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Discovering colonial India:
The construal of discursive social identities
in women's travel writings

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ABSTRACT

As a result of transportation development and socio-economic changes, 19th century upper middle class British women began travelling and discovering many countries of the British Empire of which they provided accounts. The objective of this study is to bring to the fore the recurring lexical features used in authentic non-literary Victorian women's travel writings forming a corpus. This was especially compiled, by downloading digitalised texts available in dedicated sites with the purpose of analysing the relatively most frequent key words and clusters used to construe discursive social identities while interacting with different social groups encountered in India. The methodology adopted is a mixed one. It integrates a corpus assisted approach with discourse analysis of the emerging data. The results suggest Victorian women travellers used discourse not only to construe distinct social identities linked to their awareness of England's role in India, and to demarcate their identity from the 'other' but also to highlight hybrid identities in the colonial socio-cultural context.

Keywords: social identities, travel writings, discourse, Victorian women travellers, corpus linguistics.

1. Introduction

The 19th century was the period in which Britain experienced rapid technological expansion, improved transportation, growing urbanisation and social development that encouraged upper middle class British women to travel and defy social taboos by traversing and discovering the Indian

subcontinent (Samson 2020). Through their travel writings, which included memoires, outdoor literature, guidebooks, nature writing and travel journals, women not only contravened societal norms but they were also viewed as challengers of what was considered a masculine genre, or challengers never completely free from British moral codes and interests. Furthermore, in describing and providing a subjective perspective of all they encountered, Victorian women not only narrated activities they would not have been likely to participate in whilst still in England, but they also foregrounded their subjective discursive identities while discovering India.

Drawing on Benwell and Stokoe (2006), the term 'identity' is considered in its broadest sense by referring to who people are to each other, how difference is approached and how different identities are construed. In this study, therefore, unlike most of the extant gender, socio-ideological literature, the focus is on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the linguistic features characterising women's representations of the cultural and social differences they encountered in colonial India, how diversity is encoded in their discourses construing their and other identities in their travel writings.

In order to analyse the recurring linguistic features used in these texts within a societal value-system, a corpus of non-literary Victorian Women's Travel Writings in India (VIWOTWI) was compiled with the aim of attempting to answer the following questions:

1) Which are the relatively most frequent key words and clusters used in VIWOTWI?
2) How do the clusters recurrently encode the diverse discursive social identities construed in VIWOTWI?

The present paper is structured as follows: section 2 provides an overview of Victorian women's travel writings; section 3 introduces the concept of identity; section 4 describes the corpus and the methodology adopted whilst the data are analysed in section 5. Key conclusions are drawn in section 6.

2. Victorian women's travel writings

During the past decades there has been a growing interest in 19th century women's travel writings which has not only extended our knowledge but has also greatly nuanced our understanding of women's contribution to the genre. The 1980s, for example, witnessed pioneering anthologies of

women's early travel writing (Hamalian 1981; Birkett 1989; etc.), thus demonstrating an extensive female tradition in what many had assumed to be an overwhelmingly masculine genre (Thompson 2017). The stereotype that emerged from these studies was of a few eccentric, exceptional "spinsters abroad", overtly rebelling against the gender constraints of Victorian society and limiting their writings to the domestic realm of the private, often communal, journal/diary (Millim 2016) that contributed to colonial discourse and imperial identity (Bhabha 1984).

The following decade was characterised by a number of seminal literary-critical and theoretical works on the topic (Mills 1991, 1994; Frawley 1994; Bohls 1994; Morgan 1996; and others) with the mainstream claim that women travel writers constructed their texts within a range of power nexuses. That is, the power of patriarchy which acted upon them as middle class women through discourses of femininity and the power of colonialism that influenced them in relation to people of the countries described in their books. It is the convergence and conflict of these two power structures which were seen as determining the styles and content of their books (Mills 1994). Other studies attempted to illustrate the imperial mentality and the implications of imperialism in women travellers' identity formation (Morgan1996) with the result that travel was considered less as a physical act and more as a cultural one with its own language, literature, and ways of creating meaning.

The paradigms and perspectives which had been established by previous research have lately been extended to many different branches of the genre (McEwan 2000; Anderson 2006; Mackenzie 2012; Broome Saunders 2014). Some studies have focused on the cultural features of travel writing (Pratt 2007), others on the ideological construct iterated by women writers in the service of the Raj (Agnew 2017), or on how they subverted the constraints of Victorian gender discourses, thus nourishing proto-feminism (Lewis 2013) and power relations inscribed in the traveller's gaze (Ghose 2000).

