

7-2018

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### Recommended Citation

Ferrão, R. Benedito, I am a “Pure Goan” but there is No Such Thing: An Interview with Peter Nazareth (2018). *Journal of Portuguese Diaspora Studies*, 7, 291-306.  
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/aspubs/2093>

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## I am a “Pure Goan” but there is No Such Thing: An Interview with Peter Nazareth

R. Benedito Ferrão

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**Abstract.** Conducted between February and April, 2017, this e-conversation with writer, literary critic, and professor Peter Nazareth engages him in topics of the Goan diaspora, Goan literature, as well as his own writing and criticism. As a writer of novels, radio plays, and short stories, and as a critic of multiple literatures, Nazareth is asked to reflect upon historical, personal, and other influences on his work, as well as the reception of it. In his responses, Nazareth draws from familial and personal history as a writer whose lived connections include East Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and the West. Additionally, his perspective covers such moments of import as the end of colonialism in East Africa and the Asian expulsion from Idi Amin’s Uganda. He is also asked to comment upon the trajectory of twentieth and twenty-first century Goan literature as an early anthologist of writing by those of Goan origins in various parts of the world. In so doing, Nazareth recalls how he came to the work of writers Leslie de Noronha and Violet Dias Lannoy, the latter an author whose novel was published posthumously. Further, the gamut of issues covered include inter-communal socialities and antagonisms, literature and identity diversity, and the fraught terrain of claims to authenticity.

**Keywords:** Goan diaspora, East Africa, Goan Literatures, Peter Nazareth, Violet Dias Lannoy

R. Benedito Ferrão (RBF) – I thought that for the very first question, I’d like to start with this:

What drew you to writing fiction and the study of literature? My impetus in asking this question is to reflect on the tradition of writing by Goans. Here, you stand in a unique place in that you, both, write fiction in various genres *and* write about fiction (among other subjects) by others.

Peter Nazareth (PN) – I was the first-born son in the family. My sister Ruth was born when I was over four years old, and so I was in effect a lone person.

My father had a lot of books in our house, including joke books. He was well known by Goans for giving fine speeches and always including a joke in the speeches. He also liked reading comic books—I think this was the influence of my mother.

So, I grew up reading and liking all kinds of writing.

My father loved writing limericks, so I was used to the notion that I could write all kinds of things. So, from way back I liked writing all kinds of things, and I was also good at editing the work of other students whom I encouraged to write.

In my last year at Kololo Secondary School in Kampala, Ganesh Bagchi—who was a writer of plays, Shavian plays, which he acted in with his wife, who was also a teacher in the Kololo School—made me editor of the second issue of the School magazine, *The Kololian*. (Kololo School was opened in 1954, and half the students and faculty from the Old Kampala secondary school in Old Kampala were transferred to Kololo School.) Bagchi gave me a free hand. I could make the magazine as thick as I liked. In that issue, I also included my literary criticism, a short story (I think the character was named Ronald), book reviews, etc. I wrote so much that I published some of my work as being “by an editor” (I had roped in other students to be on the editorial board).

So, from way back, I was writing all kinds of things and not considering that one genre of writing was inferior to another. This story is told by me in my essay “The Kololian and S.T. Writerji” in the volume *Exodus: Kololian Perspectives*, which I co-edited, published by The Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 2002.

RBF – You refer to the various influences in your youth as being the motivation for your life path as a writer in multiple genres. On the one hand, you bear witness to the stimuli around you: books in your household, your father’s own diverse reading practices as well as his adeptness at oratory, and also the encouragement you received while at secondary school to participate in writing and editing in an institutional fashion. But, on the other hand, you mention the loneliness of being the first-born and how reading helped you mitigate this. Two related questions arise, then.

The first is how did writing help you develop a sense of interiority, or did writing, in fact, function as a kind of escape for you? Indeed, I am thinking here of the very evident and recurrent theme of exile that appears in your novels and literary criticism.

To follow up, my other question is about origins, as well. As you know, I was drawn to your work because we share a common history—both of us are connected to the Goan British East African Diaspora (GBEAD). Your writing on the subject of this diaspora, as a scholar and fiction-writer, is part of a limited corpus of literature and criticism about the GBEAD *by* someone who also happens to be a Goan who was born in East Africa during the colonial period. At the risk of labeling you a GBEAD writer—a category that would be self-limiting and inadequate in explaining the range of your oeuvre—what role did this fact of history play in your becoming a writer? To be honest, I am curious about the rarity of such a phenomenon—that of the GBEAD writer. This, given middle-class diasporic predilections for, shall we say, more “productive” lifestyles, as well as the general lack of support for writerly pursuits as the end of the colonial era drew nigh and then in its aftermath, even as these are the very substance of your writing!

