

## **Submission to the 2025 Gunn Prize for Immigration History**

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This essay explores the political and social factors which led members of the Goan diaspora living in Uganda to migrate to Canada as refugees in 1972. I argue that this pivotal moment in the immigration history of Goans established a Goan diasporic community in Canada and thereafter sparked the chain migration of Goans to Canada, not just from Uganda and East Africa but eventually from other parts of the world as well. In August of 1972, the Military General and President of Uganda, Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of South Asians living in Uganda, giving them just ninety days to leave, or else have land and personal property confiscated, face imprisonment, or in some cases, suffer brutality and torture. The South Asian community was comprised of Sikhs, Hindus, Ismailis, and Christian Goans.<sup>1</sup> Examining the political contexts of Uganda and Canada in the early 1970s reveals how the South Asians that were expelled as ‘the enemy’ by Amin became a boon for the Canadian economy, since they were valued as middle-class, educated workers. Furthermore, the expelled South Asians represented a group of distressed people, who somewhat fortuitously, Canada could rescue on a world-stage; this heroism arguably symbolizes the performativity of the Canadian self-image as “do-gooders,” or “international peace-brokers.”<sup>2</sup> The timing of the Ugandan Expulsion of South Asians in 1972 coincided with a shifting Canadian mindset that viewed non-Europeans/non-whites more favorably than ever before, since multiculturalism was increasingly celebrated as a key component underpinning Canada’s nationhood. On October 8, 1971, the Liberal government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau introduced a multicultural policy that was intended to aid in the development and growth of non-Indigenous, non-British, and non-French cultural groups, help immigrants learn English or French, and encourage creative exchanges between different cultural groups “in the interest of national unity.”<sup>3</sup> To situate my study within a more nuanced perspective of the Ugandan South Asian experience, I will focus on the Goan diaspora, and how it was already an uprooted group

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<sup>1</sup> Roger St. Vincent, “SEVEN CRESTED CRANES, Asian Exodus from Uganda: The Role of Canada’s Mission to Kampala, Roger St. Vincent, Team Leader,” in *Perspectives in Canadian Immigration History Series*. Number 3, October 1993. Ottawa: The Canadian Immigration Historical Society, 1993. P. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel McNeil, “Shy Elitism: A New Keyword in Critical Multiculturalism Studies,” in *Citizenship and Belonging in France and North America: Multicultural Perspectives on Political, Cultural, and Artistic Representations of Immigration*. R. Mielusel & S.E. Pruteanu, Eds. Berlin: Springer International Publishing, 2020. P. 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, P. 175.

before the expulsion, since it was tethered to a ‘homeland’ in Goa, India, despite being settled in East Africa for generations. My own family’s immigration story will help to personalize this section. In this essay, I will also draw from newspaper articles printed by both the Ugandan and Canadian presses, to understand the political and social contexts for both the expelling, and the receiving countries’ perception of the South Asian refugees. Finally, in a case study comparing the personal accounts of Cressy De Mello, and John and Gladys Noronha, I will explore the rarely documented Goan refugee experience, in Uganda, and after arriving in Canada. The audio interviews I draw from are primary sources that were documented by Carleton University, for the Ugandan Asian Oral History Project which began in 2014. These files are part of a larger library archive known as The Uganda Collection at Carleton University in Ottawa.<sup>4</sup> When I found their digital archive, which recognizes the history of Goans in Canada, I was thrilled. It’s unusual to come across academic sources that reflect the Goan-Canadian experience. It reflects the experience of my family and myself.

### **The Goan Diaspora**

I was born in Edmonton in 1977. Growing up amongst the Goan diaspora, I assumed that all Goans had only sprouted up in Canada at some point during the late 1960s or thereafter, since I cannot recall meeting any Goans who arrived in Canada before then. The founding dates of various Goan-Canadian social clubs, which are integral to the diaspora may support my observations. The Goan Overseas Association of Toronto was founded in 1970;<sup>5</sup> the Edmonton Goan Association in 1975;<sup>6</sup> the Goan Association of Calgary in 1975;<sup>7</sup> the Goan Overseas Association of Vancouver in 1976;<sup>8</sup> and the Quebec Goan Association in 1977.<sup>9</sup> The historian Margret Frenz has studied the Goan diaspora and its mobility in her book *Community, Memory, and Migration in a Globalizing World: The Goan Experience, c.1890 – 1980* (2014). Frenz described her project as a study of globalization from below, which is centered on how and why Goans went to East Africa and then on to Canada, the United Kingdom, or other parts of India. Frenz has noted, “In Canada, the majority of Goans came from Uganda as refugees in 1972.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://goatoronto.com/history/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.edmontongoanassociation.com>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.goacalgary.com>

<sup>8</sup> <https://goavancouver.com/about-us/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://qga.weebly.com>

Canada accepted about 7000 Ugandan South Asians, which included Goans... In the 1970s and 1980s a steady stream of East African Asians came to Canada, but only amounting to around 5 per cent of the total number of immigrants to Canada.”<sup>10</sup> In 2010, the *Times of India* reported that the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) was interested in marketing the ‘homeland’ to members of the Goan diaspora and conducted research to determine the number of Goans living abroad. The GTDC estimated that there were approximately 40,000 Goans in Canada. The Canadian Census of 2011 reported the total population to be roughly 33,000,000.<sup>11</sup> This would mean that Goans, nearly forty years after the expulsion, represented roughly 0.001% of the Canadian population. It’s no wonder that the Goan-Canadian experience is often neglected in academia. While the Census registers those of South Asian descent, the nuanced identity of ‘South Asian-Goan’ is overlooked.

