



Antebellum White American ‘Mission Wives’ in the *Orient*: A Tale of Flawed Mimicry

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ABSTRACT

The American foreign missions of the early to the mid-nineteenth century epitomize a project that allowed white American women to share a Kiplingesque “white woman’s burden” with British “sisters,” to civilize the *heathen* world which gave the former a chance to share in an Anglo-American white identity.¹ This imperial endeavor required of them to represent/re-present supposedly the most fitting incarnation of the idealized female of the antebellum or the “American true woman,” the “American mission wife,” a subjectivity that was reflective of the presumed superiority of white civilization, offering a model for the heathen women to emulate. Hence, this paper concerns itself with the manner in which a particular antebellum white women’s genre—the mission memoir—represents/re-presents American mission wives in the *Orient* (in the then Burma and Ceylon). Reversing the typical Saidian narrative of the West’s production of the Oriental subaltern/other, I show here how the white American mimic woman in the Orient disrupts her identity, thereby rendering herself ambivalent and interstitial.

Keywords: ‘mission wife,’ memoir, Orient, mimicry

¹ Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands” (1899).

Who'd be a missionary's Bride,

...

Would leave the world and all beside,

Its pomp and vanity and pride,

Her savior's cross to bear?

...

Who feels another's pain

And loves to wipe from sorrow's cheek

The trickling tear-and accents speak

That soothe the soul again.

She who feels for them that need

The precious bread of life.

And longs the savior's lambs to feed

O, such an one would make indeed

A missionary's wife!²

Written by Betsey Learned in 1832, this poem aptly sums up the cardinal virtues of a White American mission wife³ of early to mid-nineteenth century whose selfless and all-renouncing nature was best suited for the purposes of the Christianizing of the heathen world through example. Believed to be the forerunner of the more professionalized single mission woman of the postbellum years—who had duties and responsibilities that were more formalized and organized, than was the case with the antebellum women whose marriage to a missionary became their passport to the Orient—a mission wife, “[r]ather than being remembered for ‘preaching the gospel’, the quintessential ‘male’ task, [... has] been noted for meeting human needs and helping others, sacrificing themselves without plan or reason, all for the sake of bringing the world to Jesus Christ” (Robert xvii).

In this paper, I explore how, in an *Oriental* context, this American feminine self becomes anxious and unsettled. I use “mimicry,” which Homi K. Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (1994) posits as an attribute of colonized natives as characteristic even of the American mission wife who is relocated in her foreign mission destination. Her representations/re-presentations in narrative reveal her identity to be a form of flawed mimicry/performance, where the Orient, by letting it hover between the “ideal” and the “real”/its alternative Oriental

² As quoted in Dana L. Robert *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University, 1996), 1.

³ For information on African American women’s participation in the American missions, see Vaughn. J. Watson’s and Robert J. Steven, eds. *African-American Experience in World Missions: A Call Beyond Community*, (California: William Carey Library, 2002).

versions, renders this subject interstitial and ambivalent. This rupture of the Anglo-American white female subject thereby loosens up the boundaries of exclusivity surrounding white mission womanhood making its national and racial borders arbitrary.

In what follows, I begin with a brief introduction to this ambivalent identity, going on to explore with special reference to Emily Judson's *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson of the American Mission to Burma* (1852), and Miron Winslow's *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Winslow: Thirteen Years a Member of the American Mission in Ceylon* (1840), the multiple ways in which American mission memoirs reveal the flawed mimicries of their gender idols in an Oriental context.

“Mission Wives”

Though participating in an ideal white American gender identity, mission wives are believed to have gone through heterogeneous experiences on the foreign mission field; experiences that at times even disrupted the division between characteristically male-identified and female-identified duties of the cause. Dana L. Robert's “Evangelist or Homemaker? Mission Strategies of Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Wives in Burma and Hawaii,” (1993) for instance, explains how wives of American missionaries abroad had responsibilities that even defied male and female spheres, depending on the locations where the missionaries were commissioned: “[d]espite tensions over the appropriate role for women in ministry, the Baptist missionary women in Burma did everything the male missionaries did except administer the sacraments and preside as a permanent pastor of a church” (6). In Hawaii, though, the more conservative Congregationalism of the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) did not approve of itinerant preaching by mission wives, encouraging them instead to become exemplary Christian gender ideals/idols for the Eastern women to emulate.

