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Reframing Diaspora: A Post-Colonial Reading of Women's Travel Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Diaspora studies currently engage with contemporary globalization and migrant experiences in Western metropoles. Diaspora writing, however, has a long history rooted in the colonial archive. My aim is to analyze the impact of diaspora on colonial women's travels using a post-colonial approach. This paper will focus on the narratives of both Indian and British women including Emily Eden (*Up the Country*, 1866), Anne Wilson (*Letter from India*, 1911), Krishnabhabini Das (*Englanday Bangamahila*, 1885) and Janaki Majumdar (*A Family History*, 1935) to analyze the impact of diaspora on gender identity. Both groups underwent psychic trauma and fracturing of identities when they were transplanted to alien environments. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, I interpret the recurrence of hybridization, trauma of maternal loss, and yearning for home as representations of diasporic consciousness in the two groups of women. I extend the parameters of diaspora studies by incorporating the writing of Western women and by shifting the gaze to the historical archive of colonial writing. My analysis will reframe diaspora studies and reorient current notions of whose experiences count as diaspora.

KEYWORDS: travel narratives, gender, diaspora, hybridity, nostalgia, trauma

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I. Introduction

Current engagements with diaspora focus on economic migrations or professional diasporas as self-enriching movements from the underdeveloped East to the more affluent Western metropolitan centres. Such geographical mobility is usually regarded as an effect of globalization and late capitalism, yet history indicates that contemporary multicultural societies and diasporic communities originate from earlier spatial displacements created by the slave trade and indentured labour of European colonialism. Colonial diaspora, however, was not limited to these horrific uprooting of people; there was a multiplicity of diasporic experiences under the colonial rubric. The period of high colonialism, from 1857 to 1947, saw a new type of diaspora engendered by the colonial machinery, with British administrators and Indian students travelling between England and India. Rozina Visram (2002) and Michael Fisher (2004) have presented valuable archival data to show that an Indian community in Britain paralleled the rise of colonialism, indicating an often neglected geographical displacement of colonized people. At the same time, the British presence in India was also strengthened with multitudes of people arriving from the imperial centre. As Stuart Hall ("When" 1996) points out, it is necessary to interrogate these binary forms of transculturation and reread global processes of lateral and decentered cultural connections. The reading of the British colonial community as a diaspora provides a nuanced account of counterflows within diasporas.

While the discourse of travel remained a male-dominated sphere, the nineteenth century also witnessed an expansion in travels by privileged women. Though poor women had been part of the slave trade and labour shipments, elite women did not venture out of their homes in large numbers prior to the nineteenth century. Travel associated with adventures, dangerous encounters, risk taking and, of course, exploring new vistas far from home, was not considered appropriate for women expected to stay home, confined to geographical and social boundaries. In 1716, when Lady Mary Montague, famous for her travel writing, *The Turkish Embassy Letters*, went to Constantinople with her husband who had been appointed the ambassador to Turkey, she was severely criticized for going to the Orient (Bassnett 229). There was a fear that physical crossovers would lead to cultural crossovers and moral contamination. Consequently, women who embarked on journeys, even in the

nineteenth century, had to carefully negotiate various social ideologies and expectations.

II. Gendering Travel and Travel Narratives

Recent recuperative work on feminist historiography, such as Sara Mills's seminal work *Discourses of Differences* (1993), has focused attention on women's travel and the connection to imperialism. Indira Ghose in *Women Travellers in India* (1998) and Indrani Sen in *Women and Empire* (2002), for instance, have examined British women's encounter with India. A growing interest in Indian women's travels to Britain has also emerged. The presence of women in the colonial Indian community of Britain has been brought to notice by Visram and Fisher in their valuable contributions. Antoinette Burton (*Dwelling* 2003) and Inderpal Grewal (1996), among others, have delved further into the lives and voyages of these Indian female travellers. Women's travel writing produced in the nineteenth century articulate a strong diasporic experience. However, the role of women in colonial diaspora stands mostly neglected because, as Crane and Mohanram posit, "Diaspora theory, for the most part, is predicated on an ungendered notion of the diasporic, as if both genders were affected in identical ways" (11). This essay aims to address this gap by shifting attention to the gender dimension of diasporic experience. Drawing on a range of theories from travel writing and post-colonialism, I argue that diaspora led to unsettling gender identities and resulted in ambivalences and anxieties which can be explained with Bhabha's theory of hybridity. I focus on the common diasporic themes in the texts of British and Indian women travellers to show the cultural dislocations produced by journeys and settlement in new spaces. The paper will first explain why colonial women's journeys can be considered diasporic. Then the effects of diaspora that emerge in these narratives—hybridization, maternal loss, trauma and nostalgia for home—are compared. I hope the attention to gender and race will extend the parameters of diaspora studies and reframe and reorient diaspora.

Women's travel narratives form an important site of the diasporic imbrications of historical transformation and cultural dislocation. For the purpose of this research I limit myself to four elite female travel writers who were part of colonial diaspora and who sojourned rather than settled in new places. Among the British women, I have selected one of the most widely read

travel writers, Emily Eden (1797-1869), the sister of the Governor General Lord Auckland, who was in India from 1835 to 1842. She published one volume of letters during her lifetime *Up the Country* (1866), which covered her tour of Punjab; after her death, her niece published more letters in two collected volumes (1872). The second traveler is Anne Wilson (1855-1921) who resided in India for a considerable long time and recorded her impressions in the epistolary travelogue *Letters from India* (1911).

