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# The Travels of Nellie Bly and Emma Vely in the Context of Women's Movement, Colonialism and Female Identity

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The Travels of Nellie Bly and Emma Vely in the Context of  
Women's Movement, Colonialism and Female Identity

by

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A THESIS

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## **Abstract**

This project focuses on the transcultural analysis of travel writings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the North American journalist Nellie Bly and the German author Emma Vely. It will examine displayed female identity and creations of “Otherness” in their travel writings through the lens of the authors’ positions on women’s rights matters. It sheds light on the question if the women’s movement positively influenced the interaction of western female travelers with “Others” in colonial settings and if they showed greater awareness of unequal power dynamics, especially in their display of non-western women in colonized countries that they visited. Bly and Vely both supported the women’s rights movement in the United States and in Germany and offer an excellent base for a transcultural comparative analysis as they share similarities in their perspective on women’s rights, their travel routes and the time period that they traveled in, during the 1880s and 90s. The analysis also determines if the findings reflect the varying historical background of the women’s movement in Germany, where Vely was born, and in the U.S, where Bly originated from.

The findings of this project show that Bly and Vely’s support for women’s equality only applied to white women and, even though they were interested in their living conditions, they did not perceive non-white women as equal, as their racist and derogatory statements show. Their display of female alterity shows surprisingly few variations despite their varying background and the different history of the women’s movement in both countries.

*Keywords:* women’s travel literature, women’s rights movement, nineteenth-century, transcultural literature studies, post-colonialism

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, A. Gilgen.

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## Introduction

Movement can only occur when borders—no matter if geographical or societal—do not confine an individual or a society in its mobility. Female travelers of the past centuries have long been victims of such confinements, being fundamentally restricted in their mobility by societal boundaries and expectations of (in)appropriate gender-specific behaviour. The place that was determined to be the “natural sphere” of women was their home and leaving this assigned sphere for prolonged periods without appropriate reasons contravened social norms and expected “womanly” behaviour.

Female travelers, who decided to leave the domestic sphere, did not only experience their own culture’s restrictions on their personal mobility and, as a result, commented on gender-related behaviour in their travel reports—they also compared their own culturally shaped norms to the women they encountered during their travels and reflected their own identities against the constructed alterity of the encountered “Others.” Such comparisons often served to further establish the traveler’s identity by creating discourses of female Otherness and hierarchies in their travel writings. Research on female travel literature is often examined in context of these geographical and, more importantly, societal borders and limits that were crossed, and in the past decades the women who overstepped these borders were often displayed as pioneers and feminists from a contemporary scholarly perspective.<sup>1</sup>

This project examines two female authors and travelers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Emma Vely and Nellie Bly, and their travel writings, and will analyze displayed female identity and alterity in these travelogues through the lens of the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this pattern in previous scholarship, see Gabriele Habinger. *Frauen reisen in die Fremde. Diskurse und Repräsentationen von reisenden Europäerinnen im 19. und beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Promedia, 2006), p. 115 – 118.

authors' stance on women's rights matters. It will also be determined if these findings reflect the distinct historical background of the women's movement in the United States—where Bly was born—and in Germany, where Vely originated from. Both female writers who will be examined in this project traveled outside of Europe in the 1890s and put their experience into writing in the form of travel reports that were published in multiple forms—as monographs or autobiographies, but also as short publications in journals and newspapers. Nellie Bly published “Around the World in Seventy-Two Days” in 1890, based on her travels that she started a year earlier, in November 1889. Emma Vely published her travel experiences in various German journals (such as in *Die Frau* in 1896) and in her autobiography in 1929.

Bly and Vely were selected for this analysis as both authors traveled outside of Europe at a similar time period, published their travelogues in various forms and both women were actively voicing their support for improved women's rights—therefore, they offer an excellent choice for a comparative analysis targeting the intersection between female travel literature and the women's movement. Furthermore, both authors have not received a lot of scholarly attention so far, especially Vely has barely been the object of any research. Even though the analysis of Bly can resort to a wider choice of scholarly material, her involvement in the women's movement has also not received much attention up to this point, let alone the links between her activism in the women's movement and female identity and alterity in her travelogues.

While the comparison between Bly and Vely will hint at similarities and differences of female travel literature in the U.S. and Germany, this case study should not be perceived as a generally representative view on the link between the women's movement and travel literature—the limitations of this study will therefore be discussed in the conclusion, after the analysis of the two authors.

As the suffrage movement in the United States and in Germany evolved from different circumstances (such as the initial connection between abolitionism and women's rights activism in the U.S.) and questions of "ethnic differences" were much less prominent in the German movement, it is expected that these differences will be reflected in the portrayal of foreign women in Bly's and Vely's writings. It is conceivable that Bly might be more inclusive and nonracist in her depiction of foreign women—especially women of color—than Vely and other white travelers and authors at the end of the nineteenth century, due to her social activism and the background of the U.S. suffrage movement. However, whether the historical background of the women's movement in the U.S. had indeed any influence on Bly's portrayal of non-white women, will have to be established in the course of this project and in the comparison with Vely.

Aside from the comparative procedure of this project, this analysis will apply a critical approach on the frequent characterization of female travelers as feminists, as it has been neglected that traveling women did not only overcome societal borders, but built them as well during their travels and with their published literature.<sup>2</sup> Based on this critical approach, Vely and Bly's depiction of colonialism and racism in their publications will be closely examined. As both travelers were advocates for the women's rights movement in the late nineteenth century, their position on social and legal rights for women will be examined and then—as a step that few research contributions have taken so far<sup>3</sup>—their position on the women's right movement will be contextualized with their depiction of foreign women and creations of "Otherness" in their travel reports, to

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<sup>2</sup> Ulla Siebert. "Frauenreiseforschung als Kulturkritik," in *Und tät das Reisen wählen'. Frauenreisen-Reisefrauen. Dokumentation des interdisziplinären Symposiums zur Frauenreiseforschung, Bremen 21.-24. Juni 1993*, ed. Doris Jedamski et al. (Zurich: eFeF, 1994), p.160.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of scholarship that examines the connection between female travelers and a feminist position, or the dissent with the movement, can be referred to: Gabriele Habinger. *Frauen reisen in die Fremde...*, p. 118 – 125.



critically examine the women's active and passive participation in the creation of hierarchic and discriminatory practices from an eurocentric position of power, based on a critical postcolonial approach.

Caused by the emergence of women's studies, the last decades have seen a significant increase of scholarship on women's travel literature in the United States and in Germany. However, the first contributions on female travel literature displayed the travelers merely as heroines and often did not take into account to what extent female travelers were involved in discourses of colonialism, racism and processes of hierarchization. Especially in Germany, scholarship often stylized the women as emancipated brave heroines, as Habinger points out in her contribution on female traveler's charged relationship between their female gender role and colonial ideology.<sup>4</sup> It took until the 1990's and later to establish a more critical view on women's involvement in colonialism.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the German scholarship, the research on travel literature in North America developed a critical approach much earlier, in the 1980s, which encouraged a scholarly discussion on the intersection of western women and their active and passive support of colonial practices.<sup>6</sup> Works such as by Chaudhuri and Strobel on western women and imperialism gave important impulses on the involvement of women in racism and colonial practices.<sup>7</sup> This scholarship in the U.S. and in Germany on

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<sup>4</sup> Gabriele Habinger. "Anpassung und Widerspruch. Reisende Europäerinnen des 19. und beginnende 20. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Weiblichkeitsideal und kolonialer Ideologie," in *Und tät das Reisen wählen'. Frauenreisen – Reisefrauen. Dokumentation des interdisziplinären Symposiums zur Frauenreiseforschung, Bremen 21.-24. Juni 1993*, ed. Doris Jedamski et al. (Zurich: eFeF, 1994), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> As examples for this critical perspective can be mentioned Habinger's contributions, as well as Siebert's, especially "Frauenreiseforschung als Kulturkritik".

<sup>6</sup> Ulla Siebert "Von anderen, von mir und vom Reisen'. Selbst- und Fremdkonstruktionen reisender Frauen um 1900 am Beispiel von Käthe Schirmacher und Emma Vely," in *Nahe Fremde – fremde Nähe. Frauen forschen zu Ethnos, Kultur, Geschlecht, Reihe Frauenforschung*, ed. Christa Höllhumer et. al. (Vienna: Wiener Frauenverlag, 1993), p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel. *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

the involvement of western women in colonialism applies to women who lived in the colonies but also to travelers like Bly, Vely and others who visited colonized territories during their journeys and made use of the colonial amenities (such as infrastructure and hospitality), as well as the interaction with their fellow country men and women who lived in the colonies.

Critical research on female travel literature promises to not only bring greater nuance to our understanding of female agency during travels and public life of the late nineteenth century, but also promises to unveil the intersection of gender identity and alterity more broadly. The comparative focus of this project will help to reveal differences and similarities in the discourses on colonialism and women's rights in the United States and in Germany. Even though research on women's travels has increased over the last decades, comparative works that analyze female travelers from the U.S. and from Germany in the context of post-colonial studies, women's rights movement and female identity are still rare—or non-existent at all. However, partial aspects of these intersections have been examined through a comparative lens, such as Michaela Karl's contribution that analyzes the development of the suffrage movement in both countries.<sup>8</sup> Another example, that examines parts of this intersection, is Paul's *Reiseschriftstellerinnen zwischen Orient und Okzident*, who examines mostly German travelers of the nineteenth century, such as Ida Pfeiffer, Maria Schuber and Louise Mühlbach. However, in the fourth chapter of her contribution Paul adds a comparative aspect to her analysis, by including the 'Briefe aus dem Orient' (Turkish Embassy Letters)

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<sup>8</sup> Michaela Karl. *Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. Verlag, 2011).

by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu—a traveler from the United Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Another work, by Felden, includes an analysis of Otilie Assing’s journey to the U.S. and her observations of the American women’s movement, as well as her position on the abolitionist movement, which she supported.<sup>10</sup> An important contribution that should not be left out on a study on Germany’s history of colonialism is Zantop’s *Colonial Fantasies*, in which Zantop examines the importance of “colonial fantasies” for the German national identity and a resulting racist discourse about “Others”, that increased the national idea of Germany as a “superior” nation.<sup>11</sup> These contributions are only a few examples of the variety of scholarship that exists by now on women’s travel literature, but whereas several contributions examine parts of the intersection of post-colonial studies, women’s rights movement and female identity, no works known to the author of this study include all these elements—and especially none that approach Bly or Vely in this context.

Important contributions for the research on the link between female travelers and colonialism were made for instance by Mills, who examines three female British travelers (Alexandra David-Neel, Mary Kingsley and Nina Mazuchelli) during the “high-colonial” period between 1850 and 1930.<sup>12</sup> Her findings point to the importance of the colonial context in which a text and its colonial discourses were produced, as different colonized nations were ascribed different narratives, roles and hierarchies, e.g. “India, at various periods, is represented as an ancient civilisation which degenerated, whilst Africa is often

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<sup>9</sup> Janina Christine Paul. *Reiseschriftstellerinnen zwischen Orient und Okzident. Analyse ausgewählter Reiseberichte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Weibliche Rollenvorstellungen, Selbstrepräsentationen und Erfahrungen der Fremde* (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Tamara Felden. *Frauen Reisen. Zur literarischen Repräsentation weiblicher Geschlechterrollenerfahrung im 19. Jahrhundert* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Susanne Zantop. *Colonial Fantasies. Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770—1870* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Sara Mills. *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

represented within this period as simply barbaric.”<sup>13</sup> Such differing narratives attributed by the colonizers influenced also the female travelers and their writings; a context that must be considered instead of relating such differences to personal preferences or rejections of travelers. For the analysis of these sources from a contemporary, feminist viewpoint, Mills suggests that “[...] the texts have to be considered in their entirety, both those elements which we find unattractive, as well as those elements which are more enjoyable, and works should not be judged against our present feminist standards.”<sup>14</sup>

Another fundamental research contribution, that conducted—and still conduces—substantially to an intersectional approach to travel literature is Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes*, first published in 1992. Pratt examines European travel literature in the context of colonialism, and how travel literature as a genre contributed to the political discourse and the imperial ideology in Europe. Her contribution was one of the first works that smoothed the way for a more progressive perspective on travel literature, which integrates political, cultural and social factors into the analysis of this genre.<sup>15</sup>

In the field of German literature, an important work on the connection between the women’s movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is Dietrich’s contribution. Even though Dietrich’s work is quite recent, she points to the still surprising lack of research conducted on the relationship that white German women had to German colonial history. One reason for this lack of research that Dietrich points to is the, until recently, categorization of European colonial history as a male dominated history, and furthermore the general view on German colonial history as “marginal” compared to

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 194f.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eye: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, NY; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

other, larger colonial powers.<sup>16</sup> In her work Dietrich analyzes German colonial history through a post-colonial lens, with a strong focus on the history of gender and the forms by which white German women participated in colonial politics. The main focus of her work are the positions and motivations of the middle-class women's movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dietrich connects discourses of the women's movement to the context of colonialism and examines "inwieweit damalige emanzipative frauenrechtlerische Konzepte mit kolonialen Diskursen korrespondierten und Vorstellungen weißer Weiblichkeit konstruierten bzw. verstärkten"<sup>17</sup> (to what extent emancipatory concepts of women's rights at the time correspond to colonial discourses and constructed or reinforced ideas of white femininity). Dietrich's findings point to several aspects that will be important in the context of this project, and that will be investigated more closely later on in this work. At this point, it is noteworthy to point to Dietrich's observation that white women and their position in a racially structured society are still neglected in scholarship on colonialism and racism. But they as well defined their identity as belonging to the "superior" white "race." Whereas contemporary scholarship focusses on the intersection of racism and gender, this connection receives little attention in historical research.<sup>18</sup>

The following first chapter presents the historical background of the women's movement in the United States and in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century and furthermore sheds light on the status of female travel literature around 1900. Important key figures of the movement and main events will be displayed to provide a background for the analysis in chapter two and three. Chapter two focuses on Emma Vely and—after

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<sup>16</sup> Anette Dietrich. *Weiße Weiblichkeiten: Konstruktionen von »Rasse« und Geschlecht im Deutschen Kolonialismus*. 1st ed. Postcolonial Studies (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 377f.

shortly providing some biographical background information—will focus on her travel writings and her written contributions on women’s rights matters, to examine if and how her involvement in the movement is reflected in her display of female, non-western, non-white “Others” in her travelogues and how this depiction is linked to her own identity. Chapter three follows a similar pattern in terms of its content structure but will focus on Nellie Bly and aims to analyze the same connection between her feminist writings and her display of foreign women. In both chapters two and three, similar patterns of Bly and Vely are pointed out, but a more detailed comparison is made at the end of the third chapter, when both authors’ writings and positions have been examined in detail. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the implications of this project and highlights possible prospects for future research in the field of female travel literature and the women’s movement.

## I. Women's Movement and Female Travel Literature Around 1900

At the end of the nineteenth century women in the United States and in Europe increasingly aimed for more equality between male and female members of the society. Whereas different groups of activists voiced different concerns, the key demands of this first feminist wave were political, social, economical, and societal equality—mostly though still acknowledging man's "natural superiority." The key understanding of the activists regarding gender differences during this first wave was "not similar, but equal," meaning that even though men and women had different talents, they should still have equal rights.

Despite the different goals of the various suffrage activists, four general key demands can be identified that were shared in the women's movements in the United States and in western Europe, but were embraced at different times and in varying intensity:<sup>19</sup> first, women's rights to work and to choose their profession autonomously; second, being granted the same educational chances as boys and men; and the third demand was the chance to actively participate in public life—meaning the right to vote, to become members of parties and associations. The last of the four demands targeted legal matters, such as the divorce law or custody.

The women's movement in the United States was—at least at the beginning—closely tied to abolitionism. Slaves and women were both discriminated groups that lacked legal and political rights, as well as access to education. When the slave Nat Turner started a rebellion against slavery in 1831 he was supported by several women. However, as women were mostly not allowed to join anti-slavery societies, the "Philadelphia Female-Anti-Slavery Society" was founded in 1833, and other cities followed soon after.

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<sup>19</sup> Michaela Karl. *Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung...*, p. 17-31.

Sarah and Angelika Grimke—two sisters who belonged to a rich family of slave owners—were famous abolitionists who publicly pointed out the close connection between the lacking rights and liberation of women and slaves. However the close ties of the suffrage activists and abolitionists severed not long after the civil war ended, in 1868, when black men gained the right to vote, but women were not included in the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment—leading to a deep disappointment for the suffrage activists, as women continued to be left out of the right to vote.<sup>20</sup>

Sklar, whose work examines the emergence of the women's rights movement within the antislavery movement between 1830 and 1870, points out that racial differences became also stronger over time among the suffragists. She cites Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a prominent African American abolitionist and suffragist, with the words: "If there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America"<sup>21</sup>—this statement, spoken in 1866, already foreshadowed to the exclusion of women of color in the white, middle-class women's movement of the late nineteenth century.

At the mid of the nineteenth century the female activists started to group in organizations, and the Seneca Falls gathering and the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848 mark the birth of the American women's movement. The activists' key demands in the United States at that point were women's right to property, custody in case of a divorce, access to education and women's right to vote.<sup>22</sup> In 1869 the "National Woman Suffrage Association" (NWSA) and the more moderate "American Woman Suffrage Association" (AWASA) were founded, and the following years were shaped by attempts to attain the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 39f.