The imperialist bent of the women's missionary project is also rather ambivalent, since women missionaries were not “a homogenous group of cultural imperialists but [...] people who reinvented the meanings of American nationalism and imperialism,” (Ellington, Sklar and Shema 2) a view that Amy Kaplan shares as well in the following (2002):⁴ “the anarchy of empire suggests ways of thinking about imperialism as a network of power relations that changes over space and time and is riddled with instability, ambiguity, and disorder, rather than as a monolithic system of domination” (13-14). Especially, white American mission wives had to negotiate the hierarchical power dynamic of the multiple roles they had to play in confrontation with not only the Oriental native other, who may

⁴ *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

have mirrored to them their own colonial history, but also the hegemonic British colonists and missionaries at their foreign destinations. Relations between mission wives and Orientals were also a complex amalgam of white authority, religious indoctrination as well as native affiliation and resistance. Oriental others benefited from school education, improved literacy, caste dissolution, women's empowerment etc. that came alongside the Christianization process, while some native populations discriminated against the whites as non-castes and used their Christian education to revive indigenous religions, as for instance, Arumuga Navalar in Jaffna, Ceylon, who is believed to have developed a form of evangelical Saivism laying emphasis on the scripture and individual salvation instead of religious rituals and customs. Likewise, it is fair to consider the American foreign missions, as does Mary Renda, as a development that "both fed and undermined empires, national states [...] It reinforced racism and exclusion [...] But it also served to strengthen anti-colonial nationalisms and even to trouble missionary women's own racism" (368-69).⁵

However, irrespective of the complexity of the varied circumstances in which these antebellum American mission wives fared in the Orient, back at home in America, aspiring young females of the new republic were being fed with an idealistic grand narrative of women martyrs rescuing Oriental peoples from degradation—a narrative popularized by the genre of the mission memoir—in order to fashion these young women in the image of an ideal white woman well-suited to serve the purpose of Christianizing the world. Marriage to a missionary that served as a passport to the Orient was one major strategy of legitimizing a woman's act of leaving not just her hearth and home but her country. In fact, in early American foreign mission history, most American mission wives' expatriations to the Orient were considered as a predictable and legitimate extension of women's involvement in the home missions during the time (Robert 215). In a sense, the "unwomanly" act of leaving one's domestic sphere, albeit to another domestic sphere in a foreign space, could only be made right by being incorporated within the conventional institution of patriarchal marriage. Once married, the expectation was that these mission wives would perform their female-identified duties of keeping home, bringing up children, educating the unenlightened and being an exemplary helpmeet to their husbands, all done in a religious wilderness that was shown to be starkly different from their republican homeland.

⁵ "Conclusion: Doing Everything: Religion, Race, and Empire in the U.S. Protestant Women's Missionary Enterprise, 1812-1960," *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, eds. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 367-74.

Ironically, though, the mission wife could almost be another name for the Indian *sati*, in that, like the self-immolating Indian woman, her American counterpart represented renunciation that at times even reached the extent of self-annihilation. What one did in the name of her patriarch, the other did for the mission cause, and those who died, like Harriet Newell (1793-1812), were martyred for posterity in the mission annals. Mortality was high in the tropical foreign environment and the white American women who left their motherland had at least an inkling that their lives were possibly at risk. In such a context, Rev. Jonathan Allen's advice to the wives of the first-ever American foreign missionaries, Harriet Newell, Ann Judson, and Roxana Nott, that one of their main responsibilities was "subverting indigenous customs deemed injurious to women, such as the burning of widows in India" (Robert 3) is strangely odd. According to mission logic, what made Indian females primitive made white American women pious.

This ambivalent phenomenon of the mission wife, however, was not the sole prerogative of Americans, since, before the first of such women left for their Eastern destinations with their respective husbands in 1812, British women had already ventured out into the Orient as wives of missionaries, although the practice became popular only during the mid-nineteenth century. Likewise, the first white American mission wives who left America were following the footsteps of their British sisters, and their mission posts also being located in the British colonies, these American women were indeed participating in a common Anglo-American Christianizing endeavor. As Eadaoin Agnew explains in *Imperial Women Writers in Victorian India: Representing Colonial Life, 1850-1910* (2017), different classes and hierarchies of colonial British women such as mission wives, *memsahibs* and imperial housewives were already living in the Oriental colonies, and they were "expected to exemplify British superiority through a visible and verifiable assertion of Victorian femininity," (6) an expectation that American women too tried to meet in their own ways.

