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"Indo-Mozambicans in Maputo:
Oral Narratives on Identity and Migration from 1947-1992"

Nafeesah Allen

Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore universal questions of migration and identity in the context of the particular history of Mozambique's population of Indian subcontinent residents (herein referred to as "Indo-Mozambicans"). Migration, both voluntary and involuntary, was an ethnographic entry point to explore Indo-Mozambican agency, citizenship, location, and ethnic belonging in the Mozambican national context over the 20th century. In controlling the identity group (Mozambicans of Indian subcontinent origin), geographic space (in Lourenço Marques before 1974 and Maputo after 1975), and temporal lens (1947-1992), this doctoral thesis argues that four historical punctuations forced migratory patterns and ethnic identity formations to emerge among Indo-Mozambicans. Those punctuations are 1) the end of the British empire in India and the subsequent partition of India and Pakistan in 1947; 2) the end of the Portuguese empire in India, with the annexation of Goa, Daman (also spelled Damão), and Diu (also spelled Dio), in 1961; 3) the independence of Mozambique from Portugal in 1975; and 4) the civil war of Mozambique from 1977 to 1992.

These historical markers instigated the use of migration and identity shifts as survival tools to cope with a protracted period of uncertainty. Oral narratives drawn from the country's capital, Maputo, illustrate that migratory experiences splintered the larger Indo-Mozambican community into smaller sub-identity groups, cultivated intergroup conflict that previously did not exist, and heightened non-Indo-Mozambicans' already ambivalent animosity towards the larger Indo-Mozambican community. Indo-Mozambican migratory history was further weaponized against them to justify their exclusion from the prevailing national narrative. As a result, Indo-Mozambican diversity is poorly understood. Some subgroups contested social exclusion and negotiated national belonging, despite their consistent permanence in Mozambique. Others mobilized religion and ethnic origin to claim multiple citizenships and retain their rights to stay or return to the country after security was restored in 1992. Further still, as a result of competing colonialisms, a significant segment of Indian citizens was deported in retaliation for Indian annexation of the Portuguese colonial territories in India. Findings situate Lusophone experiences within the context of subaltern studies, but outside the context of Anglophone metanarratives on transnational migration, and thus challenge existing knowledge of multi-racial societies and post-colonial states, especially in Africa.