<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar. *Women's Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830 – 1870: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> Michaela Karl. *Die Geschichte der Frauenbewegung...*, p. 36ff.



women's right to vote—which was only successful in 1890 when Wyoming, that had allowed the women's suffrage in 1869, joined the union as the 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. state—and thereby inaugurated women's right to vote in the U.S. The following decades were dedicated to the attempt of expanding the women's suffrage to other states—with a key figure being Susan B. Anthony, who introduced the Anthony Amendment in 1878—but only in 1920 women in the United States finally received the right to vote.<sup>23</sup>

In Germany, the second half of the nineteenth century led to important landmarks for the women's movement. In October 1865, women from all over Germany gathered in Leipzig to protest for their rights and this gathering led to the establishment of the "Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein" (ADF), the German Association of Female Citizens. The driving force behind the convention in Leipzig was Louise Otto-Peters, an early campaigner for women's rights, who also established the "Frauen-Zeitung" (women's magazine) mid-nineteenth century. The first women's clubs were founded, but the efforts of Otto-Peters and others were soon dashed when the suppression of the revolution led to more constraints of citizens' freedom and in 1850 a new law was implemented that prevented women from participating in politics until 1908. Only a few years after the implementation of this law, Otto-Peter's magazine was banned as well.<sup>24</sup>

It took another decade before a new serious attempt was made to push the rights of women forwards, and one of the main goals of the bourgeois women was the improvement of educational chances for girls, and a free choice and practice of occupation. However, this bourgeois aim for gender equality was not solely motivated by the aim to improve the women's stance in society, but "zum Wohle der Gesellschaft"<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 40f.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 78f.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

(for the benefit of society) in general. Their perspective was that more gender equality would ultimately lead to an improved society in general. The individually operating women's clubs increasingly connected between 1865 and 1894, and on March 29, 1894, the "Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine" (BDF) was founded and heralded the start of a new phase with a rapidly increasing number of members: in 1905, 190 women clubs with about 100,000 members were registered.<sup>26</sup> The raising numbers also led to differentiating approaches and the formation of different fractions within the BDF—a radical wing, a conservative one and a moderate one, with a majority of members belonging to the moderate wing.

Signs of a gradually changing public perception of women in Europe were subtle, but slowly becoming visible at the end of the nineteenth century. Hobsbawm observes these subtle changes in western Europe for instance through a changing title of a popular British dictionary that listed important personalities of the public and their achievements—and that changed its title in 1891 from *Men of the Time* to *Men and Women of the Time*. In 1908, when the Franco-British Exhibition took place in London, for the first time a pavilion was dedicated to "female works." According to Hobsbawm a sign that "der neue Pavillon Frauen nicht als Wesen, sondern als schaffende Personen, nicht als funktionelle Rädchen in der Maschinerie von Familie und Gesellschaft sondern als individuelle Tatmenschen feierte"<sup>27</sup> (the new pavilion celebrated women not as creatures, but as creators, not as functional cogs in the machinery of family and society, but as individual doer women of action).

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 84f.

<sup>27</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm "Kultur und Geschlecht im europäischen Bürgertum 1870-1914." in *Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Geschlechterverhältnisse im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ute Frevert and Jürgen Kochka, 175-198 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), p. 176.

This newly developing focus on women's achievements rather than on their husband or family background was also reflected in sports, such as women's individual participation in tennis matches, and Hobsbawm describes this development of women—even married women—playing in tournaments in the 1880s and 90s as “Ereignis von geradezu revolutionärer Bedeutung”<sup>28</sup> (event of downright revolutionary importance).

This new visibility in public activities however was mostly limited to women from the middle and upper classes, as working class women usually did not have the means to finance any education or leisure time and hobbies that could lead to public recognition. Weedon points out that between 1840 to 1914 the numbers of women's publications increased significantly, from about 500 entries about women in 1825 in a contemporary dictionary on important persons of the time, to more than 5000 in 1898.<sup>29</sup> Despite these slow but steady changes at the end of the nineteenth century, it still took decades until women were effectively participating in society, with the women's right to vote being implemented in Germany in 1918. In his study Weedon examines how “[...] hegemonic discourses, which sought to mark radical boundaries between femininity and masculinity and female and male spheres, determined appropriate education, suitable reading matter and how women should write”<sup>30</sup>—and additionally how and to what extent women's activists aimed to change these attributions.

One outstanding activist of the late nineteenth century—who is still well-known today—is Hedwig Dohm. Compared to some other factions of the movement, Dohm's position regarding gender roles—arguing that these roles were created by society instead of being based on biological differences—put her into the more radical wing of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Weedon. *Gender, Feminism, & Fiction in Germany, 1840-1914*. Gender, Sexuality & Culture; v. 5 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

activists. Dohm also pointed to the struggles that women from the working class experienced, which were miserable work conditions and low payment.

From today's perspective, Dohm's theories appear surprisingly modern for a woman who grew up in the mid-nineteenth century. She denounced that the laws which kept women away from power or prestigious positions—and instead confined them at home—were created by men to keep women subordinated. She was not afraid to “call-out” men and women, and even other activists whose works or statements she determined to be “anti-feminist,” which also applied to the wing of the movement which saw women as equal to men but still accepted gender differences as based on biology—contrary to Dohm's perspective of socially created gender roles. Interestingly, Hedwig Dohm was one of the women's rights activists who Emma Vely was closely connected with, which will be examined more detailed in the second chapter.

At the time of the women's movements in the U.S. and in western Europe, the politics of women's travels also gradually changed and the development that women were increasingly present in public life became also more visible in the area of travels and resulting travel literature. Increasingly, the topic of traveling women was covered in women's magazines. Publications of the nineteenth century that were directed at a female readership targeted the topic of women's travels and negotiated the social boundaries that this step out of the domestic sphere brought up. Korte, who examines the topic of female travels and travel literature in the English magazine *The English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864) states that magazines that were read by bourgeois women included travel reports, but were hesitant regarding their appropriateness:

Interestingly, while these magazines often included articles related to travel, they were reluctant to identify travel as a leisure pursuit for their female readers. Arguably, this reluctance can be connected to the fact that travel was a precarious

area of activity for women because, more than other outdoor pursuits, it challenged ideals of domestic femininity.<sup>31</sup>

Korte points out that the female travelers displayed in the *English Woman's Journal* portrayed traveling in a satisfying and liberating manner, which painted a picture of an enjoyable, exciting existence outside of the assigned domestic sphere. However, Korte points out that the included travel reports also point to the transgressive nature of their content.<sup>32</sup> Scheitler, who examines women's travels between 1780 and 1850, concludes that in the contemporary period the meaning of a woman's life resided only in her care of her husband and family and despite the social shifts in Europe during this time period, this premiss did not change. "Der Sinn eines Frauenlebens liegt nach Auffassung der Zeit einzig in der Sorge um Mann und Familie. Trotz der gesellschaftlichen Verschiebungen, die Europa zwischen 1780 bis 1850 erschütterten, änderte sich an dieser Prämisse nichts."<sup>33</sup>

Therefore the reports of female travelers who published their experience still "[...] demonstrate that women travel writers had to negotiate and voice the transgressée potential of their travels with care—even in a journal dedicated to social reform."<sup>34</sup> Only during the second half of the nineteenth century female mobility increased noticeable, when technical progress enabled cleaner and safer modes of mobility. Despite the slowly growing number of female travel literature, the public opinion on such adventures was still rather conservative and the traveling women justified the reasons for their travels and authorship in their works.

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara Korte. "Travel Writing in *The English Woman's Journal* (1858-1864): An Area of Leisure in the Context of Women's Work." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45, no. 2 (2012), p. 159.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>33</sup> Irmgard Scheitler. *Gattung und Geschlecht: Reisebeschreibungen Deutscher Frauen 1780-1850. Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur*; Bd. 67 (Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Korte. "Travel Writing in ,The English Woman's Journal..., p. 168.

Many of the published travel reports of female authors contained apologetic forewords and introductions that suggested that the reports were never intended for publication, stating that they had only intended to write for family and friends, but were then talked into publishing their reports by others.<sup>35</sup> Women who traveled at the end of the nineteenth century (especially when they traveled alone) still crossed social boundaries by willingly leaving the domestic sphere that patriarchy had assigned for them. However, female travelers who published their experiences in the form of articles or books crossed such boundaries in multiple ways, as Thompson highlights. A traveling woman crossed them

[...] twice over. Not only does she travel, she then positions herself a second time in the public sphere, as an author; [...] Even in the nineteenth century, when female authorship generally had become more acceptable, it remained common for women travel writers to adopt an epistolary or diary format, and by this means to suggest that their observations were never originally intended for publication.<sup>36</sup>

Such an example of an “apologetic” foreword can be seen in the words that Ida Pfeiffer used to introduce her travel report of Scandinavia and Iceland in 1845: “Allein weil diese meine Reisebegierde sich nach den Begriffen der meisten Menschen, für eine Frau nicht ziemt, so mögen diese meine angeborenen Gefühle für mich sprechen und mich vertheidigen“<sup>37</sup> (However, because according to most people’s view my desire to travel does not befit a woman, so may my innate feelings speak for me and defend me). Not only did the author’s preface differ significantly from their male counterparts, but the content as well:

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<sup>35</sup> Carl Thompson. *Travel Writing*. New Critical Idiom (Milton Park, Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2011), p. 180.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ida Pfeiffer. *Reise nach dem skandinavischen Norden und der Insel Island im Jahre 1845*. Pesth: Heckenast 1855, Vorrede, zitiert nach: Scheitler, Irmgard. *Gattung und Geschlecht: Reisebeschreibungen Deutscher Frauen 1780-1850*. Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur; Bd. 67 (Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 1999), p. 22.

Der Diskurs über Weiblichkeit beeinflusste auch den Inhalt der Reiseberichte, die Auswahl der Themen und Art und Weise ihrer Behandlung. Die Autorinnen wurden darin bestärkt, über das private und häusliche Leben, persönliche Beziehungen, Frauen und Kinder und alle Bereiche, die mit Emotionalität assoziiert wurden, zu berichten. Es sollten also frauenspezifische Themen und verschiedenste Aspekte der Weiblichkeit in den Berichten enthalten sein.<sup>38</sup>

(The discourse on femininity also influenced the content of the travel reports, the choice of topics and the way in which they were treated. The authors were encouraged to report on private and domestic life, personal relationships, women and children and all areas that were associated with emotionality. The reports should therefore contain topics specific to women and various aspects of femininity.)

As Korte demonstrates, the publication of travelogues in the *English Woman's Journal* were not a singular instance—also journeys within Europe were published in the form of books or in women's magazines, whose main target groups were the middle- and upper class. The authors were mindful not to let their "femininity" be negatively impacted by their departure from the domestic sphere.<sup>39</sup>

The apologetic reasoning of many of the female travel reports is also heavily reflected in the underlying motivations of the ventures. There were generally socially accepted reasons for women travelling. Belonging to the socially accepted reasons was health improvement, when traveling to certain destinations or resorts was recommended by a doctor. Another accepted reason was to accompany a family member—such as a father or brother—as a "female duty."<sup>40</sup> Habinger points out how there were also rare (or at least rarely known) cases of traveling women who did not belong to the middle- or upper classes and who accompanied their employers as maids.<sup>41</sup> Women who traveled for reasons that were not commonly accepted by society risked to be ridiculed, such as

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<sup>38</sup> Gabriele Habinger. "Anpassung und Widerspruch...", p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Korte. "Travel Writing in 'The English Woman's Journal'...", p. 160.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriele Habinger. "Reisen, Rauman eignung und Weiblichkeit. Zur Geschichte und Motivationsstruktur weiblicher (Vergnügungs-) Reisen." *SWS - Rundschau* 46, no. 3 (2006), p. 287f.

<sup>41</sup> Gabriele Habinger. "Reisen, Rauman eignung und Weiblichkeit...", p. 288.

Ida Pfeiffer, who traveled to non-European countries around the middle of the nineteenth century and was ridiculed in contemporary caricatures:

Eine zeitgenössische Zeitungskarikatur ist nicht dazu angetan, Ida Pfeiffers Mut zu feiern oder auch nur, sie sachlich zu beurteilen. Ganz eindeutig beabsichtigt der Zeichner, sowohl die Frau als auch die Reisende der Lächerlichkeit preiszugeben, indem das Touristische ihrer Unternehmungen besonders deutlich ausgestellt wird. Er bildet sie mit Attributen wie Teleskop, Henkelkorb und Kaffeemühle ab und will damit wohl die Unvereinbarkeit von Weiblichkeit und Reise- sowie Entdeckungstätigkeit behaupten. Eben diese Inkompatibilität des naturwissenschaftlich motivierten Reisens (Teleskop) mit den heimischen Utensilien (Strickzeug, Kaffeemühle) weisen sie als touristische Hybridfigur aus, die das Eigene in der Fremde nicht missen will und deren Lächerlichkeit durch ihre Geschlechtszugehörigkeit (Kleid, Hut, Korb) eine Steigerung erfährt.<sup>42</sup>

(A contemporary newspaper cartoon is not meant to celebrate Ida Pfeiffer's courage or even to judge her objectively. The draftsman clearly intends to ridicule her both as a woman and as a traveler, by making the touristic part of her undertakings particularly clear. He depicts her with attributes such as telescope, market basket and coffee grinder and probably wants to assert that femininity and travel and discovery are incompatible. It is precisely this incompatibility of scientifically motivated travel (telescope) with domestic utensils (knitwear, coffee grinder) that identifies her as a tourist hybrid who does not want to miss her own belongings abroad and whose ridiculousness experiences enhancement due to her gender (dress, hat, basket).)

The apologetic forewords of many female travel reports, as well as the "socially acceptable" reasons that were sometimes mentioned, indicate that female travelers did not fully leave behind the behavioural patterns, rules and norms that they were subjected to in their home countries.

Robison-Tomsett states that etiquette publications for traveling women do clearly demonstrate "[...] the detailed expectations that surrounded women journeyers; the qualities that were again publicly considered to constitute the proper feminine

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<sup>42</sup> Annegret Heitmann. „[A]lles öde und kahl, und somit echt isländisch.“: Ein Reisebericht aus dem Jahr 1846 oder die Anfänge des Island-Tourismus." *Journal of Northern Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011), p. 52.



journeyer.”<sup>43</sup> These rules included behaviour in public spaces and interactions with others—especially with the opposite gender, that had potential risks of leading to “immoral” behaviour, away from observing and alert family members. However, the relatively strict rules that Robinson-Tomsett points out would primarily apply to female tourists, traveling in groups, or women who traveled to colonized countries and lived within the micro-cosmos of colonial rulers with its social norms that mostly conformed to those of the home countries. Such conditions of travel prevented the women from fully escaping the controlling gaze of their native societies. In other circumstances, travelers left behind these controlling frameworks and were therefore able to experience a considerably increased freedom from social norms.

Women who traveled mainly alone or without close contact to local colonial structures had therefore more possibilities to defy social norms that they experienced as restricting, but at the same time they experienced more social stigma than women who did ordinary touristic journeys in groups. Whereas touristic travels had become much more common in the late nineteenth century, solo female travelers were still viewed with some suspicion, even at the beginning of the twentieth century:

By the 1920s and 1930s many etiquette books contained sections for women journeying alone. The fact that writers still felt it was necessary to advise these women in the interwar years does suggest, however, that there was a lingering unease about such journeys [...].<sup>44</sup>

However, not every female traveler aimed to “escape” her gender role and correlated norms—as Robinson-Tomsett’s analysis points out. She suggests that many women preserved their previous role of being a mother, wife, daughter etc. while being abroad.

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<sup>43</sup> Emma Robinson-Tomsett. *Women, Travel and Identity: Journeys by Rail and Sea, 1870 - 1940*. Gender in History (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

Her analysis shows that many of the travelers referred to relatives and families at home whom they had left behind, expressed how strongly they missed them and that they kept in close contact with loved ones at home. Whereas some, such as Birkett, interpret such insertions as an expression of the women's guilt about leaving their assigned domestic sphere and an attempt to overcome this feeling by creating a new role during their travels, not every female traveler felt guilty about her ventures.<sup>45</sup> Either because they indeed aimed to escape the domestic life and social norms, or the reason that they "[...] returned to Britain after their journeys also meant they did not feel guilty because they had not abandoned their 'proper places' at home for a prolonged or permanent period."<sup>46</sup>

Scholarship of the '80's and even early '90's—when women's travel literature was suddenly subjected to a raise of scholarly attention—was too quick to interpret each women traveling as a feminist fighting against patriarchy and the act of traveling as an escape from the restricting existence as a mother, wife and homemaker.<sup>47</sup> Such early scholarship often interpreted women's traveling as an act of rebellion against the patriarchy, and as a feminist act per se, despite the fact that a general interpretation of female travelers as supporters of the suffrage movement cannot be made. Instead, possible connections must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and with caution regarding subjective interpretations.

Even though the act of traveling can—at least to some extent—be an indicator for the willingness to negotiate gender roles and restrictions, travel reports of female writers "[...] were usually keen to stress the extent to which they conformed to contemporary

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<sup>45</sup> As mentioned in Robinson-Tomsett, p. 171ff, who refers regarding the "guilt" aspect to Birkett, Dea. *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*. Blackwell, 1989, p. 27 and 31.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>47</sup> For more details on this pattern in the scholarship refer to: Gabriele Habinger. *Frauen reisen in die Fremde...*, p. 117.

codes of female propriety in the course of their travels.”<sup>48</sup> However, more recent scholarship demonstrates that this early interpretation is in some cases more based on “wishful thinking” and a wrongful interpretation based on scholars’ personal opinions.

