CHAPTER 8

Anglo-Indians of New Zealand: Colour and the Social Construction of Identity

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As for the question, ‘Where did you learn such good English?’ I would say I learnt it on the boat over here. I got so sick of having to explain it all. I’d just make stuff up. (Anglo-Indian woman in her early sixties who had arrived with her family when she was a teenager)

I remember one comment was, ‘Oh you’ve been away too long in London, bro. You’ve picked up the accent’. ‘I was never a Māori in the first place.’ So that was quite funny. (Anglo-Indian man in his late forties who had arrived in New Zealand in his twenties)
From mid-2015 until mid-2016, I was engaged in a project exploring the experience of being Anglo-Indian in New Zealand. I was aware that while there were Anglo-Indians in New Zealand, very little about them was recorded—either in narratives of New Zealand’s history, in migrant statistics, or in other scholarly or literary works. My project sought to provide a more inclusive historical and contemporary picture of this minority group, and in doing so, add to the body of Anglo-Indian studies scholarship.

In this chapter, I discuss a significant theme to emerge from the research, that of identity: how Anglo-Indians I engaged with identify themselves, are identified by others, and, deriving from that, some of the consequences of being identified in particular ways. The two quotes with which I opened this chapter—both expressed as utterances of annoyed resignation—are exemplary of a common theme which emerged in the stories I was told by my informants. Both are examples of judgements made of Anglo-Indians by the reduction of ethnicity to colour; consequently, it suggests that whiteness studies scholarship could illuminate this issue. Being ‘not quite white’, for example, accounts for the identity questions asked of Anglo-Indians, particularly during the initial wave of Anglo-Indian migrants to New Zealand in the 1940s. The supposition by many that Anglo-Indians are non-white and therefore are Māori, New Zealand’s indigenous people, also revealed the narrow range of reference operative in many New Zealanders (Māori and Pākehā) who met these early arriving Anglo-Indians. Their experiences of being not-quite-white are comparable to those reported in other Commonwealth countries where Anglo-Indians have settled in significant numbers. As in these other countries, whiteness is the dominant narrative of belonging, which reduces ethnicity to colour and has a supporting suite of identity markers that can be used to interrogate an Anglo-Indian’s provenance. This includes names, accents, occupations, and country of origin, as will be discussed subsequently.

In this chapter, I focus on those Anglo-Indians residing in New Zealand who left India from the 1940s until recent times. This period has

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1 This project was the result of a funding opportunity provided by Asia New Zealand Foundation.
2 Pākehā is usually understood to be a ‘white’ New Zealander, but can also be used by any non-Māori New Zealander who chooses to be identified in this way.
seen a significant change, both in the increasing numbers of ‘non-white’ residents arriving in New Zealand, and in the ways in which they are regarded. Immigration policies over this time give a sense of this change and will be outlined in some depth, in addition to changing social attitudes of each successive generation. First, though, I begin with a brief discussion of whiteness studies, followed by how whiteness plays out in New Zealand.

**CONTEXTS**

*White Privilege and Racism*

Whiteness Studies, focusing on revealing the phenomena of white privilege and the underlying beliefs attached to it, can shed light on some Anglo-Indian experiences in New Zealand and elsewhere. Whiteness Studies scholarship, which began in the United States (Kolchin 2002), is an area that emerged from the acknowledged premise that race is a sociocultural construct, rather than a biologically rooted entity. Nevertheless, ‘race talk’ is still used widely, and so often in offensive and racist ways. Whiteness studies offers a particular take on racism, with some arguing that it is a subdiscipline of Racism Studies (Garner 2017, p. 1584). With its roots in racism, two central terms, ‘race’ and ‘racism’, need defining. Race is discussed by the American anthropological association (AAA) in these ways:

> Ultimately ‘race’ as an ideology about human differences (...) became a strategy for dividing, ranking, and controlling colonized people used by colonial powers everywhere.

> ‘Race’ thus evolved as a worldview, a body of prejubgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior. Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized into ‘racial’ categories. The myths fused behavior and physical features together in the public mind, impeding our comprehension of both biological variations and cultural behavior, implying that both are genetically determined. Race myths bear no relationship to the reality of human capabilities or behavior. Scientists today find that reliance on such folk beliefs about human differences in research has led to countless errors. (https://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2583)
As Smedley and Smedley argue, ‘Race as biology is fiction, racism as a social problem is real’ (2005). The term ‘racism’ is a relatively recent terminology, only coming into use since WWII (Mullings 2005). Mullings writes that while racism is understood in different ways, ‘The more persuasive perspective links racism to structures of power that emerge through processes of accumulation and dispossession within local and transnational contexts (Mullings, p. 667). Others define racism as a system of structuring opportunity and assigning relative value based on group membership, unfairly advantaging some people and disadvantaging others’ (Camara Phyllis 2002, p. 10). There is wide agreement that racism is the structural instantiations of race thinking in the dynamics governing the social body. Its impacts reverberate through societies in numerous areas, including health, access to education, employment, housing, transportation, and incarceration statistics (Gravlee 2009, 2020; Paradies 2006).

Reactions against racism are exemplified by anti-colonial protests, civil rights, and anti-apartheid movements, and simultaneously within academia with responses such as Race Studies including the more nuanced versions: Blackness Studies (introduced by Paul Gilroy (1993)) and Whiteness Studies. Whiteness studies, as noted, focusses particularly on racism around whiteness, or not-quite-whiteness, and the often unacknowledged, but nevertheless understood, privileges attached to whiteness. An outcome of the privilege attached to whiteness is the phenomena of ‘passing’ as white (Ahmed 2004), which is accessible for fair skinned people, especially when it is coupled with language and other cultural competencies perceived as ‘white’.

