Tribhuvan University

Renegotiation of Narrative Space in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels In Antarctica*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Renegotiation of Narrative Space in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels In Antarctica*" submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University is an entirely original work, and I have made due acknowledgement to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other reasons. No part of content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

…….

Raj Lakshmi Timala

Approval Letter

This research work "Renegotiation of Narrative Space in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels In Antarctica*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Raj Lakshmi Timala has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This thesis is founded on the premise that the genre of travel writing has historically been seen as a masculine genre closely bound to the ideals of mobility, conquest, and exploration that marginalises and excludes women from participation due to socially imposed expectations of domesticity and immobility. Thus, this androcentric framing or a genre based on a masculine ideology generates anxiety for women travel writers, as travel writing produced by women has often been and continues to be sidelined in travel writing scholarship. Struggling with such anxieties and insecurities, women travel writers have constantly been on the lookout for strategies and unique narrative techniques to combat the established societal norms. This study explores two late twentieth-century women travel writers and their navigation of genre and gender expectations: Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (1996). The study thus argues that both writers through their travel narrative engage in a renegotiation of narrative space that exhibits how gendered anxieties complicate the boundaries of the travel writing genre. Both authors enter territories—the Australian desert and Antarctica—traditionally constructed as masculine domains of conquest within travel writing. Drawing on theoretical insights from Mary Gerhart, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler, I analyse how Davidson and Wheeler employ personal narrative, self-reflexivity, and genre hybridity to establish authority within a tradition emphasising male-coded values of objectivity and detachment. This thesis thus through *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita*, explores the complexities that female travel writers like Davidson and Wheeler face, and reveals how their work destabilises the traditional tropes of exploration and redefines the boundaries of the genre of travel writing.

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Chapter I: Anxiety and Women Travel Writers

An article in *Climbing* magazine on Melissa Arnot Reid, the first American woman to successfully summit and descend Mount Everest without supplemental oxygen, and author of the memoir *Enough: Climbing Toward a True Self on Mount Everest,* caught my attention for several reasons. The write-up by Maya Silver mentions the deeply personal, unfiltered account of Arnot Reid's life, her extensive experiences in the mountains, and her definition of what a hero means. In the interview that follows, Arnot Reid critiques herself as well as other prominent alpinists and emphasises the fact that she was not portraying herself as the hero of the story, but one who admits one's mistakes and imperfections. And yet in another interview with another magazine, *Outside*, she admits that she has been given an opportunity because "you're the diversity quota, the lone woman, and you have to work twice as hard to establish that you deserve the spot" (Callaghan). In 2005, she quit her job at Rainier Mountaineering Institute because of what she claims was misogyny directed at her and also experienced by many women working in male-dominated fields. Her instance serves several purposes for my study —her feat as a mountaineer; the genre of her work— memoir; moreover, her acknowledgement of her imperfections and confessing to her limitations, which stand in opposition to the myth of the hero/explorer. Her "visceral honesty" (silver) also reveals the persistence of misogyny and pressures of living up to expectations in the context where women's achievements are often slighted and belittled. All the pointers related to Arnot Reid, that is, her accomplishment of venturing into 'dangerous' landscapes; usage of the subgenre of memoir; self-reflexivity; gendered expectations mirror the focus of my research, which is on two women travel writers belonging to the last quarter of the twentieth century, Robyn Davidson, and Sara Wheeler, and their work, *Tracks* (1980),

and *Terra incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (1996), respectively. The selected texts represent examples of women's travel writing and of female travellers who must *strive* to make a space for their work or their selves, "within the dominant conceptions of travel, and male-dominated spaces" (Schlick 17). Both Davidson and Wheeler share with Arnot Reid traversal of extreme spaces and negotiations of femininity within traditionally masculinised areas of travel, whether travelling through the Central Australian desert, the inhospitable Antarctic terrain, or summiting Everest. These writers, by entering male-coded terrains and narrative structures, exhibit unease with the genre norms and socio-cultural codes of journeying as a woman. They thus employ their travels and their narratives to rewrite their positionalities and negotiation of their identities, often subverting genre conventions.

In western traditions, the symbolic meanings associated with journeying have predominantly been attached to mobile masculinity, as the historian Eric J. Leed observes that travel is "genderised" and becomes a "gendering activity"(113), reflecting the difference between men and women. The latter are associated with "interiors, bounded space, security, and lack of freedom", whereas the former are associated with "exteriors, unbounded space, danger and insecurity" (116). The gendering of travel is reflected in the traditional roles allocated to men, as Roberson points out, the "journey has long been described as a male activity and the public road as a male domain" (217). This is due to the prevalence of the patriarchal ideology of separate spheres, which inflicted restrictions on women and their desire to travel. Travel is, hence, constitutive of masculinity and the genre of travel writing, in the words of Janet Wolff, is a "genre of male identification that disqualifies women from participation and even pathologises femininity" (qtd. in Alacovska 133).