Thompson clarifies:

Whilst women’s travel may always have represented an implicit challenge to patriarchal attitudes, most female travellers and travel writers historically have sought to negotiate the gender norms of their day, rather than confront them head on. Nor was every woman traveller and travel writer necessarily feminist, or proto-feminist, in their declared beliefs and political allegiances.<sup>49</sup>

Scholarship of the following decades further proved that this general interpretation of the 70’s and 80’s was premature: Whereas some of the female travelers had indeed feminist beliefs or wanted to escape from some of the rules their environment had imposed on them, others, like Mary Kingsley or Gertrude Bell “[...] sought strenuously to disassociate themselves from the contemporary ‘New Woman’ movement, and did not support the campaign for women’s suffrage.”<sup>50</sup>

Habinger points out how the female travelers—mostly coming from countries that were colonial powers—experienced a complex duality of a gain and loss of prestige and social status at the same time. When the European women traveled to colonized countries, they gained higher status due to their white skin color and nationality, and occupied a higher social position than local, colonized men of color. However, as Habinger points out, their transgression of the female sphere and common gender boundaries could at the same time lead to marginalization in the colonies in their own societies, as well as back home.<sup>51</sup> The connection between the suffrage movement and female travel writing and the role of mobility and travels for the movement has not received much of

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<sup>48</sup> Carl Thompson. *Travel Writing...*, p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>51</sup> Gabriele Habinger. *Anpassung und Widerspruch...*, p. 188f.

scholarly attention, as Mills already pointed out in her essential work *Discourses of Difference*, stating that

One of the interesting elements which is rarely considered in accounts of women's travel writing is the way that feminism informed the texts. The period 1870–1930 was one where great transformations were taking place in terms of women, both politically, in terms of the vote and changes in legal status, and socially, in terms of permissible dress and behaviour.<sup>52</sup>

However, in the almost three decades that have since passed, only a few publications have investigated this connection. One study that demonstrates that this is still a promising field for further research was done by Cresswell, who examines the role that mobility played for suffrage activists Florence Luscomb and Margaret Foley at the beginning of the twentieth century. He argues that “the mobile practices of Luscomb and Foley reflect and contribute to the changing spatial practice of Boston's suffrage movement in particular and, more generally, the reconfiguration of moral geographies of gender in the early part of the twentieth century.”<sup>53</sup>

Cresswell focusses on Luscomb and Foley's trip to England, when they sought to understand their European “sister's” actions for the women's movement. He concludes that there is “no doubt” that their journey and observations encouraged them and shaped their tactical strategies after returning to the U.S.<sup>54</sup> One of his findings is that mobility had a huge influence on the ideas of suffrage, at least in the case of Luscomb and Foley.<sup>55</sup>

Another contribution, by Bosch, examines through a postcolonial lens letters that were written by Dutch women's suffrage activist Aletta Jacobs, which she produced during her “world suffrage tour” from 1911 to 1912, that led her to Africa and Asia. The postcolonial perspective that Bosch applies to analyze Jacob's letters reveals that the activist's view

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<sup>52</sup> Sara Mills. *Discourses of Difference...*, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> Tim Cresswell. “Mobilising the Movement: The Role of Mobility in the Suffrage Politics of Florence Luscomb and Margaret Foley, 1911-1915.” *Gender, Place & Culture* 12.4 (2005), p. 447.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 458.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 459.

on women of different ethnicity whom she encountered was shaped by imperialism and hierarchy based on race.<sup>56</sup> Bosch correctly points out that “[i]t has taken white feminists and scholars quite some time to realize the extent to which historical feminism built its claims on race.”<sup>57</sup> She cites numerous parts of Jacob’s travel observations that demonstrate that Jacobs adheres to grouping ethnicities based on contemporary imperial modes of thinking:

In South Africa the natives definitely aroused my sympathy; I felt as if I were a motherly friend. I saw them as children who had to be educated with tact. Some of them had difficult characters, but many others just needed good guidance so as to grow up into good and useful people.... In British India the native was unable to gain my sympathy. By and large I have modified the repulsive impression I first had of the southern Hindu, although I cannot feel in any sense related to the fussy, screaming Hindu or Muslim of British India. His shrewd and cunning attitude, the affectation with which he conveys his caste and religion to the outer world by the green, yellow, and red paint he smears across his face and especially his belief, disbelief, and cult religion are too disgusting.<sup>58</sup>

The creation of a hierarchy, as seen in this quote, based on racial stereotypes, demonstrates that female travelers were as influenced by imperial ways of thinking as their male counterparts. This specific case of Aletta Jacobs, who was fighting for women’s rights in the Netherlands, is another striking example to prove the scholarly perception of the ‘80’s and ‘90’s wrong, which assumed female travelers were less affected by imperial and racist thinking. Furthermore, it especially contradicts and limits past claims that female travelers were generally feminists as we understand the term today—most activists of the first-wave feminism limited their demands to white women from the middleclass. Whereas Jacobs, as an activist, on the one hand clearly belongs to this group,

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<sup>56</sup> Mineke Bosch. "Colonial Dimensions of Dutch Women's Suffrage: Aletta Jacobs's Travel Letters from Africa and Asia, 1911-1912." *Journal of Women's History* 11.2 (1999): p. 8-34.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 8-34.

<sup>58</sup> Aletta H. Jacobs. *Reisbrieven uit Afrika en Azie, benevens eenige brieven uit Zweden en Norwegen*, 2 Volumes. Almelo (the Netherlands: Hilarius, 1913), 2:454, quoted after Bosch, Mineke. "Colonial Dimensions of Dutch Women's Suffrage: Aletta Jacobs's Travel Letters from Africa and Asia, 1911-1912." *Journal of Women's History* 11.2 (1999): 8-34.

Bosch correctly points out how women of color were excluded by most white feminists, such as by Jacobs:

This is precisely the idea that runs through Jacobs's collected letters: white civilized men and women have more in common--even when it comes to feminism--than do women of different races. It makes Jacobs's feminism visible as an integral part of the modern project to organize society according to natural laws that define inclusion and exclusion. Jacobs, as did most feminist contemporaries, contested the exclusion of white women within the context of Western democracies, not the process and principle of exclusion on the basis of 'nature'.<sup>59</sup>

The analysis of female travel literature and its influence by the women's movement will be examined through a post-colonial lens, as the literary display of "Otherness" and creations of alterity by Vely and Bly will not only help to understand their own identities as white women, but also integrate the complex social and historical background of colonialism and the created power imbalance between "Occident" and "Orient"—to rely here on the terms used by Edward Said.

The research on travel literature is heavily based on Said's fundamental work *Orientalism* and an analysis of travel reports from western countries could not be adequately accomplished without the consideration of the complex relations between Occident and Orient and the power imbalance that is reflected—and preserved—in travel literature. Said's main thesis is that the "Orient", as presented in western literature, art, politic and thought, is a construction of the West and does not reflect reality but instead was—and still is—used to maintain power. This western concept of "the Orient" labels various regions—such as in Africa, the Middle-East, and Asia—as underdeveloped, slow and its inhabitants as passive and infantile, which therefore served as an excellent 'justification' for the imperial subjugation of these regions by the western colonizers. A

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<sup>59</sup> Mineke Bosch. "Colonial Dimensions of Dutch Women's Suffrage...", p. 8.

key function of Orientalism is the creation of “Otherness” from a western perspective, that does also create a hierarchy of cultural value, with the European cultures at the top:

Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying ‘us’ Europeans as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans, [...] the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.<sup>60</sup>

An example that Said brings up, and which underlines the theory’s strong relevance for travel literature, is the way Gustave Flaubert, who traveled to Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century, displayed his encounter with a courtesan in Egypt in his literary work, which “[...] produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her.”<sup>61</sup> This example illustrates the objectification of the ‘Other’ that is inherent in most travel reports—of previous (colonial) centuries, but which can still be found in modern travel literature as well.

However, especially in the nineteenth century, when traveling slowly became more popular for a bigger part of the population of Europe and the U.S. and many countries in Africa and Asia were still colonized, Oriental stereotypes were especially strongly displayed in travelogues—which will also be demonstrated in the analysis of Emma Vely and Nellie Bly’s works in chapters two and three. The analysis and comparison of Vely and Bly’s positions on feminism and their depiction of foreign women whom they encountered during their travels will demonstrate to what extent their feminism and identity as women’s rights activist was built on their ethnical identity as white women, and if or to what extent this led to creations of Otherness and exclusion of women with different ethnical background in their (travel) writings.

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<sup>60</sup> Edward W. Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

Dietrich highlights the—partially—close connection between the women's movement and colonialism. One example is middle-class feminist and colonial activist Hedwig Heyl, who encouraged in the first two decades of the twentieth century the convergence of colonialist and feminist discourses in the women's association. She had connections to key figures of the movement such as Gertrud Bäumer—and Helene Lange, the founder of the women's magazine that Emma Vely published for.<sup>62</sup> Whereas one would anticipate that endorsement of colonial ideas and practices would mainly predominate in the conservative camp of the women's movement, Dietrich clearly disconfirms this assumption.

Das Kolonialengagement weißer deutscher Frauen im Kaiserreich reduzierte sich nicht auf konservative bis reaktionäre Kreise. Vielmehr erreichten die Kolonien als Handlungsfeld und Projektionsfläche für Emanzipationsbestrebungen jenseits der eingeschränkten Möglichkeiten im Reich auch die bürgerlichen Frauenrechtlerinnen. Sowohl der gemäßigte als auch der radikale Flügel der Frauenbewegung stand hinter dem Kolonialismus.<sup>63</sup>

(The colonial engagement of white German women in the empire was not limited to conservative and reactionary circles. Rather, the colonies also reached the bourgeois women's rights activists as a field of action and projection surface for emancipation efforts beyond the limited possibilities in the empire. Both the moderate and the radical wing of the women's movement stood behind colonialism.)

Even though some of the “radical” feminists around Minna Cauer criticized the violence that was often used in the colonies (especially to quell protests or resistance of the colonized locals), they did not criticize the colonial practices per se, nor the perceived superiority of the western nations, but only the way that the colonial power was enforced. The group around Minna Cauer stated: “Im Namen der Civilisation und des Christentums drang man in ein Land ein das vielleicht allmählich durch ruhige Einwirkung hätte

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<sup>62</sup> Anette Dietrich. *Weißer Weiblichkeit...*, p. 271.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 272.



gewonnen werden können.“<sup>64</sup> (In the name of civilization and Christianity, one invaded a country that could have been gradually gained through calm influence.)

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 275.

## II. Emma Vely

This chapter will examine German author and traveler Emma Vely's position on the women's movement at the end of the nineteenth century, and how her involvement in the movement is reflected in her travel reports and in her depiction of foreign, non-western women. Sources of this analysis will be a travel report that was published in the suffrage magazine *Die Frau*—which belonged to Helene Lange—and Vely's report on the International Women's Congress in 1896 in Berlin, Germany. The examination will start with Vely's report on the congress, to determine her general position regarding the movement and her evaluation of the congresses impact. The travel reports that are main sources for this analysis are "Von einer Westindienexkursion," published in 1896, and Vely's reflections on her travels in her autobiography *Mein schönes und schweres Leben*, published in 1929. They contain descriptions of her travels from Germany, over Naples, Algiers and Madeira to New York, continuing to Port-au-Prince in Haiti, San Domingo in the Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, St. Kitts (Basseterre), Antigua (St. Johns), Martinique (Fort de France), Santa Lucia, Barbados (Bridgetown), Trinidad (Port of Spain), Venezuela (Caracas), Jamaica (Kingston), and lastly from New York back to Germany. Vely started her journey depicted in "Von einer Westindienexkursion" in January 1896 and published it in *Die Frau* in the same year and, when she wrote down her autobiography decades later, she included her experiences of this journey in her memoir, amounting to about one quarter from the total 485 pages of her autobiography.

Emma Vely was born as Emma Couvely in 1848 to a Huguenot family. Her father passed away when she was only three years old, and the relationship to her mother seemed not shaped by warmth or sympathy, as indicated by Vely in her autobiography, when she recounts: "Meine Mutter besuchte mich im Laufe der Jahre mehrmals, [...]. Wir

beide waren aber damals wenig gute Freundinnen, [...] wir schieden damals wieder ohne Schmerz voneinander“<sup>65</sup> (My mother visited me several times over the years [...] But we were not the best of friends back then, [...] and we parted ways without any pain back then). She started working as a governess and channelled her suppressed creativity into writing novels, which soon led to some popularity. In 1871 she married Carl Simon, a publisher from Stuttgart, and had a daughter named Lolo with him. Soon after getting married Vely started working on a biography about Countess Franziska von Hohenheim, which became successful and even earned her a distinction by the Duke of Wurttemberg in 1875.<sup>66</sup> Her husband's publishing house experienced financial troubles over the next years, and Vely was pressured to quickly publish numerous novels. Her marriage suffered because of the hardships and they eventually divorced, and in 1889 Vely moved to Berlin with her daughter Lolo.

Wilhelmy points out that Vely initially struggled to make acquaintances in the literary circles of Berlin, but, after some time and with the help of socially established women like Elise von Hohenhausen, Vely eventually found her place in Berlin society and started to host her own literary salons, the “Montagstees” (Monday teas).<sup>67</sup>

In her book on Berlin Salon culture, Petra Wilhelmy refers to traveler Emma Vely and her involvement in the salon culture and the close ties she had with prominent figures like Fanny Lewald and Elise von Hohenhausen(-Rüdiger).<sup>68</sup> Among the guests of Vely's salon were a number of writers and artists, such as writer Frieda von Bülow, Ella Mensch, Anna Plochow, and Anna Schepeler-Lette. Whereas many of these names—

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<sup>65</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben* (Leipzig: Dr. Carl Frankenstein, 1929), p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> Petra Wilhelmy. *Der Berliner Salon im 19. Jahrhundert (1780-1914)* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), p. 370.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 370f.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 874.

except Frieda von Bülow—may not be familiar anymore today, these guests of Vely's salon are named here because all of them were—in some way or the other—engaged in the women's movement. Vely also had close connections to women's rights activists Hedwig Dohm and Helene Lange. The latter was the founder of the women's magazine *Die Frau*, where Vely published numerous articles, such as her travel reports. The magazine was established in 1893 and was considered a huge advancement for the women's movement, as it targeted women's rights to vote since its creation and shed light on women's legal and social position in other countries such as New Zealand, the United States, England and the Netherlands.<sup>69</sup> Vely had written correspondence with Dohm, they exchanged postcards, and Vely composed a certificate for Dohm, issued by the Lyceum Club, that celebrated Dohm as a “mutige Kämpferin für unser Geschlecht gegen Engherzigkeit und Unterdrückung”<sup>70</sup> (a brave fighter for our sex against narrow-mindedness and oppression).

There are only very few research contributions that examine Emma Vely. Siebert raises the question of specific constructions of Otherness from women's perspectives around 1900 and chooses Käthe Schirmacher and Emma Vely as examples. Her work focusses on the hypotheses that traveling women constructed their own identity depending on the “Other” they encountered and that these constructions of their own identity functioned mostly as demarcation and devaluation of the foreigners they pictured in their travel writings. Siebert also considers how the travelers' identification as feminists was based on their identification with the dominance of European culture. Her research on Vely provides profound impulses on discourses of femininity, identity,

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<sup>69</sup> Hedwig Richter and Kerstin Wolff. *Frauenwahlrecht. Demokratisierung der Demokratie in Deutschland und Europa* (Hamburg: E-Book-Ausgabe Hamburger Edition, 2018), p. 35f.

<sup>70</sup> Petra Wilhelmy. *Der Berliner Salon...*, p. 635.

and alterity, as well as on processes of hierarchization in Vely's texts, but cannot deliver an in-depth analysis due to the limited extent of the article.

Siebert also points to the connections that Vely had with women's rights activists such as Mathilde Weber, Jenny Hirsch and Marie Calm, as well as her attendance at the women's congress "Internationaler Frauenkongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen" in Berlin in 1896. Her attendance at this congress resulted in an article for the newspaper *Danziger Zeitung*<sup>71</sup> and for Helene Lange's women's magazine *Die Frau*. Vely fills three pages with her observations from the congress. She describes the female activists from various countries: a young Armenian doctor, a baroness from Finland, a young Italian doctor named Maria Montessori—the Maria Montessori—Käthe Schirmacher from Paris. Based on Vely's description it becomes clear that the high number of congress' attendees came together from all over Europe.<sup>72</sup> However, despite the great number of attendees, Vely's résumé of the congress is rather guarded, and it is worth to quote it in full to give insight into her opinion on the congress's outcomes:

Und das Ergebnis der Tage? Ein gewisser äußerer Erfolg läßt sich dem Kongress nicht absprechen – so weit sich das wenigstens heute übersehen läßt. Mit heißem und redlichem Bemühen ist gewiß gearbeitet, aber ich fürchte, man ist so klug – wie zuvor, und das Erreichte bleibt weit hinter den Erwartungen zurück, wenn anders etwas erreicht wird, außer das eine gewisse Anregung in etwas weitere Schichten bringt. Positives wird man nicht aufweisen können; Leute „die es angeht,“ haben sich ganz zurückgehalten; auch aus dem Auslande fehlten die bedeutsamsten Namen. [...] Der internationale Kongreß in Berlin hat keinen Mißerfolg bedeutet, wie ihm die Gegner der Frauenbewegung prophezeit, er mag auch mancher einzelnen Frau Anregung zum Nachdenken über die Lage ihres Geschlechts geben; es ist aber der volle Erfolg noch nicht, den man zu erwarten gehabt hätte, wäre er noch Jahre hinausgeschoben worden in eine kommende Zeit, wo der Boden besser bearbeitet und günstiger war und Beschlüsse von weitester Bedeutung gefaßt werden konnten.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ulla Siebert. "Von anderen, von mir und vom reisen. Selbst- und Fremdkonstruktionen reisender Frauen..." P. 177 – 185.

<sup>72</sup> Emma Vely. "Vom internationalen Kongreß für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen zu Berlin," *Die Frau*, Berlin 1896/97, p. 50ff.

<sup>73</sup> Vely, Emma. "Vom internationalen Kongreß für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen zu Berlin" ..., p. 53.

(And the result of these days? A certain external success cannot be denied to the Congress—as far as can be judged at least today. It was certainly worked with fervent and honest efforts, but I am afraid that one is as clever as one was before, and what was achieved falls far short of expectations—if anything is achieved, other than bringing a certain stimulus to wider parts of society.

One will not be able to show positive results, people “who are concerned” have held back completely; the most important names from abroad were also missing [...] The international congress in Berlin did not amount to a failure, as the opponents of the women’s movement prophesied, it may also give some women inspiration to think about the situation of their gender; but it is not yet the full success that one would have expected if it had been postponed for years to come, when the soil was better to work with and more convenient and decisions of the greatest importance could be made.)

Vely’s résumé sounds rather disappointed of the outcomes of the congress, and the lack of participation of well-known key figures of the movement. According to her short summary in *Die Frau*, the time is not yet ripe for decisions of great significance. At the same time, her opinion signals that Vely was waiting and hoping for more groundbreaking changes regarding women’s position in society at this time, and that her expectations for the women’s congress were much bigger achievements. However, the reflection also reveals a positive outlook of Vely, and her expectation that women’s rights and their opportunities in society will continue to evolve positively in future.