The Indian travellers include Krishnabhabini Das (1862-1919) who went to England with her husband in 1882 and wrote the first travelogue by a Bengali woman, *Englanday Bangamahila* (*A Bengali Lady in England*, 1885), and Janaki Agnes Penelope Majumdar (1886-1963), the author of *A Family History* (1935), which depicts her family's visits to England in the nineteenth century. Majumdar's text has been included because it narrates the historically important journey of her mother, Hemangini Bonnerjee (1849-1910), one of the early Bengali women to have travelled to England.

III. Voyaging into Diaspora

Although diaspora is formed by a journey, Ashcroft and others and Brah insist that travel and diaspora are not synonymous; the latter depends on dwelling and establishing a home. Diaspora is also distinct from ordinary travel because it is linked to power and dominance. Diaspora journeys are often imposed by external forces, such as professional goals or family demands, rather than personal desires. Brah reminds us that journeys must be historicized to answer not simply "who travels but when, how and under what circumstances?" (443). The responses to these queries situate the women's journeys as diasporic ones framed within the configuration of colonial power. Their movements within the centre of the empire and outside in the peripheries were regulated by prevailing ideologies. Despite their privileged class, the female travellers' dislocations to India or England were enforced by colonial exigencies. Ashcroft and others call attention to external pressures exerted on both exile and diaspora by the reference to the Biblical idea that "exile is a punishment" (425). The element of loss and separation is another feature that they identify and highlight in their observation that diaspora is similar to exile in quoting Said's words, "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (qtd. in 425) to convey the sorrow of journeys of parting.

However, Ashcroft and other also point out that diaspora differs from movements such as migration. Here the focus is less on ruptures and severances and more on ties and connections that find expression in the themes of nostalgia and yearning for home.

Set against these terms, colonial female travels of the elite class can also be compared to traumatic unhappy journeys since they left home because of the professional needs of husband or brother working for the colonial machinery rather than their own personal goals. The travels in this study show that women's voyages were determined by family obligations. There were exceptions such as Pandita Ramabai and Cornelia Sorabji, two Indian women who travelled on their own to England for their education, but the majority of pioneering female travellers came to England for family reasons, as did the early British women in India. The single British women who came to India on their own were also mired in family pressures because they arrived to marry and form families. Emily Eden, for example, came to India despite a much vocalized reluctance in order to fulfill the duties of the First Lady, as her brother the Governor General was a bachelor. All the four women in this study were connected to the colonial enterprise. The British women arrived with men serving the colonial administration, while the Indian women were married to colonized subjects who went to England to acquire professional training and accrue the cultural and economic capital of colonialism. Furthermore, the journeys of these women were aligned with the normative gender role of being feminine (and domestic) because Das, Bonnerjee (Majumdar's mother) and Wilson accompanied their husbands to set up dwellings and residences, thereby, carrying out the requirements of diasporic life.

Race, however, complicates the diasporic identity of the British women. Ashcroft and others caution against an English diaspora since "[it] seems inappropriate to talk about the spread of a powerful colonizing people around the world as 'an exile.' . . . Nor can we describe as a diaspora that cultural group that attains global dominance" (426). In fact, the dimension of race problematizes a comparative analysis as colonial power difference had impact upon travel experiences. By the middle of the nineteenth century a large number of Englishwomen, the wives of colonial and army officers, had settled in India (I. Sen 9), which led to the coining of a new term, "memsahib," meaning madam master (sahib being master). This term has now become a cliché, often used pejoratively to refer to frivolous shallow women of the Raj, the British empire

in India, but it still connotes the privilege and authority that British women were accorded in colonial hierarchy. The relational positioning of being colonizers as opposed to colonized subjects reconfigures some of the diasporic markers. The British women were not part of a political minority like most diasporic populations; rather, the power and status they commanded as colonizers positioned them above Indians and transformed their journey into one of conquest. They enjoyed privileges and access that the marginalized Indian women could not find in England and for whom the travel meant a reduction in the social prestige and influence they enjoyed in their native societies. British women's complicity with the imperial project is acknowledged in studies of female travellers to India (Ghose; I. Sen; S. Sen). Ghose's book foregrounds the power dimension in the title, *The Power of the Female Gaze: Women Travellers in Colonial India*, and the author states that "the transcendent traveller's gaze is the colonial gaze" (9) in her study of British women's representations of India. Consequently, the British narratives are embedded in orientalist and hegemonic discourses.

I wish to argue, nonetheless, that despite the privileged position of belonging to the colonized race, the British women who travelled to India do indeed form a diasporic group, a cultural enclave often found in diaspora community. Though race placed the white women at the top of colonial hierarchy, gender established lines of contiguity with Indian women and with marginalized groups in that they were also drafted by the colonial machinery and were subordinated to white men. The women were brought to India to establish domesticity which, in turn, would reinforce British identity. At the early stages of British rule in India in the eighteenth century, women were discouraged from settling. This policy was later reversed when racial attitudes changed and an increase in inter-racial relationships between British men and Indian women threatened the identity of the colonizers. Many surplus women were sent to India in what was derisively called fishing fleets (I. Sen 9) to lessen the burden of unwanted women in the metropole and to encourage British men to marry women of their own race. While the travellers in this study were socially above such indigent women, they served a similar function of promoting British feminine spaces and identities. But women's participation in empire building was further problematized by the ambivalence of their position. Grewal explains:

> Despite the fact that the colonies were seen as places where English-women were to be protected from the rapacious and oversexed "natives," imperial needs came to require Englishwomen in order to keep the colonists from cohabiting with "native" women. (61)

They were moved out of the domestic sphere into the public realm to set up the domestic heart of the empire. Moreover, these women, who needed male protection, had to defend the empire's interest. They were used as a bulwark against the threat of the empire's Otherness and were dispersed to India to buttress British superiority and civilization.

