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## THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF ANGLO-INDIAN WORKING WOMEN IN THE TWILIGHT OF EMPIRE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the lives of Anglo-Indian women in employment in the late colonial period. In doing so it emphasises the importance of categories in policing the location of Anglo-Indians within the world of the domiciled and the socio-racial hierarchy of the Raj. The experience of Anglo-Indian women who travelled to Africa and the Middle East before and during World War II, helps to demonstrate how selective identification with Britishness and with India contributed to shaping individual lives and identities. The case of military nurses is particularly foregrounded, based on an interview with Florence Watkins in Jubbulpore in 2010.*

### INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Indians are a mixed race group which arose out of the European mercantile and colonial presence in South Asia. Unions (primarily) between European men and Indian or mixed race women, eventually resulted in the emergence of a micro-community as a significant buttressing adjunct to the smaller colonial British population. Anglo-Indians developed as an Anglophone Christian group, and became increasingly (though never entirely) endogamous as consequential boundaries were drawn between them and colonial Britons through processes of social closure and legalised forms of discrimination which marked them out from both colonisers and colonised. Nonetheless Anglo-Indians were substantially co-opted by and materially rewarded for service to the colonial state. Anglo-Indian women played a very significant role in the economic and social life of the group. Divergent responses to decolonisation and shifting group orientation, played out in the arenas of women's work, identities and politics. This paper particularly emphasises the experience of working women whose careers were central to their constructions of self, relationships to Britishness, identification with India as home,

and accommodations with Indian nationalism.

### PIONEERING PROFESSIONALS

Anglo-Indian women in the late colonial period were more likely to be working women than Indian or colonial British women of similar or superordinate socioeconomic status. The *Report of the Pauperism Committee* (Calcutta, 1892) into unemployment among 'Indo-Europeans' (conjoining those of mixed descent with so-called poor whites) in Calcutta compiled some interesting data on women's employment from private companies and firms in the city. After referring more specifically to 'Eurasians' the Report of the Avenues of Employment Sub-Committee records that 'Messrs. Moore and Company' (who dealt in selling silks and textiles) employed '7 males and 16 females', and 'Messrs. Whiteaway, Laidlaw and Company... 20 males and 34 females' (*Ibid.*, Appendix III., 'Report of the Avenues of Employment Sub-Committee', p. liv). 'Whiteaway, Laidlaw & Co (nicknamed 'Right-away & Paid-for' because it operated on cash only)... was 'the' colonial emporium or department store in India and became a household name throughout the East' (Bandyopadhyay, 2016). This anticipates a long association of Anglo-Indian women with positions in the service industry, especially as saleswomen, which persisted and expanded in the postcolonial era.

Whilst the 'circular letter' sent out to 'Railway and Steam Navigation Companies... merchants and agents... architects and builders... mill-owners... leading tradesmen' and other employers requested a breakdown of 'domiciled Europeans and Eurasians.... on salaries below 100 rupees a month, distinguishing sex', the absence of responses mentioning female employees probably indicates they were not generally employed in these fields, which included many technical and physically arduous (and even dangerous) forms of labour (*Report of the Pauperism Committee*, Appendix III, p. xlvi). Some entries explicitly stated that there were 'No females', such as the East Indian Railways who employed 268 'Eurasians' (*Ibid.*, 'Annexure B. Railways', p. lxiii). However, a letter from the Agent and Manager of the Madras Railway on 13<sup>th</sup> August 1891 revealed 111 Domiciled European men and two women, and 845 Eurasian men and 22 women (*Ibid.*, p. lxiv). The Bengal Telephone Company reported '12 European and Eurasian males and 1 female' being unaware of their domicile, (*Ibid.*, 'Annexure C. Miscellaneous', p. lxvii) whilst the Corporation

of Calcutta employed 'One Eurasian Female vaccinator' alongside one European and 14 Eurasian men (*Ibid.*, p. lxix).

The first two Indian women to qualify as doctors, both in 1886, were Kadambini Ganguly (in Bengal) and Anandibai Joshi (in the U.S.A.). However, Anglo-Indian women were particularly prominent among the small number of practicing women doctors worldwide in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were also pioneers in fields such as nursing, where they anticipated the increasing participation of other Indian communities, particularly Christian women from South India. In both professions they would be prepared to travel globally, especially during the First and Second World Wars. In wartime records European names can make it at least as hard for the historian as for a recruiting office clerk to distinguish colonial Britons, from 'Domiciled Europeans' and Anglo-Indians. A list of 'Domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians on War Service' from the First World War compiled by an Anglo-Indian politician, is likely to include those of mixed race self-identifying under both designations as well as Europeans of Indian domicile (NAI, Legislative Department, 1921, supplementary, 1919, p. 1). The combined list includes 'Miss B. Bernard' and 'Miss I. Bernard' who had signed up in Agra for 'Woman[']s] War Work'; and two other women who also shared a family name, 'Blake', who had enlisted in Madras, with one serving as a 'Staff Nurse' at the Military Hospital, Lahore, and the other a 'Nurse' at the Military Hospital, Agra (*Ibid.*).

Though they predominantly served in subordinate capacities to colonial British nurses, as in other fields of employment they were proportionately more likely to work than most colonial British women. As Elizabeth Buettner (2004) argues, by the 1930s 'paid work outside the home for unmarried middle-class women had slowly shed some of its stigma in Britain... [yet] British women in India' still avoided 'teaching, nursing, working in... department stores, and [jobs] as typists and receptionists' to avoid perceived 'inclusion within the category of the racially mixed – in effect judged by the company they kept.' (p. 103). Buettner (2004) cites Godden's (1987) observation that Calcutta's 'schools of dancing were run almost exclusively by Eurasians', (p. 86) to make her case that 'Teaching ballet posed... [a] risk' to colonial Britons of being associated with or mistaken for Anglo-Indians (pp. 103-4). Additionally unlike many middle class women in Britain, Anglo-Indian women did not

usually face the expectation that they would cease working after marriage, making room for more long running careers.



