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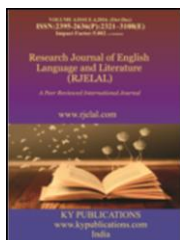
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REPRESENTATION OF THE OTHER IN THE TRAVEL NARRATIVE OF EMILY BRONSON

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ABSTRACT

Twentieth century women travel writers travelled abroad and exposed the devastations of wars. Their writings exhibit an element of patriotism and recount the growing conflicts in the world. Postcolonial theory can be used to study the representation of the Other in travel narratives. Travel writers often discriminate the familiar surroundings of home and their travel destinations. Differences are brought into existence to create the concept of the Other and exoticize it. The Other acts as an antithesis to the Self and helps in its conceptualization. Emily Bronson Conger's *An Ohio Woman in the Philippines* describes the culture, manners of the Other as exotic. The Filipino people and their landscape are described by the writer in contrast to the manners and customs prevalent in her country and are considered inferior. The article will use postcolonial theory to show the outlook of the West to the mannerisms of the Other and the existence of prejudice based on hegemonic control. Women travel writers can be seen as active participants to the imperial projects based on this travel narrative.

Keywords: women travel writing, postcolonial theory, Self, Other

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1. Introduction

Women travel writers are often thought to have remained marginal to the process of Colonialism. Emily Bronson Conger talks of the Other but also notices peripheral things which adds to the richness of the text. She comments on the landscape, the dress of the women, the local festivities, flowers and the food habits of the country she travels to. Her narrative shows how from the position of an outsider she comments on the Other. Her commenting is not always objective and is subjected to intellectual and cultural subjugation.

The aim of this article is to study the concept of Postcolonial Other in the travelogues of the twentieth century with special reference to Emily Bronson Conger's *An Ohio Woman In The*

Philippines. On her route to the Philippines, the writer makes a stop at places like Honolulu, Japan and China. It will present an argument that travel writing is not an innocent genre. It is not just a description of a journey or a destination. There are many hidden nuances within a travelogue and this can be brought to light by applying the concept of the Postcolonial theory. It will further show that there are two things that mark the relation between Postcolonial theory and travel writing. One is concerned with the identity of the traveler and the natives of the place and the second is the destination. Identity and destination are the two landmarks upon which the concept of Other is constructed. This is achieved by the use of vocabulary; i.e., by generalizing the habits, manners and taking away the element of individuality from

the natives, bringing upon comparisons to mark distinctions and constructing an exotic imagery of the locals and the locale.

Travel writing reveals how the dominant cultures of the world produce representations of the Other and draws upon contradictions to produce loci from which the western ideologies emerge as superior. Postcolonial theory criticizes these issues delineated in travel narratives. It is required of the travel writer to discriminate between the familiar surroundings at home and the travelling destination. This is done by the production of difference. All travel narratives depend on this production to cater to the interests of the readers. In order to bring forth this difference into existence, the travel writer creates the concept of the other. This is done for two purposes. One is to make the place and the people of a certain locale look strange to create an aura and then use this concept to create an identity of the self. Therefore, it can be noted that the key terms in this chapter are the 'Other' and the 'Self' and the difference between the two.

2. Construction of the Other as an antithesis of the Self

Travel narrative is about a person on the move. It is concerned with the idea of defining a stable self. The other serves as a foil to this stable self. "It was a sight! The funny little carriages, man before to pull, man behind to push, middle, laughing, singing, and enjoying the fun, a strange contrast to the stolid native." (Conger, *An Ohio Woman in the Philippines*, np). Postcolonial theory challenges this whole dialectic of the stable self. The other is a point of view which is imaginary in nature. It is created by the eye of the perceiver. The dialectic between the self and the other creates divisions within humanity. It is the self which creates the norms and the other is defined by it. The traveling self imposes categories upon the other. There is a hierarchy between the traveling self and the other which is based on economic, political, social power.

