

Reinventing Home: Images of Mobility and Returns in Eurasian Memoirs

Emma J. Teng*

Abstract

During the era of imperialism, communities of Eurasians (“mixed-race” children of European and Asian ancestry) developed in various places such as India, Hong Kong, China, Singapore, and elsewhere. These Eurasians, especially those with European fathers, were often caught between multiple definitions of “home” — defined by colonial administrators, social convention, kinship ties, and personal emotional bonds. Although born in Asia, Eurasians of European descent on the paternal side were often taught to regard England (or another European country) as the “fatherland,” or “home,” despite the fact that they had never set foot in that land. Some Eurasians identified with this notion of a “homeland,” while others embraced the Asian land of their birth as “home.” The definition of “home” was more than a simple matter of individual choice. For example, whereas European paternal descent nominally entitled Eurasians in British colonies to various colonial privileges such as “home leave,” and “repatriation” to the “fatherland,” British colonial definition of these subjects as “non-whites” often blocked access to these privileges. Instead, Eurasians were often told that they were “natives” or “locals” who should stay put in their colonial homes. How did individual Eurasians negotiate competing ideologies of race and nationality embodied in various definitions of “home,” as well as

* Emma J. Teng is an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“fatherland” and “motherland”? This paper examines various memoirs written by Eurasians who were born and raised in Asia, traveled “home” to Europe under various circumstances, then returned “home” to Asia again later in life. We will see how the reinvention of the notion of “home” as a situational concept was central to their changing sense of Eurasian identity and biracial subjectivity. At the same time, I discuss how this practice of Eurasian “mobility” was strongly dependent on class status.

Keywords: Eurasian, Home, Memoirs, Mobility, Hybridity

I. Introduction: Incomplete Returns

In “The Incomplete Return,” Isabelle de Courtivron writes of the quest for home, the hunger for return expressed in many contemporary bilingual narratives.¹ Written by exiles or émigrés, such narratives reflect back, often

1 An earlier version of this essay was first presented at the International Conference on the Cultural Interpretations of Mobility sponsored by the Center for Chinese Studies at the National Central Library, Taipei, Taiwan in March 2008. Thank you to the conference organizers, panel participants, and audience for their comments and feedback. In particular, I would like to thank my panel chair, Lin Man-houng, for her excellent suggestions and probing questions. My gratitude to Li Wai-yee for sharing her memories of Mrs. Symons with me, and for connecting me with Elizabeth Sinn. I am grateful to Professor Sinn for sharing invaluable information about Mrs. Symons with me, including earlier versions of her manuscripts. Unfortunately, due to limitations of space, I have not been able to compare the versions here, as I plan to in future work. In addition, I would like to thank Wang Ayling, Liu Ching-cheng, and Huang Ying-kuei for their comments in synthesizing the conference papers. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their comments and suggestions for revision. This work was supported in part by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. My deepest gratitude to Radcliffe and to the RI Class of 2008 for providing me with the time, resources, and inspiration to carry out this project. In addition, I would like to thank Tuli Banerjee and Hilde Heynan, who read an earlier version of this essay, and inspired me to think of home in new ways. Thanks to my research assistants Sarah Sheppard, Em Ho, Betty Zhang, Joa Alexander, and Katherine Tan for their invaluable work on this project. Last but not least, I wish to thank Isabelle de Courtivron for commenting on the draft of this essay, but most of all for inspiring this piece. I dedicate this essay to her. All errors, opinions, and shortcomings remain my own.

nostalgically, on the places and languages of the authors' childhood homelands.² Driven by a sense of loss and yearning, these writers return home in later years only to find that their homecoming is always, de Courtivron argues, inevitably incomplete. As she writes:

... can we really speak of a "return"? A return to something that is no longer there, by someone who is no longer you? After overcoming those cruel years of being a foreigner in another culture, how profoundly uneasy to become a foreigner again, this time in your own lost land.³

De Courtivron's semi-autobiographical essay explores a bicultural subjectivity that emerges from the tension between the "old home" (native land) and the "new home" (adopted country), the split between two languages and cultures.⁴ Although she focuses on bilingual narratives of exile and emigration, the questions de Courtivron raises about "home" and "return" can also be applied to other types of life-writing — including those of the biracial subject.

II. Images of Mobility in Eurasian Memoirs

In Catherine Joyce Symons's memoir, *Looking at the Stars: Memoirs of Catherine Joyce Symons* (1996), the narrator describes the moment when her "repatriation ship" carrying British nationals from Shanghai and Hong Kong arrives at the final destination of Southampton, England: "Soon everyone was caught up in the excitement of reaching Southampton. As we drew alongside the pier a military band played *Rule Britannia* and tears poured down my face

2 The authors examined by de Courtivron include Andre Aciman, Marjorie Agosin, Vassilis Alexakis, Eva Hoffman, Nancy Huston, Milan Kundera, Michael Ondaatje, and Salman Rushdie.

3 Isabelle de Courtivron, "The Incomplete Return," *Life Writing* 4.1 (2007): 33.

4 Interestingly, issues of language are not brought to the forefront in the Eurasian memoirs I have examined for this essay. However, the relationship between "home" and "mother tongue" is a fascinating subject that I explore elsewhere. See, for example, Emma J. Teng, "What's 'Chinese' in Chinese Diasporic Literature?" in Charles A. Laughlin ed., *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 61-80.

— at last I was in England.”⁵ This may appear to be a rather mundane homecoming scene from the chronicles of the British Empire, except for the fact that the author is a Eurasian — born in Shanghai, raised in Hong Kong, and with only distant ancestral ties to the “fatherland” of England. To paraphrase de Courtivron, “can we really speak of a ‘return’ to a homeland one has never seen?”

In this essay, I examine motifs of return, departure and displacement in postcolonial Eurasian memoirs in order to demonstrate how the notion of “incomplete return” described by de Courtivron is further complicated for so-called “mixed race” authors for whom the very notion of “home” is fraught with ambiguity and subject to scrutiny under the racial ideology of British colonialism. Focusing on two memoirs, Symons’s *Looking at the Stars* and Peter Moss’s *Bye-Bye Blackbird: An Anglo-Indian Memoir* (2004), I identify various images of mobility (including departure and return, diaspora, exile, refuge seeking, and wandering), and immobility (internment, denial of passage), and analyze their connection to the problematic of “home” as a literary motif. I argue that these images of mobility/immobility play a vital role in these two memoirists’ definition of their Eurasian identities. For both Symons and Moss, shifting or conflicting definitions of “home” symbolize the Eurasian’s ambiguous position as one who belongs both “here” and “there,” or conversely, neither “here” nor “there.” It is a condition that Symons describes as “the ‘no-man’s land’ of Eurasian isolationism,” and Moss describes as “the in-between.”⁶

5 Catherine Joyce Symons, *Looking at the Stars: Memoirs of Catherine Joyce Symons* ([Hong Kong]: Pegasus Books, 1996), p. 35.

6 Symons, *Looking at the Stars* and Peter Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird: An Anglo-Indian Memoir* (New York: iUniverse, 2004). It might be noted here that the representation of Eurasian subjectivity as problematic or conflictual may be a function of literary depiction. In other words, the very act of writing a memoir may be occasioned by the need for catharsis on some level. Those who experienced such identity as unproblematic may by definition feel no need to write about it. Hence their voices are unrepresented. I am grateful to Lin Man-houng for this insight. As Nilufer Göle put it so eloquently (in a slightly different context) at a panel on “Biculturalism Blues” hosted by the MIT Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Studies (October 2008): “is it biculturalism that produces the Blues, or is it the Blues that produces biculturalism?”