On Whiteness and Racism in New Zealand

In New Zealand, Māori are the most recognizable version of non-white people and have faced well-documented institutionalized racism and discrimination. They are still the largest ethnic group in New Zealand, at 16.5% in 2018 (Statistics New Zealand). Migrants from China, India, and other Asian countries have also been making New Zealand their home since the 1800s, and now comprise 15.3% of the population (Statistics New Zealand 2013). They also have a history of facing racism and discrimination in the country, exemplified by a Poll Tax that was imposed on

³This is the title of the article as well as their central argument.
all Chinese migrants from 1881 to 1944, and common newspaper headlines such as ‘Anti-Chinese hysteria in Dunedin’ in 1888 (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2019). According to the website displaying the headline from the 7 May 1888 newspaper story, ‘New Zealand in the 19th century strived to be a ‘Britain of the South Seas’ and Pākehā saw non-white migrants as undesirable’ (Ministry for Culture and Heritage 2019).

Racism in New Zealand is a product of context: social, political, and historical, including an early history of colonialism by Britain. This led to dispossessing Māori of their lands and of social and cultural practices through decades of assimilationist policies, resulting in their marginalization and entrenched unequal power relations in New Zealand society (Harris et al. 2012).

New Zealand was a British colony from 1841 until 1907 with the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) being signed in 1840 between the British Crown and over 500 Māori chiefs. As such Māori have a specific and unique relationship with the Crown, although their status as treaty partners was largely ignored for many decades. Since the 1970s though, Māori, and some Pākehā, have agitated for recognition as partners. This has resulted in acknowledgment of Māori rights and claims under the Treaty, leading, for example, to the return of lands or reparation, establishment of te reo language and cultural immersion schools, and affirmative action such as offering places in universities and a dedicated Ministry for Māori Affairs. This has, however, generated a discourse in some sections of the population of ‘unfair privilege’, an oft-seen reaction to the perceived erosion of white privilege.

Whiteness studies scholars usually maintain that ‘whites’ generally confer identity on others—various non-whites, and to group them together in the same category. In my research, however, as I describe later, in New Zealand, Māori also invoke these binary racial categorizations to attribute the non-white identity of Māori to Anglo-Indians.

A feature of whiteness is its place in many western societies as ‘the norm’, as Harris et al. (2012) observe, ‘Analysts of whiteness […] have...
long recognized that whiteness’s dominative power resides, in crucial part, in its occupation of a space of unmarked normativity’ (Harris et al. 2012, p. 213). In New Zealand, this is seen in a type of invisibility for Pākehā, as the norm, and the sense that they have ‘no culture’. This is particularly in opposition to Māori, whose culture is recognized and also commodified especially for tourist consumption. Writing about New Zealand, Claire Gray notes that a result of Pākehā New Zealanders not recognizing their own culture is that they have difficulties ‘in understanding the way in which white privilege operates’ (Gray 2012, p. 77). Their privileged position is taken for granted and, according to Gray (2012, p. 78), is unrecognized as such by individual Pākehā in New Zealand. This is the climate Anglo-Indians entered, with the advantages afforded by whiteness frequently unacknowledged (especially by white people) in contrast to the disadvantages of being non-white, as many Anglo-Indians experienced.

Anglo-Indian Scholarship on Whiteness and Racism

For Anglo-Indians, the colour of their skin has made a difference wherever they migrated, and it was mostly as a result of the gaze of the majority ‘white’ population in the countries they moved to. The late Anglo-Indian artist, Leslie Morgan, who was a child when his family immigrated to Britain from Lahore, for example, captures the experience of many Anglo-Indians in Britain when he says:

We were indelibly marked by brown skin. While white skin is not in itself a signifier of whiteness, nevertheless outside the home, we were still seen as immigrants and ‘Pakis’. So, I grew up just wanting to be the same as my white friends; however much I might mimic my peers, I was always going to fail. (Lobo and Morgan 2012: 127 as cited by Rivera (2016), p. 49)

Blunt (2005) notes that despite assimilating well in Australia, they still encountered racism because of their skin colour, and D’Cruz (2004) and Almeida (2013, 2017) make similar observations based, respectively, on research and personal experience in Britain in the 1960s. Almeida reports, for example, one British Anglo-Indian participant commenting that ‘nothing had prepared us for the racism we encountered’ (Almeida 2013, p. 4). This was especially true for Anglo-Indians with darker complexions (Almeida 2013, 2015).
In Australia, Costa-Pinto (2014) claims they encountered less racism than other Indian groups, speculating that this was due to being lighter skinned. It may also have been because of the ‘white’ cultural competencies: they spoke English, were Christians, and were generally Western in their worldviews and social practices. A number of scholars also write about Anglo-Indian ability and inclination to pass as European not only in their diasporic homes but also in India (Blunt 2003).

A hierarchy of whiteness, or not-quite-whiteness, lines up with a hierarchy of racism, that is, the whiter one is, the less one experiences racism. Almeida’s (2013) nuanced findings identified whiteness in terms of degrees; with being ‘more’ and ‘less’ white ruling many aspects of Anglo-Indian lives, from employment and housing, to friendships. There is also a factor of time, with whiteness having less power in more recent times. Rivera, in synthesizing works based on more recent diasporic experiences, says:

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\text{...as time has passed and societies have become more multicultural the ’whiteness factor’ has all but disappeared for younger Anglo-Indians who are no longer interested in trying to be as ’white’ as possible (Moss, 2008). Lewin has also noted that Anglo-Indian young adults have moved away from being ashamed of their Indian heritage and do not possess a desire to appear ’white’ or fully Anglo. (Lewin 2005; Otter 2006 [as cited by Rivera 2016, p. 49])}
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McCabe, who carried out her research in New Zealand from 2011, supports the idea that ideas around ‘race’ changed over time. She comments in her thesis, ‘The silence that significantly affected the next generation of Kalimpong families in New Zealand reflected major stigmas in the early twentieth century around race, illegitimacy and institutionalisation. The willing involvement of descendants in this study attests to a fundamental shift in attitudes regarding all three in the space of one generation’ (McCabe 2014, abstract).

