4.2  
Rudolph Valentino and Wanda Hawley in  
*The Young Rajah* (1922)

popular imagination. On the movie release of *The Sheik*, *Wid’s Daily* reported that the picture had “smashed all attendance records at the Rivoli and Rialto theatres” in New York during the first three days of its exhibition. It was estimated that the total attendance at the two theatres by the following Saturday ‘would be 120,000 persons—a new record in Broadway entertainment history.’<sup>587</sup> The film influenced popular culture in numerous ways, including the production of many Orientally-inspired romantic films, fashions, dances and songs. Films included *Burning Sands* (1922), *Tents of Allah* (1923), *The Song of Love* (1923), and Rex Ingram’s *The Arab* (1924), which starred Ramón Novarro, a role reprised by him in *The Barbarian* alongside Myrna Loy (1933). *The Young Rajah* (1922) was another Valentino vehicle and similarly exploited romantic Orientalist fantasies. Rather than having an ‘Arab’ theme, *The Young Rajah* focused on the liaison between a deposed Indian maharajah (Valentino) and a young American woman (Wanda Hawley).

In the Sheffield area, *The Sheik*, which opened in April 1923 was enormously popular over a substantial period of time, as was its sequel in 1926, which opened shortly after Valentino’s death. The enduring popularity of films with a romantic Orientalist theme is demonstrated by the fact that performances continued to be advertised around the area for a number of years after their release. For example, in 1927, Sheffield’s Central Picture House presented a programme that featured the film *Oriental Love* starring Karina Bell and Gunnar Tolnaes. Its marketing material asked the question ‘should white girls marry eastern potentates?’ The screening also featured the tenor Francis Harris singing the *Four Indian Love Lyrics*.<sup>588</sup> Screenings of *The Son of the Sheik* continued intermittently in Sheffield as late as 1939.

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<sup>585</sup> E. M. Hull, *The Sheik, a Novel* (Boston, Mass., 1922), pp. 133–134.

<sup>586</sup> B. Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 46, 90.

<sup>587</sup> *Wid’s Daily*, (New York, NY.), 10 November 1921.

<sup>588</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 28 March 1927.

Notwithstanding the impact of Rudolph Valentino and the Oriental romance genre, it is not yet possible to convincingly ascertain the extent of the influence of such entertainments on the reception of South Asian, Muslim or Arab men in either the Sheffield area or Britain in general. What is certain is that this outpouring of mass culture did little among white working-class natives to promote an understanding of the native cultures and outlook of South Asian or Muslim newcomers to Britain. This, as has previously been argued, was a process that would rely on the close quotidian proximity of natives and newcomers within working-class neighbourhoods.

#### **4.6 Acculturation and integration: the two-way streets of quotidian life**

Newly married women sometimes had to deal with fraught relationships with their own native families. Observing the attitudes of parents towards a daughter's marriage to a non-white partner, Collins, in his study undertaken at the beginning of the 1950s, noted that, in the early months of marriage, couples often became estranged from the parents of the bride. However, he found that this estrangement usually ended with reconciliation, the terms of which varied according to social class, being 'less unfavourable in the lower and more unfavourable in the middle class'.<sup>589</sup> Collins also noted that a family member might be instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation: 'the woman's sister is often helpful in this respect, and in a number of instances has persuaded her parents to change their attitude towards the couple.'<sup>590</sup> In some instances the wife maintained a normal relationship with her parents and visited them, but her non-white husband and children did not. Although her father visited her home, the mother would not, and vice versa. In one instance a father was seen at his daughter's home: 'she explained that at first her father had not given his consent to her marriage, but later he began to visit, although her step-mother had never been to her home.' In Collins's opinion, a couple's persistence in 'making overtures to the parents' might bring about reconciliation. He described how a husband had insisted that his wife, although reluctant to do so, called to see her parents. 'At first', he explained, 'they were given a cold reception but later the relationship improved... cordial relations were restored, and the husband accepted by the wife's parents...the cases found in which there was complete estrangement between the married woman and her parents were few.'<sup>591</sup> As Tabili notes, 'while some interracial couples encountered social ostracism, others were accepted, even living in the same houses with the wives' parents'.<sup>592</sup> This matrilocal habitation reflects the general pattern for working-class newly-weds during this period. Indeed, it was still in evidence when sociologists Willmott and Young made their pioneering study of family and kinship among working-class families in East London during the early 1960s.<sup>593</sup>

Collins found that ostracism by family and friends, for marrying a non-white man, could significantly affect the outlook of native British wives toward their native culture and led them to identify much more strongly with that of their husbands.

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<sup>589</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 47.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>592</sup> Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*, 145.

<sup>593</sup> P. Willmott and M. Young, *Family and Kinship in East London* (London, 2007).

White wives would identify themselves with non-whites to the extent of speaking of themselves as 'we, the coloured people', and to write letters to the local press protesting against the racism their husbands, and other non-whites, faced in Britain.<sup>594</sup> This phenomenon can also be seen in the letters of local newspapers during the interwar period. For example, in 1929 the *Hull Daily Mail* reported a discussion among members of the city's Watch Committee about the moral 'type' of women in mixed marriages, as well as the supposed willingness of Arabs to undercut white seafarer's wages.<sup>595</sup> In response, a woman defiantly signing herself 'ARAB MAN'S WIFE', wrote to the editor:

Sir,—I will be pleased if you will put this letter in your paper. I see in to-night's "Mail," about the Arabs, also about the girls being of very low moral type. I think it is wrong about them, as when an Arab marries an English girl, she has to be in the house, not the same as some, always in public houses, as Arabs don't drink, and they won't allow their wives to do so. I, myself, am married to an Arab and I could not find a better husband. There are about 20 Arabs in Hull, and they work for the same as English men for £9 10s a month.—I am, Sir, etc., ARAB MAN'S WIFE. February 27th. 1929.<sup>596</sup>

Nancy Hare's report to The League of Coloured People highlighted that many white wives not only identified strongly with their husbands, but with their community in general. 'They take sides with them; they include themselves in the category of 'coloured,' and talk of "we"', she observed.<sup>597</sup>

Unlike the family migrations of eastern European Jews at the end of the nineteenth century, the early South Asian migration to Britain was, as we have seen, almost entirely composed of men. The highly gendered pattern of non-elite South Asian and Muslim immigration during the period appears to have had a significant effect on how immigrants interacted with natives. Within this context, the relationships newcomers forged were as likely to be with natives as with other South Asians. In these close quarters, the acculturation necessary for social integration or assimilation was accrued. This may have included acquiring knowledge of the complexities involved in the outward expression of assimilation to Western culture. The finer points of this knowledge, and the cultural capital that accompanied it, was likely to have been gained from contact with natives, either directly from wives and girlfriends, or via compatriots who had themselves made such social connections.<sup>598</sup>

The acquisition of a working knowledge of the complexities of the culture of native Britons can be seen in the cases of the more successful pedlars and petty traders. For these men, native British wives provided points of access to native social networks

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<sup>594</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 54.

<sup>595</sup> *Daily Mail*, (Hull), 27 February 1929.

<sup>596</sup> *Daily Mail*, (Hull), 28 February 1929.

<sup>597</sup> Nancie Hare, 'Cardiff's Coloured Population', *The Keys*, I (Jan.-Mar. 1934), 44-45, cited in Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*, 145.

<sup>598</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 192.

for the purpose of trade, in addition to that of sociability. The previously discussed example of the former seaman Mohammed Sherrif and his wife Grace Fletcher of Sheffield is a case in point. Both husband and wife sold black-market goods. Mohammed acquired the goods from the elements of his social network that continued to be employed in seafaring, while Grace's social network of workmates was brought into play as retail customers. We clearly see the social networks of both parties being employed for the purposes of petty trade – in this instance, illegally. Grace's role, like many of the native British wives and girlfriends of petty traders, included acting as a source of market intelligence, or even as sales agents, for their partners.<sup>599</sup>

Many public expressions of belonging would have been alien to former lascar seafarers, newly arrived in Britain and perhaps more accustomed to shalwar kameez and sandals than woollen suits, topcoats and heavy hobnail boots. For example, the still extant photographs of the men during this period show them wearing immaculate and, often fashionable, Western lounge suits. Naqibullah Nairoolla, Warris Khan and Rasool Khan all appear attired in such garments. A family portrait from around 1930



*Figure 4.3*

*Rasool and Elsie Khan circa 1931 with their children Doreen and Anman. Used by kind permission.*

shows Rasool and Elsie, both about twenty-three years old, and two of their children: Doreen and Anman (figure 4.3). Dressed for the occasion, Rasool stands confidently sporting a fully accessorised double-breasted suit finished with a pocket handkerchief, a starched collared shirt and tie complete with pin. Elsie, seated and smiling slightly, has an air of elegance about her. The couple are looking out of the frame directly at the viewer and, in spite of the increasing uncertainties of the interwar world that had brought them together, they appear to have a certain youthful optimism in their demeanour. If Rasool was anything like the South Asian immigrants who followed in his footsteps in the post-Partition era, he would have sent a copy of the photograph back to his family in Nartopa, not only to introduce his English family, but to show off his success in England. As the post-*Windrush*, post-Partition era archives of Bradford's Belle Vue photographic studios demonstrate, many South Asian immigrants

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<sup>599</sup> *The Birmingham Mail*, 9 March 1943, p. 4; *Newcastle Journal and North Mail*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 10 March 1943, p. 4.

sent formal studio photographs back to their villages to demonstrate their successful new lives in Britain.<sup>600</sup>

Insofar as non-white newcomers were building social networks with working-class natives, aiding integration and acculturation, this everyday tolerance does not appear to have demanded the cultural invisibility often assumed to be the consequence of assimilation into British society. Interviews with the families of mixed couples and the findings of Collins's study (begun in 1949) both clearly demonstrate that cultural origins and religious belief still played a significant, albeit modified, role in settled men's lives.<sup>601</sup> Sheffield's first mosque, a simple ground floor room on Sheffield's Worksop Road was officially registered in 1946 at the dwelling occupied by the Yemeni steelworker Mohamed Abdulla and his English wife, Doreen.<sup>602</sup> Some of the children of the native–newcomer unions were raised as Muslims, such as Doreen Bahadur, while some of the wives in both this and Collins's study adopted the Muslim faith of their husbands.<sup>603</sup> A number of Sheffield wives (whether converts to Islam or not) agreed to their children being raised in the Muslim faith or receiving some formal Islamic education. One interviewee remembered receiving, in Sheffield in the late 1930s, Islamic after-school instruction together with other children from a man with the name or title of 'Kazi'.<sup>604</sup> There is evidence for the Sheffield area that some women retained and maintained their own religious beliefs and practices while making accommodation for their husbands' religious and cultural requirements, for example, restricting or ending the consumption of pork or alcohol in the home.<sup>605</sup> Indeed, one third of the marriages of Muslim migrants in this study were conducted according to the rites of a Christian church or chapel. Collins noted that native British wives played a significant role in the acculturation of children straddling the traditions of both native and newcomers:

At home, (a child) is influenced by the mother, who although accepting or compromising with the customs of her Moslem husband, nevertheless, in most ways, follows the pattern of British culture. And since she is with the child for longer periods than her husband, her influence on him is also strong. This aspect of training and education

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<sup>600</sup> 'Belle Vue Studio - Photo Archive - Bradford Museums & Galleries', <http://photos.bradfordmuseums.org/view-item?i=207579&WINID=1520419331233#LfbDW6hq4vQAAAFiAA3WTA/207579>, accessed 7 March 2018.

<sup>601</sup> Collins, 'The Social Position of White and "Half-Caste" Women in Colored Groupings in Britain'.

<sup>602</sup> *London Gazette*, 20 July 1971, 23; interview with members of Sheffield's Pakistan Muslim Centre, 21 Dec. 2015; Mohamed Abdulla and Doreen Gilliver, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Apr.–June 1943, vol. 9c, p. 1277.

<sup>603</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, chap. 9.

<sup>604</sup> Interview with Derek Khan, 11 Dec. 2012.