Philippines was a colony of America from 1899 to the early part of the twentieth century. After Spain lost the American-Spanish war of 1899, Philippines was ceded to America. When the Filipinos learned that America looked upon it as a

colony a war broke out which later turned into guerrilla warfare. The war ended in 1902 but still America had a strong political uphold in the island. The book was written in 1904 during the time when there were continuous clas between the local rebels called as "insurrectors" and American soldiers. The writer has very strong national sentiments. Her son is in the army and she comes as a nursing help for the wounded soldiers. She lives with the soldiers and often prepares food for the company. The accounts presented in her narrative are therefore, bound to be biased and a strong sense of otherness is visible in her narrative.

The writer constructs the other and sets herself apart from it and in the process creates her identity in the eyes of the reader. Hence, it can be concluded that otherness and identity are two inseparable entities. This is visible in the way she describes the appearances, manners, customs, the public and the private spheres of the natives.

Honolulu is a part of America but it is culturally different from the other parts of the nation. She describes the people swimming in the waters as brown skinned. The writer describes how these people pick up coins that are thrown by passengers from the steam boats. This imagery presents the people as strange. "My impressions were, as we entered the bay, that the entire population of Honolulu was in the water. There seemed to be hundreds of little bodies afloat just like ducks." (Conger *Ohio*, np)

The natives of Japan, China and Philippines are shown as sickly. Most of them are shown to be poor and the children are mostly starved and undernourished. The writer finds the people small in height and it comes as a great surprise to her to see the coolies carrying heavy loads.

One day from my comfortable bamboo chair I watched some coolies getting some timbers out of the bay near where I sat. it did not seem possible that these small men could manage those timbers, which were so slippery from lying in the water that they would often have to allow them to slip back, even after they had got them nearly on land. I expected every moment to see those poor creatures either plunge into the water themselves or be crushed by the

weight of the heavy timbers (Conger, *Ohio*, np)

These lines show that the West always looks at the Other as incapable to work on their own. The Other in these above lines are shown to be physically weak to carry out muscular jobs. The way she watches the natives show her in the light of a colonial master criticizing the work of his subjects.

The natives are described as unhygienic. "one glance and there was a wild desire to take those dirty, almost nude creatures in hand and, holding them at arm's length, dip them into some cleansing caldron." (Conger, *Ohio*, np) The writer finds the Chinese street performers too filthy to touch. Some of the street vendors appear half naked. The houses in Philippines are so structured that animals and humans live together and the animals roamed freely in the house.

The dress of the natives marks them as different. The women of Honolulu wear hallicoos. She says that their dresses are very loose and ill fitted like that of old Mother Hubbard. Mother Hubbard is a loose garment with a collar. She describes the garments of the women in Honolulu as ridiculous. "Then the manner of dress seemed so strange, especially for the women; they wore a garment they called hallicoos like the Mother Hubbard that we so much deride." (Conger, *Ohio* np). It seems apparent that the writer makes fun of the way the women from the place appear. This is a way of ridiculing the Other. The Filipino women wear a skirt which is made from fine fabri like jusi, abuka, pina and sinamay. The writer says that it is quite unbelievable to her to see such unhygienic people dealing with these delicate fabrics. The sense of the othering is visible in her description of the look of the Japanese sailors. "On the overloaded boats the curious little Japanese sailors, oddly dressed in thick padded coverings and bowl caps on their heads, with nothing on the limbs and feet save small straw sandals, strapped to the feet between great and second toes, looked top heavy." (Conger, *Ohio*, np)

The food is quite spicy and there are such delicacies which are inedible. Once she invited a few locals and fed them an American meal which the natives enjoyed and the women enquired about the

recipe. In the Philippines there is a custom of cooking the food in a hot stone. In China bamboo shoot is a food that is consumed. The food is part of a culture and the very difference in the food draws distinction between the customs of the natives and the writer. "I learned that the service rendered by the Japanese is, as a whole, unsatisfactory. Their cooking is entirely different from ours, and they do not willingly adapt themselves to our mode of living." (Conger *Ohio*, np) what can be understood is that the writer is from the West and she believes if something is beyond her control, it is a thing that is disapproving in nature. These very lines show that what the West defines becomes the norm and anything other than that is unacceptable.