This study explores and examines the entrenched gender ideologies that remain bound to women's travel writing thereby causing anxiety with regard to the genre of travel writing that perpetuates normative male experiences and norms (Alacovska 134), their struggle in their journey of adopting and adapting a traditional male preserve and the way travel writing expresses and suppresses their fundamental anxieties will be an area of research in this study.

The very nomenclature of travel writing is reflective of a double bind, as both travel and writing were activities traditionally associated with males. Travel/mobility is an activity which has historically been related to masculinity. Janet Wolff maintains that travel is related to "constructed masculinity" (230). By extension, travel writing too was an activity that has been traditionally male. To corroborate this, Shirley Foster and Sara Mills remark that travel writing has been considered one of the many "public space[s] of male textuality" (10). Hence, excluding women from both, as they were shut out from knowledge, having little or no access to education. However, despite restrictions, women travelled, rebelling against the societal norms of being relegated to their homes, as pointed out by Karen Lawrence that women did "voyage at times contesting, reinventing, reinscribing, the ideologies of domesticity" (x). Women have not only travelled extensively, either as companions to male family members, as part of diplomatic retinues, in pilgrimage groups and others, but also produced a vast body of travel writing, with the increase in female literacy, urbanisation, etc. There was a spate of travel narratives published by women in the nineteenth century; however, the format that they chose was the diary or the epistle, suggesting that they were intended for a private readership. This was because they attempted to negotiate the socio-commercial pressures and expectations of the time. They had to walk a tightrope between providing material that would attract readers

while at the same time remaining within the codes of appropriate behaviour. In other words, the framing of travelogues was influenced by market demand. This aspect is also true of some contemporary female travelogues, which is related to the focus of my research, as I shall discuss in the third chapter.

Until well into the twentieth century, the narratives of journeying in the West were filled with archetypal figures of masculinity and virility. As Carl Thompson notes, "[s]cholars have frequently pointed to Homer's *Odyssey* as an ur-text of European travel writing […] in which masculine heroes travel the world" (xix). The traditional concept of man has been as one who explores the unknown, with allusions such as "man as heroic risk-taking traveller" (Basnett 225), "itinerant masculinity" (Smith xvi) and others, which were explicitly gendered and form the basis of much travel writing of the twentieth century too. Critic Elizabeth Bohls points out in the same vein, "women did not fit the traveller's image as heroic explorer, scientist, or authoritative interpreter" (Youngs 136). Female travel writers thus had to cope with the implicit barriers created by the entwining of gender codes and genre norms, which caused genre anxiety. As pointed out by Shirley Forster and Sara Mills that Western women travellers "have always been subject to a range of constraints which are different from those affecting the behaviour and writing of men" (4).

It becomes imperative, then, to examine the history of travel and that of travel writing to explore the recent burgeoning of interest in academic circles in a genre considered, according to Michael Kowaleski, as "second-rate literary form" (qtd. in Youngs 7), and proclaimed to be dead by contemporary critics. This was due to the popularity of mass tourism, which posed a threat to individual adventure and 'authentic' experiences and also because most areas have been mapped and explored. However, Critic duo Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan uphold it as one of the

most popular forms of literature —"the genre has proven remarkably immune to even the harshest criticisms" (vii).

Since time immemorial, people have indulged in the activity of travel on different scales, and for various reasons. Most of us share the experience of the journey, whether we are referring to the actual movement of individuals or as entire peoples—across political, geographical, cultural and/or linguistic spaces. As Carl Thompson reflects that travel is not just about encountering new places but that "all travel requires us to negotiate a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity *and* identity, difference *and* similarity" (9, emphasis in original). Similarly, a minimal definition of travel writing, a by-product of travel, would entail a record of the encounter between self and other. Although both oral and written travel narratives have been around for thousands of years, critics find it challenging to give a neat definition to this "stubbornly indefinable form" (Youngs 2) as one is plagued by questions as to what could be classified as travel writing. Here, an oft-quoted comment of Jonathan Raban points out to the literary form being "a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed" (qtd. in Youngs 2). The inherent diverse and heterogeneous nature of travel writing, with closely related forms such as memoir and novel, that borrows freely "from history, geography, anthropology, and social science," its many indistinct borders results in it being a "hybrid genre that straddles categories and disciplines" (Holland and Huggan 8). Despite its generic multitudinousness, the fundamental make-up of travel writing comprises a factual account of travels undertaken by the author-narrator who, according to Kowaleski, remains "as the reader's surrogate, a cultural outsider who moves into, through and finally beyond the places and events encountered" (qtd. in Youngs 7).