‘Goans’ are those who are either from, or identify as descendants of those from Goa, a state located on the west coast of India. Although it is now part of India, Goa was a colony of Portugal for 450 years, from 1510 to December of 1961, when it was liberated from the Portuguese by Indian troops. Goa became a union territory of India, and then an official state, in 1987. Many who lived in Goa prior to the liberation, and many after, take pride in their culture, which is a blend of Portuguese and South Asian customs; to say one is ‘Goan’ often implies a subtext that distinguishes, ‘not Indian.’ The historian Manohar Malgonkar has discussed the Goan identity in the book, *Inside Goa* (1982). Malgonkar wrote:

The Portuguese were the very first European power to set foot because India and to establish a colony there. They were also the last to leave. No less than four-and-a-half centuries separate their coming and going... the Portuguese came to India not merely as conquerors or colonizers, but also as warriors of their religion; for them the process of occupying foreign territories was not complete unless and until they had Christianized the subjects of those territories as well. They set about accomplishing this in Goa with relentless, and often fanatical zeal... These two factors... combine to set the people of Goa apart from their neighbours in the adjoining areas of India, and also give them a separate identity.<sup>12</sup>

The separate identity, that is largely defined by Catholicism, amongst other South Asians who are Hindu or Muslim, is more explicitly signalled by surnames. In the book, *Goa* (1983), the

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<sup>10</sup> Margret Frenz, *Community, Memory, and Migration in a Globalizing World: The Goan Experience, c. 1890 -1980*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014. P. 247.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/hltfst/pd-pl/Table-Tableau.cfm?LANG=Eng&T=101&S=50&O=A>

<sup>12</sup> Manohar Malgonkar, *Inside Goa*. Bombay: Tata Press Ltd., 1982. P. 11.

historian J.M. Richards highlighted a viceregal decree made by the Portuguese in 1567 which called for the destruction of “heathen” temples in Goa, banned ritual ablutions that were essential to the practice of Hinduism, and expelled non-Christian priests, holy men, and teachers. Goan Christian converts were favoured in appointment to public office, and some offices were reserved for converts only. The conversion may have appealed to those Hindu Goans that had “been harassed by Muslims,” for generations, and felt that the religion of their new masters might offer them some protection. Children brought up as Catholics, and adult Goans, persuaded or forced to adopt the Catholic faith, also adopted a Portuguese surname,

usually the name of the priest responsible for their conversion or in charge of the College where they were educated as Catholics. This practice continued for many years; hence the Portuguese names that Christian Goans bear today – De Sousa, De Silva, Correa, Almeida, Dias, and Miranda... giving the stranger the impression that Goans are racially mixed.<sup>13</sup>

My late parents, Joe and Bertha De Costa immigrated to Canada from Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania in 1975. My parents were not originally from East Africa. My father had immigrated to Tanzania in the 1950s from the village of Chicalim, in Goa. My mother was born in Mombasa, Kenya to parents who had emigrated from the coastal village of Colva, in Goa during the 1940s. My grandparents’ families were farmers of rice and vegetables in Goa. Frenz has noted,

Promising income opportunities elsewhere, was the key reason to leave Goa. On the one hand, farming in Goa did not provide a means to ‘do well’. On the other hand, the Portuguese, whilst not inclined to develop Goa, encouraged education, and thus created a comparatively highly skilled labour force that did not easily find job openings in Goa... Goans developed a particular perspective on agricultural labour: their desire for social mobility, once a relatively good education had been achieved, led them to want a ‘white collar’ job and a status in society which was perceived as respectable.<sup>14</sup>

My parents spent their youth travelling amongst Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, for work and pleasure. The Goan diaspora that lived across East Africa was a close-knit community, held together by social clubs, which were centered on sports, dances, and events based in the Catholic calendar, such as Christmas and Easter parties, or feasts celebrated in honour of the patron saints of villages, back home in Goa. Frenz has highlighted the significance of the social club to the migratory Goan experience and noted that,

The social becausenstitutions of the club, the church, and the schools provide examples of the creation of a social infrastructure and the reconstruction of social and material practices.

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<sup>13</sup> J. M. Richards, *Goa*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1983. P. 25 – 26.

<sup>14</sup> Frenz, P. 66 – 67.

This reconstruction however was not purely a process of reproduction but a creative selection of the cultural and social elements that had been kept alive as well as those that had – either consciously or unconsciously – been discarded... Both processes resulted in the production of distinctive cultural contexts of social interaction... At the same time, ongoing exchanges with Goa, for example, through sporadic or regular visits, proved to be key components in the circulation of Goan people and ideas.<sup>15</sup>

Frenz underscores that “ongoing exchanges with Goa” and the “circulation of Goan people” seem to be a key characteristic of the group. The circulation of “Goan ideas” were bolstered by Goan social clubs, which could be found throughout East Africa, such as the Kampala Institute (KI), the Zanzibar Institute (ZI), the Nairobi Institute (NI), and the Dar Es Salaam Institute (DI).<sup>16</sup>

My parents met in 1969 and were married in Dar Es Salaam on January 23, 1971. Their reception was held at the DI. Two days after their wedding, the news reported that Idi Amin, a military general in the neighboring country of Uganda, had led a coup which overthrew the Ugandan government of President Milton Obote. Once in power, Amin promoted a campaign of Black nationalism over the next few months, which sought to rid Uganda of “brown colonialists” and return control of the country’s economy back to Black Ugandans.<sup>17</sup> While living in Dar Es Salaam during the early 1970s, my parents began to fear for their safety. The racial tensions between Asians and Black Africans in Uganda were reflected in Tanzanian society as well. My parents witnessed increasing aggression and sometimes random acts of violence towards Asians in Dar Es Salaam. Many of their Goan friends in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania had begun to leave East Africa for the United Kingdom and Canada. My parents considered leaving too.

