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BOOK REVIEW: BLUNT, ALISON. *DOMICILE AND DIASPORA: ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN AND THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF HOME*.  
MALDEN, MA: BLACKWELL, 2005.

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In *Domicile and Diaspora*, Alison Blunt has made an extraordinary contribution to scholarship on the Anglo-Indian community that is both ethnographic and historical. Blunt presents an impartial and scholarly historical narrative, where much of the earlier literature was dominated by the voice of Anglo-Indian leaders. She covers the period from 1857 to the present, especially from the 1919 Montague Chelmsford reforms through the repeal of the White Australia Policy in the mid-1960s. Blunt goes far beyond the historical narrative, however, by focusing on the role of Anglo-Indian women in the larger projects of creating Anglo-Indian identity, the Community's political fortunes, and working out Anglo-Indian aspirations and anxieties associated with the notion of "home". She attempts to show that by looking at domestic life we can know more about the politics of the time, and also retrieves the voices of Anglo-Indian women, which are not prominent in the public discourse. The method she uses draws on rich archival sources and interviews with Anglo-Indian women of the "generation of transition" (born before and lived through Independence) and the "generation of integration" (born around or after Independence).

Unlike other literature, Blunt seeks to dispute "locating Anglo-Indians within a broader nostalgia for the Raj and representing them as 'tragic figures of colonialism' anxiously enacting an idea of Britain as home, ridiculed by the British for doing so, and ultimately out of place in both British and independent India"(15). Instead she shows that Anglo-Indians faced challenges through a complex and shifting negotiation of their identity, racially, genealogically, nationally and culturally.

Chapter 2 articulates the importance of notions of "home" to the community, rejects

the idea of separate domestic and public spheres and argues that women carry both symbolic and material importance to the public politics of the larger community. The role of women was just as important for public and political status of Anglo-Indians as it was for the Imperial British or Nationalist Indians. The spatial politics of “home” is an essential marker of identity.

Blunt shows how the Anglo-Indian community underwent a major transition in the first half of the twentieth century. In the first phase, Anglo-Indians identified themselves in gendered and racialized terms of belonging to a British fatherland and an Indian motherland. This constituted a dual identity, but with primary loyalty and cultural affiliation to the former. This hybridity played out in the spatial politics of home through official and unofficial British preoccupations with Anglo-Indian poverty, housing type and location, food and accent of English. This gave way to a second phase, leading up to and after Independence, in which Anglo-Indians asserted that they were Indian by nationality and Anglo-Indian by community, while the notion of Britain as “home” receded. The transition came about, in part, because Britain rebuffed AI requests for representation and protections in the years immediately before Independence, whereas Anglo-Indian leader Frank Anthony ultimately succeeded at negotiating with Congress to support Anglo-Indian minority status and protections when India gained its Independence. While Blunt clearly shows this transition took place in the public rhetoric of the Anglo-Indian Community’s official leadership and publications, she does not really address whether the transition was actually made by the average Anglo-Indian. This is particularly important, because many Anglo-Indian individuals and groups in the 1940s dissented from the All India Anglo-Indian Association, protesting that it only represented a small percentage of Anglo-Indians and should not be taken by Government to be the official voice of the Community.

Blunt argues in chapter 3 that “The home and the lives of women both within and beyond it were seen as both politically crucial and dangerously transgressive in imagining the place of the community within the ‘new India’” (52). She explains the heritage of the Anglo-Indian community largely originating in conjugal pairs of European Christian fathers and Indian Hindu mothers. Such marriages rendered the mother outcaste, which resulted in a necessary affiliation of the Anglo-Indian

offspring to the British culture of their fathers. In this way, the Anglo-Indian community was brought up with a masculine, middle-class imperial heritage that, it has been argued, strengthened over time. This is reflected most in the language, clothing, customs and food of the community, by which Anglo-Indians still distinguish themselves as unique in the Indian milieu. Using journals, newspapers and the writings of leaders such as Frank Anthony, Blunt amply argues that “Anglo-Indian women were at the forefront of debates about the future and status of the community in the years before independence, with many commentators stressing their political importance within the home” (59).

Blunt challenges the frequent objectification of Anglo-Indian women by Europeans and Indians, and explains the stereotype of moral laxity and salaciousness, through the cultural transgressions Anglo-Indian women represented for their western modernity in attire, employment and public socialization. Anglo-Indian women wore western clothes, mixed freely with men, chose their marriage partners, and worked outside the home in increasing numbers from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as teachers, nurses, secretaries, and in the Women’s Auxiliary Corps. during the Second World War. This violated Indian sensibilities regarding the proper domestic place of women in society, as well as British ideas about the place of Anglo-Indians in relation to Europeans. The Second World War was a watershed moment because of the active role Anglo-Indian women played in the War effort, which naturally gave rise to romances with British and American soldiers, many of which resulted in marriages. To deflect criticisms of Anglo-Indian women, community leaders called women to prefer marriage to Anglo-Indian men over British or Americans and to “leave the dancehall and cinema for the kitchen and sewing machine” and take up a more traditional role in the home to building families that would support the uplift of the community (67-8).

