

VAIDEHI RAMANATHAN

## Photos as Narratives, Photos with Narratives: Alternate Textualities, Minority Histories and Indian Historiography

The photograph professing to be a mechanical analogue of reality, its first-order message in some sort completely fills its substance and leaves no place for the development of a second order message. Of all the structures of information, the photograph appears as the only one that is exclusively constituted and occupied by the 'denotated' message, a message which totally exhausts its mode of existence. In front of a photograph, the feeling of 'denotation' or if one prefers, of analogical plenitude, is so great that the description of the photograph, is literally impossible; to describe consists precisely in joining to the denotated message a relay or second-order message derived from a code which is that of language and constituting in relation to the photographic analogue, however much care one takes to be exact, a connotation: describe is thus not simply to be imprecise or incomplete, it is to change structures, to signify something different to what is shown (Barthes 1977, 18-19)

"... there is a paradox at the heart of the historian's practice: the reality to which the historian's interpretation is produced by that interpretation, yet the legitimacy of the interpretation is said to rest on its faithfulness to a reality that lies outside, or exists prior to, interpretation. History functions through an inextricable connection between reality and interpretation as separate and separable entities. The historian's inevitable dilemma consists in the need simultaneously to avow interpretation and to disavow the productive role interpretation plays in the construction of knowledge. This dilemma is not a new discovery, neither the product of the ravings of radical relativists nor the by-product of some nihilistic 'deconstructionism'; it inheres in the practice of history itself." (Scott 2001: 86)

Why is the need to pen presences down so imperative? What deep anxieties about absences does the act seek to assuage? Fear of losing fragments of moments, conversations, images, perhaps? And a hope that languageing them down in texts will act as an insurance against loss we know is inevitable? Memory, we know, is unreliable and most selective; we pick and choose details to embellish our stories; we return to old photographs, remember past times, and try to grasp who we were then. Our obsession with not forgetting drives

us to both scribbling reminders about personal errands, but also to rewriting histories. Capture them in images, or in the keys of my laptop, entrench them in photo albums or the white space of the screen, and shore them up for the future, lest we lose them, we say to ourselves. Presences are thus caught, we think reassuringly, halting some erosion of thought and feeling and memory caused by the passing of time.

But do pictures and texts really stem the flow of forgetfulness? At what point do we remember our forgetting? The awareness that our lived and languaged worlds, the presences of our lives, are only and always partial and hinge on the absent and silenced emerges at key temporal junctures, and marks a move away from some aspects of one's realities. Returning to old photographs, recording stories about them and pondering over what they once represented and what they mean now makes us realize that the silences and silenced voices of our past and present are not the Derridean nothingness from which speech proceeds, but live, pulsating throbs, ever present, that can rupture and tear our surface meanings. But we have to discern the silences and engage in remembering in order for them to break free, and it is about undoing some of our forgetting through photographs and narratives that informs this paper.

One realm in postcolonial Indian studies where silences seem to strain at the leash is in the voices and stories of Anglo Indians: people of British origin who lived entire lives in India and who left around or after Indian Independence.<sup>1</sup> While postcolonial scholarship (c.f. Gandhi, 2006), Chakrabarty, 2002, 2007, Loomba 2000, 2005, Pennycook 1998, Canagarajah 1997, Ramanathan 2005a, b, 2006, Radhakrishnan 2003, Guha, 1997, Guha 1997, Guha, 2004, 2007, Chatterjee 1993, Seth 2007) has already alerted us to various aspects of Empire-colony relationships, it has yet to acknowledge the silenced stories of the upheavals of "pucca" English people and Anglo-Indians as they uprooted themselves from the surroundings they had spent lifetimes in and tried to rebuild lives in their 'home' country (Visram 1986). While there were political reasons for why particular voices were left out of Indian historiography or were deemed intractable by Indian historians at a particular colonial moment (Chakrabarty 1999, Gandhi 2006, Guha 2007), current temporal moments prod an acknowledgement of these silence-filled spaces that dot the writing of postcolonial Indian history. Voices and experiences such as these contest our current discourses about equations between ethnicity and nationality and ethnicity and space, and point at once to the impossibility of citizenship/identity discourses that are oriented to one-to-one equations between them.

