

# Editorial

Ruth DeSouza

**Arriving in New Zealand from Nairobi, Kenya with my family led to the loss of numerous reference points. Most dramatic for a child was the loss of wildlife; driving past giraffes or herds of zebra was part of my world. Then there were the everyday, more mundane losses that occur when one shifts from a multi-ethnic, multi-faith community to somewhere new: School friends, peer groups, doting family and friends, food, language.**

Such deeply felt losses were for me at least exacerbated by the lack of reflection of anything resembling my culture in my new 'home'. My experience is not unique, even though it felt so at the time. 'Mississippi Masala' tells the story of Ugandan Asians, their exile and the creation of new lives in America. Their leaving Uganda reminded me of my leaving Nairobi. Our row of seats did not have a dry eye between us. 'Bhaji on the beach' introduced me to someone else who always had a ready supply of chilli powder in her handbag to embellish her food. 'Anita and me' showed me that stereotypes can be defied, redefined and resisted. The scene where a defenceless old Indian lady is waylaid by the dregs of British youth, switchblade in hand, takes a surprising yet strangely rewarding turn when she responds with an oversized cane knife.

For me, each of these movies brought into focus the depth of my craving for something that reflected my identities, my experiences. They reminded me how important this was to my well being. People who had similar experiences to me and were struggling to find their way in their new home offered me a range of survival strategies. Thankfully, such cinematic experiences have become highly accessible and I can gloriously and unashamedly indulge in them.

My personal and professional immersion in migration has brought me to realise that the flip side of loss and exclusion is freedom and creativity. Migration has allowed my family over several generations to gain new skills and experiences. Migration is transformative; providing an opportunity to sift out what isn't important to us and to try on new things – whether we like them or not! Migration provides new spaces, tools and ideas, opportunities for expression and creativity. And in return the receiving society is itself transformed and invigorated with new ideas and energy.

This brings me to our timely second issue of the AEN journal, focussed on creativity, identity and ethnicity. National identity is one of three strategic policy goals set by the Government and something that is being taken seriously. This issue is suffused with contributions from writers, poets, artists, creative organisations, museum folk, film, documentary makers and more who are committed to ensuring that the experiences of all who live here are reflected in our broader cultural spaces. Creativity not only builds bridges and creates understanding within and between people, it also provides, as Julie Roberts says, "a space within which the dissenting voice, the subversive position, and the critique of the dominant paradigm can be challenged".

This issue delights in film and in the visual and literary arts. It brings you an exciting range of contributors, many of whom consider not only the personal but the political, their own identities, New Zealand identity and diasporic identity. Because, to them, these are inseparable. The importance of creating space, the critical part arts and culture have to play in terms of our sense of self, our well-being and our sense of belonging are highlighted. Contributors grapple with issues such as freedom, being stuck, responsibility, language, absence, space, multiple identities and much more. The writing has temporal and spatial dimensions, it highlights multiple attachments to place: New Zealand, Hawaii, the United Kingdom, Norfolk and Pitcairn islands, Tahiti, Greece, Cyprus, Tonga, Korea and more.

The issue starts with questions from migrant, settler and indigenous, about their rights and responsibilities. Sean Cubitt's exploration of the freedoms migrancy brings highlights a separation from one's adopted culture that provides a unique perspective. I am reminded of an African proverb, "the stranger's knife is the sharpest". With freedom, comes the responsibility to tell both the old and the adopted what is wrong with them. In contrast with the freedom of the migrant, Nigel Murphy, a sixth generation Pākehā argues that the settler is stuck, he asks what responsibilities settlers have? Honolulu-based poet Robert Sullivan locates himself as multicultural, drawing from his whakapapa different cultural stories and different relationships with social and official power. Sullivan problematises the notion of bicultural and questions the reductive notion of a Māori nation and the availability of political process for Māori. He asks what kind of dialogue are we having and where does it take place? Perhaps this journal and its contributors are getting the ball rolling!

We move on to reflections on how creativity is evolving, with Ian Clothier suggesting that hybridity invites us to consider culture, identity and society and provides examples of how hybridity is a powerful catalyst for creativity. Karlo Mila tracks her evolution from poetry about her own experience to a more collective conversation incorporating the many communities she connects with. Mila argues that creativity provides a sacred space for bridging difference, finding common understandings and gaining empathy. Particularly so when the

differences can seem overwhelming. This theme of connecting and sharing understanding echoes in the poems of Athena Gavriel. A Greek and Cypriot mental health Nurse, she suggests that poetry opens "shafts of light into other worlds". Gavriel links her personal and professional experiences through her poetry, challenging stereotypes and prejudice. As does documentary maker Sandor Lau as he explores what it is to be a 'Secret Asian Man'.