The market place is described as one of the most interesting places where there is a lot of activity. The very first market that she talks about is the one she sees in Honolulu. She describes the atmosphere of the place as one where the prices are invariably low and the whole place is drowned by shrill cries.

I had never seen tropical fish before, and was somewhat surprised by the curious shapes and varied colors of the hundreds and thousands of fish exposed for sale. I do not think there was a single color scheme that was not carried out in the harvest of the sea. Fruits and flowers were there, too, in heaps and masses at prices absurdly low. With the chatter of the natives and the shrill cry of the fishermen as they came in with their heavily laden boats, the scene was one never to be forgotten. (Conger, *Ohio*, np)

These lines show that what she witnesses is very different from the place she comes from. The market place is one of the most intriguing places in a destination and this place occupies a central position in most of the travel texts. It is the place where the very life of a community rests. The locals meet here, they greet one another and carry on their commercial business. What appears most prominent from the lines above is the image of abundance in the East. East is a place where most of the raw materials are found. The image of the fishermen with their boats completely filled with

tropical fish shows the variety and abundance of the East.

In Japan, she describes the market as housing a variety of fruit which are a delicacy but she mentions that the manner in which they enrich the soil makes it impossible to taste them. The markets are filled with beggars which is a critique of the economic condition of the place. This is a way how the other is mentioned, the Other is shown as underdeveloped and it needs the help of the West to develop. She describes an interesting way of fishing by the natives, where birds are specially trained to catch the fish in their beaks and bring it to the boat. This is a rather unusual sight and it cannot be so easily accepted. The shopkeepers have a strange habit of keeping the best items in the shop and try to sell the lower quality items to the buyers.

3. Exoticising the travel destination

One method often implied by the travel writers from the West is making the destination look primitive and inaccessible. The writer here too creates a spatial difference between the West and the Oriental lands. The West is seen as civilized and developed and the East is seen as natural that is still savage and needs to attain enlightenment. This seen in the way the writer describes the landscape. The landscape of the destinations that she visits is never shown developed. The Orient is famous for their flora and fauna. The Japanese people are proud of their shrubs and every house has a garden. The writer feels that do not know the true essence of nature as they use artificial flowers during festivals and she finds most of Japan artificial to look at.

The religious beliefs of the natives and the writer are quite different. The Chinese are a rather superstitious race according to her. They honour the dead and lost souls in the sea by burning small papers and fire crackers for the rest of these souls. They also worshipped different gods and they had gods of wars and peace. They also believe soothsayers. The writer believes in the Christian god and the words of the reverend. She trivializes their religious belief which is a way to show the west as superior. She mentions a prayer for the God of Learning given to her by a Japanese student. "Oh, Mr. God of Learning, won't you please help me to learn my lessons, won't you please help me to pass

my examinations, and Oh, Mr. God of learning, if you will only help me pass my examination and to study my lessons and get them well, when I get through I will bring you a dish of pickles."(Conger *Ohio*, np)

This difference between the self and the other is created by the use of binaries and also by the adoption of the culture of the west and achieving an assimilation of two cultures. The effect of western culture is seen especially amongst the middle class. They are leisure group where they have servants to wait on them. They enter parties dressed in western outfits. The writer is highly critical of them and describes them as hypocrite and cruel. She accuses them of giving bribes and helping insurgents who are pitted against the American soldiers. Even the kids of the upper class Filipinos are dressed like American children and the natives take an interest in the American food.

4. Stereotyping the Other

The writer holds the notion that the Americans are a far superior race than the people of the Philippines. This is an output of the idea of the superiority of the races which came into being after the publication of Darwin's theory of natural selection. If Darwin's theory is applied in the functioning of the society it can be seen that the world is determined by the dominant group. Social Darwinism was a means to justify colonial expansion. It leads racial discrimination where the superior race dominates the inferior. The western concepts are therefore, seen as parameters. This superiority of American race is justified by the writer in her travelogue. This is achieved through misrepresentation of the locals and marginalizing them. The writer secures her identity by producing difference on racial grounds. The people of Philippines are described in negative light "In the Philippines one seldom sees a well formed person; or if the form is good, the face is disfigured by small pox." (Conger, *Ohio*, np)