Emergence of scholarly interest in travel writing studies and its relevance was due to key academic, political, and cultural changes, particularly from the 1980s onwards. In an increasingly interconnected world and societies grappling with the complexities of globalisation, and increased flow of people moving both within and across national borders, scholars have been driven to theorise and analyse these phenomena. Several scholars underlined the fact that the traditional binary distinctions of 'us' and 'them' were inadequate and the recognition of alterity and plurality was crucial. With the emergence of Postcolonial Studies and with the publication in 1978 of Edward Said's *Orientalism,* academic enquiry was directed to how information about different regions and societies is gathered and how different cultures depict and interact with each other. Travel writing consequently became a vital resource in the study of imperialism and its history.

Another major stimulus for the rejuvenation of travel writing as a distinct field, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, was a resurgence in critical attention and rediscovery of neglected women's travelogues, by feminist literary critics and feminist presses like Virago. A wave of seminal works published in the 1990s—by Sara Mills (1991), Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Tim Youngs (1994), and others brought about a change in the way travel writing was understood, as it became more diversified, entering a broader field of enquiry. It dealt with queries touching issues like "gender and sexuality, authorship and authority, power geographies, history of science, and reception and readership, to name but a few" (Adair and Filipova xviii). My area of concern is the perspective of gender in a genre which was often based on masculine ideology and how female travel writers deal with the resultant pressures.

The selected travel narratives, *Tracks* by Robyn Davidson, and *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* by Sara Wheeler, were both published long after the

Second World War, which is recognised as the era of mass tourism. It depicts a shift in the travel writing genre as being influenced by different societal and literary contexts.

Davidson's *Tracks* is an account of her arduous journey of traversing 1700 miles of hostile Australian desert, from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean, by foot and accompanied by her dog Diggity and four camels. The travelogue became an international bestseller after its publication, and went on to win the *Thomas Cook Travel Book Award,* and was made into a film of the same name in 2013. She spent two years preparing for the trip, learning the art of handling camels and taking care of them. According to Davidson, during her six-month sojourn, she acquired a great deal of knowledge about the Aborigines, and also about herself. According to Peter Hulme, the highlights of Tracks demonstrate that "Davidson's feminism and anti-racism articulated the views of a new generation" (562).. I was drawn towards this travel narrative as it essayed the survival of a lone woman (who took exception to being called 'the camel lady') defying all odds, and chiefly because of the implications between gender and genre, which I aim to analyse in this study.

Likewise, the second travel text, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* by Sara Wheeler, has received considerable acclaim for the "woman's perspective' she brought to the field of masculine exploration (Calvette 290), and her encounter with a land with no indigenous human inhabitants. Her seven-month stay as a writer in residence in Antarctica was divided between different bases and had her encountering the male-dominated environment. Alisson Rusell remarks that Sara Wheeler is one of the few contemporary travel writers who attempted an "unconventional trip[s]" by "retracing the routes of others" (qtd. in Leavenworth 12). She comments on the masculinist legacy of polar expeditions linked to figures like Robert Falcon Scott,

Roald Amundsen, Ernest Shackleton and Donald Mawson. Her grounded portrait of her quotidian experiences on the continent, bearing a history of being a testing ground for male endurance skills, was the reason for my choice of the text. Added to this was the fact that the text navigates the traditionally male-centric genre of travel writing wherein narratives revolved around male explorers and adventurers.

Statement of Problem

Through a comprehensive analysis of the selected travel texts, this research seeks to unravel the gender-genre relationship in travel writing, and also looks into the use of the genre as a tool for breaking down gender stereotypes and challenging and appropriating literary traditions developed by male writers. Davidson's *Tracks* recounts her solo trek across the Australian desert, wherein she challenges male-dominated outback culture. Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* chronicles her presence in Antarctica, a region historically dominated by male-centric polar expeditions. From the point of view of genre, Davidson resists the romanticised "camel lady" image imposed by the media, as she seeks authentic experience. Wheeler, on the other hand, navigates genre anxiety through a narrative that merges personal, historical and scientific discourse. The study thus explores the following research questions:

a) What is the relationship between gender and genre in Travel Writing? Do they condition/affect each other?
b) Do women's narratives like Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* and Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* reveal certain inherent tensions/constraints? How do they cope with genre-induced anxiety?
c) Have women's travel writing like that of Davidson and Wheeler been able to negotiate with various discourses and weight of expectations related to their gender, and reassert their right to the genre of travel writing?