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Fig. 1 Advertisement appearing in the *Anglo-Indian Review*, for the business of 'Miss June Knight, a Anglo-Indian girl only 18 years old who... started a dancing Academy of her own in Calcutta.' (December, 1929, pp. vi, 9)

As well as forging ahead in careers such as medicine, nursing, education, dance, music, telephony, clerkships and secretarial work, Anglo-Indian women were also involved in communal politics during the late colonial period. However, the assumption early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century appeared to be that Anglo-Indian women politicians would be focused on organising charitable, fund-raising and social events. This likely dampened their aspirations, generally limiting them to the provincial sphere.

In 1929 the provincial branches of the Association had no women presidents or secretaries, but district branches had two female presidents and six secretaries (*Anglo-Indian Review*, February, 1929, front matter, and October, 1929, p. 2). The year had also begun without a single female member of the Association's central governing body, but in July two women were finally appointed, one of whom, Mrs.

Ellen West of Calcutta, later replaced Earnest Timothy Mcluskie (founder of the Anglo-Indian agricultural colony of McCluskiegunge), as the Member of the Legislative Council of Bengal representing Anglo-Indians until her death almost a decade later in 1938 (*Ibid.*, July, 1929, p. 2, and March, 1938, p. 6). The *Review* (March, 1935) also celebrated Dr. May Shave, who also served in a 'Provincial Legislative Council', and was first Vice-President, and then President ('for over five years'), of the Lahore branch (pp. 8-9). Shave had graduated from Grant Medical College in 1908, married a member of the Indian Medical Department (almost exclusively comprised of domiciled men serving as Assistant Surgeons on lower salaries than their Indian and British colleagues in the Indian Medical Service and the Royal Army Medical Corps) in 1910, was temporarily put in charge of 'the Lady Aitchison Hospital, Lahore,' during WWI, and continued her own extensive private practice in Lahore alongside her burgeoning political career (*ibid.*). Thus, in the context of the time, it is apparent that Anglo-Indian women were enterprising and achieving considerable success in a wide variety of public and professional endeavours.

#### CATEGORIES OF ASCRIPTION, SELF-ASSERTION AND ELEVATION

To understand the reasons for colonial British women seeking to distance themselves from Anglo-Indian women and their predilection for work in colonial India, we need first to examine the consequential categories that attempted to map and police the Raj's socio-racial hierarchy of 'ethnic boundary making' (Wimmer, 2013), which were particularly inflected with racial and class attitudes. Other scholars such as Alison Blunt (2005) and Satoshi Mizutani (2011) have followed Buettner (2004) in emphasising the centrality of the English legal concept of domicile to policing racial boundaries. As Durba Ghosh's (2006) work reveals, legitimacy was constructed as a legal dividing line from the earliest period of 'interracial sex' into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as it was inaccurately constructed as a proxy for class status when the 'mixed race' children of offspring of more elite East India Company servants and army officers, who found themselves in the Military Upper Orphan School in Calcutta were assumed to be of legitimate descent (and could therefore in some periods be sent to England) whilst the children of private soldiers in the Lower Orphan School were assumed to be illegitimate (2006, pp. 229-230). Towards the end of imperial rule and in its aftermath legitimacy would return as a salient means of policing access to

British citizenship and subjecthood, and consequent rights to migration and assisted passages to the UK. Yet in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries despite suffering increasing subordination and discrimination it was still possible for individuals of mixed race to be surprisingly successful, with their prospects consequentially affected by a supposedly legal dividing line over legitimate or illegitimate descent. People of mixed race were strongly incentivised towards group formation by prohibitions on their employment by the East India Company State (particularly in 1791 and 1795), which resulted in a series of petitions from the group in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta between 1827-29.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century progressed, processes of social closure by colonial Britons, increasingly fostered a greater degree of bounded endogamy for the group, leading to multiple generations of (for the most part, religiously sanctioned and legally recognised) marriages within the group. This, and the rise of scientific racism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rendered the contested legitimacy of the earlier unions of their first European male and South Asian female progenitors less salient relative to a new dividing line of domicile. Whilst claims of illegitimacy could be deployed to exclude some of the mixed from a British status,<sup>1</sup> even those who asserted an (often contested) claim to exclusively European and entirely legitimate descent could now be constructed as having acquired Indian domicile if they had been resident in India for multiple generations. Buettner (2004) first alerted us to how by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century domicile had become the new ordering principle (replacing legitimacy) for dividing those claiming (varying degrees of) whiteness along what were more accurately social, racial, and class lines. She highlights the great lengths to which colonial Britons would go to ensure that, in multigenerational *Empire Families*, their offspring, particularly boys, maintained British domicile. Schooling at the metropole was a key marker in asserting a 'non-Asiatic' British domicile, and securing eligibility to the elite tiers of colonial service. It was thus deemed essential

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<sup>1</sup> Britishness was not a single social or legal status, but a range of self-asserted as well as ascribed statuses, with varying degrees of cultural and or legal proximity to the imperial metropole. As well as varying categories of British subjecthood for the 'citizens' of empire, there were imperial British identities, not only among the European settler populations of the so-called 'white Dominions', but amongst, for example, Anglophone middle class black West Indians (see Rush, 2011), whose education and upbringing encouraged them to see themselves as imperial Britons in relation to the 'mother country'. Claims to Britishness and identification with Britain thus varied in degree as well as content.

for boys. However, colonial British girls, so long as they did not acquire markers of Indian domicile (most notably the lilting 'chi chi' accent prevalent among Anglo-Indians and the domiciled more generally, or work outside of the home in positions proximate to Anglo-Indian women), could maintain their status as British and remain suitable marriage partners for colonial British men (Buettner, 2004). By contrast, a few more successful Anglo-Indian families were able to travel to the UK on holidays, to live, or for education – such as Eunice Gomez, 'an Anglo-Indian young lady of Trivandrum', whom, as Blunt (2005) has previously noted, attended the University of Oxford and 'passed the Honours in Language and Literature' (*Anglo-Indian Review*, September, 1929, pp. 8-9). Establishing such recent ties to the UK would have provided them with social capital within their group and to some extent more broadly, but it was less likely to affect the domicile ascribed to them, especially if their skin was not sufficiently fair to engage in racial passing.