However, as recorded in mission memoirs, neither British nor American women managed to replicate a model mission wifehood to the letter. Out of the numerous reasons for this setback that scholars have pointed out, Agnew above refers to factors such as the fear of contamination by the close relations between whites and the supposedly immoral, uncivilized, and non-Christian native people, the climactic conditions far different from the West, and inaccessibility to domestic resources etc., as hindering the making of Victorian homes in the Eastern *wilderness*. Patricia Grimshaw, Peter Sherlock and Emily Conroy-Krutz also draw our attention to the constant absence of mission husbands on proselytizing tours, the endless work and daily duties of the mission women, tropical illnesses and the death of children born to mission families and the death of mission wives themselves as detrimental to the successful reproduction of the

white marriage, home, and family. In what follows, I will draw attention to how not only gender but also genre reveal a gap between what the white American woman in the Oriental mission field was expected to be and what she became, thus throwing a common Anglo-American white woman's subjectivity into crisis.

Of Mimicry and the Mission Genre

Irrespective of how well or how badly mission wives fared in the heathen lands abroad, the genre of the early century mission memoir was a bridge between the women who left and the women who stayed, winning many thousands of American women at home to sacrifice themselves in order to salvage the unenlightened.⁶ Still, as I argue below, these narratives also reveal, perhaps, what should not have been revealed—the gap between the “ideal” and the “real” as it were—and thereby unsettle not only the subjectivity of the mission wife but also the genre of the mission memoir itself. This unsettling of gender and genre, likewise, projects the antebellum American true woman in the Orient as a conflicted and ambivalent identity.

It is in order that I explain here the specific manner in which I have put to use my key term, mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha popularized “mimicry” and “mimic men” in *The Location of Culture* (1994) with reference to natives fashioning themselves in the guise of their colonial masters. In the context of British colonialism, the Anglicization of the native Indian elite brought the former closer to a British identity, but at the same time, unequivocally marked the Indian native as other, for, “to be Anglicized was emphatically not to be English” (Bhabha 87). Mimicking the identity of a white man could only render the native “mimic man” a subjectivity hovering somewhere mid-way toward the white ideal. In other words, what was to bridge the “gap” ended in reinforcing the differences between the white self and the native other. Therefore, using mimicry to describe the fashioning of white American women's selves in the Oriental space, I too draw attention to a discursive gap in the production of this identity that allows it to be self-critical. I treat mission wifedom as a gendered white ideal that even white American women themselves as mimic women were to emulate, where mimicry as well as its failure reveal a rupture in the subjectivity of the American true woman, producing her as an interstitial identity, for indeed, ‘to be Americanized, was emphatically not to be American.’

⁶ See Barbara Reeves Ellington's “American Women's Foreign Mission Boards, 1800 to 1938: Over a Century of Organizing Denominationally, Ecumenically, Transnationally” (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street, 2012).

In the following sections, I present readings of two key mission memoirs of the first half of the nineteenth century that epitomize, at one level, mission wives as mimic women, and at another level, the struggles the mission memoir itself went through in emulating the conventions of the genre.

Anne Judson as Raconteur

As Lisa J. Pruitt (2005) argues, both Emily Judson's *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson of the American Mission to Burma* and Miron Winslow's *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Winslow* largely succeed in fulfilling the primary requirements of the mission memoir:

They had twin objectives: providing exemplars of feminine virtues for American women to emulate and stirring those women to exert themselves for the temporal and eternal benefit of the women of Asia. The memoirs' compilers accomplished those objectives by tracing the spiritual development of the women from birth to rebirth, and then following them to the mission field. Furthermore, juxtaposing the condition of American Christian women with that of "Oriental" women served as an extended illustration [...] that 'Christianity alone teaches the true rank of woman; and secures to the loveliest and best portion of our race, the respect and influence which belong to them.' (42)

Hence, *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson* and *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* may reveal much about their subjects, or they may reveal nothing new at all, given the heavily standardized nature of the genre. These memoirs also, at the same time, shed light on their authors in spite of the literary restrictions put upon their narrative voices. On many occasions the genre does much more than what is expected of it. In the case of Emily Judson, what her text reveals by throwing itself into excess is its author's multiple selves that eventually bring into crisis both Sarah Judson and her self as mission wives, as well as the mission memoir.