Gender is a strategically important, but fundamentally complex factor in shaping thematic approaches to the various genres/subgenres used to represent travel, resulting in hostility towards women writers who trespass into masculine domains. It is crucial to recognise that gender matters. However, postulating generalisations and separatist views regarding men's and women's travel writing must be averted. Critics like Susan Basnett are concerned by such essentialism due to the "the sheer diversity of women's travel writing" (239). The genre of travel writing is gendered as female–authored texts, as Sara Mills argues, "are received, commented upon and marketed differently" as compared to male-authored texts (6), so gender shapes both the traveller's identity and the travel narrative.

Objectives

The current research work primarily concerns itself with the selected travel texts to examine:

a) how women travel writers like Robyn Davidson and Sara Wheeler were challenged in their travels and travel writing by ideological constrictions pertaining to gender
b) to shed light on the anxious feelings of inadequacy due to the pressures of the genre, and
c) to explore the impact of the contribution of women travel writers like Davidson and Wheeler to the genre of travel writing.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study

The proposed study focuses only on the selected travelogues, and the issue of genre connected to gender in the above, which does not delve into an all-inclusive analysis of extensive scholarship with respect to gender or genre. Similarly, findings from this study will not apply to other creative areas, apart from the genre of travel

writing, except for a brief glimpse, which will give a proper perspective to the research as a whole.

Significance of the Study

This study maps out how two late twentieth-century women travel writers use their travels as a means of expressing spatial and intellectual freedom even in contemporary times, by focusing on the two significant avenues of analysis— gender and genre, and the way gender plays a crucial role in the analysis of travel writing. Taking into account the long-standing tradition of travel writing, both the authors in their journeys and their texts negotiate and challenge stereotypes and expectations by reversing them. It implies that these travellers/writers are prepared to have their assumptions about themselves altered and also transform themselves. Here it is necessary to keep in mind the numerous changes in the conditions of travel and travel writing and examine women's travel with regard to overlapping categories of gender, genre, and identity. It is important to note here that different aspects are worth considering when dissecting the gaze of the traveller, viz. their upbringing, their background, "and by membership of diverse, intersecting communities and identities" (Thompson xii). Other important factors of race, class, ethnicity, location, education, political ideals, financial position and historical circumstance also add to the complexity. In short, the contextually and historically specific natures of gender conditions add to the diversity of women's travel writing. We should keep in mind the fact that generalisations about travel writings in terms of gender is a slippery area, as female writers were not always subservient to social expectations or prescribed modes of expression. I go by the claim of Claire Broome Saunders that "women's travel writing is therefore, a complex, varied, and fluid area" (1). The study also highlights the fact that despite the extent of women's travel and travel writing, theorists have yet

to amend their accounts, so it would not be an overstatement to claim the subordination of women in travel, as in the shelves of travel literature, women remain under-represented and unrecognised. Frequently, even in scholarly works like *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (2002) and *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (2019), gender is relegated to a single chapter. Ironically, in anthologies of female travel writing, scant attention is given to non-European women as evidenced in *An Anthology of Women's Travel Writing* (2002), or *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women's New Travel Writing* (1998). Both are majorly about British women. Hence, an important point to consider is that there are many women travel writers whose works are sidelined and neglected, so an assessment of their contribution to the genre is a much needed requirement.

Theoretical Framework

The main crux of this study is to examine the junction between gender and genre in the selected travelogues and explore how the concept of genre is significant in decoding the resultant anxiety in female travel writers. This study is based on a qualitative research design. It substantiates its arguments based on critical interpretation and analysis of the primary texts, and by examining available critical responses of scholars as well as theoretical insights concerned with genre and gender. These help to justify the validity of its arguments.

For an understanding of the effectiveness of genres, I draw on insights from theorists like Jacques Derrida, who in "The Law of Genre" outlines that genres are meant to be distinct and should not intermix. However, he also stresses the paradoxical nature of genre as it can be transgressed; of belonging and not belonging: every text must belong to a genre, but if it follows all genre rules, it loses its distinctive quality. Derrida's formulation of genre proposes that the genre is

fundamentally unstable and permeable. Similarly, John Frow in *Genre* engages with historical and contemporary debates, referring to the function of genre and outlines as to how genre organises meaning. I also rely on Mary Gerhart's theoretical insights on the complex and ambiguous relationship between genre and gender: that genre is pivotal in discussions of critical theory. She points out that combining the concepts of genre and gender and analysing their relations to each other opens up new forms of interpretation for genre as well as gender studies. Added to this, Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity, which pinpoints that gender is not a stable identity, will also substantiate an important basis of my arguments. Her argument outlines the fact that gender is a social construct, created and reinforced through cultural norms and practice through a series of repeated acts; that it is performative, not innate, which suggests that subversion is possible.