More recent scholarship paints a slightly different picture of Anglo-Indian experiences in the countries they make their homes after migrating from India. Unless an Anglo-Indian identifies as such, they may not be ‘noticed’ or recognized as Anglo-Indian in the countries they arrived in. They have European names, their mother tongue is (almost universally) English, and they are Christians. These factors all aid them in settling easily in their typical destinations (Andrews and Otto 2017; Blunt 2003,
and many take pride in being able to assimilate with the communities they move into. In addition, there were many who could ‘pass’ as ‘white’ aiding them further in becoming part of their local communities, becoming potentially invisible migrants. Also, it may be that they look like other more common ethnic categories of people—in the US for instance, looking like Latinos, or perhaps Italians or the more common multiracial younger generation one sees particularly in cosmopolitan urban areas.

Invisibility involving Anglo-Indians has emerged as a theme from recent research in different geographical locations. Rochelle Almeida writes of Anglo-Indians aiming for invisibility in the United Kingdom (Almeida 2015, 2017). Jayani Bonnerjee (2013), writing about Anglo-Indians in Toronto, noted their identity as ‘invisible’ migrants in the city. Toronto is a city which has one of the largest diasporic Anglo-Indian populations in the world. It hosts a number of associations, a widely distributed newsletter is published, and regular social events are held, including two World Anglo-Indian Reunions, the last being in 2007. Despite this, Anglo-Indians’ reported experience is that they are largely invisible.

Since Anglo-Indians first began arriving in New Zealand in large numbers, the country has become very much more multicultural. The lens Anglo-Indians are viewed through in New Zealand has also been broadened. Stories told by newer arrivals shed further light on this.

Migration in New Zealand

Changes in New Zealand’s immigration policy have impacted upon the ability of Anglo-Indians to migrate to New Zealand, as well as on their reception and experience once there. Such policies are just one way to understand New Zealand’s social climate in terms of the integration of people of colour, including migrants. A preference for ‘white’ migrants or migrants from ‘European’ countries was evident in New Zealand’s immigration policies until the 1970s, as well as other countries Anglo-Indians have preferred to migrate to, such as Britain, Canada, and Australia. Patrick Ongley and David Pearson (1995) compared the immigration policies of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand from 1945 to 1995 when Anglo-Indians were flooding out of India and looking for countries to settle in. For example, while Canada began dismantling their ‘Whites
only a policy in the early 1960s (and completed the process by 1967), Australia discarded its ‘White Australia’ policy by 1973 and New Zealand, which had never adopted quite such a stringent ‘White New Zealand’ policy, replaced its ‘racially discriminatory’ policy by 1974 (Ongley and Pearson 1995, pp. 771–774). From 1974, the unrestricted right of entry for British migrants was ended and new selection criteria were introduced which emphasized ‘skills and qualifications, health, age, family size, and ability to settle’. The authors note, however, that ‘a preference for ‘traditional source countries’ and the potentially discriminatory ministerial discretion system remained in place’ until 1986 (Ongley and Pearson 1995, p. 774). This was followed by explicit objectives after 1986 to ‘to enrich the multicultural social fabric of New Zealand society’ (Ongley and Pearson 1995, p. 775). As a result the country earned the descriptor, coined by Spoonley and Butcher, of ‘superdiversity’ (2009).

Immigration policies have continued to change, for example, the early 2000s saw the introduction of a ‘skilled migrant’ category, with family reunification policies also in effect. Since the mid-2017s, however, a parental category that had been part of the reunification policy became more restrictive than it was previously. Immigration policies have continued to become more restrictive, along with many other Western countries. The main ways to enter the country now are to possess skills New Zealand needs or to hold a student study visa.

I turn now to what was known of Anglo-Indians over the period from the late 1940s to the time I carried out the research.

**Anglo-Indians in New Zealand**

Prior to engaging with the ethnographic project this chapter draws from, I began assembling a picture of Anglo-Indian arrivals and experiences in New Zealand from the available searchable sources: archival records, census data, and publications on specific groups of Anglo-Indians.

There is a small amount of archival documentation, for example, letters to officials, re-entry applications, and arrival documents. One letter to the Minister of Immigration in 1912 pleads a case for entry at a time when ‘there are certain immigration restrictions in force in New Zealand against

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6 This was how these racially discriminatory policies were referred to, but they were never named as such in policy.

7 While I suggest that social mores are reflected in social policy, there will always be a lag between one and the other, which can work in either direction.
all persons of mixed blood”, referring to the policy in place at the time. New Zealand’s armed services records, along with immigration registration records, are also potential sources of identifying early Anglo-Indians to New Zealand. Being referred to as ‘Hindoo’ combined with Western names in a record makes it likely that such a person is Anglo-Indian rather than another type of Indian, or that they are British residents in India.

New Zealand’s national five yearly census is another way of obtaining a picture of Anglo-Indians in New Zealand. While they have not been documented as such until very recently, even early census returns make it possible to identify potential, or probable, Anglo-Indians. It is, for example, possible to identify Christians who are ‘race aliens of mixed blood’ in particular national categories, including India. From the 1926 census, when such detailed data was available, there were 257 Indian ‘race aliens of mixed blood’ who are Christians (Andrews 2018, p. 223). They are very likely to be Anglo-Indian.