PN – I never thought of writing as an escape or of myself as a member of a diaspora.

I should add that my father was a civil servant posted to Entebbe and he remained there until I completed primary school (a Goan primary school) and had to go to Kampala to a secondary school, in old Kampala to begin with.

I stayed with my aunt Lily, my father's sister, for four years: she was a nurse at Nakasero hospital in Kampala.

My father wrote powerful letters, as did my Aunt, so I was used to the notion that I too could write.

In Kampala, I was befriended by the Gomes family, famous (as my brother John has written) for designing the busuuti, which is the national dress of the women in Buganda. It is also called the Gomisi. A stamp in Uganda was issued of the Gomisi.

The Gomes family consisted of Marcella, also a nurse at Nakasero hospital with my aunt, Julie, Roger, Ella and John. They loved comics: American ones (*Captain Marvel*) and British ones (*Beano* among them). They also used to buy a comic-book-styled publication of short stories. They were very generous in sharing their comics with me. A couple of years ago, I signed *The General is Up*<sup>1</sup> for Ella who lives in Toronto. As far as I know, the Gomes family read but did not write.

Two other friends in Kampala, who were equally generous and loaned me their comics, were Helen and Norman Godinho: *Batman*, *Classics Illustrated*, and others.

I never thought of myself as being in a diaspora, as I mentioned above. At Makerere, I wrote as a Makerere student just like the other Makerere students, and I was accepted as one. I was even elected Chairman of Mitchell Hall though there were less than ten Asian students out of 130.

At Leeds and back in Uganda, I wrote as an Ugandan, an East African, and was considered to be an African writer. My photo was on the cover of *Afriscopes* magazine in the early seventies with other African writers (I only knew of this cover from a Nigerian writer, Kole Omotoso, when he was in the International Writing Program).

So, the strangeness for me was to write as a Goan writer. But my father brought me up to believe I had to help Goans any way I could so I took up the challenge because I thought I could bring my experience as an African writer (which led to my reading and writing about Caribbean Literature and Afro-American Literature) to make a contribution to Goan writers. I did not call myself a Goan writer. In fact, I did not include any of my fiction in the JSAL<sup>2</sup> issue on Goan literature. The editor in chief, Carlo Coppola, when he received the manuscript, phoned me to ask why I had not included any of my work in it. "Because I am not a Goan writer," I said. He insisted that I include something of mine, which is why I included an extract from *In a Brown Mantle* because I had included an essay on that novel by Antonio da Cruz, which he had originally published in *The Sunday Newhind Times* and my novel could link up with that essay.

RBF – It is so interesting to hear about the early influences on your writing and thinking, as they reveal the complexity of the kind of world you lived in: American and British comic books, British East African multiculturalism—both in terms of race

and class, as well as your enrolment at Makere, which in those days was a part of the University of London. If one were to liken coloniality to globalization, then your youthful experience epitomizes the parallels, but it also shows up in your writing.

Could I ask you to reflect on how you deliberately incorporate the visual style of American and British comic books in your fiction?

Additionally, in keeping with the theme of coloniality as globalization, I also want to enquire about the influence of British and post-British East African multiculturalism on your writing.

In a 1988 interview with Charles Irby in the *Souvenir Publication of the International Goan Convention, Toronto*, you recall your own interview with Ishmael Reed. You quote Reed as saying “that the highest form of multiculturalism is when you look at another culture in order to understand your own . . . So, paradoxically, my Goan identity gets affirmed” (98). Your novels and short stories have a wealth of diverse characters in multiple world locations, and yet the central characters are Goans. Remarkably, even when characters of color interact with one another in the Western locations of your fiction, it is to the near-exclusion of white people. For instance, at the end of *The General is Up* (1991), Ronald D’Mello, recently exiled from the fictitious, newly independent East African nation of Damibia, encounters in the United States a man who is the son of Lebanese immigrants. Not only is Charlie confused by D’Mello’s use of the word “lift”—a British English expression—when the Goan asks if he can catch a ride (135), but the Lebanese American is also flummoxed as to why a South Asian person should be from Africa (137). The comedic elements of the conversation are also paired with the comic-bookishness of Charlie’s quintessentially American car—a Ford Thunderbird (135). The novel closes with the reader discovering that D’Mello has disappeared, leaving his fictionalized memoir for Charlie to find and possibly make public.

So, while the Goan here is characterized by his multicultural past, it is as if his story cannot be told without the intermediation of someone else who is also the product of multiculturalism. With this fascinating interplay as just one example, might I ask you to speak more to the role multiculturalism plays as a device in your work?