By contrast, other studies typified by a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach (Sinor 2002) have counterbalanced their stigmatisation of women's travel accounts as informal and marginal documents by foregrounding their heteroglossic features in which multiple languages co-exist and interact in the combination of different traditions (Delafield 2009). This means that travel accounts might be mixed with those of a household, or with business reflections in different forms such as a bare-boned journal or log-book, a guidebook, or an emotionally effusive private diary. Furthermore, Bellanca (2007) underscores how journals or other forms of

travel writing are closely engaged with their historical context and can shed light on the multitude of overlapping discourses that pervade the culture in which they originated.

More recently, scholars have recognised that women's experiences and representations of India are to be seen as shaped by multiple, intersectional factors such as gender, age, class, financial position, education, political ideals, arts and professions (e.g. medicine, nursing). Their work is still often seen on the generic borders between scribal and print culture (Thompson 2017; Colbert 2017; Howell 2017; Mulligan 2016), gradually evolving into autobiographical genres; others have considered it as a means of self-reflection and an attempt at self-control during interactions with the Indian 'other', since, as Poon (2008) claims, the performance of Englishness constantly skirts the border between: a) a self-possession of "knowledge" into England's role in India – often characterised by uncertainty regarding its colonial involvement – and an in-dissociable form of guilt about its historical effects; and b) Englishness as an identity rooted in knowledge of the Indian society and culture, although primarily represented and mediated as a form of personal seeing.

3. Identity

Identity, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), is related to a dialectical relationship between particular discursive events and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: on the one hand, the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourses; on the other hand, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is, at the same time, constituted by it. Through discourse, social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between various interacting social groups, as in this case Victorian women travellers interacting with Indians. For Koller (2009) discourse practice is inherently linked to the power of discourse participants, as it is organised in the wider social formation and its institutions, in which text producers, distributors and receivers act in particular roles. Linguistically, in an analysis of collective identity, context is thus crucial, because the representation of social actors is shaped, if not determined, by discursive and social practices and formations (Koller 2009).

Within this perspective, the self is a crucial element, since the ability to self-reflect is a pre-condition of imaginative rehearsal of behaviour which

is attained through linguistic communication (Layder 2003). It is from this specific condition that identity emerges and can be seen as the product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices, since it is fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). This means that identity is characterised by complexity, and it usually cannot be directly linked to any specific feature of language, although it can be expressed and constructed by various linguistic means and meanings in inter-subjective relations of sameness and difference, power and disempowerment (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Difference, in particular, is construed and encapsulated via the notion of 'othering'. For Fabian (2000), the 'other' is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made. Since the eighteenth century in Europe, the 'other' has been construed as negative. For instance, the savage is represented without history, writing, religion, morals, as part of a vanishing world which consequently required documentation (Hallam and Street 2000).

Such negativity increased with the advent of industrialisation, bureaucracy and the notion of progress which reinforced the opposition between civilised and savage/primitive, subject and object, forming not only relations of difference and distance, but also of spatio-temporal remoteness which was considered a necessary conceptual category for the constitution of the 'other' (Hallam and Street 2000). Othering is therefore considered a process of differentiation and demarcation (Lister 2004) by which 'the line is drawn between "us" and "them" – between the more and the less powerful – through which social distance is established and maintained' (Lister 2004: 101) as in the case of colonial India.

This view entails constructions of the self or 'in-group' (the English), and the other or 'out-group' (the Indians), through identification of what the former has and what the latter lacks in relation to the former (Brons 2015: 70). It is, therefore, the means of defining into existence a group perceived to be 'inferior' (Schwalbe et al. 2000). For Jensen (2011) the concept of 'othering' signifies 'classed', 'raced' and 'gendered' processes through which powerful groups simultaneously claim a monopoly on crucial knowledge, use ways of actively demonstrating their power and construct/exclude less powerful others as pathological, 'dangerous' and/or morally inferior. But the concept of 'othering'' also attempts to capture the practices and processes through which the 'outsider' is produced.