<sup>605</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan; interview with Angela Khan.

is further enforced in contacts within the host society and in the more formal system of the schools.<sup>606</sup>

Also of significance is that two of the marriages within our time period were of the children of two earlier mixed marriages. The marriage ceremonies of the adult children (one male, one female) of the earliest mixed couple were also conducted in church. Both marriages were to white Sheffield natives. This exogamy perhaps demonstrates the reason why the Sheffield settlement has been largely unknown by the historiography or forgotten by both the current South Asian population of the Sheffield area. Children marrying a partner outside of the cultural and religious traditions of their fathers may be more likely to relinquish, by assimilation, those traditions in favour of those of the native population. A number of the interview subjects for this study, either children or grandchildren of the pioneers, did not class themselves as Muslim or were brought up in the Christian faith. Nevertheless, some of the traditions of Islam appear to have held firmly down the generations, such as abstaining from consuming pork. While their own and their family memories of their South Asian ancestors remained and were passed down to succeeding generations, their contact with cousins who had entered endogamous marriages with South Asian natives was tenuous at best. Overall, however, the evidence presented here suggests that a flexible, often syncretic, approach towards faith and culture, based upon a mutual outlook of tolerance and negotiation, existed between husbands and wives within the private domestic sphere. This scenario would closely reflect the experience of migration and settlement of Bengalis, Punjabis and Pashtuns to the United States described by Vivek Bald. While the single, remarkable difference is that while Vivek Bald's subjects married into 'communities of colour', in the Sheffield area, as in settlements across Britain, South Asian immigrants married into predominantly white working-class communities. As Bald suggests, 'it was here that South Asian Muslims were able to forge complex and syncretic new lives and build multi-ethnic families and communities...'<sup>607</sup>

#### **4.7 Sheffield area marriages within a national context**

Of the approximately 148 identified migrants living in the Sheffield area with Muslim names or names originating in South Asia, the GRO records indicate that sixty-one individuals married in the area while there were also eighteen unmarried couples with or without children. There were also a number of couples who married elsewhere and moved to Sheffield. These figures also strongly suggest that, unless South Asian migrants were particularly successful in obtaining marriage partners in the Sheffield area, there were many sojourners who do not appear in the GRO records.<sup>608</sup> However, if we confine our attentions to the GRO records of marriages, this study, in an attempt to situate the Sheffield experience within the national context of marriages between

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<sup>606</sup> Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 169.

<sup>607</sup> Bald, *Bengali Harlem*, 9.

<sup>608</sup> At the time of writing, about half the migrants and settlers have been identified by GRO marriage records. This study excludes Indian students at the University of Sheffield unless they married or had children in the Sheffield area.

natives of Britain and Muslim-named newcomers, has revealed about three thousand native–newcomer marriages in England, Wales and Scotland during the period from 1916 to 1947 (Figure 4.4). While, there are no definitive figures for Britain’s South Asian population during the period (contemporary observers estimated the total for various dates within the period at about seven thousand), the 2901 marriages located in this study suggest that this may have been something of an underestimate.<sup>609</sup> The figures also indicate that migration and settlement of Muslims in Britain, a majority of whom were likely to have been of South Asian origin, was well under way before 1948, the ‘green light’ of the British Nationality Act and the era of mass migration.

It is not possible to determine the occupation (and thus infer the social class) of the grooms from the marriage data so far collected. This would be a priority task for further research into other settlements using this study’s methodology. Nevertheless, the distribution of marriages located by this study confirms existing historiography in the sense that the greatest concentrations lay within the ports of Cardiff, Glasgow, Hull, Liverpool, London and South Shields. Of significance is the number of ports which hosted immigration and do not currently lay within the historiography, such as the entire area surrounding the rivers Tyne and Wear in North East England. Additionally, the smaller coal ports around Cardiff on the South Wales coast are worthy of much further investigation, as are the coal, iron and steel towns of the Welsh valleys. International working-class immigration has made a significant contribution to the population of South Wales, well beyond the confines of the often cited Bute Town area of Cardiff, more commonly known as Tiger Bay.<sup>610</sup>

In addition to the newly identified settlement site of Edinburgh, a city with both active docks at Leith and a prestigious international university during the period, notable settlement sites include the ports of Dundee and the inland industrial towns of Scotland’s central belt. Marriage and settlement can also be seen in the north of Scotland including Aberdeen and Inverness. While the occupation of these individuals it is not yet certain, they have the potential to provide documentary evidence for the claims contained within the oral testimony collected by Bashir Maan. From these figures, however, it looks likely that Maan underestimated the frequency of marriage between South Asians and Scots natives.

In England significant clusters of marriages occur in all the coastal ports of the north-east, including Tynemouth, Newcastle and Sunderland and, along with Edinburgh, demonstrate that South Shields is not a migration outlier on the map of Britain’s north-east coast. The port of Hull appears as a significant site of settlement and marriage, as is confirmed by data from the 1939 Register. The clusters of native–newcomer marriages within the inland towns and cities of England also demonstrate that, even within this early period, although Sheffield was one of the largest sites of immigration and settlement, it was not alone in hosting non-white newcomers. Indeed, through the GRO data Birmingham presents itself as a major site of early

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<sup>609</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 224.

<sup>610</sup> The classic study of the district, and the source used by many British immigration histories, is Kenneth Little’s, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* (London, 1948).

inland migration, as does Manchester, although the latter's figures will be skewed by the presence of Muslim seafarers arriving at Salford docks via the deep water Manchester Ship Canal. Nottingham presents itself as a nascent site of inland immigration and settlement in this data, as does Coventry, although the great post-war centres of 'New Commonwealth' immigration, such as Bradford and Leicester, had yet to establish themselves.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This section has argued that native wives and other elements of the men's heterogeneous social networks played a crucial role in the successful sojourning, settlement and acculturation of South Asian men arriving in Britain in search of work. We have also examined the elements of the cultural and political context into which the newcomers arrived. Within this we have looked at two key strands: the anxious and sometimes authoritarian response of many elements of Britain's cultural and political elites to the perceived 'racial' threat to the nation posed by so-called miscegenation; and the possible impact of mass-cultural influences such as the trend for Orientalist romances in popular fiction and cinema. We have also explored the ways in which husbands and wives co-operated as business partners, with wives acting as advocates for, and advisors to, their husbands in official matters as well as those of everyday life. We have also examined the flexible and syncretic responses to difference on both sides of what is often assumed to be a deep cultural divide between two groups of people – one South Asian, one working-class – both holding inward-looking and conservative attitudes to life, culture, tradition and change. The evidence presented here, demonstrates that this analysis is far from the reality of the situation during much of the period. The following section will, in concluding this thesis, develop on a number of these cultural strands to explain why the picture presented here is such a contrast to that of much of our current, conflict-based, historiography.

# Numbers and Distribution of Officially Registered British Marriages with a Muslim-Named Spouse, 1916 - 1947

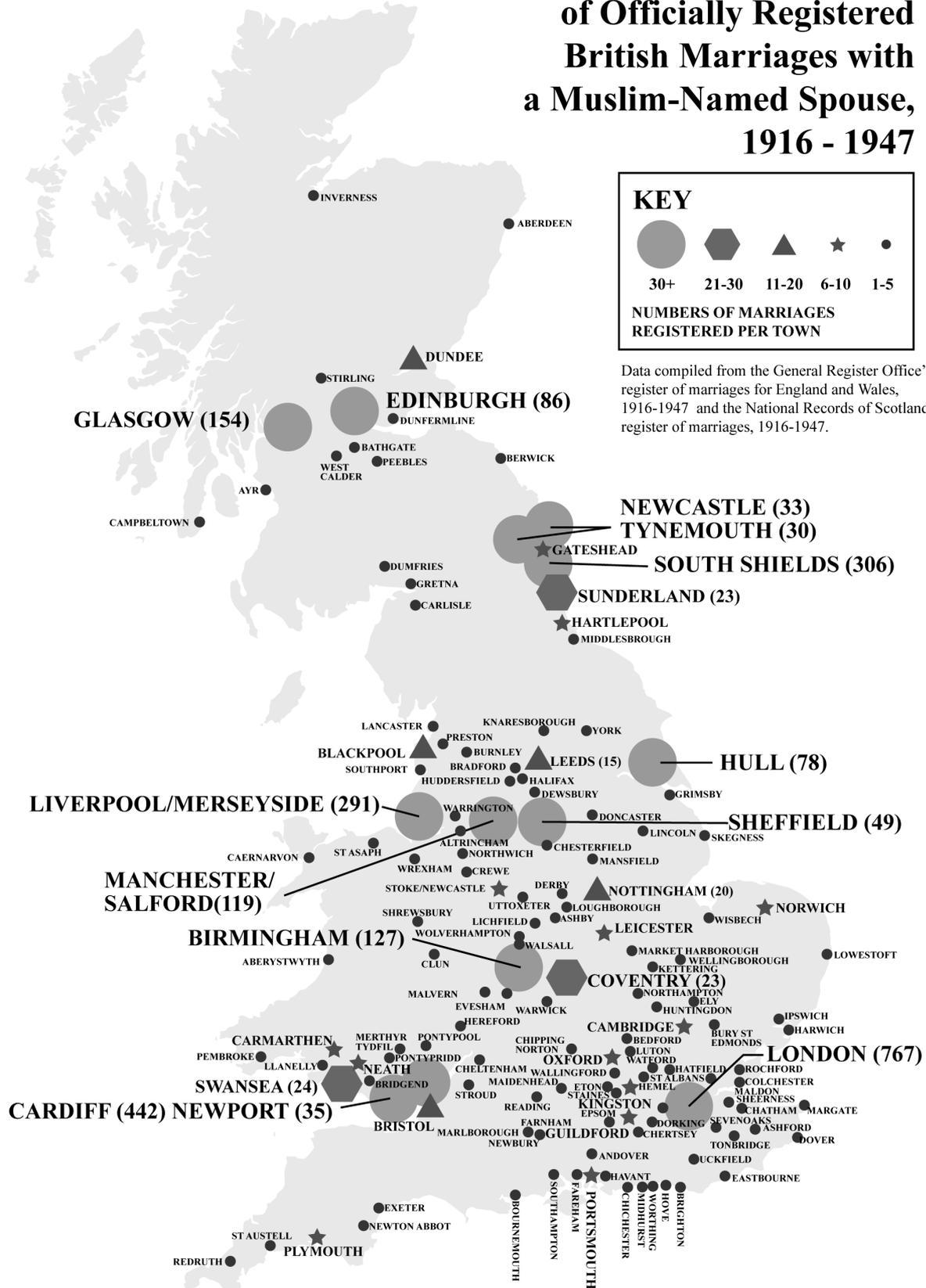


Figure 4.4

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## Section 5

### *Conclusions*

#### **5.0 Introduction**

Anita Crozier grew up in London's East End in the 1930s with a Guyanese father and white English mother. Talking to *The Guardian* in 2011, Anita remembered that 'where we lived there was no feeling that mixed marriages were wrong.'<sup>611</sup> This statement clearly expresses the lived experience of an individual who grew up as the child of a 'mixed marriage' during the inter-war period in Britain. Unfortunately, direct sources such as Anita's testimony, which enable the study of the quotidian relationship between empire and metropole at grass-roots level, are scarce. Most studies of imperialism's popular reception, such as those within the *Imperialism and Popular Culture* series edited by John MacKenzie, have focused on the imperial characteristics of material and entertainment culture. From a broad range of products and activities – from music hall, juvenile fiction and zoological gardens to biscuit tins, soap and popular cinema (the previously discussed *The Sheik*, for example) – an embedded imperial culture, complete with mass popular support for racial ideology, has been inferred.<sup>612</sup> Porter argues that the MacKenzie school 'tended to assume that (imperial propaganda) must have been overwhelming because there was so much of it; an alternative reading, however, might be that it could not have been all that persuasive, if the propagandists felt they needed to propagandize so hard.' He suggests that 'one way to settle this' would be to study the reception of imperial propaganda among consumers.<sup>613</sup> Indeed, one of the aims of my own study has been to examine the extent to which one of the key ideological justifications for imperialism – the construction of race – was incorporated into the outlook of ordinary working people.

As previously discussed, although textual memoirs and oral testimonies which mention empire and race are scarce, Stuart Hall's 'discursive approach' suggests that, in essence, historical documents which reflect the actions of individuals can speak as loudly as the words they uttered, but did not see fit, or were not able, to record or preserve in diaries, letters or memoirs. This supports the validity of a source-base

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<sup>611</sup> L. Smith, 'Mixed Race Britain: Charting the Social History', *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/oct/04/mixed-race-britain-social-history>, 2018, accessed 1 February 2018.

<sup>612</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986).

<sup>613</sup> B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), p. 6.

more familiar to 'traditional' social history than the post-colonial theorist. BMD records have proved to be a highly effective resource for locating the presence of those immigrants who possessed distinctive non-British names, as well as locating their native British wives and children. Additionally, census records, particularly those gleaned from the 1939 Register can demonstrate the close personal interactions of natives and newcomers, often at neighbourhood, street and household level.

This section will discuss the highly contested terrain to which my study responds. It will briefly examine the shortcomings and potential of the 'new imperial history' and its methodology. Although not an attempt to substantially fill the void in the historiography discussed in the introduction to this thesis, this section will contextualise my study's data with an examination of evidence for the experiences of other non-white individuals and populations within the Sheffield area during the period. This section will examine a small number of personal testimonies and memoirs which shed light on the subject from the point of view of ordinary working people, both white and non-white. The following section will provide a brief overview of the political and moral context within which the 'miscegenation' of mixed marriages took place. The section 'everyday tolerance' will discuss the historical possibilities arising from that evidence.