The concept of the other is based on the Manichean Allegory. The West is ordered, rational and good, while the Orient is chaotic, irrational and wrong. The power is invested on the self and is denied from the Other. The creation of other takes away the human essence and levels the human

subject with an identity that is the product of perception of the West. The Other is always presented in terms of lack. This lack is based on certain stereotypes. The Other is presented as lacking in terms of knowledge, culturally and economically backward. The writer does this because it is a way of showing the western values and systems as superior to the Other. Not one structurally or economically prominent building is described. Even she says that the American soldiers are treated in hospitals made by Americans. She admits that she has never heard of nor has any knowledge of Hospitals by the local Filipinos people or how they treat themselves. In these countries she mentions that everything is cheap. In the market at Honolulu the items are cheap. Also the train fares from Yokohama and Nikko are cheap. "The railway fare is only two cents a mile, first class, and half that, second class; we left the choice to our guides." (Conger *Ohio*, np)

The writer describes the Japanese salesmen as dishonest for they cheat the tourists. Even the American horses were better than the horses in China as their horses had fleas on them. The natives of the Philippines did not take bath and went to work without changing their clothes. If they bath they do not use soaps or towels but use stones to rub their bodies.

There are horses in Japan and they are poor specimens compared with the fine animals that we know. They are chiefly pack-horses, used in climbing over the mountains, consequently they go with their noses almost on the ground. Instead of iron shoes they have huge ones made of plaited straw. They are literally skin and bones, these poor beasts of burden. (Conger *Ohio* np)

5. Language as a tool of discrimination

The division between the West and the Orient is created by the by the use of disseminated vocabulary. The use of adjectives and metaphors further distances the writer from the natives. The natives are described as "poor", "unhealthy", "small", "domestic", etc. The ones who accepts the manners of the West and act civil to the Western people are described positively for their "attentive,

courteous manners; their solicitude to assist you in whatever they can."

6. Search for an Identity away from home

The writer is always in search of an identity in these remote lands. It gives are immense pleasure and security to see the American flag in the Embassy. "It is such a joy to see our beautiful flag floating from the staff in front of the consulate. No one appreciates the meaning of Our Flag" until one sees it in foreign countries." (Conger *Ohio*, np). This shows the strong hold of the Americans on the island. This very image is the symbol of imperialism. She finds her true identity by being a part of the American people in the place and so she invites the American soldiers to dinner and act as a mother figure to them. When it came to choosing accommodations she found the American Quarters much better than the native quarters which were infested by bugs and other insects.

The way in which the writer appropriates language, images, traditions and manners of the other show the existence of racial undertones. This can be asserted due to the presentation of the locals as inferior to the people or culture of the Americans. The writer lumps together the whole race and ignores the individual characteristics. If she happens to mention an individual who has acted out of order she would blame the whole race for the fault of one individual.

The narrative voice in the travelogue is confident and self assured and the writer makes well formed judgments about what she finds at the distant new place. Speech is effaced from the other. The power of vocabulary or the ability to articulate is invested on the people from the west. She shows that most of the people speak fragmented English. "The whole outfit is hired by the day for about a dollar, the price depending upon the amount of Pigeon English the leader can speak. The first thing they say to you is, 'Me can speak English.'" (Conger *Ohio*, np)

Geographical determinism is a device used to depict the conditions of the destination of travel. The places that she visits are described as places where the civil civilization has no existence. She describes these places where violence runs as an undercurrent and can occur at the slightest spark.

Describing the destination as a marker of violence is a strategy which is used to describe the place as removed from sober and dignified societies of the west. The writer wants to show that the natives have a natural affinity to violence. In the travelogue the writer shows the way the owners treat their servants. The servants are beaten for slightest mistake. Even the children are severely punished by their parents. She mentions an incident where a man was beaten by the public.