Another highly relevant source that highlights Vely’s feminist stance is an article that she published in 1898/99 in the *Sonntags-Zeitung für Deutschlands Frauen*. The article carries the title “Die unverheiratete Frau in früheren Zeiten und heute” (The unmarried woman in former times and today) and discusses how negatively unmarried women used to be treated by society, and how this has changed in recent years. Vely voices a strong feminist perspective in this piece and brings up the woman as an acknowledged strong competition for men in contemporary times—a rather “radical” perspective that differed from those suffragists’ perspectives who saw women as equal, but generally distinct from men. It is worth to have a more detailed look at Vely’s strong

feminist contribution here. She starts with a look back at the past and the situation of women who were not married:

Also damals, gewiß viel früher auch schon, bis in unsere Tage war die unverheiratete altgewordene Frau ein Gegenstand des Spottes, der Vernachlässigung, etwas scheinbar in den Augen der Mitlebenden Überflüssiges. [...] Den Spott der Männer hatten die alten Jungfern in erster Linie zu ertragen – eine unglaublich anmaßende Ansicht, daß nur der Mann, die Ehe dem weiblichen Wesen zu einer geachteten Stellung verhelfen könne.<sup>74</sup>

(Well, back then, certainly much earlier too, up to our days the unmarried old woman was an object of ridicule, of neglect, something that seemed superfluous in the eyes of the contemporaries. [...] The old maids had to endure the mockery of the men in the first place—an incredibly presumptuous view that only a man, marriage, can give the female being a position that is respected.)

She heavily criticizes the prior prevalent societal view that a woman's worth was defined by being married and that this was pretty much the only way for her to gain solid social standing. This was especially true for (unmarried) female travelers, who were mocked as spinsters and publicly made fun of—therefore “worse” than being an unmarried woman was an unmarried woman who dared to travel instead of hiding as an aunt behind her family's doors.

After this look back in time, Vely brings the contemporary situation into focus, and her position on this topic is worth to be included in detail here:

Betrachten wir die unverheiratete Frau von heute, so zeigt sich uns ein ganz anderes Bild. Die verspottete, beiseite geschobene alte Jungfer ist ganz verschwunden. [...] ihr fiel ein, daß sie das Recht auf Arbeit habe, für sich direkt – und sie nahm ihr Leben in die Hand und baute es aus eigener Kraft aus. Die im Kampf ums Dasein hart und ernst ringende einzelne Frau entgeht von vornherein der verspotteten Lächerlichkeit des Altjungfertums. Sie ist eine arbeitende Zeitgenossin, sie setzt sich ein, sie nimmt ihren Platz ein, sie läßt sich nicht beiseite schieben, wie ihre Mitschwesteren durch so und soviel Jahrhunderte. [...] Und dieser wollenden, selbstbewußten Frau, die unsre Tage zeitigen, kann keine Lächerlichkeit mehr anhaften. Sie tritt mit dem Manne in Konkurrenz, und daß er diese ernst genug nimmt, dafür liegen triftige Beweise vor. In der Zukunft – jetzt

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<sup>74</sup> Emma Vely. “Die unverheiratete Frau in früheren Zeiten und heute.” *Sonntags-Zeitung für Deutschlands Frauen*, H. 42, 1898/99, p. 659.

sind ja alle arbeitenden und strebenden Frauen noch Bahnbrecherinnen, wird also dem Altjungferntum mit all der ihm anhaftenden Sagenhaftigkeit vollends der Garaus gemacht werden. Man wird mit verheirateten und unverheirateten weiblichen Mitgliedern der Gesellschaft zu thun haben. Ein Beruf oder eine Lebensstellung nach Neigung wird der einstigen alten Jungfer gestatten, das Dasein für sich zu gestalten. Der Mann hat mit ihr zu rechnen als gleichwertiges Geschöpf [...].<sup>75</sup>

(If we look at today's unmarried woman, we see a completely different picture. The mocked, pushed-aside old maid has completely disappeared. [...] it occurred to her that she had the right to work, directly for herself – and she took her life into her own hands and cultivated it from her own strength. The single woman, who struggles hard and serious in her fight for existence, escapes from the outset the mocked ridiculousness of a spinster. She is a working contemporary, she is committed, she takes her place, she cannot be pushed aside like her fellow sisters through so and so many centuries. [...] And this willing, demanding woman, who is a product of our time, can no longer be ridiculous. She competes with man, and there is clear evidence that he takes her seriously enough. In the future - now all working and aspiring women are still trailblazers, spinsterhood will be completely eliminated with all the fabled qualities attached to it. One will deal with married and unmarried female members of society. A job or a position in life in accordance with inclination will allow the former old maid to shape her life for herself. The man has to reckon with her as an equal creature [...].)

It is astonishing which passion Vely puts into this piece of writing, and with which great amount of fervor she argues in favor of the changing societal perspective on older unmarried women, stating how the new possibilities that they experience in her contemporary time lead to a confident new type that displays a strong competition to men. Her words sound almost aggressively, when she speaks of women who are struggling “hard and seriously” by themselves, who are ready to compete with men and must be taken seriously. On the one hand, this document serves as a strong proof of Vely's feminist point of view. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as an indicator of Vely's feelings about her personal position in society. Even though Vely had been married, she divorced from her husband before moving to Berlin with her daughter in 1889, about

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<sup>75</sup> Emma Vely. “Die unverheiratete Frau in früheren Zeiten und heute...”, p. 660.



a decade before the here mentioned article was published. Her writing indicates that Vely—being a “single-mother” then and fighting to make a living in Berlin—experienced similar hardship like those being an “alte Jungfer” when she was searching for employment, which is also reflected in her autobiography, when she looks back at her start in Berlin: “Ich beanspruchte das Recht auf Arbeit und ihren vollen Lohn. Viele Steine sind mir in den Weg geflogen [...]”<sup>76</sup> (I claimed the right to work and full wages. Many obstacles were put in my way).

Similar to her piece on the women’s congress, this article also indicates that Vely was aware of the just recently changing status of women’s position in society, as she states that even in contemporary times women who work and strive to achieve more are still pioneers (“Bahnbrecherinnen”). As in her comments on the congress, she appears full of hope regarding future developments for women, predicting that married and unmarried women will be normal parts of society, and that unmarried women will be able to positively fill their lives with an occupation that they freely selected based on their inclination. Even though she eventually managed to overcome the mentioned obstacles and successfully found her place as a writer and salonnière in Berlin society, the negative experiences still reverberated a decade later and led to the here displayed strong solidarity with the unmarried women who had to experience such social and financial struggles through the whole course of their lives.

It is noteworthy, that both Vely and Bly published several pieces where they clearly argue for a necessary improvement of women’s position in society. Even though Bly’s writings on the topic will be examined in detail in chapter three, to foreshadow a bit on her positions it is reasonable to already point to her articles “Should Women Propose?”

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted after Wilhelmy, Petra. *Der Berliner Salon...*, p. 371.

(1888), her interview of the women's rights activist "Susan B. Anthony" (1896), and "The Girls Who Make Boxes" (1887), where she describes the precarious working conditions of female factory workers. Especially the former signals a—for the time untypically strong critical position on expected behaviour and social norms for women's private life. Like Vely, Bly appears also optimistic about an improved future for women, however, she comes across slightly more cautious than Vely's displayed optimism, asking Susan B. Anthony at the end of her interview: "What do you think the new woman will be?" to which Anthony answers "She'll be free." Bly finishes the interview with the words "[...] if we will have in women who vote what we have in her [Anthony], let us all help to promote the cause of woman suffrage."<sup>77</sup> Like Vely, Bly seems to believe that their work for women's rights will continue to pay off in the future, and that the "new woman" will have a bright future ahead of her.

Another important source for an analysis of Vely's position on the women's movement, as well as the connection of her stance on this topic to the travels that she undertook and her encounters with "Others," especially women from foreign countries, is, beside her essay and newspaper publications, her autobiography "Mein schönes und schweres Leben," which was published in 1929 and contains numerous reflections on her travels.

In January 1896, Vely traveled with the Hamburg-America Line to the Caribbean—contemporarily called "Westindien" in German (West Indies), whether colonized or independent islands—and Northern parts of South America.<sup>78</sup> The journey led Vely from Hamburg in Germany, over Naples, Algiers and Madeira to New York. From there she

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<sup>77</sup> Nellie Bly. "Susan B. Anthony." in *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings*, ed. Jean Marie Lutes (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 137.

<sup>78</sup> Ulla Siebert. *Von anderen, von mir und vom reisen. Selbst- und Fremdkonstruktionen...*, p. 186.

continued to Port-au-Prince in Haiti, San Domingo in the Dominican Republic, St. Thomas, St. Kitts (Basseterre), Antigua (St. Johns), Martinique (Fort de France), Santa Lucia, Barbados (Bridgetown), Trinidad (Port of Spain), Venezuela (Caracas), Jamaica (Kingston), and lastly from New York back to Berlin.<sup>79</sup>

Siebert points out that women who traveled on ships—an environment perceived traditionally as a rather “male sphere”—constructed different images of their “female” behaviour within this space. The traveler Schirmacher, examined by Siebert, emphasizes that the men on board treated her as an “equal” and that she downplays the gender differences and social differences between them, which is interpreted by Siebert as Schirmacher’s attempt to affirm her (self-)perception as an emancipated traveler who is equal to men.<sup>80</sup>

Vely by contrast, also emphasizes her distinctiveness, but compares herself only to the other women on board and does—at least in this instance—not aim to put herself on an equal footing with the men on board, but instead dissociates herself from the other women on board whom she describes as “die sonst furchtsamen Damen”<sup>81</sup> (the usually fearful women) and points out:

“Von Madeira nach Neuyork hatten wir stürmische Fahrt. Ich war die einzige Dame, die an den unterwegs einfallenden Festdinners, Kaiserkrönung Versailles und Kaisers Geburtstag, teilnehmen und ausharren konnte, sogar in großem Putz.”<sup>82</sup>

(We had a stormy journey from Madeira to New York. I was the only woman who was able to attend and endure the festive dinners, imperial coronation of Versailles and the Kaiser’s birthday, even in great attire.)

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 191f.

<sup>81</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 378.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 377.

On Madeira, Spain, Vely also accentuates her endurance, when she describes how she and her travel group use the local famous wicker sledges, controlled by two men, to hurtle down the streets, and states that back home no neurasthenic woman would do something similar: “[...] zwischen Gärten, Mauern, durch Straßen hin – eine originelle, aber etwas gefährlich scheinende Beförderungsart, der sich sicher daheim keine nervenschwache Frau unterwerfen würde”<sup>83</sup> ([...] between gardens, walls, through streets – an original, but somewhat dangerous mode of transport that no neurasthenic woman at home would submit to). Those reoccurring comparisons were used to highlight the special sturdiness and courage that female travelers often aimed to accentuate in their travelogues for their readers, but also to create a certain self-perception as a courageous woman. However, in some cases—like in Vely’s instance—such accentuations appear somewhat constructed and artificial for the readers’ entertainment—ultimately, Vely traveled in a group with other European and American men and women, had no financial troubles during her journey, often used connections with local authorities or guides and did not encounter any seriously dangerous events.

Interestingly, she compares herself to other women to point out her distinctiveness, but she does not directly compare herself to the men she travels with—the reason likely being that she aimed to preserve her femininity. Whereas some female travelers compared their achievements to those of men, Vely remains careful to not appear too “masculine” in her travelogues by overstepping gender boundaries too obviously. Even though she emphasizes that she was—according to her—the only women on board who was able to handle the rough weather, she nevertheless pays attention to underline her femininity by mentioning that some men on board gave her a “hilfreichen

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<sup>83</sup> Emma Vely. “Von einer Westindienexkursion“ in *Die Frau*, Berlin 1896, 3 Jg., H. 7, p. 394.

Arm zum Erklimmen der Treppen”<sup>84</sup> (a helpful hand to climb the stairs) and that she dressed up despite the stormy weather and the swaying ship, indirectly emphasizing that she does not—despite her travels—neglect her female role. Especially for women from the middle and upper-class, it was necessary to conform to their female gender role, unless they wanted to be subjected to gossip. Their appearance was considered an important way of female travelers to express their femininity, which was heavily reflected in etiquette pieces that advised women who traveled how to dress and behave appropriately during their journeys.<sup>85</sup>

As Vely’s commonly occurring references to other travelers already indicate, she did not travel alone, which displays a difference in the travel modes of Vely and Bly during their journeys. Whereas Bly coped with most of her trip around the world by herself, Vely often moved around in groups with other traveling westerners whom she encountered on ships or other transport modes, or at times she traveled with her daughter. This difference is interesting to observe as the public sphere in foreign countries was still not a typical environment that western women felt fully comfortable exploring at the end of the nineteenth century. As discussed in the first chapter, gender norms still mostly assigned the domestic sphere as a woman’s “natural environment” and even though this perspective was slowly changing and becoming a little less restrictive, walking around in foreign cities surrounded by “Others” —meaning foreign, non-western cultures—was still an activity that not many western women were comfortable with. In light of these circumstances it is interesting that—even though both women were travelers who left their home countries due to their desire to travel and make new experiences—Vely still surrounds herself during her explorations to a great extent with social company that she

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<sup>84</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 378.

<sup>85</sup> Emma Robinson-Tomsett. *Women, Travel and Identity...*, p. 82.

perceives as being more “equal” and like-minded to herself, e.g. with other white westerners from the U.S. or Europe.

By exploring the visited places in groups of other white people, she therefore prevents herself from being more vulnerable to the gaze back of the “Others” whom the western visitors observed and judged. Traveling in groups of “whiteness” provided female travelers with a sense of greater safety, but more noticeably with greater access to power over the observed “Others.” In Bly’s case, one of her reasons for traveling alone during her trip around the world is likely based on the competitive nature of her journey and her rush to stick to her timeline. This theory is supported by the fact that on other occasions—her investigative trip to Mexico years earlier, when she traveled at a slower pace—she was accompanied by her mother and also refers to this company in her text.

Vely published her impressions of this journey in several newspapers, in the “Berliner Tageblatt,” the “Danziger Zeitung,” the “Hannoversche Courier,” and sixteen regional newspapers.<sup>86</sup> However, her published descriptions of the places that she visited were not always positive and offended individuals who originated from these regions.

Vely states:

Der Besuch in Port-au-Prince bekam später in Berlin noch ein Nachspiel. Ich hatte wahrheitsgetreu im Berliner Tageblatt die Beschreibung der Residenz gegeben. Darauf ließ mir der Berliner Generalkonsul für Haiti sagen, ich möge froh sein, daß ich eine Frau wäre. Dreißig Haitianer studierten in Paris, die würden einen Mann, der ihr Vaterland so verunglimpft habe, sofort fordern. Ich entgegnete, trotzdem ich eine Frau, könne ich doch zu einer Waffe greifen – zu meiner Feder. Ich sei bereit.<sup>87</sup>

(The visit to Port-au-Prince had an aftermath in Berlin later on. I had truthfully given the description of the residence in the Berliner Tageblatt. The Berlin Consul General for Haiti then told me that I should be glad that I was a woman. Thirty Haitians were studying in Paris, who would immediately challenge a man who had disparaged their homeland like this.

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<sup>86</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 377.

<sup>87</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 382.

I replied that despite being a woman, I could still use a weapon – my pen. I told him I was ready.)

The newspaper article of the *Berliner Tageblatt* shows that the “descriptions” she used are equally derogatory as in her autobiography, that also contains deeply insulting parts about Haiti.<sup>88</sup> She describes Port-au-Prince as “schmutzigste Stadt, die je unsere Augen gesehen. [...] Augen und Geruchssinn, wie waren sie beleidigt.”<sup>89</sup> (the dirtiest city our eyes had ever seen. [...] [T]he eyes and sense of smell, how offended they were.)

She also “depicts” the population of the city, stating about the Haitian women that they were dressed in “[...] schleppenden Rattungewändern, die den Staub und Schmutz aufwühlten, als wären sie zum Straßenreinigen bestimmt [...]” (dragging rattan robes that churned up dust and dirt as if they were meant for street cleaning) and about the Haitians in general that they were “intelligent, aber faul”<sup>90</sup> (intelligent, but lazy). Based on these “truthful descriptions” from Vely, it appears hardly surprising that the Haitian nationals felt deeply offended by her degrading comments. As outlined in chapter one, disparaging the population of visited countries and the appearance of the cities was a common occurrence in travel reports of westerners who visited the “Orient” and was generally used to create the European hierarchical distinction between “us” and “them,” as pointed out by Said.<sup>91</sup> Even though it was previously thought that female travelers would display less imperial thinking and racism than male travelers, studies of female travel reports since the 1990 demonstrate that most female travel accounts did not lack behind in terms of racist and degrading descriptions—indeed, the analysis of

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<sup>88</sup> Vely’s newspaper article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* can be found online: Emma Vely. “Von der Westindienfahrt der Columbia. Der schwarze Herr Präsident.” *Berliner Tageblatt und Handelszeitung*, February 21, 1896.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 381.

<sup>90</sup> Both quotes: Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 381.

<sup>91</sup> Edward W. Said. *Orientalism...*, p. 3.

Vely and Bly's works will show just how pronounced these sentiments are in the case of these two female travelers.

The connection of Vely to major figures of the women's movement has been pointed out here, as well as her personal position regarding this topic. The next step is an examination of her travel writings, through the lens of her closeness to the movement and her support of it, to determine whether her appreciation of it was solely restricted to white women and was therefore the rather typical racialized feminism that excluded women of color, as pointed out in chapter one. Vely's travel descriptions depict some interactions with women who she encountered during her ventures, such as in St. Thomas:

Die Negerinnen waren bestrebt, liebenswürdig zu sein [...]. Wenn ich die Couleurladys ansprach und sie fragte, wie es bei weißen Damen drüben Sitte: „Lady, how are you? Glad to see you!“ so hatte ich ihnen die größte Ehre erwiesen, und sie gerieten in Verzückung. Unsere amerikanischen Reisegegensinnen konnten das nun nicht begreifen. Wie konnte man sich nur bei Schwarzen aufhalten?<sup>92</sup>

(The Negroes tried to be amiable [...]. When I spoke to the 'Couleurladys' and asked, as it is custom with white women over there: "Lady, how are you? Glad to see you!" I had given them the greatest honor and they were thrilled. Our female American travel companions could not understand that. How could you stay with black people?)