The representation of otherness through language, as Hall (1997) claims, is central to the processes by which meaning is produced; consequently, dominant or hegemonic groups can exert control over

processes of representation, while representations of otherness can also be read as inverted representation of those doing the othering (Hall 1997) in discourse. Discourse, then, is not just a set of textual features but it embodies socially shared assumptions and practices that allow, as in this case, Victorian women travellers to construe discursive representations of the Indians as well as of themselves in the context of colonial India.

4. Corpus and methods

In an attempt to answer the research questions of this study, a corpus of Victorian Women's Travel Writings in India (VIWOTWI) consisting of 7,106,099 words was compiled. The texts forming the corpus were selected according to their authors' gender, content and the historical period in which they were written. Moreover, all the texts in VIWOTWI are published, non-literary accounts in forms varying from narratives to recollections and letters written by travel writers, educational social reformers, military officers' wives, journalists, biologists and botanical artists. The works in VIWOTWI are listed in Table1.

Table 1. Works in VIWOTWI

Author	Year	Titles	Words
Billington, M.	1895	*A woman in India*	570,561
Carpenter, M.	1868	*Six months in India*	492,344
Eden, E.	1872	*Letters from India* Vol. I.	711,824
Eden, E.	1872	*Letters from India* Vol. II.	320,026
Eden, E.	1867	*Letters written to her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India*	625,483
North, M.	1894	*Recollections of a happy life. India*	65,050
Parks, F.	1850	*Wanderings of a pilgrim*	1,037,078
Postans, M.	1838	*Western India* Vol. I.	301,168
Postans, M.	1838	*Western India* Vol. II.	284,776
Roberts E.	1835	*Scene and characteristics of Hindostan* Vol. I.	693,824
Roberts, E.	1837	*Scene and characteristics of Hindostan* Vol. II.	418,192
Roberts, E.	1837	*Scene and characteristics of Hindostan* Vol. III.	441,667
Savory, I.	1900	*A sportswoman in India*	572,050

Firstly, by drawing on Partington (2004, 2009), a corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADS) was applied to VIWOTWI, since the corpus is used for replicable quantitative techniques. These allow us to identify and qualitatively interpret units of discourse construing reality, social identities and relationships.

The analysis started by applying Word Smith Tools (WST) 7.0 (Scott 2016) to VIWOTWI, in order to extract the relatively most frequent key word place-names and related nouns. My choice was based on the assumption that place-names are linked to spatial and social identity which are crucial for a sense of being in VIWOTWI.

The key words are calculated by comparing the frequency of each word in the word-list of VIWOTWI with the frequency of the same word/s in a reference word-list. A word is considered key in a key word list if it is unusually frequent in comparison with what one would expect on the basis of the larger word-list of the reference corpus (RC) (Scott 2016). The RC used in this study is a Corpus of Late Modern British English Extended Version (CLMETEV) – Dept. Linguistics, Leuven – of 15 million words.[1]

Secondly, the relatively most frequent key word clusters[2] referring to the construal of social identity in VIWOTWI were analysed qualitatively.

5. Analysis

The relatively most frequent key words – *India*, *Calcutta* and *Indian* – indicated in Table 2, were extracted by comparing VIWOTWI with the RC.

In Table 2, the first column shows the key word in VIWOTWI; the second its frequency in the source text(s)/VIWOTWI; the third, the percentage of the key word frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts the key word is included in; the fifth, the key word frequency in the reference corpus and in the last column the p value, that is, the keyness value of the item under consideration.

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[1] The Corpus of Late Modern British English Extended Version (CLMETEV) – Dept. Linguistics, Leuven – includes various text genres: personal letters, literary fiction, scientific writing by men/women belonging to different social classes of 18th-19th century British society. The texts range between 1710 and 1920 and the sources include Project Gutenberg, the Oxford Text Archive and the Victorian Women Writers project.

[2] Clusters refer to two or more words found repeatedly near each other in some environments more than others (Hunston 2011).

Table 2. VIWOTWI key words by comparison with RC

N	Key word	VIWOTWI Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	%	P
1	INDIA	1,712	0.14	15	1,287	–	0,0000000000
2	CALCUTTA	911	0.07	12	73	–	0,0000000000
3	INDIAN	606	0.05	12	1,623	–	0,0000000000

It is no surprise that the first three relatively most frequent key words refer to place-names, since VIWOTWI is a corpus of travel writings and place-names are an important part of any geographical and cultural environment. They identify geographical entities of different kinds and represent irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of being. A place-name usually exists in relation to a geographical object and the address function of place-names is seen as fundamental (Andersson 1994; Helleland et al. 2012). However, place names also function at an emotive, ideological community-creating level and an analysis of the key clusters can significantly aid in the highlighting of the various meanings India acquires in construing identity, while referring to its territorial ideology in the colonial period.