That domicile, like legitimacy, posed as a clearly demarcated division in law, whilst still effectively functioning as a proxy for racial and racialised-class difference, is illustrated by such contradictions as: (a) Indian-born colonial British girls not requiring education in Britain to maintain their domiciliary status, (b) some colonial British families not being able to afford an education in Britain for their sons, and (c) the fact that those ascribed a domiciled status (both Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans) were socio-economically stratified groups, some of whose members could afford and did provide a metropolitan education for their offspring. Mizutani's (2011) work further developed Buettner's (2004) theme of constructing whiteness in complex ways, through the deployment of the category of Domiciled Europeans who self-asserted unmixed descent, but who were nevertheless constructed as being outside the boundaries of uncontested whiteness. Thus domicile and a domiciled category, which existed on the borderline of whiteness and *mestizaje*, could help the colonial British group police their own boundaries and consequent access to the more elite positions of colonial service.

As these categories, ascribed and self-asserted, were so consequential to group formation, boundedness, political organisation, and one's position in an ever evolving socio-racial hierarchy (most clearly embodied in discriminatory structures of employment, which there is not space to explore here), we must give some account

of them before proceeding further. The polymath, racial theorist, and advocate of pan-Eurasianism and, later, of *Coloured Cosmopolitanism* (Slate, 2011), Cedric Dover was an Anglo-Indian who preferred to self-identify with the more expansive category Eurasian, which allowed him to construct a broader collectivity with mixed race peoples across Asia. The title of Dover's seminal work, *Half-Caste* (1937), was the most derogatory epithet applied to those of mixed race in India from the earliest days of Company rule. More euphemistic was 'country-born'. In the late 1820s debates within the group amidst a political awakening (articulated in a politics of petitioning), a series of terms were argued for and against by rival factions including: Anglo Asians, Anglo Indians, Asians, Asiaticks, Asiatick Britons, East Indians, Eurasians and Indo-Britons. Petitioners of the Company state in Madras in 1827, who vehemently objected to its use of 'Half Caste' as deeply wounding, argued for Eurasian, and expressed their disappointment 'that one party who are favourable to the term "Indo Briton" have entered on private means to establish that term... [in] a procedure improper and unjust' (BL, IOR/F/4/1115, 28<sup>th</sup>, December, 1827, p. 354).

The Company's own correspondence reveals that they favoured Indo-Briton precisely because of its capacity to engender identification 'with the English nation' from those who were in some cases 'Indo-Germans or 'Indo-Dutchmen' by descent (BL, IOR/F/4/1115, 30<sup>th</sup>, November 1827, pp. 346-347). This is highly significant as the fictive boundaries implied by the term Indo-Briton were far narrower than the Madras petitioners favoured term, Eurasian (which would later be championed by Dover for its boundary expanding potential to foster a common identity with other mixed race groups across Asia), or indeed the designation chosen by John William Ricketts in his 1829 petition to parliament – East Indian, which would have been highly advantageous for the group had it been retained into the late colonial era when the group was responding to Indian nationalism. Through category ascription, the content of education shaped by colonial Britons and western religious orders, as well as the Raj's socio-racial employment hierarchy, the group was incentivised towards a boundary-blurring identification with Britain. This facet of Anglo-Indian identity would pose great challenges as India moved towards Independence.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the term Eurasian had become highly inflected with racial scorn. As a result the group's major political bodies again campaigned for a

redesignation, this time to Anglo-Indians. The category change achieved state-sanction in the 1911 Census of India and persisted as the group's legal and official designation in all colonial and Indian constitution-making thereafter. Dover's and a few subsequent discordant voices notwithstanding, the new term was embraced by most of the group. The term Anglo-Indian had the advantage of being more racially ambiguous, as it had previously been used, and would occasionally persist in being used, to refer to colonial Britons. It was therefore initially loaded with the social capital of colonial Britons and asserted the mixed group's orientation towards Britain and its attempts to blur boundaries between itself and Britishness as well as whiteness. It also facilitated the disavowal of Indian ancestry by some members of the mixed group who wished to engage in racial passing, especially as its definition at least as early as the 1935 Government of India Act was deliberately constructed to specify European descent in the male line without reference to Indian ancestry. Thus it could include both those who acknowledged Indian maternal ancestry and those who denied it. Self-assertion of the Domiciled European category provided a more emphatic claim to exclusively European descent, even though this was contested by colonial Britons (see Buettner, 2004) and by Anglo-Indians.

There is very extensive evidence from within the Anglo-Indian group that many Domiciled Europeans were fairer skinned Anglo-Indians who could use the Domiciled European category in their attempt to ascend the socio-racial hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> Externally and to a large degree internally, the 'domiciled community' was more broadly constructed to include both Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans for much of the late colonial period, and both were ascribed to the legal status of being Statutory Natives of India, which was critical to the politics of their claims to continuing state employment as an Indian minority in the face of Indianisation, particularly after the 1919 Government of India Act.

Until 1935 Burma was treated as though it were a province of British India, and it attracted a large number of Anglo-Indian migrants to work on the railways, other state services, and for private industries such as logging. In Burma the ethnic Anglo-

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<sup>2</sup> Owing to considerations of brevity here, readers may refer to the author's other forthcoming publications.

Indians intermarried and enjoyed a common legal and constitutional status with ethnic Anglo-Burmans under the Anglo-Indian category. With the 1935 Government of Burma Act, in response to the growth of Burmese nationalism, the conjoined group of ethnic Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmans, were redesignated collectively as Anglo-Burmans. Similarly in the 1940s in anticipation of partition it became politic for Anglo-Indians in areas which were to form part of the new bifurcated state of Pakistan to be redesignated as Anglo-Pakistanis, yet without ongoing constitutional recognition of such groups it was easy for these identities to be marginalised by a broader ascription of simply being Christians. Yet in India it was significant that at Independence the Anglo-Indian category received specific measures – especially reservations (positive discrimination in Europe, or Affirmative Action in the United States) and nominated seats in the Lok Sabha and provincial legislatures – whilst the more typically communal status of Christians received no such recognition. This history clearly creates a burden of perambulatory discourse for Anglo-Indian studies, but it is within this galaxy of proliferating categories that we must locate the attempts of those of mixed and allegedly unmixed descent, to self-identify, to varying degrees with Britain and India (and Burma) and with whiteness and mixedness, in pursuit of individual and collective strategies of repositioning and boundary blurring.

