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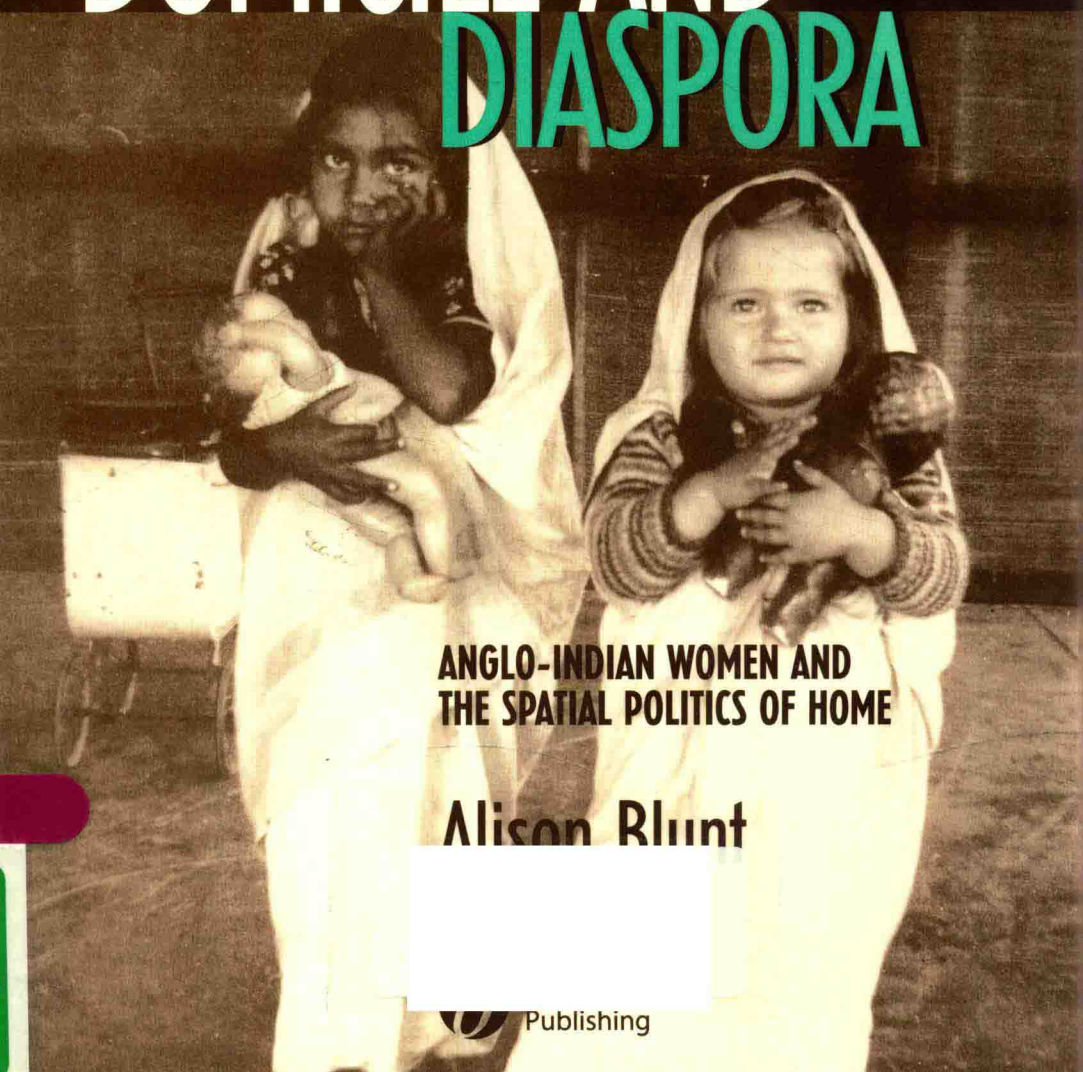

ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN AND THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF HOME

Alison Blunt

Publishing

Domicile and Diaspora

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Domicile and Diaspora: An Introduction