Emily Judson was not just a writer: she also inhabited the subjectivity of the mission wife herself, sailing to Burma in 1846 as Adoniram Judson's third wife, an identity that she would have been expected to be true to as she wrote her memoir on Sarah B. Judson (who was Adoniram's second wife). In fact, in a definitive biography on Emily Judson—*The Life and Letters of Emily Chubbuck Judson: Fanny Forester* (Vol.1-V-2009)—George H. Tooze presents us with the fascinating details of the multiple transformations of Emily's self. She was "Emily Chubbuck" during her early career, mostly writing children's books, "Fanny Forester" in the period when she was contributing to popular magazines, and "Emily Judson" during her missionary period and her later years. Somehow, as I will explain shortly, she was all three of these subjectivities all at once.

Mimicry is at the core of Judson's own identity. She needed to be transformed from "Fanny Forester," the witty and sprightly writer—the "great trifler and world-lover, [... one who] could never be serious and sober minded as a missionary ought to be"⁷—into "Emily Judson," the mission wife (with the aid of her husband, Adoniram and her mission circuit) before she became qualified to go to Burma, let alone write a mission narrative. Tooze goes on to say in this regard that, in spite of her rather scandalous life as Fanny Forester and her romance with Nathaniel P. Willis, a notable American author of her day, reforming this woman writer into a model who fitted the Christianizing project was considered to be worthwhile, since her writing talent so far utilized for worldly entertainment could be channeled into a new direction (Vol. I-200.) Yet, this transformation is left incomplete as shown by the subversive narrative elements one finds in *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson*.

Judson begins her text conventionally, validating great praise for Sarah by claiming that, "[i]t has been written of her [Sarah] that her English friends, [...] regarded her as the 'most finished and faultless specimen of an American woman that they had ever known'" (58). The author of *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson* is required to keep this superlative promise throughout the text, and she does so to a large extent. Not only does she infuse Sarah profusely in qualities characteristic of American true womanhood such as "patient industry and quiet endurance," (Judson 9) but also contrasts her with Burmese women and children in a typically dualistic self-other/East-West dichotomy and echoes a common mission content, rhetoric, jargon, and technique that aggrandize white superiority. In some instances, though, she overdoes it too, where the memoir moves from being one of balance to one of excess. Dramatization, sensationalism and even possibly titillation offered by the descriptions of some key episodes in her text, make her throw caution to the winds.

It was generally understood that white American women who wrote mission memoirs in the nineteenth century needed to restrain their writerly selves from giving into excessive sensationalism, lest that enticed impressionable young American women to join the cause of the foreign missions for the wrong reasons. In fact, we find Miron Winslow himself warning writers engaged in this genre by suggesting that, "[i]t is time that the romance of missions is done away [...] no attraction from its novelty [...] will bear up and carry forward anyone, amidst long continued labors of almost uniform sameness [...] A young lady [...] should either chasten her imagination, or invigorate her principles, before she goes forth (*Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Winslow* 68). Emily Judson, though, is unstoppable. In the

⁷ Judson to her friend Anna Maria Annabel (Tooze 4): *The Life and letter of Emily Chubbuck Judson: Fanny Forester*, Vol. I (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009).

first of the following passages, she dramatizes the bloody scene of the murders that take place in the boat that is taking baby George—Sarah’s son—back to America, while the latter theatricalizes an episode of Burmese marauders looting the mission camp while everyone is asleep in the middle of the night.