Particularly prominent in our exploration of such attempts at repositioning (or ‘racial passing’) here will be the work of Anglo-Indian women in spheres such as medicine, teaching, and, more specifically, nursing. The nursing profession in late colonial India was a gendered profession with a socio-racial hierarchy which mirrored that faced by Anglo-Indian men in the service of the colonial state and the railways. The most highly remunerated positions went to Britons who had come out to India, with those of Indian domicile (not synonymous with place of birth, or even, in the case of women, place of education) being subordinated into more middling positions between coloniser and colonised. Such a position still placed Anglo-Indians above and in relative privilege to the great majority of South Asians. Though explicit discrimination in tiers of service, pay, perquisites and promotion prospects, was extensively challenged by Indian members of the central and provincial legislatures set up in 1919, and had to be rendered more opaque during the late colonial period, higher *de facto* salaries and other remnants of past practice substantially persisted until the end of colonial rule. In 1929 Mr. S. C. Mitra’s question in the (Central)

Legislative Assembly charged 'that in the Accounts Department Indian clerks are entertained on Rs. 50/- per mensem whereas European or Anglo-Indian and lady clerks are entertained on Rs. 80/- and 100/- respectively' (Cited in NAI, Finance Department, 1929, p. 12).

Returning to the nursing profession, the televised adaptation of Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* provides fascinating insight into how the employment hierarchy functioned for Anglo-Indian women in India. Amidst much exploration of the intersection of class and race, of consensual and non-consensual interracial sex, and the birth of a mixed race child named Parvati, the solitary reference to Anglo-Indians is when the newly arrived Daphne Manners is corrected for saying 'thank you, nurse' with 'Oh, by the way, out here QAs [i.e. Queen Alexandra Nurses] are sisters. Only Anglo-Indians are nurses' and her apology is met with 'One of those things' – a swift induction to the importance of language and the socio-racial hierarchy ('Crossing the River', *The Jewel in the Crown*, original 1984 / DVD 2009, 11:26-11:44).

Scott himself, through a series of character-narrators (intended to be of varying reliability) devoted significantly more time to those of mixed race, with his narrators calling them Eurasian as well as Anglo-Indian, alongside use of the term Anglo-Indian in the older sense of referring to colonial British society. In the voice of Scott's original Daphne Manners:

...the rulers of the roost are the official VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment field nurses] and the QAs. You should see the airs some of the QAs give themselves. At home they'd simply be ordinary ward nurses, or staff nurses at most. Here they rank as sisters. Neither they nor the voluntary bods are supposed to do anything menial. That's all left to the poor little Anglo-Indian girls. (Scott, 1998, p. 98)

This highlights the degree of socio-racial policing of the boundaries between colonial British women, Domiciled European and Anglo-Indian women, which involved class-inflected as well as racialised forms of snobbery and othering towards those of mixed descent or Indian domicile (who were suspected by colonial Britons, and sometimes known by Anglo-Indians to include fairer skinned individuals with concealed or deliberately forgotten Indian ancestry). With such boundaries being so socially, materially and professionally consequential for domiciled women (whether they identified as being of mixed or unmixed descent – and self-identification as Anglo-

Indian did not preclude claims to the latter) it is not surprising that movement could be used as an opportunity for socio-racial repositioning across such boundaries. Roy Nissen, a self-identifying Domiciled European, whose social existence was interwoven with Anglo-Indians (who accused him of being a 'fair Anglo-Indian'), said of his sister, who was a nurse and the matron of a sanitarium that she was 'infinitely more qualified than a good many of the colonial British Queen Alexandra nurses, and yet was 'treated as dirt in comparis[on]... by these Queen Alexandra nurses' (BL, Mss Eur R189, Nissen, 1989).

Despite ill treatment by colonial Britons in India, Anglo-Indians and Domiciled Europeans such as Nissen often imagined they would receive a fairer hearing at the metropole. Even if this belief proved ill-founded migration is and was a potential means of elevation, which could often facilitate attempts to change one's ascribed status in order to pass from one group to another. Whether the boundary is one of caste, class, or race, such attempted repositionings were functionally similar. As H. Simons persuasively argued 'Social mobility is much the same thing, whether it occurs between classes or between colour groups. To be accepted, the climber must adopt the habits, style of life, and attitudes of the group to which he aspires.' (H. Simons 'Preface' in Watson, 1970, p. vii).

While such attempts would be, by their nature, secretive, and usually invisible when they succeeded, it is not difficult to see how travelling within the empire could form part of an effective strategy for repositioning, when moving to a new location involves more reliance on documentary evidence (filtered through bureaucratic norms) and when one is less known to others in the new surroundings. To give an example of where such attempts might have been made, the imperial authorities in British Honduras found that their advertised salary of £300 was insufficient to attract young European doctors to the post of Assistant Medical Officer in the colony, and discussed whether the proposed salary should be increased or whether they should knowingly accept 'well qualified but inexperienced Eurasian or coloured creole doctors' (NAUK, CO/123/276/86, p. 244).

We cannot be sure whether they used 'Eurasian' to refer to those of mixed descent from South Asia, East Asia or Southeast Asia. Yet when there is extensive evidence

of successful repositioning by Anglo-Indians within India, it is not difficult to imagine fairer skinned Domiciled Europeans or Anglo-Indians being accepted as Europeans or Britons by migrating great distances to take up such positions. The stresses, confusion and demands of two global conflicts in particular brought increased opportunities to ascend the socio-racial hierarchies of empire.

