

MCCABE, JANE. *Race, Tea and Colonial Resettlement. Imperial Families, Interrupted.* Bloomsbury Press, London [etc.] 2017. xvii, 253 pp. Ill. £65.00. (E-book: £56.16.)

In 1900, Reverend Dr John Anderson Graham, a missionary of the Church of Scotland, who had settled in Kalimpong to work with the local community, founded St. Andrew's Colonial Homes. The institution became known as Dr Graham's Homes (hereafter Homes). The primary aim of Homes was to provide institutional care for tea plantation children of mixed parentage, born of British men planters and Indian women workers. The scale and ubiquity of these relationships had captured considerable public attention in the late nineteenth century. Homes adopted a scheme to facilitate the migration and settlement of these children to New Zealand. It is this scheme that is the chief subject of Jane McCabe's book.

The author's grandmother was one of the inmates of Homes, who had been sent to New Zealand as part of the scheme in 1921. The book traces the history of several such children, who were removed from the plantations to the home and then to New Zealand, focusing on six families. The search for similar families and the tracing of their histories of separation, travel and settlement is part of the nuanced and sensitive account constructed by the author. It draws together history, memory, genealogy and ethnography to tell a most unusual story. One significant aspect of the account is the inclusion of the seekers of the story in the frame of analysis – the descendants in New Zealand who have been a critical part of the research and whose questions and curiosities about their Indian past has provoked and enriched the search. It is a story, moreover, that has been recovered from many silences, two of which I shall discuss in this review.

Nearly ninety per cent of the inmates of the home were drawn from the nearby tea plantations, writes the author. Their interracial origin was framed in the archetypal opposition between the powerless Indian mother, a coolie, banished from the records and silenced to the point of erasure; and the British planter father, who was the source of identity, wealth, and social status. There has been considerable research and writing on the Anglo-Indian community in recent years.¹ This is a community legally defined by paternal descent, it denotes persons whose father or other male progenitors is or was of European descent. One major feature of the creation of this "community" was the separation from the maternal line, which researchers have noted from the period of the early nineteenth century.² This was true of the inmates of the home, too. In most case, the maternal "Indian" line was obliterated and this, argues McCabe, is one resounding silence in the story she is telling.

The general term "Anglo-Indian" has now been problematized in many ways. McCabe argues that the specificity of the plantation context must be taken into account in understanding the life trajectory of the individuals, who were brought up in Homes. Despite, for instance, the strong rhetoric of "rescue" employed by Dr Graham, the move from the plantation to Homes meant for most of the children a fall in living conditions and standards.

1. Lionel Caplan, *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Postcolonial World* (Oxford, 2001); Alison Blunt, *Domicile and Diaspora: Anglo-Indian Women and the Spatial Politics of Home* (Oxford, 2005); and Sudarshana Sen, *Anglo-Indian Women in Transition: Pride, Prejudice and Predicament* (Singapore, 2017).

2. Indrani Chatterjee, 'Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans under the East India Company', in G. Badra. G. Prakash and S. Taru (eds), *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (New Delhi, 1999), pp. 49–97.

Second, a variety of children were kept in the homes and to lump them together as “Anglo-Indian” may not be very helpful. It is also important to note that Homes was a stopping point – between their lives before, for many this meant plantations, and after, which may have been in India or in some other country. For all these families, multiple streams of migration meant transnational kin networks, in which perhaps the absence of the maternal line was the most conspicuous lack. In this respect, it is important to mark some of the characteristics of this community, which played out in the dynamics of the Homes scheme for migration.

Even though the community was marked by a heterogeneity of European paternal descent, which was not only British, in a later period, the kinship with the British imperial rulers became an important aspect of the community’s self-definition. There is a curious history associated with the naming of the community. Earlier, people of mixed descent were named Eurasians, Indo-Britons or East Indians, while British people living in India, either in government or for trade or other private purposes, were termed Anglo-Indian. In the Census of 1911, government officially termed those of mixed blood, children born of European fathers and Indian mothers and the children born of their offspring as Anglo-Indians. This general definition was included in the Government of India Act of 1919. It was confirmed after Independence. In the Indian context, Anglo-Indians emerged as a distinct minority community. On the one hand, there was some social isolation because they belonged wholly neither to the community of their fathers nor to that of their mothers. On the other hand, however, a strong culture of endogamy gave an intergenerational definition to the group.