While at work in 1974, my father found a blank Canadian Immigration Form tucked into a copy of Readers’ Digest. Considering it an omen, he and my mother decided to fill it out. After submitting the form, my parents were called for an interview, and were surprised by how successfully it went. In the essay, “Mosaic Versus Melting Pot?: Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States,” the historian Howard Palmer noted that,

In a break with prewar policy, during the 1950s both countries (Canada and the United States) began to seek out skilled industrial and urban-oriented immigrants capable of assisting industrial expansion and of ‘integrating’ more rapidly than rural immigrants. The

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<sup>15</sup> Frenz, P. 134 – 135.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, P. xxiii – xxix.

<sup>17</sup> Shezan Muhammedi, *Gifts from Amin: Ugandan Asian Refugees in Canada*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. P. 71.

settler in a sheepskin coat and the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free’ were replaced by immigrants with a slide rule.<sup>18</sup>

My father was a draftsman and had worked for an architectural firm in Dar Es Salaam for many years. My mother had worked as a secretary at Phisoderm, before becoming a homemaker, to care for my brother who was 3 years old at the time. To supplement the family income, my mother worked as a seamstress, sewing for a clientele of Goan women who like her, loved the latest Western-style fashions, (especially mini-skirts). My parents’ immigration application was swiftly processed and accepted, to their delight. They decided to leave, and within months travelled to Canada in February of 1975, taking three different airplanes to reach their destination. My father, mother, and brother had never experienced air travel before. They intended to live in Toronto, but the immigration officer that interviewed them when they landed, advised them to settle in Edmonton instead, since it would be more likely for my father to find a job there. Just one month before leaving Dar Es Salaam, my father received a letter from a friend who’d immigrated to Canada a few years before. Francis De Souza who had also lived in Dar Es Salaam, wrote to my father from Toronto, on January 1, 1975:

“Dear Joe, Many thanks for your xmas card... I hear that you’ll be coming here next month. Well congratulations! In spite of high inflation, and unemployment, and other problems, Canada is still a great place to settle. It is a safe, tension-free place too... You’ve made a wise move, Joe. The future for your kids is just tremendous... On the 9<sup>th</sup> of last September, I was sworn in as a Canadian citizen. I made the move after I saw what living is like in E. Africa and India. Mind you it’s completely different down here. It’s one great hassle. Don’t expect to get the cushy life you got in Dar. It doesn’t bother me one bit because it’s the same as Bombay... Job conditions are not too good at the moment. For women, it is no problem. Especially in the secretarial and clerical field. The architectural trade has been badly hit, since the last two years (in Toronto that is). The other reason is the saturation of draftsmen and technicians... It took me almost two years to get the right job, whereas Edward Fernandes got one within a week of arrival...”<sup>19</sup>

Considering the advice of the immigration officer and Francis De Souza, Edmonton appealed to my parents since they knew of many East African Goan families that had settled there just a few years before. They also trusted the immigration officer, since his suggestions echoed the

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<sup>18</sup> Howard Palmer, “Mosaic Versus Melting Pot?: Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States,” *International Journal*, Summer 1976, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1776: The U.S. and Us. Sage Publications Ltd. P. 512.

<sup>19</sup> Immigrant letter, from my family’s archives, addressed to my father Joe De Costa of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, from ‘Francis De Souza’ of Don Mills, Ontario, Canada. Sent on January 1, 1975, and received on January 14, 1975. (The name ‘Francis De Souza’ is a pseudonym to protect the privacy of the writer).

advice received from a more reliable source within their Goan community. Upon arrival in Edmonton, my parents and brother lived out of a motel, before finding a townhouse to rent. My mother told me that on the first day it snowed, she ran outside of the motel room with a teaspoon in hand to catch snowflakes – so shocking was the sight. Within days, my father was offered a draftsmen’s position at an architectural firm that had hired several other South Asians from East Africa. My mother took occasional shifts sewing denim at the Great Western Garment (GWG) factory, until an Ismaili businesswoman from Uganda hired her to sew custom-made curtains from home, for a South Asian clientele. My mom often noted how grateful she felt to be in Canada, where she could walk down the street without the fear of being attacked. My devout Catholic parents worshipped their holy trinity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Pierre Trudeau.

### **Uganda and Canada in the Early 1970s**

On August 5, 1972, the Liberal Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Trudeau held a press conference and stated,

I’m on record as saying that you know, President Amin doesn’t intimidate me. I don’t think he does the other Commonwealth leaders either. If he wants to sit around a table and discuss problems with us, I don’t particularly shake with fear or concern. Now whether the British people and the British government want to have them (the South Asian refugees) in their country, I think is a political decision. And I respect the political realities that might lead him [Amin] not to come, or him not to be made welcome.<sup>20</sup>

Noting the tone of Trudeau’s words, we might recognize his speech as a display of masculinity and power; he challenges a bully and reminds him that he is outnumbered by the Commonwealth and outclassed by its civilized practice of handling conflict through discussion “around a table.” Trudeau’s statement may have also alluded to the fact that Amin had come to power in 1971 by overthrowing the government of President Obote, while Obote was away in Singapore participating in the Commonwealth Summit, Heads of Government Meeting.<sup>21</sup>

The day before Trudeau’s press conference, President Idi Amin declared on August 4, 1972, that Uganda had “no place for the over 80,000 Asians holding British passports who were

