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Cosmopolitanism, Colonial Shopping, and the Servant Problem: Nurse Ida E. Cliffe's Travels in Wartime India

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Ida E. Cliffe was posted in India as a nurse during the First World War. In a travel memoir published sixty years later, she captures her extensive travels across wartime colonial India. Her travel diary combines two distinct positions—that of the woman-coloniser recording her travel in the colonies, and of the nurse in a war-zone. It focuses on the British coloniser's home-life in India, the picturesque landscape of the country, the cosmopolitanism of its people, and its recent history. This article explores the problematic nuances in Cliffe's celebration of colonial cosmopolitanism, her shopping for colonial artefacts and her appreciation of the picturesque embedded within the subtext of pride for British imperialism. It demonstrates not only the complexities in the figure of the female imperial traveller, but also the heteroglossia in the genre of women's travel writing.

Keywords: First World War, India, imperialism, heteroglossia, female imperial traveller

The First World War unfolds in the background of Ida E. Cliffe's war memoirs, *S.R.N. at War: A Nurses Memoirs of 1914–1918*, published in 1975, almost sixty years after the war. A State Registered Nurse (S. R. N.), Cliffe served in hospitals in Mesopotamia and India during the war, but her memoirs reveal her extensive travelling, making "the most of our time" in these places (4). The travel writings of British women in the colonies have received critical attention in recent years (Ghose 1998; Chaudhuri 1994; Suleri 1992; Mukherjee 2009). Alison Fell (2011) draws attention to a sub-genre in this heteroglossia of women's travel writings — that of the wartime (French) nurse adopting "the voice of pseudo-ethnographer", recording details of the life and customs of African and Indian patients in "a manner reminiscent of colonial travel writing" (See also: Atia 2012, 2017). These works however,

focus more on the war-work of the nurses, and less on the politics of their engagement with their surroundings — the colonial peripheries.

This article combines these two distinct positions: that of the woman-coloniser recording her travel in the colonies, and of the nurse in a war-zone. It sheds light on the writings and experiences of white nurses who not only nursed non-white patients outside Europe during the war, but also recorded their extensive travel in these places.

Cliffe's travel document, however, is unusual: apart from the title, it has no dates. She does not mention how long she spent in India, when she arrived or when she left. Her memoirs remain suspended in time, with a complete absence of any temporal markers, yet also dated through her specific references to stores and commodities and people's illnesses. It is also unusual because although we glean from the title that she is a war-nurse in India, she herself makes no reference to war nursing in her memoir. I found her book in the Liddle Collection of the Brotherton Library, while looking for nurses' personal narratives of the First World War. It was privately published, and she had donated the copy to the archive herself, having hand-written her compliments. Cliffe's war memoir is remarkable not only because of her uniquely patchy recording of the war in India, but also because it celebrates facets of imperialism and colonial nostalgia for what — by the time of the book's delayed publication — was then a postcolonial country.

Cliffe was a trained nurse who arrived in India during the war to tend to wounded soldiers. Her diary is extensively about travel and non-work activities. This is noteworthy because she is a working-class woman with a disposable income for travelling for pleasure. (She earned between £22 and £30 per annum during the war.) The discussion that follows demonstrates the complexities in Cliffe's war diary, looking beyond comparisons of the Westerner and the Oriental, and analysing an ambiguity that originates from the intersections of gender, race,

class, and employment status. Cliffe's knowledge about India comes from her readings about the country, but her travels contest the impressions she gleaned from them. This contrast between her prior knowledge and her personal experiences contributes to the complexities in her tone: she vacillates between a frank admiration of the culture, landscape and people of the country, and celebration of British imperialism that has 'acquired' it. Through her travels in the major Indian cities and British garrison towns, Cliffe captures the beauty of the country, the cosmopolitanism of the society, and the daily life of British colonialists in their Indian homes. It is each of these strands in her writing that I will explore in this article. I shall first analyse her portrait of the British housewife in India, as a "self-consolidating Other" to Cliffe, the financially-independent, working woman. I shall then examine a series of problematic discourses in the text: her narrative of colonial shopping as a laudatory step for a working-class woman but with the uncomfortable significations of colonial acquisitions; her portrayal of cosmopolitan colonial Indian society versus the awareness of the exclusions of colonialism; and ultimately her admiration for the beauty of India with the subtext of pride in British imperialism.

The Memsahib's Domestic Space and the Servant-problem

It is surprising that Cliffe did not make use of one of the most common tropes of Western women's colonial travel writing, that of the Oriental woman's *zenana*. Beginning with Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, the writings of these women were considered valuable in Western society because they offered a glimpse into the *zenana*, from where men were barred. Cliffe, however, provides a very interesting insight into the domestic workings of a Memsahib, an unnamed married English woman living somewhere in India. We do not know who this Memsahib is, where she lives, how Cliffe has come to visit her, how long has she

stayed at the Memsahib's house, or how has she had the opportunity of observing the running of her household. Although Cliffe's portrayal of a harried Memsahib not in full control of her household makes familiar pitfalls into generalised depictions of Memsahibs by contemporary women as well as by later critics like Margaret MacMillan, her portrait has deeper significations. Indira Ghose has written about how "the constitution of self also always hinges on the setting up of a 'self-consolidating Other', which in the case of women travellers was particularly represented by the 'other' woman — less 'free' than the Western woman" (1998, 8). Cliffe indeed draws on the alterity of the poor Indian woman as a comparison for the seemingly comfortable life of the Western woman; however, here I argue that, by dint of Cliffe being a working woman with expendable income and time for leisure, she portrays the idle, unemployed Memsahib, financially dependent upon her husband, as her 'self-consolidating Other': Cliffe has more control over her life, her movements, and her commodities as compared to that of the Memsahib who lives in a house full of servants, but has no autonomy.