More recent censuses offer a straightforward way to ascertain numbers and other details about Anglo-Indians. The 2013 census, for example, reported 327 Anglo-Indians in New Zealand on 5 March of that year. It also generated further information, including that the most common residential location for Anglo-Indians was the Auckland region (at 52.3%); the median age was 49.6 years; 28% were born in New Zealand and 71% were born overseas; with 95.1% having a formal educational qualification (Statistics New Zealand 2013). Each Anglo-Indian who identifies as such in the census must take several steps in the survey to do so as there is no category of Anglo-Indian to tick. They must tick ‘other’ in the list provided (which includes European and Indian, amongst others) and then write Anglo-Indian. This indicates some determination on the part of the one taking the census to have him/herself counted as Anglo-Indian.

The scholarly literature on the community in New Zealand is comparatively limited. Works include anthropologist Jacqueline Leckie’s Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community (2007), which, while not mentioning Anglo-Indians as migrants, does identify one Edward Peters as an Anglo-Indian from Goa. It is suggested that he may have actually initiated the gold rush in New Zealand in 1861. More significant are two other scholars, both historians, who centre their work on specific groups of Anglo-Indians in New Zealand. Dorothy McMenamin

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8 Letter from J.S. Coyne to New Zealand’s Immigration Minister 3 August, 1912. ACIF 16475 C, 46/c 1912/1717 Wellington, Archives New Zealand.
spent more than a decade, from 1997 to 2008, collecting oral histories of Anglo-Indians who had lived in British India and are now in New Zealand (McMenamin 2010). Aligning with my findings, a number of her participants told her stories of how they were identified and misidentified in New Zealand. In particular, she notes the trend of Anglo-Indians in New Zealand being mistaken for Māori (McMenamin 2010). She gives an example of a woman from Lahore, who arrived in New Zealand in the late 1960s, and talked about a visit to Rotorua when she was offered free admission to a tourist show. She explained: ‘She [the ticket seller] said to me, you’re Māori, a native, so you don’t pay. [The person with her] said, you are not Māori, and I said, well I didn’t want to insult her, she thought I was a Māori, a native, I wasn’t to pay so I wasn’t going to argue’ (McMenamin 2010, p. 197). This trend is one I discuss further along in relation to my own research.

Jane McCabe’s work focuses on ‘Kalimpong Kids’: the 130 Anglo-Indians who came to New Zealand between 1908 and the late 1930s from St Andrew’s Colonial Homes, better known as Dr. Graham’s Homes, in Kalimpong, North East India (McCabe 2014, 2017). They arrived in New Zealand to be permanent settlers as part of a colonizing scheme for students from the school. The young men were employed as farm labourers, and young women as domestic help mostly in urban contexts (McCabe 2014, 2017). As she documents, a reasonably steady trickle came directly from the school having just graduated. Dr. Graham, who founded the school and the scheme did so as he felt that New Zealand would be a country these Anglo-Indian students would fit in and settle well. McCabe records that his original stated purpose in opening the Homes was to provide a long-term solution to the Anglo-Indian problem through permanent settlement of mixed-race adolescents in ‘the colonies’ (McCabe 2014, p. 10). As it transpired, while he hoped to settle graduates in Australia and Canada, he was successful in doing so only in New Zealand (McCabe 2014, p. 11). It was through my own contacts with this school that my research interest in the Anglo-Indian community began.9

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9 I explain the details of this connection in Christmas in Calcutta: Anglo-Indian stories and essays (Andrews 2014).
THE PROJECT

As a New Zealander spending periods of time in India, I was frequently told of Anglo-Indian friends and family who were now living in New Zealand. It was from these conversations that my curiosity about those in New Zealand grew. Apart from the small number of Anglo-Indians I knew personally, I had very few potential contacts in New Zealand. A search for Anglo-Indian associations, for example, was unsuccessful. So where was I to start to find members of this community? I followed up friends of friends or family of people I had met. I was then introduced to their friends and acquaintances, so I began to grow a participant base. At the same time, I created a Facebook research website describing and promoting the proposed research and inviting New Zealand-resident Anglo-Indians to contact me. This approach led to locating Anglo-Indians throughout New Zealand.

I carried out over fifty informal interviews around the country with Anglo-Indians or their descendants, in addition, another fifty filled in interview-type survey forms rather than being interviewed. For the purposes of the project I did not use the Indian constitution definition to determine who was Anglo-Indian but accepted, as participants, all those who said they identified as Anglo-Indian, or as descendants of Anglo-Indians. They all explained their connection to Anglo-Indians, or ‘Anglo-India’, as part of the research. The interviewees were male and female, from their early twenties to early eighties, with varied links to and identification with the community. Some had arrived in New Zealand less than a year before the interview, while others’ grandparents or great grandparents came to New Zealand many decades ago. As I have noted already, for this chapter I draw on those interviews with Anglo-Indians who came to New Zealand from the 1940s until the time of the project.

What I was told by these Anglo-Indians was in line with existing scholarship on Anglo-Indians, with specificities to the New Zealand situation, as I discuss in the next sections. I begin by exploring issues of identity and misidentification, as well as some experiences of racism and discrimination in various arenas including employment. I end with a section examining what Anglo-Indians in New Zealand do to claim their Anglo-Indian identity, as well as claiming a space in New Zealand society.
Anglo-Indian Identity

Explanation Fatigue, Identification, and Misidentification

My personal experiences with Anglo-Indians in New Zealand before starting this project, as well as recent scholarship by Bonnerjee (2013) and Almeida (2017), suggested that invisibility was going to be a key theme for this project, but as I discuss next, while it was part of the picture in New Zealand, it was not something that Anglo-Indians I spoke to dwelt on in interviews. Rather, they told me about feeling frustrated, and at times exhausted, by having to explain who they were. Mostly they said they did not feel not invisible, rather they stood out from ‘the norm’ in the way they looked and sounded. This frustration was captured below by a woman now in her early sixties, who came to New Zealand with her family in the late 1960s and who later completed doctoral studies:

I’m always asked where I’m from, and then I’m asked how I learned such good English. And when I converted to Christianity.