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<sup>20</sup> Pierre Trudeau, Video footage, (43 Seconds). The Ugandan Collection: Canada Timeline. Associated Press Archive, “SYND, 11577, Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau Press Conference on President Amin, August 5, 1972.” <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/chronology/>

<sup>21</sup> Muhammedi, P. 26.

sabotaging Uganda's economy and encouraging corruption."<sup>22</sup> Essentially, Amin deemed British passport-holding Asians as a problem for the British government to deal with and encouraged them to reclaim their interloping citizens, "or else." Furthermore, Amin ordered all people of "Indian, Pakistani, or Bangladeshi descent, regardless of citizenship, to leave the country within ninety days." The expulsion was to take place between August 9 and November 8, 1972. One month after the original decree had been announced, Amin warned that, "any Asian still in Uganda after November 8, who had not been exempted from expulsion, would have to be rounded up by the security forces and taken to military camps."<sup>23</sup> Looking into the exemptions that were granted to some South Asians in Uganda, helps to elucidate what led to this racially fraught political situation. Amin clarified that "Asians who are Ugandan citizens, will not be required to leave the country," however, he also noted that he would "carefully check the citizenship of those claiming to be Ugandan Asians."<sup>24</sup>

The East African countries, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zanzibar were controlled by colonial powers such as the Portuguese, the Germans, and ultimately the British, until each gained independence roughly around the same time, during the 1960s. During the British rule of Uganda, to create an inexpensive colonial administration and to avoid the use of British administrators, the government enacted a recruitment campaign which encouraged the voluntary migration of Goans to East Africa. Goans occupied more than half of the recruited colonial government positions in Uganda.<sup>25</sup> Aside from the Goan population, South Asians had already established themselves within East Africa, long before British colonial rule, and as early as the ninth century. Indian merchants were the primary suppliers of several goods such as, ivory, iron, gold, and incense, and trading networks over centuries became pathways for numerous South Asian migrants, eventually from Gujarat, Bombay (Mumbai), Punjab, Karachi, and the former Portuguese colony of Goa, until the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> The South Asian diaspora was well entrenched in Ugandan society.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, P. 58.

<sup>23</sup> "Uganda Asians Facing Threat of Internment," in *The Vancouver Sun*, September 9, 1972. Binder 2, The Hempel Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/archival-material/the-hempel-collection-looking-in-from-the-outside/>

<sup>24</sup> Muhammedi, P. 62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, P. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammedi, P. 27 – 29.

Uganda became an independent nation on October 9, 1962, and its first President was Dr. Milton Obote, who served until his government was overthrown by Amin in January of 1971.<sup>27</sup> In October of 1962, the issue of Ugandan citizenship, was addressed by the newly formed constitution which stated that,

“all persons born in Uganda who were citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, or British protected persons, should become citizens of Uganda”... Second- and third-generation British Asians automatically became Ugandan citizens because they had at least one parent or grandparent who was born in Uganda... all those born after 9 October 1962 were considered citizens... only British-protected persons or naturalized British citizens were eligible to apply for citizenship... those who wished to become Ugandan citizens needed to apply within two years. The most pertinent feature of the new citizenship regulations was the requirement for individuals to submit proof they had renounced their British citizenship within three months of securing Ugandan citizenship. Those who failed to produce sufficient evidence were considered noncitizens and rendered illegal.<sup>28</sup>

While the process of application sounds straightforward and even permits what seems to be a generous period of two years to get one’s citizenship in order, the stipulations also implied a subtext that people who held Indian or Pakistani citizenship were ineligible.<sup>29</sup> Seen by some as one of many anti-Asian tactics of the Obote government, it is important to note that more than 24,000 Asians left Uganda between 1969 and 1971. It is estimated that roughly 20 percent of the Goan community left Uganda by 1970.<sup>30</sup> This timing coincides with the establishment of the Goan community in Toronto and the founding of their Goan Overseas Association in 1970, as noted above.

The increasingly inhospitable climate for South Asians was evidenced by a headline on the front page of the *Ugandan Argus* newspaper, on September 16, 1970, which read “CO-OPERATE – ASIANS TOLD”. The article quoted Haji A. Wasike, the Regional Trader Development Officer of Obote’s government, who stated, “It should be well known that Asian businessmen did not come here with money or with land. The means of production they found here, should remain here in the hands of Ugandans.” The article also reported that,

Mr. Wasike (has) conducted a shop-to-shop operation. In each shop he checked citizenship documents, trade licenses, and birth certificates of shop owners... All suspected non-citizen traders at Mpigi had their licenses withdrawn, shops closed and vacated, to be opened for African traders. “I have no grudge against non-citizens, nor any ulterior motive

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, P. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, P. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, P. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, P. 61.

in carrying out these operations. I am only fulfilling my duty, purely implementing the Trade Licensing Act, that was enacted by Parliament.”<sup>31</sup>

Wasike’s investigation sought authentic documents to probe shop owners’ identities. Returning to the constitution’s stipulation that second- and third- generation British Asians “automatically” became Ugandan citizens may be viewed as a tactic of the Ugandan government to dodge its own responsibility of providing tangible documentation to prove the citizenship of Ugandan Asians. Later, Amin seems to have knowingly taken advantage of this loophole when he succeeded Obote. The process of citizenship verification was a precarious one. It was challenging to provide valid documentation of Ugandan citizenship since Ugandan Asians were expected to produce original copies of birth certificates. This was not possible for many adults since an official birth registry was not instituted until 1930, and photocopies were assumed to be forged and deemed insufficient as proof. After the expulsion decree, the government set a deadline of September 10, 1972, for all Ugandan Asians to verify their documents, or else they would automatically lose their right to apply for Ugandan citizenship.<sup>32</sup> This sent many Ugandan Asians into a panic. Some other Ugandans enjoyed the frenzy it caused.

