Anglo-Indian Nostalgia: Longing for India as Homeland[1]

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This paper argues that the 'nostalgia' that the Anglo-Indian community exhibits in the telling of its (hi)stories can be seen as functioning to (re)claim India as homeland. The Anglo-Indians are the Indian-European minority community of India whose origins and history is inextricably interwoven with the politics of colonial India. Within the framework of post-independence Indian thought, the Community has been alienated from embodying the national identity and is made to feel unhomely.

In his book *Long-distance Nationalism* Zlatko Skrbiŝ defines nostalgia as "a painful condition related to the homeland (Gr. *nostos* means 'to return home' and *algia*, 'a painful condition')" (41). Roberta Rubenstein, in her book *Home Matters*, also describes nostalgia as a temporal separation (4). The recent nostalgic writings produced by the Anglo-Indian community remember, idealise and pine for the colonial past – a time when the Anglo-Indian community felt a sense of belonging in India. Some historians claim that nostalgia is "perhaps the most dangerous … of all the ways of using history"[1] because it glosses "over the past's iniquities and indignities"[2]. However, Rubenstein points out that nostalgia can also "fix" the past and recover it in "narrative terms" (6). With this insight, I will argue that via nostalgic writing the Anglo-Indian community can revisit, and hence reclaim, India as home.

Introduction

The Anglo-Indians are the Indian-European minority community of India whose origins, development and social positioning are inextricably interwoven within the political, racial and cultural problematics of the English colonization of India. Anglo-Indians have historically endured an unsettled position in India. From the beginning of their formation as a group, the Anglo-Indians were regarded as "feringhees (foreigners)" (Moore 4) by 'native' Indians who made no distinction between them and the British imperialists. Although in independent India the Anglo-Indian community is constitutionally recognized as one of India's six minorities, the Community continues to occupy a contentious position within the discourse of Indian national identity and thus has historically been regarded as 'unhomed' in India when in fact India is the homeland of the Community. India should be regarded as the homeland of the Anglo-Indian community because India is its birthplace and, most importantly, the domain of their experiences, which constitutes the Community's historical memory. In "The 'Home' in Homeland", Thembisa Waetjen writes about the idea of unhomeliness, describing it in these terms: "'Unhomeliness' is not

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explicitly a homelessness but rather a state of exile, of being removed from a place of belonging . . ." (662). A large Anglo-Indian diaspora was the result of the condition of unhomeliness experienced in India. Today, there are approximately 300,000 Anglo-Indians living outside India concentrated mainly in "Canada, New Zealand, England and Australia" (Pais James n.p). This paper argues that the nostalgia experienced by the diasporic Anglo-Indian community produces (hi)stories that can be seen as functioning to (re)claim India as homeland.

Defining who is an Anglo-Indian is complex. According to the New Constitution of Independent India of 1950 article 366(2), it means:

> a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only… (qtd. in Pais James)

This 'legal' definition is highly problematic because it erases maternal lineage. 'Anglo-Indian' has become an umbrella term applied to two distinct groups of people: those persons who have two parents of European descent – "previously known as Domiciled European" (Gist and Wright 2) – and those 'mixed race' persons being of both Indian and European ancestry. However, the definition fails to encompass the identity of persons who have Indian fathers and British mothers, thus effectively branding these people as 'unidentified subjects' in the definitional terms laid down by the Constitution. Within this paper, I use the term 'Anglo-Indian' to refer to people with Indian ancestry either of maternal or paternal lineage.

Taking a critical approach to analysing the 'collective' identity of the Anglo-Indian community allows the discursive construction of this identity to be evaluated. The discourses of English colonialism and Indian nationalism - the latter being a political 'speaking back' to the former - as working in tandem to situate the Anglo-Indian community outside the realm of what is considered 'Indian'. From within these two discourses contrasting histories about the Community have emerged which, although they exist in contention with one another, between them ultimately position the Community as 'un-Indian' and therefore 'unhomed' in India. In recognizing that multiple histories can exist, a Foucauldian approach to history production can be assumed. The modern notion that history is an objective and singular record of the past is critiqued by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. History is a discourse, a constructed body of knowledge which purports to be factual when in reality it is a 'culturally inflected' account of events: an experience rather than 'a truth'.

