processes. The papers by Morgan, O’Neill and Dredge are an especially worthwhile read for those who want to know more about New Regionalism in Australia.

REFERENCES

Amanda Davies
University of Western Australia

Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home

Allison Blunt describes this unusual story of McCluskieganj and other homes imagined and created by the Anglo-Indians in eight rather long chapters. Multiple voices speak out through her work. Her introductory chapter outlines the three major themes running through the book: the fact of being ‘ domiciled’ – living and belonging in ‘ somebody else’s home’ where the perceived home is far away, and often imagined, yet constituting an essential part of the fluid identity; the homing desire of diasporic Anglo-Indians locating the spatial politics of home in a specific and highly gendered context; and how memory and nostalgia weave through each other to invoke not only spaces of home but also stereotypes of gendered identities. It also outlines her research strategies that span several years, and enormous amounts of archival and interview material. Chapter 2 considers the place of the Anglo-Indians both at home and abroad, focusing on the national and imperial discourses of Britain as fatherland and India as motherland. In Chapter 3, she describes how such discourses are reproduced and resisted on a domestic scale, and in Chapter 4, the mobilisation of such discourses in establishing the homeland of McCluskieganj. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the two migratory flows in Britain and in Australia, and the book returns in Chapter 7 to consider the place of the Anglo-Indian community who remained to live in independent India, and concludes with Chapter 8 explaining the notions that this revitalisation of an Anglo-Indian identity and sense of belonging have for transnational connections.

In writing the gendered history of the search for a homeland, Domicile and Diaspora does not attribute a gender to this primordial longing for a space, but wades through how rigid colonial gender codes created spatial divisions for women and men. It shows women as being crucial in creating the community, in propagating it, and ‘centrally important in political debates about the future and status of the community both before and since the independence [of India]’ (p. 16). Above all, it shows how women were critical in maintaining Anglo-Indian homes and identities in the wider diaspora by informally determining the image of the particular race that the community would have modelled itself after. As the book reveals, this identity is not a singular and static one for the Anglo-Indians, it is a multiple identity reliant heavily on time and location from which the homeland is being viewed. In the process of negotiating the tensions that these multiple identities generate, ‘home’ or the ‘homeland’ too becomes an imagined space. This imagined terrain over which the contestations take place is as flowing as the memories of it, constantly creating and recreating that space one always wanted, but could never belong to: ‘Colonization and settlement at McCluskieganj enacted the homing desire of many Anglo-Indians who imagined themselves to be living in an imperial diaspora and sought to create, rather than return to, a “homeland”’ (p. 103). Anglo-Indian women are crucial in this siting of memory and the politics of home and homeland that are associated with it. Allison Blunt equates this creation of an ordered and imagined space designated to be the home as a gendered process in which the Anglo-Indian women both embodied and transgressed an ideal of feminised domesticity through their lives and beyond the home.

As the Anglo-Indians are the product of the mixing of the peoples of two far separated continents, Alison Blunt’s work too has a spectacularly global canvas, straddling three vast continents, a long time period of history, and a broad range of source materials that include historical documents, contemporary interviews and modern website content. The painstaking
work took her to far corners of the world – she draws the pictures like a master painter drawing in broad and sweeping strokes, but never misses out on the fine details. Theoretically too, Blunt covers a vast terrain: from mixed race studies to memories to diasporic identities and concepts of home. For example, Blunt claims (p. 12), ‘Unlike studies of gender and diaspora that explore the symbolic importance of feminized spaces of home, I explore the ways in which memories of a masculine imperial inheritance were both symbolically and materially important for Anglo-Indians.’ As a central part of this, she considers ‘the intersections of material and imaginative geographies of diaspora by interpreting memories and experiences of migration and resettlement alongside an analysis of how the British Nationality Act of 1948 and the White Australia Policy from 1901 to the mid-1960s affected the migration of a distinct community of mixed descent.’ This is precisely where the breadth of the ground covered in the book becomes a burden: crucial leads such as possible comparisons with the essences of other (for example, German) ideas of homeland (Heimat) are allowed to freeze in her efforts to focus on Anglo-Indian women as the primary subjects of her interviews.