What a gleam of fiendish eyes! A moment of rapid action succeeds—a push—a plunge—and the kind fruit giver is struggling with the waves which have closed above his head [...] The little boy from his hiding place, beneath a bench, marks every thrust; and his flesh creeps, and his blue eyes glitter and dilate until they assume an intense blackness. And now the form of his protector sways and reels, and the red blood trickles from his wounded side to the bottom of the boat. [...] The marauders stand with drawn cutlass, or brandishing the curved crease [...] Their tones are those of infuriated madmen, and their gestures, hah! (193-94)

[A]nd there had the desperate villains stood, glaring on the unconscious sleeper with their fierce, murderous eyes [...] the sharp knife or pointed spear glittered in their hands [...] regarding with callous hearts the beautiful tableau [...] (68-69)

The first is indeed a horror-filled thrill-ride of native violence and brutal heartlessness which is contrasted with the innocent babe in the boat, while the second recreates a scene of the ominous gaze of the savage brutes falling on an innocent white woman and her child in vulnerable slumber—which is surely a fictional reproduction since there is no plausible way in which either Sarah while asleep, nor Emily, would have been able to see by themselves the “glint” in the marauders’ eyes—possibly titillating a young woman’s heart back at home in America in the safe lap of civilization. Such episodes, by making an otherwise arduous tale more exciting would have tapped into the thrill-seeking consciousnesses of young women at home, enticing them to the foreign mission cause through a spirit of adventure rather than one of humble piety.

What we see emerging in dramatic episodes like the above is the subject position of “Fanny Forester,” the sprightly writer, storyteller, and sensationalist, rather than that of the all-renouncing American true woman in the Orient. In fact, there was constant criticism being thrown around on Judson’s fitness to serve the mission cause, let alone write about it, which her friend Anna Maria Anabel gives expression to in a letter from 1848: “So you think Miss FF that you will give up writing! I should like to see you do it. I think a person who writes poetry when her child is ten days old is likely to give up writing. Your book I hear sells very well, but the critics lash you unmercifully. They are mortally offended because you are still Fanny Forester” (Tooze 53). Such criticism would have troubled our author, I suggest, for we find her defending her writing style in an apologetic letter to Rev. Dr. Solomon Peck in 1849, saying that, “I sometimes embellish my style, I never have been guilty of embellishing facts, except when I have presented

them in the guise of fiction [...] I had my reasons, and I believe them good and sound ones, for departing from the beaten track of compilers” (Tooze 216). Only if Emily Judson knew that embellishing style could indeed embellish and thereby change the facts could one assume that she would have pulled the reins of her authorial excesses and returned to the beaten track.

If “Fanny Forester” thus keeps appearing where “Emily Judson” needs to show her pious self, in both private letters as well as in *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson*, the writer does something yet more unconventional by including the humanized voice of the native other at least in one instance in her text, while also revealing an American mission wife’s willingness to forge deep bonds with Oriental women, which Judson, however, takes pains to carefully invalidate through her mediating voice. Mah Doke, a Rangoon woman prays with Sarah for her loss after the death of her child and pacifies the latter, “I have been telling Moungh Shwayben, that now you would be more distressed than ever, and he sent me to speak soothing words,” (154) which makes Sarah consider their exchange as “one of the pleasantest prayer meetings we ever had” (154). They sit together and speak the name of God albeit in different languages, bonding in a common female community that surpasses national, racial, religious, and even linguistic differences. Judson though is quick to reduce the significance of this democratic moment: “From some of the extracts just made, showing the sympathetic disposition of the native Christians, and Mrs. Boardman’s affection for them [...] may be called in question [...] it was only as Christians that they were companionable and worthy of affection” (156-57). Here is a clever authorial mediation that validates the narrator’s thoughts in the guise of the thoughts of the narrated, where the former skillfully maneuvers her objective of establishing an insurmountable gulf between the white angel and the heathen other.

Nonetheless, after a particularly unflattering and debasing observation on Oriental women, Judson wonders, “Can this indeed be my sister? And is this but an exhibition of my own nature, in its uncleansed nakedness?” (25). This moment of self-doubt I see as a moment where the white racial subject considers her own inner evils, projecting othered or externalized sin within one’s own self, gaining knowledge of the permeability of the boundaries between self and other. What is vital here is that Judson’s rhetorical question suggests the possibility that the Oriental woman could be the American true woman’s sister, albeit deformed. The narrator of *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson* is here on a sure path to developing a broader and more progressive vision of the world that challenges Anglo-American superiority, though, unfortunately, she does not pursue this moment any further.