When I was a teenager, I used to string people along. I got so sick of the questions, which I found insulting actually. I wouldn’t just go up to people and ask...! So, I would reply ‘where do you think I’m from?’ And if they said, say ‘Egypt?’ I’d say, ‘you’re right!’ And as for the question, ‘Where did you learn such good English?’ I would say I learnt it on the boat over here. I got so sick of having to explain it all. I’d just make stuff up.

But once I was in my thirties or so I would tell people: ‘I’m Anglo-Indian’, and then if they genuinely seemed interested in knowing more, I’d explain. But only if they had time! (laughs)

Most Anglo-Indians I spoke to said they regularly fielded questions about ‘who they were’. They explained that the reason people asked that question was due to their appearance (a cast of features combined with skin tone) and their accent. Explaining further that people could not identify their ‘look’ nor could they accurately place their accent. Offering an explanation about one’s identity was not always straightforward either.

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10 See also, Almeida in this volume ‘Thus, the majority of First Wave settlers believed that their mixed racial descent was of no help in making Britain their adopted home. Indeed, if anything, their mixed racial ancestry was a hindrance, they stated, for it caused misrecognition and misidentification (they were usually perceived as South Asians).’
For example, Trina who is now in her early seventies and was a small child when her family arrived in New Zealand in 1949 says this:

When I say I’m Anglo-Indian, which I do, frequently, they look at you blankly, and ‘What? Does that mean you’re half caste?’ and I say ‘No. I have got Indian … We’ve found one forebear who is Indian, and there are others, but it goes back a long way.’ And then they say, ‘But your father was dark?’ and I say, ‘Yes, he was Anglo-Indian.’ ‘And your mother was fair,’ because she was very fair.

Anglo-Indians within the same family, including siblings, often talk about their fairer and darker (referred to as swarthy) family members. Such variety is another area frequently requiring explanation.

Another characteristic I was told that others commented upon were their names, which seemed to be a source of curiosity bordering on suspicion. One participant said people would ask, ‘if you’re ‘Indian’ then why do you have such European names?’. A male teacher I spoke to told me his Pākehā wife was asked by his principal what his ‘real’ name was, assuming an Indian given name had been replaced by a European name to aid migration. This indicates a lack of understanding about who Anglo-Indians are. This mismatch between the name, and how a person looks could also be problematic for some in New Zealand who expected that a European name was likely to mean a person was ‘white’, (although, again this lines them up with Māori, many of whom have European names from Pākehā ancestors). Another New Zealand resident Anglo-Indian talked about an earlier, Australian experience, of losing a job offer because of what he looked like. He said he had been led to believe his job application was successful, but on turning up in person at the school to finalize the contract, that decision was turned around. He had no doubt that his ‘Indian’ appearance was not something the headmaster had anticipated given his European name, and not what this elite school was looking for.

The lack of understanding and misunderstanding of their identity as Anglo-Indian was due to the ways they were exceptions to ‘the norm’. The examples above are all pre-1980s (after which, New Zealand began to open its borders to more diverse populations) and demonstrate that Anglo-Indians were very often not accepted as ‘culturally white’. This was

11 Conversely, in India, I heard from Anglo-Indians that their non-‘Indian’, European family name, was at times experienced as an obstacle to gaining employment.
responded to in a range of ways, as the examples demonstrated, from pain and exasperation to fiction about their country of origin.

**Identity Linked to a Country**

Another form of misidentification was to their country of origin, without nuance or recognition of community identity. India, for example, has internal nuance to name ethnic difference by different ‘community’ terms. New Zealanders very often do not have this awareness about India and perceive it as an ethnically monolithic country.

In asking about how others identified them I was told both identification and a number of misidentification stories. For example, Len arrived in New Zealand in 1953 and explains that he is still misidentified, well into the 2000s, by people who have known him for a long time. He gives the example of his parish priest who he regards as a long-time friend:

> It’s funny, I used to take Father [name] some food and all that, sometimes, quite often actually. And his housekeeper then, she said, ‘Oh, this gentleman came and left you some food’, so Father said, ‘Oh, is he the Indian?’ ‘No, he doesn’t look Indian’ (laughs). See, a lot of them believe that if you’re from India, you have to be Indian, you see. Well, I’m from India, and I’m Anglo-Indian. (Man in his early eighties)

Len’s comment reflected what was said by a number of interviewees—that when they said they were from India, then they were regarded as being undifferentiated ‘Indian’, no matter what they may look like, or what ‘white’ cultural competencies they may exhibit. So, while it should not be surprising to be identified by nation, it was a source of frustration to be grouped with others they do not identify with. Their reaction to their ‘incomplete’ identity says something about identity—that it is much more than being about a place or country ascription. The subtleties of identity are vitally important to the identity holder.

**Misidentification as Māori**

There is another form of misidentification which is unique to New Zealand, that of Anglo-Indians being mistaken for Māori. These next two quotes illustrate this reasonably common occurrence. In the first, Marie is talking about her mum arriving in the late 1940s:
She said that when they first came here, when they first got off the ship, someone came up to her and did a *hongi*!\(^{12}\) Of course she didn’t know what that was about! They thought she was Māori. People assumed that she was Māori until they talked to her. Because she spoke, well, a bit like the Queen. A very nice English sort of accent. We used to tease her about it sometimes.