A focus on gender as a category by itself approaches the pitfall of essentialism and ignores the asymmetry of power between women. However, by situating the women in specific contexts when comparing the two groups of women, this analysis presents a contextualized examination of women and takes into account the intersecting dimensions of race and class. My study shows that white women and native women could meet in the interstices of gender and race in the male colonial project. Such a reading is supported by the common tropes that emerge in their narratives. Although travel texts are written mainly to convey accounts of new places and the Other to an audience back home, there is always an element of self-representation. In women's writing, the self-inscription is noteworthy because women writers mostly confined themselves to confessional and autobiographical texts such as memoirs and letters (Mills 103). Interestingly, the self-narratives were not aimed at self-promotion. The selection of this genre was motivated by the need to remain on the margins of knowledge discourse and not encroach on male preserves of scientific and official accounts of travel. As travellers, the women transgressed gender boundaries when they broke free from the confines of domestic sphere and gained mobility and access to different discourses; so, they mitigated the damage by underscoring a feminine style. Even Das, who selected a more masculine text type of the travelogue, secures a feminine identity by withholding her name from publication and by publicly declaring that her husband helped her to produce this work.

The assertion of a female self is further complicated because travel texts are not, in Mills's opinion, "expressions of individual subjects in the context of an alien country, but rather are the site of various discourses which play on the

text" (39). In colonial travel writing, the multiple positionings stem from the "basic ambivalence" of colonial experience which Bhabha traces to "the disturbance of its authoritative representations by the uncanny forces of race, sexuality, violence, cultural and even climatic differences which emerge in the colonial discourse as the mixed and split texts of hybridity" (161). Hence, the texts manifest complex negotiations with different discourses of gender, colonialism and travel, and they reveal a self-conscious construction of identity, which I consider to be a gendered diasporic identity.

IV. Hybridity—the Impact of Diaspora

In analyzing the diasporic contours of the texts, identity emerges as a central preoccupation, since travel narratives are sites for the enactment of self-representation and identity formation that emerges from colonial travel's unsettlement of selfhood. The colonial realm is a place where identities are "made and re-made" and "both the colonizer and the colonized had to reinvent themselves" according to Gikandi (33). Hence it follows that there will be an inherent link between diaspora and identity formation. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Hall argues that essential identities are fractured by diaspora, and European presence positions the black subject in a new way so that: "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (402). Like Bhabha, he contends that the colonial encounters with cultural and other differences lead to the creation of hybridity.

Hybridity is perhaps best summed up as "neither the one, nor the other" (Bhabha 37), a definition grounded in Fanon's ideas of colonial instability and double consciousness. In post-colonial approaches, the term encompasses more than the denotative meaning of mixture. Bhabha's theory of hybridity places stress on the transformation and contestation involved in forming a new space or culture after dissolving binaries, as in the colonial encounter. He emphasizes the dynamics of transforming and contesting fixed identities in colonial encounters. The connection between ambivalence or in-betweenness and diaspora is an accepted fact that prompts Gandhi (1998) to contend:

> . . . diasporic thought finds its apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline figure of the exile, caught in a historical limbo between home and the world. (132)

Her phrase "culturally contaminated," captures the unease of hybridity, an issue that is often neglected in post-colonial celebrations of the transformative agency of the hybrid condition. This fear of cultural mutation or cultural corruption was prevalent in both British and Indian societies. It was thought that transnational influences would threaten gender norms, and women on both sides were encouraged to avoid contact and imitation of the Other (Grewal; Suleri; I. Sen; S. Sen). Bhabha regards this cross-cultural impact as the invasion of the public on the private domestic spaces, blurring distinctions between home and world, and engendering the uncanny, a monstrous doubling or split in consciousness, and the unhomely, the in-between space of belonging and not belonging. The diasporic figure, unlike the migrant, resists the pull towards assimilation and remains fixed in the in-between state. It creates a tension between living in a new place and longing for the old home, which James Clifford (453) thinks is grounded in the pride of belonging to a rich culture. The strong connection to the original home probably accounts for the valiant efforts of travellers to retain essentialist identities and even internalization of colonial discourse in their adherence to being Occidental or Oriental.

Diaspora leads to unsettling of defined identities which the female travellers countenanced by adopting pronounced feminine personas and national self-projections. In their displays of femininity, one finds resonances of Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990), a view of gender identity based on culturally acquired modes of behavior such as talking, acting and dressing in certain ways. Bhabha similarly gestures to the importance of enacting rituals in remarking that the subject is often produced through "the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (209). His concepts of performative and pedagogical narratives provide a useful frame of reference to analyze women travellers' complex transactions with gender and identity. The pedagogical narrative, according to Bhabha, is the official story or myth that a nation imposes on its people and the performative narrative is personal identity construction at the micro-level. Colonial subjects often exploit the performative as a space of resistance to undermine the authority and dominance of the

pedagogical narration. In these travel texts, however, we notice a more complex treatment of the performative inflected by racial and gender dimensions.