Eventually, then, what we have in the trio, Emily Judson, her memoir, and Sarah B. Judson is an author whose multiple selves bring into tension her fitness to

serve the mission, a text that unsettles the mission genre through its excesses, and a subjectivity that becomes ambivalent through authorial mediation. Together, they cause a disruption of both gender and genre, not only loosening up the boundaries of exclusivity surrounding the ideal white American gendered subject but also a genre that represented the superiority of white civilization and its women. The Orient, therefore, presented white American mission wives with not so much a binary space but an ambivalent and subversive one.

Of “Mrs. Winslow”

What of Harriet Winslow? No other name can represent Harriet⁸ better than her married name, “Mrs. Winslow,” in the specific manner in which she is represented by her husband Miron Winslow, in *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow: Thirteen Years a Member of the American Mission in Ceylon*. To memorialize a subject is also to mediate the representation of that subject. Like Emily Judson, Miron Winslow’s attempt is also to ensure that Harriet exemplifies the truest of American womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood. In fact, by his own claims, he writes her biography with a view to “kindl[ing] a spark of missionary zeal in one youthful breast, [...offering an example] of early consecration, and patient and self-denying activity and perseverance in the service of Christ, [illustrating...] the usefulness, responsibility and encouragements of Christian mothers, and especially the wives of missionaries” (*Memoir of Mrs. Harriet* 4-5). In compiling these “delicate touches of a female hand, [t]hose portions that were less important [were] omitted or condensed, [...] giving place to new and valuable matter,” (3-4) something that clearly shows the degree of patriarchal intervention that one can expect in the representation of Harriet’s voice. However, I demonstrate in the following how in spite of this considerable patriarchal authorial mediation, a subversive voice breaks through in *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* that drastically alters the feminine ideal that the mission memoir set out to memorialize.

Mission wifehood is infused with three overlapping images that are the cornerstones of American true womanhood—wife, homemaker, and mother—although, none of the above subjectivities come easy to Harriet in nineteenth-century Ceylon. For one, her memoir records the numerous ways in which it was made difficult for a wife of a missionary to emulate the exemplary conjugal relations that American true women were expected to forge between themselves and their husbands, in creating a model family; nor was the “mission compound”

⁸ Since I will make references to both Miron Winslow and Harriet Winslow, I will use the first name Harriet and Winslow to refer to her husband, in order to avoid confusion.

an exact replica of the ideal American middle-class home. In addition, the Oriental space was not conducive to the performing of American republican motherhood, since both British and American women on foreign missions in one or all three ways below failed to fulfill the dictates of “true” motherhood: either by dying children who dwindled “away under a tropical sun,” (Winslow 422) by children being sent away back home to “civilization,” and/or by children being brought up by others to accommodate mission wives’ tireless Christianizing efforts. In the case of Harriet Winslow, motherhood becomes compromised by all three of these eventualities.

The “mission marriage” too was a curious kind. It challenged, from the outset, the companionate union that was deemed as supreme in America during the early nineteenth century. Simply put, as the term itself claims, it was a marriage to the mission cause, since the conjugal union between the true woman and the benevolent patriarch was second to the responsibilities of the mission cause. As Dana L. Robert (1996) says, “[m]ost of the time, the commitment to mission preceded commitment to the husband” (18-21). Emily Conroy-Krutz (2018)⁹ reiterates Robert’s claims by showing unions such as Roxana Nott’s with her husband in the likeness of marriages “arranged” by the Foreign Missions Board. The voice of Mrs. Winslow that manages to seep through the nooks and crannies of her husband’s text conveys this failure to replicate ideal conjugal unions in the Orient. Likewise, the mission memoir textualizes the instrumental nature of the mission marriage, showing it as more of a professional arrangement rather than a companionate unification of a man and a woman. At one point, we find Harriet writing in her journal, “Mr. W left home on the 1st inst for a missionary tour on the continent [...] to the Neilgherry Hills, for his health, and *I have been for four long weeks alone*,” (emphasis added 356). Though short, the highlighted line manages to capture an emotion that may have been the lot of many a white American woman in their foreign homes. It could also signal the curtailing of emotion, since a mission wife was not expected to lament and complain of her plight, as she was symbolic of the highest level of self-renouncement. Still, at the same time, she was also expected to represent an ideal model of conjugal bliss, and this tension/mis-match between renouncement and desire for emotional comfort comes to light in Harriet’s brief yet impactful phrase.