Whereas Vely's behaviour at first appears to come from a place of kindness and affinity—which was likely the intention of this description of her 'open-minded' behaviour—a closer look at this example reveals that her interaction contains a great amount of fabricated hierarchy, based on racism, with her being in a higher position than the "Couleurladys." Vely states that by addressing the black women in a way that was completely normal vis-à-vis white women ("bei weißen Damen drüben Sitte") she bestowed them the "greatest honour," suggesting that she was doing them a favor by

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 383.



talking to them. She refers to her American fellow travelers, who, according to Vely, were surprised about her interaction with them. The portrayal of her own 'positive' behaviour towards the local women, in contrast to the hostile mentality of the American women, aims to serve as a display of Vely's open-mindedness of her interaction with non-European ethnicities that were contemporarily not considered as equal and worthy of interaction.

Despite her aim to display her behaviour in a more positive light than that of others, a feeling of superiority still clearly shines through her descriptions. It appears that this feeling is based on the whiteness of her skin color, which was the root of racism in colonized countries, and this perceived superiority also had its influence on members of the women's movement. Dietrich points to this connection between the women's movement and colonialism:

Auch wenn sich die Vorstellungen und Geschlechterkonzeptionen der kolonialen und der Frauenbewegung unterschieden, gab es immer wieder Überschneidungen von frauenrechtlerischen Hoffnungen und Forderungen, die vom Reich auf die Kolonien übertragen wurden. Diese Forderungen gingen von der grundsätzlichen Überlegenheit der weißen ‚Zivilisation‘ aus und stabilisierten mit ihren rassistischen Prämissen die weiße Herrschaft in den Kolonien. Die Frauenrechtlerinnen vertraten ein evolutionistisches Weltbild, nach dem westliche weiße Frauen und die europäischen Gesellschaften die am höchsten entwickelten und zivilisiertesten seien.<sup>93</sup>

(Even if the ideas and gender conceptions of the colonial and women's movement differed, there was always an overlap of hopes and demands for women's rights that were transferred from the empire to the colonies. These demands assumed the fundamental superiority of the white 'civilization' and stabilized the white rule in the colonies with their racist premises. The women's rights activists advocated an evolutionary worldview according to which western white women and European societies are the most developed and civilized.)

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<sup>93</sup> Anette Dietrich. *Weißer Weiblichkeit...*, p. 272.

Vely states that the islands of the Antilles were more or less all the same, and she describes “Negerschulen” and “Negerfamilien”<sup>94</sup> — instead of just mentioning schools and families, and therefore puts a clear focus on them being “different” and thereby highlighting the “exotic” nature of her venture.

Her 1896 journey to “Westindien” was also published in the women’s magazine *Die Frau*, with the title “Von einer Westindienexkursion.” The analysis of this travel report is especially interesting, as the magazine was founded by one of the key figures of the German women’s movement, Helene Lange. Lange, born in 1848 in Oldenburg in Germany, had moved to Berlin in 1871 but after completing her degree only became a permanent teacher in 1876 and—based on her experience with her female students—she started to develop her own views on the education that girls in Germany received at the time. In her social circle in Berlin, Lange met other women who aimed to advance possibilities for girls’ education and women’s employment, and the women started to send out petitions with rather modest requests for educational changes. But especially an attached brochure (called “Yellow Brochure”) written by Lange, where she voiced her disagreement very directly, raised attention and received negative reactions from the authorities and male teachers. Lange’s views, that she had displayed in the Yellow Brochure, evolved over time, one of the reasons being a trip to England in 1888, where she became fond of the education system for girls and praised the schools as well as the women she encountered studying at Girton College at the University of Cambridge, using them as positive examples to contradict the commonly voiced stereotypes against women in universities.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 383f.

<sup>95</sup> James C. Albisetti. “Could Separate Be Equal? Helene Lange and Women’s Education in Imperial Germany.” *History of Education Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1982), p. 305ff.

As stated, Lange was the founder of the magazine that published this travelogue of Vely and it is very likely that she would have prevented articles from publication that went against her own beliefs or values, or articles that contradicted the values of her magazine. Vely's publication of this travel report in *Die Frau* can therefore be interpreted as a display of contemporarily common opinions that were similar to those of her female circle, or—at a minimum—did not contradict those significantly. The article displays numerous racist stereotypes in Vely's "observation" of the population of the visited countries, and some specific references regarding women.

Beginning in Algiers, she describes how her group wanders around the historic city parts, observes complex buildings with shops and cafes, but then seems to feel observed and judged by the local men: "[...] Cafes, in denen die weißbeburnusten Araber saßen und mit Verachtung auf uns schleierlose Frauen sahen [...]"<sup>96</sup> (cafes, where white-robed Arabs sat and looked with contempt on us unveiled women). The text does not mention any interaction between the group of women and local men, and it can be assumed that Vely's presumption of the contempt that the men allegedly feel towards her and her unveiled hair seems to be solely based on her culturally motivated stereotypes about their character. Vely seems to have some knowledge about the religious meaning of the veil in Muslim countries, as she links her uncovered hair with a transgression of local norms for women—and therefore suspects the condemnation of the men towards her and the other female visitors. By simply labeling them as "die Araber" (the Arabs) she creates a hostile distance that allows her—from a colonial perspective—to assume their feelings towards her, without having any interaction with them.

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<sup>96</sup> Emma Vely. "Von einer Westindienexkursion...", p. 393.

However, Vely's stereotyping observations and imputations are not limited to the men whom she encounters but are directed at women as well. In Funchal, Madeira, she mentions the "völlig neuen Typen" (completely new types) she encounters, "die Männer sind schön und seeluft-gebräunt, die Frauen haben die südliche Weichheit und Indolenz in der Erscheinung"<sup>97</sup> (the men are beautiful and tanned by the sea air, the women have the southern softness and indolence in their appearance).

With her choice of the word "Indolenz"—which she links to the Southern location of the island—she seems to indicate indolence or laziness (Trägheit; Faulheit), which were commonly attributed in contemporary travel reports to inhabitants of the "South" or "Orient" by western travelers and with the article "die" (the) she appears to refer to a specific, "well-known" indolence in the South. The inhabitants of countries with hot or humid weather, especially in Africa or Southeast-Asia, were often ascribed negative characteristics that supposedly reflected the climate, such as being lazy, slow, indolent, passive, and much worse attributions, as Frank points out: "Genau wie bei den Rassentheorien [...] galt das Klima (genauer: die Hitze, das Licht) als Ursache für *Degeneration* im doppelten Sinne des körperlichen und moralischen Verfalls."<sup>98</sup> (As with race theory, [...] the climate (more precisely: the heat, the light) was regarded as the cause of degeneration in the double sense of physical and moral deterioration).

Towards the end of her article, Vely starts to focus increasingly on her "observations" of the people of color whom she encounters, and her descriptions contain strongly derogatory and racist judgement:

Was mich auf der ganzen Reise mit am meisten interessiert hat, war das Leben der Deutschen und das Gebahren der Farbigen. Letztere bilden überall noch die

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 394.

<sup>98</sup> For further reading: Michael C. Frank. *Kulturelle Einflussangst. Inszenierungen der Grenze in der Reiseliteratur des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2006), p. 175f.

verachtete Menschenkaste; ist man freundlich mit ihnen, so sind sie ungemein dankbar. Sie haben noch eine große Kindlichkeit im Wesen; der Natur Nahes steckt in ihnen. Sie fassen eine plötzliche Zuneigung und zeigen dann die Gutmütigkeit und Schmiegsamkeit eines Hundes.<sup>99</sup>

(What I was most interested in during the whole trip was the life of the Germans and the behaviour of the people of color. The latter still form the despised human caste everywhere; if one is friendly with them, they are extremely grateful. They still have a great childishness in their nature; they are close to nature. They take a sudden affection and then show the good-naturedness and affectionateness of a dog.)

This labeling of other ethnicities—as also seen in the textual example of Aletta Jacobs in chapter one—as “kindlich” (child-like), or even as animals or pets, is a very common occurrence in travel literature of the nineteenth and even twentieth century and served as a repressive mechanism that strips those ethnicities of all autonomy: like children, they need the guidance and observation of the further developed westerners—such is the common contemporary tenor. This corresponds to other of Vely’s travel depictions, when she describes how “clean” the black children in a missionary school in St. Kitts are and how this occurred thanks to the local German priest and his wife, who are dedicated to the “Erziehung der Schwarzen” (the “education of the blacks”).<sup>100</sup> Similarly uncritical remarks by Vely can be found regarding colonialism, which will be discussed in chapter three, in direct comparison to Bly’s statements on the topic.

As Gagen points out, this downgrading of other cultures has been one of the most commonly observed mechanisms in colonial literature and served political purposes: “Historically, such policies allowed colonisers to infantilize native populations, justified a range of paternalistic policies and surveillance strategies and legitimated the exploitation

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<sup>99</sup> Emma Vely. “Von einer Westindienexkursion“ ..., p. 395f.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 395.

of native economies.”<sup>101</sup> By constantly degrading the native inhabitants of the colonized countries the colonizers were able to “justify” their invasion, as pets and children are seen as incapable of taking care of themselves and fully rely on the guidance and care of custodians. Vely’s remarks demonstrate a similar thought pattern that declares the “incapacity” of people of color to lead an autonomous existence:

Noch heute kann der westindische Neger dasselbe sagen in Bezug auf den Weißen – seine Indolenz läßt ihn nicht mit eintreten in den Kampf ums Dasein, in die Jagd nach Erwerb. Was ihm in den Mund wächst, was er mit der Hand erreichen kann, daß ist ihm eben recht – Schmutz, Schmutz und nochmals Schmutz belästigt ihn nicht.<sup>102</sup>

(Even today, the West Indian Negroe can say the same regarding the white man – his indolence does not allow him to join in the struggle for existence, in the hunt for work. Whatever grows into his mouth, what he can achieve with his hand, is just right for him—dirt, dirt and dirt again does not bother him.)

Such degradations were often combined with the emphasis on “dirt” —whether the cities were depicted as dirty, or their inhabitants: both occurrences were used (or fabricated) to allow the assumption that the process of colonization would ultimately also benefit colonized countries and their ethnicities, as their population was displayed as “not autonomous.”

Vely’s racist stereotypes about the foreign ethnicities that she encountered—especially targeting people of color—also strongly corroborates scholarly claims that female travelers mostly displayed equal amounts of racist and imperialist thinking as their male counterparts. From a contemporary perspective it might appear rather contradictory to see these remarks in a magazine that aimed to overcome social inequality and enhance women’s rights, but this discrepancy accentuates as a

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<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth A. Gagen. "Reflections of Primitivism: Development, Progress and Civilization in Imperial America, 1898-1914." *Children's Geographies: Global Childhoods: Why Children? Why Now?* 5, no. 1-2 (2007), p. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Emma Vely. "Von einer Westindienexkursion" ..., p. 396.

consequence that the first-wave feminism—and therefore the feminism that Vely and Bly were a part of—was far from being inclusive when it came to divergent social backgrounds or ethnicities, with the latter much more pronounced in the United States.

This discrepancy between the feminist view of Vely and her depiction of the foreign women she encountered becomes especially visible in the last paragraph of the article, when Vely philosophizes about the “West-Indierin” (which actually refers to Havana, Cuba in this case):

Von Frauen sieht man nur die aus dem Volke und dunkelfarbige gehen – die Dame fährt, trägt nie ein Paket, schlüpft frühmorgens in die Messe, bleibt den Tag über hinter den Läden der Fenster, die bis auf den Erdboden reichen, nascht Süßigkeiten und fährt am Abend zum Korso auf den Prado, um ihre neueste Pariser oder Bostoner Toilette bewundern zu lassen, oder sie sitzt am Fenster, vor dem die Herren stehen und macht mit ihnen Konversation, das heißt, sie nimmt ihre Komplimente entgegen, bewegt den Fächer, schlägt die Augen auf, lächelt und fühlt ihr Dasein völlig ausgefüllt. Was hat die Westindierin überhaupt zu denken? Sie führt ein Blumenleben, und von dem Kampf, den ihre nordischen Schwestern mit dem Dasein zu führen haben, liest sie so wenig, als sie davon hört.<sup>103</sup>

(One only sees women from the lower classes and the dark-colored ones walking – the lady drives, never carries a package, slips into the mass in the morning, stays behind the shutters of the windows that reach to the ground, nibbles sweets and drives off in the evening to the procession on the Prado to let others admire her latest Parisian or Boston dress, or she is sitting at the window, where the gentlemen stand and makes conversation with them, that is to say, she takes their compliments, moves the fan, casts up her eyes, smiles and feels her existence completely fulfilled. What does the West Indian woman have to think about? She lives a flowery life, and she reads as little as she hears about the struggle that her Nordic sisters have to fight with existence.)

Vely depicts the Cuban women of the middle and upper classes as shallow, carefree figures, who only seem to care about their appearance, comfort, and about male compliments. With these components their existence is completely fulfilled, according to Vely, and they do not have much to ponder about, least about the existential fight that her

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 397.

“Nordic sisters” are fighting. She constructs a picture of domesticity that positions herself—and the other “Nordic sisters”—as fighters for a female freedom that, according to Vely, the Cuban women are not even aware of. Even though Vely declares herself and the other “Nordic” women as “sisters” of the Cuban women, her characterization of them demonstrates that this is rather an empty phrase—she does not classify them as equal peers or “sisters,” but instead as shallow beings who do not care about or know much more than flirtation, fashion and sweets. Again, this characterization is based on Vely’s assumptions, and the image of the female Other that is constructed here reveals much about Vely and her self-perception as an enlightened exception in contrast to the shallow “flowers” in Cuba. The dissociation is used to strengthen her own image, contrast herself to those women who know are depicted as knowing nothing about the suffragists’ causes and struggles.

During the analysis of Vely’s travel reports it becomes obvious that she was interested in foreign women’s lives, as her statements and several written observations of women prove. However, her descriptions, which are often degrading and racist, reveal that she viewed most of the foreign women not as equal, at least not the ones from the “Orient,” non-western women. While she describes their appearance, clothes and habits often in details, the language that Vely uses is far from respectful and makes her interest in the “Other” women seem like an inquisitiveness that people show when seeing a cabinet of curiosities. She appears interested in their lives, but not because she views them as equal “sisters” in the movement’s fight for better rights. Instead, her constructions of Otherness aim to enhance her own position in a hierarchy that is heavily influenced by social status and race.

A telling example that substantiates this thesis is Vely’s description of women’s lives in Libya. She states:



Der Städter, der wohlhabende Moslem, hat meistens nur eine gesetzmäßige Frau. Der Landbewohner nimmt immer mehrere Lebensgefährtinnen, denn sie sind ihm Sklavinnen, Arbeitstiere. Sie müssen den Feldbau besorgen und die Lasten schleppen wie die Kamele. Sie werden meistens mit zwölf Jahren geheiratet, haben viele Kinder und sind mit dreißig Jahren alt und scheußlich anzusehen.<sup>104</sup>

(The city dweller, the wealthy Muslim, usually has only one legitimate wife. The men in the countryside always take several companions because they are his slaves, workhorses. They have to take care of the field and carry loads like camels. They are usually married at the age of twelve, have a lot of children and are ghastly to look at by the age of thirty.)

Vely does not clarify where she got this information about the women's lives, therefore her description, like all travelogues, must be taken with a grain of salt: likely, another traveler could have told her this story, a local westerner, or she could have read about it. Much less likely is the assumption that Vely talked to one of the Libyan women and therefore obtained the information from a first-hand source from the same culture. However, proceeding from the assumption that Vely's statement contains some level of truth, it reveals a rather shocking level of indifference and judgment from her side regarding the women's fates. Even though she does not voice any form of approval, based on her description of the local women it does not appear as if Vely feels even an inch of compassion with the women who are, according to her description, married when they are still children, and treated like "slaves" and "animals." Whereas the reader at first believes to detect some kind of compassion when she starts to describe their fate and their living conditions, Vely's last sentence, describing them as looking "ghastly" and with a focus on their unattractive appearance, promptly adjusts this assumption and appears misogynic: one wonders why their attractiveness—or the lack thereof—would be of importance considering their harsh fate.

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<sup>104</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 460.

It appears irritating, if not disturbing, that a journalist and feminist like Vely, who would fight for increased rights for women in her own society, would describe the lives of girls who were married at a very young age and treated as unpaid workers in a patriarchally dominated society without pity, and instead of expressing her empathy or some level of disturbance, instead proceeds to insult their appearance at the age of thirty, after years of childbearing and harsh living circumstances. Instead of emphasizing with their harsh fates, she focuses, rather sexist, on their appearance and their apparent lack of attractiveness.

It appears as if this lack of empathy that Vely displays here so strikingly is based on their different ethnicity—even though their gender is female, Vely does not acknowledge them as equal or “sisters.” Even though she occasionally uses the terms “brothers” or “sisters” when she describes the inhabitants of the visited countries, her often derogatory descriptions demonstrate clearly that these terms were nothing but empty shells, used to construct an image of herself as a caring, empathic and open-minded traveler—but at the same time, she constantly debunks her own intended image with her judgmental depiction that are far from any sisterliness.

### III. Nellie Bly

Similarly to the previous chapter on Emma Vely, this chapter on Nellie Bly examines Nellie Bly's stance regarding the women's movement and asks to what extent her position is reflected in her travel reports from her trip around the world and to Mexico. Beforehand, a short overview on the most important scholarship on Bly will be given and following that, Bly's position on women's rights issues will be established by analyzing some of her writings in which she positions herself in the contemporary discourse. These findings will then be integrated into the examination of her portrayal of foreign women in her travelogues.