Although the tropes of the “unseen homeland” and “incomplete returns” can be found in various examples of Eurasian writings, for the purposes of this essay I have chosen to focus specifically on two memoirs.⁷ I have chosen these examples for comparison for a variety of reasons. First, Symons and Moss lived during the same era — one that witnessed British colonialism in Asia, World War II, the gradual decolonization of Asia, and the resulting diasporas of Eurasian populations from the East.⁸ Second, they published their memoirs within approximately a decade of one another, during a time of postcolonial reflection on the meaning of colonial identities. Third, both authors undertake multiple journeys back and forth between Asia and England during the course of their narratives, a mobility afforded by their relatively privileged class backgrounds. Hence, their memoirs are simultaneously travel accounts, foregrounding the importance of mobility to identity construction or self-fashioning. At the same time, their diverse experiences as a Hong Kong Eurasian (Symons) and an Anglo-Indian (Moss), and also as female and male authors, respectively, make for interesting points of comparison.

A. Eurasians and the Conundrum of “Home”

Before beginning my analysis, it is first necessary to define the term “Eurasian.” In the most general sense, the term describes someone of “mixed” European and Asian ancestry. However, within the British Empire, this label was generally limited to persons with European ancestry in the male line. This was certainly the case in British India, though the situations in other places such

7 See, for example, Stan Blackford, *One Hell of a Life: An Anglo-Indian Wallah's Memoir from The Last Decades of the Raj* (Fulham Gardens, S. Aust: S. T. Blackford, 2000), Maureen Baird-Murray, *A World Overturned: A Burmese Childhood, 1933-1947* (New York: Interlink Books, 1998), “Confessions of an Eurasian,” in *Anglo-India, Social, Moral, and Political; Being a Collection of Papers from the Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 1 (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1838), pp. 362-414, and Cedric Dover, *Half-Caste* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, 1937).

8 The politics of race and identity were of course very different during the eras of colonialism, decolonization and postcolonialism. A detailed treatment of these differences is beyond the scope of this essay.

as Burma, Singapore, and Hong Kong were less clear-cut.⁹ The term originated in India in the first half of the nineteenth century as a more euphemistic phrase to replace the term “half-caste.” In India, Eurasians (later known as “Anglo-Indians”) were heavily influenced by paternal heritage: the community was Christian, English-speaking, English-educated, and used European names. In sharp contrast, Eurasians in Hong Kong were greatly diverse: some were Christian, others Buddhist or Confucian; some had English as their primary language, some had Chinese; some had English education, some Chinese, and some a combination of both systems; some used European names, some used Chinese names, and others, both.¹⁰ Despite these differences, Eurasians in both colonies shared an ambiguity concerning their status: were they British? Native? Neither or both? The Eurasian was a problematic figure for a colonial ideology that sought to draw a clear line of demarcation between ruler and ruled. Since both my authors are British Eurasians, I will only deal with British Eurasians in this essay. Many of my remarks, therefore, will not be relevant to other groups, Portuguese Eurasians, for example.¹¹

It may also be helpful to consider the various meanings of “home.” A

9 See Vicky Lee, *Being Eurasian: Memories across Racial Divides* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), Frank Anthony, *Britain's Betrayal in India: The Story of the Anglo Indian Community* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1969), Myrna L. Blake and Ann Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes* (Singapore: Published for the Eurasian Association, Singapore by Times Editions, 1992), Noel Pitts Gist and Anthony Gary Dworkin, *The Blending of Races: Marginality and Identity in World Perspective* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1972), and Dover, *Half-Caste*.

10 The actual level of bilingualism among Eurasians in India and Hong Kong is not well documented.

11 It bears repeating that the particular material conditions of Eurasians varied widely according to geographic location. Eurasian author Cedric Dover discussed the subject at length in his *Half-Caste*. The subject is also treated in Gist and Dworkin, *The Blending of Races*. As pointed out by one of the anonymous reviewers of this article, some Eurasians in Singapore enjoyed successful careers in the civil service. In addition, numerous Eurasians rose to prominence in Hong Kong, the most famous examples being Sir Robert Hotung and Robert Kotewall. On the complex position of Eurasians in Singapore, see Blake and Ebert-Oehlers, *Singapore Eurasians*. On Eurasians in Hong Kong, see Lee, *Being Eurasian*.

glance through the Oxford English Dictionary reveals numerous definitions and usages of the term “home.” The most relevant for this essay are:

3. “The place of one’s dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally and properly attach to it...”;
5. “A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one’s affections center, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction.”;
6. “One’s own country, one’s native land. Used by Britons abroad, by inhabitants of (former) British colonies and territories, and by those of British descent in the US, for Great Britain = the mother-country...”;
7. “... the place or region where a thing is native, indigenous, or most common.”¹²

For Eurasians (of British descent in the paternal line) born in British colonies in Asia, the ambiguity surrounding the notion of “home” is at the very heart of the question of their indeterminate status.¹³ Where is “home” for the Eurasian? Considering the definitions above, we might answer for the various usages: 3. Asia; 5. Asia? Britain?; 6. Britain; or 7. Asia. In other words, the answer would vary depending on how we conceptualize “home.” For the Eurasian, however, “home” was never simply a matter of individual choice or proclivity, but also determined by colonial definitions of race and identity. Where did Eurasians fit in the colonial hierarchy of race and class?

B. Domicile: “The place where one has his home or permanent residence, to which, if absent, he has the intention of returning.”
[OED]

In “Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining ‘Europeans’ in Late Colonial India” (2000) Elizabeth Buettner describes how ongoing contact with Britain was imperative to maintaining “European” status in late colonial India.

12 “Home,” *Oxford English Dictionary*. In traditional societies where mobility was very limited, the sense of “home,” moving outward from one’s dwelling and the family, to the village, to the country, overlapped a great deal. In the case of highly mobile individuals or populations, however, multiple (often conflicting) meanings of “home” are introduced.

13 The conundrum of “home” was also felt by Taiwanese who traveled to China under Japanese colonialism (my own family included). This dilemma is depicted in Wu Zhuoliu’s novel *The Orphan of Asia*. Thanks to Lin Man-houng for this insight.

During this time, people of “European ancestry” in India were divided into three general categories: Europeans, “domiciled” Europeans, and Eurasians (later called Anglo-Indians). Affluent Europeans stayed in contact with the Metropole through periodic travel between Britain and India and thus ensured their status as “Europeans.” Those born in India who could not afford this mobility were stigmatized as “domiciled Europeans,” a low status category that was often equated with the “mixed-race” category of Eurasians who were also “domiciled” in India. As Buettner writes: “Being considered ‘European’ in this setting required far more than ancestry and biological attributes, and depended heavily on class, culture, occupation and ongoing imperial border crossings that allowed individuals to maintain direct contact with Britain.”¹⁴ Thus, both “poor whites” and those of “mixed-race” were excluded from the privileged sphere of ruling class whites. In some senses, therefore, class trumps race — or at least is complexly intertwined with it.

Buettner argues that the ability of families to send children “Home” for schooling played a vital role (especially for boys) in determining their racial status. In fact, a variety of colonial institutions and practices were crucial in producing these distinctions of status between Europeans, “domiciled Europeans,” Eurasians — and ultimately “natives.” These included not only sending children “Home” for education, but also “Home leave” (furlough), retiring back “Home,” evacuation, and repatriation. Access to these (colonial) privileges of mobility defined one’s location on the hierarchy of race and class.

These forms of racialized mobility between Metropole and colony could be found throughout the British Empire in Asia. These practices helped make the sense of the “mother country” as “Home” concrete for British expatriates.

Therefore, while we tend to associate “home” with “being in place” or “rest,” within this context ongoing mobility was vital to maintaining a claim over Britain as “Home.”