The preceding moment in Harriet’s memoir also draws attention to the textual presentation of yet another threat to the mission marriage brought on by the long absences of her husband, that of marauding native thieves who threatened to violate the white woman’s honor: “As soon as he[Miron] was gone, thieves began to come every night to their [neighbors’] houses [...] They were reprimanded and charged to keep the peace, and not to disturb the *Ammah* while

⁹ “The Forgotten Wife: Roxana Nott and Missionary Marriage in Bombay” (2018).

the husband was absent [...] probably there would have been no disturbance now if Mr. W had been at home” (356-58). Harriet’s words are suggestive of her own proximity to bodily harm and even sexual assault, revealing how an absent husband on mission duty could endanger the honor, safety and even the life of a mission wife, in turn fracturing the desired model of conjugal bliss.

In tandem, Harriet also demonstrates how challenging it was to replicate a model American home in Ceylon, because a “mission home” could not help becoming structurally different to the American middle-class household. Mission homes “were usually constructed on large plots, which would house one or more bungalows, and even a day school within the compound” (Singh 50-51).¹⁰ Some huts functioned as hostels for native children. Oriental homes of course would have provided the white woman with alternative domesticities. Predictably though, in most cases, Harriet devalues these native alternatives as absent of civilization and culture. For instance, she finds it impossible to wrap her mind around the “one roomed huts” of the poor: “It is the parlor, dining room and bed room [...] here they sit cross legged on the floor [...] conveying [food] to their mouths with the right hand [...] and here they sleep almost promiscuously” (205). What she mainly draws attention to here is a lack of privacy inside the native home, an arrangement that would have symbolized communality, or perhaps even poverty and deprivation, if seen through an indigenous perspective. Jaffna upper classes though, lived in larger and “less promiscuous” domestic spaces, something that Harriet fails to mention here. In fact, as we shall go onto understand in the rest of this section, her perceptions of Ceylon and the Ceylonese will continue to be based on her relations restricted to the underprivileged classes in Jaffna; the cohort of natives that American missionaries primarily catered to.

Moreover, in a section detailing her household affairs (268-74) we read how Harriet being in charge of not only her family but also an extended family of boarding native children and scores of domestics is constantly nagged by petty annoyances such as thieving servants who would “slip a lime or some curry seeds into their clothes” (270) if she did not watch them at all times, or by a breaking well-rope or a stolen water-basket (272) that she needed to replace. Her entire day is occupied with such numerous cares uncharacteristic of an American middle-class home but certainly common for a mission home. The latter space was inevitably infiltrated by native presence, and Harriet complains: “I know not how much we may alter our habits in these things. In almost all respects you may expect us to deteriorate, for we are in a destructive atmosphere [...] disadvantage

¹⁰ See Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia (1860s-1940s)* (New York: Garland, 2000.)

to our mental progress, to have the stimulus of refined social intercourse taken away, and to be shut up mostly to a strange language, so barren of useful thought as is the Tamul” (225)!

Mothering itself seemed to become transformed in the “Eastern wilderness,” as recorded in the mission memoir: “I could spend many pleasant hours with these dear ones, but if they are well, I do not feel justified in giving time to them which I can employ in something more important. While so young, with a little of my care, they are comfortable in the hands of others. I therefore give them up almost entirely,” (261) writes Harriet. This rhetoric of renouncement resounds well with the image of the mission wife whose ability to sacrifice is one of her cardinal virtues. At the same time, it also shows a deep rupture in the white American mission family that parted children from parents—more importantly, their mothers—for several reasons that were accommodated by the missions themselves. In *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries tried to Change the World but Changed America* (2017) for example, David A. Hollinger includes a substantive section on missionary children and their psychological ailments due to being parted from their parents as they were sent back home to America to be educated and “Americanized,” going through the “culture shock” of readapting to American life, or for being brought up in confinement in a foreign environment. Like Sarah Judson who sends some of her children to the lap of western civilization, Harriet and Miron, too, send away their child Charles to America when he is merely eleven years old, which disintegrates their family structure. (This causes a twin tragedy as Charles dies mid journey.) Wiping away any possible doubts in the mind of the reader of the appropriateness of thus parting a young child from his parents, Miron Winslow authoritatively adds the following explanation to his narrative, rationalizing the choice that missionary parents made in sending their children back home:

The reasons which induced all the missionaries to consider such a course necessary, in regard to their children, were entirely satisfactory to her [Harriet’s] mind. Some of the principles are, 1. The children cannot be *properly educated* in Ceylon. 2, The state of society endangers their *moral and religious character*. [...] 5, There are not opportunities for their forming *suitable connections in marriage*. 6, They cannot, as a general thing, remain in the country with the *prospect of usefulness and happiness*. [...] Southern Asia is no place for Northern people to *colonize*. They dwindle away under a tropical sun. (421-22)

What the above passage displays is a scathing white prejudice and intolerance toward an Eastern space deemed degraded and degenerate. It is this othering Orientalist discourse that helps justify the disruption of the mother/parent-child bond on the mission field. Of course, such renunciation does not brutalize or demonize white motherhood as is often done in mission rhetoric in the

representation of heathen women who sacrificed their children due to their superstitious faiths.¹¹

Likewise, both Emily Judson's *Memoir on Sarah B. Judson* and Miron Winslow's *Memoir on Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* represent the obstacles that American true women met with as they were being physically and metaphorically transplanted on heathen spaces across the seas. If Emily keeps reverting to her former spirited self of Fanny Forester from the model of the mission wife, Harriet symbolizes the unsettling of not only the idealized American marriage and family but also American motherhood.

Mission Memoir's Narrative Lacunae

I close this paper by drawing attention to the mission memoir's many telling silences/narrative lacunae with special reference to *Memoir on Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow*. If filled, these silences would have further thrown both gender and genre into disarray. For one, neither *Memoir of Sarah B. Judson* nor *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* makes even a remote reference to how the American mission wife herself was othered by the Oriental native, an act that muddles the white self-native other binary. In fact, in the larger context of British colonial and imperial relations with the East, there are numerous accounts of white women being perceived as the "caste other," especially in countries like India where a strict caste-system was being observed. The first female medical missionary to the colonies from Britain, Dr. Anna Sarah Kugler says

it was not pleasant to be constantly reminded as one entered high caste Hindu homes, that one was an unclean object, defiling everything one touched. It was not pleasant to have [...] a very ill patient to have taken out and brought into the courtyard because the doctor was too unclean to go inside [...] Neither did one enjoy stooping down and picking up the medicine bottle because one was too unclean to take it directly from the hand of the Brahman.¹²

In the context of the then Ceylon where Harriet Winslow situates herself, Arumuga Navalar (1822-1879), a Sri Lankan Tamil who is considered as the backbone of the Saivite Revival in nineteenth-century Jaffna, where most of the American mission activities were located, used the word *mleccha*, meaning "a non-Aryan or person of an outcaste race; a barbarian [...] a person who does not conform with conventional Hindu beliefs and practices; a foreigner,"¹³ as a

¹¹ See Lydia Maria Child *The History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations* (Boston: J. Allen, 1835) on *native* motherhood.

¹² As quoted in Maina Chawla Singh (2000), 65.

¹³ <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/mleccha>>

derogatory term to refer to white missionaries. “His activities are a major reason why Protestant conversions among the high castes in Sri Lanka decreased notably in the mid-nineteenth century” (Hudson 96).

However, other than vague references to the difficulties in luring upper caste Jaffna women to attend a religious meeting, let alone getting them to convert to Christianity, *Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* makes no mention of this crucial factor of class disproportion in the America-Ceylon mission’s accessibility to the native other. Using a particular restricted class of ethnic Ceylonese—underprivileged Tamils—belonging to only a particular area in Sri Lanka—Jaffna, in the very North of the country—*Memoir of Mrs. Harriet L. Winslow* underrepresents an entire country with far more complex colonial realities, portraying Jaffna as an intellectual vacuum full of “primitive” natives.

In fact, before American missionaries took on their Christianizing responsibilities of the Northern most areas of Ceylon, imperial Britain had already “westernized,” i.e., “civilized” a class of native elites in the model of Macaulay’s interpreters. Elite Ceylonese women in the Southern areas of the country, for example, had already embraced Victorian domesticity and the merits of a western-style patriarchal family creating a racial fracture in a female ideal springing from a superior white race. To fill up the gaps left by the absence of such information would only have been to the detriment of the mission memoir that served American aggrandizement as well as America’s global importance in civilizing the non-Christian world.

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