Structure of the Thesis

As already outlined, Chapter One basically sets the background against which this research work is based, while giving a brief historical overview of travel writing and delving into its definition and an analysis of its genre. This thesis also examines the contextual background for women's travel and travel writing, and introduces the selected travelogues. Apart from this, it pinpoints the purpose and objectives of this research and its significance along with an overview of the theoretical framework selected to study the chosen texts. Chapter Two examines the available research on the selected travel narratives, critiquing them to highlight the gap that marks a clear departure from them. Chapter Three focuses on the theoretical framework of this research work. In this section, the gender and genre connection in literary genres is briefly touched upon, and the male-dominated genre of travel writing is explored with discussions pertaining to the theories as propounded by theorists like Jacques Derrida,

Mary Gerhart, Judith Butler, and their relevance and appropriateness to achieve the intended outcome of this study. In addition, a close reading of the selected travelogues, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita,* wherein the gender-genre nexus is looked into great detail. Chapter Four concludes this research work, where I draw inferences with a summary of my findings, highlighting the significance of this study. The importance of both genre and the relatively ignored concept of gender brings home the fact that texts must be critiqued through both gender and genre. The gender quotient in the predominantly male-centric genre is still something to ponder about, and literary scholars need to work on this count to come up with more research to give women travel writers their due recognition for their innovative strategies and perspectives to expand the boundaries of the dynamic genre of travel writing.

Chapter II: Genre, Gender, and Identity In *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita: Travels In Antarctica*

Before turning to the question of the gender-genre nexus and resultant anxiety in *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita,* it is essential initially to look into a broader thematic research on the primary texts that engage with a wider lens and provide a significant critical context in order to highlight the gap that marks a clear departure from them. Critics have variously approached these texts on questions of identity formation, narrative positioning, memory, adaptation, inner journey, ecocriticism, and genre negotiation. Each of these criticisms offers insights into how these works make women's travel writing complicated.

Rune Graulund, in her essay "Deserts," discusses the features of contemporary travel writing and examines *Tracks* as a prime example of the genre. Graulund observes that *Tracks*, "the widely lauded travelogue in which Davidson describes her trek across the dry desert interior accompanied solely by a dog and a couple of camels, has become a modern classic of desert travel writing and contemporary travel writing more generally" (440). What makes Davidson's work particularly significant is how it embodies the shift from traditional travel narratives focused on external exploration to contemporary ones that emphasise internal journey and self-discovery. Unlike earlier travel writers who primarily documented foreign lands and cultures for their readers, Davidson uses the physical journey across the Australian desert as a vehicle for personal transformation, making the traveller's psychological experience as important as the geographical one.

Graulund identifies 'transformation' as a key element that distinguishes contemporary travel writing from its predecessors, and this concept is central to understanding why *Tracks* achieved classic status. In traditional travel writing, the

journey typically served to illuminate the external world—new territories, exotic cultures, or unknown peoples—for the benefit of readers who would likely never experience these places themselves. However, contemporary travel writing like Davidson's focuses on how the journey transforms the traveller. Davidson's quest across the desert becomes a means of self-examination and personal growth, where the harsh landscape serves as both physical challenge and metaphorical catalyst for inner change. This shift reflects broader cultural changes in how we understand the purpose of travel, moving from conquest and documentation to self-discovery and spiritual renewal.

Meanwhile, Christy Collis in her article, "Exploring *Tracks:* Writing and Living Desert Space", partly deals with the genre of exploration narrative, and partly with desert as lived space. She describes Davidson as a"post-colonial feminist" and mentions the spatiality of *Tracks*.