V. British Reactions to Hybridity

The conflict of multiple identities is manifested in several ways, one being the anxiety over hybridization, particularly in British travellers. Apprehensions in British women revolved around "her own fear of native women—a fear of proximity rather than of difference" (Suleri 77). It was necessary for colonial authority to maintain a rigid demarcation because, as Bhabha explains, the "construction of colonial subject" and "the exercise of colonial power" (96) rested on racial difference. British women's supremacy depended on their distinctiveness and separation from native women. The tension over cultural contact emanated from moral and cultural arrogance. At the same time, the fragility of colonial authority emerges in the dread that "colonial settlers might submit to the civilizational depravity of their victims, or in other words 'go native'" (Gandhi 133). Metropolitan prejudice against colonial cultures and places was extended to the India returned British men and women who were regarded with contempt and condescension (Nechtman). The disdain was, of course, an extension of the colonial boundary between centre and periphery. Singh points out that this binary was also a way of elevating British superiority while condemning India. The persisting social disparagement of India returned individuals was embedded in literary discourse as in the mockery of the fictional Joseph Sedley in William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848) or colonial society in George Atkinson's satire *Curry and Rice* (1859). Consequently, many women resisted being drafted into British diaspora such as Jane Eyre in Brontë's novel, who is loath to go to India. Not surprisingly, Emily Eden, belonging to an aristocratic Whig family, was reluctant to travel to India. She repeatedly writes home that she longs for England and can find nothing good here. Although she had gone to India for her brother's career advancement, a professional diaspora, she describes her stay as an exile. Thus, she constantly reiterates her alienation in India and her privations despite being at the centre of colonial pageantry and power as the Governor General's sister. She projects herself as an Englishwoman untainted by knowledge of India, "I never ask questions. I hate information" (Eden, *Letters* 1: 62). Such a move secures her normative social identity as a feminine English woman. She reinforces the

femininity by dwelling on domestic arrangements and clothes. She devotes great space to colonial fashion and sartorial challenges of finding fabrics and ruining dresses.

The attention to these superficial quotidian details points to Eden's distancing from India. This also emerges in her treatment of Indian women. Considering that women travel writers' claim to authority and fame rested on their exposure to the unknown lives of Indian women, to which men did not have access, one would expect Eden to present lavish descriptions of Indian women as Fanny Parkes had done. However, she offers scant portraits of Indian women she met. Among the retinue of servants, only Rozina, her maid is mentioned by name. She makes more of an effort to delineate women of Indian royalty in keeping with the Orientalist mode of colonial discourse. Accordingly, she emphasizes the appearances and dresses of the ranees whom she met. She writes of one of Runjeet Singh's wife, the mother of Pertab Singh, "one of the prettiest little creatures I ever saw" (Eden, *Up the Country* 226), and she notes the jewelry worn by the royal ladies. However, she undercuts the splendor by underscoring flaws, as in the quip that another queen "was immensely fat and rather ugly" (226). In another encounter, she remarks on the illness and age of a queen and comments "it was not very nice" (28) to have to kiss her. The focus on the shortcomings betrays the uneasiness in confronting the Other.

A similar concern to sustain inviolate British identity is found in the letters of Anne Wilson who came to India towards the end of nineteenth century. She differed from Eden in her enthusiasm for living in India. In her published letters, an account of the places and people of India she had encountered, she inserts a letter mourning the death of Queen Victoria. This letter is an interruption in the narrative of colonial life; however, like Eden's narrative strategies, the purpose is to remind readers of the writer's patriotism and Britishness. She also asserts her national identity in the opening of another letter: "Blessings on the man who dreamt of Sakesar and made it an English home" (Wilson 46). Although senior colonial officials were given grand bungalows, Wilson declares the superiority of English homes and her bias towards Englishness when she admits: "The roof of this house enchants me, merely because it slants instead of being flat" (46) as in the Indian style. These instances reflect attempts to dominate through disavowal or, as Bhabha explains, "the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority" (159). In other words, the women are othering India and valorizing Englishness.

The paucity of details about Indian women is also notable in Wilson's letters. She is rather insular in focusing on Anglo-Indian society, and her indifference is a means of removing herself from a close association with Indians. She mentions being invited by the Maharani of Kuch Behar but does not offer any description of the queen, a celebrated beauty.

The female travellers, unlike male writers such as John Beames (1896) or John Lang (1859), appear to be more concerned with expressing emotional responses than depicting India. This gender hallmark is attributable to the fact that the emotional terrain is traditionally regarded as the sphere of female writing (Mills; Thompson). In contrast, Beames, a young civil servant, was so emotionally reticent in his letters that he recounts how his fiancée, who had remained in England, felt he had lost interest in her. He writes:

> . . . being in a state of great excitement over my journey up-country and settling in my new district, had not shown much sympathy for her in my letters as I ought. She told me afterwards that my letters at this time were short and cold, and she had persuaded herself that I was getting tired of our engagement. (105)

In Eden's letters, we notice the opposite, an excessive yearning for British culture and people. Perhaps she feels compelled to let her readers know she had not "gone native" (Gandhi 133) and was not changed by India. Unfortunately, diaspora fractures selfhoods, and Eden finds herself changed to yellow. There are several references to this mutation as in "I think we are all very much altered in looks" (Eden, *Letters* 2: 40).

Eden's more subtle internal hybridization is manifested in the contradictory impulses produced by the intersection of race, class and gender in travel writing. In her examination of white women's encounters with Indian women, Alam reflects that despite the repressive hegemony of colonialism and Orientalism on Eden's writing, the traveller does write sympathetically in her appreciation of the tower named Kootub Minar and her guilt at the transience and absurdity of British rule. Nonetheless, the instances are few and presented obliquely. She mentions once that she would have liked to learn more about the Indian queens and wished she could have met them "without all these nonsense" (Eden, *Up the Country* 227) of protocol, where her regret is conveyed as irritation at official etiquette rather than interest in Indians. Wilson, too, betrays

a shift from her intransigent aloofness when she writes about the village women she encountered during a visit. Although her response was mediated by hearing stories from "a Missionary," she arrives at the conclusion: "We are the same birds with different feathers" (Wilson 94), hinting at the possibility of female bonding.