#### SERVING INDIAN PRINCES AND AN AFRICAN KING

Such categories and their consequences are particularly important in Anglo-Indian women's employment in the late colonial period. The 1921 'Annual Return of Europeans and Eurasians Employed in the Kapurthala State' reveals that 'Miss G. M. Friend Pereira M.D.', listed as Eurasian, had been employed since 1901 as 'Lady Doctor to Her Highness the Maharani Sahiba and Ranis and in charge [of the] Female Hospital', on Rs. 425 per month as well as 'House and carriage' (NAI, Punjab State Agency, 1922, p. 8). 'Native' or Princely States, being indirectly ruled by Britain through Indian princes, were probably slower to change their use of Eurasian to Anglo-Indian than the colonial administrations of British Indian provinces. In Bahawalpur (Punjab), 'Miss. Z. E. Decosta.' had worked as a 'Lady Doctor' since 1908, on Rs. 700, with her own personal assistant – Miss Brown (*Ibid.*, p. 18). All three women were listed as British Subjects, but Decosta and Brown were also declared to be Europeans. It is not a stretch to suppose that Decosta, based on the prevalence of her surname amongst Anglo-Indians, was domiciled, and probably an Anglo-Indian with the social capital and complexion to pass as European, even if this must be considered a conjecture. The Punjab States Returns also reveals Anglo-Indian women as prominent in the teaching profession, with a Miss Angelina Thomas, serving as Head Mistress of a local Girls' School on Rs. 90 per month, and a Miss J. Reid, Head Mistress of a Girls' School on Rs. 50, both of whom were listed as Eurasian and as British Subjects (*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 4).

In 1930 a list was compiled 'of Anglo-Indians and... [Indians, and their dependents,] who came with Dr C. Martin and... [were] registered at the British Consulate, Addis Ababa', Abyssinia/ Ethiopia, mostly to work in a range of relatively middle class professions (e.g. engineering, surveying and teaching) on three year probationary contracts for King Taffari (NAI, Foreign & Political, 25<sup>th</sup>, June, 1930). They had been recruited a year after the globally impactful Wall Street Crash in the United States.

Like the far greater number of poor indentured workers who were induced to migrate to South Africa and East Africa, the conditions they encountered on arrival failed to live up to the assurances made to induce them to undertake the journey.

The first on the list was a Miss H. Hickie, born in Dum-Dum in India, who was a nurse unaccompanied by family members. Another 'Nursing Sister', Miss Mabel Melvill (born in Dehradun), we may presume to have accompanied her husband or male relative, Mr E. G. Melvill (born in Mussoorie), who was a Civil Engineer. Almost half of the group had identifiably Indian surnames, the rest had European names. Martin had advertised 'for Service in Abyssinia... in the Statesman... for a lady doctor and a lady teacher' (NAI, Foreign & Political, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1930, p. 2). A Miss D. H. Carleton of Dehradun whose sister had been offered the doctor position, and who was herself offered the teaching position, wrote to the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India asking whether it would 'be quite safe for us to go and work in that country.' (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

Carleton remained sufficiently interested to ask about the feasibility of Martin's claims that employees would be paid in rupees and asked whether 'English or Indian coinage [could] be obtained easily in such a country?' (*Ibid.*, Letter, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1930, p. 1). She found him to be 'most persuasive and very keen that we should go with him' (*Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930, p. 1). However, over the course of several letters she evinced a growing scepticism at Martin's 'queer methods of recruitment', (*Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930, p. 3) as he sought to persuade the sisters to sail with him within the month with the contracts 'to be signed... on board ship going to the port [of] Djibouti' (*Ibid.*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 1930, p. 4). Her enquiries to Government as to whether he was 'an authentic agent of the Ethiopian Government and... [whether] his credentials [were] quite in order' and if he had 'the required permission from the British Foreign Office to recruit and take British people to work in his Country', appeared to have hastened his departure with those he had already recruited (*Ibid.*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1930, p. 1).

A telegraph from the British representative in Addis Ababa opined that local conditions were 'still primitive in many respects, and though suitable for men... [were] less suitable for women.' (NAI, Foreign & Political, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1930). Carleton was advised to ensure contracts were signed before departure and to register at the

British Consulate on arrival. She was acquainted with the Melvills who had also been living in Dehradun and knew that they had decided to proceed. Carleton claimed she and her sisters were domiciled in Scotland and explained that:

...the appointments he offers us seem tempting. In these hard times we should not like to miss the chance of good posts, for with so much unemployment at home, and with the present economic crisis in the this country Britishers are glad to have an opportunity of earning a living honestly. Professional people like ourselves and mere girls cannot turn to doles [i.e. welfare] to support us. We prefer to work and earn. (*Ibid.*, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1930, p. 2)

In this passage, she made various claims to social capital – by ‘at home’ she meant Britain, by ‘this country’ she meant India, and by presenting herself and her sister as professional and preferring to work she signaled both the status and values she believed distinguished them from others. However, whilst asserting Scottish domicile she made no mention of having been born in Scotland, which would not have been out of place amidst so many disclosures. So while the two sisters may have been colonial Britons acquainted with the presumably domiciled European or Anglo-Indian Melvills, it is not hard to conjecture that the Carletons too may have been domiciled, but seeking to project an identity which attracted considerable efforts from the colonial state to address their concerns. Whatever the answer to this question, Carleton’s astute judgement about the whole ill-fated enterprise remains revealing:

He was a very clever man to come to India at the time of such political unrest and take people who were suffering from the pressure of economic disaster in this country and would not think of what they may be going to in that country as long as they could earn a wage promised them. He would have them entirely in his power and to do with as he wished. In taking Anglo-Indians he knew that these poor folk would not be entitled to protection if there was a sudden upheaval in India the Government here might not bother about them or their fate in Abyssinia. Perhaps he did not take us when he found that we insisted on going there as British for we are British... He seemed very much annoyed in his reply to my cable... (*Ibid.*, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930, pp. 3-4)

The level of response that Carleton received to her enquiries to Government were connected with her claims to being British. Whether or not these claims were true, the distinctions she drew asserted a consequential superordinate status. It is perhaps telling that she protested her Britishness so much and seemed to take solace in this having been the basis for her and her sister not ultimately being employed. The key point is that Carleton was only willing to undertake work

overseas if she was understood to be going as an imperial Briton and not, like others who ended up going with Martin, as an Anglo-Indian.