14 Elizabeth Buettner, “Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining ‘Europeans’ in Late Colonial India,” *Women’s History Review* 9.2 (2000): 277.

As Buettner has demonstrated in her analysis of children's schooling, it is necessary to consider the gender-specific ways in which status was acquired. "Home leave" and retirement were largely masculine privileges, whereas war evacuation was commonly the prerogative of women and children, although (as in the case of repatriation) it was a privilege reserved for those with European ancestry in the *paternal* line. (We might note here that "repatriation" is a heavily gendered term, with etymological roots in the Latin *patria*, which denotes the native or ancestral land of one's father.) Gender dynamics are thus pivotal in delineating mobility and home.

Indeed, on an ideological level, "Home" was a patrilineally defined concept in the British Empire, where racial ancestry was reckoned paternally. As mentioned above, in colonial India, only those "mixed-race" individuals with European ancestry in the paternal line could be included in the Eurasian/Anglo-Indian category. Those with European mothers and Indian fathers were classed as "natives." Like the "pure-blood" Indians, then, they had both their "home" and "domicile" in India. British colonial ideology thus combined gender bias with racial bias, giving second-class status to both the feminine and the "native" in relation to the privileged status of the white male as head of the familial line. Given the patrilineal bias, the expatriate's notion of Great Britain as the "mother country" was more aptly replaced by the notion of "fatherland" for Eurasians. Indeed, in some Eurasian writings the phrase "mother country" is used to refer to "the land of one's mother" (India, Hong Kong, etc.).¹⁵

The relationship between "home" and "domicile" was more complex in the case of those with European ancestry in the paternal line, and a distinction must be made between "home" as an emotional or ideological construct, and

15 Consistent with the privileging of "Fatherland" over "mother country" in Eurasian writings, the notion of a racial "mother tongue" is also overshadowed by the dominance of the "father's tongue" (English) as the communal language of Eurasians in many places. Interestingly, this seems to have held true even in cases where the father was largely absent from the family. This is not the case, however, for Portuguese Eurasians in Asia who spoke the "mother tongue" of Kristang, a Portuguese "Creole."

“domicile” as a statutory term. As mentioned above, expatriate Britons residing in the British colonies defined Great Britain —“the mother-country” — as “Home” [frequently capitalized]. For “pure Europeans,” “Home” therefore coincided with “domicile,” just as it did for “natives.” For “domiciled Europeans,” their ancestral “Home” was in Europe (regardless of actual birthplace), but their “domicile” was India. Eurasians occupied an ambiguous position between “British” and “natives,” an ambiguity exploited by the British colonial administration for various purposes — for example, when they wanted Eurasians to serve in the army.¹⁶ Eurasians were born in India, domiciled in India, but where was “home”?

The situation was rather different in Hong Kong, colonized much later than India, where the category of “domiciled European” does not appear to have been employed. The two main population groups in the colony were Europeans and Chinese. The latter were often referred to as “natives,” though very few Chinese were actually born in the colony during the early years of British rule. Rather, most were immigrants from mainland China. The Chinese population regarded their ancestral villages in mainland China as their home or native place, while the British regarded Great Britain as “Home.” The ambiguity between “home” and “domicile” did not emerge as it did in India. However, for Eurasians with European patrilineal ancestry, the question again arose: where should they call “home”? Now there were three potential answers: mainland China, Great Britain, or the colony itself.

Many Eurasians raised and schooled in the colonies were taught to identify with Britain as their ancestral homeland in order to ensure their loyalty to the colonial regime. Yet, their right to call Britain “Home” was contested — by the colonial administration, by expatriate society, or both. This contradiction was central to the condition of inhabiting the Eurasian “no-man’s land.”

16 See Anthony, *Britain’s Betrayal in India*.

III. Looking at the Stars: A Hong Kong Memoir

Looking at the Stars is the life-narrative of Catherine Joyce Symons (née Anderson), a [third-generation?] Eurasian of English, Scottish, Austrian, Spanish, American, and Chinese descent who colorfully describes herself as a “human cocktail.”¹⁷ “Joyce,” as she is known, was born in Shanghai in 1918 and raised in Hong Kong, where she attended The Diocesan Girls’ School (DGS), a British school originally established in 1860 for Eurasian orphans. In 1946 she married a Eurasian doctor, Bob Symons. After a failed attempt to make a new life in Britain, the couple returned to Hong Kong to establish their careers. Symons enjoyed an illustrious career as the first “local” headmistress of DGS, and also received appointments to Hong Kong’s Legislative Council and Executive Council, rare achievements for a woman in her time. She was awarded both the OBE and CBE for her dedicated service to Hong Kong. Symons’s memoir was published in 1996, in the lead up to Hong Kong’s “return” to Chinese sovereignty in July 1997, along with a host of other nostalgic texts seeking to document life in the colony.

A. In the Middle

Symons was raised in a bicultural and bilingual family, and felt herself to belong to “two different cultures — both Chinese and foreign.”¹⁸ Her memoir portrays this as a difficult position for children, both at home and at school: “Being in the middle was not easy. Even now, the ‘no-man’s land’ of Eurasian isolationism is still a hazard for those born into two cultures as they try to blend the different threads together. Today, at the age of 78, I am still painfully aware of them.”¹⁹ In the introduction, Symons describes this dilemma in even more

17 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, vi.

18 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, vi. The use of the word “foreign” to denote European culture here reveals a Chinese, or at least local Hong Kong, perspective.

19 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 3.

extreme terms: “All my life I have felt slightly uneasy, for to be Eurasian — certainly when I grew up — has been like suffering from an emotional form of AIDS. I was not totally accepted at best by either culture, nor totally despised at worst.”²⁰ This feeling of being an outsider made Symons determined to strive for success — which she clearly achieved — and to fight for equality.

The narrative represents “Eurasian identity” as situational and flexible, shifting according to location. Not long after Joyce’s birth, the Anderson family moved from Shanghai to Hong Kong, and immediately noticed the difference in terms of Eurasian status. As Symons writes: “In Shanghai, people were Chinese, or non-Chinese — foreigners — who included British, American, Irish, German, Filipino, or even Eurasians. But in Hong Kong throughout the colonial period, people were either expatriates or Chinese, no-one mentioned Eurasians.”²¹

Joyce’s father grew disillusioned with the exclusive expatriate community of Hong Kong and increasingly accentuated his Chinese identity, spending most of his time at the Chinese Club.²² In contrast, Joyce’s mother increasingly identified with “the West,” and spent all her time at St. Peter’s Church. The Anderson family thus exemplified the split between “Chinese Eurasians” (who identified with Chinese culture) and “British Eurasians” (who identified with British culture) as identified by C. G. Alabaster in his article “Some Observations on Race Mixture in Hong-Kong” (1920). As Alabaster argued, this distinction had nothing to do with blood quantum, or even paternal inheritance versus maternal inheritance, but rather with individual cultural orientation.²³

Symons describes her own early childhood as predominantly Chinese in terms of cultural influences. For example, Chinese New Year was celebrated,

20 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, vi.

21 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 2.

22 Her father was also a prominent member of the Welfare League. See Eric Peter Ho, *The Welfare League: the Sixty Years, 1930-1990* (Hong Kong: The Welfare League, 1990). Thank you to Elizabeth Sinn for helping me obtain a copy of this source.