The photograph on the cover of this book was taken in February 1948, six months after Indian Independence and the Partition of India and Pakistan. It was taken outside a bungalow in a railway colony near Chittagong in what was then East Pakistan and is now Bangladesh (see Figure 1.1). It is a photograph of an Anglo-Indian girl, Felicity, with her ayah's daughter,[1] both dressed up in saris made from a pair of old curtains, and it was taken by Felicity's father, who worked on the railways. In many ways, this photograph could be viewed as a classic representation of British domesticity in India, forming part of a long tradition of British families posing with their servants and reproducing an empire within as well as beyond the home.[2] But this photograph differs in three main ways. First, it was taken after Independence, when many of the British elite had left India. For those who remained, either waiting for a passage home or, in fewer cases, 'staying on',[3] family photographs could now less easily represent imperial domesticity and an empire within the home. Second, although the Bengali girl looks far less confident than two-year-old Felicity, they appear more similar than different in other ways. The Bengali girl is standing further back, with her hand to her face, and returns a far less assured gaze to her mother's employer. But both girls are dressed up in the same way, both are holding dolls, and both have been playing together. Finally, unlike photographs of British domesticity in India, Felicity is an Anglo-Indian rather than a British girl.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term 'Anglo-Indian' referred to the British in India, and is still sometimes used in this way.[4] But since the Indian Census of 1911, the term has referred to a domiciled community of mixed descent, who were formerly known as Eurasian, country-born or half-caste. Anglo-Indians form one of the largest and oldest communities of mixed descent in the world, and continue to live in

Figure 1.1 Map of the Indian subcontinent

India as well as across a wider diaspora, particularly in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Descended from the children of European men and Indian women, usually born in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,[5] Anglo-Indians are English-speaking, Christian and culturally more European than Indian. Before Independence in 1947, the spatial politics of home for Anglo-Indians were shaped by imaginative geographies of both Europe (particularly Britain) and India as home. Although Anglo-Indians were 'country-born' and domiciled in India, many imagined Britain as home and identified with British life even as they were largely excluded from it. In many ways, Anglo-Indians imagined themselves as part of an imperial diaspora in British India. Indian nationalism and policies of Indianization gave a new political urgency to Anglo-Indian ideas about home and identity. Some Anglo-Indians who did not feel at home in India settled in a homeland called McCluskieganj, whereas

many more migrated after Independence. In 1947, there were roughly 300,000 Anglo-Indians in India and, against the advice of Anglo-Indian leaders, at least 50,000 had migrated by 1970, half of whom resettled in Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s.[6] The second main wave of migration was to Australia in the late 1960s and 1970s once White Australia migration policies had become less restrictive.

In the 1935 Government of India Act, Anglo-Indians were defined in relation to Europeans in terms of their paternal ancestry and domicile:

> An Anglo-Indian is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India. A European is a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent and who is *not* a native of India.[7]

Whereas Anglo-Indians and Europeans shared European paternal descent, Anglo-Indians were born in India and would, before Independence, and unlike most Europeans, expect to die there. Although written out of this definition, the maternal line of descent for Anglo-Indians usually included an Indian woman, often as far back as the eighteenth century. This gendered and geographical definition of what it meant to be an Anglo-Indian formed the basis for the definition that has been part of the Indian Constitution since 1950.[8] Since 2002, the date that the legal definition was adopted in 1935 has been designated 'World Anglo-Indian Day', which is celebrated by community functions held in India and across the wider diaspora.

The legal definition is important in personal as well as official terms as it informs how many Anglo-Indians understand and explain their identity and community. For example, a teacher who grew up in Lahore before Independence and now lives in Lucknow told me about her family background by explaining the origins of the Anglo-Indian community:

> I shall start from approximately three hundred years ago. The British came out to India and stayed there. Now some of them married. Well, there's no such thing as an Anglo-Indian that they married, they actually married the Indian girls. So the British and that Indian lady started up a line of Anglo-Indians. By the time my grandfathers came out, which was two hundred years after that, one came with the Welsh regiment and one came with the Irish regiment... there was a line of Anglo-Indian ladies.... They married a mixture of Anglo-Indians. Therefore we Anglo-Indians are a different strata.... I think I have two-thirds British blood in me, and one-third Indian, hence the way I dress, the way I speak, the way I live.

* * *