### **5.1 Bringing it all back home?**

It is important to note that the marriages located by this study only include those couples who had their marriage formalised in the Sheffield area and/or had children born in the city and where at least one party possessed a name of Muslim, Hindu, Sikh heritage. If we include mixed marriages of native and non-white newcomer from other ethnic groups outside South Asia, this category expands as does the visibility of non-white individuals and the couples and families they created among the native population of the Sheffield area.

As we have seen throughout this thesis regardless of whether men were engaged in proletarian labour or were self-employed, the quotidian spaces of work and neighbourhood brought non-white newcomers into regular contact with British, predominantly working class, natives. Nevertheless, native-newcomer couples in which the groom was a 'coloured man' could face hostility from local officials in Sheffield. The Superintendent Registrar for Sheffield's very public comments about how he actively discouraged white women from entering into 'mixed marriages' demonstrate that such activity was not merely frowned upon but actively discouraged.<sup>614</sup> Notwithstanding Fergusson's 'certain advice', we still have records of a number of local couples who were prepared to defy the racial logic of local functionaries.

The act of entering into a 'mixed marriage', I would argue, indicates at the very least an indifference toward, or ignorance of, British Empire's foundational ideology of race and racism, if not a conscious rejection of it. Nevertheless, whether mixed marriages were the result of ignorance of the racial imperatives of the empire, or a defiance of them, the consequences of such unions were clearly understood by those

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<sup>614</sup> Sheffield *Daily Independent*, 29 October 1938.

involved in the maintenance of empire. Indeed, the coupling of non-white men with white women had the potential to undermine the foundations of white prestige and British rule in the colonies. A marriage gave the appearance that the non-white husband had at least an equal social footing with his white wife – a representative member of the ruling ‘white race’. Additionally, if we take into account the pronounced gender inequalities of the period, marriage could potentially offer the non-white husband a superior social standing to his white wife. Mixed marriages involving low-status white women (particularly those from the ‘feckless’ labouring classes or, as J.B. Priestley described them, the ‘slatterns of the slums’) were also considered a threat to the safety of ‘respectable’ white women in the colonies. Such unions, it was thought, undermined the prestige and unattainability of white women to non-white men – even to the extent of encouraging rape by non-whites – a so-called ‘Black Peril’.<sup>615</sup> Consequently, marriages between white British subjects and colonised non-whites were taken extremely seriously by officials and considered taboo or transgressive when measured against moral and scientific standards – particularly, it appears, when such unions produced ‘half-caste’ children. Such procreation transgressed both scientific race theories of the medical consequences for the individuals concerned, but also fashionable eugenic theories about the dire consequences for the ‘imperial race’ if it became diluted by supposedly inferior genetic stock. Therefore, mixed marriages, however much or little the participants were aware of the racial hierarchies and the racial foundations of empire, were a deeply transgressive practice according to the worldview of their social superiors. Indeed, the inclusion of the symbols and practice of matrimony and the union of white native and non-white newcomer, within the ‘discursive’ approach to historical enquiry – particularly when mixed-race children were born – provides vital insights into the Empire’s effect on the quotidian life of the working-class population.

Widespread ‘race-mixing’, generated within the imperial metropole by the empire’s increasing demand for cheap colonised labour, was a new problem for the authorities. As we have seen, Britain’s shipping industry, the primary agent in this process, depended on the racial segregation and segmentation of its labour force. It was the means by which it maintained its global advantage over mercantile shipping nations without access to cheap colonised labour. However, the British merchant marine unintentionally provided its colonised labour force with the means of unofficial global migration, in search of parity of terms and conditions with Europeans, often to Britain itself. As a result, with increasing numbers of non-white immigrants now resident in Britain during the interwar period, there formed a dawning realisation among those responsible for the maintenance of the colonies that the active maintenance of white prestige required the importation of colonial social relations into domestic politics. As non-white working men inevitably interacted with the British ‘lower orders’ (long considered by many in the elite to be a ‘race apart’ in themselves), it became a question of concern that colonised non-whites would interpret their experience of white fallibility as an indication of the flimsiness of the

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<sup>615</sup> A. L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Oakland, 2002), p. 59.

construct of white racial superiority and the impregnability of imperial power.<sup>616</sup> As a Shipping Federation representative observed, 'the more they mix with the Europeans, the more ambitious they become to obtain European wages and European conditions.'<sup>617</sup> It was, however, sexual relationships which caused the most consternation for the official mind. In the aftermath of the 1919 port riots, the *Liverpool Evening Express*, summed up this sense of anxiety in its comment that 'undoubtedly these associationships (sic)... are un-desirable and harmful to the dignity of the white – that is to say, the dominant race'.<sup>618</sup>

After the First World War the British merchant marine's racial categorisation and division of seafarers was adopted by the state as a highly corrosive political strategy aimed at promoting the allegiance of white workers in port communities. The state presented itself, through the selective racialised implementation of immigration control, as a bulwark against the threat to British maritime jobs and wages of 'coolie' labour. Laura Tabili has argued that the British state's first experiences of employing racist political arguments domestically was the enactment and enforcement of the Aliens Act, 1919, particularly its extension in 1925 targeted solely at non-white workers – the CASO.<sup>619</sup> While Jacqueline Jenkinson has tended to view the maritime trade unions as being the prime-movers in mobilising state support for the implementation of domestic racism, both Tabili and Tony Lane have argued that the British state incorporated the racist arguments of the leadership of the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU) and the National Union of Seamen (NUS) for its own ends.<sup>620</sup>

The incorporation of protectionist trade unionist discourse into government policy by William Joynson Hicks – a Conservative Home Secretary of distinctly authoritarian inclination – should be viewed as a domestic turn in the British state's longstanding racist justification for empire. The co-ordinated attempt to drive non-white labour out of key British home ports by means of CASO took place at least five years after the port riots and may have been motivated more by political concerns than the economic concerns of native British seafarers. Frank Füredi identifies this as 'the central question' of the post-First World War period: by what means could the state once again 'endow public institutions with legitimacy'.<sup>621</sup> It was an uncertain period for nervous imperial observers, as Bolshevism and anti-imperialism appeared to be everywhere. Moreover, as all working-class men in Britain had been recently enfranchised, 'perhaps the most important issue facing Western societies was how to maintain order – in war and peace – at a time when it required the consent of the masses.' As Füredi argues, these issues would have been brought into sharp relief by the failure of the 'Land Fit for Heroes' to materialise after the war.

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<sup>616</sup> G. Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (London, 1984), pp. 358–360.

<sup>617</sup> BL, L/E/7/1152, Michael Brett, Shipping Federation representative.

<sup>618</sup> *Evening Express*, Liverpool. 6 June 1919.

<sup>619</sup> Tabili, 'The Construction of Racial Difference in Twentieth-Century Britain', 56.

<sup>620</sup> Jenkinson, 'Black Sailors on Red Clydeside', 33–34.

<sup>621</sup> F. Füredi, *First World War: Still No End in Sight* (London, 2014), p. 41.

Furthermore, Arno Mayer has suggested that during this new era of 'public opinion', state policy 'ceased to be the preserve of an encapsulated elite'. State institutions needed to invoke external threats to the newly enfranchised national community in order to 'maintain the domestic status quo'.<sup>622</sup> The growing potential for industrial militancy in maritime industries crucial for British global economic survival cannot have been far from the minds of those in government during this period. In this case the state utilised the racially divisive and socially corrosive measure of enacting CASO to blame non-whites explicitly for the crisis in employment and wages affecting maritime workers. The state's attempt to build a white racial solidarity British home soil appears as a remarkable, highly targeted state attack on non-white seafarers – regardless of their British subject status. It can be viewed as an attempt to dissipate the growing danger of crippling class-based conflict by the importation of colonial social relations based on race for the purpose of policing non-white Britons. Moreover, CASO was introduced during a period of wildcat strikes over a sweetheart deal between the NSFU and employers sanctioning wage cuts. Consequently, and possibly due to the dual-pronged state/trade union campaign to refocus the blame for poor pay onto non-white seafarers, the conservative leadership of the NSFU was able to abstain from active involvement in General Strike of 1926.<sup>623</sup>

It can thus be seen that the penetration of Indian and other non-white seafarers into the space beyond the imperial dockside after the Great War influenced the nature of British domestic politics. This influence was unintended but, unfortunately for the migrants it coincided with eugenically inspired experiments by elements of the British state, such as Home Secretary Joynson Hicks and local officials within the major ports to reconfigure the state's relationship with its domestic population on the basis of a racial hierarchy augmenting (but not replacing) that of class. In the era of universal suffrage and mass politics, the state would now pose as the sovereign defender of a new, white-British identity against a 'coloured' and 'alien' interloper. It is arguable that the domestic turn in imperial race-thinking during the interwar period had a profound impact not only on interwar Britain but also the British reaction to mass-migration in the post-Windrush era.

As we have previously discussed, the early 20th century, especially during the interwar period, has been dubbed the 'era of moral condemnation'. Concerns of 'racial decay' by elements of the British establishment, the metropolitan middle-classes and the intellectual elite led to a growing enthusiasm to translate eugenic theory into social policy in order to prevent a 'race-suicide' by 'Anglo-Saxons' who failed to defend the nation's genetic stock.<sup>624</sup> However, by 1941, a distinct change in tone is discernible from the press, as well as many organisations campaigning for moral and social hygiene. The demands placed on the merchant shipping industry by the isolation of Britain during the Battle of the Atlantic, combined with the transferral of thousands of merchant ships' crews to the Royal Navy, meant that the labour of Indian and other

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<sup>622</sup> L. Krieger and F. Stern, eds., 'Domestic Causes of the First World War', *The Responsibility of Power: Historical Essays in Honor of Hajo Holborn*, Ed. By Leonard Krieger and Fritz Stern., (London, 1968), p. 288.

<sup>623</sup> Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*, 98.

<sup>624</sup> *Eugenics Review*, January 1920; 11(4), pp. 210-215.

colonised seafarers was at a premium.<sup>625</sup> It is apparent that the language used to describe Indian seafarers, for example by the *Hull Daily Mail*, became very much more respectful, with their bravery and contribution to the survival of the 'home islands' to the fore in news reports and editorial pieces. During this period, the designation of the men changed in the press from the distinctly racialised 'coloureds' 'coolies', and 'lascars' to the much more dignified and respectful 'Indian Seamen'. The change in tone was reflected the new self-conscious British attitude of paternalistic praise for their colonial subjects. With the rise of anti-imperialism and nationalism in the colonies, especially in India, it was now of the utmost importance not to alienate those subjects who might return home with tales of ill-treatment. Instead of being the threat to British racial purity and way of life imagined in the drawing up of CASO in 1925, even the conservative British press was now ready to acknowledge 'what a mountain of debt we must owe (Indian seamen) for the safe transport of food and other necessities in these war days.'<sup>626</sup>

In 1941, Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies, summed up this sea-change in the presentation of domestic imperial attitudes and the urgent need to discourage the conclusion that the British could be seen as an imperial 'master-race':

If we are fighting for liberty, we cannot set the bounds to the advance of other races which look to us for their welfare. We must avoid any reproach that, when we blamed Hitler for his poisonous doctrine of the *Herrenvolk*, we had a similar doctrine lurking in our own hearts.<sup>627</sup>

Despite this softening of tone by the offices of state, as the 1944 Young report on conditions in Stepney demonstrates, the 'similar doctrines' of racial difference would endure for some time among the stratum of 'experts' responsible for providing welfare, charity 'social hygiene' and 'moral guidance' to working-class communities.

## 5.2 An everyday tolerance?

Marriage certificates reveal a growing network of contacts in the names of both immigrants' native wives and the witnesses they chose and, just as importantly, who agreed to validate relationships which straddled the racial, religious and cultural divide. The names of witnesses show the migrants drawing 'outsiders' into their social networks, not only by marriage exogamous to their religious, ethnic and kinship groups, but as part of a much broader network of friends, neighbours, workmates and colleagues.

Carina E. Ray has, however, demonstrated the problems faced by similar couples at the hands of the British state's Home, India and Colonial Offices who were often reluctant to recognise that a non-white husband's nationality was as equally British as that of white natives.<sup>628</sup> Indeed, official constructions and interpretations of 'race' and citizenship were often inconsistent, arbitrary and contingent upon the

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<sup>625</sup> T. Lane, *The Merchant Seamen's War* (Manchester, 1990), p. 156.

<sup>626</sup> *Daily Mail*, (Hull), Monday 21 September 1942.

<sup>627</sup> Quoted in A. R. Watson, *West Indian Workers in Britain*, (London, 1942), p. 14.