23 See C. G. Alabaster, “Some Observations on Race Mixture in Hong-Kong,” *Eugenics Review* 11 (1920): 247-248.

but not Christmas. Chinese kinship relations structured family life. Moreover, Joyce did not speak any English until she began school at age 7. Her entry into school proves to be a turning point, however, as Joyce is subject to the strong influences of Christianity and British colonial ideology. At the DGS, Joyce learns not only the English language and the British-set curriculum, but also British sports, dancing, and religious practices. After years of daily scripture lessons at DGS, Joyce becomes a devout Christian at the age of 16. School thus served as an important site for the transmission of colonial ideology to the colonial subjects — as has been remarked in numerous postcolonial memoirs.²⁴

Joyce also joined the Girl Guides, which performed a similar function. Through both institutions, Joyce was drawn into the pageantry of empire, participating in events such as Empire Day, for example, and was inculcated with a sense of loyalty to the British Empire. Literature also provided the young Joyce with a window onto the imaginary world of British culture: she was a devoted reader of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Oliver Goldsmith, Walter Scott, and Alfred Tennyson. Having never set foot in Britain, the young girl nonetheless was steeped in a cultural milieu that made “merry old England” more “real” for her in some ways than China, to which she had limited exposure during her school years.

B. Evacuation, Internment, and Refuge Seeking: Mobility during the War

The uncertain status of Eurasians in Hong Kong — were they British or Chinese? expatriates or locals? — was made painfully clear to Joyce with the advent of World War II. In the summer of 1941, as the Japanese threatened to invade Hong Kong, the colonial government decided to evacuate “expatriate

24 See, for example, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1996), and Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—a Woman’s Journey* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999) and Maureen Baird-Murray, *A World Overturned: A Burmese Childhood, 1933-1947* (New York: Interlink Books 1998).

women and children”²⁵ to Australia. Joyce and her sister Marjorie attempted to register for the evacuation, but were turned down by officials who: “said they didn’t know what to do ‘with the likes of you’.”²⁶ The evacuation was conducted on a strictly racial basis: the Chinese — as “natives” — were excluded, as were Eurasians and Portuguese (whose racial “purity” was similarly suspect), “despite,” as Symons writes, “their possession of valid British passports.”²⁷ Thus, the Eurasian might have legal status as a British subject, and yet still not be considered “British” (white) enough to qualify for evacuation. Refused this important form of mobility during the crisis of war, the Andersons are temporarily stuck in the colony. This denial of mobility came only a few years after extended members of the Anderson and Symons families had come to Hong Kong as refugees as part of the flood of “foreign nationals” fleeing the Japanese in China. The ambiguity of Eurasian status thus enabled mobility at times, and blocked it at others.

The double standard in British treatment of Eurasians remained a source of resentment throughout Symons’s life. Bitterly recalling the denial of evacuation for “the likes of you,” Symons remarks: “However, ‘the likes of us’ were ordered to share in the war effort, with our young men conscripted into the volunteers and trained for battle, and everyone with a non-Chinese name having to take on some kind of war work.”²⁸ Denied the mobility of evacuation, Eurasians were nonetheless mobilized for the war effort. Indeed, Joyce’s brother Donald would die in the Battle for Hong Kong. Ironically, this exclusion from the upper tiers of Britishness only seemed to reinforce Joyce’s loyalty to the British. As she continues: “I was incensed when some Eurasians escaped all this, simply by adopting Chinese names.”²⁹ Symons thus expresses her disapproval of Eurasians who utilized the strategy of “name changing” in order to pass as Chinese and be

25 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 23.

26 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 23.

27 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 23.

28 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 23.

29 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 23.

exempted from the war effort.³⁰

The tables would be turned on the British after the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong, when all British civilians were interned, and military personnel sent to POW camps. British privilege and mobility were thus transformed into an extreme form of immobility and confinement. If the British had excluded Chinese civilians in Hong Kong from evacuation, the new Japanese rulers now excluded them from internment. Once again, the ambiguity of Eurasian status came into play. As Symons recalls: “We heard from others that Eurasians had the option of being considered civilian prisoners of war, but it would be preferable if they avoided internment.”³¹ During this time, some Eurasians chose to be voluntarily interned as British, while others chose to identify as Chinese, and thus avoid internment. The Anderson family in Hong Kong adopted yet another strategy.

As Symons relates, her father went to the “Third Nationals” bureau established by the Japanese for the Irish, Free French, and others to apply for visas for Macau. A “sympathetic man” granted them visas, and the family left for Macau as refugees. In this case, the liminal status of Eurasians as not-quite British/not-quite Chinese enables them to be classified as “Third Nationals,” supposed neutrals in the conflict. When they reach Macau, however, Symons reports that they were “ostracized for being British.”³² Indeed, the war experience highlighted the young Joyce’s sense of loyalty to the British, a loyalty that is reinforced by her family’s contributions to the war effort: two siblings worked for British intelligence; Donald had given his life in the Battle for Hong Kong; and Marjorie endured internment in Shanghai. Her fiancé, Bob, was also held as a civilian prisoner-of-war in Yangchow. Joyce listens daily to the BBC Overseas Service, with enormous emotional investment. As Symons

30 For more on the phenomenon of name changing (from European to Chinese names) see, John M. Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

31 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 24.

32 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 27.

writes decades after the war: “Even now, the sound of Big Ben’s chimes gives me a thrill.”³³ Despite the discrimination which the author railed against in the previous chapter, then, in the chapter on Macau, she expresses a strong sense of identification as British. For example, recalling reports at the end of the war that the Nationalist Chinese would claim Hong Kong from the Japanese, Symons writes that these rumors proved: “All untrue, thank God.”³⁴ She is overjoyed when the British once again reclaim the colony.

With the end of the war, Joyce is taken “home” to Hong Kong to work for the DGS. Traveling on an Australian frigate, Joyce arrives at Hong Kong harbor only to find it deserted. The rest of Hong Kong is also a ghost town, and Joyce is overcome by a sense of eeriness. Separated from her family and from Bob (still in camp), she feels herself cast adrift. It is a very “unhomely” homecoming, filled with anxiety and loneliness. The scene forms a sharp contrast with Symons’s later emotional narration of her “homecoming” to Southampton port.

C. Repatriation: “Return or restoration to one’s own country.” [OED]

One of the most striking forms of discrimination, following on the heels of evacuation, emerged over the issue of repatriation after the war. British who had been interned during the war were entitled to repatriation to Great Britain. But what about Eurasians? One of the most explosive moments in Symons’s memoir occurs when she recalls the attempt by her sister Marjorie (who had been interned by the Japanese near Shanghai) to leave Hong Kong. Symons writes:

The problem was how to get a passage to England; a free passage, to which she was surely entitled as a former civilian prisoner-of-war. We went together to that bastion of officialdom, the Colonial Secretariat, which was ruled by Admiral Harcourt of the newly-formed Military Administration of Hong Kong. After an

³³ Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 28.

³⁴ Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 29.

interminable wait, we were ushered into the office of a very senior civil servant who listened coldly to Marjorie's story, pronouncing at the end: "Miss Anderson, this is your home. I'll see to it that you are taken off any ship at any intermediate port if you try to get away." It seemed hugely unfair — surely she had earned her right to repatriation by suffering internment! The list of injustices was endless...We had all been refused evacuation in 1941. My brother had been killed fighting for Hong Kong.... The sneer on that official's face and his manner stuck in my mind for years. At the time, I was furious — and showed it.³⁵

This official insists that the right to "repatriation" is only open to those British subjects with "pure European" racial status. Again, mobility is denied the Eurasian, with the blunt declaration "this is your home." However, Marjorie and Joyce soon pass another office for "Repatriation of Civil Personnel," and attempt to plead their case again. This time they are greeted by a friendly young army captain. As Symons recalls:

Without preliminaries I demanded: "Have you ever been east of Suez before?"

"No, I haven't," he replied.

