

Migrant Mobilities: Cruel Optimism and the Case of AJ D'Cruz
Glenn D'Cruz



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Migrants are mobile by definition. They literally uproot themselves and move to sometimes-distant lands for a variety of reasons. Some move away from real or imagined threats to their very existence. Others seek a better quality of life. And some adventurous souls are inhabited by a restless wanderlust – a desire to roll the dice and see what happens.

Such mobility requires fortitude and faith. Migrants move through space and, if they have an aspirational disposition, they attempt to accumulate symbolic capital to move up those social and economic hierarchies that bestow status and prestige within their adopted homes. The migrant journey to Australia often ends with the realisation that one has to make and re-make one's identity, and perform a series of adjustments – adjustments in terms of comportment, dress, accent and disposition.

My father was a migrant to Australia. More specifically, he was an Anglo-Indian migrant – a member of the 'mixed-race' community produced by British colonialism. He left India for the UK in 1962 and, after living in London for 10 years or so, immigrated to Australia in 1973, dragging his immediate family with him. Lured to the so-called 'lucky country' by the optimistic prospect of building wealth and prosperity under the Southern Cross, his ambitions were thwarted by casual and institutional racism. He died prematurely at the age of 53.

This multi-media presentation tells his story through a series of encounters with the historical archive and the material remnants of my father's relatively short life (letters, photographs, sound recordings, 8mm films). It provides a singular account of the performance practices involved in becoming a 'New Australian'. Combining personal anecdotes and philosophical ruminations on history, technology, and cultural identity, the presentation interrogates and performs a series of migrant mobilities.

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AJ D'Cruz, 1972

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