Letters printed in the *Ugandan Argus* written by various members of the public, indicate what some felt about Asians in Uganda. On August 18, 1972, the headmaster of Soroti High School, Dr. Karamohandi stated,

I appeal to all those men and women affected under the [expulsion] decree to be calm and patient, and realise within their hearts that it was part of their disloyalty and dishonesty when not all but many of them in trade, commerce, and industry concentrated upon oiling their wealth and exporting that to other lands. Today when they are facing the results and fearing for their own safety, they should very well have known this day could come. Long live the President.<sup>33</sup>

In the next column, the Reverend Peter Ben Ochan, stated, “Our Asian friends have been in a deep sleep since they were shipped to East Africa as coolies for the Mombasa to Kampala Railway Line. During this sleep, they have had sweet dreams of East Africa as an Asian paradise.

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<sup>31</sup> “CO-OPERATE – ASIANS TOLD,” in *the Ugandan Argus*, September 16, 1970. The Bennett Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/the-bennett-collection-uganda-argus-newspaper/>

<sup>32</sup> Muhammedi, P. 63.

<sup>33</sup> “An Asian Dream Has Ended,” in *the Ugandan Argus*, August 18, 1972. The Bennett Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/the-bennett-collection-uganda-argus-newspaper/>

I am glad that they are having nightmares for a change.” Yavan M.K. similarly lauded the expulsion decree, stating, “No doubt every rational human being in the world must be thankful to the President for what he has done to restore justice which has been denied Ugandans... No doubt the Asians have milked us economically so that an action like the one the President took was overdue...”. Writing as a group, the Traders of Kyegegwa, praised their “Beloved President” stating, “Your Excellency, you have discovered why Ugandans have been still poor... It is these [Asians] who have been enjoying all that should have been enjoyed by the sons and daughters of Uganda... They have even forgotten about Delhi, and their second state, Britain.”<sup>34</sup>

The day after these letters were printed in the Ugandan paper, the British response to the crisis, was reported on by Colin McCullough in the Toronto *Globe and Mail*:

The British Government has asked Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to take in some of the 50,000 Asians who will be expelled from Uganda, by the end of October... “We would like Canada to accept as many Asians as possible,” said the British Foreign Office official last night, but no figures were suggested... Estimates vary, but it is thought that there are at least 50,000 Indians and Pakistanis in Uganda. Most of them hold U.K. passports... Britain has established an annual quota of 3,500 Asian families from East Africa (including Kenya and Tanzania), providing they hold U.K. passports... no other Commonwealth countries (except Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) had been asked to accept the immigrants. “We couldn’t seriously make the request to other African or Asian countries, because they have problems of their own to contend with.”<sup>35</sup>

Rising to the occasion, the government in Canada was quick to respond. Six days later on August 25, 1972, the Montreal *Gazette* reported that Prime Minister Trudeau had announced his authorization of Immigration Minister Bryce Mackasey, to establish an emergency admission program that would allow Canada to accept up to 5,000 Ugandan Asians within two months. Trudeau added that “a team of immigration and health officials would fly to Uganda’s capital, Kampala, to speed up the process.” The Liberal cabinet’s decision was intended to offer the Ugandan Asians, “an honourable place in Canadian Life.” Britain suggested that Canada should accept at least 16,000 – 18,000 of the expelled Asians; however, Mackasey specified that – while there had not been an upper limit set for the offer – 5,000 seemed an adequate number to accept;

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<sup>34</sup> “An Asian Dream Has Ended,” in *the Ugandan Argus*, August 18, 1972. The Bennett Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/the-bennett-collection-uganda-argus-newspaper/>

<sup>35</sup> “U.K. Calls on Canada to admit Asians expelled by Uganda,” by Colin McCullough, in *The Globe and Mail*, August 19, 1972. Binder 1, The Hempel Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/archival-material/the-hempel-collection-looking-in-from-the-outside/>

he appealed to the other Commonwealth countries to do their share, as well.<sup>36</sup> The *Gazette* also reported,

“If a bunch of fanatics start a genocidal war against the Asians, [said Minister Mackasey] we’d have it on our consciences. We are very concerned that the situation in Uganda could rapidly deteriorate.” ... He added that because the Ugandan Asians fall mainly in the merchant or professional class, the problem of job finding would not be as acute as some critics insist... The Trudeau statement concluded that the humanitarian reasons given for the government decision would help Uganda and also Great Britain, “whose people would otherwise be forced to share their already overcrowded island with a tide of involuntary immigrants.” Both the Prime Minister and Mackasey said the Ugandan Asians would add to the cultural richness and variety of Canadian life, and will make, together with other Asian immigrants already here, “an important contribution to Canadian society.”<sup>37</sup>

“Cultural richness” and “variety” had come to the forefront as concepts underpinning the Canadian sense of nationalism, in the years leading up to the response to the expulsion crisis. On October 8, 1971, Trudeau’s government introduced a multicultural policy that was intended to aid in the development and growth of non-Indigenous, non-British, and non-French cultural groups, help immigrants learn English or French, and encourage creative exchanges between different cultural groups “in the interest of national unity.”<sup>38</sup> Multicultural policy, which became associated with the Trudeau government, was based in findings of the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of 1963 – 1969, which bridged the eras of Lester B. Pearson and Trudeau. Howard Brotz has noted,

(the commission) sought to meet the demands of French nationalism with the idea of bilingual and bi-cultural Canada. When some ethnic groups protested that bi-culturalism ‘left them out,’ multiculturalism then emerged as the broader conception that might placate both them as well as the French nationalists. In the meantime, multiculturalism became something of a growth industry and a ubiquitous theme of political rhetoric.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “No limit – but 5,000 expected: Canada takes Uganda Asians,” by Guy DeMorino, in *The Montreal Gazette*, August 25, 1972. Binder 1, The Hempel Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/archival-material/the-hempel-collection-looking-in-from-the-outside/>

<sup>37</sup> “No limit – but 5,000 expected: Canada takes Uganda Asians,” by Guy DeMorino, in *The Montreal Gazette*, August 25, 1972. Binder 1, The Hempel Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/archival-material/the-hempel-collection-looking-in-from-the-outside/>

<sup>38</sup> McNeil, P. 175.