"Then," I announced dramatically, "you won't know about the likes of us!"

He heard me out, then smiled and turned to Marjorie: "Miss Anderson, we will fly you home by RAF. When can you leave?"³⁶

In these two passages, we see the clash between two concepts of "home": on one hand, the senior civil servant (representing old-school British colonial ideology) who insists that Hong Kong is Marjorie's home (the place where she "properly belongs") — by virtue of her "mixed race" ancestry — and challenges her right to consider Great Britain "Home"; on the other hand, the young army captain (representing postwar British liberalism) who promises to fly Marjorie home (the mother country) to England, thereby legitimating her claim to "Britishness," whether this claim rests on patrilineal descent, or on the notion that Marjorie "earned" it through internment. Marjorie's immobility during the war is now finally rewarded with the coveted form of mobility — repatriation.

35 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 31.

36 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, pp. 31-32.

In sharp contrast to Marjorie's ordeal, Bob faced no trouble obtaining repatriation from Shanghai. He asks Joyce to join him in Shanghai, where they would be married before traveling on a civilian repatriation ship to make a new life for themselves in England. As noted at the beginning of this essay, Symons describes arrival of the repatriation ship at its final port thus: "Soon everyone was caught up in the excitement of reaching Southhampton. As we drew alongside the pier a military band played *Rule Britannia* and tears poured down my face — at last I was in England."³⁷ This is clearly an extremely emotional moment for Joyce and also one that articulates her "Britishness": her tears expressing a mingling of patriotism with her longing to see the ancestral "fatherland," or what we might call the colonial subject's "spiritual homeland."³⁸

Joyce's Uncle Henry meets them in Southhampton, and takes them back home to live with him in Wales, where Bob will work in his medical practice. Their new idyllic life in the countryside is marred, however, by Aunt Ethel's insanity. The gradually escalating conflict comes to a head one day when Aunt Ethel (a white woman) shouts out the window: "They are all against me, those bloody Chinese."³⁹ Far from being "at home" in Wales, then, Joyce and Bob are stigmatized as "foreigners," called out as "bloody Chinese." They have been "repatriated," only to find themselves outsiders, their "Britishness" called into question again. "Restoration to one's own country" therefore proves to be an elusive notion for the mixed-race subject, and their return can only be incomplete.

Joyce and Bob decide to move to London, where they enroll in post-graduate courses: Bob in Tropical Medicine, and Joyce in Education. Despite positive experiences in London, Bob and Joyce begin to grow homesick for Chinese food and warm sunshine. Soon they decide to attempt to secure

37 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 35.

38 In twentieth-century writings, Great Britain is often referred to as the "spiritual homeland" of Eurasians born in the colonies. In other words, it is a homeland they have never seen, nor set foot in, but which nonetheless serves as a "homeland" in the ideological sense.

39 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 36.

“passage home on any of the ships sponsored by the Government to take people to work in Hong Kong; our finances made it essential for us to utilize this small emigration scheme.”⁴⁰ Having been “repatriated” to the “fatherland” of England, the Symons now attempt to “emigrate” to Hong Kong, once again utilizing their “British” status in order to obtain free “passage home.” (Note the interesting contradiction inherent in the notion of “emigrating” home.) In effect, they had gone home only to go home again. “Home” is thus seemingly quickly and easily redefined, a move that Symons makes again later in the memoir.

D. Emigrating “Home,” and “Back” Again

The next chapter is titled “Home to Hong Kong.” As Symons recalls of their arrival in the colony: “it was quite overwhelming to be home in Hong Kong, although home we had none.”⁴¹ In this sentence, Symons herself plays with the dual meanings of “home” as a place of belonging or as domicile.⁴² Gradually they do move into a new home (abode) as Bob establishes a medical practice and Joyce a career in education. Indeed, she would go on to enjoy an eminent career as headmistress of DGS, while also performing charitable and civic work for Hong Kong, all of which would eventually be rewarded with the OBE and CBE. Had Joyce at last found a place to call “home”? A place where she properly belonged? Of rest and refuge? Could this return be complete? With the 1997 handover looming on the horizon, the answer could only be “no.”

After many productive years in the colony, Joyce is widowed in 1974. In 1977, she purchases a flat in Walton-on-Thames, a small village just outside London, and begins to prepare for her retirement. When the time arrives, Joyce is seen off by 200 friends and students at Kai Tak airport in Hong Kong as she

40 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 40.

41 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 41.

42 Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to explore the meanings of “home” as domestic space. However, it is noteworthy that the Symons’s eventual inability to establish a conventional home life with children leads to some heartbreak for the author. At one point, she moves her “home/abode” over her office. I hope to explore this subject further in a future essay.

tearfully departs for retirement. As Symons relates: “I cried most of the flight back to Heathrow.”⁴³ Her use of the term “back” here, implying return, once more calls to mind the image of England as “home.” Here we see Joyce following the well-established British colonial pattern of retiring “Home” after a successful career in the colonies. We are reminded, however, when Joyce lands at Heathrow, that she does not fit this mold. Yet again, documents prove to be a problem for Joyce: “My Hong Kong passport seemed an anathema to the passport control officer who managed to project intense suspicion and anger, even at that early hour. Not even the sight of my birth certificate, issued by Somerset House, could appease the fellow.” Finally, she does gain entry, and once installed in her flat, Joyce finally feels “at home.” Symons writes: “I kept feeling that at last, now that I was in England, I was free.”⁴⁴

Joyce seems settled in at long last, but there is one more journey in her memoir: a trip to Hong Kong in 1995 to participate in the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of Hong Kong. Writing of her arrival in Hong Kong, Symons notes: “It was good to be ‘home’ despite the fatigue, heat and mass of humanity.”⁴⁵

This is the first time in the narrative that Symons places the word “home” in quotation marks, indicating her distancing of herself from identification with Hong Kong as “home” at this stage of her life. The memoir ends with her “return” to England. And yet, the image of mobility remains as she expresses a wish to see certain friends in Hong Kong when she makes her “1996 trip.”⁴⁶

Mobility is thus a cornerstone of Joyce’s bicultural identity, the condition of inhabiting the Eurasian “no-man’s land.”

IV. Bye-Bye Blackbird: An Anglo-Indian Memoir

In sharp contrast to Symons, Peter Moss, author of *Bye-Bye Blackbird: An*

43 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 90.

44 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 91.

45 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 96.

46 Symons, *Looking at the Stars*, p. 97.

Anglo Indian Memoir, could never feel “at home” in England, despite his being of more recent British extraction; and whereas Symons made a doubled return to England, once Moss left he never looked back. Moss was born in India in 1935 to a British father and an Anglo-Indian mother, and spent his childhood moving between the railway colonies that formed the centers of Anglo-Indian communities under the Raj. His family left India in 1946, and resettled in England. In his early twenties, Moss left England again to work in Malaya and later Hong Kong, where the author still lives. In *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, written from Hong Kong in 2004, Moss recalls his early years in the Anglo-Indian railway colonies that were scattered throughout British India, and his struggles to adapt to life in England as an adolescent and young man. “Bye-Bye Blackbird” refers to a popular tune from World War II, which Moss notes took on a racialized meaning when sung by Allied servicemen taking leave of their Anglo-Indian girlfriends after the war. The title may also be taken to refer to the diaspora of Anglo-Indians who “flew away” from India at the time of Independence in 1947. The title frames the narrative as the author’s own extended farewell to his once-beloved Anglo-India.

A. A Vanished Atlantis

The main autobiographical narrative is nested inside a scene of return and departure that takes place in 1978 (related in Chapter 1 and the Postscript) — a paradigmatic moment of “incomplete return” as described by de Courtivron.