VI. Indian Responses to Hybridity

The negative side of cultural hybridity was also a matter of concern for the Indians. Hindu travellers in the nineteenth century faced religious restrictions on sea-voyages and were excommunicated upon their return from England. The husbands of both Krishnabhabini Das and Hemangini Bonnerjee were rejected by their families for breaking religious taboos through their travels to England (S. Sen). The women, who initially remained in India, were also tainted by association. As doubly colonized subjects, the Indian women's hybridization was more traumatic and problematic. They were caught in a snare of conflicting ideologies of social reform and nationalism surrounding "the woman question" and "home" (Grewal 134) that mirrored metropolitan concerns about private and public spaces and gender roles. Women as cultural signifiers were appropriated by reformers to embody social progress, and they linked travel and Western education to women's modernity. On the other hand, society, sometimes even the male modernists, would not support the hegemonic influence of Westernization and wanted women to embody Indian traditions. This type of problematic positioning of women led to their ambivalent responses to travel. Das's excitement at going to England, to become free and acquire knowledge, corresponds to the enthusiasm of her contemporary male travellers like Romesh Chandra Dutt and Trailokyanath Mukharji. The difference emerges in her lamentation at being separated from the homeland, a note missing in the male narratives. For women, the cultural capital of visiting the metropolitan centre came at a greater cost of social alienation. Though Das's travelogue is mostly impersonal with few self-reflexive moments, one such rare inner revelation deals with the consciousness of change within her. She is aware of her transformation from the start of her journey. As she travels past familiar landmarks when leaving Calcutta, she has a self-realization:

> During my train journeys to my father's home, I came to these stations veiled, but where is my veil now? When I tried to cover my face with my veil, my fingers touched upon my hat instead. It was a bit embarrassing to realize I am in different clothes. If any acquaintance sees me, he might not recognize me; perhaps, he will mistake me for a mem (British woman) and keep his distance from fear. (Das 7)

The new outfit makes her anxious about public perceptions. Once she is in England, she is more confident. Still she registers a tension over social approbation when she writes:

> It has been a few months since I came to England. My lifestyle is very English in the food I eat and the clothes I wear; if any fellow countrymen were to see me they would mock me as a thorough memsahib—let them ridicule me, it will not affect me. (Das 35)

In spite of her assertion that mockery will not affect her, the concern betrays her dread. She consoles herself by reasoning that reformers have always been criticized for introducing foreign ideas. She justifies the decision to adopt European clothes because apparels do not change people. This tension at being mistaken for the Other discloses the fear of hybridity. At the same time, it signals ambivalence towards the British woman. Like Eden, Das has a mixed response to the women of the other race, whom she describes in a separate chapter (ch. 12). She begins by pointing out the good qualities of the female colonizers, recounting their beauty and accomplishments; but she also adds shortcomings and compares them disfavourably with Indian women for their cunning and lack of hospitality (77-78). In her disparagements of the female Other, Das shares with her British counterparts the intransigence and racial exclusivity of diasporic community. Das's hybridity, however, also alludes to a greater internal shift. The writer acknowledges this transformation in her declaration that England changed her; she writes she was ignorant and caged before she came here and learned about freedom (129).

Clothes, however, are an interesting and important marker of hybridity as they provide a visual manifestation of the change in travellers. It is particularly significant in women since they were the bearers of cultural specificity and

cultural values. Consequently, dress becomes a marker of diasporic experience in Majumdar's text too. She recalls that her mother Hemangini Bonnerjee had to wear "English dress" (Majumdar 48) even when she lived in India due to the wishes of her England returned husband. At home she dressed in English fashion, but when she visited her relatives she was "in a saree and barefoot" (48). Traditionally, Indian women went barefoot, a few wore sandals when they went out but never shoes, which were a symbol of Western influence.[1] Hence, women like Bonnerjee and Das who were influenced by Western ideas and fashion would have been objects of ridicule in their societies.

Hemangini Bonnerjee's hybridization was also expressed in other ways. Her husband gave their children English names along with Indian ones such as Janaki Agnes Penelope. W. C. Bonnerjee's desire for a British lifestyle was realized first through changes in the interior domestic space along English lines and later by insisting his wife lived in England so that the children could be "brought up entirely in English ways" (Majumdar 51). Majumdar's mother's hybridization here becomes mimicry of British culture in the rejection of native culture and internalization of colonial ideology and education.

H. Bonnerjee's transformation was greater than Das's because she ultimately converted to Christianity during her stay in England (Majumdar 72). It is unsettling that this woman would change her religion even though she was a devout Hindu in her youth and her husband remained one till his death. This transformation can be read as an effect of diasporic trauma because, Burton writes, it is possible that Bonnerjee joined the Plymouth Brethen to find some companionship and to "mitigate the trauma of living as an outcaste woman doubly burdened by the difficulties of exile" (Introduction xvii). It needs to be remembered that Hemangini Bonnerjee's diasporic suffering was occasioned by her husband's colonial aspirations, and so the dual forces of colonialism and patriarchy had doubly colonized her. Her hybridization was a coping mechanism to deal with cultural dislocations. Yet, the change also indicates self-assertion and confidence akin to Das's brought about by travel.

[1] The sartorial detail is important because shoes were not worn by women of the gentry in the colonial era. A telling social document is a popular cartoon by Benoy Bosu, titled *Bengali Lady Clerk*, ridiculing the Westernized Indian woman in her cross-cultural dress of saree with shoes.

