

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# Personal narrative: 'All of me meets here, an alchemy of parts' – negotiating my identities in New Zealand

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He could not see that I could be both ... The body in front of him was already inscribed within the gendered social relations of the colonial sandwich. I could not just 'be'. I had to name an identity, no matter that this naming rendered invisible all the other identities of gender, caste, religion, linguistic group, generation ... (Brah, 1996, p. 3)

### **Introduction**

The title of this chapter comes from a poem by Chris Abani (2000) whom I met many years ago at the Poetics of Exile conference. This line from the poem captures the intention of this chapter, to bring parts of myself together. I am often asked the question 'where are you from?' Depending on the person asking, it can imply that I have come from somewhere else, not here; that I am visibly and noticeably different; and sometimes reflects a desire on the part of the person asking to either connect, name or categorize. For the sake of economy, choosing one identity and keeping things simple inevitably backfires. Answering Tanzania, the country of my birth, and that of my parents, or Goa, India, the place of my ancestors, results in more questions. The question has different nuances in the place of my ancestors and in the place where I choose to live: Aotearoa/New Zealand. Being asked where one is from more easily translates to 'whom do you belong to?' and the reference points are intimate, connecting me to a village and to a family. In Māori contexts, similar notions of belonging to place and people are invoked, where intimacy and connection rather than categorization are emphasized. Such



Ruth (in school uniform after a prize-giving), with her parents Edwin and Ivy and sisters Sarah and Rebecca, Nairobi, December 1974.

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a question highlights issues of identity, difference and belonging. The process of active negotiation of identities in relation to oneself is the focus of my chapter. I centre on a little-known minority group within a larger Indian umbrella identity – the Goan diaspora living in New Zealand. My aim is to provide a complex answer to the question of where I am from and, in doing so, provide a platform for further scholarship about the Goan diaspora in New Zealand.

Goans, a minority within the Indian community, have experienced multiple migrations, arriving in New Zealand often from places other than Goa. In this chapter, I loosely present my family's migration trajectory, traversing three generations and two continents against a backdrop of social, political and historical events. I relate my family's sojourn from Goa in India to Tanzania in Africa, to Portuguese colonisation and economic decline; factors that led to the creation of a diasporic community. Our subsequent migration to New Zealand occurred in response to African independence and nationalism. Such narratives challenge the perceptions of migrants being foreign newcomers and uninvited guests, and instead locate migration as the outcome of the displacement of populations through European colonialism and late capitalism (Razack, 2004). This does not

ease the disquieting position within empires or neo-colonial contexts (Gupta, 2009) that diasporic Goans have frequently occupied in the middle of the 'colonial sandwich' (Brah, 1996, p. 3).

### **Goan colonisation and the creation of a diasporic community**

Goa, one of the smallest states of India, has a unique history shaped by almost five centuries of Portuguese political, social and cultural domination (Kale, 1994). Located on the south west coast of India, Goa has an area of 3701 square kilometres, with an agrarian economy and thriving tourism and service industry. The name Goa comes from Gomant of the Mahabharata, and Goa is thought to have been reclaimed by Lord Parshuram when he shot an arrow into the sea (Mahajan, 1978). Goa was conquered by Alfonso de Albuquerque, who wrested it from Muslim Bhamanid rulers in 1510, taking advantage of Hindu discontent with Muslim rule and ascendancy, in preference for a Portuguese alliance (Sant'ana, 2008). The capture of Goa marked it as the first European colonial site in Asia. It remained a Portuguese colony until 1961, when it was liberated (or invaded) by the Indian army, becoming the 25th state in the Republic of India on 31 May 1987.

The Portuguese colonisation of Goa was driven by economics (to control the spice trade) and the desire for Christian souls. The assimilation of Catholic values occurred through the intense proselytising efforts of the Portuguese, who used 'bribery, threat and torture' in the inquisition which began in 1560 and ended in 1812 (Robinson, 2000, p. 2421). Inquisitions were used to prevent defection back to other faiths and in the laws and prohibitions of the inquisition in 1736, over 42 Hindu practices were prohibited (Newman, 1999a). Indigenous cultural practices such as ceremonies, fasts, the use of the sacred basil or tulsi plant, flowers and leaves for ceremony or ornament, and the exchange of betel and areca nuts for occasions such as marriage, were forbidden (Robinson, 2000). Repressive laws, the demolition of temples and mosques, the destruction of holy books, fines, and the forcible conversion of orphans were used to institute these edicts (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1997).