> Davidson initiated a traversal not of physical but of cultural space, of a landscape constructed in over 150 years of non-Aboriginal spatial discourse as empty, dead, passive, useless, flat, blank and vacant. In keeping with the dominant tradition of exploration writing, established by nineteenth-century explorers, Davidson's published narrative not only detailed the major events of the trip, but also, more importantly offered up a textual construction of land itself. (179)

Collis' remark takes into account the reason for the construction and representation of the Central Australian desert as barren and uninhabitable for settlement, as nineteenth-century explorers failed in their attempts to understand the desert. Collis further enquires, "[H]ow does Davidson understand and produce Australian desert space? That is, how does Davidson write home?" (179). Here, the implication is that

Davidson, being an outsider in the sense that she was from Queensland, not from Central Australia, so for 'white settlers' like Davidson, the desert is not 'home'as it is for the Aborigines. Collis answers this query herself by mentioning a "lived space" as propounded by Henri Lefebvre (which reflects the individual's relationship with the space). Collis states that Davidson renders the desert as a lived space that Davidson "writes home" and explains the position of Davidson, who is not an observer, but a participant, "a component of active desert space" This clearly indicates the rapport between her and the desert.

Magali Sperling Beck examines the position and identity of Davidson and observes that *Tracks* is a "narrative that recuperates the political and ideological background of an important moment in Australian history", and elaborates this statement thus

> Davidson's *Tracks*, more than merely celebrating the process of self-transformation in travel, lingers on the tension between its narrator's search for freedom and her awareness regarding the responsibility involved in engaging with cultural difference and in representing geographical crossings. If on the one hand, Davidson welcomes the changes she identifies in herself while traversing the desert, on the other hand, the narrative becomes a space to reflect about her position as a writer since it is directly implicated in the legacies of a colonial history. (95)

Here, Sperling Beck is referring to Davidson's ambivalence about chronicling her travels. It should be kept in mind that the influence of postcolonial discourses on contemporary travel writing problematises not only descriptions of the culture encountered but also the traveller's position within it.

In a similar vein, Simone Fullagar, referring to two travelogues of Davidson, *Tracks* and *Desert Places,* believes that "Davidson became a famous international figure in the 1970s when she first travelled with several camels across the outback in Australia."(32). Davidson's journey and her narrative of the desert challenged the masculine myths of contest that brought her fame, but Fullagar also pinpoints her position.

> The lone figure of a woman desiring closeness to the otherness of nature and indigenous cultures […] is the feminist stranger, an emergent figure in Western travel writing […] she cannot escape her own whiteness as a Western woman and while she travels through a desire to encounter otherness, her journeys are characterized by profound ambivalence (32).

Here, Fullagar is referring to Nicola L. Pratt's idea of the feminist stranger, someone who is both close to and distant from the 'other', embodying ambivalence and outsider status while seeking connection and understanding. Davidson's position is a complex one, as a white woman crossing Aboriginal lands, as she is aware of its colonial history.

> The analysis of *Tracks* by Debbie Lisle discusses the inability of the position of Davidson as a white woman traveller to be separated with the complex history of colonialism in Australia and the unresolved issues of Indigenous people. According to Lisle, the very fact that Davidson is travelling the Australian desert is bound to be confronted with the issue of land ownership, cultural appropriation, and the politics of claiming the landscape. This is an important reading in that it emphasises that modern travel writing must contend with its own ethical consequences of privilege and position, especially as travellers enter spaces with heavy historical trauma and cultural weight on

> the Indigenous people. Lisle thinks over the identity of Davidson as a white woman who is involved in the political context of the Australian colonial history. There is something provocative in the juxtaposition of Davidson's cautious regard for Aboriginal communities and her passionate support for their political mobilisation. She is well aware of the legacy of colonialism, and knows that her identity as a white woman prevents her from participating fully within that community. (129)

Lisle is stating the complexity of Davidson's position and identity as a white woman traveller and her awareness as well as her self-consciousness about questioning colonial legacies, which stands at variance with the Aborigines desire for autonomy.

Nicoletta Brazzelli mentions how Davidson initially feels powerless due to the vastness of the desert, but interpreting the cultural inheritance of the desert, she enters this desert space as a participant, "Davidson plots a new track, conceiving a space that the community of non-aboriginal Australians can inhabit. The crucial question is whether by trying to see through Aborigine eyes and to get back to a primitive idea about nature, the traveller is able to escape the history of Western approaches to nature" (Abstract).

Clearly, Brazelli is cognizant of conventional Western traditions of travel writing as well as the history of white-Aboriginal relationships. Here, the reference is to the indigenous population and their lifeways, wherein they were more directly related to land, animals or plants or 'prelapsarian bliss', in contrast to Western civilisation and modern life, and the latter could take a leaf from their book.

Since Davidson traverses the Central Austrailian desert as an indigenous person in a sense that she seeks to gain access to their way of life, hence, Sidonie Smith outlines the "historical practices through which white westerners have

constituted Aboriginality," this refers to complexity of the portrayal of Aboriginal people vis-à-vis Davidson's position as a white woman and its limitations (66).