There also once a son of a glass blower who bet him severely beaten for giving the wrong colour bulb. "Without a warning the father gave him a severe stroke with the hot tube across the forehead, which left a welt the size of my finger. Without one cry of pain he immediately handed his father the correct lube and went on with his work as if nothing had happened." (Conger, *Ohio*, np) these lines indicate the nature of the natives who through years of subjugation has lost the feeling of body pain. Violence for them is as natural as breathing.

She mentions the civil unrest in China and it was upon the American soldiers to take part in the restoration process. In the Philippines, she mentions the struggle between the Insurrectors, who she terms as "butcher", and the American soldiers. The criminals were executed in the open sphere and even the women watched such violent acts without the slightest inhibition.

7. Exoticising the Other

The Other is always eroticized. Exoticism is one of the forms of creating geographical otherness. Whatever constitutes the other is seen with awe and is considered abnormal. Exoticism is visible in the description of the landscape and people or their cultures. In reality no place is exotic. It is merely a construction by the west to define the east in terms of other. It is used to mystify the other and create a difference between the east and the west. it is a creation by the travel writers to make their narratives more readable and easily published. The main idea is to create a sensation so that people read their books. Such representations also led to the sudden spurt of travels to the east. It should be noticed by the reader as to who is doing the representation and who is represented.

In Japan she mentions the delicate art

presented by the Geishas and the tea ceremony. She also describes the massage treatment in which the blind people are trained by the government.

The blind Japanese are an interesting class. They are trained at government cost to give massage treatment, and no others are allowed to practice. These blind nurses, male and female, go about the streets in care of an attendant, playing a plaintive tune on a little reed whistle in offer of their services. The treatment is delightful, the sensation is wholly new, and is most restful and invigorating after a long voyage. (Conger *Ohio*, np)

The massage treatment provided by the Japanese is something very unique to the West, especially to the early twentieth century West. This massage treatment makes the place appear unique for it is something very original which is offered by the place and therefore, by talking about it in her travelogue and making it appear more strange and particular to the place, the writer wishes to draw the attention of the readers to her text. These exotic elements make her work more sellable and also it encourages more tourism to the destination.

She also describes the varied range of butterflies found in the place which is because the Orientals believe to not hurt these beautiful creatures. She calls Japan the land of umbrellas and parasols. Such sights are particular only to Japan which separates it from the west. By presenting the place in such a light she eroticizes and makes the place look exotic to the eyes of her readers. In Philippines mentions the cock fighting tradition which is peculiar to the place. People of every age group partook in it and the labourers left their work to enjoy these fights. Cock fights are a serious business for the natives and the cocks were more valued than the children in a family.

The embroidery is also very exotic to the writer. The use of different delicate threads entices her eyes. But she cannot reconcile with the native working on these delicate materials. In America everything is machine produced and the handmade embroidery of the East are original and are better quality than the Western goods. This is a small industrial business for the locals. Being a part of the

imperial world she does not feel that the natives should earn a fair living out producing materials which are better than the Western world. The following remark on the Filipino women working on their embroidery proves it.

We invited many of the places where the most extensive weaving is done, and there we saw the most wretched- looking, old women handling the hair-like threads...These poor, dirty, misshapen creatures, weaving from daylight to dark, earn about fifty cents a month. So many of them are unclean, both the makers and the sellers, that it seemed utterly incongruous that they should handle the most delicate materials. (Conger *Ohio*, np)

8. Conclusion

The writer tries to merge new experiences, geographic and cultural differences within a particular cultural frame which is Eurocentric in nature. Travel writing has been accused of being Eurocentric. It is always the white traveler who travels and defines the other. The judgments of this traveler are never contested. Postcolonial theory challenges this purview of looking at things from just the perspective of the white traveler. The writer structures her narrative in such a manner so as to show that these places are not easily accessible or recognizable. They are extraordinary and present a dramatic overwhelming feeling to human knowledge and understanding. By making these places seem remote she dissociates but also her readers from the places and the people she visits. This is done by using certain techniques like disseminated vocabulary, generalizing the habits and manners of the locals, use of exotic imagery in order to mystify the other and distinguishing between the Occidents and the orients by depicting the former as the superior.

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