However, the sisters had been fortunate. An Intelligence Report on Abyssinia in December 1930 found the majority of recruits were already 'returning to India' (*Ibid.*, J 571/571/1, 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1930). In 1931 the British Legation in Addis Ababa had declared 'Dr. Martin's experiment has proved far from a success', attributing its failure to 'no adequate preparation... beforehand for the reception of the Indians', 'unwise' recruiting methods, and that 'the Ethiopian Government... [had] not yet learnt the art of keeping foreigners contented in their service' (NAI, Foreign & Political, 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1931, p. 2). While some paid their own fares, many waited for Martin to furnish the money for their return to India, and the British Consul had to intervene in several instances to ensure this, for example obtaining Rs. 800 for S. Mayadas and G. W. Lall to return, and the 'money to cover expenses of... repatriation at the cheapest rates and also... arrears of pay' for an E. W. Mckinley who it was claimed had been 'dismissed... for constant drunkenness.' (*Ibid.*, p. 1). These efforts to repatriate mainly professional Indians and Anglo-Indians contrast with the almost complete disregard for the welfare of poorer classes of indentured labourers who gave rise to a significant portion of the global South Asian diaspora. The Anglo-Indian female nurses who had been willing to go to East Africa prefigured those who would go in far greater numbers during WWII. Failure exposed all to the charge of foolhardiness, but these women had also displayed dynamism, courage and enterprise.

## GLOBAL NURSES IN WORLD WAR II

Anglo-Indian women served as nurses in both world wars as well as in the Women's Auxiliary Corps (India) during the Second World War, while the latter were more likely to see service in India and Burma, the former could either find themselves taking over from British nurses in India or being deployed in various global theatres of conflict. As one of the colonial British nurses of the superordinate Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) recounted, during World War II:

Practically all the British personnel were removed from our hospitals and their place taken by Anglo-Indians, all of whom had to be trained

as quickly and efficiently as possible into useful members of the Royal Army Medical Corps. Members of the Auxiliary Nursing Service, India, also came to help us and to receive instructions. (NAUK, WO 222/189/10, cited in Starns, 2010, p. 34)

In Burma, threatened with Japanese invasion, colonial British women were clandestinely evacuated by sea, a measure those in charge sought to keep secret from the mixed race group, now designated collectively as Anglo-Burman. Its leader Charles Haswell Campagnac (2013) was an ethnic Anglo-Indian, but married to an ethnic Anglo-Burman. Campagnac's great-grandfather (the first Charles Campagnac) had been 'a French Huguenot... [in] the service of the King of Oudh', and his grandfather (also Charles) received a medal for his role defending the Residency in the Siege of Lucknow (lulu.com, pp. 3-5). Campagnac was born in Calcutta and lived only briefly in Burma, receiving some of his schooling in Darjeeling and most of it in England, where, after a brief sojourn in Paris for want of funds, he eventually qualified as a barrister. However, his father Alexander spent his career as an educationalist in Burma in the service of its colonial government, and it was to Rangoon that Campagnac returned to begin his legal career – soon combined with concurrent success in politics. As leader Campagnac appears to have been instrumental to the redesignation of his conjoined group when he was invited to represent them as 'Anglo-Indians' at the Burma Round Table Conference of 1931. He thus embodied in his person as well as his career the deep intertwining of the Anglo-Burman and Anglo-Indian groups, with each having been subsumed as a nested social category under the other as a legal and political category before and after 1935.

In India, Anglo-Burman women (including some ethnically Anglo-Indian women of Burmese domicile) were working as 'clerks at Army Head Quarters... [and staffing] the telephone exchanges... up to the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1942, when they were ordered to evacuate' (NAUK, FO/643/140, 10<sup>th</sup> February, damaged – believed to be 1949, pp. 3, 41). The last English woman in Rangoon, 'Lady June Hobson, head of the St. John's Ambulance,' (Campagnac, 2013, p. 321) would later write to Campagnac after he had been evacuated by air to India to say:

I feel very deeply and very strongly about the Anglo-Burmans. I know what magnificent service they rendered in Rangoon and later up-country. People even now do not appreciate, that there would have

been no first aid service day and night in Rangoon, had it not been for the Anglo-Burman girls coming straight from work, to sleep in their clothes at our Headquarters, and man their posts at each alert... The majority of our nursing divisions were Anglo-Burmans. (Cited in NAUK, FO/643/140, pp. 3, 41)

In India Anglo-Indian women had also enrolled as nurses at the outset of the war, generally signing up merely for 'the duration' to be demobilised at its conclusion. However, there were Anglo-Indian career nurses for whom the war provided a means of further advancement. One such example is Florence Watkins (who went by Flora), who was born in Nagpur in 1912. The author interviewed Watkins over the course of two days at her home during fieldwork in the tier two city of Jabalpur (modern Madhya Pradesh) in 2010. Jabalpur (Central Provinces), as it used to be known, is a major railway junction, and was the hometown of the Anglo-Indian national leader (1942-93) Frank Anthony. Watkins had five brothers and five sisters, most younger than herself. Their father was a subdivisional officer on the Engineering Telegraph (and would later serve as Anthony's secretary despite being many years his senior). Characteristic of the general mobility of Anglo-Indian families serving the colonial state, and of the specific connections a significant minority of them had with Burma, her family had also spent time there during her youth. Watkins recalls:

...oh my, he roamed all over the place... I still remember we were, we were little things, 4 and 5 I think we were, when he was posted from Igatpuri to Burma... we all had to run with him wherever he went... We had an ayah, we had a bearer, and we had a cook... and they all came with us to Burma, and they all came back with us.