<sup>39</sup> Howard Brotz, “Multiculturalism in Canada: A Muddle,” in *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*, Winter 1980. Vol. 6. No. 1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. P. 43.

A mindfulness of multiculturalism in 1960s Canada, may be seen to reflect an international political climate after World War II, which viewed scientific racism and white supremacy with shame. The historian Daniel McNeil has highlighted the Advisory Committee on Cooperation in Citizenship, established by the Canadian Department of National War Services during World War II, as laying a foundation that was ironically rooted in a colonial sensibility for the multicultural policies that followed. The Advisory Committee was mainly the project of Tracy Phillips, a British Colonial officer, who had spent his life working in overseas intelligence. Phillip’s committee sought to “interpret the views of Canadian citizens of non-British and non-French origins and to communicate them to the government and the general Canadian public.” McNeil asserts that “the manner in which (the committee) interested itself in situations that appeared to be producing ‘misunderstanding, dissatisfaction, or discord amongst groups of Canadians of European origin, non-French, or non-British’ is particularly notable as a template” for the Trudeau government’s multicultural policy of October 1971. The Canadian self-image as “do-gooders,” and “interpreters” of culture may be seen to stem from, “the impetus to transform complaints about ... disunity into celebrations of Canadians as ideal peace brokers and translators”.<sup>40</sup> By rescuing Ugandan Asian refugees on a world stage, the Trudeau government ‘did good’ for Britain – that “overcrowded island,” whilst showing mercy to those deemed undesirable by an ‘uncivilised’ bully, such as Amin. The grateful Ugandan Asians could take refuge in a country that logically valued their skills and the “cultural richness” they added to the economy and Canadian society. By the end of the crisis, over 7,000 Ugandan Asian refugees were accepted, and settled across Canada.<sup>41</sup>

### **Ugandan Goan Refugee Stories: The De Mellos & The Noronhas**

A feeling of gratefulness towards Canada is often expressed by many Ugandan Asians who reflect on their experience of being expelled from Uganda in 1972. Audio interviews of some of the refugees have been documented by Carleton University for the Ugandan Asian Oral History Project, which began in 2014. These files are part of a larger library archive known as The Uganda Collection at the university, located in Ottawa.<sup>42</sup> Comparing the accounts of two Goan families, the De Mellos and the Noronhas – how they arrived in Uganda, their memories of the expulsion,

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<sup>40</sup> McNeil, P. 175.

<sup>41</sup> Main Page, The Uganda Collection Website, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/>

and of resettling in Canada – reveal similarities and differences that help to illuminate the migratory experience that is more complex than a linear process of travelling from ‘point A’ to ‘point B.’ Like many immigrants, the Goan diaspora’s experience of migration is probably better described as a journey from A to B; then B to C; then C to D, sometimes doubling back to any previous point along the way.

Cressy De Mello was born in Bombay (now Mumbai), to parents from Goa. She moved to Uganda at the age of eighteen and began working there as a secretary. While in Uganda, she met Nick De Mello, from the village of Nerul in Goa. He had immigrated to Uganda, to work as a travel agent. The couple married in late December of 1970, and went abroad to South Africa for their honeymoon. While they were away in January, they heard about Amin’s takeover of the Ugandan government. When Cressy and Nick returned to Kampala, they were shocked by the situation in town and noticed an air of fear and anxiety amongst their peers, about Amin’s leadership. Life carried on, despite the undertones of racism towards Asians that the De Mellos and their friends began to perceive. In 1971, Cressy and Nick welcomed the birth of their daughter Evelyn, and for a few months, their attention was diverted by the blissfulness of family life, until they began to witness increasing occurrences of people being “shot, hurt, and harassed.” In August of 1972, after the expulsion order was made, their daughter Evelyn, although born in Uganda, was made stateless, as was Nick, who was a Ugandan citizen. In fear, the De Mellos applied to immigrate to Canada, since they had friends who had moved to Ontario some years before. When their application number was posted in the paper, they went for an interview and were offered aid by the Canadian team.<sup>43</sup> Cressy recalled the days leading up to their departure:

One day... Nick... dropped me off and asked me to go shopping for things to take. We could not take our money from Uganda, we were allowed only \$50. After I came from shopping, this is hard... I found a friend [from] his office, who told me that Nick had [sent him] to take me home – the army guys had told Nick to drive his car, at gunpoint to the Makindye prison where they tortured him and set him free only after Nick offered them 50,000 shillings and all of his belongings. His car, his house, all his stuff, his fridge, etc. They arranged to meet him at City Bar on Kampala Rd. So, we dropped Nick there the next day and we hung around the area to protect him. He gave them all the stuff and [we] left Uganda the very next day. We were helped by the Canadian team... We took the bus to the airport that day and Nick was hiding in the bus in case they stopped him for a further ransom.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Interview with Cressy De Mello, September 1, 2022. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/cressy-de-mello/>