PN – One of the best things about me as a literary critic was written by Saadi Simawe, an Iraqi (who had been imprisoned by Saddam Hussein) who came to Iowa, took my class on African literature in 1982, was in the International Writing Program, got his PhD from the American Studies Program, and taught at Grinnell. He passed away three days ago.

I am working on a tribute to him in which I quote from his piece on me. When it is done, I will send it to you.

My interpretation of the Epilogue is that Ronald leaves his manuscript in the hands of someone who understands the situation and has connections with publishers so he will bring it out while Ronald vanishes. Has he gone to Phoenix? Is this a metaphor for rising out of his ashes? Did he run away and then regret having done so, which is why he wrote the novel, fingering all the guilty people in the last chapter? Is he rising from his ashes through the novel?

Or is he going to rise from his ashes by joining guerillas?

It is fitting that a man going to Phoenix is given a ride by a man driving a Thunderbird. These are both mythic birds, the one from Africa and the other from the US.

There are some indications in the text that “Charlie”—Charlie is the first name of Marlow who tells the story of Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—edited the text, perhaps for American reading.

The novel opens with comic book language, and the last chapter is full of comic book language.

RBF – I was very sorry to hear of the passing of Simawe. Please accept my condolences. In your tribute to him that you kindly shared with me, you echo his assessment of you as a “communal critic” (79). Simawe comes to this conclusion given your own personal history. He observes that you were “[b]orn from *three* cultures, that is, African, Malayan, and Goan, [and that] this fragmentation becomes for [you] an urge for bridging, which later develops into a high artistic synthesising” (79). To my mind, in referring to your Goan roots, your East African birth, and your mother’s Malaysian background (though she is of Goan origin), Simawe traces a genealogy of the presence and influence of multiculturalism in your life, as well as on your critical and creative work. Further, it is what he gleans as being part of the insight you bring to your analysis of diverse works of cultural production, be it the poetry of Singaporean poet Edwin Thumboo or the African-set literature of Joseph Conrad.

It is noteworthy that you see Simawe as an apt interlocutor, and here I would like to turn to the late Iraqi writer’s past. Both Simawe and you dealt with tyrannical political dispositions; his entanglement was with Hussein’s Iraq, yours was with Idi Amin’s Uganda. It is likely that Simawe saw similarities between his own experience and that of the characters in your novels. In a 2003 interview with Wisconsin Public Radio’s *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, Simawe is asked if the book he co-edited, *Iraqi Poetry Today* (2003), bears “testament to a dying culture,” given the US war with Iraq (“Saadi Simawe on ‘Iraqi Poetry Today’”). He responds, “It’s not dying; it’s a culture that’s under siege.” Simawe explains that the volume fills a lacuna by bringing to light the literature of a people whose country is otherwise known to the world only as an embattled region. Your novels, the aforementioned *The General is Up* and *In a Brown Mantle*, may be viewed as works addressing a culture under siege. Born of that tumultuous moment in post-independence East African history that led to the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the novels may still be seen—like Simawe’s work—as lessons for politically unstable times and about the rise of demagoguery. May I ask you to comment on this, but also the place of literature that tells the stories of the ordinary and the marginalized in periods of political strife?

PN – I was brought up in Uganda as a Goan.

It was years later that I realized that my mother’s birth and upbringing in Malaya was important and was overlooked by my considering myself, and being considered, as a Goan with no recognition at all of the Malaysian part.

Almost all the Goan children in Uganda were brought up with the parents talking to them about Goa. So, when Goans went back to Goa, the children tended to be surprised that they were not considered to be Goans.

In my case, my father talked about the family in Goa and my mother talked about the (large) family in Malaya. My mother's first trip back to Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, to be precise) was in 1960, twenty-two years after she got married in Goa. My father had gone to Goa on leave from Uganda and a proposal for my mother was brought to him by her uncle in Goa. She was not told she was being taken to Goa to get married. After her wedding she came to Uganda.

I was surprised that my maternal grandfather, who was blind by that time, was so small whereas I had expected a giant. I have drawn from this part of the story in my "Rosie's Theme."

I was also surprised that when we got to Malaya, my mother spoke English with a Malayan accent, like the rest of the family, and not like me.

So, one day, when someone questioned me because he was going to put info about me on Google, I decided to mention the Malaysian ancestry. I was aware that people would confuse race and nationality and decided to throw a spanner in the works. But I felt that my mother's upbringing until she got married was being erased when she was just considered to be Goan.

I could answer your question by saying I am a "pure Goan" but there is no such thing.

Subsequently, the large family of my grandfather brought in through marriage people of different nationalities.