It is these silenced narratives that constitute the heart of this paper. Part of a larger project that focuses on the lives of British public and private citizens in India, the focus of the present exploration is on the migrations and upheavals of two British women<sup>2</sup> born and raised in India, having never seen England until they migrated as adults. The two women occupy the same generational space and together their narratives and photographs cast lights of different hues on their lives in and connections to a certain part of the world. My entry into addressing their stories is through their photographs and accompanying narratives (oral and written). Contrary to the general assumption that photographs are inert texts that capture imagistic moments of our pasts (Mitchell 1994, 2006), the discussion will explore how photographs are narratives themselves of a sort taking us way beyond the superficial realm of icons deep into recessed histories, and lives once lived. They open up pathways that once we traverse only open up other routes, thus gently reminding us that our explorations (and subsequent textings of them, as in the present case) are forever unfinished. When accompanied by oral and written narratives by the owners of the photographs, our understandings acquire laminations, the borders around our comprehension become mercifully stretched, and we realize in Derridean fashion that the photographs far from being static are all about movements because the images in them while pointing to entrenched lives also simultaneously point away from them to journeys and migrations. Bringing these silenced phototextualities into our present moments through particular heremeneutic motions (Steiner 2003) casts into light the seductive spaces between the “present’ and the ‘past’, narratives and photos, texting and silencing, language and silence and renders them crossable and mobile. The key questions motivating this paper, then, are: 1) What are some key themes around entrenchments in and movements from India that emerge in the stories of these British women and in what ways do photographs-as-narratives, and photographs-with-narratives laminate our understandings of their lives?; 2) And what are the implications of their stories for Indian historiography and how do they extend the postcolonial canvas (Loomba et al. 2005, Cooppan 2005, Brennan 2005)?

As the paper unravels, themes of entrenchments and movements that mark their lifestories are captured by the fluidities inherent in the photographs and narrative. Both forms and stories are about several layers of movements and extend beyond the journeying from India to UK or UK to India, to movements back in time when reading these forms, to movements into altered ways of writing and interpreting parts of Indian history. Movements and entrenchments,

then, and the forms in which they get articulated including the present one of texting them, open up complex spaces and tensions around migrations, re-settling and 'home.' The peculiarities in these crossings openly disturb the self recognition of a national, unified Indian culture, and make us realize that the subjectivities of minorities emerge partially in our discourses about communal identities, over-determined national selves, and societal narratives of similarities and difference (Bhabha 1996). We are moved by the stories we listen and the photographs we pour over, and to communicate about them is not for us as writers to shine light on realms distinct from us, as much as it to awaken ourselves to a realization that our feet and our footsteps have always matched those we write about, and that the lines of (Indian) history and historiography remain forever incomplete (Attridge 1987, Bennington 1987, Loomba 2005)

*Memories, Histories: Photographs as Narratives, Photographs with Narratives*

A natural place from which to begin an exploration of a photographic essay (such as this one) is by perhaps asking "What do photographs do? Why do we take them? What moments of our lives are we conferring importance on and what makes us render inert particular backdrops, people, actions? Also, what do we read into photographs taken a long time ago and what of ourselves and pasts float back into our consciousness? As we know, experiences are encoded in a textured material of interwoven threads in the taking of the image: a photograph indexes a special relation to the world, where for both the time of taking the photo and the later time of reading it, fragments and scraps—bits of memories, moments of happy occasions, pieces of backdrops and ourselves--dominate (Hughes and Noble, 2003). They are at once statements of several things: particular points of view at the time of taking the photograph, moments deemed significant at one time, some anticipation of how people at another moment in time might read them, a moment being frozen. But crucial to remember is that this experience moves into a spacy emptiness and is rendered fluid and malleable as people read the images at another point in time, drawing on old narratives and stories they have heard to interpret them, casting both old stories and photos against current historical, political tropes, a juxtaposition that permits not just the present textual remembering, but an acknowledgment of pain, separations and unsettlements.

Given the focus of the paper, the temporal junctures encoded in these multiple readings—the two women reading their old

photographs, and me reading both them and their photographs and narratives—are crucial to note. What in the present confluence of factors allows these narratives to rise to the surface? India is now 60 years from having gained Independence and I now revisit this temporal and socio-historical site to openly articulate the threats that disallowed an open display of these stories. Indian history was written in particular ways at particular colonial moments for particular reasons (Chakrabarty 2003, 2006, Guha 2007, Loomba 2002)—nation building and the formation of a collective identity, among them—but temporal distance now prods a questioning of the borders of our national selves, of the need to turn the pages of history in other ways (Radhakrishnan 2003) by among other things expanding the borders of postcolonial scholarship (Loomba et al. 2005, Ramanathan and Pennycook 2007). The legitimizing of some voices in the assembling of collective identities hinge on the silencing of others, and just as some temporal junctures disallow particular voices, other times permit revisitations and re-thinking, and compel us to start on new enquiries “which includes an anamnesis of former elucidations” (Lyotard 1988). Such anamnesis, Derrida (1992) reminds us, is crucial, since it mitigates against the threat of *cinders*, by which he means not just erasure or repression of memories and experiences, but the forgetting of forgetting, the threshold of non-memory, the crumbling into ashes of things that had an existence. While cinders are forever built into all writing, all experience, indeed, all of living, *recits*—which is not just a simple telling but one that becomes a promise—are our redeeming moments. Interventionist in nature, a *recit* is “not simply a memory reconstituting a past” (p. 206), but “something that makes a commitment to the future” (1992: 206).