The occupation by the Portuguese saw the implementation of other far-reaching cultural changes, such as the prohibition of traditional musical instruments and singing of celebratory verses, which were replaced by Western music (Robinson, 2000). People were renamed when they converted to Christianity and not permitted to use their original Hindu names. Alcohol was introduced and dietary habits changed dramatically, so that foods that were once taboo, such as pork

and beef, became part of the Goan diet (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1979). Baroque architecture became popular. Consequently, many customs were suppressed and Goans became Westernized to some degree and viewed as a Catholic elite who came to see themselves as a cultivated branch of a global Portuguese civilisation (Routledge, 2000, p. 2649). During Portuguese rule, the Konkani language was suppressed, made inferior and displaced by the enforcement of Portuguese, becoming known as the 'lingua de criados' – the language of the servants (Newman, 1999b; Routledge, 2000). Hindu and Catholic elites turned to Marathi and Portuguese respectively. Ironically Konkani is now the cement that binds Goans across caste, religion and class, and is affectionately termed Konkani Mai (Newman, 1999b). Konkani became an official language of Goa in 1987.

Both Portuguese colonisation and the economic decline of the Portuguese empire led to the creation of a Goan diasporic population. Mascarenhas-Keyes (1990) attributes such socio-economic factors as land taxation to generate revenue for Portuguese expeditions, the removal of land from villagers, and the subsequent outsider control and marginalization of people from their livelihoods, as important contributing factors. Yet Newman (1999b) claims that what drove Goans to emigrate was that they valued a consumerist, bourgeois-capitalist society in Goa and sought more money, despite the relatively high incomes available at home. Nazareth (1981) suggests migration was precipitated by a declining Goan economy and unemployment under Portuguese rule, in contrast with the kinds of opportunities and economic development available in British India. Historically, there has been a strong Goan ethos of moving up, caused by the small size of Goa and the inability to divide communal land (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1994).

The English language displaced the dominance of Portuguese in the 1920s as Goans began migrating to British India and other British colonies. Goans first worked for the British in 1779 during the French Revolution. The British Indian government stationed its naval fleet in Goa, because Christian Goans fitted in easily with their Western dress, diet and customs. When the fleets withdrew from Goa, many Goans went with them. In the eighteenth century, Goa began trading with Mozambique, Zanzibar and East Africa. Indian independence in 1945 increased the flow of migrants of Goan origin who were residing in British India. Mascarenhas-Keyes (1979) suggests that Goans were well placed to learn Western languages because over the centuries they had been exposed to Western education through Catholicism. As English became more significant to Goans as a tool for upward mobility and economic gain through migration to British

India, schools began to teach it. Many Goans also gained English-language skills in the process of migrating to British territories (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 1979, p. 2). With demand for English-language schools overtaking those teaching Portuguese, several Goans began sending their children to neighbouring cities such as Mumbai, Pune and Belgaum, where there were Catholic schools reputed to provide quality education.

### **Migration to Africa: 'an admirable connecting link'**

Being unaffected by the climate, much cheaper than Europeans, and in closer touch with the daily lives of the of the natives than it is possible for a white man [sic] to be, they (the Asians) would indeed form an admirable connecting link (under the close supervision of British officers), their status being nearly on par with the natives, while their interests are entirely dependent on the Europeans. As they would establish themselves permanently, with their families, in the country, they would have a personal interest in it. (Captain Lugard cited in Mamdani, 1976, p. 71)

Indians were recruited to participate in the British Empire's colonisation of East Africa (Wu, 2007). In my family, this recruitment followed a previous sojourn in Burma where my great-grandfather and grandfather had worked until the Great Depression. Both my grandfathers were recruited to work in Tanganyika. This was a German colony from 1880 to 1919, and then a British trust territory until 1961. Tanganyika became Tanzania after forming a union with Zanzibar in 1964. Catholic Goans made up the only significant number of Christian Indians in East Africa, as it was the Catholic rather than the Hindu Goans who migrated there. Catholic Goans were set apart not only by language from Hindu and Muslim Indians but also through religion and associated culinary taboos – Goans could consume pork and beef. For Goans, migration to Africa was intended as a way of earning money for retirement in Goa; putting down permanent roots was not encouraged by colonial authorities (Kuper, 1979).