Cliffe's depiction of Memsahib's life in India begins with the words, "The housewife in India has a different life to the one at home" (7). It is important to note that Cliffe refers to the English woman only as "the housewife", and only twice as the Memsahib, but puts the word within quotation marks each time to denote that it is merely an appellation. The term "Memsahib" has undertones of class, privilege, and marital status. Cliffe's working-class background, spinsterhood, and her hard work towards earning an independent living, make her non-conforming towards the connotations and status of the term. Cliffe states that the housewife/ Memsahib has no agency, as she is "not allowed to do as she wishes", and not even "choose her own menu", which is chosen for her by her cook. It is the servant who instructs her when he would like to meet her, thus implying that despite being the mistress,

she has to comply with the wishes of her servants. Cliffe notes how the latter "struggle[s]" in her own storeroom, and cannot even visit her own kitchen "without warning".

Cliffe follows this with a lively account of the nature of Indian servants and the helplessness of the housewife. In fact, Cliffe's documentation of the Memsahib's manoeuvrings with her servants, and the habits of the servants themselves, closely follow the manuals of dos and don'ts of housekeeping for Memsahibs in nineteenth-century India, such as *English Bride in India*, *Indian Outfits*, *The English Woman in India*, and *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*. Cliffe's observations of the Memsahib's household reveal what happens when the Memsahib fails in controlling her domain — something that the manuals had warned against. Cliffe was undoubtedly familiar with these manuals, and through her almost-cheeky record of the Memsahib's life, she shows not only her judgement of the "woman's character by her drawing-room and servant", but also establishes how different her own life as a travelling, professional woman is from the idle rich woman under the control of her "native" servants (Chota Mem, 1909, 4).

All the manuals instruct that the Memsahib should begin her day by inspecting her servants and discussing the day's menu. Chota Mem, or the junior Memsahib-writer of *The English Bride in India* notes:

> I advise punctuality in seeing your servants after breakfast and trying to keep to the same hour daily, as a good housekeeper should show an example to her servants, in keeping to a good routine and method. [. . .] Half-an-hour should be sufficient time for your housekeeping, so after first seeing the cook (who by-the-way comes to you, instead of you going to him as in the English custom) sally forth to your store-room or godown, where your servants will come to you for their different requirements. (4)

From the very beginning, Chota Mem sets down the hierarchy of status and power between the mistress and her servants. Flora Annie Steele and Grace Gardiner go further in laying down stringent customs for the morning inspection:

> Inspection parade should begin, then, immediately after breakfast, or as near ten o'clock as circumstances will allow. The cook should be waiting—in clean raiment—with a pile of plates, and his viands for the day spread out on a table. With everything *en evidence*, it will not take five minutes to decide on what is best, while a very constant occurrence at Indian tables—the serving up of stale, sour and unwholesome food—will be avoided. (8–9)

On the other hand, Cliffe's description of the Memsahib's encounter with her servants in the morning reveals the circumstances which unfold when life in the colonies does not closely mimic that of the instruction manuals:

> The housewife is told when the cook awaits her in the dining-room. She goes and finds all her servants assembled. A chair is always dusted for her and she sits down. The contents of the kitchen are placed before her. (7)

Instead of the strong and strict Memsahibs of the manuals, Cliffe's "housewife", in a case of reversal of power, appears to be directed by her servants. Cliffe's short sentences lend a sarcastic and comic tone to the situation. She is the spectator of this scene, and she has captured the failure of power and control of the English woman over her household of native servants. Steele and Gardiner warn against the prevalence of stale food prepared by Indian cooks for British tables, and point out that the "good mistress will remember" the nutritional requirements of the breadwinner "Sahib" and the children, reassuring their readers that arranging the daily menu will not take longer than five minutes (8). Chota Mem provides a more organised way to approach this on a daily basis:

> You should give your cook money in advance daily and keep account of it at the end of his book, or write each day at the end of his account what money he has in hand for the next day. Make him tell you what he used his eggs for. It is as well, when ordering your meals to write them down on a slate. (77)

However, the scene at Cliffe's Memsahib's house is utterly chaotic. She can neither decide on the menu, nor have the opportunity to keep lists:

> It may be a saddle of mutton or a cold fowl. There is nothing an Indian cook hates so much as preparing a simple dish. All the housewives know that with difficulty one might persuade him to allow one to finish the meat cold, but he would prefer to hide it under truffles and port wine. With the fowl an Indian cook can make a wonderful dish, adding cream, eggs and also butter, as he does his own shopping in the bazaar every morning. (7)

For Cliffe's Memsahib, the advice on carefully-curated lists become redundant, and there is no opportunity to demand accounts of expenditure. As Cliffe repeatedly demonstrates, her "housewife" cannot even choose her own menu. After deciding on the menu, the manuals advise the Memsahib to go to the storeroom and give out the ingredients that the cook needs for the day's menu. However, here too, in Cliffe's Memsahib's household, there is a systemic breakdown of structure, expectation, power, and control,

> When the housewife goes to her storeroom to struggle against the cook's inroads on sugar, rice, and dried fruits, he will gently ask "Will one fritter be sufficient for both of you", if one protests against the quantity of flour he needs: with much humility he will remark that "the Sahib's nature has recently undergone a change". But, when he was a "batchelor" he ate cakes with "much" currants in and "much" raisins also. Now, of course he must eat what the "Memsahib" must

> please to order. With a profound salaam he then departs bearing with him enough currants and raisins to make the richest possible cake. This happens every day and one cannot check it at all. (7)