Given this exhortation, it seems imperative that we read photos not as just as a moments of reality, but as sites of struggle, invested with emotion, and that our interpretations be (Derridean) *recits* pointing us to spaces that (Indian) historiography has thus far needed to deem as being exterior to its interests. There is deep poignancy in all aspects of the photos and narratives, and it is in a sensitive exploration of the fraught complexities around this space that we can begin to breathe life into past moments, not so much to recapture or reclaim them, but to bend down and pick them up as if hail, there for a second or two before melting away. It is in these gestures that we begin our acts of undoing forgetting. Remembering is in those moments when the hail is still hail on the palms of our hands, and when some of our silences cease to be so.<sup>3</sup>

*Some Necessary Background about Joan Densham and Jane Bigg*

The two people that inform this paper lived in India during the cusp between the Raj and its end (1920-1950s). Both Joan Densham and Jane Bigg grew up knowing each other in Bombay, attending the same school, going back together for the school's reunions, and staying in contact with the same friends in India. Their oral narratives were recorded by me in June 2007, in the U.K. While I have known about the two women for most of my life, I had only always known them as "my mother's friends who had grown up in India." The idea of recording them as they went over their old photo albums emerged out of my long-term applied linguistic engagement with issues around English and vernacular language teaching in Gujarat, India where my focus was on addressing ways in which particular language ideologies and policies in the colonial aftermath disadvantaged vernacular-medium students (Ramanathan 2005a, b). My prolonged engagement with history and historicizing in this endeavour opened up the possibility of addressing other history-making issues. Below is some biographical information about each of them:

**Joan Densham:** Joan is a 5<sup>th</sup> generation (on her father's side, 2<sup>nd</sup> on her mother's) Anglo-Indian whose parents, grandparents and great grandparents had all been born in India. None of them had ever been to England and Joan herself had never been to England until she was 21. Her parents never left India even after Independence, choosing to stay on since that was 'home'<sup>4</sup> and because all of their lives' connections were there and not in England. Joan went to India almost every two years from the time she left and towards the end of her father's life went several times a year.

**Jane Bigg:** Like Joan, Jane was born in India, and had never been to England before she left (at 16). Her father was an Armenian refugee who had fled to India in his teens and landed in India in his teens. Her English mother had gone to India with her sister who had plans to settle in India. Her parents met and married in Bombay. Jane went to Cathedral School like Joan, attended the same church and had a very mixed, cosmopolitan upbringing, celebrating all the key Indian religions and while part of her life was "European" (attending ballet dancing classes), big parts were "Indian" ("eating bhelpuri from roadside stalls in Bombay"). In 1956, at 16, after writing her Cambridge School Certificate examination, her parents decided it was time for them to go back to England. Having done after a short course in typing, Jane and her younger sister arrived in England, with the expectation that Jane would do work as a secretary somewhere while her sister finished school.

## *Movements in Entrenchments: Living in India, Having to Leave*

As mentioned earlier, the photographs discussed are all about movements, not because present interpretative motions that render them less inert, but because they are flashes and glimpses into entrenched lives, investments in and with communities and peoples that came to abrupt ends as they left all and tried to resettle faraway. Figure 1 shows Joan and her brother as young children with their parents and grandmother outside their flat in Bombay. Both children are barefooted, a common sight for a lot of kids in India, since footwear is both cumbersome in the heat and because one is constantly expected to take shoes off when entering homes. As Joan says in her narrative about growing up in India:



“We had absolutely no English background as I am the 5th generation on my father’s side to be born in India (second on my mother’s side)

Our view of England was gleaned from stories told of friends from India who visited England, from the Women’s magazines and books we read. These views were obviously biased and we regarded England as a distant country (never ‘home’) I did feel that the English were better educated, spoke with a better accent (our Anglo-Indian accent was noticeable) wore more fashionable clothes and lived in better houses. When I came to England (aged 21) I found that all these ideas were wrong! We didn’t think or ponder on how we lived and we had a great childhood. We were strictly brought up, but knew that we were greatly loved, I enjoyed my schooldays, specially the breaks, as I wasn’t really clever; we had a large garden in which all the children of the building and their friends played. Thinking of it we had a multi racial mix, with Hindus, a Muslim, 4 Jews, Parsees, one Anglo-Burmese (Catholic) and 3 Europeans (and we didn’t regard ourselves as Anglo-Indians.) I was the oldest, about 4 were my brother’s friends and the rest were Wadia House children. We played Indian games, 7-tiles, a hopping game called “Lungri”, hide and seek games and French cricket (which you probably know).