VII. Losing Children in Diaspora

The destabilization of gender identity is another effect of colonial diaspora. Not only did women commit social transgressions through geographical mobility, they also fractured the limited gender roles that defined them. The image of motherhood was central to British and Indian female identities. Queen Victoria projected herself as an imperial mother in the public images she circulated (Agnew 92). However, women living in colonial spaces were not able to sustain a maternal role. Studies show that many European children in India died in infancy, and those who survived were soon sent away to England. Most British women felt that Indian food and climate along with the constant moving from town to town took a toll on children's health and weakened them, which motivated the parents to send children back to England (Ghose 237). Maud Diver remarks "there is a limit of age beyond which she (the mother) dare not keep them without the risk of handicapping them" (qtd. in Ghose 235). Apprehensions over children were rooted also in fears of hybridization, the contamination of cultural influence. This is why one traveller comments that despite the terror of separation:

> the greatest anxiety is to secure for them the advantages of a European education and in almost every instance those who remain in India are only kept there in consequence of pecuniary embarrassments. (Emma Roberts qtd. in Ghose 235)

Women were conflicted about staying with their children or their husbands, and mothers who chose to remain in the colonies were criticized for "loosening of the sacred-family bond" (I. Sen 30). It was a sad fact of diaspora evident in at least two of the travellers under study.

Anne Wilson's separation from her son was typical of the British diaspora. She writes of her son's sorrow at being separated from his familiar milieu and her own sadness. She consoles herself with the thought that she could go visit him once a year. Although she is reserved about the separation, one of the most moving letters that she writes is of an emotional moment when a child "just like my own boy" with the same height, face and eyes came rushing towards her calling out "Mother," but the moment is distorted when the child "threw himself into the arms" (Wilson 203) of another woman. This poignant moment released

in her "a sense of anguish of a thousand mothers, who pay for India with their babies" (203). She ends the letter with a plea that mothers like her be not judged harshly as they have to endure the pain of turning away "their eyes from haunting baby faces" (204). It is a plaintive testimony of how diaspora creates rifts.

The loss of children also arises in Indian women's narratives. Das was forcefully deprived of her daughter by social regimes. Under the patriarchal power structure of Indian family organization, she had to obey her father-in-law and leave her daughter Tilottoma behind when she travelled to England with her husband. She was forced to sever all ties with her daughter. Although she does not write about Tilottoma, her interest in women's rights and women's freedom in England is perhaps an indication of repressed longings for the daughter. The verses advocating women's emancipation, which she inserted in the travelogue, constitute an embedding of her criticism of patriarchy for denying women their rights.

Bonnerjee, too, suffers from maternal sorrow. First she loses her son Kitty at age 11 to double pneumonia in England. Majumdar writes that her mother felt guilty because she had not realized the severity of his cold: "She never really got over the shock, and wore mourning for the rest of her life" (Majumdar 82). But the greater deprivation was her emotional distance from the children who grew up in England. Majumdar considers cultural differences to be the cause behind this:

> . . . she was very much out of touch with her elder children, who rather despised her lack of education . . . and really had nothing in common with her, as they scarcely remembered their life in India and the relatives there. (72)

The loosening of the family bonds due to spatial and temporal dislocations is a recurrent motif in many diaspora texts, notably diaspora fiction such as *Brick Lane* (2004) and *The Namesake* (2004), where the second-generation immigrant characters feel a disconnect with either their parents or the original land of their parents.[2] This is an instance of how diasporic hybridization

[2] In Ali's *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's elder daughter refuses to return to Bangladesh or to accept her father Chanu's glorification of his homeland. Similarly, there is a gradual cultural alienation in Ashima's children in Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*. In fact even Ashima's desire to return to Calcutta lessens by

generates alienation across generations.

VIII. Nostalgia and Transplanting Homes

The impact of diaspora is not limited to ideological perspectives and internal shifts. It needs to be remembered that geographical displacements forced the women to grapple with alien environments on a physical level. In her analysis of colonial narratives, Suleri notes how "colonial terror" emerges from the "ostensible unreadability of the colonized subcontinent" (6) that can emanate from the climate and landscape of colonial spaces. Eden constantly underscores the difference of India by mentioning its oppressive heat. Her letters are full of records that "the heat was intolerable everywhere" (Eden, *Letters* 1: 155). In a similar move, Das also highlights the physical variation in her complaints of the thick fog and coldness of London (44). Her first impression of London is one of dislocation: "one will fall into a daze" (62), a response consistent with Bhabha's explanation of displacement, which is to confront "a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (Bhabha 13). The disorienting experience of "extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (13) is the "paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" in Bhabha's opinion. Such trauma, therefore, produces nostalgia and longing for home among the travelling women.

The importance of home in diasporic discourses has been highlighted by Clifford in his observation that diasporic subjects "resist erasure" of a prior home (453). This then explains the recurring motif of an absent home in most travelogues. The texts under study were all published accounts of new spaces, aimed at entertaining readers with the frisson of a novelty and excitement. Paradoxically though, the writers foreground their longing for the home left behind. Wilson's elaborate account of servants, camp life and homes in her letters can be linked to her diasporic consciousness because Brah reminds us that identity of diasporic community is "constituted within the crucible of materiality of everyday life" (444). The diasporic nostalgia for home is a major theme, too, in Emily Eden's letters. Soon after her arrival at Calcutta, she writes:

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the end of the novel and she decides to divide her time between India and America, indicating her assimilation and acceptance of the new home.