However, Indian migration to Africa goes back even further than the diasporic developments of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indians first arrived in Africa in the first century AD, as traders rather than migrants or permanent settlers (van den Berghe, 1970). The Indian diaspora was a nineteenth- and twentieth-century development related to the impact of the British indentured labour scheme, which sought to replace slave labour with cheap and reliable labour for plantations (Sowell, 1996), or the building of railways, for example in Uganda (van den Berghe, 1970). This scheme was seen by some as a

new system of slavery (Tinker, 1974) and though formally abolished in 1916 it continued until 1922 (Brah, 1996). Smith (1999) notes that Indian women were the second-largest group transported to colonies after African women, and were subjected to similar experiences of fieldwork, punishment and gross indignities. Although the indentured labour system was brief, it was as inhumane as the slave trade, because of the brutality of captivity and forced labour to achieve capitalist gains. Large-scale migrations of Indians to Africa began with the construction of the great railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria in Uganda in the late nineteenth century (Sowell, 1996). The British employed Indians because the Africans who owned land would work only for brief periods. Indians comprised 15,000 of the 16,000 manual labourers or 'coolies' (as Asians from China and Indian were known) who worked on the railroads. They were renowned for their work ethic and competitiveness, but one quarter of them died or returned disabled (Sowell, 1996). Indians, especially Goans, were recruited to run the railways after they were built (as my grandparents were), and Goans came to dominate the colonial civil service (Sowell, 1996).

Asians, who made up one per cent of the total population in East Africa and originated from Gujarat, Kutch, Kathiawar, Goa and Punjab, played significant roles as middlemen and skilled labourers in colonial Tanganyika. As Brah (1996, p. 3) states, Asians were the middle layer of the 'colonial sandwich', through the institution of policies that excluded them from certain professions or from living in areas where Europeans preferred to settle, such as the fertile Kenyan highlands (Kuper, 1979). They operated within a milieu of prejudice, suspicion and disadvantage. Land was unavailable for freehold purchase and education provision was inadequate, resulting in children returning to India for education (as my father did). Later, as communities grew, special schools were established and women and children joined their men (as was the case for my mother's family). During the Zanzibar Revolution of 1964, over 10,000 Asians were forced to migrate to the mainland because of violent attacks (also directed at Arabs), with many moving to Dar es Salaam. In the 1970s over 50,000 Asians left Tanzania. President Nyerere issued the Arusha Declaration in February 1967, which called for egalitarianism, socialism and self-reliance. He introduced a form of African socialism termed *Ujamaa* (pulling together). Factories and plantations were nationalized, and major investments were made in primary schools and health care.

My parents migrated to Kenya in 1966. The newly independent East African countries of Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1962) and Kenya (1963) moved toward

'Africanizing' their economies and civil service after independence, which led to many Asians finding themselves surplus to requirements and leaving East Africa. This period was known as the Exodus. A major crisis loomed for British Prime Minister Harold Wilson's government, with legislation rushed through to prevent the entry of immigrants from East Africa into Britain. The Immigration Act of 1968 removed Kenyan Asians of their automatic right to British citizenship and was retroactive, meaning that it deprived them of an already existing right. The vulnerability of Asians was compounded by the ambiguity of their relationship with the sub-continent and with Britain, whose subjects Asians had become when brought to East Africa. Enoch Powell's now infamous speech followed, in which he asserted that letting immigrants into Britain would lead to 'rivers of blood' flowing down British streets. The Immigration Act of 1971 further restricted citizenship to subjects of the Commonwealth who could trace their ancestry to the United Kingdom (Adelson, 2004).

While Asians (that is, South Asians) were discriminated against by the British, they were relatively privileged compared to indigenous Africans. Goans were viewed with uncertainty by both colonisers and the colonised in the three-tier plural society of East Africa, where brown settlers were positioned in the middle of the colonial hierarchy (Gupta, 2009). In part, this was due to a perception that they remained separate from people outside their communities. Alibhai (1989, p.

31) argues that 'Asians had evolved a very strong network, partly because of the needs and fears that inevitably arise when groups migrate and partly because they were not dominant in countries where they had no political power and a constant sense of being vulnerable'. Yet, the Kenyan freedom struggle was supported by many Asians, such as lawyers A. Kapila and J. M. Nazareth, who represented detained people without trial provisions during the Mau Mau movement. Others, like Pio Gama Pinto, who fought for Kenya's freedom, were



Ruth with friends during her family's first summer break in Wellington, December 1975.

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assassinated. Joseph Zuzarte, whose mother was Masai and whose father was from Goa, rose to become Kenya's vice president. There was Jawaharlal Rodrigues, a journalist and pro-independence fighter, and many more. In 1914, an East African Indian National Congress was established to encourage joint action with the indigenous African community against colonial powers. Demands made by Indians for equality with European settlers in Kenya in East Africa were cleverly managed by the British colonial government, which made a statement giving African interests paramouncy in the Devonshire Declaration of 1923 (Maxon, 1991).