I never felt English - in fact I felt somewhat ill-at-ease with them. My family never called England “home” and commented

(unkindly) on people who we knew grew up in India and said they were “Going home for the holidays”. We always regarded Bombay as our home — and I still do.

These views about India being home is also picked up by Jane in her narrative

Growing up in India was what we did! We knew nothing else, and Bombay was home – all the talk of “home” by many expatriates, meaning the United Kingdom, meant nothing to us, and we never called it that, although my mother may have done; after all, it was legitimate for her. We made all our friends at school – the friends who have stuck, that is. We met others on the periphery of our lives, too, like the children of the people my mother worked with at Wallace Brothers, and the children of other grown-ups who had been at the Cathedral School with my father, but their children were not necessarily at school with us. We went to Christmas parties at the Breach Candy club and swimming pool – Christmas Trees, they were called, and we went in fancy dress sometimes – I have a photograph of myself as a “woodland fairy”! There were other parties at the Bombay Mint for Christmas, too – we had friends there whose father was the Chief Engraver. Tore a gash down my leg there once, having “Just one more turn, *p-l-e-a-s-e*” on a lovely long slide in the grounds, which had a crooked nail sticking out of it on the edge at the bottom, and I still have the scar to remind me.

I don't think there were cultural dislocations. We loved Diwali, when we exchanged boxes of Halwa with those of my parents' work colleagues whose festival it was, and the wonderful illuminations for Republic Day were so spectacular, we walked all over Bombay to marvel at them – when I close my eyes I can see them still. Any festival was a time of excitement and fun, Hindu, Christian and Muslim, because for Id we went to my Aunt and Uncle's house, and were served more sweetmeats! I enjoyed eating Bhel Puri from the roadside stalls in my early teens, and loved all the fruits we were lucky enough to get there.

Indeed Figure 2 shows her and her mother as very much a part of an Indian milieu, being accompanied by an Indian ayah. While scholars such as Beuttner (2004) have pointed out how English families would send their children away to England lest they, among other things, got spoiled by Indian servants, narratives such as the above accompanying these photos index other realities that didn't get voiced enough, namely the lives of the English and Anglo



Indians born and raised in India were similar to those of middle-class Indians. The narratives above also counter a widely-held stereo-typed belief about the English finding India's heterogeneity mind-boggling (Beuttner 2004, van der veer 2001). While such a view may have no doubt had credence in government and bureaucratic discourses (during the governance of India by the Empire and subsequently during the working out a self-sustaining democracy) that sought to accommodate India's heady mix of religions, tribes, castes, and ethnicities, it was precisely India's untamed heterogeneity that Jane and Joan mention as a valuable part of their growing years. One needs also to take account of the fact that this rejoicing in heterogeneity is a remembered joy, and that possibly parental anxiety fostered a subterranean 'required apartness', one that was built into the rearing process; these girls were one day to go 'home' to marry in England. Clearly the experience of childhood was complicated by skin colour, ethnicity and the imperial presence.

Nevertheless, the expressed joy of growing up in India undermines the sweeping nature of colonial tropes, lenses through which very particular interpretations of the lives of the English in India got read, as well as ways in which they drowned out the ordinary, everyday experiences (Scott 1990, Chakrabarty 2004, van der veer 2001) of English people growing up in a space that they had known all their lives, spaces that they had to abruptly leave, and in some cases, flee. While important and necessary at a particular point in Indian history—tropes around constructing a sense of being "Indian"—also erected borders that current temporal junctures permit a questioning of. While nationalisms (Hobswam 1990, Hobswam and Ranger 1983) in postcolonial contexts were necessary (Moore-Gilbert 1998, Young 1999a, b), and while the need to darken borders and limn lines in certain ways essential, the danger of the limits assuming a certain power and authority (and of it being passed down in distinct ways) are ever present, running the risk of blinding us to the fact that limits are traces that uphold distinctions between the "permissible" and not, 'order' and 'disorder.' But as Leslie Hill reminds us,

"To institute a limit . . . is not only to circumscribe and contain, but to yield paradoxically to the fragility of any such attempt at circumscription or containment; and it is to make the limit itself a function or effect of the limitlessness on which it is necessarily premised" (Hill, 1997: 93).