> I find it not at all unwholesome to think of home. I never think of anything else; and as for those little pictures I brought out, I should like to know what I should have been without them. (Eden, *Letters* 1: 121)

Such reflections are common in women's travel writing. Identity for female travellers is often predicated on their property and social authority, unlike men, who can access authority from knowledge, money or political power (Pratt 159). Female travellers, therefore, endeavour to cope with strangeness by recreating homes in alien environments. The interest in dwellings and domestic arrangements positions the writers as proper feminine subjects, adhering to the normative gender roles, and also as diasporic figures searching for a lost home. Women's attention to domestic details in their travel narratives has been noted by both Pratt and Mills. Pratt regards this phenomenon as a form of gendered discourse:

> The predictable fact that domestic settings have a much more prominent presence in the women's travel accounts than in the men's (where one is hard pressed to find even an interior description of a house) is a matter not just of differing spheres of interest or expertise, then, but of modes of constituting knowledge and subjectivity. (160)

Pratt's explanation of the theme of home, therefore, provides support for my view that women, by selecting certain narrative motifs, constructed a particular self-identity, which in most cases was the articulation of a feminine diasporic identity.

A recent study on the lives and representations of British women in colonial India states that women considered it their imperial duty to recreate home environments to support their husbands (Agnew 56). The wives of colonial officials were careful to observe British traditions even when these clashed with personal inclinations. As a consequence, one wife writes that she had to prepare a simulation of English Christmas dinner—"We had turkey and plum pudding for dinner, and a few holy berries"—even though she would have preferred to visit the river bank (Violet Jacobs qtd. in Agnew 57). Wilson expresses a similar compulsion to recreate British homes when she writes: "I

have seen already how pretty they may be made to look, notwithstanding the doors, with pictures, curtains, draperies and feminine knick-knacks and devices" (7). Her plan echoes Steele and Gardiner's advice to colonial wives in *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* to decorate their homes with British goods such as carpets, curtains, piano and knick-knacks (qtd. in Agnew 57). Such attempts to transplant the old home culture were part of the British women's enactment of being British, which in Bhabha's term would be a pedagogical narrative.

Nostalgia for home is also a motif in Indian women's narratives. The centrality of home is present in Majumdar's memoir of her experiences in England. As the daughter of a successful barrister involved in Indian nationalism, this traveller, like Eden, belonged to an elite class. Although she occupied a subordinate position as a colonized subject, her social background of affluence and education counters the marginality of race. She describes in detail the family homes she had in India and England. The focus on her homes is interpreted by Burton as the striving to hold the family together in the face of "transnational existence" and "the sorrows of exile and displacement" (Introduction 3). The foregrounding of home is diasporic and feminine at the same time. Majumdar's style can be connected to the travel writing mode of Flora Tristan and Maria Graham Callcott. Pratt describes their narratives as "emplotted in a centripetal fashion" around places of residence from which the protagonist sallies forth and to which she returns (157-59). To convey the diasporic hardships, Majumdar describes the difficulty of living with the British family, the Woods, when her mother first comes to England. She writes that the family eventually adapted and settled during the second trip when they bought a house of their own. As this is a memoir, it is retrospective description, an act of recalling the past home, and the writer has given a vivid portrayal of the three-storied house with its gardens and various rooms. The diasporic consciousness manifests itself in the longing for the old home when she proudly remarks: "it made an exceedingly comfortable family home, though it was not of course half so grand or luxurious as the Calcutta house" (Majumdar 71). The unfavourable comparison with the home back in India is doubly diasporic. It establishes the superiority of the original, the home of memories, and it also attests to the impossibility of faithful recreation as in mimicry where the articulation of repetition always comes with a difference and disjunction. However, the inscription of India in her reminiscences of England shows an

assertion of the pedagogical narrative of Indian nationalism in upholding an essentialist Indian identity.

A corresponding attentiveness to home is not found in Das's representation of England because she wrote a travelogue rather than the more personal memoir or epistolary text. As a result, she takes an ethnographic approach and presents reports about England instead of sharing anecdotes and responses. Accordingly, Das does not provide any description of her homes either in England or India. Mishra, discussing trauma in diasporic experiences, writes that: "Sometimes, the 'absence' is a kind of repression, a sign of loss" (449). Given the traumatic circumstance of Das being cast out by her family, this silence around homes may indicate a repression of the painful memory. The neutral and objective style, usually associated with male writing, is at times interrupted by insertions of emotional notes in the verses scattered amidst the prose chapters. Thus, her sadness at leaving India once the ship sails from Bombay is presented in a poem entitled "Farewell" (Das 15-16). Here she inscribes her love for home as "dear land" and "mother" using typical Bengali imagery for the nation and drawing on the pedagogical narrative of nationalism. She ends the poem with sadness at having to leave India.

The preoccupation with home represents a strategy to deal with hybridity and diaspora. A case in point is the Bonnerjee family's evocation of home culture despite the mimicry of English lifestyle. On Sundays the family went to church, the Iron Room of the Brethens, and in keeping with their English lifestyle they sang hymns and played the piano in the drawing room. But the imitation of English lifestyle is undercut by the ritual of eating Indian food. After the Sunday hymns, her mother would then "cook a real Indian dinner" with "spices sent" by the Aunts (Majumdar 73). The force of the diasporic recreation is supported by other people's reminiscences as well. Majumdar supplements her own narrative with interpolations of other people's memories of her family. In one such addition, a family friend, Mrs. Alexander, recalls the nostalgic element of these dinners: "what an oasis Kidderpore must have been to the dozens of young Indian students in London who came there on Sundays and were transported in spirit to their own country!" (qtd. in 79). The re-enactment of home culture helps to repress the unfamiliar and to mitigate the trauma of loss. However, the endeavours to reproduce national cultures and past memories are in most cases not accurate. The defamiliarised attempts can perhaps be explained by Clifford's contention that diasporic cultures "mediate,

in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement" (453). As a result, we find in Majumdar's account of life in the Croydon house a depiction of cultural hybridity.