Where Mila adopts a European style of poetry to talk about Tonga, her homeland, Okusitino Mahina's poetry about the death of the beloved Māori Queen, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu, belongs to the Tongan genre of 'ta`anga tangilaulau', 'ta`anga tengihia' or 'ta`anga tutulu'. It is the poetry of weeping, translated into English by Manase Lua and into Māori by Te Aouru Biddle and Vicky Te Puhi-o-Te Arawa Rangī.

Migrants have many bridges. Bridges between the old and new and from the new back to the geographical, cultural and religious past. This requires a sense of dynamism that is reflected in a number of the contributions. Sapna Samant writes of becoming 'ethnic' on arrival in New Zealand and realising that in turn she had been re-classified a 'non-resident Indian' (NRI). She challenges the risk of reductiveness and hegemony in creative endeavours undertaken in diasporic communities. Samant emphasises the importance of moving away from representations that are safe and desirable. Hye Rim Lee extends this exploring how identities are influenced by culture, in particular challenging stereotypes of Asian cuteness as a Korean-born woman living in New Zealand. Perhaps no other creative endeavour this year challenges our cultural senses more than the movie 'Borat'. Reflecting on this, Australian Julie Roberts argues that film, visual and literary arts provide a medium where issues of identity and belonging can be played out, but that in Australia the space is paradoxically policed and hyped so that multiculturalism rarely goes beyond lifestyle manifestations to permeate ethnic equality and acceptance. Similarly, Natasha Beckman suggests that ethnic creativity whilst considered desirable and advantageous can remain a passive consumable and challenges museums to take greater responsibility to work for the good of all our diverse communities. Museums don't just preserve the past, they help shape our future. The dynamism

of ethnicity and creativity is reflected on by Ellen Altschuler talking about the 'Going Bananas' conference and how sharing culture provides bridges. Anand Satynand, New Zealand's first Asian Governor General suggests moving forward through our diverse communities' treating each other using good judgment, information, understanding and goodwill. We reprint his inaugural address not just because of its message but because none of the mainstream media – Māori TV aside – seems to have noticed his arrival.

Loss and grief form part of many stories of migration. We migrants leave things behind. It is, I suppose, inevitable. Fe Sarmiento shares her journey to enhancing arts opportunities for migrant and refugee communities. Eventually loss is replaced with new opportunities. Krishnamurthy reflects through her grief on the loss of her Father, considering her journey of being a minority in New Zealand. Jameela Siddiqi journalist, broadcaster and music critic contributes a short story. Born in Kenya and brought up in Uganda, much of her work focuses on the experiences of those families originally from the Indian sub-continent who were expelled from Uganda.

The importance of artistic expression as a vehicle to celebrate our own culture and a shared New Zealand culture is explored by Helen Bartle and Cath Nesus from Creative New Zealand who argue that arts and culture are critical to our well-being. They suggest that national identity and pride can be facilitated through ensuring all New Zealanders are visible in the arts. The built environment is also an important space for inclusion and exclusion, award winning architect Pip Cheshire suggests that it is timely to consider the degree to which public space might be culturally determined given the changing makeup of the city's demographic. Buildings reflect individuals, governments and corporations but city spaces are much more than the some of the parts. Consider 100,000 people filling Britomart's urban valley to celebrate Diwali. Less than half were Indian.

I hope that this second issue of the AEN Journal provides an opportunity to see your own experiences reflected and to share in the experiences of others. It is an opportunity to be challenged, excited and invigorated. I've certainly had that experience myself as I read these contributions.

*Ruth*



## The AEN Journal is a New Zealand Diversity Action Programme Project

The New Zealand Diversity Action Programme, a ten point plan to strengthen cultural diversity, was adopted by a community forum at Parliament in August 2005 following the desecration of two Jewish cemeteries in Wellington. The Programme includes a call for dialogue and exchange between different views, cultures and faiths, and the establishment of networks.

[www.hrc.co.nz/diversity](http://www.hrc.co.nz/diversity)