No abundance of scholarship on Nellie Bly exists, but some important contributions on her life and her writings will be beneficial for this project. The probably most comprehensive and fundamental work on Nellie Bly is the biography by Brooke Kroeger. Kroeger points out the surprising lack of research on Bly at the time of the publication of her book in 1994 and suspects that one of the reasons for this is the lack of written documents that Bly left behind—no journals or diaries were discovered, and only a few letters. Kroeger examines the full complexity of Bly's life from her childhood, through her travels, to her private life and her many publications, including important aspects regarding Bly's position on the women's movement.<sup>105</sup> However, in the twenty-six years since Kroeger's observation of the lack of research, Bly has received more scholarly attention and several monographs and articles on the author were published in the meantime.

One of the most recent publications that includes Bly is Homberg's *Reporter-Streifzüge*, which examines the developments of journalism in the U.S. and in Europe

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<sup>105</sup> Brooke Kroeger. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* (New York: Kindle Edition, 2013).

between 1870 and 1918, and therefore also examines Nellie Bly in the context of “girl stunt reporters”—a new phenomenon of female reporters who went undercover (such as Bly, in asylums or prisons) to reveal social injustice.<sup>106</sup> A similarly holistic approach like Kroeger’s work presents the work *Nellie Bly: Journalist* by John Bankston, who also shines light on the complexity of Bly’s life, describing her upbringing, her family, and the events that led to her successful career as a journalist, her travels to Mexico and around the world.<sup>107</sup> A short scholarly contribution that shines a light particularly on gender in Bly’s work is made by Vengadasalam. In “Dislocating the Masculine: How Nellie Bly Feminised Her Reports,” she examines how Bly incorporated gender into her writings and connected her work as a sensationalist reporter with her desire to stir social reforms.<sup>108</sup> Vengadasalam points to the subtle ways that Bly used to highlight the fact that she achieved her goals “despite” being a woman. She did not negate her female gender, but pointed to differences in her behaviour and to her flexibility to disprove the stereotype of the “typical woman” (such as bringing only a small bag to contradict the stereotype that all women traveled with countless luggage pieces filled with their clothes). Furthermore, the work highlights how Bly’s engagement for the women’s movement and her travelogues consolidated her image as a feminist to the extent that she was selected to join as a herald during a suffragists parade in 1913.<sup>109</sup> Even though this article on Bly is rather short and lacks a detailed examination of the exact mechanisms that Bly used to highlight her gender, Vengadasalam’s article points to the important fact that most research on Bly to this point focussed on her career as a

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Homberg. *Reporter-Streifzüge: Metropolitane Nachrichtenkultur und die Wahrnehmung der Welt 1870-1918*. 1st ed. Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

<sup>107</sup> John Bankston. *Nellie Bly. Journalist* (New York: Chelsea House, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> Puja Vengadasalam. "Dislocating the Masculine: How Nellie Bly Feminised Her Reports." *Social Change* 48, no. 3 (2018), p. 451.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 455.

journalist and her sensationalism, but not many scholarly contributions exist that examine discourses of gender in Bly's writings.<sup>110</sup>

As a result of a rising focus on accomplished historical women in recent years in the mainstream book market, Nellie Bly has even found her way into children's books. Christensen's *The Daring Nellie Bly : America's Star Reporter* introduces the life of Bly in a picturesque and appealing manner to children, contributing to society's general knowledge of the author and feminist.<sup>111</sup> The selection of research contributions on Bly shows that she has gained scholarly and mainstream attention in the last years. However, as previously stated, few of these contributions examine her work through a lens of feminism or gender or link her travel writings and display of foreign women with her activism for the white, middle-class suffrage movement.

Bly—whose real name was Elizabeth Cochran Seaman—was born in 1864 in Cochran's Mill as one of five children of judge Michael and Mary Jane Cochran. Her family was financially well-off, until her father died when Nelly Bly was only six years old, which resulted in her having to work (instead of continuing school) to support the financially troubled family. Her family eventually moved to Pittsburgh, which led to the start of Bly's career as a journalist (and the start of her feminist writings), when she angrily responded with an anonymous letter to an article in *The Pittsburgh Dispatch* with the title "What Girls Are Good For," which claimed that women's purpose was marriage and that they had no other use.<sup>112</sup> The author was Erasmus Wilson, who had started a column named "Quiet Observations" in the *Dispatch*, which Bly seemed to have been a fan of. However,

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<sup>110</sup> Puja Vengadasalam. "Dislocating the Masculine: How Nellie Bly Feminised Her Reports." *Social Change* 48, no. 3 (2018).

<sup>111</sup> Bonnie Christensen. *The Daring Nellie Bly: America's Star Reporter* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

<sup>112</sup> Keira Stevenson. "Nellie Bly." *Nellie Bly*. (MasterFILEpremier: August 2017), 1.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=18053383&site=ehost-live>.

in 1885 Wilson published several columns on women's role in society, which displayed an extremely conservative view on women, which upset a number of female readers of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*.<sup>113</sup> He stated that there were "restless dissatisfied females who think they are out of their spheres and go around giving everybody fits for not helping them to find them" and concluded that a women's sphere is "defined and located by a single word—home."<sup>114</sup>

Like other female readers, Bly was deeply offended by these statements made by him regarding women's position in society, and she grabbed pen and paper to write a striking and sharp response and signed her letter with the pseudonym "Lonely Orphan Girl," which was received by the managing editor George Madden. Her fierce and, for the time, progressive response impressed George Madden and prompted him to publish a note asking for the letter's author to identify herself—which Bly did, and as a result was hired as a reporter. In "The Girl Puzzle," her first published article, she points out the huge disadvantages that girls and women experienced compared to boys and men:

If girls were boys quickly would it be said: start them where they will, they can, if ambitious, win a name and fortune. How many wealthy and great men could be pointed out who started in the depths; but where are the many women? Let a youth start as errand boy and he will work his way up until he is one of the firm. Girls are just as smart, a great deal quicker to learn; why, then, can they not do the same? As all occupations for women are filled why not start some new ones. Instead of putting the little girls in factories let them be employed in the capacity of messenger boys or office boys. It would be healthier. They would have a chance to learn; their ideas would become broader and they would make as good, if not better, women in the end. It is asserted by storekeepers that women make the best clerks. Why not send them out as merchant travelers? They can talk as well as men — at least men claim that it is a noted fact that they talk a great deal more and faster. If their ability at home for selling exceeds a man's why would it not abroad? Their lives would be brighter, their health better, their pocketbooks fuller, unless

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<sup>113</sup> Brooke Kroeger. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist* (New York: Kindle Edition, 2013), loc. 674 of 9883.

<sup>114</sup> Both quotes *ibid*, loc. 690 of 9883.

their employers would do as now — give them half wages because they are women.<sup>115</sup>

Bly was often assigned to work on unusual and risky reportages, which, for example, resulted in her undercover work in the Copper Cable factory and an article on her experience that targeted the precarious working conditions of the women and child laborers there. Her publication *Six Months in Mexico*, where she examined from a critical perspective politics and the lives of poor Mexicans, was also based on a journey that she undertook as a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*.

This brief outline of some of her most popular works indicates already that Bly was especially interested in the living and working conditions of disadvantaged groups in society, such as women, children, and the lower working class. Several writings by Bly demonstrate that she indeed belonged to the group of advocates for women's rights, and that her initial protesting response to the newspaper article by Wilson was not an isolated incidence, but, on the contrary, the starting point as an apologist for women's rights. Further proof for this can be found in other writings by Bly, such as "Should Women Propose?," published in 1888, or her interview of Susan B. Anthony, who played an essential part in the movement, in 1896.

In the former article, Bly brings up the question why women should wait for a man to propose, and why they should not instead be able to ask this question themselves, bringing up the developments of women's role in society and her highly critical perspective on women's treatment in the past:

In the days of barbarism, when men stood off and made their selections and afterwards consummated the bargain with the father; or even in the days of our gentle great and great-great grandmothers, whose golden chains and rings were fit emblems of their slavery – when women were animated dolls, having no will

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<sup>115</sup> Nellie Bly. "The Girl Puzzle." in *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings*, ed. Jean Marie Lutes (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 6f.

but their lords', having no thoughts of their own – when they were dressed, curled, driven, then it would have been sheer folly to ask such a question. Women are not confined to their homes now, lamentable or otherwise as different persons may deem the fact. They are in the world—are of it. They write, think, drive and work like men. Should they not, then, have an equal right to propose marriage?<sup>116</sup>

Bly mentions how women used to be “slaves” before and therefore condemns the passive position without rights, that women had for centuries, speaking of them as “animated dolls” who were treated as dependent and as naturally less capable than men. Speaking of the contemporary situation for women, Bly locates them now as actively participating agents in life, who “write, think, drive and work” and should therefore have equal rights to make an active choice regarding their future companion, which clearly shows her belief in further progress for women’s active role in society and social equality.

The question if making a marriage proposal would be proper for women is also one of the topics that Bly brings up in her interview with Susan B. Anthony, which was published in *The New York World*, on February 2, 1896. An admiration for Anthony shines through Bly’s article and through her comments and becomes visible right at the start of the interview, which is titled “Champion of Her Sex. Miss Susan B. Anthony,” underlined with the subtitles “Woman Suffrage Must Come and Perfectly Proper for Women to Propose Now That They Are Independent Wage-Earners.” Even though it is not clear whether Bly selected this title and subtitle or her editor did, the tone of the (sub)title reflects the tone of Bly’s remarks in the interview and it appears believable that she selected the titles or at least approved of them.

In the interview, Bly asks Anthony about her reasons for becoming a suffragist, her family background and upbringing, her work ethics, her stance on religion and

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<sup>116</sup> Nellie Bly. “Should Women Propose?” in *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings*, ed. Jean Marie Lutes (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 122f.



marriage, and the interview closes with Bly's own conclusion, stating admiringly: "Susan B. Anthony is all that is best and noblest in a woman. She is ideal and if we will have in women who vote what we have in her, let us all help to promote the cause of woman suffrage."<sup>117</sup>

Another text that displays Bly's—for the time—unusually critical perspective on social injustices is the article "The Girls Who Make Boxes," published in the *New York World* in November 1887. Here she critically examines the labor conditions of female factory workers. She describes how she starts working "undercover" in such a factory and criticizes the harsh working conditions and low wages of white women who work there—stressed by the subheading which carries the title "Nellie Bly Tells How It Feels to Be a White Slave." In this article, Bly describes how she pretends to be looking for work and, after being rejected at several factories, eventually gets hired at a small factory on Elm Street, where she starts to interrogate the other factory girls about their salaries, family background and living conditions.<sup>118</sup> Bly describes that even though she found the work very easy to learn, it was still "[...] rather disagreeable. The room was not ventilated and the paste and glue were very offensive."<sup>119</sup> And the end of her article, Bly mentions a girl who states that they were not allowed to talk about their earnings, but "[...] she had been working here five years, and she did not average more than \$5 a week. The factory itself was a totally unfit place for women. The rooms were small and there was no ventilation. In case of fire there was practically no escape."<sup>120</sup>

Even though Bly's critical perspective correctly points out the precarious working conditions that factory workers of the nineteenth century had to endure, it does seem a

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<sup>117</sup> Nellie Bly. "Susan B. Anthony" ..., p. 137.

<sup>118</sup> Nellie Bly. "The Girls Who Make Boxes" in *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings*, ed. Jean Marie Lutes (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 89ff.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

rather odd comparison to compare the female workers to slaves, or “white slaves” as the subheading states. Despite the lack of safety, ventilation problems and awfully low wages, which were mostly not enough to make a living, Bly’s comparison seems improper, considering the millions of humans who had been brutally enslaved, sold and abused until a few decades earlier—without getting a penny for their harsh work, mostly living in inhumane conditions. Race seems to be a differentiating factor here, as the “white slaves” in the factory work in rather miserable conditions compared to men, earning much less, “one half to one third the wages of working men,”<sup>121</sup> which was barely enough to make a living. Bly’s comparison of the female workers to slaves therefore appears to be used to exaggerate the disadvantages of working women. However, it also points to the varying standards of acceptable living environments and treatments that Bly seems to apply to men and women from varying ethnical backgrounds—whether it is a white American women, or one of color whom she encounters during her travels appears to influence what is determined as an acceptable living standard. While she characterizes the white women in the factory as “slaves” due to low wages and unsafe work environment, her display of “Other” women—and men—from foreign countries is much less critical regarding the appropriate treatment of those individuals, which becomes clear in the analysis of her travel report of her trip around the world.

*Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*, published in 1890, can probably be declared as Bly’s most popular work, still well-known today. Her journey around the world started in November 1889, with the goal to be faster than the fictional main character of Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*—therefore the title of her publication. The following examination of Bly’s travel report and the focus on her

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

depiction of foreign women aims to analyze if and how her outlined feminist position is reflected in her portrayal of non-white women.

As described earlier, Bly was a supporter and strong advocate of women's rights, and her stance on the contemporary discourse on women's rights will be contrasted in this chapter with her display of foreign, non-western women. The main source of this analysis will be the report of her trip around the world, and parts of her work *Six Months in Mexico* will also be included in the analysis, as it also contains detailed descriptions of local women's living conditions.

According to Bly's own accord, the basis for her trip around the world was laid on a Sunday, when her pondering about ideas for new articles remained fruitless and she fretfully wished to be on the other side of the world—with her response to her own thoughts being “why not?”<sup>122</sup> After bringing up this idea to her editor, another year passed before Bly was summoned into the office by her editor and was asked whether she could start her trip around the world in two days—with her response apparently being “I can start this minute.”<sup>123</sup>

She starts her journey on November 14, 1889, boarding the ship *Augusta Victoria* in Hoboken, New Jersey with her first destination being Southampton, England. From there she continued to London and then to Amiens, France, to meet Jules Verne and his wife, who were both completely smitten with the young Bly. Verne later stated that Bly was

the prettiest young girl imaginable...and what took the hearts of myself and Madam Verne was the complete modesty of the young person. Nobody, to look at the quiet, ladylike little thing, would have thought for a moment that she was what she is and that she was going to do what she is doing.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings*, ed. Jean Marie Lutes (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 145.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p. 147.

<sup>124</sup> Brooke Kroeger. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist...*, loc. 2273 of 9883.

From the French harbour in Calais, Vely continued to Brindisi in Italy, and then proceeded to Port Said in Egypt, Aden (today Yemen), to Colombo (today Sri Lanka), to Penang (Malaysia), Singapore, Hong Kong, Yokohama (Japan), and from there back to the United States. As briefly indicated before, Bly's critical view on the living conditions of the white women in the factories is considerably less pronounced in her travel report and her descriptions of the local men and women she encountered, even though many of them lived in much worse poverty than the white factory workers she described.

One example is her first stop in the "Orient," Port Said in Egypt. All passengers arm themselves with canes and parasols "to keep off the beggars."<sup>125</sup> Even though Bly appears critical of that, and states that she did not bring any of those as she suspects "that a stick beats more ugliness into a person than it ever beats out,"<sup>126</sup> her descriptions of the locals are rather repulsive:

When the ladder was lowered, numbers of them [local men] caught it and clung to it as if it meant life or death to them, and here they clung until the captain was compelled to order some sailors to beat the Arabs off, which they did with long poles, before the passengers dared venture forth. This dreadful exhibition made me feel that probably there was some justification in arming one's self with a club.<sup>127</sup>

While exploring the city, she continues to describe the population she encounters, and the repulsiveness of the local beggars who—instead of making her feel sympathetic—evoked negative feelings of rejection in her.<sup>128</sup> Those feelings are not solely limited to the men she observes, but also creep into her depiction of the veiled Egyptian women, described by Bly as small and

[...] shapelessly clad in black. Over their faces, beginning just below the eyes, they wore black veils that fell almost to their knees. As if fearing that the veil

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<sup>125</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days...*, p. 192.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 192f.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 194f.

alone would not destroy all semblance of features they wear a thing that spans the face between the hair and the veil down the line of their noses.<sup>129</sup>

The words that Bly uses here reveal a rejection of veiled women, which can be commonly observed in travel accounts of western women who visited the “Orient.” The hidden figures of the local women—and sometimes hidden faces—evoked negative feelings in the western travelers. These feelings of rejection, repugnance or pity run like a common thread through female travel reports of several centuries. In 1843, German traveler Ida Hahn-Hahn wrote in her *Orientalische Briefe* about her visit of a harem in Constantinople that one could not imagine

[...] wie das schwierig ist mit Personen zu sprechen, welche die Welt nur hinter vergitterten Fenstern [...] betrachten, und die dennoch keineswegs von irdischen Interessen abgezogen, sondern ganz und gar drin lebend und webend sind; - denn mehr noch als der Leib, wohnt hier der Geist im Käfig.<sup>130</sup>

(how difficult it is to speak to people who only look at the world behind barred windows [...] but who are in no way detached from earthly interests, but are entirely living and weaving inside; - because even more than the body, the spirit lives here in a cage.)

Swiss writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who traveled to Persia and Afghanistan in 1939 and published her experiences in *All The Roads Are Open*, describes the Afghan women with even stronger feelings of hostility and pity, describing the veiled women as “muffled, formless figures,” with “little humanity in these ghostly apparitions.”<sup>131</sup> But even though Schwarzenbach judges and insults them on the one hand, on the other hand she seems to seriously contemplate their existences and fates, asking herself: “Were they girls, mothers, crones, were they young or old, happy or sad, beautiful or ugly? How did they live, what occupied them, who received their sympathy, their love or their hate?”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>130</sup> Ida Hahn-Hahn, Ida. *Orientalische Briefe* (Berlin: A. Duncker, 1844), p. 65

<sup>131</sup> Both quotes: Annemarie Schwarzenbach. *All the Roads Are Open: The Afghan Journey* (London: Seagull Books, 2011), p. 51.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

Like Bly, Vely mentions the sight of veiled “Oriental” women as well, and like Bly, Hahn-Hahn, Schwarzenbach and other western travelers, her depictions are negative and judgmental:

Die Frauen der Moslem gehen verhüllt; sie haben Kopf und Körper mit demselben schmutzig gelben Gewand bedeckt, das ihr einziges Kleidungsstück ist, und lassen nur das rechte Auge frei; es gehört wohl angeerbte Geschicklichkeit dazu, den Behang so kunstgerecht zu halten und auf dem Kopfe schwere Last zu schleppen. Solche Hexengestalten, wie sie, schwarz oder dunkelgelb, hier bettelnd die Hand ausstreckten, kann aber die realistische Darstellung nicht erinnern. Daran denkt man mit Grausen zurück.<sup>133</sup>

(The Muslim women are veiled; they have covered head and body with the same dirty yellow robe that is their only garment, and only leave the right eye free; it is probably an inherited skill to keep the veil workmanlike/artfully and to carry heavy loads on the head. The realistic depiction cannot convey such witch figures like them, black or dark yellow, stretching out their hand begging. One thinks about it with horror.)