When I was at Makerere, I wrote as part of the scene, not someone separate from it. My earlier writings had African names or people who were nameless. No one had a Goan name. It was at Leeds, after I had written my third radio play, for the BBC African Theatre, that Ngugi said to me, "It's time you started writing about Goans."

He wrote me a letter from Leeds when I was back in Uganda, working for the Ministry of Finance, to remind me of what he had told me and to say, "Write a novel." But, I did not want to write about Goans as living in a bubble in Africa. And in fact, they were not living in a bubble, although they lived as Goans. So, how was I to write about Goans and yet about Africa and African issues? The answer was to create a character who was Goan and who was a politician. When he confessed the story that obsessed him while living in exile in London, he would be telling the story of Goans and Africans, and others. In fact, the Goan experience of colonialism in Goa could help shed light on what was happening in Africa.

A strong influence on me at that time was David Rubadiri's novel, *No Bride Price*. Rubadiri was from Malawi but had spent so much time in Uganda that he was considered to be a Goan. In his novel, the daughter of the Indian high commissioner says that the Africans and Asians (Indians) should be putting their experiences together.

By the way, the head of my department in the Ministry of Finance, when my novel came out, was a Ugandan who was married to an Indian. They were both at the launching of my novel and I have a photo of us together.

When I wrote *The General is Up*, which was done mainly at the University of Iowa, the Expulsion announced by Amin threw people together. The Institute became a lens through which one could understand what was going on.

I don't like critics who say that *In a Brown Mantle* shows how Asians were expelled. I don't want to be considered to be a poor innocent victim. Deo D'Souza in that first novel tries to find excuses for getting corrupt and running away so he blames his history, etc. At the end, he recognizes that he has been a "bastard" in his behavior and betrayal. So, it is very much an activist novel.

The things I could not say in fiction I said in non-fiction, that is, journalistic essays and literary criticism.

Incidentally, Saadi could have also included "Indian," but four would not have the power of three. I should add that I did a lot of work in the Ministry of Finance, at the same time as I was writing *In a Brown Mantle*. A lot of the work was high powered, although I never met Obote or Amin.

I was sent by the Ministry of Finance on a one-month seminar to Egypt in May/June 1972 on the Role of the Public Sector in the Economic Development of Africa. I apparently did so well I was invited by the UNDP for a six-month seminar in Senegal. But the invitation came at the same time as Amin announced that God had told him in a dream to get rid of Asians because they were dangerous to the economy. So, I told the head of my department I could not accept the invitation and leave my family alone. He understood.

I learned a lot from Ngugi, and he says he learned a lot from me. He always stressed the past as a key to the present and the future.

You may be interested to know that the end-epilogue I use in the later two editions of *The General is Up* was uttered by the Egyptian critic Ali Shalash, when he and his wife were having lunch at our home, in reference to Saddam Hussein, whom he saw in Egypt before Saddam assumed power in Iraq. I got up from the table and wrote it as an end epilogue to my novel, which was ready for submission to TSAR books in Toronto.

RBF – "I am a 'pure Goan' but there is no such thing" – this compelling statement reminds me of the opening line in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* where Karim Amir introduces himself as "an Englishman born and bred, almost" (3). Both these self-assessments query authenticity, while yours also reverberates with the theme this special issue of the journal takes up: "Goans on the Move."

Questions of identity and displacement show up in your writing as a matter of course. In *The General is Up*, Ronald D'Mello recalls his time in Goa, which he goes to for the first time as a secondary school student. "[T]here was nothing inherently middle-class about Goans" (16), the character discovers. "Just like Damibians, Goans could be servants, bus-drivers, peasants, as well as the occasional landowner" (16).



Even as Ronald only comes to this realization by journeying to the homeland, the sojourn does not make him feel any more or less Goan; if anything, it makes him more attuned to the multiculturalism of Damibia, his birth-country, and its racial segregation and class stratification. Of a community organization called the Goan Institute, Ronald explains that he supported the dropping of the word “Goan” from its title, post-independence, so as to move away from the purpose of its “creation during the colonial period of Divide-and-Rule!” (16). Thereby, the institute could become a space of integration, and “[provide] a window into Goans, so that Goans could at least be known and so that Goans could know Damibians” (16).

“I don’t want to be considered to be a poor innocent victim,” you emphatically state earlier, in reference to critics calling *In a Brown Mantle* a book about the Asian expulsion. On the contrary, I find your writing refreshing precisely because it considers the multiplicity of Goan diasporic identities when it comes to class and caste. Moreover, you pull the curtain back on the complicity of some Asians within the colonial system, in addition to them being the target of post-independence Africanization policies. You go even further in showing how it was not only Asians who found themselves in dire straits during such times, but also many Africans, including student agitators, minority tribespeople, and the very poor.