Furthermore, clusters allow us not only to look at the immediate environment (co-text) of a search word, but also to link it outwards to the wider meaning context. This permits the isolation of lexical units and the foregrounding of the connotations which give sense to the place names in this particular context. Contextual meaning is therefore vital as, on the one hand, simple surface equivalence can hide important connotative meanings of proper nouns. On the other hand, different situational contexts develop clusters which are unique to that environment which, in this case, is related to the key word *India*.

5.1 India

India's relatively most frequent cluster *the natives of India* (np+prep+n) emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words is shown in Table 3.

The discourse functions of the four-word cluster[3] *the natives of India*, which was found in 35 occurrences within VIWOTWI, were analysed by considering the cluster's proximity to a consistent series of collocates that

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[3]   Four words left and right of the key word India.

share its semantic preferences beyond the cluster itself. *The natives of India* is repeatedly used to single out particular attributes of the Indians as can be seen, for instance, in example (1), wherein they are compared to animals for the way in which they sit, thereby implying that the country is uncivilised and, consequently, the natives are unfit to belong to society.[4] Such an attribution highlights the writer's conviction of the relevance given to positioning people in their exact place within the Victorian social hierarchy.[5]

Table 3. Cluster key word India

N	Cluster	Freq.	Length
1	THE NATIVES OF INDIA	35	4

(1)   The monkeys sat down in the attitude which *the natives of India* seem to have borrowed from these denizens of the woods.

Individual social values are further brought to the fore in example (2) to underline the negative nature of the natives who react to situations in a bizarre manner, according to the members of English society.

(2)   *The natives of India* form an extraordinary compound of apathy and vivacity. In the midst of noises and tumult, which would stun or distract the most iron-nerved European in the world, they will maintain an imperturbable calmness; while, in ordinary matters, where there appears to be nothing to disturb their equanimity, they will vociferate and gesticulate as if noise and commotion were absolutely essential to their happiness.

In examples (1) and (2), the encoder presents phenomena from her point of view with her personal impressions of relations, qualities, positions and directions in space. The linguistic choices, apart from describing, give

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[4]   Alexander and Struan (2013) categorised into sense-families the evolution of social concepts of incivility in the colonial and post-colonial periods. Specifically, considering Indians similar to monkeys refers to wildness, that is, foreigners considered beast-like. The consideration emphasises the way in which not being part of society is akin to being animalistic, a frequent conceptualisation found in many Western societies. It constitutes one of the earliest beast-to-man metaphors recorded in English.

[5]   In the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online* the entry for the noun 'native' indicates that the term may refer to: "A member of an indigenous ethnic group as distinguished from foreigners, especially in European colonies. Frequently with a suggestion of inferior status, culture, etc., and hence considered offensive" (5.a).

expression to associations, attitudes, feelings and moods that the Indians release in the women travellers by the use of evaluative expressions – *extraordinary compound, imperturbable calmness, absolutely essential* – which usually encode a positive connotation whereas here acquire a negative one, since they refer to what seems to contravene the norms of what is considered polished, according to the English behavioural standards. Thus, the traveller ascribes a negative identity to the Indians by differentiating them from the English.

Such differences are attributed or perceived by the English living in or outside India and they provide a social construct which is based on the description of the Indians' nature and manners. These contribute to construing a "place identity" that distinguishes it from any other while resembling that of an individual's "place identity" construct that is based on personal representations of images of a place (Peng et al. 2020) lacking civilisation, or characterised by ignorance, as can be seen in examples (3) and (4).

(3)   The aim of education must be to civilize, and through the medium of civilization, to Christianize *the natives of India.*

In example (3) the reference to what education should aim at implies the Indians are considered uncivilised and should therefore be converted to Christianity. Such an assertion recalls not only Alexander and Struan's (2013) investigation of how the English conceptualised 'incivility' through their travels and contacts with the outside world, but also Layder's (2005) concept of sociological dualism according to which an individual has subjective experiences but at the same time is never free of social involvements. In other words, the traveller's personal view of Indian culture and religion leads to providing a very partial description of the socio-cultural Indian context because, according to the ideology of the time, it appeared unworthy of attention. This, in turn, reproduces clusters of power and social organisation which claim group superiority (Sommer 2011; Osterhammel 1997). Moreover, example (3) reflects the rule underpinned by missionary doctrines based on the colonial conviction of being culturally superior to the Indians.