Two key developments precipitated my parents' second migration – this time to New Zealand. Idi Amin had given Uganda's 75,000 Asians 90 days to leave in 1972, and my parents were concerned that a similar expulsion could occur in Kenya. Secondly, increasing Africanization meant that my parents felt that their children's educational and economic future was limited.

### **Indians in New Zealand: neither the prestige of whiteness nor the moral certainty of indigeneity**

Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country, with neither the prestige of whiteness or Europeanness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me, but carrying instead the stigma from a generalized recent memory of an exclusive race of brown 'Shylocks' who had collaborated with the colonizers. What could I hope to achieve in public service? Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians. (Vassanji, 2004, p. 276)

While Indians have been travellers since the first century AD, the Indian diaspora is a more recent phenomenon that has its origins in the 1830s with the advent of the indentured labour system. The over 17 million strong diaspora continues to grow as India exports albeit voluntary migrants who comprise a diverse range of regions, faiths, castes and occupations (Parekh, Singh and Vertovec, 2003).

In the African migrations described, Goans have occupied precarious positions in the colonial sandwich. However, what place do Goans occupy now in white settler societies where many have migrated? In the final section of this chapter, I explore this issue in what I view as the hierarchical context of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Sherene Razack (2002, p. 1) describes a white settler society as:

... one established by Europeans on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans. As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a



racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus become the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship. A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour.

First in Aotearoa/New Zealand's hierarchy are Pākehā New Zealanders, or settlers of Anglo-Celtic background. The second group are Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand. The third group are migrants and their descendants. Visibly different Pacific Islanders or Asians make up the largest groups within this category (although numbers of Middle Eastern, Latin American and African communities are increasing). This latter group does not usually come to mind when the category of New Zealander is evoked and its members are more likely to be thought of as 'new' New Zealanders. This label especially applies to Asians.

Indian migration to New Zealand has been well described elsewhere (Leckie, 1995; Leckie 2007; McLeod, 1986) so this section is only a summary. Small numbers of Indians had been arriving there since the early nineteenth century. Lascars (Indian seamen) and Sepoys (Indian soldiers) deserted their British East India Company ships. The Indians who followed mainly came from Gujarat and Punjab, areas exposed to economic emigration. Indians could enter New Zealand freely until the Immigration Restriction Act of 1899 was enacted. Migration increased until 1920, when a permit system was introduced. In 1926, the White New Zealand League formed in response to the perceived threat Chinese and Indian men presented to racial purity, values and lifestyle. By 1945, families (mostly of shopkeepers, fruiterers and farmers) were established, and marriages of second-generation



Ruth with her sisters Sarah and Rebecca at their first home in Titirangi, 1976.

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New Zealand Indians occurred. The dominance of Indians born, in or descended from, Gujarat and Punjab changed after 1980, with arrivals from Fiji, Africa, Malaysia, the Caribbean, North America, the United Kingdom and Western Europe. It is thought that one of the first Indians to arrive in New Zealand in 1853 was a Goan nicknamed 'Black Peter' (Leckie, 2007, p. 21), but otherwise little is documented about Goans in New Zealand. From a handful of Goan families on our arrival in 1975, there is now a thriving Goan community of hundreds of families, following changes in New Zealand's migration policy. Most of these latter immigrants originated from India and the Gulf States.

Indigenous rights and increased migration from non-source countries are threatening the white origins of New Zealand. Allan Bartley and Paul Spoonley (2004) consider that intercultural relationships have been traditionally shaped by New Zealand's historical reliance on the United Kingdom and Ireland, leading to the foregrounding of Anglo-centric concerns. Discourses of a unified nation have been predicated on a core Pākehā New Zealand cultural group, with other groups existing in relation to this, such as Māori and migrants. The increased prominence of Māori concerns during the 1970s over indigenous rights and the Treaty of Waitangi began to challenge this monoculturalism. Bartley and Spoonley (2004) suggest that while countries such as Canada and Australia focused on developing multicultural policies, New Zealand grappled with issues of indigeneity and the relationship with tangata whenua (Māori). Although the Māori translation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is acknowledged as the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand and enshrined in health and social policy, the extent to which policy ameliorates the harmful effects of colonisation remains minimal. The Articles of the Treaty have been unfulfilled and the overall objective of the Treaty to protect Māori well-being have been breached (Webby, 2001). The guarantee of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) for Māori collectively in Article 2 of the Treaty, and the guarantee of equality and equity between Māori and other New Zealanders in Article 3, has not been reached. Māori do not have autonomy in health policy and care delivery, and the disparities between Māori and non-Māori health status point to Māori achieving neither equality nor equity. Colonisation has also led to the marginalizing and dismantling of Māori mechanisms and processes for healing, educating, making laws, negotiating and meeting the everyday needs of whanau (family) and individuals. So, in addition to experiencing barriers to access and inclusion, Māori face threats to their sovereignty and self-determination. Issues such as legal ownership of resources, specific property rights and fiscal compensation are fundamental to Māori well-