So, even as Ronald arrives at his Goanness and Africanness by visiting Goa, his identities are not dependent upon an attachment to the homeland, one can conclude. A similar sort of revelation seems to have occurred for you in your visit to Malaysia, where your mother was from; it even resulted in you writing “Rosie’s Theme.” Have you had the opportunity to visit Goa, and did it similarly influence your writing? Might you also be able to say something about how the Goan and Black East African communities received your novels, given their frank portrayals of interracial relations and the attendant politics of the time?

PN – Africans received *In a Brown Mantle* very well. All African readers praised the novel. Africans who read the manuscript on behalf of the East African Literature Bureau recommended publication. Theo Luzuka, student at Makerere doing English Honors, who designed the cover of the novel while working for EALB, wrote a critique in *The Makererean*, the university newspaper, during the time of the expulsion, a long critique, which contradicted what Amin said.

Someone working in the Entebbe post office praised the novel to me and said he would like to read such a novel by Patels.

It was Goans, with the exception of Antonio da Cruz, who seemed to have problems with the novel.

I wonder whether I ever mentioned to you Zenaides Morenas who worked for the Uganda government. He and I and Ted Abura from the Ministry of Public Works were sent to Abidjan in 1970 on a water supply project (a project to be financed by the African Development Bank to improve our water supply in rural regions of Uganda). I told him about my novel, which was in manuscript form, and he asked to read it.

When he read it, he said I knew a lot about politics in Uganda but not in Goa so he gave me the book by Alfred Braganza, *The Discovery of Goa*, to read. (Braganza was a Goan poet born in Kampala.) I did read it and made significant changes in the novel.

Morenas retired and went to Goa before Amin's coup. He introduced me through letters to a writer and journalist named Antonio da Cruz. I began corresponding with da Cruz.

Da Cruz wrote me many letters about Goan writing. He was very cynical. At one point, I wrote to him that Goan writing reminded me of Chicano writing. He replied that he was not surprised because Goan writing was so full of chicanery.

I sent him In a *Brown Mantle* and was surprised to receive from him in less than a month a long review of the novel in *The Sunday Narbind Times*. It was very political and made the connection with Pio Gama Pinto. It was radical in a political way. I liked it, though I thought he overlooked the human side of Goan behavior in Uganda, and he dumped on the Goan Institute. I told him so, and he thought I was finding fault with his writing. It was all or nothing with him.

I edited and included his essay in the Goan anthology, making a change in the conclusion because he was very patronizing about Africans without realizing it.

I included one of his stories from a volume he sent me, "The Bomboicar."

Sadly, he died before the anthology came out, and we never met. I went with my parents and siblings to Goa twice: in 1946 and 1950. There are many things that stuck in my mind. The land was different from that in Uganda where I lived. I used to walk about barefooted at that time. I walked from our home in Novo Portugal in Moira to Mapusa. I remember the pigs in the lavatory and was stunned. I went to the small farmland where my step-grandmother lived (my grandfather and grandmother both passed away before I was born).

I was scared of the foxes howling at night. When I had to go from the dining room to the sitting room at night, I had to cross an empty room which was like a corridor. I used to walk quickly through this room. I was six years old. One day, as I was going through the room, my mother shouted from the dining room, "The fox is after you!" I ran through the corridor and collapsed on my father's lap. He gave me a brandy to recover. He got mad at my mother.

Some of the things Ronald observes were what I saw and thought about.

My father's neighbor in Novo Portugal was a goldsmith, a Hindu. I remember going to see him at work. Then I took over and began hammering a piece of copper, being determined to turn it into gold, to the amusement of the goldsmith. He had a son named Narayan, who was my age, and we became good friends.

Incidentally, Augusto Pinto<sup>3</sup> wrote to me a few years ago to say his house was directly opposite my grandfather's house and he could see the house every morning. So, I sent Augusto some of my books: my Trickster book,<sup>4</sup> my *Two Radio Plays* (both produced by the BBC African Theatre). I felt that I was sending my books to my grandfather's turf.

RBF – Your wonderfully detailed reminisces of Goa, mirror some of my own from visiting my grandmother in Panarim, Aldona, which, incidentally, is the village that adjoins Moira. Furthermore, it was very compelling to read about your process, and in particular how your correspondence with other Goans informed your writing. There is, thus, a sense of the communal here, to evoke Simawe. With your last response in mind, especially in thinking of literature and the communal, I would like to ask you more about one of the most important compendiums of Goan literature to be put together. I am referring, of course, to *Goan Literature: A Modern Reader*, which you compiled and edited as a special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* (JSAL) in 1983.