A dualism between allurement and repulsion appears to be prevalent in the western women’s descriptions of the veiled women, that lets the western women reject the “Others” appearances, assumed habits and traits, but at the same time evokes fascination based on their perceived “Otherness,” which explains the preoccupation with the veiled women in the travelogues of western women. As Schwarzenbach’s pondering questions demonstrate, the western women were often outright curious about the foreign women’s way of life, despite their condemnation of them.

It is possible that women like Schwarzenbach, Hahn-Hahn, Vely and Bly were especially resentful of the veiled women because as female travelers they had—to varying degrees—crossed social barriers in their own societies, and might have interpreted the veil as a subordination to a patriarchal society, and therefore as a dissent from their own worldview. The words of Hahn-Hahn point into this direction, as she speaks of them living behind barred windows and in a cage—therefore she thinks about

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<sup>133</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 459f.

them as prisoners. And Schwarzenbach speaks of them as ghostly and muffled figures, thereby displaying them as voiceless individuals. However, at the same time such a portrayal of veiled women as “prisoners” and “voiceless” beings in cages also reassured the western women about their own identity. Dietrich points out that even members of the radical, internationally oriented women’s associations instrumentalized the “suppression” of women in foreign cultures to raise their own position in society: “Selbst bei den internationalistisch ausgerichteten Frauenverbänden [...] diente die Skandalisierung der Unterdrückung anderer Frauen in ihren jeweiligen Gesellschaften der Aufwertung der eigenen gesellschaftlichen Situation (vgl. Lotz 1998: 45).”<sup>134</sup> Even though the passages here cited are only a few examples from western women’s travel reports that described the veiled women of the “Orient,” it appears to be a rather typical feature that dislike or condemnation of the local chador was expressed by the western women who visited the countries. Interestingly, many of them—such as Nellie Bly, or Annemarie Schwarzenbach—would be identified as feminists or with feminist traits from today’s perspective. However, their judgement of the veiled women demonstrates that such early feminist thought did not include much respect towards non-western women, or toward women with deviating ways of living.

Similar differentiation based on ethnicity can be observed in Bly’s different portrayals of western and non-western women. The poverty and hardship of the white women in the factory apparently evoked significantly more empathy in Bly than the “Arabs” she encounters in Egypt. However, women from North-Africa (the “Orient”) are not the only ones where Bly displays her disapproval—women from other foreign regions are also affected, as her visit in Canton displays:

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<sup>134</sup> Anette Dietrich. *Weißes Weiblichkeit...*, p. 273.

I was warned not to be surprised if the Chinamen should stone me while I was in Canton. I was told that Chinese women usually spat in the faces of female tourists when the opportunity offered. However, I had no trouble. The Chinese are not pleasant appearing people; they usually look as if life had given them nothing but trouble; but as we were carried along the men in the stores would rush out to look at me. They did not take any interest in the men with me but gazed at me as if I was something new. They showed no sign of animosity, but the few women I met looked as curiously at me, and less kindly.<sup>135</sup>

Her negative display of the Cantonese women is reflected in Bly's negative depiction of Hong Kong, before she arrives in Canton, where she criticizes the general appearance of the town and its inhabitants:

The town seemed in a state of untidiness, the road was dirty, the mobs of natives we met were filthy, the houses were dirty, the numberless boats lying along the wharf, which invariably were crowded with dirty people, were dirty, our carriers were dirty fellows, their untidy pigtailed twisted around their half-shaven heads.<sup>136</sup>

Astonishingly, Bly manages to place the word *dirty* five times into one sentence, supplemented by synonyms like untidy and filthy, to make sure that even the most kind-hearted and unbiased of her contemporary readers must understand by now what a terrible, dirty, awful place Bly encountered here, inhabited by equally daunting, "dirty" inhabitants of the city. Such an astonishing focus on "dirt" or "filth" was another common trait that can be observed in travel literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and aimed to build or consolidate the hierarchy between the "dirty," backward foreigner and the "clean," developed westerners. Most often, these descriptions were of course not only aiming to stress the lack of cleanliness. More so, this ascribed lack of hygiene—whether on the streets or the inhabitants bodies—can be interpreted as a method used by the authors to communicate to their audience the lower stage of development that the foreigners occupied, which almost suggested that

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<sup>135</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings...*, p. 252.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, p. 238.



they would ultimately also benefit from the colonial rule and the western “orderliness” and “advanced culture.”

However, the mentioned dualism between allurement and repulsion did not always lean towards repulsion for every encountered ethnicity—sometimes allurement was strong enough to be visibly apparent in the travel reports, and repulsion made space for some kind of fascination with the ‘strange Other’—which then often resulted in exoticism. Even though the fascination with the other culture appears at first as rather positive and not necessarily racist, this mechanism is ultimately just another display of colonial perspective on the ‘Other’ and a depiction of an “object” whose perspective and voice is never heard.

In Bly’s writings, her visit to Aden displays such exoticism when she describes the people who catch her eye:

On the road we saw black people of many different tribes. A number of women, who walked proudly along, their brown, bare feet stepping lightly on the smooth road. They had long purple-black hair, which was always adorned with a long, stiff feather, dyed of brilliant red, green, purple, and like striking shades. [...] To me the sight of these perfect, bronze-like women, with a graceful drapery of thin silk wound about the waist, falling to the knees, and a corner taken up the back and brought across the bust, was most bewitching. On their bare, perfectly modeled arms were heavy bracelets, around the wrist and muscle, most times joined by chains.<sup>137</sup>

The picture that Bly creates here—even though it appears like admiration at first—is full of exoticizing language and is a commonly observed feature of travel reports of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In such cases, the “natives” were described as proud and impressive beings, connected with nature, which created a mystification, supported here with poetic descriptions of “bronze” skin, tribal adornments, and feathers. It is surprising how positively connoted Bly’s language is in this description, compared to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p. 204.

other parts where she describes the encountered people as dirty, filthy or hostile, using terms like “adorned,” “striking,” “perfect,” “graceful,” “bewitching” and “perfectly modeled” in this instance.

The reason why such exoticism is highly problematic is accounted for by the power imbalance that it creates, or in this instance even further increases. Huggan points out that exoticism is

[...] a political as much as an aesthetic practice. [...] [E]xoticism has proved over time to be a highly effective instrument of imperial power. And its effectiveness can be measured, in part, by the occlusion of underlying political motives. The wonder beheld in exotic peoples, as Stephen Greenblatt demonstrates in his book on New World conquest, may precede their violent subjugation; the exotic splendour of newly colonised lands may disguise the brutal circumstances of their gain (Greenblatt 1991: esp. chap. 3). The exoticist rhetoric of fetishized otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function.<sup>138</sup>

Even though the language that is used here by Bly and in other similar descriptions is supposed to express a level of sympathy and admiration, it ultimately objectifies and mystifies the observed groups, and attributes characteristics that are rooted in the observers’ western, imperial dominance and exploitation of the ethnic groups. Especially for travel literature, such strong creations of “Otherness”—whether aiming to create positive or negative images by the authors—were highly demanded by the western audience, as the majority of the readers would never go through similar experiences and therefore craved for the “unknown” —and the authors willingly delivered.

Literary culmination of this preference of the audience were (mostly faked) dramatic encounters of the authors with cannibals, because “[w]ithout anomaly there is no travel book, no story to tell, and the more wondrous the anomalies the better the

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<sup>138</sup> Graham Huggan. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2001): p. 46. and Stephen Greenblatt. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991): chapter 3.

account [...]"<sup>139</sup> and Gutiérrez points out correctly that these presented occurrences only rarely—if ever—happened in reality.<sup>140</sup> Ultimately, such deep fascination with the unknown—especially the concept of unknown “evil” in the form of cannibals and monsters—is rooted in human nature, which becomes apparent in the fact that almost every culture had and has its tales of (ancient) monsters, mystical creatures and evil threats. Travel literature, with its often-problematic relation to truth, offered a widely used projection surface for the readers’ and writers’ fantasies and fascination with the unknown.<sup>141</sup>

Even though Bly makes ample use of exoticizing descriptions of the encountered ethnicities, she does not bring up any fictional tales of monsters and cannibals—rather the opposite, as she appears to mock the common use of such fictional stories when she apparently “spots” such a dangerous creature in the bay of Colombo, in Ceylon/Sri Lanka,

[...] fastened on a strangely shaped object, resting on the surface of the water in the bay. It seemed a living, feathered thing of so strange a shape that I watched it with feelings akin to horror. What horrible feathered monster could that lovely island produce, I wondered [...]"<sup>142</sup>

—just for this monster to turn out to be a red buoy, that was covered by birds. It is likely that Bly, being a journalist, applied a different form of ethics and truthfulness to her travel reports than many other travelers, and therefore could not resist to mock the common dramatic use of fictional encounters with dangerous creatures.

Despite Bly’s (as far as one can tell) rather truthful depiction of her experience, her use of exoticism in her travel writings demonstrates on the one hand that she was

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<sup>139</sup> Valerie Wheeler. "Travelers' Tales: Observations on the Travel Book and Ethnography." *Anthropological Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1986): p. 58.

<sup>140</sup> José María Hernández Gutiérrez. "Traveling Anthropophagy: The Depiction of Cannibalism in Modern Travel Writing, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries." *Journal of World History* 30, no. 3 (2019): p. 397.

<sup>141</sup> For further reading on the aspect of truth in travel literature refer to: Peter Brenner. *Der Reisebericht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989).

<sup>142</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days and Other Writings...*, p. 208f.

well aware of the expectations of the contemporary audience and publishers, and their demand for “exotic Otherness,” but on the other hand also reflects her interest in the foreign women whom she encountered during her journey, as many parts of her travel writings give detailed accounts of women’s appearances and living conditions—be it the veiled women in Egypt, the “bronze-like” women in Aden, or the women she observes in China and Japan.

In Bly’s various descriptions of the cultures that she encounters, it becomes obvious that she performs a sort of ‘ranking’ regarding their developmental stage, with harsh, racist judgments made especially regarding the Chinese men and women she encountered. Such rankings were common mechanisms of travel literature of previous centuries to create hierarchies of the cultures that the travelers met—often using valuation standards based on eurocentric thinking that aimed to create a hierarchy for the visited countries, cities, and inhabitants based on subjects like cleanliness (clean vs. “filthy/dirty”), productivity (lazy vs. efficient/active), or appearance (attractive vs. unattractive)—to name only a few. Such comparisons and classifications were heavily based on racist eurocentric stereotypes, generalizations and individual snapshots that were assigned to countries as a whole and to its entire population.

Such hierarchizations are also present in Bly’s travel report, when she contrasts her visit in Japan to her previous negative connoted depictions of China:

The Japanese are the direct opposite to the Chinese. The Japanese are the cleanliest people on earth, the Chinese are the filthiest; the Japanese are always happy and cheerful, the Chinese are always grumpy and morose; the Japanese are the most graceful of people, the Chinese the most awkward; the Japanese have few vices, the Chinese have all the vices in the world; in short, the Japanese are the most delightful of people, the Chinese the most disagreeable.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days*. Amazon Digital Services Kindle Edition, (n.d.), pos. 2558 of 3077.

Ultimately, such creations of hierarchy as displayed by Bly attribute levels of “worthiness” to other cultures, based on a eurocentric perspective that either discredits or fetishizes other ethnicities. Rarely, the observed inhabitants are talked to or asked about their perspectives—but more often, their feelings, thoughts and apparent character traits are assigned to them by the Western travelers, who judge from a position of imperial and social power, and their own worldview. Even though these hierarchies do not always directly declare it, it remains obvious to the reader that the western visitors considered themselves to be at the top of this hierarchy.

In 1885, Bly visited Mexico, which resulted in her travel report *Six Months in Mexico*, published three years later in 1888. Right at the start of her travelogue, on the first page, Bly expressed her feminist views and her objection of the treatment of women in society. When she sees women working on the fields in the southern states on her way to Mexico, she disapproves of this occurrence and expresses her anger towards the men who just watch the women—Bly does not specify here whether these are women of color, but it is probable—work, while they smoke, stating “For the first time I saw women plowing while their lords and masters sat on a fence smoking. I never longed for anything so much as I did to shove those lazy fellows off.”<sup>144</sup> Likely it was no coincidence that Bly included this statement right at the start of her report, to communicate her positions on women’s rights to the reader and establish a certain image of herself.

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Interestingly, for reasons unknown to the author of this project, the quoted text above, which contains an extremely racist comparison by Bly, was omitted in the Penguin Classics edition that was also used for this project. Whereas the exact reasons for this omission are not known, it remains a questionable decision, as this could easily be perceived as an effort to present an altered version of Bly, that ignores the racism that was also included in her writings.

<sup>144</sup> Nellie Bly and Cairns Collection of American Women Writers. *Six Months in Mexico* (New York: American Publishers, [1888]. HathiTrust Digital Library), p. 5.

Compared to other nationalities she encountered during her trip around the world, Bly's earlier text on her stay in Mexico appears at first almost positive in its descriptions of the locals. She praises them as being polite, honest and their cleanliness as "overwhelming,"<sup>145</sup> which, on the other hand, indicates a racist presumption that they would or could be "dirty" —a common stereotype that Bly also addresses in her text. Bly's text contains numerous detailed descriptions of the Mexican women, such as their clothes, looks, family life and work. She travels with her mother and expresses her aim to get to know the Mexican culture better, and therefore changes her accommodation from staying in a hotel to living in a local Mexican family.

Her depictions of the people she encounters and her depiction of the city, however, heavily depends on the region she visits. Even though some parts of her travel report appear seemingly "positive" in their judgment, other regions are again displayed negatively and compared hierarchically to the U.S. or to Mexican regions that she judged more positively. When she visits El Paso at the beginning of her journey, which is still in the U.S., she describes her first impression from the Mexican town El Paso del Norte (today's Ciudad Juarez) which is directly nearby, at the other side of the Rio Grande:

"It is not possible to find a greater contrast than these two cities form, side by side. El Paso is a progressive, lively, American town; El Paso del Norte is as far back in the Middle Ages, and as slow as it was when the first adobe hut was executed in 1680."<sup>146</sup> Again, Bly's text starts with a comparison, the creation of a hierarchy, before she has even entered Mexico, and, as other textual examples of her demonstrated already, she presents the visited nations often much lower in the hierarchical order than the United States. The

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<sup>145</sup> Nellie Bly and Cairns Collection of American Women Writers. *Six Months in Mexico* (New York: American Publishers, [1888]. HathiTrust Digital Library), p. 22.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

country is presented as backwards, slow and passive—again, commonly used attributions that are also present in other parts of Bly’s travel texts.

Interestingly, Bly uses different techniques to underline her credibility to the reader regarding her observations. One of these techniques is pointing to her encounter with a Mexican “gentleman”<sup>147</sup> who had spent several years in Europe and had “[...] been away long enough to learn that the Mexicans had very strange ideas [...]”<sup>148</sup> He tells Bly amusedly how the local Mexicans took a long time to understand how wheelbarrows were used, and that they thought the first trains to be the devil, and the passengers as his workers.<sup>149</sup> Bly recounts the stories of her Mexican co-passenger in detail here, which clearly aims to amuse the reader about the “silliness” and the cluelessness of the locals. However, by letting a Mexican narrate these stories, she avoids portraying herself as a traveler who personally makes fun of the visited nation’s “ignorance” of technology and progress—instead, she presents these stories through the eyes of a “progressive” local—progressive of course only because he spent several years in the West, and can therefore not only purge herself of any guilt of making fun of the Mexicans as being uneducated and backwards, but also use his “expertise” as a local to substantiate her own judgment that she made before about El Paso del Norte.

Another technique that Bly uses to verify her observations is to directly acknowledge the limitations at some parts. When she retells the story that the train conductor tells her, of a Laguna in Chihuahua which had such strong alkaline water, that it burned the Americans’ skins and made the fish inside the lake white and uneatable—Bly adds: “I give his stories for what they are worth; I did not investigate to prove their

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

truth.”<sup>150</sup> By specifically mentioning at this point that she could not verify the conductor’s story and therefore cannot stand for the truth here, she indirectly indicates that she speaks the truth when she talks about her own observations. By directly pointing out a possible lack of truth at this point, she thereby underlines the accuracy of the other parts of her report and accentuates her own aspirations of honesty towards her readers.

This episode is followed directly by another one that relates to the problematic topic of truth in travelogues and journalism, and also gives a hint to the reader regarding the possible “responsibility” for such untruths. The conductor tells Bly and her mother:

We do not think much of the people who come here to write us up [...] for they never tell the truth. One woman who came down here to make herself famous pressed me one day for a story. I told her that out in the country the natives roasted whole hogs, heads and all, without cleaning, and so served them on the table. She jotted it down as a rare item.<sup>151</sup>

Bly’s mother then replies to the conductor by asking him how he could expect strangers to correctly present his country in their writings, when he, as a local, tells them lies. As a response, the conductor then flushes and replies that he had not thought about it before from this perspective.<sup>152</sup>

In this episode—whether it truly occurred this way or not—Bly addresses again the subject matter of truth, and the misrepresentation of some cultures in travel reports. However, in this case the cause of such misrepresentation is pointed out to be caused by a local’s—the conductor’s—mocking of a visitor. It appears as if Bly uses this story to address the locals’ perspective and their—maybe even in Bly’s time sometimes expressed—feeling of being misrepresented and depicted negatively by visitors. However, at the same time Bly puts the ball back into his court by stressing that the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.



misrepresentation, at least in this instance, is based on the conductor's lie to the visitor, thereby indicating that false representations in newspaper or travel reports might be caused by (deliberate) misinformation by the locals.