Borders, then, point not just to their artificial, albeit sometimes obligatory assemblage, but to the possibility of their being more elastic, porous and expansive than we think. Probing the limits of

history (making) make us consider both the politics around why certain voices get left out, while also underscoring the possibilities of 'limitless' implied in 'limits.' While opening ourselves up to the idea of bringing in other voices and interpretations is risky (because it at once points to both the over-determined nature of a prior interpretation/"limit" while also jostling it and nudging us to another space), it is crucial that we do so since it is by doing so that we render our engagements with the world and the past honest.

Returning to the focus of this paper, present (temporally marked) readings of photographs and narratives together renders this interpretation an echo of sorts, not so much one that resounds back fragments of a prior sedimented interpretations, but one that calls openly to the silences in our prior history making, prying at the borders of earlier reverberations towards generating other lights. These pictures and narratives compel us to reckon with the details of entrenched lives of the English in Bombay just as they underscore their migrations away from Bombay, movements whose articulations disturb a self recognition of a national self, "its anointed horizons of territory and tradition" (Bhabha 1996). The subjectivities of Anglo-Indians such as Joan and Jane, thus, emerge not just from their stories and photographs of lives and movements but from communal discourses about collective identities that mark dark lines between 'insider' and 'outsider,' and from present discourses and temporal markers that permit a voicing and probing of cultural 'limits.' Both textual forms nudge us towards acknowledging and bringing into Indian historiography "new 'formats' of significance initiated by [temporal] distance and by [emotional] contiguity" (Steiner, 2000: p. 196), permitting us to simultaneously fill in spaces of Indian historiography while also reminding us of the 'limitless' that is implied in 'limits.'

### *Entrenchments in Movements: Refusing to Leave India, Choosing to Come Back*

Connections to India show up in other photographs and narratives as well. In the following picture, taken in 1996, we see Joan's father (in the wheelchair), holding the hand of his nurse immediately behind him, his caretaker (in the green sari) and her family (son, wife and grandson).

As mentioned earlier, Joan's father never left India and chose to spend out the rest of his years there. His life was in India—he had been born and raised there as had his great grandparents, grandparents and parents—and he saw no reason to try to acclimatize

to another country when he was 'Indian.' The depth of his attachment to India is indirectly articulated in Joan's narrative about her difficulties in adjusting to England. I am deliberately juxtaposing his photograph indexing his staying on with Joan's narrative about her difficulties transitioning into UK. Here is what she says:



It was an accepted fact that when we left school my brother and I would move to England. My father always said that he would not leave India - he said it was his home.

After my brother finished Sr. Cambridge we both left. I had worked as a Secretary in Bombay for about 4 years so was able to support myself in England.

. . .

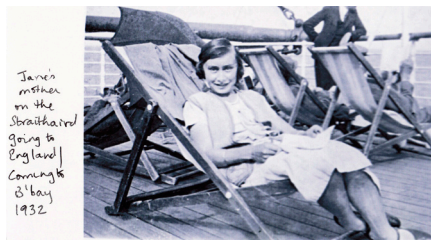
Finding a suitable job would have been difficult for my brother. . . . This was in the late 50s when things were very different. My father's sister had moved from Lahore to England a few years before and my brother and I were landed on her even though she and her husband had two children of their own. My Aunt Doris was very kind to us - and were very fond of her but it was the unhappiest 3 years of my life. We moved from a warm, friendly community (and Wadia House was a community) to what I found a cold and unfriendly country and I was miserable. I went to an employment exchange and was sent to BOAC (British Airways) as it was then. After I had been working for a while I kept hearing about "Staff travel" and asked someone what it was - I can still remember my feeling of joy and euphoria when I realised that I could go back home on holiday after a year for 10% of the fare.

Moving to England was hard for Joan. As she points out, once she realized she could travel to India at 10% of the fare, she was going back 'home' every year, and when her father was ailing, several times a year. The people in the photograph looking after her father in India were people she had hired (a nurse and a caretaker) after her mother died and as she points out in another point in her narrative, her father was much happier being surrounded by people in India than in England where he would've been in an elder home.