The women travellers' sense of superiority occurs also in example (4) wherein *our advantages* are represented as deriving from the ignorance of the Indians and not from the power of the English on whom the former rely. In addition, the use of the possessive adjective *our* foregrounds the traveller's social identification as a process in which an individual recognises herself as

a member of one social group or the larger English collectivity. Specifically, through identification of what the English have – *advantages* – and what the Indians lack – *intelligence* – in relation to the former, the 'other' or 'out-group' is framed (Brons 2015).

(4)   Many of our advantages have been hitherto derived from the ignorance of *the natives of India*.

5.2 Calcutta

Such contempt does not occur in the co-text of the relatively most frequent cluster *going down to Calcutta* (pv+prep+n) emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words of the key word *Calcutta* shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Cluster key word Calcutta

N	Cluster	Freq.	Length
1	GOING DOWN TO CALCUTTA	7	4

The discourse functions of the four-word cluster *going down to Calcutta*, found in 7 instances within VIWOTWI, were analysed by considering the cluster's proximity to a consistent series of collocates that share its semantic preferences beyond the cluster itself. The use of the cluster highlights a change in the writers' perspective which from a sense of superiority towards the Indians turns towards the English community and its life in India, thus projecting an emotive, community-creating level meaning related to the place name Calcutta. Indeed, by frequently using the first person personal pronoun I, the traveller suggests a more intimate relationship between her subjectivity and the broader Indian context as in example (5).

(5)   I have met hundreds of enormous boats, laden with cotton, *going down to Calcutta*, and other parts of the country; they are most remarkably picturesque.

In example (5), the traveller also provides an impressionistic action-recording description of life in the city, while defining identity as positioning the self and other (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) which, in this case, is the self and the life along the river. The description of the transportation of cotton provides a glimpse of the activities taking place in Calcutta and are connected to the use of the motion verb – *going down*. This highlights the spatial relation

between a path or linear entity and a landmark (Talmy 2003). Specifically, the river is the path along which motion – *going down* – is occurring and Calcutta with the rest of the country is the landmark. The description recalls what Richardson and Matloch (2007) claim to be a literal spatial description wherein the specific trading of cotton between England and her colony is represented and it creates a subjective social construct based on objective physical settings of the city (the river) that distinguishes it from others (Paasi 2009). Moreover, the use of the evaluative adjectives *enormous* and *picturesque*, the latter being boosted by the superlative *most remarkably*, provides a highly positive representation of what can be encountered in Calcutta wherein, however, only members of the traveller's in-group – the English – are referred to, as in example (6).

(6)   We set off half-an-hour earlier than usual, and, from the strength of the tide, were three hours *going down to Calcutta*. It was very fatiguing, and we shall hardly try it again.

The action-recording sentences in example (6) are characterised by the use of evaluative expressions – *very fatiguing*, *hardly try it again* – indicating the difficulties faced by the English in India while the choice of the first person plural pronoun *we* indicates the in-group relation between the encoder and the English group of people among whom the author is placed and with whom knowledge and goals, language, norms and values, attitudes and ideologies are shared. This suggests a contrast with the evaluations referring to the Indians in the key word cluster *the natives of India*.

Furthermore, the spatial descriptions of Calcutta not only provide a representation of daily life, but they also generate a visual image of the means implemented to accomplish activities. This allows the reader to imagine the scene and simulate motion whilst reading the travel writings back home in Britain (Samson 2020), thus creating a sense of belonging to a certain social group.

5.3 Indian

The relatively most frequent collocational cluster *of an Anglo Indian* (prep+np) with the key word *Indian* emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 tokens/words is shown in Table 5.

The discourse functions of the cluster *of an Anglo Indian*, found in 5 occurrences within VIWOTWI, were analysed by considering the cluster's proximity to a consistent series of collocates that share its semantic

preferences beyond the cluster itself. The key noun *Indian* does not refer to a native inhabitant of India, or to a person of Indian descent but to Anglo Indians who the *OED Online* defines as "a person of British descent born or living in India; or relating to people of British descent born or living in India. Now chiefly historical".