In chapter 4 Blunt explores how some Anglo-Indians sought to resolve or stabilize their identity by creating a self-sufficient homeland. Citing their paternal ancestry in the “colonizing race” some Anglo-Indians rhetorically mobilized their heritage to justify founding the Colonization Society of India, which ultimately created McCluskiegunge as an exclusive Anglo-Indian colony, a *mullok* (native home), with high ambitions of future industrial, political and cultural importance. A few other

similar schemes were established elsewhere, but as many as 30 plans were made in total. Blunt shows that the promotional literature and commentary about these colonization schemes drew on masculine imperial ideals and identity yet depended on a particular casting of Anglo-Indian femininity. Women were to be pioneering homemakers, unafraid of hard work, the jungle, and child rearing. The ambition of McCluskiegunge was not to create a ghetto but a nation, and the domestic space was to be a site of its fulfillment. Blunt's work can be illuminated further by Laura Bear's more recent work on Indian Railway colonies, as sites where many Anglo-Indians may have also gained a sense of *mullok*, or even a corollary to the caste identity of their Indian counterparts.

In chapters 4 and 5, Blunt shows how others sought to resolve their anxieties about their future by migrating to England, Australia or elsewhere. It is important to note that Blunt treats migration of Anglo-Indians as part of the larger narrative of working out their cultural and geographic home, not as a separate chapter of history. She also treats migration without any bias towards migrating or staying, in contrast to some commentators who (mostly writing from within the community) have a clear position on which was the better choice.

Gaining citizenship or permission to migrate magnified Anglo-Indian racial anxieties. The British Nationality Act of 1948 set out racial categories and corresponding privileges or restrictions on claims to citizenship. Anglo-Indians were forced to produce legal documents that could substantiate their descent from an Englishman in the male line. After migrating, domestic life in England demanded substantial adjustment for Anglo-Indian women, in the way of domestic chores, cooking and living space. Employment was difficult due to discrimination and non-recognition of one's experience and credentials. What Blunt does not address is that many or even most Anglo-Indians who migrated to England between Independence and the early 1960s did not obtain British citizenship before migrating, but were permitted by law as citizens from the Commonwealth to live in Britain. It was only in the early 1960s that immigration to the U.K. tightened.

Migrating to Australia was different. Due to the White Australia Policy, few Anglo-Indians migrated there until after its repeal in the mid-1960s and a shift to a multicultural view of the Australian people. Early Anglo-Indian migration to Australia

was characterized not by proving European genealogy as in the case of Britain, as much as it was by passing the test of skin color. Blunt recounts the story of the *Manoora*, an Australian ship sent to bring British and Australian nationals out of India at Independence. Instead, it carried 700 Anglo-Indians to Australia's shores. This contributed to Australia restricting immigration along strict color lines. As unease with purely racial criteria for immigration grew in Australia, it shifted to proving that one was fully western in culture.

In chapter 7 Blunt addresses the majority of Anglo-Indians who stayed in India. Their socioeconomic status has deteriorated in most quarters, though some Anglo-Indians have become very prominent and wealthy. Blunt features how Anglo-Indian women now hold a relatively much higher level of education, employment, earnings and domestic responsibility as compared with Anglo-Indian men. The unemployment problem among Anglo-Indian men has deepened over the years, making it less likely that Anglo-Indian women will marry within the community, but rather seek partners based more along socioeconomic and educational lines similar to their own. This chapter is a great contribution because it serves as a corrective to the overemphasis in some works, but especially the popular tendency in Anglo-Indian circles, to privilege the diasporic community's claim on Anglo-Indian identity, while viewing the domiciled community as a shadow of something that was instead of a living and evolving Anglo-Indian-ness.

This book is highly valuable to scholars of all disciplines, whether their interest is in Anglo-Indians specifically or more generally in colonial and post-colonial hybrid ethnicities. It creates a scholarly (not nostalgic) historical narrative covering a relatively long and turbulent period of the Anglo-Indian community, with an anthropological assessment of its negotiation of a hybrid, minority identity. It does this through both archival and ethnographic sources that provide a more holistic picture than any other work to date. The political and social life of the Community, the ambitions to establish a homeland like McCluskiegunge, and the decisions of Anglo-Indians to migrate or remained domiciled in India, are viewed as expressions of the community working out its notion of home. By focusing on the domestic sphere of life, Blunt retrieves the voice of Anglo-Indian women who appear silent in the public male-dominated discourse. She breaks down the theory of separate domestic

and public spheres, convincingly showing that Anglo-Indian domesticity was in fact an important battleground on which Anglo-Indian identity and political status was worked out.

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