To many of us who come to the study of modern Goan literature, this is the text that at some point became our go-to for reference on the subject, if not a direct source of inspiration. What this issue of the journal indicated to me when I embarked upon my own research was that there was an existing body of writing by Goans, as well as scholarship on the literature of this community. It is equally important to point out that your efforts in chronicling this material, especially in light of its appearing in a journal of a very specific geographic and literary context, was not just to highlight the particularities of Goan literature in relation to a larger corpus of South Asian literature, but also the diversity within this community itself and its cultural production.

What were the challenges you faced in compiling work by a diverse range of Goans of different backgrounds of faith, class/caste, gender, and geographic locations? Here, I am also reminded of Professor John Hobgood's observation that "Goans [are] 'cultural brokers,'" a reference you make in your 1988 interview with Irby (98). Is this a theme that one might say informed the compilation of the issue, thinking about the work you did in bringing together Goan writing from the multiple locations of the community's presence in Asia, Africa, and the West, but also given the heritage of Goans as a people with multiple colonial histories?

PN – I told the story of how I was roped into editing a volume of Goan literature for Michigan State University (in the second edition of the issue of JSAL on modern Goan literature and then in the book<sup>5</sup>). I may repeat myself in what I say . . .

Dilip Chitre, a writer from Maharashtra, India, told me to take it up and he would give me advice, connections, etc.

So, I sent out letters, including to Antonio da Cruz.

When I began receiving material from Goa, I found it very strange.

I was an African writer and after coming to the US, I extended my knowledge of African literature to Afro-American literature and Caribbean literature (Singapore literature was to come later).

I thought I would be able to extend my knowledge of the above literatures and take my energies to Goan literature, but found it was not working. But, I did not have much context for Goan literature. I felt I was struggling through mud.

Furthermore, I found that Goan writers seemed to want to break into the west in their writing, to get famous for their writing in the west. They seemed to

have some wonderful idea of the US which was not mine and they thought they could use me to get famous. I decided that the only way to move would be to take a step back and to develop muscles regarding Goan literature. The first thing I did was to write an essay on Goan writing which had an East African connection, and I published this in *Afriscopes* in Nigeria. Then I moderated a panel on Goan literature in the conference in Wisconsin. By the standards of what I had already done in the other literatures, this was low. But, I found ways of sneaking in Goan connections. I was using myself to draw attention to Goan writing.

In his early book of essays, *God Made Alaska for the Indians*, Ishmael Reed referred to me as a writer from Goa. The essay in which he refers to me is entitled "Race War in America?":

Peter Nazareth, a writer from Goa, said: "Many black Americans seem to believe that all was fine in Africa before they were snatched off into slavery, and that they can somehow recapture the innocence of those early days by romantically embracing their African identity, as though nothing has changed in all those years. This is a dangerous illusion, as one can see from African plays like Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* and Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo returns from exile to find his place has been filled, 'just as the lizard that loses its tail grows another one.'" [(85)]

You will see what I mean if you read my books of literary criticism which came out before the issue of JSAL on Goan literature. I mean about being far ahead as a literary critic of Third World writing. A good example is my book *The Third World Writer: His Social Responsibility* which came out in 1978. It made an impact, despite typos and a title given by the Kenya Literature Bureau instead of what I had given it.

Chitre suggested that I write a letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* requesting submissions to the Goan issue I was going to edit. *The Times Literary Supplement* did not normally publish such letters, but it made an exception in this case. Richard Lannoy in Bath saw the letter and wrote to his sister-in-law Bemvinda in Goa to send me copies of the typescript of Violet's short stories and she did. I found out from her covering letter that Violet had an unpublished novel, *Pears from the Willow Tree*, so I wrote to Richard Lannoy and sent him some money so he could make and send me a copy, which he did.

I found it very difficult to read Violet's work because it was very dense, unlike my writing. But that was the time I had been given a research assistant by the Afro-American Studies Program, Joseph Henry, who was African American, and I asked him to read some of the Goan work and tell me about them. It was he who told me Violet's work was very good and we should publish her short story, "Roses in the Grass," in its entirety instead of making an extract, as I had intended. He was right. By the time the anthology came out, I was able to read all of Violet's work, and I realized just how good a writer she was. In fact, one of the best Goan writers. I sent one of her stories to *Callaloo*, and it was published. And you know the story about how the novel got published.

I found the novel by Leslie [de] Noronha in the library, *The Mango and the Tamarind Tree*, and I taught it in a class of selected global literature. It went well. I asked Joe to read it and he wrote such a good report that I included it in the volume.