It is not coincidental that a day in the life of the Memsahib-housewife that Cliffe was observing and writing about follows the same pattern as advised in the manuals. Cliffe's "housewife" is nameless, unrecognisable; in its generalisation, her portrait of the woman could be one of the many Memsahibs living in any of the predominantly British areas near the unnamed Indian city where she was posted. The major difference between her portrayal of the hapless English Memsahib who has no control of her household and the ideal Memsahibs of the manuals is the tone and approach of the two texts. The writers of the instruction manuals directly address the Memsahib-reader, offering their advice in the first-person, to an invisible second. For example, Chota Mem begins her chapter "The Servants" by writing, "You must again go to your lady-friend for help, as to the number you keep, and their respective wages, but you cannot go far wrong if you follow what I tell you" (54). Direct, helpful, but unpatronising, she advises the inexperienced English housewife, setting up home in a foreign country, on matters unfamiliar to the latter. Perhaps due to her working-class position, Cliffe is the sardonic spectator, of what seems to be an unfortunate series of episodes unfolding in her host's house; her housewife is portrayed in the third person, and her own tone is that of the omniscient narrator. Through her record, Cliffe others not only the "native" Indian servant, but also the English housewife, refusing "natural" identification with white culture. However, while her portrayal of the English housewife differs completely from the ideal described in the manuals she has read, her depiction of the housewife's Indian servants still conform to the same stereotypical representation as reflected in all writings about the colonial working classes.

After the trip to the storeroom, the Memsahib — the manuals inform us — must inspect the kitchen. Cliffe's housewife does the same, except Cliffe writes, "The housewife must never go alone and without warning into the kitchen, if so a fellow servant of the cook will find a means of detaining her elsewhere" (7). What follows is a list of "devices" by which the servants prevent her from entering the kitchen, until the cook "will be given time to retrieve from his own quarters the cookhouse lamp that is dry every morning and other articles borrowed even though his mistress and master have dined out most nights". These devices include:

> It will suddenly be urgent that she examines household towels or discusses with the "dhobi" just starting for the washing ghats, the coffee stained table mats he is washing in the most mysterious manner. [...] This happens in nearly all households. (7)

Cliffe diverts her attention completely from the hapless housewife to the Indian servants. In this one passage, she ticks numerous stereotypes about the Oriental Other. The native servant is a thief, who smuggles household wares to feed his own family:

> He will be able hastily to dismiss to their mother tiny creatures with exquisite eyes, shaded by long curling lashes and outlined, as they all are, with bands of kohl, who have been running round the kitchen, waiting their opportunity to take sugar or fruit, which their father has already purloined in his daily plea for more stores.

Edward Said has listed the characteristics of the Oriental in the minds of the Europeans as being "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different' [as opposed to the European 'normal']", and Cliffe's portrayal of the Indian servants exactly to match those (2003, 40). She next refers to an incident from her own work at the hospital of some money missing from

the Matron's desk. The money was later found in the dressing case of one of Cliffe's V.A.D.s. However, convinced of her innocence, Cliffe discusses with the English officer at the Garrison and finds the culprit: "A whip and a few sharp words to the collected native servants and one soon confessed" (2003, 8). Said has written that for the European, the Oriental is always "guilty", whose crime is that they are orientals, and the widespread acceptance of such a tautology revealed that it thrived with no "appeal to European logic or symmetry of mind" (2003, 39). Cliffe believes that the native servant is essentially disloyal, despite serving his "Memsahib" for "many years", because he unhesitatingly slipped the stolen money into her dressing case (8). Here it is important to note the spaces in Cliffe's writing, where she lapses into stereotypes — as a tourist, as I shall show in the following section, she is open and cosmopolitan, but as a nurse or in an English household, she stereotypes Indians much more.

However, it is striking that Cliffe employs the haplessness of the English woman in front of the apparent depravity of the Indian servants, as a means of drawing attention to the alterity of the Memsahib in her household, and reinforces the common stereotype of Memsahibs as ornamental props to the Raj. The alterity is more striking because it is placed in contrast to Cliffe herself — a financially-independent woman, who is not a Memsahib because of her spinsterhood, but who nevertheless has the financial capacity and the independence to travel, has control over her life, as well as can exercise power over servants. Her awareness of her difference and the advantage of it make her assume the tone of amusement when reporting the plight of her housewife. Sara Suleri, on writing about the stereotyping of Memsahibs and the generalised chastisement that was offered towards them in some writings, notes that the English Memsahib "becomes a paler counterpart of the greater otherness of the Indian woman, rendering indistinct her location in the expected trinity of culture, race, and gender" (1992, 79).

Throughout my article I demonstrate how Cliffe's profession as a nurse was irrelevant to the experience of travel and pleasure that she recorded in her war diary (although that very profession make her travel possible in the first place). However, it is here, in looking back at her portrayal of the nameless Memsahib/housewife that her medical training appears to have been more directly useful. I have shown how her depiction of the Memsahib resembled and departed from the ideal of the Memsahib depicted in domestic instruction manuals. We do not know if her portrayal was based on a real woman. However it is extremely plausible that she had read the domestic manuals of housekeeping in India. These manuals were themselves fashioned after medical manuals of the nineteenth century, which had metamorphosed from popular medical guides to companion cases for the Victorian traveller travelling overseas (especially India), and together formed the genre of the travel manual. Edward Tilt's 1875 text *Health in India for British Women and on the Prevention of Diseases in Tropical Climates* and W. J. Moore's 1877 book *A Manual of Family Medicine for India* moved on from providing medical information and discourse on life in the colonies to becoming, in Tilt's words, "*a guide to life in India*" (See: Hassan 2011). These books were "produced as companion to travel", and were "aimed to furnish the British traveler with medical protection and knowledge through the production of easily transportable and readable material objects designed for encounters with the places and people of the tropics" (Hassan 2011, 2). By tracing the existing culture of medical manuals as travel manuals and household guides in the colonies, I argue that Cliffe was already familiar with this genre as a medical woman in the colonies, and was working on a variation of it in her representation of the Memsahib. Narin Hassan bridges the gap between these medical travel journals with domestic journals by arguing that, "representations of the body and medicine became central motifs in women's ethnographic accounts of travel. Spaces of encounter [...] within private domestic spaces were

particularly fruitful for women as sites of cultural exchange, and women writers could produce powerful representations of native bodily rituals and health" (2011, 20).