This deliberate juxtaposition of Joan's father staying on and Joan leaving (only to find her way back) underscores connections and pulls towards both the UK and India. As both Jane and Joan tell me, Europeans like them had to leave because "things were getting difficult" (a line I have to over-read and interpret in terms of

prevailing nationalistic discourses, the general anti-white sentiments, the broad strokes by which all Europeans got ‘read’ as ‘colonizers’). As I look at the photograph of him sitting in the verandah of his Bombay flat, I think about the hard choices he had to make: of ensuring that his son and daughter had a life outside India, sending them to England in time was crucial to their being able to settle there, the thought of himself resisting the disturbing nationalistic discourses around English-colonial equation and staying on in India since that was “home.” Joan’s “joy and euphoria” about being able to “go back home on holiday,” while mirroring and echoing in different images and sounds what her father’s photograph sends out, also paradoxically indexes a space they both inhabit, a space fraught with tensions around staying behind, leaving, and returning. There must surely have been anxiety around the possibility of the girls marrying ‘natives’—a non-acceptable proposition. This is hardly surprising given the dominant discourses of race and empire the time. Inter-marriage with the subject race would in those circumstances be unthinkable; yet some women did it (Jane’s mother’s sister for instance). Thus the girls had to leave India for good and seek their fortunes in England.

Not all photos and narratives, though, are about staying on or leaving India for good. There are some that speak of journeying to India, of India being chosen as a possible place to build a life. The following picture is one of Jane’s mother on a ship called the *Straithaird* taken in 1932 on her way back to Bombay after a sojourn in the UK.



This photograph was taken 8 years before Jane was born, and a couple of years before her mother married. As Jane’s narratives to me point out,

My mother had gone out to India from England in her mid-twenties, with her sister who had married a Muslim barrister, and who was going to settle permanently with him in his native land. Whether she stayed to keep her sister company, or had by then met my father and had found herself a very good job is

still somewhat shrouded in mystery, and there is no-one left to ask. They were married on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1934, at St. Thomas' Cathedral, Bombay, and I was baptised there on their wedding anniversary, six years later.

A traditional reading of this photograph and accompanying narrative could well be that Jane's mother was one of the "Fishing Fleet"—single British women that came out to India to find eligible bachelors working in the Indian Civil Service. But as we know from Jane's narrative excerpt (quoted earlier), her mother married an Armenian refugee (Jane's father) and not an English man. Also, an alternate reading yields other laminations: Here was this attractive woman in her twenties who set sail to start a very different kind of life in India, who goes back to the UK for a break where she could perhaps have decided not to go back to India, but instead does, and chooses for many years thereafter to make India her home.

An interpretation such as this does two things: To begin with, it lets us see that not all women who came out from England went back; some were ready to make a home here and to marry a non-English person (Armenian in this case). This sheds a different light on the 'fishing fleet' stereotype of Englishwomen who came here. It also points to the crossings and re-crossings between England and India. English families in India had familial connections in the UK—including children being schooled there—and travel between the continents was common. Jane's mother went back and forth and Jane grew up with a sense of England being an accessible place, and within her reach, images that no doubt contributed to her transition into England being a relatively smooth one.

But beyond the sweeping tropes that such narratives counter are the ways in which temporalities and spatialities are so heavily implicated in history making, a point that tends to recede until we zoom in on experiences and narratives (Dube 2004, Chatterjee 1993) in history making. Hearing about Joan's struggle as she left India and intuiting her father's struggle, or listening to Jane speak about transitioning into the UK and 'reading' her mother's choices to come back to India through both kinds of textual forms underscores, at this present moment, both the relentless charge of time (with "loss" being its perpetual chime, as Tennessee Williams points out) as well as the encodings of locales. Joan's photos and narratives situate her and her family at particular points in time and spaces leaving India and settling in the UK (in 1961 and 1956 respectively), just as the photo of Joan's father staying behind (taken in 1996, 40 years later), and or Jane's mother coming back to India in 1932 locate them in distinct moments and places. Michel de Certeau (1998) points out ways in

which spatial practices of walking, speaking, telling stories, cooking, everyday living activities hinge on time eroding, a point that gets illuminated by the present interpretations. My present narrative of these textual forms—photo as photo and photo as narrative—permits us to see how time and movement can get reduced to a line that can be seized as a whole by the eye and read in a single moment, a danger that gets momentarily stemmed when we breathe life into photographs by accompanying them with the narratives of those that own them, and when we text them to remind ourselves of our forgetting.