I mentioned *The Discovery of Goa* by Alfred Braganza which Zenaides Morenas in Uganda had recommended. I lent it to a Goan who never returned it. By chance, when I was in LA visiting with a friend of Mary's,<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Correa, she mentioned she knew Alfred. He was in LA. I went to see him, looked through the Xerox of his book, and selected two chapters, which he sent me.

I chose some extracts from what I was sent to fit into what I felt the manuscript required. When the manuscript became much thicker than I was told to submit, I raised money from the University of Iowa to pay for the extra pages so a double issue could be published. I also raised money to be able to send every writer in the volume a copy.

The person who typed the manuscript was Evalyn Van Allen, niece of the famous James Van Allen, who was working for the Iowa Writers' Program, and so she did the work without payment. She suggested that we include some of the drawing by Mario Miranda from a volume of his cartoons that someone sent me.

I also included things about Goa and Goan literature by people who were not Goans such as Adil Jussawalla.

So, I was all embracing.

The first edition included a short introduction by me in which, following the model of Andrew,<sup>7</sup> I did not say anything about the work, except for what was in the biobibliographies. But the first printing sold out, and I raised money for a second printing in which I wrote a fuller introduction, which was a shortened version of something I wrote about editing a volume of Goan literature published in *World Literature Today*.

My father brought me and my siblings up without any consciousness of caste. We did not know what it was, and so we did not know what caste other Goans were. The only time I began to know about caste was at university, from some books I read on religion, and that was academic.

I understood much later that my paternal grandfather did not believe in caste because it was man-made.

RBF – I am really glad you brought up Violet Dias Lannoy. As you mention, I am familiar with the story of how *Pears from the Willow Tree* came to be published posthumously and the pivotal part you played in making this happen. Readers of the novel can learn about the book's pre-publication history—a saga unto itself, and one that involved African American writer Richard Wright—by referring to Richard Lannoy's introduction and your postscript in the text. I heartily agree that Dias Lannoy is one of the best fiction writers of Goan origin, and an extremely important one, though she has never really gotten her due. This fact is made all the more poignant given the belated publication of her novel.

It is a pleasure to teach *Pears from the Willow Tree* in my classes on the literature of Goa and its diasporas, not least because students are awed by Dias Lannoy's mastery of her craft. But they also see the book as a scathing exposé of the caste politics of the Indian nation-state following its independence from the British. This representation of India emerges from Dias Lannoy's own involvement in the

freedom movement under the tutelage of Gandhi, but it is also true that her book arises out of a sense of disillusionment with Gandhian politics.

"In the minority Goan Christian community, where caste status had never lost its cardinal Indian role, the Dias family were openly proud to be 'low-caste' rather than, like the majority of their prosperous middle-class Christian peers, brahmin" (xxii), Richard Lannoy emphasizes when referring to his in-laws. If this was the familial influence Dias Lannoy brought to her writing, it was equally inspired by her larger world view as someone whose birthplace was Portuguese-colonized Mozambique. Certainly, there is an overlap in Dias Lannoy's personal history and your own, seeing as your existences have spanned multiple geographies, colonizations, and political dispensations.

The JSAL special issue you edited did the important work of preserving the Goan literary legacy of its moment, as epitomized by the discovery of and inclusion of Dias Lannoy's writing. As a theoretical exercise, were you to compile a contemporary survey of Goan literature today, what would set it apart from its predecessor?

PN – I agree with what you have said about Violet and what Richard said about her work.

I would like to think about your question. But I have a comment regarding my new introduction to the anthology for publication in the book, *Pivoting on the Point of Return* (inadvertently, the publishers did not include the epigraph by Desmond Hogan, from which the title is taken, which was in the issue of JSAL).

*World Literature Today* agreed to my condition that I would review books they sent me in the field of African Literature provided I could send them voluntary reviews and take my chances whether they would publish them or not. Most of my reviews of Goan books were my books that I reviewed voluntarily.

WLT selected three of my reviews, not about Goan literature, to publish in a book called *Twayne Companion to Contemporary World Literature*, edited by Pamela A. Genova of the University of Oklahoma. My reviews, in Volume 2, were Nuruddin Farrah, Somalia, "Sweet and Sour Milk"; Simon Tay, Singapore, "Alien Asian"; and Evelyn Accad, Lebanon, "L'Exercise." I did not select these reviews for inclusion in the volume.

So, when writing the new introduction to *Pivoting on the Point of Return*, I thought, "If they can do it, I can do it." After all, most Goans will not have been aware of my short reviews in *World Literature Today*. So, I included the reviews in the new introduction—without asking WLT for permission. I thought cumulatively, they had a lot to say.