<sup>628</sup> Ray, "'The White Wife Problem'".

shifting rivalries between civil servants and their departments.<sup>629</sup> As we have seen with the case of Abdul and Winnifred Gunni, those newcomers whose social networks incorporated natives could play an important role in supporting 'mixed' couples, enabling them to endure and resist such attentions from unsympathetic, racially-minded officials.

With regard to parental attitudes Collins's observations are borne out by R.L. Lee's memoir of growing up in the ethnically diverse iron and steel town of Dowlais in the Welsh valleys. After Lee's Welsh mother secretly married his Chinese father and became pregnant she was 'virtually banned' from her parents' house. Despite the 'shame' of the union, 'after sorrow, came forgiveness', and the door was once again fully opened to mother and infant.<sup>630</sup> As we have seen, Ayaht Khan's occasionally fraught relationship with his mother-in-law ended up in front of the magistrate on one occasion. Despite this unfortunate incident in which they were both injured, they appear to have maintained contact with each other and his in-laws continued to play host to Hawas Khan, their South Asian lodger.

Despite the sometimes uneasy relationships between newly-wed mixed couples and their native families, the couples often endured a much more troublesome, long-term and vertical relationship with the various departments of the state and the moral entrepreneurs who sought to reduce the incidence of births of 'half-caste' children. Scholars, such as Carina E. Ray and Mark Christian, have examined this issue in some depth with the consequence that further research into the relationships between couples, their families and their neighbourhoods is needed to add nuance and texture to the everyday lived experience of native-newcomer relationships.<sup>631</sup> Nevertheless, as this study illustrates, relationships between native and newcomer, and the social networks they constituted, played a key role in facilitating both migration and migrant integration into the life and culture of this most proletarian of cities.<sup>632</sup>

Both working-class memoirists and social historians, such as Andrew Davies, Hoggart and Roberts have described in detail a tight-knit and tolerant northern working-class culture, a product of overcrowded homes and scant disposable income.<sup>633</sup> However, we must remain mindful of the dangers of reminiscence – particularly the tendency to romanticise the past by glossing over hardships of working-class childhoods. Indeed, Doreen Bahadur (née Khan), an astute and politically-aware realist, was comfortable with articulating a critical outlook toward racism and British imperialism when her nephew Paul interviewed her in 2004.<sup>634</sup> Nevertheless, she communicated a warm sense of the neighbourhood, the friendships

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<sup>629</sup> For example: Lane, 'The Political Imperatives of Bureaucracy and Empire'; Tabili, 'Empire Is the Enemy of Love'.

<sup>630</sup> Lee, *The Town That Died!*, 22.

<sup>631</sup> Ray, "'The White Wife Problem'"; Christian, 'The Fletcher Report 1930'.

<sup>632</sup> Describing Sheffield as 'the most proletarian city in England' the economic historian Sidney Pollard assessed the working-classes of Sheffield to comprise 80% of the city's population. Pollard, 'Labour', 260.

<sup>633</sup> Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 109–110.

<sup>634</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

forged in the tightly packed streets and courtyards of Sheffield's East End, her sense of belonging and of her family's integration into the life of the street and the neighbourhood. The daughter of Rasool and Elsie Khan, she grew up in the heart of Attercliffe – the centre of steel production in the Sheffield area. Between the massive soot-blackened sheds housing the furnaces, forges and mills were crowded thousands of small terraced houses, many of which were clustered around courtyards and shared privies. Here, social life, like a great many working-class neighbourhoods, was lived to a great extent (weather permitting) in the street. In this environment newcomers would inevitably have been in regular contact with native neighbours and the life of



Figure 5.1 The shared courtyard to the rear of Amberley Street, Sheffield – the neighbourhood of Rasool and Elsie Khan. The massive steelworks at the end of the road can be seen looming in the distance  
© Picture Sheffield

the street. For example, Doreen's mother and father shared out off-ration, and freshly-slaughtered, goat meat to their English neighbours during Eid (although the neighbours were happy to think of it as black-market lamb). They also enjoyed a share of his curries when available. She recollected that her father 'always gave Mrs Ware (the next-door neighbour) a piece because her husband worked on the railway. If he got any bits, odds and sods – everybody shared and mucked in – we got a bit of cheese on the black market (in return)... so everybody helped one another... they all mucked in and everything.'<sup>635</sup> A working-class culture of informal mutuality, the public space and street-based sociability, for both adults and children, likely played a large role in the process of integrating newcomers into the

neighbourhoods they inhabited. Doreen remembered that in the Attercliffe district 'everybody knew us', and 'if you went out – "oh hello Topsy", "oh it's one of the Peters", because everybody knew the Peters family (her mother Elsie was a Peters)'<sup>636</sup> Away from her home in the Attercliffe district of Sheffield, however, some strangers would regard her with curiosity and comment openly on her appearance:

I used to get on the tram car and they all used to go "Oh, hello Topsy". I used to say "me name's not Topsy". (They said) "She's

<sup>635</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan.

<sup>636</sup> Topsy referred to the child slave in Harriet Beecher Stowe's highly popular novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

got eyes to fetch ducks off t'water...Ooh, look at the little piccaninny". But it wasn't malicious, it was curiosity.'

Later in her account of her early life, Doreen described her treatment as an arriving wartime evacuee in rural Leicestershire. She differentiated between the attitudes of city dwellers and country folk:

It was like an Alabama slave market – all coming in and looking which one (they) were going to have – you know – who'd give the least trouble – 'cause they'd never seen a black kid in their life – it was unusual in Sheffield so you can imagine a village – "Ooh, look at all the little piccaninnies! Is your name Topsy?"..."No me names not Topsy, I'm not a piccanniny, I'm an Indian" they were all coming in to have a look and they were all picking them out, but anybody...could see (it was) "oh we don't want that one – might be trouble."

For Doreen, the meaning behind the use of the names 'Topsy' and 'piccaninny' by strangers was a matter of intent. In Sheffield, she remembered such terms being used, at worst, in friendly ignorance and not used to cause offence. However, in Leicestershire, she interpreted the same terms as being used in an upsetting and negative manner, where to be non-white indicated a potential problem child.<sup>637</sup>

The response to Indians in Glasgow was also complex and Andrew Davies has described the murder in 1925 of the Punjabi pedlar Noor Mohammed by members of a Glasgow gang. The pedlars' business was 'hawking clothes such as silk scarves and jumpers door-to-door throughout Glasgow', with 'numerous local women... among their customers.' This was a matter of great consternation in city and the case featured prominently in Scottish press. Neighbours described Noor Mohammed and his fellow pedlars as gentle and that they gave no cause for offence: 'They come and go and trouble no one', one neighbour explained. In court, the wife of Noor's colleague Nathoo Mohammed's, Louie (described in the press as a white girl of Spanish extraction'), was cross-examined. She explained that she had been had married to Nathoo for eight months and firmly denied any ill-feeling in the district towards her marriage to an Indian 'coloured' man.<sup>638</sup> As we can see from Davies's research, beneath the tragic headline of an Indian pedlar viciously murdered by a local gang lies another layer of evidence. Here the newcomers were accepted by most people in the neighbourhood, many of whom, like those we have seen in the Sheffield evidence, were themselves customers of the men. Here, social networks included white native neighbours, with at least one of the men married to a local woman.

Reggie Lee, a boy whose 'father had gone to China, a long time ago, and never came back', recalled the small ironmaking town of Dowlais in the Welsh valleys as being 'drab, squalid and sprawling... set amongst dirt hills, twisted steelwork and slag tips'. Nevertheless, to him the town was populated with 'fabulous people' and 'love

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<sup>637</sup> Bahadur and Khan, 2004.

<sup>638</sup> A. Davies, *City of Gangs: Glasgow and the Rise of the British Gangster* (London, 2014), pp. 37–38.

and tenderness sprouted forth - like flowers on a dung heap.' Here, children's loyalties were primarily to the street where they lived, rather racial affiliations. As with Richard Hoggart's recollections and Andrew Davis's studies, each street or cluster of streets would have its own gang which fiercely defended its territory against the incursions of rivals. Reggie's own street gang comprised children of all ages from Spanish, Irish and Welsh families and which, despite its multi-ethnic membership, was 'more clannish than all the clans'.<sup>639</sup> Reggie recalled the name-calling typical of children and which sometimes made reference to each other's ethnic background or to appearance. He does not appear to have been overly concerned with this, attributing it down to the general rough and tumble of children's play. Despite the occasional name-calling, what is apparent from Reggie's memoir is his pronounced sense of belonging within his family, street and town. In this sense his memories share many of the qualities of Doreen Bahadur and her siblings.

Reggie's biggest early upset to his sense of belonging came during a visit to the local Conservative club for a talent show. Here he witnessed the Conservative candidate boasting to the audience that they had ensured that all the evening's performers were 'all Welsh'. As Reggie had himself played violin on this stage, it was understood that this was a reference to the exclusion of 'foreigners' such as himself from future performances.<sup>640</sup> Unfortunately for the young Reggie Lee, a slow realisation dawned that life outside the working-class culture of the Welsh Valleys was going to be a difficult experience for a boy with a Chinese father. After being sent to join his mother in the small seaside resort town of Aberystwyth, Lee attended a school where the boys 'wore nice clothes even for school' and were 'very stuck up'. Feeling out of place he was, to his fellow pupils, 'something of an oddity', and he often 'spotted someone pulling their eyes slanting, or shuffling around with hands tucked into sleeves.' To compound his sense of externally imposed difference, the middle-class Aberystwyth boys even mocked his working-class Dowlais accent. Here, his sense of Welshness and belonging was not sufficient to prevent feelings of being made an outsider, increasingly aware of his origins and his colour when beyond the Valleys.<sup>641</sup>

Olive Harleston, the illegitimate daughter of an African-American couple, grew up in a working-class district of Wigan, Lancashire after being left in the care of a white English family. She grew up among the northern working-classes from her birth in 1906 up until being reunited with her parents in the USA in 1920. After many years of activism, including work for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as a field representative in New York City's Human Rights Commission and teaching black history in the late 1960s, she revisited Wigan in 1983 to be reunited with her childhood friends. Interviewed at the time by the historian Jeffrey Green, her recollections, like those of Doreen Bahadur and Reggie

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<sup>639</sup> Lee, *The Town That Died!*, 32.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

Lee, provide useful insights into life of non-white children growing up in working-class neighbourhoods within imperial Britain.<sup>642</sup>

Olive, 'an impressive and vibrant person', responded to Green's questions in a thoughtful and clearly defined manner. Indeed she appears to have surprised Green somewhat. His responses indicate that he perhaps expected memories of hostility, racism and resistance to form a distinct thread running throughout a recollection of a deracinated early life. In contrast, her recollection was of her strong sense of belonging in her neighbourhood and her school. Indeed, upon return to Wigan in 1983, she reunited with her old school friends. One even produced a photograph of her old pal Olive, now a United States' citizen, dated 1920.

When asked by Green whether, on leaving her immediate social surroundings, she was ever 'conscious of being "odd" on the tram'. Olive's reply differs somewhat from that of Doreen Bahadur who, as we have seen, experienced a sense of difference when leaving her immediate neighbourhood to travel on public transport:

No, I was never - no, no, there was never any - nothing to make me feel self-conscious about me not being white. No. The way I realised I wasn't quite like the rest of them - I'd look at myself! No difference in any area of my life. The only time that any mention was made of me being different was when I was in, I guess, the fifth - Standard V - it may be IV or V; and a little boy called me "blackie" ... that's the only time in the whole time I was there that anything ever made me realise the matter of colour. I never felt any different.<sup>643</sup>

Green, requiring clarification of Olive's surprisingly unambiguous response, went on to ask her that, if he was 'desperately looking for some social prejudice in pre-1920 Wigan', would it be religious in character? In response Olive reiterated her previous claim to the apparent lack of racial prejudice: 'That's right', she confirmed, 'they had a lot of prejudices but I'd never been exposed to or heard of any racial prejudice.'<sup>644</sup> Her own experience of religiously-based discrimination was of being denied a part in a play staged by her Church of England maintained school. This, as her English aunt was informed by one of the teachers, was because the white (apart from Olive) family were all 'heathens' due to their adherence to Unitarianism and rejection of the Holy Trinity.<sup>645</sup> In Wigan it appears that racial 'Othering' took a minor role in a social and cultural landscape where the primary categories of difference were of class and of confession.