From there, the narrative unfolds in multiple layers, recounting various departures and returns: altogether, there are two returns to India, one return to England, and one return to Hong Kong. Moss’s nomadism is driven by restlessness and a search for a place to call home, as well as his struggle to come to terms with his queer identity in a homophobic world.

The first return in the narrative is a stopover Moss makes in Calcutta en route from London to Hong Kong, where he has made his “new home.” (Here we see the contrast between a home one has made for oneself out of choice, and the home that is made for one out of the accident of birth.) He visits the railway

institute at Kanchrapara, one of the railway colonies from his childhood, which he has not seen for thirty-four years. Moss finds the Bell Institute, once the social and spiritual hub of the Anglo-Indian community, empty, dusty and cobwebbed. He describes it as a “sarcophagus,” a “mausoleum,” an “abandoned temple,” a space of memories and ghosts. Propelled by a deep urge to return, to “rediscover this tiny corner of Bengal that had burned its image deep into [his] retina,” he finds that “My India, my Anglo-India, was an Atlantis vanished beneath the waves of history.”⁴⁷ Beyond the walls of the Institute lies the “new India,” one to which Moss can never belong.

Yet Moss’s anguish stems not simply from his sense of loss at this “incomplete return,” a general nostalgia for the vanished past, for the “old India” that has been displaced by the “new India.” It stems also from his conviction that the *particular* disappearance of Anglo-Indian collective memory and the marginalization of this community from the chronicles of “the Raj” were driven by a racist logic. As Moss writes: “Why was it so hard to trace our descent or track down our history? Why was so much of who we were, what we had done, vanished beyond recall? Because we had been taught to live with shame.”⁴⁸ The “mausoleum” of the Bell Institute thus symbolizes the burial of Anglo-Indian history. Moss concludes that the sense of shame concerning miscegenation and “mixed” origins had deprived Anglo-Indians of the ability to draw “spiritual solace and pride that all people need to be fundamentally whole and psychologically secure.”⁴⁹ Hence, according to Moss, the diaspora of Anglo-Indians at the time of Independence entailed both displacement and subterfuge, as Anglo-Indian émigrés attempted to hide their origins (with the implications of “passing”). Moss, however, chose to fly his “Anglo-Indian colors” bravely, in part, he asserts, to divert attention away from his “queer” identity.

47 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 1.

48 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, pp. 1-2.

49 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 2.

B. A Lost Hat

The second chapter, “Farewell to All That,” narrates Moss’s first departure from India at the age of eleven, a moment that the author also calls the end of his childhood.⁵⁰ Joining the Anglo-Indian exodus, Moss’s family sails for England on the *Britannic*. The memory of this voyage, this uprooting from all he loved, was formative for Moss. “Which is why,” he writes, “instead of beginning at the beginning, my careening mind goes back to that September afternoon in 1946, when I discarded my last solar topi.”⁵¹ This pivotal moment, so loaded with symbolism for Moss, occurs as the ship is crossing the Suez Canal, marking the dividing line between Asia and Europe. The young Peter is told that it is customary for soldiers to toss their solar topis (worn by Europeans to protect them from the tropical sun) overboard at Port Said in a collective “goodbye to all that.”⁵² He decides to imitate the gesture, and flings his headgear over the side. As the author relates: “I abandoned my last solar topi with a sigh of relief and a pang of regret. For even as I knew I would never wear one again, I also saw that I would never again be given a reason to do so.”⁵³ Thus, despite the fact that he had always detested the hard and confining solar topi as a child, he senses the loss inherent in this symbolic gesture. Moss writes:

Through the perspective afforded by advancing age, I now see the irony of my gesture. Of all aboard the *Britannic* that day, I should’ve been the last to sacrifice my solar topi. For I wasn’t going “back to Blighty.” Though my father had been born there, England was no home to me. I was being torn away from everything that topi signified.⁵⁴

Moss had great difficulty saying goodbye to India, and even more so, to the very idea of empire itself, to which he remains deeply attached. Others in his family did not

50 The moment of exile as the ending of childhood is a common topos in bilingual and bicultural memoirs. Thank you to Isabelle de Courtivron for this insight.

51 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 5.

52 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 5.

53 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 3.

54 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 6.

share his “preoccupation with the past. We were British. We had always been British. The British had left India. Ergo *we* had left India, long before the lowering boom posed by passport addenda and codicils could restrict our ability to do so.”⁵⁵ To his family, going “home” to England was the logical thing to do at that historical moment.

In yet another flashback toward “the beginning,” Moss relates the arrival of his father’s family in India in 1924. A “Cockney in love with Kipling,” Moss’s father, Frank, married a local Anglo-Indian girl. Frank worked for the railway and the Moss children grew up in various railway colonies across India as their father received periodic transfers. Peter Moss’s childhood was thus characterized by a high degree of mobility, or nomadism. The railway colonies were largely populated by Anglo-Indians, since the British allotted the railways as reserved employment for this communal group. Much of the narrative is devoted to fond memories of the Anglo-Indian community and their rituals.

C. Diaspora: “The Dispersion” [OED]

Yet, Moss’s childhood mobility does not prepare him for the ultimate “uprooting” occasioned by the Anglo-Indian diaspora. In “Gathering of the Tribe,” Moss relates how his extended family drew together to make plans to leave India amidst the mounting communal violence erupting during the final days of “the Raj,” a time when they were keenly aware of the Indian call for them to go. He describes postcards and photos sent from friends and relatives who had already settled in Britain. He writes:

Had these been “wish you were here” holiday snapshots, the prospect of joining our cheerfully encouraging precursors would have seemed immediately attractive. Who would not wish to satisfy curiosity as to what life in that never before visited “homeland” was *really* like? But this would be a one-way journey, from which there was no coming back.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 85.

Moss introduces here the idea of a “homeland” that one has never seen before, drawing a sharp distinction between the concepts of “homeland” (England) and “home” (India). Having narrated the preparations and departure from India, Moss then closes the circle by returning once again to the moment when he tossed his solar topi at Port Said, and finally relates the family’s arrival at Liverpool, where they are met by his paternal grandfather (who had long ago returned “Home” to England).

D. An Uneasy “Homecoming”

In striking contrast to Symons’s tearful and relieved “homecoming” at Southampton, Moss relates his deep sense of apprehension as his ship docks at Liverpool. Overhearing a remark that they would soon be surrounded by “Liverpudlians,” the young boy mistakes the word for “Lilliputians,” and he is filled with dread as he recalls his childhood fears of *Gulliver’s Travels*. This sense of unease would grow as Peter disembarks and travels through the countryside to his grandparents’ home. He is not only struck by the alienness and unfamiliarity of England, but also by “the smallness, the narrowness, the Lilliputian scale of everything,” in comparison to the vastness of India.⁵⁷

Expecting to arrive at the glorious Metropole, the center of a [once] great empire, the source of all that is superior, Peter finds instead the privation of postwar Britain. He is also surprised to see white laborers for the first time in his life, challenging the colonial racial order he had internalized. Rapidly, he feels a mounting sense of disillusionment and he compares himself to Dorothy deceived by the Wizard of Oz.