The central point of debate in the production of these contrasting histories is the issue of the Community's legitimacy. The Community has produced a version of its history that substantiates its claim to legitimate origins. For example, many scholars of the Community have attempted to legitimate the 'birth' of the Anglo-Indians by arguing that the English directors of the East India Company propagated a policy in the 16th century that 'financially encouraged' European men to marry Indian women and have children by them (Anthony 12; Gist and Wright 10; Moore 4). In this way Anglo-Indians have constructed themselves, in their version of their own history, as a 'people chosen' to support the assumed prerogatives of Empire. In order to produce

an image of wholesome, 'decent' origins, the Anglo-Indians have had to praise the morality and attitudes of the colonizer. This history is produced from within the colonial discourse. The Community has historically portrayed itself as a handmaid of Empire, often boasting about how Anglo-Indians held key positions within the colonial administration such as in the telegraphs and railways. This dominant representation spawned the resentment of the other Indian communities which reject the notion of English superiority and, in turn, regard Anglo-Indians as 'un-Indian'. These attitudes manifested themselves clearly in the making of the anti-colonial Indian nation as, while Indians attained the deserved freedom they had fought for so tirelessly, the Community was alienated from contributing its part in embodying the national identity and has been made to feel unhomed.

In opposition to this history, the Indian mindset has produced a history about Anglo-Indians that encourages a perception of the Community's illegitimacy. It is still a widespread belief that Anglo-Indians are the bastard consequences of sexual misdemeanours between "outcaste Englishmen" (Anthony 11) and morally wayward Indian women - products of the 'sins of miscegenation'. This supposed illegitimacy of the Anglo-Indians de-legitimates their right to an 'authentic' subjectivity within the nation, consequently problematizing their relationship to India as 'home'.

The Community's abandonment into the realm of the 'unwelcome' in India is a result of the way in which Anglo-Indian history has been produced from 'outside' what is specifically an 'Anglo-Indian' way of thinking and experience. That is to say, Anglo-Indian history has been constructed through English colonial and Indian nationalist rhetoric. Consequently, the Anglo-Indian voice is silenced by these 'totalizing discourses'. The key to negotiating India as home for the Anglo-Indian community is finding and celebrating a voice(s) for the expression of a specifically Anglo-Indian history. Simply, my project is to seek out a genealogy of Anglo-Indian history which can serve to anchor the Community in Indian history and India as home. The purpose of genealogy, a method which Foucault derived from Nietzsche (see "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"), is to locate histories that have not been given recognition within the discourse of History. It seeks to bring to the fore 'underground', localized knowledges.

In order to locate a 'Community-owned' speaking position, 'traditional' forms of history production – that is, history produced, and methodologies commonly employed, by the dominant class/group in society – must be abandoned to make way for more liberating (some might use the word 'alternative') historical forums. In producing these liberating histories, which can reshape Anglo-Indian identity, the Community can (re)centre itself in India as home. Popular writing, written in a nostalgic mode, is one of the formats in which this genealogical history can be 'found'. The recollections that are voiced in the nostalgic mode reveal the specific knowledge and experience of the Anglo-Indian community in India, and thus establish the Community's (re)connection to India as home.

Home
In her book *Home Matters* Roberta Rubenstein explains that home is: "Not merely a physical structure or a geographical location but always an emotional space . . ." (1). Anglo-Indians have been denied this emotional space through the refusal of other

Indian groups to allow them to be a part of the expression of Indian national identity. From the Indian point of view, this denial can be regarded as retribution because Anglo-Indians are thought to have only Eurocentric affiliations. As stated earlier, a large Anglo-Indian diaspora has emerged as a result of the unhomely condition that the Community has experienced in independent India. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah identifies the strong relationship between 'diaspora' and the need to belong to 'home': "the concept of diaspora embodies a subtext of 'home'" (190). Brah asserts that "'home' and belonging may be integral to the diasporic condition, but how, when, and in what form questions surface, or how they are addressed, is specific to the history of a particular diaspora" (193). She goes on to note that while one may want to feel at home in a place, the "experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home" (193). This insight is particularly pertinent to the Anglo-Indian situation. While Anglo-Indians may want to feel 'at home' in India, historical social conditioning, which discriminates against the Community from achieving cultural acceptance, may be seen as a factor that has prevented them from always expressing this desire. However, in recent years there has been an increased attempt to reflect upon the Community's 'diasporic condition' through (re)constructing the Community's history and subsequently 'remembering' India.

How is a relationship between a community and its home established through history production? Thembisa Waetjen explains that: "A homeland is the landscape . . . of historical memory that offers tangible images of rootedness and grounded community" (654). She also argues that, "Land becomes national territory, is infused with a political identity, through the stories that relate it to a people" (666). Here Waetjen constructs a nationalism centred on the marrying of ideas of historical memory, nationality and home. This stands in contrast to nationalisms that are based on notions of ethnicity and/or ethnic purity. Waetjen's notion of 'nationalism' enables new possibilities for situating Anglo-Indian history and experience in the Indian context which, it might be suggested, has previously been negated on grounds of ethnic 'impurity'. The production of a community's history is vital to forming a bond with a homeland.