Watkins' father also served overseas in WWI, returning with a 'Mesopotamian carpet' and a 'camp bed' which she would take with her when she was sent to the Sudan. After finishing her Senior Cambridge and finishing a Pitman course in shorthand and typing, which strained her wrist, she told her parents that she wanted to be a nurse. Being under 21 years of age she was not eligible to sit the exam, but the matron of a hospital agreed to take her as a 'student nurse' with room and board if her father would provide her with an allowance of Rs. 40 per month in lieu of a salary. When she later qualified and joined the Indian Military Nursing Service (IMNS) in 1940 she remitted Rs. 50 of her Rs. 72 monthly salary to her parents to support the education of her younger siblings. Describing the makeup of the IMNS she said:

Most of our girls were Anglo-Indians... in the nursing side... the

majority of us were Anglo-Indians, very few were [Indian] Christians... Most of us were Anglo-Indians during the war, and it was only afterwards that, some of the Christians, in those days the Hindus and the Mohemmedans never took to nursing, they thought it was beneath their dignity, sort of thing, but it was only the Christians that used to, that took up nursing, and most of them were from the South... (Author's interview: Watkins, Jabalpur, 2010)

She was to work alongside a number of domiciled women, including two Anglo-Burmans. Initially however, Watkins was sent out to the Sudan 'as a relief party' with six others, of whom only 'one was... Anglo-Indian... more like a Domiciled European, she had that colouring too... very fair' and the other five 'were from the South... [and] had Indian names' whom she assumed to be Christian 'Malayalis' (*ibid.*). This reminds us how these categories, despite being so consequential in interactions with the colonial state, could be far vaguer and often unstated in the social arena and were not necessarily part of the explicit self-identification of individuals. Rather, in everyday life, and in self-perception, less clearly demarcated and more fuzzy conceptions of self and other abounded, and yet this did not preclude Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Burmans and Domiciled Europeans from feeling themselves part of the same social world, and perhaps, at times, of common background. Yet how the new arrivals were perceived, sorted, divided and integrated by their British superiors is instructive:

...we were put into... a combined hospital, that is British and Indian. It had a British matron. But we had... an MNS, Military Nursing Service, India, she too was a matron, so she, sort of, looked after the Indian side, and this British matron Miss Hall... looked after the British side. But we all... had to go to Miss Hall's office. And she told those five girls, she said "you will go" and she told her assistant, who, she was a Britisher as well, "you take them and hand them over to Miss D'Souza. Miss Watkins you will stay here." She said. And I, I got a bit surprised. And so she said "Miss Watkins, you will work on the British side." I, I just gave her a look, and that's all... Then she told the other Assistant Matron, she said "Please take Miss Watkins and hand her over to the British."... I know I was very self-conscious... the first time going overseas, and suddenly you take the other five off, and leave me alone somewhere else... (*ibid.*)

Watkins had a range of fascinating wartime experiences in Sudan, Egypt and Mandate Palestine. From the outset she had to contend with British unfamiliarity with the existence of Anglo-Indians as a mixed race Anglophone group culturally orientated towards Britain and Europe:

I was always referred to as the Indian sister, and I didn't mind it, after all they didn't know the difference between Anglo-Indian and Indian and all that sort of thing. Because they've never been to India they don't know it... I didn't explain it, but once or twice, one or two British officers, in the British officer ward, they said "Sister, you talk the most perfect English. You talk better English than any of us. So how did you learn this? And you're from India." I said "Yes, my mother tongue is English." "What did you say?" I said "Yes, my mother tongue is English." And they looked at me. So I said "Yes. My father and mother talk English... Our schools, all our schools... they teach us English... The nuns that are working in the schools... they are from various nationalities, Spanish, English... Irish... some are even Swiss... They all talk English, and they teach us English. There are some nuns from France, and... our second language is French... We learn French as well." And they said "Really sister?" I said "Yes... I learnt how to be a nurse from a hospital. The hospital was... brought up and manned by a British matron... we learnt all the British ways." "Oh I see." I said "Yes, I know what y'all are thinking of, y'all are thinking that we were brought down from the branches... of a tree." So they laughed like anything... I said "Yes, I know... sometimes... we've been referred to as that... "Oh don't worry about them, they're only brought down from the branches and put on uniforms, uniforms put onto them, and they've come out."" So that sort of thing, see, but then they realised when they saw our work, and how we handled things, how we served up things, how we did the dressings and things. And I know... two sisters were talking and one of them said "Do you know this little, little Indian nurse, she's making beds the way we... we are taught, where did she learn that from?" So I went up to them and said "Sister, *all* the hospitals in India are manned by *British sist...* by British matrons, or by Italian matrons, or by Spanish matrons, anything, but most are manned by British matrons. Hence why I am making a bed the same way you make it." You know they got such a shock when I told them that. It shook them... (*ibid.*)

Such experiences prefigured those of later Anglo-Indian migrants to Britain after the war, and though this might have encouraged her to identify more with India, it had, as we can observe here, led to a more emphatic assertion of her proximity to Britishness. Unsurprisingly, given Anglo-Indians sartorial preference for western suits, skirts and frocks, Anglo-Indian women opted for the western style uniforms of the WAC(I), IMNS or ANS, whilst their Indian counterparts could and did choose to wear the sari style uniforms which were also an option for these Indian services. This symbolically marked the difference between them and other Indians and closed the gap between them and British servicewomen and nurses. Yet the reaction of British women could also create distance and conflict. Watkins recalled one such

experience whilst travelling on a train, where the two groups of nurses observed and responded to one another:

[They were saying] something about our uniform, and... where did they get these uniforms stitched or something like that, and... look at their, look at their veils, they've even got that embroidered... "They've come from India, but where did they get all this from?" So they were wondering where we had got it from. So we never said anything, we just quietly smiled and in Hindi we said... "we'll tell them where we got it from"... So when we told them, "thank you for all you've thought and said about us, we are from India, we have been trained in India by British matrons... our Indian tailors have been taught to stitch by British... ladies and so they can produce better clothes than what the British ladies produce." So they were looking at us, and looking at us, each one said something you see, and so then naturally they said "Thank you." So I said "Thank you for what you've said about us. Now you know where we are, and who we are, and why we are." (*ibid.*)

Although Watkins emphasised that English was their mother tongue, and French often their second language during her youth, she revealed here that she was quite comfortable switching to basic Hindi, which in this case allowed her and her fellow nurses to listen at length to what was being said about them in English. Defining everything in relation to a civilizational scale measured by proximity to Britishness she seemed unaware that India had a longer history of global preeminence in textiles, instead equating her experience of learning British nursing methods with the probable provenance of quality Indian tailoring. However, despite its cultural ambivalence, this was a moment of solidarity with India and with Indians.