The fascination and wonder of Britain continues with India, ‘... almost every family in this country has some Indian connection’ (Brendon, 2005), yet this postcolonial engagement is also marked by great unease. This is nowhere more evident than the literature on the Anglo-Indians – the imperial fantasies of a hybrid other – including Domicile and Diaspora. The intense popular and academic interest in the mixed races has been described as the ‘global masala’ (Ifekwunigwe, 2004, 1), whereas scholars from the imperialist first world have intensively scrutinised the unstable, non-essential, impure and insecure identities that the notion of ‘mixing’ gives form and meanings to, and theoretical constructs such as ‘hybridity’ lend well to. In Domicile and Diaspora, Blunt has cleverly brewed post-modern concepts of hybridity and post colonial critiques in the hotpot of spatial politics. The extensive empirical nature of the work spreads the canvas thin, causing the loss of focus at times, in view of heavy theoretical claims.

While reading the book I often felt as though the nostalgic memories outlined in the book were superseding the actual individuals, projecting the ordinary lives of human beings as smaller than that imagined ‘India’s large warm embrace’. Anglo-Indians, especially those who were left behind or those who could not find a way out, felt in every sense as being orphans of the Raj, victims of a grand betrayal (see Anthony, 1969). This sense of betrayal, of being left behind, albeit diffused over the years, is evident from a wide range of material including popular fiction by Anglo-Indians. At the same time, in recent years there has been a rise of more ‘westernised’, often metro-based, Indian cultures effectively blurring the rigid boundary between English-speaking Western/Bengali-speaking Indians and blunting the sharp distinction of identities. Here, certain quick sweep statements seem hollow; the portrayals of Anglo-Indian women as loose and easily accessible by the Indian mainstream contest with those of Anglo-Indian women as role models for an entire early generation of Indian women going out of home to work in offices as the first secretaries and receptionists (rendered eloquently in Satyajit Ray’s film Mahanagar), or as teachers in Anglo-Indian schools, nurturing generations of urban-based English-speaking Indians. Consequently, the extensive quotes cited by Blunt often fail to gel with her repeated and explicit theoretical claims. Whereas John Masters’ Bhowani Junction or Stephen Alter’s Neglected Lives or Manorama Mathai’s Mulliga-tawny Soup are able to closely illuminate insider perspectives, some of the interviews and narratives in Domicile and Diaspora are confusing, leaving some important terrains unexplored. For example, what were the Anglo-Indians up to in those decades between McCluskieganj in 1933, HMS Manoora and the large-scale influx of Anglo-Indians in the 1960s and 1970s (given that the Colonisation Society wound down as early as 1955 (Lahiri-Dutt, 1990)? We are excluded from that vital part in the evolution of the identity of the community transforming itself from colonists to settlers in Australia and Britain. This temporal fluidity of the text – even uncertainty of the specific time being conversed – forces the reader to feel that the entire story of McCluskieganj could have been dropped without affecting the value of the work.

Finally, I draw attention to the recent critiques of historiographic (and possibly geographic) use of memories and nostalgia, now a major preoccupation of many historians and geographers (for example, in recounting partition memories in the Indian subcontinent). Many of these critiques are arising not from the first/imperial world intellectuals, but from postcolonial South Asian scholars, pointing to the fact that remembering
is a political act and instead of using remembrance narratives as cultural text, one must also carefully examine who remembers, what and above all, under what political circumstances and power relations (Samaddar, 2006). Can the Anglo-Indians and their spatial politics of home be understood as an identity that ‘resulted’ from the complex and wider forces of history, or also as part of the imperial dream that is continually brought into being by the play of subject memories? The geographer, working through the memories and nostalgic materials, in search of the spatial politics of home, cannot escape this reality.

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Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt
Australian National University