Next, Patrick, who came to New Zealand in 1990s via the United Kingdom where he grew up, says:

I was working in a role in the public service sector in New Zealand, I ended up working for the Ministry of Māori Development. And in the early days, people naturally assumed because I was working in the Ministry of Māori Development, I was Māori. And it was only when I started speaking that they all got confused (both laugh). I remember one comment was, ‘Oh you’ve been away too long in London, bro. You’ve picked up the accent’. ‘I was never a Māori in the first place’. So that was quite funny.

Some Anglo-Indians said they feel Māori are something of kindred spirits—as well as looking similar, they are both products of colonialism, speak English, are familiar with Christianity even if they are not practicing Christians. One man I spoke to said he is regularly asked ‘What iwi [tribe] are you from?’ He says this engenders a sense of inclusion in the nation, even if it is mistaken. As soon as his identity is interrogated, however, any gains he may have felt are lost. He, and other Anglo-Indians I have spoken with, said they feel that New Zealand is still very much a bicultural country and that unless one is Māori or Pākehā it is difficult to stake a place in the nation.

My own research experience supports this type of misidentification: on several occasions when someone I knew heard I had interviewed one of their acquaintances, they commented that they had always presumed the person was part Māori. This form of misidentification as part of the indigenous community is not something I have come across in anecdotal accounts or in research on Anglo-Indians in other countries, for example, in Australia and Canada, which also have indigenous populations. As such, this form of misidentification seems to be unique in New Zealand. Anglo-Indians have also shared with Māori the experience of being poorly treated at times, as I discuss next.

\(^{12}\) A *hongi* is a traditional Māori greeting involving the touching noses.
**Discrimination and Racism**

From the perspective of those involved in my research, the key aspect of being Anglo-Indian in New Zealand is that you are not white. Being not white matters—it can lead to racism and discrimination and stereotypical treatment. For all the policies and strategies in place, racism in New Zealand still often targets Māori and other non-white New Zealand residents.

Mira talked candidly about racism and discrimination she experienced after arriving in New Zealand in 1955, when she was 12 years old. She identifies being treated in a particular way, because she was ‘dark’, explaining:

> I went to [a prestigious school in Auckland], and my grades were very poor. And those were two of my most unhappy years in my whole life. I had an Australian teacher, and she took one look at me and … I learned about what they call coloured prejudice in those days. And she used to make fun of my accent, because it was very strong, and again I was the only dark one there.

A brother and sister, whose father came to New Zealand in the 1930s as a young man directly from Dr. Graham’s Homes as part of the colonization scheme (discussed earlier (McCabe 2017)), told me about the racist attitudes their father had experienced:

> I think he was a forward-thinking man. He was doing farming for a little while, and then he decided he wanted to change his career and become an accountant. But he soon found out that, because of the era, that coloured people couldn’t get that kind of a job. He actually passed the exam for accountancy, and everything. And all it had to be was rubber stamped by the accountant.

> He passed the exams, but then he was unable to practice?

> He wasn’t prepared to take the next step, to start up an accountancy business.

> And the other thing: haircuts. Our Father couldn’t get a haircut up the top of the street! Well, he had to go down to the bottom barber, to [named person], who cut the Māori people and other Indians, and Chinese. And you go up to the top of the main street and it was only white … And there were other things as well.

> What era was that?
‘50s and ‘60s. Even one of my school friends, who was an Indian fella, he said he had a hard time as well. So there was some discrimination, but dad was always positive.

This example and the one above suggests that Anglo-Indian experiences were often similar to Māori, Pacific, Chinese, and other Indians. They were viewed altogether as ‘brown people’ and treated the same as these other marginalized groups. In particular, they were treated as a group of non-white residents without the privileges associated with being white. Discrimination of services was not formalized, but informally they were in place, and recognized by those who used the services.

Of those I interviewed, only one referred to more recent discriminatory treatment, and it seems it was quite subtle. Patrick, who worked in the Ministry of Māori Development, talked about what he called ‘misplaced’ racism.

But I remember, from about 15 years ago [so about 2000], there is that underlying bit of redneck stuff in New Zealand, that people just don’t talk about. I copped a bit from people who thought I was Māori. A very very small minority, but it was definitely there.

**Employment-Linked Identity**

The way Anglo-Indians were identified affected employment prospects too, as it did for the other marginalized groups in New Zealand. But again, individual appearance played a part and experiences were varied. Marie, for example, provides a positive example, although still referring to non-white appearance as a possible impediment. She relayed her mother and her aunt’s late 1940s experience of gaining employment in teaching, a very popular employment area for Anglo-Indians:

Before they left India, someone from New Zealand had sent a package to a friend of theirs, wrapped in an Auckland newspaper which just happened to have an Ad for teachers at [an Auckland] School. Mum’s sister, who came at the same time, taught secondary, and mum was primary, so they both applied for jobs. I asked Mum, ‘Did you send photos?’ (laughs). Well, they did. Mum said, ‘They were black and white photos, but you know...’ (laughs) They weren’t really hiding what they looked like [which they later described as ‘quite Indian’]. So, they got the jobs even before they turned up. They were able to walk straight into work. They had no problem work-
ing there. My aunty, who came a bit later, stayed there for twenty years and became head of department. They definitely looked Indian, and they spoke so nicely so they fitted straight in. So, their qualifications must have been okay and recognised.