### *Historicizing, Textual Forms, Minority Narratives Again*

Impossible to disentangle, then, seams between experiences, images, and narratives blur (Barthes 1977, Mitchell, 1984, 1994), Sontag 1977). Images, like oral and written narratives, are far more than what they seem to reveal on the surface, and in the case of forgotten or silenced histories, it is in deliberate moments of remembering and of creating textual spaces of inclusion that alternate hermeneutic endeavours (Steiner 2003) begin. It is then that we realize that connotations go deep into and way beyond the borders of the photograph, past the motives of this production or selection of that subject, or plays with light and angles and poses (Mitchell 1984), but stretch into histories, texting, memories, remembrances, inequalities, untold stories, separations, and who knows what else. It is here that a photograph's interventionist orientation gets highlighted. While the moment of readying the camera and people may in itself be non-interventionist, the reading of it all decades later is all about interrupting flows of thought, undoing forgetting, and remembering, with image in front of us underscoring its own ephemerality, drawing its sustenance and life-force from stories told of and around it. And it is in the stories that pictures evoke, and through the stories accompanying the pictures that we rise to an awareness of how national and cultural borders while fixed, are also arbitrary, of how discontinuities and halts in histories can be made continuous and fluid by framing our thinking differently, of how the juxtaposing of very different elements—people's lives, photographs, an awareness of a country's incomplete history—permits us to speak of migrations, citizenship, and history differently.

All of this, of course, brings us to history as narrative. Historiography, as Joan Scott (2001) points out is "in the paradoxical position of creating the objects it claims only to discover" (p. 85), that historical "construction is a complex process that takes place

according to standards of coherence and intelligibility that are widely diffused and usually unarticulated (they function as a kind of disciplinary “common sense”) except in moments of crisis (p. 85). But it is a gnawing awareness of the fallibility of ‘common sense’ or what Barthes would term ‘reality effect,’ a cloak of ‘taken for granted’ realities moves us to alternate hermeneutic motions that disavow the continued darkening of earlier interpretations. Uncovering tensions around the confluence of factors that render the languaging of certain stories possible is critical to address since the act of doing so is an act of altering a bit of ‘reality.’ As Barthes points out:

The extrusion of the signified outside the ‘objective’ discourse, letting the real and its expression apparently confront each other, does not fail to produce a new meaning, so true is it, once more, that within a system any absence of an element is itself a signification. This new meaning—extensive to all historical discourse and ultimately defining its pertinence—is reality itself. (139)

The opening up of textual space to hear the voices of Anglo-Indians—British people born and raised in India—and the lives they gave up to resettle in their unfamiliar ‘home’ is a move towards stemming the borders of Indian history becoming overly darkened and towards a recognition that their voices are now Indian history’s minority stories (Chakrabarty 1998, 2007), prompting a questioning of sedimented historical truths. Entering the world of migrations and entrenchments of the British in India becomes a way by which historiography moves beyond the intersubjective space (Merleau-Ponty 2002) of recognition and gazes meeting, where my texting is an echo to their silences and muted sounds, to realizations that the threat of ‘radical forgetting’ (Derrida 1992: 209) runs thickly and silently through all history making.<sup>5</sup> Erasures rupture as our reckonings pick up the strains of silences; old narratives shift, and prior codes move as we acknowledge the binds and gazes by which we hold others in our history making. And we work to undo this Heideggerean position of the self-being-hostage-to-the other by openly acknowledging that our historicizing tropes are entrapping and binding, and work to loosen the borders of our thinking. Reading these photographs years later while listening to the stories they tell and that are embedded in them moves them beyond the pale of mere recollections to interventionist recits. This process of ‘remembering’ and telling and showing also unseals the borders around our notions of history (‘the British were like this or that, or did this or that’), and discloses lives ordinarily lived, joys ordinarily experienced, pain undergone as the ship moved on and

the familiar shoreline receded. History takes little account of such ordinary experience, preoccupied as it is with political events and momentous upheavals. Cinders are at our heels and it is the fear of *'il y a la cendre'* (Derrida 1992) that prompts the penning of memories, and fuels the hope of both resuscitating traces and creating them, since to live is to die, something has to *exist* for there to be cinders. It is remembering what had *existed*, not losing sight of them, and remaining vigilant about remembering our forgetting that is at the heart of this paper.