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Cressy De Mello, September 1, 2022. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/cressy-de-mello/>

Cressy, Nick, and Evelyn took an Air Canada flight that stopped in Las Palmas, Spain, before reaching its destination of Montreal. There, the family was driven to the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) at Longue Pointe, and warmly welcomed at a centre for the Ugandan Asian refugees, set up by the Canadian Military, complete with army cooks who “had been given a crash course in Indian cuisine by the Maharajah Restaurant in Montreal.”<sup>45</sup> Based on the government’s resettlement program, the De Mellos were sent to Halifax, Nova Scotia which Cressy remembers fondly as an accepting environment, filled with many kind people. The family grew to include two more daughters, and eventually lived in Saint John, New Brunswick; Montreal – where Cressy and Nick helped to establish the Quebec Goan Association in 1977; and, finally, settled permanently in Toronto. Cressy noted, “I’m very grateful to the Canadian government for helping me raise my kids in a way that I never could have raised them back home.”<sup>46</sup>

Gladys Noronha was born in 1950, to a father from Bangalore, India, and a mother from Goa. Her parents met in Goa and immigrated to Uganda in 1947. Gladys grew up in Uganda but lived in England from 1969 to 1970 to study at a secretarial school. She returned to Uganda when her father passed away in 1970. Despite being born in Uganda, Gladys was made stateless by the Amin government. When the expulsion was announced, Gladys’s family dispersed. Her mother and brother returned to India, but Gladys took responsibility for her younger, teenage sister Valerie, and the two applied for immigration with the Canadian Team’s assistance. Once they were accepted, they were whisked away on a long journey, arriving at CFB Longue Point, in Montreal on September 30, 1972. Gladys recalled standing in line with her sister at the reception centre, waiting to be interviewed, “here was I – the minis were in fashion then, and here we are standing the two of us, with these short skirts...”<sup>47</sup> Her emphasis on what she was wearing is significant to note, considering the political climate that Gladys and Valerie had just left behind. On May 29, 1972, the *Ugandan Argus* featured the headline, “Dress Decently – President; Minis Banned, So are Hot-Pants and V-Split Maxis.” The journalist Immy Wamimbi, reported that “at the Nsambya Police Barracks on Saturday, the President told thousands of people present: “ ... ‘I would like to tell the people of Uganda that they should not be brainwashed by imperialists and be made to think

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<sup>45</sup> St. Vincent, P. 139.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Cressy De Mello, September 1, 2022. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/cressy-de-mello/>

<sup>47</sup> Interview of John and Gladys Noronha, October 12, 2016. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/john-and-gladys-noronha/>

that our women should wear mini-skirts.’ ... A decree defining mini-skirts and hot pants in detail and setting out the punishment for those wearing them will be signed next week.”<sup>48</sup> The decree made on June 5, 1972,<sup>49</sup> which delineated what constituted state-sanctioned clothing for females, thereby effected how certain women were treated in public, based on their attire. In June of 1972, the *Ugandan Argus* reported that,

... a girl was wearing a skirt which shoe-shine boys and other people on the verandah of the buildings on William Street thought to be a mini, and they started shouting at her... This did not hamper her... she bravely made her way through the taxi park... Her would-be molesters looked at her unbelievably while other women who had been scared by the approaching mob took cover by boarding the Mengo bus.<sup>50</sup>

The mob seemed to operate as vigilantes, since the article indicates that the skirt is what they “thought” to be a mini. Gladys Noronha humorously recalled that she and her sister were wearing short skirts while waiting to be interviewed by Canadian immigration officers, but mini-skirts were not a laughing matter to the Ugandan government. In Montreal, the young women’s choice of attire did not affect the treatment they received which as Gladys recalled, “... they were so kind, they fed us... stamped your passports and then they asked you what you did, and where you planned to go, and whatever.”<sup>51</sup>

John Noronha was born to a family who had immigrated to Zanzibar from Goa, in the early 1900s. The family moved back and forth, between Zanzibar, Goa, Kenya, and eventually settled in Uganda. John was born in Kampala in 1950 but made stateless by Amin’s government. After the expulsion was announced, John and his immediate family members were split apart, settling in various locations such as Canada, Australia, England, and India. When the Canadian team in Uganda granted John a visa, he was given a day and a half to prepare for his departure on an emergency flight to Canada. Fortunately, a friend named Peter that John often played guitar with, in a local band, was scheduled to leave on the same flight. The two young men, in their early

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<sup>48</sup> “Dress Decently – President: Minis Banned, So are Hot Pants and V-Split Maxis,” in *the Ugandan Argus*, May 29, 1972. The Bennett Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/the-bennett-collection-uganda-argus-newspaper/>

<sup>49</sup> “Idi Amin Decrees on Mini-Skirts, Gonorrhoea, and Wigs,” in *The Daily Monitor*. May 30, 2015. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/idi-amin-decrees-on-mini-skirts-gonorrhoea-and-wigs-1612806>

<sup>50</sup> “The Men Kept Their Distance,” in *the Ugandan Argus*, June 1972. (Exact day, unrecorded). The Bennett Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/the-bennett-collection-uganda-argus-newspaper/>