Here again, we have another “incomplete return,” as Moss journeys to the much vaunted fatherland, the mythologized “Home” of British colonial ideology, only to find alienation and estrangement. He writes:

Much of what I viewed on our journey is now recalled, in hindsight; with my subsequent interpretations overlaying the original impressions. Even so, the seeds were planted that day of the disquiet which would dictate, through all the years

57 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 88.

ahead of me in England, my inability to see this as my fatherland rather than as my father's land.⁵⁸

Raised to believe that England was “Home,” the source of his cultural roots, heritage, and his distinct status that set him apart from the “natives” of India, Moss now confronts a profound sense of shock to his identity. Again, as Moss earlier made a distinction between “homeland” and “home,” he now distinguishes between “fatherland,” an ideologically loaded concept, and the mundane reality of “father's land.”⁵⁹

This shock entails a redefinition of “home.” As he writes:

The conviction would grow that, much as I might be indebted to the stimulus of rich literary and cultural traditions that had shaped my attitude and outlook, I could never physically adapt to the restrictive environment that had inspired them. I was intended for greater breadth and scope, unfettered by narrow concepts dictating the pivotal English sense of “home” as foundation for one's being. Increasingly I would be forced to recognize that my formative years in India had abruptly ended. A door had closed that could never be reopened.... Denied the English sense of home, as foundation for my own being, I was cast in the role of misfit and drifter, a person of no fixed abode.⁶⁰

Indeed, despite coming of age in England, Moss would never feel “at home” in this “small” land, and develops a profound sense of nostalgia for the “adventure” and “greatness” of empire. England, for Moss, represents exile and confinement: it is a land to which he has been “unjustly condemned.”⁶¹ As an adolescent, he spends hours gazing out to sea sunk in “nostalgia for the adventurous exploits of the Great British people”⁶² and dreaming of expansionist vistas. Similarly, his father has trouble

58 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 88.

59 As de Courtivron notes, responses to concept of the “mother country” and “Fatherland” (as well as the “mother tongue”) are often heavily mediated by the subject's relationship to his/her own mother and father. These complex dynamics are played out in both Symons's and Moss's memoirs. Unfortunately, this fascinating topic is beyond the scope of this essay. I hope to explore this further elsewhere.

60 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 89.

61 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 133.

62 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 133.

readjusting to England, the loss of India and colonial privilege (and the family's attendant downward class mobility), and he eventually suffers a nervous breakdown.

E. Returning to the Start

At age twenty-two, Peter determines to emigrate to another “imperial” possession and finally settles on Malaya. In order to get himself out East on his meager savings, he takes an overland bus service from London to Calcutta, thereby making his first return to India since Independence. After an adventurous overland expedition in a dilapidated bus driven by an eccentric Irishman, they at long last begin to approach India. His expectations mount as they enter Pakistan: “Lahore made me feel I was already home.”⁶³ Here, Moss solidly identifies India as “home.” Finally, he arrives “back where he started,” fulfilling his long-held desire to return to India, the plains, the tropical sun, his place of origin.⁶⁴ Nostalgically, he sets out to “rediscover” various old haunts, and then dutifully visits his grandmother's grave. India at first seems comfortingly familiar to him, as though nothing had changed. But soon he feels the “incompleteness” of his return: “Time had raised invisible barriers between what was and what had been, and — having traveled so far to return — I had not brought with me the right keys to open the locks.”⁶⁵ After a brief stay, he journeys onward to Malaya. Thus, the narrative ends with yet another scene of leavetaking from India, which Moss compares to his previous departure. This time he journeys East, not West. This time, he sheds tears: no longer a child, he understands the finality of his leavetaking. As in Symons's memoir, tears mark the emotional potency of arrivals and departures, the two pivot points of mobility.

F. Atlantis Again

The postscript comes back to the spring of 1978, when the author returns

63 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 211.

64 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 220.

65 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 223.

again to Calcutta after another twenty years, a moment Moss calls his “belated homecoming.” His return to the railway colony of Kanchrapara is an act of compulsion, a full circle that must be drawn: “No matter where I have roamed, in all those years since I last set eyes on it, I have returned more or less to where it all began.”⁶⁶ A taxi driver takes him to the Bell Institute only to find the building closed for a district sports day. Moss finally gains admission to the event and is then trotted out on stage as a foreign “VIP.” After the event, he asks to see the old auditorium, which has fallen into disrepair. He enters to find it filled with dust, cobwebs, stale air and memories, and is overcome with nostalgic anguish for the vanished Atlantis of his Anglo-India, to which he can never return, no matter how many journeys he takes.

The realization strikes me with painful clarity. The Bell Institute has become a mausoleum to a period of time that has no relevance, no bearing on the kind of occasion I have just witnessed in its grounds. So much has happened in the thirty years and more since I last saw it that I should not have expected otherwise. The wonder is that it should be here at all, preserved as an ungainly memorial to a former folly; a temporary aberration in India’s ongoing history that spans millennia rather than centuries.⁶⁷

Whereas Symons’s memoir ends with a return that closes the circle, Moss concludes his with a scene of departure and the verse: “Fly away Peter, Fly away Paul, Fly away Blackbird, Fly away All.” Instead of an image of coming home to roost, then, Moss leaves us with an image of dispersal and parting. Yet Moss reveals that departures can also be incomplete, for he can never entirely leave behind the past that has a powerful hold over him, compelling him to return after all his wanderings to the place “where it all began.”

V. Toward a Politics of Home

As Rosemary George has argued in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial*

66 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, p. 227.

67 Moss, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, pp. 231-232.

Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction (1996): “Home..... along with gender/sexuality, race, and class, acts as an ideological determinant of the subject.”⁶⁸ In the two Eurasian memoirs I have examined in this essay, the lack of a stable site to call “home” is emblematic of Eurasian “mixed-race” subjectivity. It is a subjectivity determined both by the material and ideological conditions of colonialism, and by those of decolonization, which saw the mass diasporas of Eurasians from both India and Hong Kong. Under the racial ideology of British colonialism, the “mixed-race” subject was constituted as a “problem” to the racial order — neither ruler nor ruled, neither white nor black, neither fully expatriate nor fully native, but “half-caste.”⁶⁹ The Eurasian was at once taught to regard Britain as “Home,” and also summarily rejected from full belonging due to the stigma of “impurity.” Speaking out of two sides of the mouth, British colonial ideology declared: “You are one of us/You are not one of us.” Under a dominant ideology that sought to use concepts of “home” and “domicile” to fix racial subjects in place, the lack of a stable site to name “home” became emblematic of “half-caste” status as the neither/nor. Hence the Eurasian was at times excluded from privileged forms of colonial mobility such as “evacuation” and “repatriation.” Yet, the ambiguity of Eurasian status at times allowed for access to these colonial privileges. This ambiguity made the place of Eurasians (as so-called “colonial lackeys”) in their “native lands” problematic after decolonization, an insecurity that prompted the mass diasporas from various parts of Asia.

Eurasian advocates were conscious of this problematic politics of home even before decolonization. Among them, Eurasian scientist and political activist, Cedric Dover, began in the 1920s and 1930s to urge Eurasians throughout Asia to stop “insisting on loyalty to dominant minorities or ‘fatherlands’ they have never seen,” fatherlands that had disowned them long ago.⁷⁰ Instead, he argued, Eurasians must regard themselves as “sons of the soil”

68 Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

69 See Dover, *Half-Caste*, for the history of this term.

70 Dover, *Half-Caste*, p. 283.

on which they were born and raised. For Dover, it was the mother country (mother's country) and not the fatherland that should be the root of Eurasian identity, and a sense of "home." Yet, the claim on the "mother country" could not be taken for granted either, as anti-colonial nativists called on Eurasians to "go home" — raising again the conundrum: "where is home?"⁷¹ One response to this conundrum was the demand for the creation of separate Eurasian "homelands" at the time of decolonization — as witnessed in both India and Indonesia.⁷² What Symons and Moss reveal, however, is that Eurasian subjectivity is produced not only through the stable rootedness of "home" and belonging, but also through mobility and displacement.