Historically, they were culturally marked by their proximity to the community of their fathers rather than of their Indian mothers. They were the only community to use English as their mother tongue, professed Christianity and generally followed European habits in, for instance, dress and food. Even so, they were not accepted in the social world of the British in India. Instead, a large majority were absorbed in the lower echelons of the Raj, in customs and excise, post and telegraph, railways, teaching professions, mines, plantations, and other such varied employment. Within the community, there were contradictory forces at play. There were stable and well-established member of the community, anchored in India. There was, however, also considerable instability, given the in-between, the racial and social middleliness of the people. One expression of this unsettled character was in preference for migration to such countries as Great Britain, Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. There has been some exploration of such patterns of migration in recent years; in this book, the author traces the thinking behind an assisted scheme for migration from the beginning of the twentieth century. The attempts began in 1905 and gained momentum in 1908 but the peak of this effort was in the 1920s. Three groups were sent from Kalimpong to New Zealand in quick succession in 1920–21. The scheme began to falter in the mid-1930s and by 1938 became non-operational. Dr Graham visited New Zealand in 1937 and visited the Homes immigrants to a fair degree of publicity but this did not help to restart the scheme. His efforts were interrupted by the war.

The book narrates the efforts to place young men and women in employment and to settle them in different parts of New Zealand. There were major differences in the lifeways of men and women. In the case of women, marriage often gave them greater anchor in the settler colony’s society. The author also shows the divergences between the north and south of the country, the concentration shifting from south to north over a period of time. The typical employment envisaged for the immigrants was farm work for the men and domestic service

for the women. Apart from farm work, some men worked for forest camps, a few were in other professions, urban working class or clerical employment. On the whole, these jobs were physically exacting, involved long hours in basic living conditions, and the workers suffered from extremely cold weather in winter. Some of the women, too, did farm work or were taken into nursing or social work. There was, however, some degree of mobility; both men and women were able to change jobs and improve their prospects.

The author takes the story forward to the 1950s and 1970s, when there was a steady stream of migration as well as some continuity in networks among migrants from Kalimpong. The author also explores multiple connections between families located in different parts of the British empire – a sister married in Britain with other siblings settled in New Zealand or siblings separated by the Home scheme, some in India and some in New Zealand. These tendencies increased after India became independent. For instance, by some estimates, the Anglo-Indian community was reduced to less than one-third its strength from the time of independence to the turn of the twenty-first century. Thus, transnational families are common to the experience of the community in the present.

I have mentioned the erasure of the mother as one strong element of this story. In the final chapter, the author writes of another enveloping silence. The Kalimpong settlers were invariably silent about their heritage, leaving a trail of a perplexing intergenerational legacy. Most settlers did not mention or speak at any length about their Indian past. There were variations – in some cases, the past was hidden, in others, it was not actually hidden but not discussed. In some cases, there were some stories told but details omitted. This may have been a generational characteristic marked by a strong notion of privacy or it may have been from a consciousness of stigma about racial miscegenation, institutionalization, and/or illegitimacy. The exploration of these issues is an important trope of family history and has animated the search by descendants and is an important element of this book. The author explores the issues of skin colour, food, language, class status, and other elements in the Indian legacy of settlers, which contributed to the complexity of identity formation. The book ends on an interesting note – the much easier acceptance of their Indian past among descendants and their attempts to recover these by visits to Kalimpong. The contrast, she writes, is between the stability of the settlers and the mobility of the descendants. To the settlers, the Indian past was an inconvenience for their social acceptance in the settler colony; to their children, the excavation of that past is a disruption of received family history.

This book contributes greatly to our understanding of the intersections of race, family, and community within the British imperial framework and the transnational flows and network of people that characterized the long twentieth century. It contributes towards the growing genre of family history and will help students of commonwealth and imperial histories.

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