Olive went on to reflect on the limited knowledge those around her possessed of the outside world, including America. Just before she left her childhood home to re-unite with her biological parents, Olive was told by the next-door neighbour: 'When you go to those United States you'll see a lot of people the same colour you are - those Indians.' Olive explained, 'they just assumed that American Indians were the main inhabitants of the United States.' Olive's recognition of this lack of knowledge

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<sup>642</sup> Green, 'Beef Pie with a Suet Crust'.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

and awareness was compounded by her first return to England in 1924 when she visited the British Empire Exhibition with her Wigan aunt. After viewing an exhibit of African peoples her aunt exclaimed, 'Oh, my goodness, look at those Africans! You don't look anything like those Africans.' Olive understood this to mean that her aunt assumed that her niece was from 'a different part (or) race' to the people performing and that, despite her parents being African-American, 'She had never associated me with the African.'<sup>646</sup>

The apparent ignorance of many working-class people of the geography and cultures of the world outside their immediate vicinity – and also an ignorance of imperial racial hierarchy – were phenomena noted by the Trinidadian socialist C.L.R. James during his period of residence in the working-class mill town of Nelson, Lancashire:

The people of Nelson began by believing that we had something to do with India. When they were made to understand that this was not so, that English was our native language and we had no native religion, they began to look upon us as an entirely unknown sort of people, unknown at least to them, and they began to look upon us as typical West Indians.<sup>647</sup>

Before arriving in Nelson, James experienced an entirely more judgemental reaction from strangers during his first visit to London earlier in 1932. His occasional experiences of racism when walking out in public with white women provoked him to write at the time: 'there remains something in the average Englishman which can only be called sheer blind prejudice.' By May that year, James had followed his friend the great Trinidadian cricketer Learie Constantine to Nelson, with the plan of writing Constantine's biography. This period, according to Christian Høgsbjerg, would be 'the making of C.L.R. James'.<sup>648</sup> It was, in other words, James's close encounter with British working people which transformed his previously, rather elite, Fabian worldview into one of proletarian socialism. James himself remembered his close relationships among the mill workers of this Lancashire cotton town: 'Some of Constantine's intimate friends who came to the house often found congenial company in me, apart from cricket... these humorously cynical working men were a revelation... some of the best friends a man could make I made during my first weeks in Nelson.'<sup>649</sup> Moreover, James later wrote in the Trinidadian *Port of Spain Gazette* that he 'could forgive England all the vulgarity, and all the depressing disappointment of London for the magnificent spirit to these north country working people.'<sup>650</sup>

Despite James's positive experience of life among the working class and radical traditions of 'Red' Nelson during the inter-war period, we must also bear in mind the contingent and shifting nature of racism in society. By the late 1960s the tolerant atmosphere in Nelson, according to the granddaughter of pioneer settler Shazreen

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<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>647</sup> Cited in C. Høgsbjerg, *C. L. R. James in Imperial Britain* (Durham, NC., 2014), p. 58.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 38–64.

<sup>649</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>650</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 46.

Khan, had changed. She considered the experiences of her father and grandfather as without doubt very tough, with poverty as one of the defining features of life during the 1930s and 1940s, but that being subject to everyday racial discrimination or harassment was not one of them. Her own assessment was that, in terms of tolerance and acceptance, the period in which she grew up was very different to that described by her family and recalled being taunted at school that her mother 'went with Pakis' due to her father being of mixed-race.<sup>651</sup>

The academic and cultural commentator Richard Hoggart grew up in a working-class district of the Yorkshire city of Leeds during the inter-war period. In *The Uses of Literacy* Hoggart described in detail the social attitudes of the community in which he spent his formative years, regarding them as typifying a British working-class worldview. Despite noting the conservatism, inward looking nature and resistance to change common to many working-class neighbourhoods, there was, he explained, an attitude of 'tolerance', of 'living and letting live' among those he grew up with. It was, he argued, 'a tolerance bred both from a charity, in that all are in the same lower situation together, and from the larger unidealism which that situation creates.'<sup>652</sup> Much has rightly been made of the legacies of the anti-slavery movement, Chartism and the influences of socialism and non-conformist Christianity in the development of working-class hostility to racism and imperialism.<sup>653</sup> But the tolerance Hoggart describes perhaps also helps explain the lack of racially-motivated conflict one might expect in districts where non-white immigrants began to arrive – especially when they entered into relationships with native white women. While marriage records examined by this study do not show the ideological attachments of the couples concerned. Neither do they show whether the individuals involved supported the maintenance of empire. Nevertheless, it is fairly safe to assume that the individuals voluntarily joining together in matrimony were distinctly lacking in their adherence to those imperial racial theories which advocated against miscegenation.

By and large, Indian newcomers had arrived in the Sheffield-area seeking work in its metalworking industries. And, as McKibbin recognised, the culture of the working-class within such industries was proudly and profoundly focused on work. For men he observed, 'the workplace and its social relationships were irreplaceable'. Here, 'work was life'.<sup>654</sup> Helen Smith, in her historical analysis of working-class masculinity in the north of England, contends that her subjects 'were imbued with a strong sense of security in their own masculinity due to the nature of their work'.<sup>655</sup> Smith's analysis contrasts somewhat with the brittle and deeply challenged white working-class masculinity, damaged by the experience of the First World War, that Lucy Bland identifies as lying at the root of working-class antagonism to 'mixed' couples.<sup>656</sup> According to Bland, 'myths of black sexual potency were widespread', although the working-class men, who she says subscribed to these myths, remain

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<sup>651</sup> Interview: Angela Khan, 2 September 2014.

<sup>652</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 72, 79.

<sup>653</sup> Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 217–226.

<sup>654</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 162.

<sup>655</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*, 94.

<sup>656</sup> Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', 37–38.

silent in her analysis. This historical silence means that we are invited by Bland to 'speculate', without benefit of evidence, that 'their fury at miscegenation... lay in its perceived negation of part of their sense of self-worth.'<sup>657</sup> In distinct contrast, Smith describes the robust but tolerant sociability that developed in collieries and steelworks, precisely the environments in which non-white newcomers were employed, and 'men were reliant on their mates for safety and even their life.'<sup>658</sup> Workers in the heavy industries, often organised into gangs, and working in dangerous trades developed a culture of mutuality, essential for the safety and relative prosperity of the group – a culture of workplace-derived mutuality vividly described in Patrick McGeown's account of life as a northern steelworker during the period.<sup>659</sup> Moreover, as Hoggart discusses at length, this quotidian culture was imbued with a sense of acceptance of difference, regardless of prevailing standards of 'respectability' - provided individuals were willing to 'muck in' and play their part.<sup>660</sup> Although from the post-Second World War period, a sense of such mutuality and sociability among workmates can be found in the experience of the West Indian men who worked underground in the collieries of Nottinghamshire from the 1950s. In conversation with the independent historian Norma Gregory, one man recalled that underground 'we were very united down there. You had to be...you had to watch each other's backs. Colour didn't come into it. We were all on one level.' Another, recalled that he 'enjoyed mining, because you got to make friends...if a finger got crushed, there would be somebody there to come and give you a helping hand.' Nevertheless, such mutuality and comradeship had, by this point in time, limits and boundaries: 'once you came back on to the surface and had a shower, then the white folks would stick to themselves and the black folks would stick to themselves...but when you were down there, you were automatically united, because you knew you were all in the same boat.'<sup>661</sup>

As we have seen, the case of Sultan Mohamed, although tragic in its outcome, supports the case for the existence of a working-class mutuality that transcended imperial divisions of race. Away from the highly racialised environment of the decks, docksides and shipping offices of the British merchant marine and its dominant trade unions, the National Sailors and Firemen's Union and its successor the National Union of Seamen, Sultan, a former lascar, worked alongside his white-British workmates. While the families of lascar seafarers were likely to receive little or no recompense following the death or serious injury of their husbands, fathers and sons at work, Sultan, through his non-maritime trade union, was ensured parity with white workers

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<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>658</sup> Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957*, 94.

<sup>659</sup> McGeown, *Heat the Furnace Seven Times More*, 95–97.

<sup>660</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 82.

<sup>661</sup> F. Perraudin, 'How Britain's Black Miners Are Reclaiming Their Place in History', *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/24/black-miners-britain-nottingham>, 2016, accessed 14 April 2018; 'Digging Deeper: Unearthing Narratives of Black British Coal Miners', *University of Nottingham*, <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/peopleandculture/2017/09/14/digging-deeper-unearthing-narratives-black-british-coal-miners/>, 2017, accessed 14 April 2018.

under the law.<sup>662</sup> Sultan's case appears as an isolated incident at present and further investigation is needed into similar cases where the right of non-white workers to equal treatment before the law was defended at grass roots level. This may help ascertain the degree to which the imperial ideology of race had, at shop-floor level, penetrated the non-maritime element of the labour movement during this period.<sup>663</sup>

In the section devoted to the social networks of the South Asian newcomers, the private domain of the home was a place of close interaction. Men were taken in as lodgers by white working-class families on an informal basis as well as being accommodated on a commercial basis in mixed lodging houses, tenement blocks, hostels and hotels. Moreover we have seen examples where the situation reversed, such as that of Jim Badloe (Mohammed Noor) and his wife Ivy, who took in a young white woman as a lodger. In Sheffield migrants and their families lived across the city in both private and social housing. Moreover, like Ali and Maggie Amidulla, a number of native-newcomer families lived in the relatively expensive and sought-after social housing, built and maintained by the Sheffield Corporation.<sup>664</sup> This sits in contrast to the widely documented experience of informal discrimination by social housing officials against non-white families in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>665</sup> During the period there is no evidence in Sheffield of any defensive clustering of Indian or Muslim households similar to that described in some British cities from the mid 1950s.<sup>666</sup>

Unlike the family migrations of Eastern European Jews at the end of the nineteenth century, the South Asian migration into the Sheffield area was almost entirely male. The relationships the newcomers forged within the area were as likely to be with natives as with other Indians. This gendered pattern of migration appears to have had a significant effect on how migrants interacted with natives. In Sheffield, opportunities for social contact between men and women were greater than other industrial cities as a substantial proportion of the female population was traditionally employed in the cutlery and flatware industry alongside men. Opportunities for workplace social contact between men and women were also significantly increased during years of war when thousands of young working-class women were recruited for munitions work.<sup>667</sup> Despite being raised in cultures of the Indian subcontinent that often enforced strict gender segregation (such as *Pashtunwali*: the ethical code of the Pashtuns), the informality and directness of courting among young working-class men and women noted by both McKibbin and Davies would have certainly increased the opportunities for social contact between young women and men.<sup>668</sup> The GRO records show that 31 couples lived in the same neighbourhood, in the same street or

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<sup>662</sup> T. Carter, *Merchant Seamen's Health, 1860-1960: Medicine, Technology, Shipowners and the State in Britain* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2014), pp. 83–84.

<sup>663</sup> BL, IOR, L/E/7/1321, File 4570, Workman's Compensation Act 1906, Sultan Mohamed.

<sup>664</sup> For example, TNA, 1939 Register: Wosman household, Sheffield, RG101/3565I/008/39-KIXC; Khan household, Sheffield, RG101/3562F/002/43-KIWB.

<sup>665</sup> J. Rex and R. Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict: A Study of Sparkbrook*, (1967), pp. 19–27.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, 263–264.

<sup>667</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 109–111.

<sup>668</sup> Spain, *The Pathan Borderland*, 79–80; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 99–103; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 185; Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 99.

even next door to their future husbands. This proximity strongly supports the argument that the culture of the street and the neighbourhood played a large role in native-newcomer interaction.<sup>669</sup>

Jonathan Rose argues that 'before the First World War, the working classes in Britain were considerably less racist than the governing classes. They rarely engaged in racial violence, and they had not absorbed the scientific racism fashionable among the university-educated.'<sup>670</sup> However, he notes that 'after 1918, as racism became less acceptable among educated people, it became more common among British workers, as they increasingly competed with immigrants for jobs.'<sup>671</sup> This argument may be, to some extent, reflected in the sporadic outbreaks of racially motivated violence which afflicted some British ports, particularly during 1919-1920. Nevertheless, the evidence presented by this study would support the argument that elements of the British working class did not absorb, to a significant degree, the racism of the imperially-minded elite throughout the period covered by this study. The evidence also suggests that working-class people failed to take on the racism of the more middle-class eugenic movement, as Rose suggests. This racist outlook did, however, remain fashionable among the 'university educated', until it was finally discredited by the experience of Nazism.<sup>672</sup>

In contrast to the concerns of eugenic campaigners, and to Rose's conclusion that an increase in racist attitudes occurred after 1918, Robert Roberts observed the development of a new tolerance toward diversity developing among the working and lower middle-class people of his northern home in the years after the First World War. He described 'a growing maturity in mass attitudes towards strangers and a decrease in that xenophobia rife before and (of course) during the war. Italians, Indian seamen, the so-called Lascars, with small groups of coloured people - to all the first decade after the war brought toleration.'<sup>673</sup> For Hoggart, an outlook which eschewed strong ideological allegiances lay at the heart of working-class tolerance, sociability and mutuality. It was a pragmatic and 'unidealistic tolerance', a 'taking-life-as-it comes, a goodwill-humanism' necessarily combined with a 'slowness to moral indignation', which informed a 'live and let live' outlook among the northern working-class of the period.<sup>674</sup>

Bernard Porter also identifies a general indifference to imperial ideologies promoted through mass consumption during this period. He suggests notions of race do not appear to have particularly attracted working-class people to empire, which remained a 'marginal' concern. Moreover, he argues that even when the working classes behaved in an 'imperialistic way', such as attendance at Empire Day festivities,

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<sup>669</sup> For example, Ahamed Wosman and Constance Goodwin, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield, Jan.-Mar. 1919, vol. 9c, p. 885; Maherban Shah and Annie Dunn, m. cert.: GRO, Marriages, Sheffield District, Oct.-Dec. 1924, vol. 9c, p. 1360a.