Scholars agree that, for diasporic people, the process of recovering homeland through narration (history-making) is imperative for forging identity, maintaining cultural ties with the homeland and for re-establishing cultural links with a place of prior experience. In his book *Long-Distance Nationalism* Zlatko Skrbiš acknowledges that it is possible to be a 'well-integrated' migrant in a new country and still love, and express the culture of, a homeland. He argues as follows:

> The relationship between ethnic group members and their homeland and its political establishment … is one of the main indicators of their connectedness to their ethnic pasts. The relationship between people's loyalties to an ethnic homeland, and their integration into the new host society, is not necessarily a mutually exclusive one. . . . Or put another way, it is possible to retain a rootedness in the past with successful integration into a new society. (40-1)

Akhil Gupta in his chapter "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference" states that speaking of "[r]emembered places have . . . often served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people" (39). He clearly argues that, "'Homeland' . . . remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and

displaced peoples . . ." (39). However, scholars contend that for diasporic people it is not possible to fully recover the homeland (Lindemeyer 423). The connections made with points of origin will be mythic in nature – what Aparna Rayaprol, in her book *Negotiating Identities,* claims will be "part real and part imagined" (2).

In *Migrants of Identity* Nigel Rapport states that, "'Home' brings together *memory* and longing, the *ideational*, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global" (8) [my emphasis]. The point Rapport is making here is that 'home' is the culmination of various aspects of human experience and interactions with the tangible world. It is true that the illusory plays a prominent part in the diasporic construction of homeland because, as time passes, the place of origin remains stagnant in the memory of the migrant while in reality it has evolved. For example, when I was in Bangalore on holiday my father asked me to go to a particular pen-shop at a specific location. But when I went there a tailor sat stitching in silence. However, my connection to wanting to feel 'at home' in India was not dependant on whether my father could correctly locate a pen-shop or not but, rather, that he had a memory of it ever being there. Although imagination intervenes, to some extent, in the production of histories of diasporic communities, what remains significant is that the connection between a community and its homeland is made. In her article "The Re-writing of Home: Autobiographies by Daughters of Immigrants" Antje Lindenmeyer states that: "'[H]ome' can never be fully recovered, but has to be reclaimed and rewritten" (423). 'Home' can be, and must be, claimed through the 'writing', that is the production, of history. The (hi)stories Anglo-Indians relate demonstrate that, as a Community, their historical memory is embedded in India and that India is embedded in the memory of each Anglo-Indian. This realization is paramount to the Community attaining a place in India as home.

Nostalgia as a Historical Experience
For the Anglo-Indian community, India as homeland is produced through the experience of nostalgia in (re)constructing remembered places and events, and the narration of personal associations with them. Skrbiŝ defines nostalgia as "a painful condition related to the homeland (Gr. *nostos* means 'to return home' and *algia*, 'a painful condition')" (41). In his article "History and the Politics of Nostalgia" Marcos Piason Natali notes that it was in fact the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer who, in 1688, coined the term 'nostalgia' from these Greek roots (n.p). The term 'nostalgia', therefore, has its origins in "medical history, where it had been originally regarded as a disease with physical symptoms that were the result of homesickness . . ." (Chase and Shaw 1). In their article "The Dimensions of Nostalgia" Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw acknowledge that today the term nostalgia bears "metaphorical" meaning as the home we long for is not geographical "but rather a state of mind" (1). They also argue that: "Certain classes or strata within a society (especially those whose situation has changed for the worse) are likely to experience a more public and collective nostalgia" (15). With this consideration in mind, the Anglo-Indians can be viewed as typical candidates for becoming nostalgists. Indeed, the Community's social situation changed from 'tolerated' during the English occupation of India to being despised as pseudo-colonialists in post-independent India, making the Anglo-Indians lament for the India of yesteryear. Therefore the nostalgia the Anglo-Indian community uses to delineate their history can be regarded as a 'natural' consequence of their unhomeliness. In embracing this vehicle of historical expression, Anglo-Indians can (re)claim India as homeland.