This employment situation was very positive, and no hint of discrimination or racism was indicated, as is the case in the next example. One very fair, European-looking Anglo-Indian man said that finding employment had been the easy part of coming to New Zealand. He had work experience both in India and in the Middle East and explained:

When I came to New Zealand … we came in ’65. 1965. There was under-employment over here. There were heaps of jobs, you could just walk in … The first three months I was here, I had three jobs. (…) I wanted to work. I could have worked 7 days a week if I wanted to. There was plenty of work available (…) And of course, it was good for me then, because it meant a lot of money coming in. Sort of start early, come back about eight at night.

This man attributed the ease he had in gaining employment to New Zealand’s want for workers at the time, which probably was at least part of the story. He did not mention his appearance at all and may not have been aware of how he was seen, as qualified, experienced, with excellent English, and would pass as white. Given other stories from this time it seems likely that he was seen as Anglo/white, which helped him to so easily gain employment. Others have reported different, less happy experiences, such as the teacher discussed earlier, who was confident of being offered employment, until a face-to-face meeting occurred when he was turned down.

**Fitting in**

In the last section of this chapter I look at what Anglo-Indians say about their sense of fitting into New Zealand on the basis of their identity. A common theme was of feeling they did not fit in, as Patrick says here, in relation to filling in forms:

There’s never a box for that [Anglo-Indian] and you never fit into anything. So, I always tick Other and then write in Anglo-Indian. Even basic stuff, when you register for things, you fill in forms … Recently when I registered for my GP [general practitioner] and they wanted to know what ethnicity I
was, and I said Anglo-Indian. And the reply was ‘Oh, we don’t have that down as a particular option.’ I asked, ‘Can I just write it in?’

In addition to the types of forms referred to above, Anglo-Indians can identify as Anglo-Indian every time there is a national census as that also requests ethnicity information. Responses to my questions about why they did or did not take the opportunity to do so are revealing of various identity issues, such as the ability to pass, and not wanting to be grouped with ‘other’ Indians, or taking ethnicity to mean the same as nationality, as the following examples demonstrate.

One man who had arrived in the 1945 with his family when he was under 10 years old provided this explanation around identity and passing. He said he could not remember exactly what he had ticked in the last census but that:

There was a time when my parents maintained that they were white enough to just be called English. And so, in the early days, I think it was … it’s more prestigious, to be English instead of Anglo-Indian. If you were white enough to pass, then it was a better option.

*Your mum looked as she could have.*

Oh, my Mum, definitely English-looking and went to the Anglican Church and all that. She was very English, and the way she spoke too.

He articulated what a number of people may have done, not only in the census but in other areas of their life. That is, if they were white enough to pass, they would passively let people believe, or actively communicate, that they were ethnically white as well. This claiming of a white identity, in this next case as European, was part of the rationale for Trina too, as she describes when I asked:

*In the Census do you say you’re Anglo-Indian?*

I have done in the past, but in the later years I was thinking, ‘Well, people will say, ‘Oh, what’s that?’ she must be Indian,’ so I say I’m European now in the Census. I don’t really know what to say, but I don’t want to be lumped in with the Indians here. I’m different.

*You feel more similar to the Europeans.*

Yes, and I have got the European in me.

This woman lives in an area where there is a large population of (non-Anglo-Indian) Indians, so it was important to her to distinguish herself as
she felt quite different to them, so called on a genuine point of difference. Others said they selected ‘Indian’, giving me various reasons for doing so. For example, a young woman who had been in New Zealand for just over a year when I interviewed her, said she is guided by her passport for her identity. That is, she draws on the idea that ethnicity is the same as citizenship. She explained, in answering my question about whether she said she was Anglo-Indian in the census:

No, I didn’t. I said Indian, and it’s very difficult because on my passport … they don’t have that option.

I put myself as Indian, and then I’m like, ‘Oh no, I’m actually not, I should be Anglo-Indian’.

Similarly, another woman said:

I was like, I don’t exactly identify as Indian, but that’s what I’ve always put because there was no other option.

Trying to work out where they fit, in terms of their identity, was a vexed issue for many. Some felt perhaps they should identify as Indian, as their passports supported this, but they really resisted doing so as they felt culturally different. One participant, after looking at her interview transcript said she did not like the way it sounded for her to be differentiating herself from other Indians. Her sense of distinction though, drawing on her European ancestors, was felt strongly. She knew it was not an appropriate differentiation to have made, based as it was on a sense of being ‘whiter’ than those she compared herself with, both in skin tone and culturally. In her assessment, however, she did not belong with them.

Anglo-Indians almost invariably talk about being different from ‘Indians’ in such a way that indicates they regard, and use, the category of ‘Indian’ as a monolithic ethnic category, not differentiating between various ‘Indian’ communities. This is premised on how they think about their own identity, seeing Europeans as one thing, Indians as another, and Anglo-Indians as a mix of the two but culturally identified mainly to the former. While it would be normal today to think of any of the ethnic groups within India as Indian, because nationality is not, according to India’s constitution, an ethnic, religious, or linguistic category (though, of course, Hindutva ideology may suggest otherwise), Anglo-Indians commonly use the term ‘Indian’ as a conflated racial-national category.
Making Spaces to Belong

Some I spoke with commented that it took them a long time to feel they belonged, and getting to that point often involved thinking about their identity as Anglo-Indian and working out how they could make a space to belong. Sometimes this involved first recognizing their sense of not belonging. One person I interviewed talked about ‘feeling different’, as she expressed it, recalling being brought up in a farming area of New Zealand:

So rural New Zealand didn’t quite understand parents who were born in India. It was a bit tricky (chuckle).

Was it a problem?

I don’t think so, no, no. But we certainly always felt different. Because, especially once Dad worked on the farm, and it was very Kiwi-orientated, and yeah, something that was a bit different. But having said that, there were lots of people who … We had some teachers out at [named very small rural town], and they talk about Kitty’s Curry, for years. So, it was an awakening time for them, I think.