Both kinds of manuals were interested in the prevention of tropical diseases, and in the health of the English family. The anonymous "Lady resident" author of *The Englishwoman in India* blurs the distinction between the medical and the domestic manual by suggesting that "camphor and camphorated spirits of wine are supposed to be inimical to certain unpleasant insects" and that English travellers to India should "take a couple of jars of chloride of lime and several packets of Allnuts fumigating paper" (1864, 7). Hence someone like Cliffe, working on medical care in India, would undoubtedly have read these manuals if only to acquaint herself with medical care in the tropics. That she learned far more from them than simple caring for the English family against tropical insects, is evident from her portrayal of the English woman in India and the latter's control of her household — a representation which closely corresponds to her portrayal in the manuals. As I have shown, Cliffe's portrayal of the Memsahib depends on her comparative financial independence and agency, but also relies on second-hand knowledge acquired from travel manuals. In the next section, I will examine her direct experience of India outside of the domestic space as she depicts herself as an empowered consumer.

Cosmopolitanism and Colonial Shopping

> The colours of the native dress are very attractive and the people very cosmopolitan. One can see Indians, Parsees, Chinese, Japanese, English, Americans and people of many other nations in the streets of Bombay. (5)

On first arriving in Bombay, Cliffe is struck by the city's cosmopolitanism, and comments on the people of different cultures and nationalities that she sees on its streets. For the rest of her time there, its cosmopolitanism becomes a major theme in her writing. Yet writing about cosmopolitanism in the context of a colony is fraught with contradictions. Julian Go asks, "But why would we think that colonialism — with all of its exclusions, exploitation, and violence — could be productive of cosmopolitanism, when cosmopolitanism is about shared humanity?" (2013, 210). This section will address that question in the context of the early cosmopolitanism that Cliffe encountered in wartime colonial India.

Theorists have called for the acknowledgement of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism "including earlier kinds of cosmopolitanism and [those] which cannot be explained in terms of a single, western notion of modernity or in terms of globalisation" (Delanty 2006, 27. See also: Vergès 2001; Go 2013). Cliffe's war diary reveals "a *cosmopolitics* that emerged in a contact-zone" (Vergès 2013, 170). The background of the war made Bombay a ripe contact-zone for Chinese, Japanese, and American nationals, in addition to Turkish and Australian soldiers. Also, the presence of numerous cultural particularisms of the several languages and cultures of what is collectively called "India" unfolded beneath the colonial rule. Of the social life in the city, Cliffe writes,

> There are lovely shops and cafes. "Thackers" the "W. H. Smith's" of Bombay is very interesting. Here one can roam about amongst priceless books, some of which cannot be bought in England. Poetry written by Indian ladies is specially [sic] beautiful to read. One of the large stores, a sort of "Selfridges", was full of dark headed Indian women, attending at the counters to our needs and speaking excellent English. It always seems such a pity to me that we English are so slack, as a nation, in learning other languages. (5)

Here Cliffe admires the English-centric cosmopolitanism of ordinary Indians. Yet her admiration is not merely for the effectiveness of mimicry of the colonial subject. Macaulay had stated in his infamous 'Minute on Indian Education' in 1835:

> It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be affected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them. [. . .] One-half of the committee maintain that it should be the English.

It is because of British colonial rule that the Indian staff in Thackers spoke in English, and Indian women wrote English poetry. However, Cliffe also admonishes her own country, the colonial centre, for being monolingual. Here she reveals an admiration for vernacular cosmopolitanism, the kinds of which she notices in the streets and shops of Bombay are the bottom-up, "*non-elite*" forms of culture, travel and trade in a colonial society (see: Werbner (2006) on different kinds of vernacular cosmopolitanism). Despite the ubiquity of English education, the "omnipotence" of British imperialism in India fell short in certain "margins" (Vergès 2013, 172). Françoise Vergès writes about how in the "interstices of colonial society and the imperial metropole, processes of hybridity" occurred (2013, 172). According to Cliffe, colonial India is more cosmopolitan than its colonial centre, England. This is an unusual response for a member of the coloniser class, and though such cosmopolitanism can be looked upon as a result of the colonising rule, and as I will eventually show, Cliffe did celebrate the successes of British colonialism in India, her appreciation for vernacular cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity in Bombay needs to be noted and valued. It is also striking that as a working-class woman, she valued this colonial-cosmopolitanism, given that cosmopolitanism has been associated with a certain kind of cultural elitism. Pnina Werbner considers the measures to be taken for imbibing and possessing a "cosmopolitan consciousness":

> in what sense does cosmopolitanism need to be grounded in an open, experimental, inclusive, normative consciousness of the cultural other? Such a consciousness would need to include elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distantiation, an awareness of the existence and equal validity of other cultures, other values, and other mores. Is travel without such an inclusive consciousness cosmopolitan? Does travel inevitably lead to such openness and reflexivity? (2006, 497–98)

In Cliffe's case, her travel in wartime India, her identity as a working-class professional woman, and her willingness "to engage with the Other", lead her to adopt such openness about vernacular, working-class cosmopolitanism in a colony, and her acceptance of the shortcomings of the colonial centre (2006, 497).