As a historical experience, nostalgia is quite often thought about in a negative way. Some historians claim that nostalgia is "perhaps the most dangerous … of all the ways of using history" (Lowenthal 20) because it glosses "over the past's iniquities and indignities" (Lowenthal 21-2). If Utopia is literally 'the good place that is no place' in the future, then nostalgia becomes its "counterpart" (Chase and Shaw 9): the Utopia of the past. However, Rubenstein thinks about nostalgia in a more positive light. She argues that "Narratives that engage notions of home, loss, and/or nostalgia confront the past in order to 'fix' it . . ." (6). She goes on to explain that:

> "To 'fix' something is to *secure* it more firmly in the imagination and also to *correct* –as in *revise* or *repair* – it. Even though one cannot literally go home again . . . it may be recoverable in narrative terms" (6).

This insight enables us to understand how a history constructed through a nostalgic lens can allow the Anglo-Indian community to revisit, and hence recapture, India as home.

Rubenstein explains that, "In the deeper register, nostalgia is painful awareness, the expression of grief for something lost, the absence of which continues to produce significant emotional distress" (5). However, she also points out that nostalgia refers to a temporal separation rather than a spatial one (4). The lost place for the Anglo-Indian community is the age of colonial rule in which the Community had its conception and it felt a sense of purpose and belonging. For the Anglo-Indian community, India became 'lost' when India gained independence from the English. This event further ensured the Community's marginalisation in Indian society. Since Anglo-Indians were regarded as 'lackeys of the British Empire' they were, like the English, regarded as an enemy of India: contributors of abuse suffered by India and its people for 350 years.

Rubenstein further acknowledges that, "culturally displaced or exiled people may mourn their separation from home/land, community, language, and/or cultural practices that contribute to identity" (6), and that these people may be more inclined to employ nostalgia to (re)centre their identity about a homeland. For a people such as the Anglo-Indians who have evolved into an expansive diaspora as a result of their unhomeliness, the idea of 'home' is particularly vulnerable. According to Rubenstein, a nostalgic response to this condition of unhomeliness is more acceptable. She uses:

> the phrase *cultural mourning* to signify an individual's response to the loss of something with collective or communal associations: a way of life, a cultural homeland, a place or geographical location with significance for a larger cultural group, or the related history of an entire ethnic or cultural group from which she or he feels severed or exiled, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. (5)

Chase and Shaw explain that "nostalgia involved a special way of being involved in the past: one had to be connected to the object of scrutiny, perhaps through kinship or through a broader feeling of identity … These were in some way *my* people and my present therefore was bound up in their past" (2). This way of thinking about nostalgia is clearly evidenced in the history of the Anglo-Indians. Within the nostalgic mode, India and its peoples become the objects of scrutiny; the objects of longing and kinship.

The nostalgia experienced by the Anglo-Indian community produces a history which creates a window to the Community's 'unique' experience. However, this history relies greatly upon memory and the ability to recall those memories. Rubenstein makes this point as she states that, "Implicit in the deeper register of nostalgia is the element of grief for something of profound value that seems irrevocably lost – . . . in the form in which it is 'remembered'" (5). In his book *Imaginary Homelands* Salman Rushdie makes this same point as he states that:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

Although nostalgic history is told predominantly via recollection, and therefore to some extent imagination, it is a voice which demonstrates and celebrates the connectedness of the Community to its birthplace: India. What remains important then, is that the connection to place, culture and people is established through the narration of historical memory.

Writing 'Home'
As was mentioned earlier, in recent years there has been an earnest attempt by key members of the global Anglo-Indian community to use the 'voice of individuals' to construct and record a new, localized version of the Community's history. One of the ways in which they have tried to achieve this goal is by organizing an Anglo-Indian literary contest in which Anglo-Indians were invited to submit short stories and poetry. Selected contributions were subsequently published into an anthology of Anglo-Indian prose and poetry titled *Voices on the Verandah*. In the preface to the anthology, contest organizer and prominent Anglo-Indian community member Blair Williams writes:

> Why did we publish this book? To answer this, we must ask two crucial questions: How are communities defined? How are histories of small groups recorded? Stories passed from generation to generation are one way; the studies of anthropologists, sociologists and historians are another. But perhaps popular literature is the most common repository of such knowledge. (v)

He continues:

> We [Anglo-Indians] are the custodians and purveyors of our Community's history, its culture, and values. And we owe it to ourselves, to our future generations . . . to provide them with source material which goes beyond distortions of fact and derogatory literary stereotypes. Before the last generation of Anglo-Indians born in British India fades away, the need to document our stories and our way of life thus assumes paramount importance. (v-vi)

In his statement, Williams recognizes that personal stories and experiences of individual Anglo-Indians constitute historical knowledge. He therefore invites his Community to speedily usher this knowledge into the public space of literature so that it can become a part of what he hopes will become a canon of specifically Anglo-

Indian history. The poem "I Remember When" by Daphne Ruth Clarke is an example of how nostalgic writing constructs a history that privileges local knowledge and individual experience, which can ultimately be seen as functioning to (re)claim India as home.