<sup>670</sup> J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2010), p. 385.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>672</sup> G. Schaffer, "'Like a Baby with a Box of Matches': British Scientists and the Concept of "race" in the Inter-War Period', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 38 (October 2005), pp. 323-324.

<sup>673</sup> Roberts, *The Classic Slum*, 221.

<sup>674</sup> Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 79, 146.

'it was invariably for un-imperialistic reasons'. In other words, it was usually undertaken for what else could be got from these activities, such as the half-day off or the 'knees-up', rather than for the imperialism.<sup>675</sup> Mary Partlett's childhood memory of Empire Day chimes closely with Porter's interpretation. 'Empire Day was absolutely wonderful', she recalled. 'It was the highlight of our lives, simply because it was something to look forward to...I suppose because we didn't have much, therefore all the things that came along was a way of taking your mind off of the poverty that you actually lived in.'<sup>676</sup>

Rose also questions the claims of many scholars who argue that popular culture was 'supersaturated with imperialist propaganda.' By way of contrast he suggests that:

Too often, those who examine literature for evidence of imperialism, racism, or male supremacy assume that these values were unproblematically transmitted to its readers, as if literature were a kind of political drug, with predictable and consistent effects. In fact, the ideological impact of popular literature is far more complicated and often fairly surprising.<sup>677</sup>

Rose goes on to explain that working-class readers (like all readers) 'framed' the content they consumed - effectively filtering out content or meanings which did not appeal to them, or reinterpreting them in ways which reflected their own experience. He argues that an individual can simultaneously enjoy literature of widely differing outlooks in separate compartments, actively framing each text to take what meaning is desired and to disregard or reject those elements which do not fit the reader's



Figure 5.2  
'Living flags' during Empire Day celebrations at Bramall Lane football and cricket ground, Sheffield, 1906 © Picture Sheffield

current concerns. Rose uses the example of Percy Wall (b. 1893) to illustrate his point.<sup>678</sup> As a boy, Wall enjoyed boy's papers such as the *Magnet* and the *Boy's Own Paper* as well as G. A. Henty novels. He collected cigarette cards featuring images of Baden-Powell, Kitchener, and Redvers Buller. In a miners' library in his South Wales home town, 'he loved to "penetrate darkest Africa with Rider Haggard as my guide."' Despite these patterns of consumption (all of which have been described as characteristic of the imbrication of the nation's culture with imperialism), Wall regarded *Cleopatra's Needle* as a "symbol of Britain's predatory attitude to the African continent". During the war he was sentenced to

<sup>675</sup> Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 208.

<sup>676</sup> Salisbury, *The War on Our Doorstep*, 66–67.

<sup>677</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 322–323.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

thirty months in prison as a conscientious objector. As Rose explains, 'while he read Henty for enjoyment, he studied the *Clarion*, the *Freethinker*, *The Struggle of the Bulgarians for Independence*, and *The Philippine Martyrs* for their politics, and did not allow one body of literature to affect the other.' Moreover, he argues:

There are no real paradoxes here. These responses simply demonstrate that whether a text is "conservative" or "subversive" depends on the context in which it is read and the larger literary diet of the reader. The same reader can enjoy Karl Marx and Frank Richards in separate compartments, bringing a different frame to each.<sup>679</sup>

The apparent indifference to, or rejection of, ideology in the form of racial justifications for imperialism by many working-class people is explained to some extent by Rose. Like Porter, he suggests that 'even after a half-century of unrelenting indoctrination, most working people knew little of the Empire and cared less.' In the case of a literate audience, 'reader response depends entirely on the frame of the audience, which in turn depends on their education and their other reading experiences.'<sup>680</sup>

Tara Zahra has examined this sense of ambivalence toward forceful ideological imperatives among ethnic and religious minorities among European populations. She notes that the failure to engage in the development of the collective prejudices of the nation's 'imagined community' has been variously termed, among other things, regionalism, cosmopolitanism, socialism, localism, intermarriage, immorality, backwardness, stubbornness, and false consciousness.<sup>681</sup> These terms notwithstanding, it is worthwhile considering that the collective prejudices of many members of the working-classes lay elsewhere. Or perhaps it was possible for members of the working-classes to participate in an 'imagined community' in which the imperial ideology of racism was not a defining feature. Indeed, such a response to imperial propaganda is demonstrated by the members of the social networks located by this study. As Tabili suggests, close co-operation between natives and newcomers contradicts the view of British society as 'monolithic' in its attitudes to perceived racial and cultural difference.<sup>682</sup> Moreover, Zahra warns that 'historians who analyze nations as "imagined communities" risk remaining imprisoned within nationalists' own discursive universe, analyzing the contested content of nationalist ideologies and cultures without questioning the extent to which those ideologies resonated among their audiences.'<sup>683</sup> Bearing in mind Zahra's argument, 'indifference', rather than being the opposite of political engagement, might express a deep popular scepticism toward the ideological solutions offered in response to the problems of everyday life during this period.<sup>684</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>681</sup> T. Zahra, 'Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis', *Slavic Review*, 69:1 (2010), p. 98.

<sup>682</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, 7.

<sup>683</sup> Zahra, 'Imagined Noncommunities', 112.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid., 118–119.

Many middle-class left-wing activists and groups, such as that of celebrated socialist Edward Carpenter – the St. Philip’s Settlement Society – despaired of the indifference of a large proportion of the working classes to their conception of socialism. They deplored the widespread preference of ordinary people for the sociability of football and cinema, public houses and music halls.<sup>685</sup> The Sheffield-based St. Philip’s group’s pioneering social survey *The Equipment of the Workers* classified over three-quarters of the 816 working-class men and women it interviewed as either ‘inadequately equipped’ or ‘mal-equipped’ for participation in the expanded electoral franchise of 1918.<sup>686</sup> Unsurprisingly perhaps, it was those who failed to wholeheartedly share the Society’s vision of a progressive future who were thus categorised.<sup>687</sup> It is of interest, however, that many of the ‘inadequately equipped’ participants displayed what we might today describe as instinctively democratic and egalitarian values.<sup>688</sup> For example, ‘Jorde’ a railway worker, trade unionist and family man was categorised by the survey as ‘inadequately equipped’.<sup>689</sup> He was described as demonstrating no knowledge of the Battle of Hastings, Magna Carta, the Industrial Revolution or the Reform Act of 1832, ‘nor of Wolsey, Cromwell, Watt or Owen’, or about the past or present of the Trade Union Movement. He knew ‘nothing of the Chartists, (Sydney) Webb or (G.D.H.) Cole’ and had only had the ‘usual elementary school education up to the age of 14’. “ ‘Jorde’ did however know that ‘India was larger than England’ and that although he had previously supported the Liberals, he was ‘now moderately Socialistic.’ On the question of Home Rule, he considered that ‘Ireland should have it, not exactly because they deserve it, but because it’s long standing, and to let them have a try.’ On the House of Lords, he did not ‘think much to it’ but he agreed with the introduction of women’s suffrage. On the question of ‘the future of the workers in England’, ‘Jorde’ believed that the country ‘should be more democratic; not subject so much to (the) capitalist; deserving of more consideration.’ He did, however, remain a supporter of the king, being ‘satisfied with the present democratic ruling of the Monarch.’<sup>690</sup>

The Society’s survey also interviewed another fairly typical ‘mal-equipped’ individual: ‘Mrs Goldspoon’, a twenty-six year old street hawker and mother of three, whose husband had been killed in the war. She spent her afternoons ‘standing by a handcart at the corner of a side street near the (railway) station, selling her goods.’ She was considered to be ‘a good mother in her very rough and ready way’ who appeared

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<sup>685</sup> St Philip’s Settlement Education and Economics Research Society, *Equipment of the Workers*, 14–21.

<sup>686</sup> Despite the elitist and rather technocratic intentions of Sheffield’s settlement society, the snapshot of the attitudes of ordinary working people in the period between 1916 and 1919 is unique: St Philip’s Settlement Education and Economics Research Society, *Equipment of the Workers*.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>688</sup> The study’s authors declared that ‘it seemed best to name these three classes the “Well Equipped”, the “Inadequately-equipped”, and the “Mal-equipped”. These terms are unimaginative enough for a thesis for a doctorate. They do not appeal to us as much as “Those Living Finely”, “Those Living Indifferently”, and “Those Living Basely” ...’: *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>689</sup> All participants were given aliases chosen by the researchers.

<sup>690</sup> St Philip’s Settlement Education and Economics Research Society, *Equipment of the Workers*, 243–245.

‘very fond of her children, who are all big and bonny, and well-fed.’ Although she had lived in the same locality in Sheffield all her life, and ‘would not dream of moving from it’, she had ‘not a scrap of the knowledge about local things that would fit her to vote.’ She was convinced that ‘the country is governed by men who try to make it very difficult for poor people to get a living’ but she apparently knew nothing of English history or the names of any of Sheffield’s Members of Parliament.<sup>691</sup>

The insular, conservative and frequently defensive nature of much working-class life, not to mention the civic pride of Sheffielders, has often been commented on and the St Philip’s Society recognised this. ‘Speaking generally’ they suggested, ‘the people of Sheffield are neither recognizably superior (as they are themselves inclined to believe) nor recognizably inferior (as those whom they call “foreigners” are inclined to allege) to those living elsewhere.’<sup>692</sup> Well into the second half of the twentieth century, the label of ‘foreigner’ in south Yorkshire applied as much, and more frequently, to an individual from an adjacent town or district, as it did to anyone from overseas.<sup>693</sup> The conception of the alien or the ‘Other’ was, perhaps for many, so diffuse as to be lacking in the meaning necessary for the development of sustained racial thinking at this time. For example, Pat O’Mara, Liverpool-Irish working-class memoirist and participant in the Liverpool anti-German riots of 1915, wrote lucidly about the life of a ‘slummy’ among the super-diversity of his sailortown neighbourhood. His street:

was different from its neighbours: it was peopled for the most part by West-of-Ireland folk or their descendants. There was the same poverty, but no Negroes or Chinese or Flukes (Hawaiians). The men were dock labourers or carters and their wives and children chip-choppers and oakum pickers but, when washed, all white.<sup>694</sup>

While O’Mara’s considered the inhabitants of his street as Irish and white, was proud of his ancestry, and expressed himself in racialised terms, his attitude to other immigrant groups was complex, although not necessarily hostile. The active members of his gang, who he recalled with affection, were almost all immigrants to Liverpool and reflected its status as a global city:

Joe Manassi... of Italian parentage; Harold May, Protestant, very English...; Johnny Mangan... Irish; Johnny Ford, the same; Henry Roche... Irish but no relation to me; my cousin Bernard Roche; Frankie Roza, half-caste Protestant Manilla boy... favourite of the gang; Jackie (Quanito) Sanchez, amiable Spanish boy, whose mother kept the big Spanish boarding house... ; “Lepsey” Phillips, Protestant boy, mother, a very belligerent gypsy, and father, Irish; Jackie Oldham... English;

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 268–271.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>693</sup> A promotional film for the steelworks in the town of Stocksbridge on the northern edge of Sheffield refers to the fact that ‘some refer to those from nearby Barnsley as “foreigners”, or in even less polite terms.’ *Steel Town* (United Steels Films, 1960).

<sup>694</sup> O’Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, 10.

Freddie Seegar... of German-Irish parents; (and) "Mickey" an upcountry boy who had drifted into Liverpool.<sup>695</sup>

As we have seen, even in land-locked Sheffield the diversity of the population, although mostly white, often originating in local rural districts, was remarkable for the period.<sup>696</sup> The city had, by the end of the First World War, populations of Irish, Scots, Belgians, Italians, Germans, Jews from Poland and Russia, Indians, West Indians, Chinese, West and Southern Africans, and even African Americans. Many individuals and families lived in the Scotland Street and Shalesmoor neighbourhoods to which St Philip's Church was adjacent. One of the most remarkable aspects of the St Philip's Settlement Society study is that, despite the wide ranging questions posed to their respondents – including on international affairs, India and the monarchy – barely any of the working-class men and women participant in the survey declared any support for, or even mentioned, the British Empire. This cannot be explained by the reluctance of the investigators to ask questions regarding sensitive political topics and the St. Philip's settlement does not appear either hostile or enthusiastic about discussing the subject of the Empire. In response to questioning, 'Mrs Stort', a twenty-two year old shop assistant, suggested that 'we must magnify Empire'. By way of explanation she offered that 'our laws are the best in the world and others would be glad of them.' The St Philip's Society, who had expressed some admiration for the organisation of the annual celebration of Empire Day considered that '(Mrs Stort) has fairly good ideas, but they are mostly on the surface...'<sup>697</sup> Indeed, the paternalism toward, and sense of imperial stewardship of, colonised peoples expressed in 'Mrs Stort's' statement are frequently mirrored in the Society's narrative regarding 'the workers' of Britain and their supposedly inadequate intellectual, moral and spiritual 'equipment'. In contrast, however, the workers interviewed did not appear to have similar feelings toward the peoples of the colonies.