Nevertheless, as Partha Chatterjee writes, colonial rule was perpetrated by "the rule of colonial difference", and as Frantz Fanon states, "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations." (Chatterjee 1993, 14–34; Fanon 1968, 38–39). In Bombay, Cliffe regularly visited restaurants and clubs where Indians were barred from entering: "There is also a very exclusive club, the Yacht Club. Some of us were guests there and enjoyed looking round" (5). Again,

> The Appollo Bunder Landing Stage is remarkable for its history and very near the Taj Mahal Hotel, and "Greens" which is a fashionable restaurant where "white" meets "white". Especially does one notice the large number of expensive motor cars in the streets and many of them on their way to Malabar Hill, where all the best residences are. (5–6).

These quotations reveal the inherent contradictions in colonial cosmopolitanism: "racial misinterpellation" and "socio-political bifurcation" (Go 2013, 212). Thus although Cliffe

appeared to champion the vernacular cosmopolitanism she met on the streets of Bombay, she still preferred to visit racially-exclusive places, and judged the cosmopolitanisms of elite colonial subjects by their affinity towards English language and culture: “The Parsees rank next to the English in position and influence” (5). Hence my argument here is that Cliffe’s engagement with the Other was not unambiguous and unequivocal, and she had herself internalised some of the contradictions of cosmopolitanism in a colonial setting. Her acknowledgement of vernacular cosmopolitanism is valuable, but not free from paradoxes.

This contradiction is also visible in how Cliffe shows her enjoyment of cosmopolitanism in India by capturing it materially: she rigorously shops for ethnic Indian artefacts from every place she visits. Nevertheless her “obsessive accumulation of exotic artefacts” represents more than “a commodity for consumption by the Western traveller” (Ghose 1998, 42). Her rhetoric of consumption and possession also reveals the experiences of a working-class woman with a disposable income. Hence James Clifford’s analysis of colonial-souvenir possession as “one of the crucial processes of Western identity formation” in the capitalist order falls short, as it fails to take into account the material conditions that enabled women like Cliffe to acquire colonial souvenirs (Ghose 1998, 42). I do not intend to dilute the symbolic nature of the acquisitioning: Cliffe was after all an English woman in India who had deep faith in the institution of the empire, and hence her collection of Indian goods cannot be divorced from the rhetoric of acquisitive, possessive, and appropriating connotations of colonial ownership. Yet I want to establish the novelty of her position to be able to afford such a collection. After a long journey to the north of India for Christmas holidays, Cliffe and her female friend “tidy [themselves] up” and “set out to visit the shops and buy our Christmas gifts” (9). She is also not free from the pitfalls of typical colonial travellers. As Ghose writes, “the enumeration of exotic curios serves as a rhetorical strategy to underline the authenticity

of the traveller/ narrator" (1998, 43). Cliffe too goes to great effort to establish the novelty of some of the items she has acquired:

> The city manufactures shoes and inlaid mosaics amongst other things, and small models of Indian slippers may be bought cut out of the Agra stone. This can be obtained from the trays of knick-knacks for sale on the railway station, and I brought a small pair home with me. Models for the Taj Mahal are also for sale, some of them made from ivory from the Delhi Palace. (10)

She reveals her pride on certain acquisitions: "I am particularly proud to possess a small ivory elephant which was bought in Delhi during my visit" (10). At the same time, she is aware of the workings of colonial trade, and comments in jest: "We visited the bazaars and brought Indian brass, hoping that our "pieces" were not made in Birmingham" (6). Even in jest, she reveals her emphasis on authenticity. In writing about female colonial travel writers, Ghose mentions that the "acquisitive connotations of the search for the picturesque were not hidden from its contemporaries and occasionally surface in texts" (1998, 42). Cliffe too pairs the interesting aspect of a tourist destination with the "interesting" objects she can buy there:

> The silk shops and the brass and copper shops are also very interesting and one enjoys a morning, beating down the price to almost half of what was first asked for an article! I purchased some lovely silk tablecloths and table mats and also an Indian bedspread, all very cheaply indeed. (11)

The reference to the prices of the items is notable because Cliffe does not let her readers forget that she is earning money by working in India. The unlikeliness of her acquisitions also deserves comment: she mainly buys homeware despite not having a home; the shared nurse quarters in the hospital where she lived, would not have sufficient space for her to display the

souvenirs. Her list of material acquisitions reveal the cultural hybridity of India that she was growing so fond of, and her experience of colonial shopping is one of pleasure.

Picturesque History

Cliffe's presence in India is marked by ambiguity because she does not fit into any of the expected roles assigned to British women in India. As a spinster she is immediately disqualified for this role as a "symbolic representative of the joys of an English home" (Suleri 1992, 76). Kenneth Ballhatchet's neat demarcation of the role and purpose of English women in India is made redundant by Cliffe:

> Improved conditions encouraged more Englishwomen to live in India, and in various ways their presence seems to have widened the distance between the ruling class and the people. [...] As wives they hastened the disappearance of the Indian mistress. As hostesses they fostered the development of exclusive social groups in every civil station. As women they were thought by Englishmen to be in need of protection from lascivious Indians. (1980, 5)

Cliffe was not a hostess; rather, as we have seen, she was an observer of the work carried out by hostesses, and noted their shortcomings. By travelling the length and breadth of the country by herself, she proved that she did not need male protection. Suleri writes that one of the "few socially-responsible positions" made available to English women in India was that of the "amateur ethnographer" (1992, 75). These female amateur ethnographers sketched and captured landscape and life in the colonies. Yet the heteroglossia of the genre only reveals that not all female travellers and ethnographers consciously stopped themselves from commenting on imperial politics; similarly not all sympathetic female ethnographers were

resentful of imperial control. Cliffe, despite her overt praise and support of the imperial regime in India, is mostly awed by her travelling experiences, and wants to convey her joy and pleasure. In this section I will analyse her portrayal of the "picturesque" — the landscape and life of India — and read her writing as not subversive of the genre, but nevertheless nuanced.