I remember when:

In   our   little   backyard   at   home,
Our fowl roamed tame and free;
When chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys, too,
Pecked, scratched, gobbled, slept happily.
. . . .
Winged   ants   flew   into   hurricane   lamps,
Dying in hundreds against their will,
And *stick boochis* rested on guava-tree branches
For days, so silent and still.
. . . .
Barefooted experts played *gilly-dundoo*,
An outdoor, everywhere game,
Needing only a gilly and a stick,
Calloused feet and a steady aim.
. . . .
Near the kitchen, the *ayah* would sit
At the grinding stone on the back stoop,
Chatting to *luchi* sweeping out droppings
From under each large hen coop.
. . . .
Ball curry (on Sundays) with coconut rice,
A traditional family blend,
With chilli and onion chutney, as well,
Tickled everyone's palate no end.

The *kutipi* vendor would limp to the door,
Covered *dekshi* on his head,
On the spicy dish still simmering inside
Many families that day would be fed.
. . . .
I could easily go on and on-
Remembering-when gives me much pleasure- (135-8)
. . . .

The nostalgic writings produced by the Anglo-Indian community remember, idealise and pine for the colonial past – a time when the Anglo-Indian community felt a sense of belonging in India. Through these writings the Anglo-Indian community finds a speaking voice for the articulation of its own history. Through the process of narrating home, Anglo-Indians can challenge the notion that the Community was simply a 'lackey' of the English and, instead, 'prove' their knowledge about India, and share their perceptions and emotions about life there. As another example of such writing, I present Anglo-Indian writer Margaret Deefholts' aptly titled poem "Homesickness":

I want to walk again along the city streets
Thronged with people;
The hawkers, the beggars, the urchins,
The hurrying office workers
All jostling by me.
I want to hear again the
Noise and clatter of the crowds;
The honking cars, the wheezing buses,
The confusion and clamour
Beating around me.
I want to smell again the
City's dust, spices, rotting detritus
And dung and urine stench of the sidewalks;
The sweaty, sour, strong musk of
Swarming humanity
Heady within my nostrils.
I want to feel again the
Throbbing life of a crowded, dirty City,
Its colour, its movement, its intensity,
Its vitality infusing
My own heart's beat.

India is my blood, my bones.
The land,
Its harsh contrasts…
Blazing days, clamorous nights;
Its cruelty, its violence,
Its huddled, wretched filthy slums,
Its destitute skeletal poor.
Its children with swollen bellies,
Carrying naked children on their skinny hips,
Dusty, matted hair and large black eyes,
Streetwise urchins.

And beyond the City's frenetic beat,
Its tranquil timeless villages,
With mud-walled huts,
Set under the dappled shade
Of flickering leafed pipal trees.
A brown, bare-bodied farmer,
Plodding the fields behind thin oxen
And a wooden plough,
Tilling through the flowing centuries,
Watching the sunset blaze
The stubbled fields.

Small towns with neem-tree shaded
Rickshaw wallahs dozing in the lethargic
Dusty glare of a summer afternoon.
The harsh screech of country parrots

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Amid scented mango topes;
And the plaintive questing call
Of brain-fever birds
Across twilight lawns of
Red-roofed bungalows
Left over from the days
Of the old Raj. (115-6)
</div>

In this poem, Deefholts' memories come alive as she recalls the various elements of her life in India. Her desire to live these experiences again – through aesthetic recollection and even literally – is obvious. Perhaps the most powerful line of the poem is Deefholts' exclamation that "India is my blood, my bones". In this passionate statement the reader can see that, from an Anglo-Indian perspective, 'India' is not only a physical, exterior experience but that 'living India' is internalized so that it becomes the very core of Anglo-Indian identity in an emotional and spiritual sense. The detailing of such deep feeling is instrumental to forging the ties between the Anglo-Indian community and India as homeland. The nostalgic mode enables this connection to be established as it constructs a specifically Anglo-Indian history.

In expressing a longing for India, through the recollection of personal relationships and sensory experiences between the Community and India, the bond between identity and place is cemented. The process of writing 'home' in a nostalgic mode is central to establishing these bonds, as this type of writing produces a culturally specific history. As the experience of nostalgia unveils feelings, associations, and ways of living that are a part of the Community's memory, Anglo-Indians can claim their rightful place in Indian history and India as home through the production of their own history.

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