Despite such evidence, the everyday lives of ordinary Britons during the imperial era have been more recently characterised as steeped in a popular and national culture 'imbricated' with empire.<sup>698</sup> Catherine Hall argues that 'empire was part of everyday life for Britons between the late eighteenth century and the end of World War II, when decolonization began.'<sup>699</sup> John MacKenzie concurs that 'the Empire constituted a vital aspect of national identity and race-consciousness', although he concedes that this was 'complicated by regional, rural, urban, and class contexts.'<sup>700</sup> In contrast, Bernard Porter, Hall's 'king of the sceptics', has described in

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<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>696</sup> Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, 90–91, 184–185.

<sup>697</sup> St Philip's Settlement Education and Economics Research Society, *Equipment of the Workers*, 22, 96.

<sup>698</sup> C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830 - 1867* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>699</sup> C. Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', in S. E. Stockwell, ed., *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, (Oxford, 2008), p. 199.

<sup>700</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in A. Porter and W. R. Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century: The Nineteenth Century Vol 3*, 1st edn, (Oxford, 1999), p. 292.

detail how the domestic working classes' relationship with, and knowledge of, the empire were a continuing source of disquiet for the British ruling elite.<sup>701</sup> This, he explains, was originally in terms of maintaining their ignorance and general exclusion from the imperial project during the nineteenth century. As an example he cites the 'almost total lack of imperial education in schools for most of the nineteenth century'. To share a proprietary sense of duty to the empire with the working-classes, he argues, would imply:

a common citizenship, the idea of which ran right against the whole structure of British society, which was built on the principle that each class only needed to know its obligations towards the other classes... So, the working classes were taught to work hard, obey, and so on, and the upper classes to rule and serve.<sup>702</sup>

This relationship was modified, Porter suggests, in the latter years of the nineteenth century when substantial elements of Britain's ruling elite recognised the need to develop a sense of pride in the Empire among the working classes. In a period when Britain was beginning to face great economic competition from the United States and Germany in world markets, the benefits of a 'free trade' area within the Empire and tariffs on goods from outside it was appealing to many, such as Joseph Chamberlain. 'Working men and schoolchildren were' he notes, 'especially targeted' in campaigns to boost the idea of what became known as 'social imperialism'.<sup>703</sup> This aspired, Porter notes, to attempts to boost the attachment of workers to the Empire with promises of socialistic welfare benefits deriving from it. These included low-cost social housing and even 'abolishing poverty', in addition to compulsory military conscription and drill. As one Liberal Member of Parliament for Camberwell in London put it:

All this sounds terribly like rank Socialism... I'm afraid it is; but I am not in the least dismayed. Because I know it also to be first-class Imperialism. Because I know Empire cannot be built on rickety and flat-chested citizens.<sup>704</sup>

Numerous campaigning groups were also established during this period with the aim of promoting the idea of the 'imperial citizen' (with native working-class Britons cultivating a sense of themselves as imperial stewards of colonial citizens). Nevertheless, Porter underlines, for the ruling elite 'to admit the working classes as equal citizens with themselves would undermine their claim to be uniquely fitted to govern them, and hence to govern anybody else.' Porter raises here the crucial issue of social class, neglected within much post-colonial study and which, John MacKenzie acknowledges, somewhat 'complicates' any picture of the nation as as an unusually

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<sup>701</sup> Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 307–308; C. Hall and S. O. Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511802263>, accessed 7 January 2018.

<sup>702</sup> Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 308.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–176.

<sup>704</sup> T. J. Macnamara, 'In Corpore Sano', *Contemporary Review*, 87 (1905), 248, cited in: B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*, 1st edition (Oxford, 2004), p. 191.

monolithic social formation. Moreover, in describing Britain as a 'notoriously class-stratified society', Tabili has also underlined that 'despite some lip service, class analysis has proven almost entirely absent from the study of 'immigrants and minorities'.<sup>705</sup>

### 5.3 'Everyday practices of inclusion'

How this 'indifference' played out in the quotidian encounters of native and newcomer within the neighbourhood requires further investigation. These are the interactions Tabili terms 'everyday practices of inclusion'.<sup>706</sup> The establishment and maintenance of trust can be viewed as one such practice and no doubt played an important role in the integration of newcomers. The successful construction of relationships of trust and loyalty are demonstrated by the success of many South Asian pedlars. As we have seen, to ply their trade from door to door or through their native/newcomer social networks, many pedlars needed to offer credit on goods supplied to cash-strapped working-class customers. In order for this relationship to be effective on a commercial basis, the establishment of mutual trust between trader and customer would have been a crucial element of success and long-standing relationships. A complete outsider working on a 'here today, gone tomorrow' basis would obviously have not needed to build such relationships. It can be argued that a newcomer's establishment as a trusted trader can be viewed as a key indicator of acceptance into a neighbourhood and the 'everyday practice of inclusion'. The frequency of these everyday practices between natives and newcomer range from marriage and the raising of children, to neighbourly relationships of mutuality, the trust and comradeship of the shared workplace and the transactions of trade, not only locally, but nationally. They indicate that native-newcomer relationships were not isolated exceptions proving the rule that racism or xenophobia was deeply ingrained in British society.

While mixed social networks aided integration and acculturation, this was not a process of total assimilation into, and absorption by, British society. While recognising that the onus is usually on newcomers to adapt and integrate into the host population, tolerance and integration can still be viewed as a two-way process as both the host population and the newcomers adapted to each other over time. For example, the marriages of Muslims conducted according to Christian rites indicate a willingness to compromise to the wishes of their Christian brides on the part of men raised within an intensely conservative culture. Moreover, while a number of the children, such as Souriyah Khan, were raised as Muslims, Derek Khan was raised to venerate both Christian and Muslim traditions, and many of the wives in Collins's study adopted the Muslim faith of their husbands.<sup>707</sup> Glenda Munro (née Khan) stated that all the children in her family were baptised, although some siblings chose to follow the Muslim faith as they grew older. All the children in the family were 'brought up to

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<sup>705</sup> Tabili, *Global Migrants, Local Culture*, 240.

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>707</sup> Interview with Derek Khan, 2012; Collins, *Coloured Minorities in Britain*, 160–172.

observe the (Islamic) dietary laws.<sup>708</sup> One interviewee remembered receiving, Islamic after-school instruction together with other children in Sheffield in the late 1930s.<sup>709</sup> There is also evidence that in Sheffield some women retained and maintained their own religious belief practices while making accommodations for their husband's religious and cultural requirements - for example restricting or ending the consumption of pork or alcohol in the home. Doreen Bahadur remembered that her mother, after parting company with the Salvation Army was 'Muslim in all but name'. She remembered that her mother told her that she had never eaten bacon from the day she married and remembered how she was meticulous in ensuring the absence of pork if her husband ate tinned food. Her husband Rasool maintained an allotment to grow coriander, spinach and onions and raised chilli and garlic on the windowsills of the family home. He would also make trips to Liverpool on his motorbike whenever there was word that a ship from had arrived from India. There he would stock up on spices and provisions for the family kitchen. In the early days he had to obtain garlic from Sheffield's Italian quarter.<sup>710</sup> Such were the efforts he made to ensure that he and his family could enjoy the food he had grown up with on the family farm in Chhachh. The evidence presented here demonstrates the flexible, often syncretic, approach to faith and culture adopted by both husbands and wives during this period. As Kenan Malik has observed 'the first generation of post-war Muslim immigrants to Britain, in the 1950s and 60s, were pious, but wore their faith lightly... their faith defined their relationship with God, not a sacrosanct public identity. They were more likely to call themselves Sylheti or Punjabi than Muslim.'<sup>711</sup> Judging by the flexibility with which the many Muslim subjects of this study appear to have approached the often conflicting demands of religion and culture, this characterisation may fit those men who arrived during and after the First World War just as it does for Malik's later migrants to Britain.

#### **5.4 Do actions speak louder than words... (or textual discourse)?**

As has been explored in the introduction to this thesis, the historiographical terrain, onto which any study of relations between natives and newcomers within the British Empire inevitably finds itself traversing, is contested in sometimes passionate and highly politicised terms. For instance, Antoinette Burton's claim that Bernard Porter's *The Absent Minded Imperialists*, an account of 'what the British really thought about empire' amounts to 'a rather unsophisticated argument about plausible deniability' which, in an 'age of rampant Anglo-American imperialism...' will 'likely be a balm, if not a full-fledged propaganda instrument.'<sup>712</sup> Here the past is a site of 'strategic intervention' and frequently conceptualised as a vehicle to be mobilised in the present

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<sup>708</sup> Interview with Glenda Munro, 9 September 2015.

<sup>709</sup> Interview with Derek Khan, 11 December 2012.

<sup>710</sup> Doreen Bahadur and Paul Khan; Interview: Angela Khan, 2 September 2014.

<sup>711</sup> Malik, 'Diversity and Immigration Are Not the Problem. Political Courage Is...'

<sup>712</sup> Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*; A. M. Burton, 'The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought About Empire (Review)', *Victorian Studies*, 47:4 (2005), pp. 627–628.

to realise social justice in the future.<sup>713</sup> However, the risks for historical writing emanating from such morally or ideologically-laden standpoints lie in the temptation to selectively marshal evidence in support of theoretical or factual claims, simultaneously ignoring or overlooking evidence which might undermine the argument. Indeed, such an intensively theoretical approach, characterised as the ‘new imperial history’, often goes so far as to question the construction of arguments based on factual evidence. Catherine Hall, for example, criticised Porter’s closely argued, critical and extensively evidenced work as a descent into the ‘darkness of empiricism’.<sup>714</sup>

The methodology of ‘new imperial’ historical analysis is claimed to complicate, undermine and destabilise binary oppositions of imperial racial hierarchy, ‘whiteness’ and gender in order to recognise the diversity of human experience – particularly that of the colonised ‘Other’. However, such an approach often appears to have the opposite effect by reinforcing such binaries by inverting them or collapsing complex human responses into a series of oppositions informed by Manichean narratives of ‘oppressors’ and ‘victims’. In short, despite claims to the contrary, the nuances and fine detail, not to mention the paradoxes and contradictions of thought and action, often existing simultaneously within the same individual or social group, are too frequently erased.

With this in mind, the investigation of relationships between British natives and South Asian newcomers undertaken for this thesis has led to me to present a significant quantity of evidence and analysis which casts doubt upon the certainty of claims within the current historiography to know how Britons encountered and responded to empire. Within these claims there lies the implication that the British population, *in toto*, took an active role in, the formation, support and maintenance of empire. My doubt lies alongside my sense of unease at the ‘new imperial’ history’s elision of the voices of the overwhelming majority of Britain’s population – those of its working classes – from its analysis of the impact of Britain’s empire upon its metropolitan population. This elision is summed up by the suggestion that the ‘structure of feeling’ (to follow Catherine Hall’s adoption of Raymond Williams’s concept) of this great swathe of the working population was one of a sense of being ‘at home with the Empire’.<sup>715</sup>

Although this segment of the population is occasionally specifically referred to by scholars of the ‘new imperial history’, the strong tendency is to subsume it within the broader analytic category of ‘Britons’. For example: ‘Empire was part of everyday life for Britons between the late eighteenth century and the end of World War II, when decolonization began’ and was ‘central’ to ‘British identities’.<sup>716</sup> Working-class voices are largely silent within such analysis despite the fact that, as Ross McKibbin reminds

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<sup>713</sup> A. Burton, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, And Teaching British Imperialism* (Durham, NC., 2011), p. 6; For example A. Burton, ‘Deja Vu All Over Again’, *Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, And Teaching British Imperialism*, (Durham, NC., 2011).

<sup>714</sup> Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, 200.

<sup>715</sup> C. Hall, ed., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 5, 206; R. Williams, *The Long Revolution*. (London, 1961), p. 47.