Cliffe's travelling adventures begin with trips to the city of Nasik, a few miles away from her hospital. She describes it for her English readers as "one of the most sacred of Hindu places of pilgrimage, the banks and even the bed of the river being crowded with shrines and temples. Formerly it was a Mahratta capital. Now it manufactures brass, copper, paper and cotton" (6). She personalises factual information by pairing them with her own association with the place. In this case:

> There is a small nine hole golf course for Europeans there. We often motored to Nasik on our half-days "off duty", for tea and golf, or a picnic on the river banks. (6)

She immediately notes:

> But we always appeared to be very unpopular with the natives there. They would throw stones at us, I believe they would occasionally kill Europeans, especially officials. (6)

The gulf between the private worlds of the Europeans enjoying their holidays in Nasik filled with golf, tea and picnic, and that of the stone-throwing natives capable of killing them is immense. The transition is also sudden, and seeks to establish not only the incommensurable difference between the coloniser and the colonised, but also the difference between them in terms of being civilised, and hence the urgency and necessity of the civilising mission that

warrants the presence of the civilised Europeans in India. Just as casually, Cliffe returns to the landscape and the merry-making of the Europeans:

> The Dak Bungalow provides a fairly good meal. The surrounding country is very pretty and there are lovely caves where we would sometimes go for a picnic. Several of us would be lent horses, those of us who could ride, and we would join the officers from the garrison, and they would send on their servants to get lunch ready in the caves. We could only ride to the bottom of the caves, so we had to climb up the hill and leave the horses in charge of someone at the bottom. I took snaps of the caves and they were very good. (6)

In E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India*, the climax takes place in Marabar Caves, where Adela Quested hallucinates her rape. The caves become the symbolic site for the breakdown of the relationship between the English colonisers and the colonised Indians. Forster describes the caves thus: "Hinduism has scratched and plastered a few rocks, but the shrines are unfrequented, as if pilgrims, who generally seek the extraordinary, had here found too much of it" (116). The caves that Cliffe encounters in Nasik have:

> peculiar faces on the walls, Indian gods I presume, cut out of the rocks. Inside they were immense and quite high. (6)

This is not where the similarities between the two texts end. The jollities of picnicking and motoring in Cliffe's text closely resemble the picnics of the English in Forster's:

> Those of the party who could not ride horses would go by car. It was all very jolly [...] They would invite parties out to dinner and bridge or a dance. It was so lovely in the cool of the evening to sit out on the garden roof and have dinner with pretty lights all hanging round and lovely scented flowers in abundance. (6–7)

Cliffe's autobiographical text acts as an antithesis to Forster's novel. Cliffe's trip to the caves is a communal jaunt with several British officers outnumbering the Indian servants who would get lunch ready or look after the horses, unlike the lonely expedition of Dr. Aziz, Adela Quested, and the Indian guide. Cliffe's working camera, which she uses to photograph the caves, serves as the inverse of Quested's broken field-glasses with the torn leather strap, lying on the "verge of the cave" (145). Cliffe's officers from the garrison prevent any untoward incidents from unfolding by keeping the native servants in their place, and outnumbering the local, dangerous natives. These officers are also respectable married men. They would send "home for their wives", who on arriving would be "housed in lovely creeper covered houses with flat garden roofs" (6). Unlike the aborted picnic after the trip to Marabar Caves, Cliffe's visits to the caves of Nasik were always followed by jolly picnics, parties, and stays at beautiful houses in the locality. Ultimately, if Forster's "critique of the feminine picturesque" manifests itself via Adela Quested's "search for the "real" India", Cliffe's narrative shows the triumph of her engagement with the colonial picturesque (Suleri 1992, 133). By the time her diary was published in 1975, Cliffe must have read Forster's novel, which would help explain the similarities between the two texts.

Cliffe captures both the clichés and the unique experiences of her travels in India. On observing the "Snake Charmer and the Rope Wizard" she offers a rational explanation:

> I distinctly saw the boy climb the rope, yet many around me saw nothing at all. The only explanation I can find is that the native was a hypnotist to those who could receive his suggestions; and I must have been hypnotised into seeing the boy climb the rope. (8)

Cliffe's first Christmas in India captures in detail the celebrations of the colonisers in India. She received her leave a few days before Christmas and travelled to "Amballa" [*sic* Ambala], a city in the north of India. She describes her journey in picturesque terms:

> It was a long cold journey and the cold was more intense during the nights. We wrapped up in our coats and rugs, wondering how we should find the weather up north. It was a wonderful journey too, the longest train journey I had ever taken so far, stopping at all the large towns, arriving at Amballa three days later in the early morning. (9)

Cliffe is, understandably, homesick. The Indian Christmas weather is considerably different from the one she was accustomed to in Yorkshire:

> In the afternoon the sun was quite warm and much nicer than the chilly days of an English December yet I could not at first get the right Christmas spirit. There were no carol singers, no holly, or mistletoe. (9)

For her, this was a new experience and very different from "Christmas as we knew it". She stayed in a hotel together with other English people, who "tried to make it all as jolly as we could" (9).