> Her representations of 'Aboriginality' harkens back to certain anthropological discourses that romanticised Aboriginal people as 'primitive' outside and therefore less corrupted by the processes of modernisation…Yet this romantic discourse, like the discourse of degraded Aboriginality, fixes indigenous Australians in a premodern state of essentialized, ahistorical difference. And it reproduces a notion of Aboriginality that serves the personal, social and political purposes of white Australians. (66)

The narrative tropes discussed in the quote above perpetuate essentializing discourses of aboriginality. Such portrayals through the lens of romanticised anthropological discourses that examine indigenous people as primitive and untouched by modernity, negate the reality of modern and shifting indigenous lives. Narratives of travel dealing with cross-cultural encounters and the way we portray ourselves and others are significant as they are related to do with ethical complexities of representing the "other". Along with Bruce Chatwin, Davidson was also charged with romanticising Aboriginal life.

As Davidson states that having read a lot about Aborigines, she wanted to know them directly, and it was one of the reasons as to why she decided to travel the Australian desert (Youngs 93). Tim Youngs' analysis of *Tracks* lays emphasis on the reconstruction of Davidson's Australian identity, he reveals the complicated connection of personal transformation with cultural encounters in travel writing. His observation about Davidson's─ " renegotiation of her Australian identity through her encounters with Aborigines. In particular, the understanding she claims to reach with an Aborigine man, Eddie." (93). Although Tim Youngs, acknowledges, "an openness

that results in a change of outlook" he is quick to remark that "such usage of the indigene,[…] however lays Davidson open to the charge of exploitation […]. Yet even texts that appear radical in their politics are at risk of using the Other exploitatively to the advantage of the self" (93-4). This tension is significant because it highlights the problem of how even apparently radical or self-critical travel writings are at risk of echoing colonial tropes, with the Indigenous character being used to further the self-discovery of the traveller. Tim Youngs is cautiously inferring to her portrayal of the Aborigines and that some critics, like Robert Clarke, charge Davidson of "exploit[ing] the exoticism of indigenous culture" (qtd. in Rawlins and Hooper 6).

In a different strain, Maureen Mulligan discusses the influence of the discourse of Romanticism on women's travel writing in her article, "Women's Travel Writing and the Legacy of Romanticism". Distinct changes in women's travel writing were perceived post 1945, with regard to a growing tendency of focusing on the "personal and the subjective" which Mulligan proclaims as "popular feminism" and wishing for a "certain humility in travel that might be appropriate in a post-colonial world." Hence she denounces the resultant "series of books that are based on gimmicks to promote the trip and make it stand out from ordinary tourism" (11). Mulligan cites examples of Christine Dodwell's journey by microlight in *Travels with Pegasus*1989/1993, and Robyn Davidson's travelling by camel in *Tracks* (11), among others.

Mulligan believes that women travel writers are giving more importance to their emotions and are lacking in serious intent to use their journey to collect facts and information about a different culture in the post-colonial scenario; rather, the focus is more on attracting attention and having an 'anti-tourist' stance. Similarly, Carl

Thompson argues, “Contemporary travel writing in this romanticising mode frequently works as an adjunct to the tourist industry” (161).

This interpretation is about the inner journey and the importance of memory. Simon Cooke, in his essay, “Inner Journey: Travel writing as Life Writing” juxtaposes Peter Matthiesen’s *The Snow Leopard*, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Travels with a Donkey* and Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks,* stating that “in each of these travel texts, then, the autobiographical experience of the journey itself is inextricable from the view it affords over the life as a whole”. This refers to the genre of travel writing as life writing that documents experience beyond the confines of everyday life. He further adds that

> another crucial aspect of travel writing as life writing is its relationship to memory and to what is sometimes called memory-work […] As we have seen in the examples of Stevenson, Matthiesen and Davidson, travel writing often involves not only recounting the journey itself, but also a kind of more active memory-work, as the life of the traveler is remembered, sometimes in new ways through the journey. (22)

In an interview with Tim Youngs, conducted on 8th July 2004, Davidson talks about her relationship with Australia and “her peripatetic existence, which she compares with the movement of traditional nomads” (21). She also refers to the importance of memory and its capricious quality, and how she was able to recall “every single day of the journey with extraordinary clarity, every camp for over nine months,” as she had penned the travelogue “two or three years after the event. ” She admits, ”I’m very interested in memory and concerned about it and of course even more so in something like travel literature where the immediate assumption is that you’re giving someone a piece of reality” (25). However, the same approach was not applicable to *Desert*

Places as, comparatively, with reference to *Tracks,* "it was an intense kind of re-living of the journey" according to Davidson. Hence, travel writing helps us to understand 'what' and 'how' the past is remembered and how such remembering is changed over time.