being. The Treaty as a founding document has been poorly understood and adhered to by Pākehā or white settlers, to recognize Māori sovereignty and land ownership.

Globally, indigenous and migrant communities are set in opposition to one another as competitors for resources and recognition. Comparing such groups is farcical:

... an immigrant is someone who's specifically come to this country to capitalize and exploit opportunity. Comparing any immigrant group to virtually any native born group is like comparing the most ambitious members of one team with the entirety of another team. This is to say nothing of whatever skills, education and wealth a particular immigrant group may bring to bear. (Coates, 2009)

In New Zealand this debate takes the form of questions about whether migrants being accountable to Māori will merit inclusion into this plural nation. This is problematic, because a multicultural agenda has the potential to silence Māori and placate mainstream New Zealanders (Walker, 1995), while the elite has positioned Asians as 'model minorities', to shield against accusations of racism (Mok, 2004). Migrants are implicated in the ongoing colonial practices of the state. The imposition of colonisers and other migrants on land traditionally owned by Māori maintains Māori disadvantage at the same time that economic, social and political advantage accrues to non-Māori (Riggs and Augoustinos, 2005). In addition, as migrants we benefit from colonialism and theft; that is, the privileges and benefits of the wealth and opportunities created and maintained by colonisation (Dumpling, 2010). However, Rasanathan (2005, p. 2) suggests that our accountabilities are different:

Some argue that we are on the Pakeha or coloniser side. Well I know I'm not Pakeha. I have a very specific knowledge of my own whakapapa, culture and ethnic identity and it's not Pakeha. It also stretches the imagination to suggest we are part of the colonising culture, given that it's not our cultural norms and institutions which dominate this country.

Migrants from ethnic backgrounds have also been asking whether a bicultural framework can contain multicultural aspirations. New Zealand has not developed a local response to cultural diversity (multiculturalism) that complements the bicultural (Māori and Pākehā) and Treaty of Waitangi initiatives that have occurred (Bartley and Spoonley, 2004). However, there are many of us who believe that the only viable long term response to racism in New Zealand is a coalition between those of recent migrant origin and tangata whenua (Mok, 2004).

## Conclusion

Anger, fear, the diminution of our place in the world, our affirmation of identities through negation of others ... we awoke to all these things, the infrastructures of a system we had only been dimly aware of ... It came upon us all. Gradually. This was how you grew up. Each group drifted away from the others, under the shadow of knowledge. Now we have to figure out how to return to each other without becoming ignorant again. (Mok, 2004, p. 19)

Taking action against colonising intentions that contradict the Treaty (such as Māori property rights of the foreshore and seabed) and deny Māori sovereignty (Riggs, 2004) will assist in moving beyond monoculturalism and the (re)production of whiteness through the construction of competing others. This denial of sovereignty is matched by denials of a Pākehā migrant history with 'entry by Treaty' (Mok, 2004, p. 23). I have been struck by how the commitment to be treated in a culturally safe manner advanced by Māori has led to benefits for those of us from ethnic communities who have come later (and me personally). This and the ethic of manaakitanga, which undergirds Māori relationships with other social groups, create the possibility for a just society. As I see it, Goans have two choices; the first is to ignore their own history and those of the country that they come to. That is, unquestioningly accept the colonising status quo, thereby participating in the ongoing disadvantage of Māori (as my respected friend Moana Jackson puts it). In the process we pass on legacies of grievance and injustice to descendants, as has been handed to us (Dumpling, 2010). Or we make efforts to understand and support Treaty of Waitangi claims for redress and Māori self-determination (tino rangatiratanga), thus committing to Aotearoa/New Zealand's founding principles (DeSouza and Cormack, 2009; Mok, 2004) and allowing for the possibility of the development of a social space that is better for all of us.



Ruth DeSouza today.

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