From Ambala, Cliffe travels to Agra to meet "more friends" and rings the New Year in "standing beside the lovely Taj Mahal." Cliffe is certainly moved by the beauty of the Taj Mahal and the city of Agra, and tries to convey it to her English readers. She attempts to provide the historical background to the building of the Taj, but she makes mistakes in communicating the details.

> Akbar's son, Shah Jehan [grandson] lives through the memory of the Taj Mahal. Its presence will always live in Indian history. Its sweet love story always appeals

> to all. Shah Jehan bult the Taj in memory of his wife, whom he loved so well, who died when her thirteenth child was born. Agra is also a very noted city, lying on the banks of the Jumna. It has a fortress, erected in 1566 by Akbar, and is surrounded by walls seventy feet high and contains a Palace where Shah Jehan and his wife lived with their many children. The Taj Mahal was built specifically so that Shah Jehan could see the tomb from the Palace windows. Fresh flowers are daily, even now, put on the tomb by the natives and it is always guarded. (9–10)

Cliffe's appreciation of Mughal history and architecture is interesting to observe. Well-versed in the history of India, she is aware of how Delhi was captured from the descendants of Akbar and Shah Jehan whom she celebrates above. As I will demonstrate, her recording and retelling of the First War of Indian Independence in 1857 and the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British government reveal her nationalistic pride in the enterprise of the British Empire. How then can her appreciation of a certain aspect of Mughal history be read? Does it reveal a veiled panic for the fragility of the empire as it reveals how lands and countries have changed hands from one ruler to another, and although artefacts like the Taj Mahal remain, they survive as testimonies to a past? Or is her appreciation mere pride at the realisation that the architectural beauties constructed by the Mughal Empire in India now all belong to the British? Suleri points out that the anecdotal nature of autobiographical travel writing of English women writers not only dilutes or reifies "male historiography, as it inscribes a female and foreign body onto an Indian landscape", but also signifies "an Anglo-Indian breakdown of the boundaries between official and intimate languages" (1992, 82). By constantly providing historical commentary on the places she visits, Cliffe tries to position herself closer to the official version of historiography usually reserved for male commentators and tries to shake off the redundancy offered to her by virtue of her gender.

Cliffe also displays a secularism in her appreciation and notes the beauty of the mosques in Agra:

> There are very beautiful mosques to be visited, the Moti Masjid and the Jama Masjid and also remains of other tombs and mosques. [...] After visiting all these beautiful mosques and the bazaars during out short stay in Agra, on the second of January we caught the train to Delhi, one hundred and thirty-eight miles, by railway. (10)

She follows the same pattern of recording her stay and travels in Delhi, pairing her personal experiences with historical and factual information.

> We found Delhi a very interesting city indeed. It is the present capital of the empire and consists of an old and a new town, the new being erected in 1912. The main street of old Delhi is known as "Chandni Chank", [*sic*] or Silver Street. This runs from the Fort and Palace to the Fatchpuri Mosque [*sic*] near Lahore Gate. The fort was built by Shah Jehan. The entrance to the Fort by the Lahore Gate is considered by many as the "noblest entrance to a Palace known". [...] The city was built by Shah Jehan on the site of older cities and passed into English control in 1803. (10)

By noting the importance of the industrial centre, she cements the significance of the new capital of the British Empire (Delhi had become the capital only in 1911, a few years before Cliffe arrived). She further informs her readers of the local industries of the region:

> Its native craftsmen are noted for their ivory carving, silver and brass work, and their weaving and embroidery.

In Delhi too, Cliffe spent a few days with her friends, and records her visit to the Residency.

> Our first visit was to the Residency, where we were shown round the most wonderful gardens. It is a "perfect" home. At this time Lord and Lady Willingdon were in residence at Bombay. He was Governor and they were very good indeed to all nurses. He became Viceroy of India and lived in Delhi, at the Residency. I have a photograph of both which was sent to me as a Christmas gift when in India. (10)

The mention of "nurses" is her first tacit reference to the War in a long time. In her vivid descriptions of her travels and the landscape and history of the places she visits, it is easy to forget that her travels unfolded against the backdrop of the First World War. In Delhi she also visits the famous mosque: "We visited the Jumna Masjid Mosque [*sic*], one of the largest in the world, putting on slippers over our own." Cliffe travelled extensively in Delhi, from "Fattehpur Sikri", which she described as:

> a very interesting city buried outside the walls of old Delhi. Here is the Tomb of Akbar, a very famous king indeed in Indian History. It was his son, [grandson] Shah Jehan, who built the Taj Mahal. (10)

She is lyrical in her praise of the Palace and the Kutub Minar:

> The beautiful inlaid work and carving of these buildings are the admiration of the world. The saying "If there is a Heaven on earth it is this!" can almost be said of this place. The Tomb of "Kutab Minor", ten miles outside Delhi we also visited. It appears to be almost falling over and has a winding staircase inside, garlanded with inscriptions from the Koran. (11)

Cliffe's descriptions draw on the full gamut of the senses. Her writings reek of smell:

> the pungent odours of the native bazaars vary in their intensity. There are lovely sweet scented flowers in the town gardens. (6)

They also revel in colours — "the colours of the native dress are very attractive"; and appeal to a wide range of taste buds from "fairly good meal[s]", to "native sweets, butté sas [*sic*], jellabis and burfam [*sic*]", "luddu", "fairly nice and very juicy but messy to eat" mangoes, "large and delicious" oranges, "cheap" bananas, and "plentiful and sweet" grapes (11). It is interesting to note that while recording the taste and variety of local food, she uses words from the local language, as if to render a sense of authenticity to her experience.