<sup>51</sup> Interview of John and Gladys Noronha, October 12, 2016. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/john-and-gladys-noronha/>

twenties, had a laugh together on the flight and felt as if they were on a whirlwind adventure, until they arrived at the CFB Longue Pointe reception centre in Montreal, and the shock of being on the other side of the world and alone, set in. After a few days at the Longue Pointe centre, John and Peter were given accommodations at a YMCA in Montreal. While at the YMCA, they met other Ugandan refugees who had recently arrived and were being housed on different floors. Amongst the group were some familiar faces from back home, including a young woman John once met in Entebbe, named Gladys. A courtship began between them and by September of 1974 they were married. John and Gladys started a family and eventually both found steady jobs in banking. From Montreal, they moved to Toronto and settled in the west end, favouring Etobicoke and Mississauga, since so many others from the diaspora had laid down roots there as well. So much so, that the west end community had gained stability as a group and founded the Goan Overseas Association, the first Goan social club in Canada. By the early 1980s, John and Gladys became active in the Goan social scene, which was growing due to new arrivals, not just from Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zanzibar, but eventually from Goa, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States as well.<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The *International Goan Convention of 1988* took place in Toronto over two weeks, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. Roughly eighteen years after some of the first East African Goans began settling in Canada, the community had established itself to such a degree that it seemed as if a grand gesture was in order, to mark their place in Canadian culture and the world more substantially. Sixteen years had passed since the Ugandan Expulsion had sent many East African Goans scrambling for a new place to settle, in some cases starting from scratch again, in Canada. Those who had immigrated in the early 1970s were now well integrated into Canadian society, many with grown children, and even grandchildren born in Canada. Goans are generally not against assimilation, since they often take pride in their mixed heritage, which is a hybrid of Indian, Portuguese, British, and African/Swahili cultures, given their history and tendency towards a migratory lifestyle. However, after settling more permanently in Canada, the need to preserve a

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<sup>52</sup> Interview of John and Gladys Noronha, October 12, 2016. The Uganda Collection, Carleton University. <https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/people/john-and-gladys-noronha/>

sense of ‘Goanness’ was emerging as an important issue amongst the Goan diaspora in Canada. The *International Goan Convention of 1988* was organized by members of the Goan Overseas Association, with four goals in mind: to bring together Goans and strengthen their sense of community; to develop the capacity of Goans to weather social, economic, cultural, and political challenges; to foster relationships between Goans and the community at large; and to promote Goan values, such as industriousness in the workplace, and pride in home and family life. The President of the Convention, Zulema De Souza wrote an official statement which welcomed visitors to the convention, highlighting representatives from across Canada, Goa and other parts of India, Hong Kong, Macau, United Arab Emirates, Australia, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Brazil, England, and the US.<sup>53</sup> Though the total number of attendees is not known, more than 600 volunteers were required to organize and run the events, which occurred at various venues in Toronto, such as Roy Thomson Hall, Harbourfront Centre, St. Michael’s Cathedral, the Queensway Lions Club, and the University of Toronto.<sup>54</sup> Events included opening and closing ceremonies, balls, art exhibitions, lectures, workshops, harbour cruises, Konkani film-screenings, Konkani theatre, musical concerts, folk dance shows, food markets, and a public debate addressing the challenge, “Young Goans Have Lost Their Ethnic Identity.” The convention was also commemorated with a 186-paged souvenir book, containing the programme, advertisements for local Goan-owned businesses, sheet music for traditional Konkani songs, and essays addressing various topics, such as the effects of tourism in Goa, Goan literature, and Goan Associations around the world.

The first page of the souvenir book features a letter signed by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, in which he congratulates the delegates to the first International Goan Convention. Mulroney notes that, “We, as Canadians, take great pride in celebrating our individuality and, at the same time, are unified by our shared ideals and values. The preservation and enhancement of heritage, tradition and culture are unique to Canada’s vision of nationhood.”<sup>55</sup> Mulroney’s words

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<sup>53</sup> Zulema De Souza, “Message from the President of the Goan Overseas Association,” Souvenir Book of the *International Goan Convention of 1988*, August 1988. P. 6. Goan Cultural Archives, 2016. [https://archive.org/details/InternationalGoanConventionBookSouvenir/International%20Goan%20Convention%20Book\\_Souvenir/](https://archive.org/details/InternationalGoanConventionBookSouvenir/International%20Goan%20Convention%20Book_Souvenir/)

<sup>54</sup> “Organizational Personnel & Programme,” in *Proceeding of the International Goan Convention of 1988*. Goan Overseas Association, 1988. Goan Cultural Archives 2016. P. xi – x. <https://archive.org/details/InternationalGoanConventionBookSouvenir/Proceedings%20INTL%20Goan%20Convention%20Book/>

<sup>55</sup> Brian Mulroney, Letter of Congratulations, Souvenir Book of the *International Goan Convention of 1988*, August 1988. P. 6. Goan Cultural Archives, 2016.

hint at the ‘mosaic’ that symbolizes the truly Canadian sense of culture. Canada became the first nation in the world to adopt multicultural policy in 1971. However, official multiculturalism policy was not written into Canada’s constitution until 1983. Then in 1988, the year of the Goan Convention, Canada’s first Multiculturalism Act was passed in Parliament, led by Mulroney.<sup>56</sup> The Goan diaspora seems to fit in comfortably, as a piece of the Canadian cultural mosaic. In Canada, it has grown alongside, or perhaps because of, the development of multiculturalism as a key concept underpinning Canadian nationalism.

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[https://archive.org/details/InternationalGoanConventionBookSouvenir/International%20Goan%20Convention%20Book\\_Souvenir/](https://archive.org/details/InternationalGoanConventionBookSouvenir/International%20Goan%20Convention%20Book_Souvenir/)

<sup>56</sup> Lloyd Wong & Shibao Guo, Eds. “Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: An Introduction,” in *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: Theories, Policies, and Debates*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015. P. 2.

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