Additionally, they would build up the confidence of Goans that their work was worthwhile and worthy of world recognition.

I looked at your question again, but I find it hard to think about caste issues. Richard Lannoy does not find it hard because he believes it served its purpose. There are people who believe that you move to your caste according to what you can do, not because of any notion of superiority or inferiority. The Indian writer

Shiva Prakash, who was in the International Writing Program some years ago and who attuned my wife and me to reiki, told me he was lower caste but has no objection to Brahmins who do not behave Brahmin.

You will have realized from what I sent you that I am a well-known scholar of Singapore Literature and of African Literature and of Caribbean literature and of African American literature. Not only what these literatures mean: also deciphering the meanings of specific works. And encouraging the writers. And taking from one literature to another, and more important, to the local scene.

I think once I got there, I lost interest in Goan literature as such. I am interested in specific writers, of whom one of the greatest is Violet Dias Lannoy. I feel there are other scholars in the field who can do what I am not so interested in doing. I don't know enough now to write about Goan literature today. I think you are able to take it further.

I feel privileged that you have turned up to write about my work and ask me searching questions.

RBF – Thank you, Peter. Again, I would reiterate that my own interest in literature about and by Goans grew out of the pioneering work you did in the field. What I glean from your statement about the multiple other literatures you work on—Singaporean, Caribbean, African, and African American, among others—is that even though you may no longer work on contemporary Goan writing, you see Goan literature as part of a larger terrain. If Violet Dias Lannoy as someone born in Africa who wrote about post-Independence India is emblematic of the “place” of Goan writing in past decades, then one might see a similarity in the American-born Margaret Mascarenhas writing about enslaved Black people, Goa, and Angola in the novel *Skin*, more recently. Issues of caste, race, displacement, gender, and colonialism are extant in, but definitely not unique to Goan writing; yet, they signal the complexity of the cultural production from and about the territory. That a place so small is entangled with world history, as can be seen in the multiple diasporas of Goans in so many parts of the planet, further complexifies the narrative of Goan literature. However, much work remains to be done in the multiple literatures of Goa as pertains to the different local languages in which such cultural production occurs, as well as the various communities these literatures might represent, including Goa's First Peoples. The Goan academy itself also needs to develop scholarship that is mindful of caste, indigeneity, diasporic displacement, and regionality to recognize marginalized voices, as well as secure the legacies of writers who are in danger of being forgotten.

In addition to Dias Lannoy, I would suggest that you were also instrumental in bringing back into public memory the work of Leslie de Noronha, whom you previously mentioned. In the past, you shared with me that he wrote to you and your research assistant on the JSAL project, Joseph Henry, and almost as an afterthought revealed that he was gay. What relevance might this have, if any, in future studies of de Noronha's novels?

PN – Leslie de Noronha’s casual declaration to Joe Henry that he was gay made no difference to our reading of his *The Mango and the Tamarind Tree*. However, it did prepare me for the gay presence in the sequel, *The Dew Drop Inn*, which I reviewed in *World Literature Today*.

RBF – My final question is about your own writing. In your *Indian Literature* interview with H. S. Shiva Prakash, in 2001, you reply to his question about whether “the writer is completely free in the United States” by emphatically stating that you do not think so, and that “[t]he real battle is taking place in the field of literary criticism,” because it offers “the power to interpret” (161). As one of a rare group of writers who has worked in the fields of both literary criticism and literature creation, might readers still await fiction from you in the future? Please also add anything else we might not have already covered. Thank you for giving so generously of your time.

PN – I have always been interested in writing all kinds of works. As an anthologist, I am able to make a lot of different kinds of writers and writing available which I would not be able to write about in fiction myself. As a literary critic, I am doing a lot of creative criticism, breaking the rules, such as the way I wrote about Suchen Christine Lim’s *Fistful of Colours* in a book edited by Gwee Li Sui. I said at the end where I was explaining what I did that I took my model from *Hopscotch* by Julio Cortázar.

Many people assume that if I write a novel and also criticism, the criticism must be by definition inferior to the fiction. I don’t agree. Whatever comes to me is what I will write. If fiction comes to me again, I will write it. If radio plays come to me again, I will write them. I will not force myself to write in any particular form.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 2013 edition.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of South Asian Literature*.

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor of Literature at Dempo College, Goa.

<sup>4</sup> *In the Trickster Tradition: The Novels of Andrew Salkey, Francis Ebejer [i.e. Ebejer] and Ishmael Reed*, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> “A Twenty-first Century Foreword.” *Pivoting on the Point of Return – Modern Goan Literature*, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Nazareth’s spouse.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Salkey.

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