<sup>716</sup> Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, 199, 205.

us, 'although the manual working class had declined a little proportionately, in 1951 it still constituted nearly three-quarters of the whole population: as it had been in 1918, England was emphatically a working-class country.'<sup>717</sup>

A certain irony lies in the fact that despite the self-conscious attentiveness of scholars to the needs of 'the subaltern', populations of low socio-economic status continue to be hidden from, and by, scholarly history. Catherine Hall, perhaps the 'new imperial history's' leading scholar, explains that the aims of this method – 'post-colonial analysis' – is to 'reveal the subjects that have been hidden, the agendas that are obscured when stories are told one way rather than another. It aims to open up silences, reveal gaps and absences, explore what gets left out when a history is related this way rather than that.'<sup>718</sup> Nevertheless, despite these laudable aims, the working-class subject is, much as the colonised subaltern subject described by Spivak (following Antonio Gramsci), rendered almost entirely voiceless by many scholars.<sup>719</sup> Such a rendering, suggests David Washbrook, 'represents a reversion back to an elitist historiography.'<sup>720</sup>

Hall and fellow scholars of the 'new imperial history' rely heavily on colonial discourse critique and the close critical analysis of texts as the evidential base for their theories. She explains that:

One way of exploring how empire impacted on people's lives is through the study of individuals, both men and women who travelled the empire and those who stayed at home. Letters and diaries that record personal feelings and reactions are particularly valuable in telling us about what people thought and felt.<sup>721</sup>

This study, concerned as it is with the close study of the lives of ordinary individuals living within the structures of the British nation state and empire, has also been informed by such an approach. Unfortunately however, the historical texts subjected to critical scrutiny by scholars of the 'new imperial history' were produced almost entirely by the middle to upper echelons of British society. Hall concedes that 'sources of this kind are sadly more available for certain kinds of individuals – those with a public presence' and that 'it is harder to find out about the reactions of working class Britons to empire than that of the middle and upper classes.'<sup>722</sup> A reasonable solution to this lacuna within the historiography would be to expand the concept of 'discourse' to encompass the sphere of actions as well as words. Indeed, following Foucault and Stuart Hall, Catherine Hall has explained that 'culture is associated primarily with the production and exchange of meanings—how we make sense of the world. It is not simply about ideas in the head, for it is also about how those ideas organize and

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<sup>717</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 160.

<sup>718</sup> Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', 206.

<sup>719</sup> Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

<sup>720</sup> D. A. Washbrook, 'Orientalism and Occident: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire', in A. Low, W. Roger Louis, and R. Winks, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography*, (Oxford, 2001), p. 608.

<sup>721</sup> Hall, 'Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain', 205.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.*

regulate social and institutional worlds.' 'For Foucault', Hall continues, 'discourses are tied not only to languages but to practices, institutions, and power: discourses include institutional practices and technologies of power.'<sup>723</sup> As we can see, in this concept of discourse, it is not only texts that can betray the underlying intentions, assumptions and prejudices within a system, institution or individual, but also the unspoken practice, symbolism and ritual of quotidian life. As Stuart Hall explains,

The discursive approach is more concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation – its 'politics'. It examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised and studied... it points us towards greater historical specificity – the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice.<sup>724</sup>

The 'discursive approach' requires the location of evidence to support a credible, fully historicised analysis of the behaviour of individuals and groups in the past. Unfortunately, much beyond the port riots of 1919-20, the annual performance of Empire Day and the working-classes' voracious appetite for sugar and tea, the discursive approach has yet to succeed in penetrating the hearts and minds, hearths and homes of the British working-classes, thus opening them up to detailed analysis and critical study of their responses to empire. Totalising accounts that claim to encapsulate the nature, extent and consequences of the mutually constitutive relationship between colonies and metropole, therefore remain somewhat unconvincing. Consequently, this thesis questions the *a priori* assumption that hostility, conflict and racially-motivated animus were inevitable corollaries of encounters between white native and non-white migrant populations in Britain during this earlier period.

## 5.5 Conclusion and recommendations

The Sheffield area's long-standing, non-white presence existed without the incidents of racial violence witnessed in some of Britain's maritime cities during 1919-1920. This population demonstrates that although the empire had an influence on the ethnic composition of British society (particularly at the level of the industrial working-classes), imperially-motivated racism was not a phenomenon that neither 'saturated' British society, nor 'permeated' the life of working-class Britons, as argued by scholars of the 'new imperial history'. Areas of Britain, such as Sheffield, remained free from this kind of mass violence, even when faced with the direct challenge to notions of so-called 'white supremacy' that the numerous mixed-marriages presented. Moreover, there is little doubt that the local press would have reported such newsworthy incidents with alacrity, as they did in the ports. None of this is to suggest that

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<sup>723</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>724</sup> Hall, *Representation*, 6.

support for empire or racial ideology was entirely absent within the working-class population. However, the findings of this study show that totalising claims as to the extent of its influence need to be treated with scepticism.

There are undoubtedly cultural, social and ideological links between the colonies and metropole of the British Empire. The arrival of commodities, consumer goods and representatives of colonised populations are all concrete examples of the constant interaction between colonies and metropole. The arrival and settlement of non-white migrant workers in the Sheffield area demonstrate a clear connection between localities on a global level. However, this influence was uneven, complex and had unexpected consequences. Moreover, the frequency of ethnic exogamy during this period is a barely-researched phenomenon. Indeed, the results of the preliminary nationwide enquiry discussed in sub-section 4.8 certainly contradict lazy assumptions about working-class attitudes to racial difference. Based upon the previously unknown numbers of 'mixed marriages' with Muslim-named individuals in working-class neighbourhoods, the domestic impact of empire upon the consciousness of ordinary people appears neither as deeply reactionary or as xenophobic as has often been implied by recent cultural-historical emphasis on race riots, 'mafficking' and the annual celebration of Empire Day. In contrast to these widely cited indicators of the working-class 'structure of feeling', a quotidian working-class tolerance to difference has been described by many memoirists. From the experiences of Trinidadian socialist C.L.R. James among the textile workers of Nelson, Lancashire, to the experiences of mixed-race working-class children growing up during the inter-war years, instances of everyday tolerance appear frequently and in often surprising ways.

The Sheffield area does not feature in modern world history as a site of inward migration for non-white people from Britain's empire and former colonies. While Liverpool's dockland 'sailortown' district is celebrated as an early centre of cultural diversity and seafaring cosmopolitanism it is also remembered for its anti-immigrant riots. Those of 1919-1920, which also struck a number of other British ports, are regarded as key indicators of a generalised working-class hostility to 'foreignness' and perceived racial difference during the first half of the twentieth century. As scholars have focused on these spectacular outbursts of racial violence, as they have on other instances of exoticism and hostility, they have, as this thesis has demonstrated, overlooked early populations of non-white immigrants across Britain. This thesis has, by situating immigrants firmly within family, neighbourhood and workplace contexts, also revealed some of the complexity inherent in quotidian relations between white and non-white in working-class across Britain. It has historically reconstructed the lived experience of people who engaged in inter-racial relationships as spouses, neighbours, friends, workmates, landlords/tenants and customers and provides valuable new perspectives on the attitudes of ordinary working people toward perceived racial and cultural difference during this period. Indeed, within the testimonies of a great many early immigrants lies acknowledgement of the mixed couples and households into which they were welcomed upon their arrival in Britain. Through marriage, these predominantly working-class men and women appear to have been both willing and able to defy the racial expectations of the British Empire on a continuous basis.

Racially mixed marriages and social networks are a largely overlooked aspect of Britain's settlement by the peoples of its empire. As has been discussed, this may



Figure 5.3 Former silk merchant and pedlar Mohammed Ali, wife Phyllis, and eleven of their seventeen children in 1958. The couple lived at 57 St Leonard's Road, Rotherham before, moving to Heeley, Sheffield. *The Star (Sheffield), 1958.*

be a consequence of the tendency for scholars to view British society as monolithic in its attitudes to racial difference in the first half of the twentieth century. This approach has stressed division and hostility rather than co-habitation and co-operation and co-existence among Britons. The Sheffield area study demonstrates that a narrow focus on dramatic instances of violence obscures much from our understanding of early encounters and everyday contact. Further research focused on social networks and immigrant integration through marriage,

work, friendship, neighbourliness or trade will shed new light on both the processes of early non-European immigration to Britain and on the means by which migrant newcomers and working-class natives negotiated their interactions on an everyday basis. These encounters aid our understanding of why apparently insular, often conservative, working-class neighbourhoods tolerated or resisted the emerging ethnic and racial diversity in their midst within a rapidly changing world. The Sheffield area's settlement of South Asians was, however, a relatively small one compared to other British cities such as Manchester and Birmingham. These and others highlighted by the national map (figure 4.4) offer great opportunities to explore the many contradictions to the current conflict-based historiography raised by the widespread early instances of inter-racial marriage, co-operation and co-habitation in the Sheffield area. Further research into native-newcomer relationships will aid a more rounded understanding of the attitudes of period, their complexities and paradoxes, and help fill the gap in our understanding of how ordinary Britons responded to perceived racial difference at a time when the Empire was at its fullest extent.

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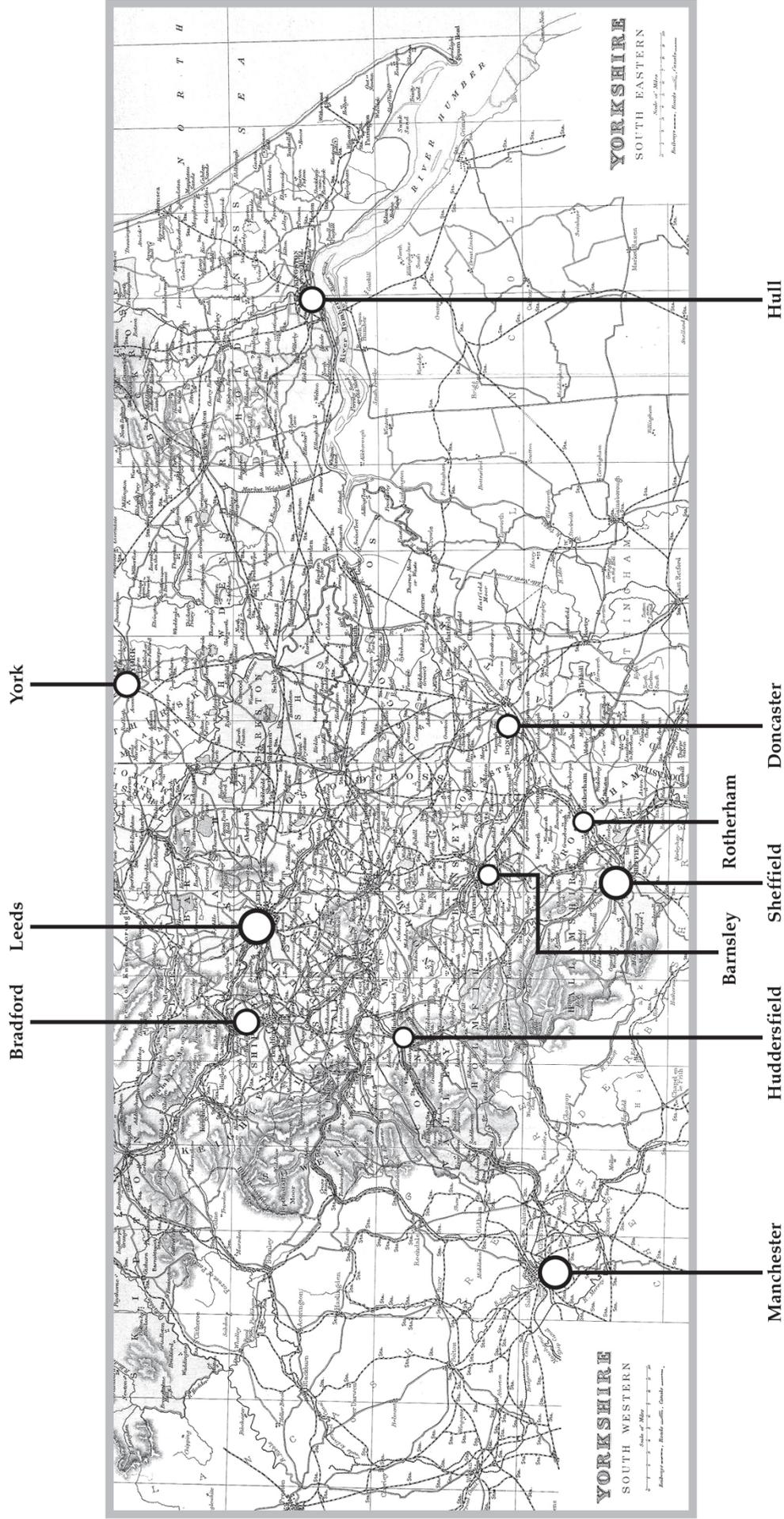
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*Appendix 1*  
*The south-east and south-west of the county of Yorkshire, circa 1900*