## Notes

1. The phrase "Anglo Indian" indexes several connotations, including those people of English ethnicity who were born and raised in India (as in the case of the two women informing this paper), people of mixed ethnicity (with one parent who was English and the other Indian), and people who moved to India and spent years there.
2. They are now British, having come to Britain at the ages of 16 and 22 respectively. When in India they were classified as 'European' in the school register which had to keep up its status as a European school. They had access to club facilities at Breach Candy club which was reserved for Europeans. Over the last many years, both have been pondering over their connections to India, one on her 'Anglo-Indian' affiliation, and the other on her father's fleeing the Turks in his homeland of Armenia and her English mother's coming out to India in the 1920s.
3. Derrida and Blanchot would maintain that there is no escaping spaces, silences no matter what/how much we language, since silence is what language rests on.
4. This is interesting inasmuch as 'home' was usually the word used for England, even if unvisited, a place to which they would eventually go in a movement of 'returning' to a place of origin—therefore home. Yet home as a lived in, familiar place was of course in India, and the moment of leaving it for the other 'home' was in many cases a wrenching experience.
5. The fear and dangers of forgetting and erasure are perhaps what prompts Stamelman (1992) to say that "to write black on white was to give reality, if not immortality, to the shadowy, imprecise experiences of inner, subjective life. . . . By inscribing words on a page, the writer was able to grasp permanently an elusive idea, to transfix a fleeting impression, and to seize an ephemeral perception before it disappeared (Stamelman 1992, cited in MacKendrick 2001, p. 34).

## References

- Attridge, D., Bennington, G. and Young, R. Eds. (1987). *Poststructuralism and the question of history*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. London, Fontana.
- Bhabha, H. (1996). "Culture's in-between." In Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds) *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 53–60). London: Sage.
- Brennan, T. (2005). "The economic image-function of the periphery." In Ania Loomba et al. (eds) *Postcolonial Studies and beyond*. (pp. 101–122). New York: Routledge.
- Buettner, E. (2004). *Empire Families: Britons and late imperial India*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Canagarajah, S. (1997). *Resisting imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Certeau, Michel de. (1998). *The practice of everyday life*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2002). *Habitations of modernity: essays in the wake of subaltern studies*. Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. Majumdar, R. and Sartori, A. (2007). *From the colonial to the postcolonial: India and Pakistan in transition*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
- Coppan, V. (2005). "The ruins of empire: the national and global politics of America's return to Rome." In Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Sty (eds) *Postcolonial Studies and beyond*. (pp. 80–100). New York: Routledge.
- Dube, S. ed. (2004). *Postcolonial passages: contemporary history writing in India*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.
- Gandhi, L. (2006). *Anticolonial thought, affective communities and the politics of friendship*. Delhi, Permanent Black.
- Guha, R. (1997). *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Guha, R. (2004). *The last liberal and other essays*. New Delhi, Permanent Black.
- Guha, R. (2007). *India after Gandhi: the history of the world's largest democracy*. London, Macmillan.
- Hill, L. (1997). *Maurice Blanchot: extreme contemporary*. London, Routledge.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1990). *Nations and nationalisms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, .
- Hughes, A. and Noble, A. Eds. (2003). *Phototextualities*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press.
- Loomba, A. (2000). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. London, Routledge.
- Loomba, A., Kaul, S., Bunzl, M., Burton, A., Sty, J. Eds. (2005). *Postcolonialism and beyond*. Durham, Duke University Press.
- Lyotard, J. (1988). *Peregrinations: Law, form, event*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- MacKendrick, K. (2001). *Immemorial silence*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002). *Phenomenology of perception*. London, Routledge.

- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1986). *Iconology: image, text, ideology*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Moore-Gilmore, B. (1998). "Postcolonialism: between nationalitarianism and globalization? A response to Simon During." *Postcolonial studies* 1(1):49–65.
- Pennycook, A. (1998). *English and the discourses of colonialism*. London, Routledge.
- Radhakrishnan, R. (2003). *Theory in an uneven world*. London, Blackwell.
- Ramanathan, V. (2005). "Ambiguities about English: ideologies and critical practice in vernacular-medium settings in Gujarat India." *Journal of language, identity, and education* 4(1):45–65.
- Ramanathan, V. (2005a). *The English-Vernacular Divide: post-colonial language policies and practice*. Cleveland, Multilingual Matters.
- Ramanathan, V. (2005b). "The vernacularization of English: crossing global currents to re-dress west-based TESOL." *Critical inquiry in language studies*. Special issue on Postcolonial approaches to TESOL, 3 (2&3), 131–146.
- Ramanathan, V. (2007). Unpublished manuscript. "Silencing and languaging: Assembling collective identities, British Indian public citizens and the epistolary form."
- Scott, J. (2001). *Schools of thought*. New Jersey, Princeton University Press.
- Seth, S. (2007). *Subject lessons*. Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press.
- Sontag, S. (1977). *On photography*. New York, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- Steiner, G. (2004). "The hermeneutic motion." *The translation studies reader*. L. Venuti, New York, Routledge: 183–198.
- van der Veer, P. (2001). *Imperial encounters: religion and modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Visram, R. (1986). *Ayahs, lascars and princes*. London, Pluto Press.
- Weber, E., Ed. (1992). *Points . . . Interviews, 1974-1994*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.