This family made a place for themselves by introducing locals to ‘different’ and, no doubt, exotic food, which they felt was appreciated. The ‘awakening’ of those they came in touch with was viewed as a contribution to broadening their worldview and knowledge.13

What also appears to help Anglo-Indians to feel they belong is meeting with other Anglo-Indians. I was told of many small groups who meet regularly at church services and for lunches or house parties where they share traditional dishes, such as Ball Curry and Yellow Rice and Vindaloo. I asked those I interviewed, who didn’t already have a network of Anglo-Indian friends, if they would be interested in being part of, or forming, some sort of Anglo-Indian group. There was a lot of enthusiasm for finding a way of being in touch with other Anglo-Indians. For example, Cushla, who did not know any others in New Zealand, responded as below when I asked if she would like to meet others:

13 This participant added that for her being involved in this project has helped her to find where she fitted, saying ‘It’s been really enlightening for me. I’m really thrilled to have met you, to find out … (said tearfully). It’s become very special. It’s been lovely. It’s helped me to slot into my little place. Because we did … I have always felt different’.
Definitely, yes! Yes, definitely. I started thinking about this a lot, and of course having had time [in India] with Granddad last year, all his beautiful stories were there and that sort of thing (…) So now I would definitely want to. And that’s partly how I found you, because I was [on holiday] and I had this brainwave that I should be a part of some Anglo-Indian group in New Zealand, and then (laughs) this is how this happened.

In contrast to other countries where Anglo-Indians have settled, where there are Anglo-Indian associations, clubs, dances, and even residential homes for their elderly, New Zealand has no Anglo-Indian association or society. There was an association up until 2001 when one organization, the New Zealand Eurasian Society, hosted the World Reunion of Anglo-Indians in Auckland.14 Because of the project there is now a Facebook group created in 2016 by several Anglo-Indians after the first Auckland community dinner. This was the first of a series of dinners held around the country for Anglo-Indians to meet others.

What has been heartening for Anglo-Indians to see is the inclusion of a panel dedicated to Anglo-Indians in a recent travelling installation celebrating 125 years of Indians in New Zealand (https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/news/mokaa-the-land-of-opportunity/ accessed 26 May, 2020). A recent meeting with Te Papa’s (New Zealand’s national museum) curator of a new portfolio focused on Asian communities in New Zealand also holds promise that within the next few years Anglo-Indians in New Zealand will be acknowledged for who they are, a culturally distinct Indian migrant group.15

Concluding Discussion

Key themes in the experience of Anglo-Indians in New Zealand were around identity (their own and others’ assessment of their identity) and the limited options that New Zealanders have had to situate people of colour, particularly in the mid-twentieth century. This is not to say experiences were consistent: for Anglo-Indians who were fair, that is those who

14 At that reunion, the idea of an Anglo-Indian day was first mooted by New Zealand-resident reunion convenor, David Leckey. Celebrations for Anglo-Indian Day are now held each 2 August, all over the world, wherever there are Anglo-Indians in sufficient number.

15 In addition, during New Zealand’s 2020 COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when high school students were offered online teaching, a module featuring an Anglo-Indian was developed as part of the senior social studies curriculum.
were ‘white’ enough—both in terms of appearance and cultural competence—it was possible to disappear into their new communities; for those who were not so fair, their appearance could lead to colour-based treatment and frequently lead to awkward and misinformed questions about who they were.

Whiteness studies offers a way to view Anglo-Indian experiences in New Zealand, as it does for Anglo-Indians in other parts of the world. Experiences have been similar in terms of colour-based treatment. New Zealand’s situation is unique, however, in Anglo-Indians being misidentified as Māori. Due to New Zealand’s colonial history, most Māori share similar western characteristics of religion, language, and westernized practices and worldview. Anglo-Indian responses to these parallels and being misidentified as Māori are mixed. While the shared characteristics can lead to some comfort and connection to Māori, they have also, similarly, experienced racism and discrimination, especially in the early years of Anglo-Indians arriving in New Zealand.

This situation has changed over the decades since Anglo-Indians began making New Zealand home, as the country’s immigration policies indicate. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, New Zealand’s ethnically discriminating policies mirrored the idea of New Zealand as a nation of white settlers, but by the turn of the millennium, immigration decisions were based on skills potential immigrants could bring, with settler diversity and cosmopolitanism now officially embraced. New Zealand’s changing immigration policy then has both contributed to and reflects the social acceptance of non-white migrants making it easier for Anglo-Indians to come to New Zealand, and arguably to identify with New Zealand as home.

Anglo-Indians I spoke with compared themselves to others in New Zealand when thinking about their own identity: to Pākehā, Māori, and other Indians. The woman living near other Indians deeming them more ‘other’, for example, called on her European forebears to distinguish herself.

There are different types of invisibility operating in the examples in this chapter: one is that of the ‘white’ population of New Zealand, who as ‘the norm’ can feel they have no noticeable or visible culture. While Māori can feel visible ‘as Māori’ and as part of a unique New Zealand group, rather than being individualized. Another other kind of invisibility, which Anglo-Indians can feel, is of being unknown and unrecognized as
individuals or as a community. They did not generally report feeling invisible though as they were not regarded, or identify, as the norm.

It is clear that Anglo-Indians want their own identity recognized for what it is; it has never been enough to be ‘a bit like other brown people’ in New Zealand. As such, when opportunities arise, they seek out their own space with the society, customs, food, and shared history with other Anglo-Indians. What is also promising is the recent interest and profiling, by various bodies, of Anglo-Indians in New Zealand. Such initiatives may yet see Anglo-Indians being very much more widely known.

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