In the midst of her travels in Delhi and sampling of local food and culture, Cliffe declares, "The natives rather depress me" and this marks a sudden break in her description of the picturesque (10). She identifies "a certain sadness of decay amongst them", yet she does not believe that British imperialism is responsible for the poverty and dereliction that mark their lives. For her, it is their reluctance to embrace modernity (that introduced by British imperialism), and their clinging "to their old traditions so intensely" that is responsible for their poverty. She writes:

> One wonders sometimes how many of them live at all. The lives of the women when left alone in the world are quite pitifull [*sic*]. Some of them spend a joyless existence at the cornmill, trying to earn enough money to buy food. The Mohammedan woman is most patient and content to take a very lowly place in life. (10–11)

The otherness of the Indian woman appears stark and bare through Cliffe's pity for her. This is another incommensurable gulf, this time between the female coloniser and the female colonised. Cliffe, who is in India for work but is travelling for pleasure, recognises the hard labour of the impoverished Indian woman, her "joyless existence", her patience despite never

having enough, and her helplessness. Yet in contrast to the ironic distance and difference maintained between the empowered Cliffe and the hapless Memsahib, in this context the bridge that binds both Cliffe and the Indian woman is their individual helplessness. While the Indian woman's helplessness results from poverty, Cliffe's helplessness is essentially the redundancy of the imperial female in the greater imperial structure. Cliffe's pity for the poor Indian woman or her pride in the successes of British imperialism is ultimately inconsequential because she would not be allowed to contribute or make a difference to either. Her presence in the colonial picturesque is aesthetic, and she can only record it in paper for her readers back home (which she only publishes six decades later).

Nigel Leask and Pablo Mukherjee write about the two modes of British imperial travel writing, 'useful knowledge' and 'picturesque' (Leask 2002, Mukherjee 2009). While 'useful knowledge' included historical, political, administrative, and anthropological details, the 'picturesque' concentrated solely on the anti-utilitarian aesthetics (Mukherjee 2009, 24–25). Cliffe has liberally juxtaposed 'useful knowledge' with the 'picturesque' to provide a more substantial portrait of India. However, it is towards the end of her diary, as her time in India draws to a close, that she engages in vigorous commentary on a controversial aspect of Indian history. It is first sparked by a visit to the Red Ridge:

> The Red Ridge of Delhi also called for a special visit. It recalled to our memory the days when the English fought for conquest. How terrible those days must have been, but we must always remember that for a few disloyal Indians there are many who are loyal. (11)

It is important to note what constitutes 'loyalty' for Cliffe, despite all her rejoicings in Indian diversity and cosmopolitanism. The "disloyal" Indians here are the ones who revolted against

the British colonisers in the First War of Independence in 1857. The British won, and Cliffe writes:

> In 1877 Delhi was the scene of the famous Durbar, when the Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. It is a very European city, more so than many of the others in India and is immemorable [sic] to us by the sad events of 1857. The march to the city of the Mutineers of Meerut, the terrible May 11th, the explosion of the powder magazine by Willoughby and his heroic band, the assault when the city was won, September 20, gate by gate, quarter by quarter, a success saddened by the death of the gallant Nicholson. The subsequent daring capture of the King of Delhi by Hodson, of Hodson's horse, and the capture and shooting of his miscreant sons, by the same officer, are all memorable events in Indian history. (11)

Just as she had listed the industries of Delhi before ("ivory carving, silver and brass work, and their weaving and embroidery"), she lists the events that unfolded in the history of India throughout 1857. Interestingly, Cliffe's individual voice, which is so valuable in her reporting of her travels and experiences in India, is suddenly lost in her nationalist recounting of facts. There are some references to emotions — "memorable", "saddened" — but they seem to be merely sprinkled in an otherwise dry listing of events. Nevertheless the purpose cannot be overlooked: Cliffe here explicitly favours the capture of India by Britain. In reading the feminine picturesque, Suleri points out the notion of "degree" and asks, "to what extent is the British woman implicated in the structures of colonialism and what lines are drawn between her collusion with, and confinement in, the colonization of the subcontinent?" (1992, 76). While Suleri examines the symbolic presence of the English woman as wife in India, a role for which Cliffe is unsuitable, the latter's detailed reference to the history of the establishment of the British rule in India reflects her attempt at overt political engagement

and alignment with male colonialists. She does not pursue this further in her war diary — she abruptly announces that after a few months she received orders to leave India. This ironically demonstrates that even if she had wanted to analyse the merits of British imperialism in India, her pursuits were aborted by the very masculine domain which has kept her out of the confines of imperial politics in the first place.

By the time Cliffe finally published the memoirs of her war-work in India in 1975, she had had ample opportunities to edit her writing. One assumes that back in England she would have had more space to display her souvenirs and acquisitions from her travels in India. Ivory figures and silk shawls acquired from India over sixty years ago assume special significance: a "'signifier' of something further" (Grewal 1996, 6). Grewal writes that, "Spectator and consumer were related figures, yet class, gender, and sexuality functioned to create various recasting and refigurations into discrete but related imperial subjects" (1996, 6). A working-class woman travelling in colonial India and shopping with the disposable income she has earned from her job indeed recasts the image of the typical (female) imperial subject. Yet the positioning of Cliffe's nostalgia for Delhi in her autobiography (at the very end) after devoting pages to its beauty, culture, and cosmopolitanism is noteworthy. It justifies the "conquest". Cliffe best demonstrates the complexities in the figure of the female imperial traveller. Her war memoir of travels around India is an excellent example of the heteroglossia of this genre that works across so many intersections.

Acknowledgements

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