Another episode centered on food and the experience of eating created a less ambiguous sense of identification and solidarity for Watkins with her Indian background, whilst once again alienating her from her British nursing colleagues. She described how during her time in Sudan:

...we were in this combined hospital. So we had all our meals together. Now, we, girls from India... we were only used to eating butter, not margarine, like we were given during the war years. We were not given butter, we were given margarine. And the [British] QAs were eating it quite nicely, but we, were, so suddenly in the canteen... they used to call it naffy, we used to get... I don't know where they got it from, but *packets and packets of lovely Australian butter*. [Speaker's inflection] ...we had... a suitcase with us, and every week each one of us would put in so many pounds, into the suitcase and keep it, as soon as they said naffy we'd... two or three of us, whoever was off duty [clicks fingers], we would go down to the naffy and buy packets and

packets of butter and packets of... cheese, and some other things, whatever we felt that we couldn't get every day... So when we came to the dining room, we brought these packets of butter, and once or twice we heard these QAs, they were sitting at the top end of the table and we were at this end. So, once or twice: "Just look at these Indians, they can't eat margarine. Look at the, look at the butter they are eating." So I was very upset, so I said "Sister... We have never used, or been used to, or we didn't know that margarine existed! We are only seeing it now in the army. All we've had is butter, butter, butter. So that is why we couldn't get used to this. And now that there is butter in the naffy, we save our money and we buy the butter and we have it with our bread or whatever it be..." So she just looked at me, as if to say, that's enough, I've heard enough from you, sort of business, so after that we... never heard anything more. The cheese and the butter used to be passed around... (*ibid.*)

The Second World War created a field of opportunities for Anglo-Indian women like Watkins to rise to new heights of success and responsibility, as well as to face danger and acquire truly global experience. In the process it provided the means for assertion of identities which naturally grew out of the upbringing, culture and origins of the mixed and domiciled groups. Other Anglo-Indian women's strategies, during wartime service in the WAC(I) or military nursing, could consciously centre on hypergamy and/or racial passing.<sup>3</sup> Yet for Watkins, it meant a complex mix of identifications with both her self-asserted proximity to Britain, and with India, where she would choose to continue her postwar career. The managerial deficit created by the sudden removal of the top layer of the nursing profession, which had been dominated by colonial Britons, at the final stages of decolonisation, also created new opportunities for her to put her wide-ranging and high level experience to good use for the new India. By the end of the war she had been promoted to Captain, and on being informed she would be posted to Campbellpur to take over the running 'of a 95 bedded hospital... from the four British sisters that are there' her immediate response was "where on earth is Campbellpur? I don't know anything about this..." Then in the Punjab, it is now Attock in Pakistan. She was made Royal Red Cross Associate (ARRC) by the almost departing British, was presented the Florence Nightingale Medal (around 1964) by the President of India, and ultimately rose to the rank of Colonel. When her sister stepped down as President of the Jabalpur branch of the All India Anglo-Indian Association owing to a serious hand injury, Colonel

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence for the prevalence of which will be presented in Charlton-Stevens, U., *Anglo-Indians and Minority Politics in South Asia: Race, Boundary Making and Communal Nationalism* (Royal Asiatic Society Books, Routledge, forthcoming 2017)

Watkins was persuaded to step in, and was twice nominated the Anglo-Indian Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Madhya Pradesh during 1972-77 and 1980-85.

While many Anglo-Indians deployed strategies of boundary-blurring between themselves and colonial Britons, and some attempted to ascend the socio-racial hierarchy of the Raj by repositioning themselves across boundaries, for others like Watkins there was a more flexible and varied engagement with Britishness and with India. During the late colonial period she had been able to move, with increasing confidence, between the worlds of the British imperial war effort and her life in India. Whilst some Anglo-Indian women sought or entered into hypergamous marriages with allied servicemen during the war, which facilitated emigration to Britain or other Anglosphere countries, Watkins pursued her profession as a vocation and became firmly embedded in the life of the new Indian nation. Yet if the contending forces of imperialism and nationalism demanded of Anglo-Indians that they make a binary choice, it was, in a sense, a false one that would involve them in a denial of one part or other of their very being. In neither case could an Anglo-Indian simply become a Briton or an Indian as the concept was understood by some Hindu nationalists.

Anglo-Indians were a product of the imperial and colonial situation, and most were loyal to an India which existed within the British Empire, rather than being readily able to identify with the India that nationalists sought to create. However, as for the small but significant number of Anglo-Indian men who served in the armed forces after independence, having a vocation as a nurse gave Watkins a stake in the new nation, and indeed the prospects of a role of leadership and senior management within her own profession. This in turn proved to be an unintended springboard into the Anglo-Indian politics ushered in by Frank Anthony – the communal nationalism of remaining culturally distinct as Anglophone Christians able to feel themselves Indian by nationality and Anglo-Indian by community. Anthropologists such as Lionel Caplan have argued that Anglo-Indian women more readily adapted to the private sector employment opportunities (particularly in the service industries and in the hospitality and travel sector – for example as flight attendants for Air India) of the new India than Anglo-Indian men (Caplan, 2001). Consequently, Caplan suggests, many Anglo-Indian women became primary breadwinners and held family units

together during a process of difficult and challenging adaption to the post-colonial world (*ibid.*). The evidence presented here of the long history of Anglo-Indian women's work in a variety of professional spheres should provide a useful context to such observations. More importantly, we have seen what Anglo-Indian women's work could mean for their own lives, trajectories and identities. Anglo-Indian women's contributions to post-Independence politics would continue to grow, as more women took on roles as communal MLAs, following in the footsteps of pioneers such as West, Shave, and Watkins.

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