VI. Conclusion: Unseen Homelands

To conclude: whereas for the bilingual authors de Courtivron analyzes the "incomplete return" is a return to the land of their birth, a place to confront childhood memories, for the Eurasian authors treated in this essay the "incomplete return" Home can also be an act of migration, a movement away from the land of their birth and childhood — there is thus a doubling of their returns. This difference in the construct of "home" is key, and the notion of a "homeland one has never seen" becomes a major topos of colonial and postcolonial writings on Eurasian identity. The "incomplete return" is further complicated by the ambiguity of "home/Home" as delineated by British colonial racial ideology. Hence, for the biracial subject, the impact of externally imposed racial constructs weighs heavily. In further contrast to de Courtivron's authors, many Eurasian life narratives reveal the central role of the father in identity

71 See, for example, Blackford, *One Hell of a Life*.

72 It is interesting to note here that the notion of a "Eurasian homeland" was proposed in several former colonies at the time of decolonization, including Indonesia and India. None of these schemes were successful. See Coralie Younger, *Anglo-Indians, Neglected Children of the Raj* (Delhi: B. R. Pub. Corp., 1987) and Paul W. van der Veur, "The Eurasians of Indonesia: Castaways of Colonialism," *Pacific Affairs* 27.2 (June 1954): 124-137.

construction, as the “homeland” is ideologically defined through paternal descent, rather than through inherited memories of the mother and the mother tongue.⁷³

What distinguishes these Eurasian narratives is thus their particular relation to a racialized notion of a homeland within the context of the ambiguity of the Eurasian’s position under British colonial ideology, which taught them to identify with Great Britain as “Home,” but at times summarily rejected them or denied them mobility because they were not of “pure European descent.” Thus, while the topos of an “unseen homeland” also figures in the writings of/about colonial settlers and diasporic subjects, it is the particular racial “no man’s land” inhabited by the mixed-race subject that distinguishes this experience. The ambiguity of “home” thereby comes to stand for the liminal position indicative of “half-caste” status. The “incomplete returns” I have described in this essay took place within very specific historical conditions — those of British colonialism and the later movements of decolonization and diaspora. They involve the particular dynamics of “race mixing” within British colonial ideology (distinguished from the Portuguese, for example), of gender (paternal versus maternal inheritance), and class (mobility as a function of class). Nonetheless, as the life narratives of Symons and Moss demonstrate, even within these limited parameters, there was significant variation based on individual responses to historical circumstances — as Symons identifies as British, whereas Moss does not.

Despite this difference, both authors reveal the contingent nature of “mixed-race” identity as a “traveling practice,” constantly in flux and shifting according to location and time. In this, the biracial subject of an earlier age serves as a precursor of the in-betweenness and deterritorialization that many view as emblematic of the current era of globalization, in which the fixedness of identities and the stability of “home” (not to mention the dichotomy of

73 On the distinction between a “racial mother tongue” (what I am calling the “father’s tongue”) and the language of the mother, see Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*.

Metropole and margins) can no longer be taken for granted.⁷⁴ While much of the contemporary discourse on globalization valorizes or celebrates this in-betweenness and indeterminacy, especially as it relates to a type of cosmopolitan mobility, Symons and Moss reveal the private anguish that can also be a symptom of deterritorialization and dislocation, which makes every return and every departure “incomplete.”

Reference

- Ahmed, Leila. 1999. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America—a Woman’s Journey*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Alabaster, C. G. 1920. “Some Observations on Race Mixture in Hong-Kong.” *Eugenics Review* 11: 247-248.
- Anon. 1838. “Confessions of an Eurasian.” In *Anglo-India, Social, Moral, and Political; Being a Collection of Papers from the Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 1. London: W. H. Allen and Co., pp. 362-414.
- Anthony, Frank. 1969. *Britain’s Betrayal in India; the Story of the Anglo-Indian Community*. Bombay: Allied Publishers.
- Baird-Murray, Maureen. 1998. *A World Overturned: A Burmese Childhood, 1933-1947*. New York: Interlink Books.
- Blackford, Stan. 2000. *One Hell of a Life: An Anglo-Indian Wallah’s Memoir from the Last Decades of the Raj*. Fulham Gardens, S. Aust: S. T. Blackford.
- Blake, Myrna L., and Ann Ebert-Oehlers. 1992. *Singapore Eurasians: Memories and Hopes*. Singapore: Published for the Eurasian Association, Singapore by Times Editions.
- Buettner, Elizabeth. 2000. “Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining ‘Europeans’ in Late Colonial India.” *Women’s History Review* 9.2: 277-297.
- Carroll, John M.. 2005. *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- de Courtivron, Isabelle. 2007. “The Incomplete Return.” *Life Writing* 4.1: 31-39.

74 I avoid using the discourse of “homelessness” in conjunction with these ideas, in order to avoid confusion with the very different material conditions experienced by homeless populations in the US and elsewhere.

- Dover, Cedric. 1937. *Half-Caste*. London: M. Secker and Warburg.
- George, Rosemary Marangoly. 1996. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gist, Noel Pitts, and Anthony Gary Dworkin. 1972. *The Blending of Races: Marginality and Identity in World Perspective*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Ho, Eric Peter. 1990. *The Welfare League: The Sixty Years, 1930-1990*. Hong Kong: The Welfare League.
- Lee, Vicky. 2004. *Being Eurasian: Memories across Racial Divides*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. 1996. *Among the White Moon Faces: An Asian-American Memoir of Homelands*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York.
- Moss, Peter. 2004. *Bye-Bye Blackbird: An Anglo-Indian Memoir*. New York: iUniverse.
- Symons, Catherine Joyce. 1996. *Looking at the Stars: Memoirs of Catherine Joyce Symons*. [Hong Kong]: Pegasus Books.
- Teng, Emma J. 2005. "What's 'Chinese' in Chinese Diasporic Literature?" In Charles A. Laughlin ed., *Contested Modernities in Chinese Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 61-80.
- van der Veur, Paul W.. 1954. "The Eurasians of Indonesia: Castaways of Colonialism." *Pacific Affairs* 27.2: 124-137.
- Younger, Coralie. 1987. *Anglo-Indians, Neglected Children of the Raj*. Delhi: B. R. Pub. Corp.

再造「家鄉」—— 歐亞裔人記憶中的移動意象

鄧 津 華*

摘 要

在過去帝國主義的勢力範圍中，如印度、香港、新加坡等地，由歐洲男性與當地女性經婚姻、私通而發展出歐亞裔人（歐亞混血兒）的社群不少。這些歐亞裔人與其後代對「家」的多樣認識，是來自於英國殖民當局、社會傳統、親屬、祖先關係等的定義，以及個人情感所繫。屬於父方的歐亞裔後代，往往被教育將英國（或其他歐洲國家）視為「祖國」或「家」，儘管事實上他們從未到過那邊。有些歐亞裔人如此認定「家」，有些人則傾向將亞洲的出生地視為「家」。對「家」的定義並非單純個人意識下的抉擇。例如，有歐父的歐亞裔人名義上有特權回到「祖國」去「探親」和「返鄉」，但殖民當局認定他們為「非白人」而不予同意。相反的，他們被視為「本地」或「本土」居民而被告誡應該留在當地。歐亞裔人是如何各自談論種族與國籍的理念，而依此形成如「祖國」或「母國」各種涵義的「家」？這篇論文檢視歐亞裔人的回憶錄，他們在亞洲生長，依不同際遇旅行至英國的「家」，晚年再返回亞洲的「家」。我們將看到他們如何再造「家」的意象，並成為環境中改變他們歐亞認同，最重要的因素。

關鍵詞：歐亞裔人、歐亞混血兒、家鄉、祖國、回憶錄

* 作者係美國麻省理工學院外文系副教授。