Table 5. Cluster key word Indian

N	Cluster	Freq.	Length
1	OF AN ANGLO INDIAN	5	4

In VIWOTWI, *Anglo Indian* seems to suggest a social identity threat to the English. The Anglo Indians are not seen as fully part of the English nor of the Indian population, they are not recognized as inhabitants of their own country. Consequently, their acceptance as part of the English in-group is in jeopardy in identity denial situations; they are denied in-group status because they do not resemble the prototypical group member (Que-Lam 2013) and its English cultural values. Therefore, their common in-group identity is called into question or unrecognized by the English group members in power. Identity denial of the Anglo Indians then becomes, in colonial India, a blatant questioning of belonging to one's own country.

Moreover, the cluster *Anglo Indians* highlights how these inhabitants of India are typified by debasing attributions that cast doubts on their nature while suggesting how naming is a form of social control (Brown 1993). *Anglo Indians* are addressed with unserious and ironic propositions which Nash (1985) describes as utterances requiring a truth condition for their ironic supposition constituted by acknowledged facts that foreground negative connotations. These suggest that the *Anglo Indians* are not fully included in the English in-group and are partially considered members of the Indian out-group within the dichotomies that are crucial for the practice and vision of social order. The *Anglo Indians*, within the phenomena presented from the traveller's viewpoint, seem to be a hybrid, due to their calmness and reluctance to react dynamically, as the English instead would. They need *very stirring* information to do so, as indicated in example (7):

(7)   Intelligence from the mother-country must be of a very stirring nature
        to excite the sobered feelings *of an Anglo-Indian.*

The linguistic choices also express the negative attitudes, feelings and moods that the Anglo Indians generate in the perceiver by the use of evaluative

expressions such as *slumbering energies*, which once again indicate people who react very slowly to important events, as shown in (8):

(8)   Stimulants of inferior power have little influence over the mind *of an Anglo-Indian,* whose slumbering energies can only be called forth upon great occasions.

The process of differentiation and demarcation (Lister 2004) by which the line is drawn between the English and the others living in India is further enhanced when describing the relationships between the Anglo Indians and the Indians, as can be seen in examples (9) and (10).

(9)   The mountaineers of this part of the country notwithstanding the wild and lawless life to which they had been long accustomed, have proved to be loyal and orderly subjects but they are sometimes to be seen amidst the retainers *of an Anglo-Indian*, and touching instances are related of their fidelity and attachment to those from whom they have received kindness.

(10)   The Hindoo servants *of an Anglo-Indian* establishment, when this festival comes rounds offer little presents of sweetmeats and toys to those members of the family who they think will condescend to accept them, the children and younger branches.

The *Anglo Indians*, being tolerant and *kind* with *lawless* and *wild* Indians working for them (9) or showing willingness to receive *little presents* from their Hindoo servants during a festival (10), hint at, on the one hand, their capacity to understand and show their Indian workers empathy; on the other hand, by doing so, they seem to breach, to a certain extent, social differentiation and demarcation established by and characterising the norms of English community. This makes their identity look unstable and vulnerable to the Victorian women travellers' eyes.

6. Conclusion

In sum, the relatively most frequent key words in VIWOTWI – *India*, *Calcutta* and *Indian* – and their recurring clusters – *the natives of India*, *going down to Calcutta*, *of an Anglo Indian* – foreground some of the recurring social discursive identities construed by Victorian women in their writings while

discovering India. The clusters highlight the women travellers' constant performance of Englishness with their insight into England's role in India and their social identity awareness rooted in their repeated need to differentiate and demarcate themselves from the Indians and their culture. Such an awareness is a characteristic feature of their discourses typifying their negative other-presentations of the Indians but positive in-group presentations of the English, thus suggesting how engaged they were with the colonial ideology while travelling across and discovering India.

However, the representation of such social identities turns fuzzy in the discursive depiction of the Anglo Indians. The latter suggest the existence of no strict identity boundaries wherein they represent a hybrid; they appear to conflate identity variations according to the situational settings, thus indicating that identity is to be understood as something dynamic and often incoherent in social practice.

To conclude, although the findings are not exhaustive, they nevertheless show how Victorian women's travel writings can be considered, on the one hand, a crucial means of discovering and disseminating first-hand information of the colonial territories by representing the social identities characterising such contexts; on the other hand, while the writings support the rule of one collectivity over another, they underscore how identities cannot be considered immutable but more likely as incompletely consistent, if not fluid.

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