Bly and her mother then reach the City of Mexico. Even though Bly seems fascinated with the street scenes in the city, she soon switches her focus on the inhabitants and the poverty that she encounters.

It is not a clean, inviting crowd, with blue eyes and sunny hair I would take you among, but a short, heavy-set people, with almost black skins, topped off with the blackest eyes and masses of raven hair, and are invaded by no hope that through effort their lives may amount to something.<sup>153</sup>

Bly's description of the inhabitants of Mexico City apparently aims to scare the reader away from any potential visit. The crowd is labeled as uninviting and dirty, and Bly's remark on their non-blue eyes and non-light hair— therefore the opposite of the western stereotype with light skin, hair and eyes—can be categorized as racist as it links hair and eye color, and therefore "race", to the "dirtiness of an uninviting crowd." Beside its racist connotation, this link appears as well far-fetched, as the streets of western cities like New York or London suffered as well from extensive poverty and dirt in the nineteenth century and Bly had to problem to mingle with factory workers and asylum inhabitants in the U.S. Even though Bly appears to speak from a point of compassion when she argues that there is "no hope" for the poor locals despite their efforts, at the same time her empathy is accompanied by the colonial habit of speaking about the "Other" as a homogeneous, voiceless group and therefore denying their individuality and autonomy. Bly barely talks to any of the locals, and therefore judges them again as objects instead of as human individuals. After her remarks on the general population, Bly focusses on the most vulnerable part of the society; the local women and their children, stating:

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

Nine women out of ten in Mexico have babies. [...] it is no unusual sight to see a woman carry three babies at one time in her rebozo. [...] No baby smiles or babyish tears are ever seen on their faces. At the earliest date they are old, and appear to view life just as it is to them in all its blackness. They know no home, they have no school, and before they are able to talk they are taught to carry bundles on their heads or backs, or pack a younger member of the family while the mother carries merchandise, by which she gains a living. Their living is scarcely worth such a title. They merely exist. Thousands of them are born and raised on the streets.<sup>154</sup>

The picture that Bly draws here is a picture of hopelessness, of misery and forlornness.

She continues with her previous claim of lives that are so hopeless and “black,” that even the babies do not behave “babyish” and smile and cry, but instead recognize at an early age the misery that is awaiting them. Bly’s description, again, contains empathy and much more sympathy for the Mexican women and children than for other nationalities, like the Chinese. But despite this empathy, her depictions still appear judgmental and from a position of power. She claims that their lives are not, or “scarcely,” worth the title but instead they only exist—meaning their lives lack intensity, emotions and meaning, and they exist like empty shells of human beings. But Bly makes these claims based on her observations of their poverty and their lives on the streets, but one has to ask: what does she know about their dreams, hopes and family lives? Her judgement of their lives as joyless and hopeless existences is based on her own privileged cultural, economical and social perspective in life, and she projects her own feelings about their situation—therefore her expectation of how she would feel in their shoes—onto them, without talking to them or interrogating them about their own perspectives. Therefore, Bly speaks, as in other parts, on behalf of her observed “objects” and expresses her own point of view instead of theirs.

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 19

In her remarks on the poverty of some of the Mexicans, Bly brings up the same incongruous comparison of women and slaves that she already included in her article on the white female factory workers a year earlier. Even though Bly, as an American citizen and someone who was interested in social rights, would likely have been knowledgeable about the treatment of slaves in the United States, several of her writings display a belittlement of the horrendous treatment of slaves, as also visible in her text on Mexico, when she states that the poor in Mexico City are “worse off by thousands of times than were the slaves of the United States. Their lives are hopeless, and they know it.”<sup>155</sup> Bly’s comparison appears to come from a position of compassion with the people living in extreme poverty whom she encountered during her stay in the country. Despite the poverty in Mexico, that Bly rightfully acknowledges, and the precarious living circumstances of the people there, it appears highly problematic to compare the trade of enslaved humans, their deprivation of human rights and their abuse to the saddening poverty of humans who were at least legally free to make their own choices and who were not separated from their families and transported thousands of miles away.

Surprisingly uncritical at times appears also Bly’s position on colonialism and the repression of the colonized countries. When she visits the port city Aden, located in today’s Yemen, and occupied by the British at the time, she comments:

From the highest peak of the black, rocky mountain, probably 1700 feet above sea level, floated the English flag. As I traveled on and realized more than ever before how the English have stolen almost all, if not all, desirable sea-ports, I felt an increased respect for the level-headedness of the English government, and I cease to marvel at the pride with which Englishmen view their flag floating in so many different climes and over so many different nationalities.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>156</sup> Nellie Bly. *Around the World in Seventy-Two Days...*, p. 203

While this statement could be interpreted as some spark of irony, other parts of Bly's text underline that she was indeed impressed by the high number of English conquests and flags raised, and the rule of the queen: "The loyalty of the English to their Queen on all occasions, and at all times, had won my admiration. [...] I could not help admiring the undying respect the English have for their royal family."<sup>157</sup> Even though Bly fought for women's rights and was much interested in the lives of socially disadvantaged groups, she did not address the injustice that the colonialization of the English, and other governments, implemented in the oppressed countries and on their population. Instead, she expresses her admiration for the pride of the English when they look at their raised flag in so many colonized and oppressed countries around the world at that point.

An equally uncritical view on colonialism is present in Vely's travel descriptions. She attributes orderliness to the "right" kind of colonizing country. In Bridgetown, Barbados, she states: "Bridgetown auf Barbados als englische Kolonie zeigte Ordnung und frisches Blühen der Geschäfte, recht im Gegensatz zu den französischen Plätzen und den Negerrepubliken"<sup>158</sup> (Bridgetown in Barbados, as an English colony, showed order and new thriving of the businesses, quite in contrast to the French places and the Negro republics).

Therefore, a hierarchy is not only created in terms of the "worthiness" and "development" of foreign cultures, but also aiming to rate how "effective" certain countries are operating their colonies. As Bly's and Vely's examples highlight, the British colonies were often presented as especially well organized, clean and effective, and mentioned as a stark contrast to those countries that were no longer under colonial rule ("Negerrepubliken"/"Negro republics") and mostly displayed negatively as dirty and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>158</sup> Emma Vely. *Mein schönes und schweres Leben...*, p. 386.

chaotic. This technique was used to reinforce the message which was already brought up regarding the “native’s” character—e.g. being childish, lazy, passive—and aimed to show that the deficiencies of these “lower” cultures were not only present on an individual level of the populations’ character traits, but also visible on a macro-level through dirty, unkempt townscapes.

All in all, by generating this picture of “failure” of the countries’ inhabitants on an individual and communal level, Bly, Vely and other female travelers therefore strengthened the messages of colonialist empires of the necessary development that the colonized countries would ultimately experience through the colonization.

A common behaviour of westerners who traveled to colonies or the “Orient” was also a display of social behaviour that they would not exhibit in their own societies and cultures, which demonstrates a lack of respect. Whereas taking someone’s picture without permission, or stopping at an open door or window to stare inside a stranger’s house would commonly be perceived as rude behaviour and not be displayed by women of the middle- or upper class, this behaviour was commonly seen as permitted when visiting other countries. Vely outright acknowledges these differently perceived norms and how she displays behaviours in her interaction with the foreign inhabitants that she would not display back home in Germany. In St. John’s, she stops to look into the open door of a house, stating: “[...] auf Reisen in fremden Ländern ist ja etwas Neugier erlaubt”<sup>159</sup> ([...] a little curiosity is allowed when traveling in foreign countries). In the same manner she argues when she describes how she interrupts a school lecture during her visit of St. Kitts: “In Basseterre auf der Insel Kitts besuchte ich eine Schule, an welcher der Zufall mich vorüber führte. Ich hatte es mit der auf mein Gewissen zu ladenden

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 384.

Störung nicht ganz genau 'hier draußen' genommen und war am offenen Fenster stehen geblieben."<sup>160</sup>

(In Basseterre on the island Kitts I visited a school, where I was led by happenstance. The interruption did not prey too much on my conscience 'out here' and I had stopped at the open window).

During Vely's visit of Tripoli, she and her fellow travelers observe a caravan with camels, men with turbans, women, "half-naked" children who stare at them with "huge velvet eyes," and the group starts to take pictures of them without asking or even talking to the members of the caravan, treating them merely as objects, as supernumerary actors of a joyful Oriental play that is performed for their amusement.

As Vely's own statements "hier draußen" (out here) already indicates, western travelers felt as if they were not only geographically in a place "outside" of their norm, but also behavioural, and therefore were permitted to cross social boundaries that they would not cross within their own culture and living environment. However, this perception was of course heavily influenced by the perceived hierarchy of the other culture—a perceived "lower culture." like the 'Oriental' one, therefore permitted the transgression of boundaries, whereas similar behaviour would probably not have been displayed in other Northern and Western European countries or the United States.

Travelers who, for example, visited the U.S. would much less likely perceive this culture to be hierarchically lower and would be more careful in terms of the transgression of cultural boundaries—the level of respect for another western culture was likely incomparably higher than for colonized and/or "Oriental" nations, which becomes notable in the respectful interactions that Bly and Vely have with other westerners they

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<sup>160</sup> Emma Vely. "Von einer Westindienexkursion...", p. 394.

encounter during their journeys, compared to the degrading comments on people of color.

Research on Bly that was published in the past illustrates how effective Bly was with her creation of an image of someone who was always siding with the poor and disadvantaged members of society. Ehrlich claims that Bly “became an effective voice for social reform and the nemesis of law breakers, scoundrels and those who exploited the poor and the helpless,”<sup>161</sup> and similar characterizations can even be found in recent research: “Always siding with the poor and the disenfranchised,” states Bragg.<sup>162</sup> Even though this cannot be declared to be untrue—as Bly indeed raised her voice for the disadvantaged in the American society, such as low-paid workers, women or the mentally ill—this is only one side of the coin.

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that the other side of the “Nellie Bly-coin” was influenced by contemporary racism and colonial ways of thinking. Even though a reformer and advocate in some ways, it becomes clear that Bly did not advocate for all disadvantaged individuals equally—ethnicity was a decisive factor in her perception of others, including other women, and must be considered when her activism is brought up.

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<sup>161</sup> Elisabeth Ehrlich. *Nellie Bly* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), p. 105.

<sup>162</sup> Diane Bragg. “Nellie Bly: Flying in the Face of Tradition”. In *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-century reporting*, ed. D.B. Sachsmann and D.W. Bulla (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), p. 269 (quoted after Vengadasalam, p. 454.)

#### IV. Conclusion

The preceding analysis of Vely's and Bly's travelogues and their positions on the women's rights movement pointed to a great number of similarities between the two authors, but revealed surprisingly few differences between Vely and Bly regarding the display of female alterity. Even though the American women's movement of the nineteenth century originally had close ties to the abolitionist movement and the discussion of "race"—and the exclusion of women of color in the movement—accompanied the middle-class women's movement, Bly, as an "activist for the socially disadvantaged" shows little to no awareness of her own racism, of that of others around her, of western racial stereotypes and hierarchies. Like Vely, she divides the encountered foreign cultures in more or less "advanced" groups, and attributes different levels of worthiness to them.

Both Vely and Bly aim to create images of themselves as open-minded travelers in their writings, aiming to appear interested in the situation of women's position in society, which for example is demonstrated in Vely's description of how she treated the women of color who she encountered much better and more inclusive than her female American companions, or Bly's concern about the living conditions of white factory workers—which is in stark contrast to the depiction of foreign women she encounters and judges during her travels. Vely for example would not have specifically included this scene and her interaction with the women of color, (whether or not this actually happened the way she describes it) if she did not aim to create a positive, progressive image of herself.

However, for both Vely and Bly, the findings of this project reveal that their aim for women's equality in reality only applied to white women, which becomes very clear in the contradictory remarks which both authors make. Even though they showed interest in the lives of foreign women whom they encountered during their travels, they



did not see the “Oriental” or non-white women as equal “sisters,” as their strongly derogatory and racist remarks on numerous occasions demonstrate. Both Bly and Vely display the visited countries and cities, and their inhabitants often as “dirty,” which conveys to the reader a negative image of cultures that are described as being not able to take care of their infrastructure and personal hygiene. Therefore, both authors reinforce a colonial propaganda of cultures who are “underdeveloped” and unable to care for themselves without the guidance of “civilized nations,” e.g. western countries.

Additionally, this project also points to the insufficiently researched connection between the women’s movement and racism, or more specifically the link between the first-wave feminism, women’s travel literature and racism. Even though contemporary scholarship increasingly focusses on the intersectionality of racism and gender, its historical context is rarely considered. The here examined comparative case study of Vely and Bly suggests that white female travelers—even though they were advocates for women’s rights in their own societies—demonstrated the significant imprint that contemporary racism and colonialism had on their world-view, their view on female alterity and the reflection of these views on their own identity as white women.

However, limitations of this comparative study must be pointed out as well. Even though the comparison of Vely’s and Bly’s position on women’s rights and the reflection of their stance in their travel reports points to neglected perspectives in the scholarship and the fact that feminist travelers were equally influenced by contemporary racist outlooks, this comparison should not be perceived as a general representation of the positions of the majority of feminist travelers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the U.S. and in Germany. As short references in the analysis demonstrated, female travelers of the contemporary period displayed all kinds of variations in their positions on the women’s movement (such as the disapproval from

Getrude Bell or Mary Kingsley). Furthermore, as pointed out in the first chapter, the women's movement in North America and in Europe displayed a great variation of different positions, "radicalism" of some wings, progressive thinking in other groups and strong conservatism of other wings. Whereas a few feminists supported an inclusion of women of color in the white middle-class movement, others argued strongly against it. Given the enormous variety of political mindsets and social and biographical backgrounds of women in the suffrage movement, it would therefore be erroneous to perceive the present analysis as a general representation of links between the movement and female travel literature.

Instead, this project should be perceived as an indication that previous assumptions about female travelers, and especially about those travelers who were activists in the women's movement, might be faulty and that further research on the individual links and connections, and the feminist's approach to "Other," foreign women must be conducted in future.

Scholarly work that continues to neglect the examination of this historical link in future, would therefore continue to contribute to existing inequalities and power structures. Dietrich rightly concludes:

Zur Reproduktion dieser [rassistischen] Strukturen trägt auch die immer noch vorherrschende Privilegierung der Kategorie Geschlecht in der Geschlechterforschung und in feministischen Auseinandersetzungen bei, mit der eine Fortschreibung und Unsichtbarmachung rassifizierter Verhältnisse verbunden ist.<sup>163</sup>

(To the reproduction of these [racist] structures contributes the still prevailing privileging of the category 'gender' in gender studies and in feminist debates, which is tied to the continuation and invisibility of racialized relationships.)

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<sup>163</sup> Anette Dietrich. *Weißer Weiblichkeit...*, p. 381

Dietrich's conclusion also applies to the research on travel literature. As indicated before, the contribution of women as travelers and authors to prevailing racism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has barely been considered in the scholarship.

This project demonstrates that the category of "race" was a defining and crucial part of the white travelers' identities—and this was also valid for traveling women and also for women's rights activists such as Bly and Vely. Even though their interest in women's position in society is visible in their travelogues due to a stronger focus on foreign women's living conditions, habits, clothes and general appearance, the analysis reveals that this interest did not result in a perceived equality. Even though the authors appear to depict themselves as more open-minded—such as by addressing the foreign women as "sisters" or by pointing out how "open-minded" they interacted with them—great parts of their travel reports reveal that their white skin color was clearly a segregating factor that led to a—perceived and contemporarily real—higher position on the hierarchical ladder of society. A fundamental difference between Bly's and Vely's portrayal of female "Otherness," as well as to other western travelers of the same period, can therefore not be found, despite their activism for women's rights.

Neglecting these complex intersections in future research would therefore only extend the past ignorance on the historical intersection of women, colonialism, and travel literature. Furthermore, a rise of popular literature in recent years on traveling women or outstanding female personalities—to name Keay's or Strohmeyr's works here as examples<sup>164</sup>—can potentially pose a risk of presenting one-dimensional images of the women by neglecting negative aspects and views of female travelers of the nineteenth

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<sup>164</sup> Armin Strohmeyr. *Abenteuer reisender Frauen. 15 Porträts* (München: Piper Verlag, 2012) and Julia Keay. *Mehr Mut als Kleider im Gepäck. Frauen reisen im 19. Jahrhundert durch die Welt*. (München: Piper Verlag, 2009).

and early twentieth centuries, if racist statements are excluded from reprints and popular literature to not “stain” the women’s reputation.

The analysis of Vely’s and Bly’s texts demonstrated that even women’s rights activists—which, from today’s perspective, one would have expected to be more inclusive of other minorities—were heavily influenced by contemporary colonial racist stereotypes and hierarchies created by the west, and therefore displayed similar levels of racism in their writings like other (female) travelers, who did not have any involvement in the women’s movement or created an image of themselves as feminists. This displayed racism appears in Vely’s and Bly’s writings alike, and therefore disproves the assumption that the varying historical background of the women’s movement in the United States and in Germany resulted in a more inclusive and nonracist depiction of foreign women in Bly’s travel reports—instead, pronounced racism is visible in the writings of both authors.

Based on the findings of this project and the lack of existing research in the field, recommendations for future scholarly work include the examination of feminist positions (or the lack thereof) of female travelers at the end of the nineteenth century. Even though, from a contemporary perspective, it appears obvious that social and feminist activists would likely display a greater awareness of racism and discrimination in their writings, the present project demonstrates that this assumption is faulty—at least in the case of Nellie Bly and Emma Vely.

Examining this connection can lead to a greater nuance in the contemporary glorification of female historical figures and awareness of the fact, that female travelers—and also female women’s right activists—participated in the racialization of cultural groups and corroborated contemporary discrimination of other cultures with their travel reports and the negative display of other, non-western nationalities.

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