Like the Bonnerjee dinner of hymns and Indian curry, Eden's efforts at duplicating Englishness becomes mimicry, a repetition with difference. Once, for example, Eden wanted to transport herself to "Eden Farm" and indulge in nostalgic remembrances. Accordingly, she attempted to recreate the privacy of her home garden and asked the servants to move away. She comments that "altogether it was a rather pleasant hour" (Eden, *Letters* 2: 57) with her book and her memories under a beautiful sky, but India's otherness interrupted the moment and the reverie was lost: "two little paroquets began screaming," the native "tamarind-tree" and the "strong perfume of exotic flowers—Indian Indian white blossoms" (2: 57). The inability to accurately bring England to India also fails at other moments such as the Queen's ball at Simla. Although she considers it to be a successful event, Eden registers a note of disquiet in the ladies' clothes being off and in the presence of the mountaineers who surrounded them:

> . . . and there we were, with the band playing the "Puritani" and "Masaniello," and eating salmon from Scotland, and sardines from the Mediterranean, and observing . . . that some of the ladies' sleeves were too tight according to the overland fashions for March, &c.; and all this in the face of those high hills, some of which have remained untrodden since the creation, and we, 105 Europeans, being surrounded by at least 3,000 mountaineers, who, wrapped up in their hill blankets, looked on at what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. (*Up the Country* 293-94)

The gaze of the Indians ruptures the enactment of British social culture of balls. The impossibility of reproducing the past life is also demonstrated in the "too tight" sleeves, as if to suggest that the British women have changed, metaphorically and literally, by not fitting into their old clothes. Thus, the efforts of both Indian and British women to retain national identities and to recreate home culture result in failure or deformation. Eden's Simla ball and the Bonnerjee Sunday dinner are attempts invested with a sense of national

belonging. However, the desire to remain inviolate in fixed identities result in hybridity, and the attempts are flawed simulations, a repetition that is not exact and that convey the impact of diaspora on the female travellers.

IX. Conclusion

This essay has tried to show that diaspora leads to shifting patterns of cultural connections and cultural projections. In their representations of travel experiences, the four female writers demonstrate a compliance with normative gender and racial identities by repeating metropolitan binaries of separate gender spheres and centre/periphery boundaries. They do not exploit travel as a means to resist pedagogical narratives of being British or Indian women. They underscore instead racial and feminine markers in their texts to emphasize that they have observed social boundaries. In other words, they accept and uphold pedagogical narratives. In this way, gender provides an overarching framework to bring together the varied encounters of these female travellers. Women's narratives differ from male travels in the heightened emotional resonances and domestic inscriptions of empire that they present. Men, both colonizers and colonized subjects, did not narrate their journeys as dislocating or traumatic; they conveyed the excitement and adventure of travel. Another impact of diaspora on gender was the fracturing of feminine identities through separation of mother and child and through transgressions of domestic boundaries. This is in contrast to travel opening up the scope for masculine markers of strength, courage and even recklessness in male writers. The destabilization of female gender identities compelled the women writers to adopt a feminine persona in their selection of topic and genre. One could, therefore, argue that the impact of colonial travel was the creation of female colonial diaspora.

However, this common ground must be qualified, because post-colonial studies warn against collapsing individual voices and texts into one universal category. By taking note of the multiple axes of race, gender, class and historical time, one can undertake a nuanced reading of diaspora narratives to appreciate the heterogeneity of women's responses to travel and colonial experience. The most notable difference between the two groups of women is the attitude of hybridity. While the British women resisted the mixture of cultures and feared change, the Indian women expressed greater acceptance of hybridity. Hybridization carries within it a subversion of authority, especially the

undermining of colonial authority in acknowledging similarity with colonial subjects. For this reason, the British women show a stronger resistance to cultural transformations. Their racial superiority rested on cultural exclusivity, based on the performativity of Britishness in clothes, food and social interaction. The privilege of belonging to the ruling class insulated them to an extent from having to adapt and change, which, in turn, facilitated the enactment of the pedagogical narrative of British nationalism. Also, since colonial authority rested on difference between the colonizer and the colonized, the British travellers were keen to sustain essentialist identities, which accounts for there being no mention of wearing Indian apparels or much interaction with native women.

The Indian narratives present a different perspective of hybridity. Das and Bonnerjee not only altered their clothes and lifestyles, they also embraced hybridity as positive in spite of the pain and trauma it had caused. For the native women, journeys and transculturation were linked to modernity, with travel opening up a scope of social mobility and agency. Consequently, they display complex dealings with the pedagogical and performative narratives. This may be due to the fact that as colonized female subjects they occupied lower social and power positions; thus they were more vulnerable to pressures from the alien imperial centre. But it is more likely that they appropriated hybridity to oppose the pedagogical narrative which circumscribed them to marginalization as female colonized subjects. Nevertheless, it was a subtle undermining, one embedded within a public avowal of essentialized female Indian identity. On one hand, they mobilized an Indian identity to placate social conventions and allay fears of hybridity. On the other hand, they enacted Indianness as a performativity to disrupt British authority through unfavourable comparisons with India. At the same time, a duality is also discernible in their performativity of femininity. On the surface, they appear as acquiescent females occupied with home and wifely virtues. However, there are moments of slippages and slight shifting away from traditional female roles. Both Das and Bonnerjee exhibit independence and newly found assertiveness in the choices they make when they reside in England, whether it is to advocate for women's rights or to convert to Christianity. They use hybridity as colonial resistance and patriarchal defiance. Although a common gender does not imply homogeneity in responses, the shared experience of gendered and colonial travel prompts women of both groups to articulate a diasporic consciousness in order to find moorings in

geographical and cultural dislocations. The post-colonial analysis of the recurring common themes indicates that the writers consciously projected a diasporic identity, and it suggests that travel narratives can thus offer a cultural space for colonial self-fashioning.

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