On the other hand, Richard Snailham's review of the travelogue outlines *Tracks* as "earthy, irreverent, anti-establishment" (116). He further contends that it is not a

> dispassionate carefully documented, conventional travel tale. It is however an immensely readable personal evocation of a journey from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean made over eight months by four camels, a dog and an intelligent, interesting, emotional young woman, much given to self-enquiry and self-chastisement. (116-17)

He also mentions that the reader "maybe becoming impatient with her neurotic soul-searchings and bewildered broodings" (117). This quotation characterizes certain assumptions about women writers and their writing, one of them being that women writers should not be considered ordinary but 'exceptional'-This can be related to Carl Thompson's remark that "women who undertake major feats of travel are still often depicted […] in popular culture in terms of their exceptionalism and eccentricity" (196). Similarly, Snailham, a male, follows gender stereotypes as he patronizingly views the text as a simple transcription of the writer's adventure and the writer as "staggeringly brave" (117).

Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan in *Tourists with Typewriters* mention the meaning of freedom experienced by Jan Morris as different from Davidson. The former is related to sexual preferences, while for Davidson,

> freedom is best learned in the open[…]. Like several of her male contemporaries-[…] Davidson is drawn to the desert as a site of both adventure and contemplation. *Tracks* is one of the canniest of contemporary women's travel narratives, [it…] contains the classic ingredients for a woman's survival narrative: the contagious solitary traveller, defying the restrictions placed on her sex, the fearless confrontation of total strangers and 'hostile surroundings, the gradual adaptation to and communion with the environment. (121)

Critic duo Holland and Huggan emphasise how Davidson's journey challenges traditional gender expectations. She disrupts the typical assumption of women as dependent or vulnerable. Davidson's narrative asserts female autonomy in a landscape that is depicted as hostile and rugged. In a minute analysis of the travelogue, they note that Davidson's journey is not only a physical one but a metaphorical one, a quest for self-discovery.

A different reading of *Tracks* is by Isabel Rawlins and Myrtle Hooper in their article "'Journeys into Dirt' in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980) and Patrick White's *Voss* (1957)", which discusses *Tracks* from an ecocritical perspective. They refer to eco-critic Tom Lynch's survey of desert writing, wherein *Tracks* falls into the category of 'traversal narratives', or "works that portray the desert as an alien, hostile and undifferentiated void" (qtd. in Rawlins and Hooper 2). He sees *Tracks* as "more similar to that of different from earlier desert narratives" (3).

Apart from an ecocritical perspective, this article also throws light on the concept of 'home' as Lynch is sharply critical of Davidson's moving to "that most un-desert-like of places, England" as her preferred 'home.' He notes that the "implicit message is that the desert remains a suitable place or an adventure but not a suitable

place for a home" (3). He censures her and other 'traversal narratives' where the desert is not considered worthwhile on its own. Davidson mentions in her interview with Tim Youngs about her movement between four countries— Australia, England, India and the States and that she still refers to Australia as home, "but not without ambivalence"(22).

The article can also be seen from the point of view of gender. Further, he reluctantly allows the text its "self-reflective subjectivity", which "may represent a tipping point in the evolution of desert narratives, opening up certain possibilities for reconfiguring the desert, especially but not exclusively by women" (3). Davidson's contribution to Australian desert writing is vaguely acknowledged. The genre of travel writing as a male bastion seems to get the better of Lynch as the quotation presents the devaluation to which women's writing is typically subjected to. Both Rawlins and Hooper pointedly refer to the way Lynch ignores Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark's initiative and impact, 'both desert explorers elsewhere in the world, both women" (3). Meanwhile Anna Johnston remarks that by "bringing Aboriginal philosophy together with European travel histories, Davidson connects the landmass itself with human mobility and restlessness" (267). Australia occupies a unique place in the body of travel writing, the Australian colonies were established coinciding with late eighteenth-century innovations in thought and culture. Johnston's reference to restlessness points to an individual quest and an exploration beyond mere travel. Johnston also comments on the theme of gender in *Tracks,* thus, "*Tracks* addresses the inherently masculine Australian national character and the physical endurance demanded by remote landscapes" (268). The inference here is to the rugged outback, traditionally dominated by men.

This critical response pertains to the adaptation of the travelogue into a film. Although the 2013 film adaptation of *Tracks* brought renewed attention to the travelogue, several critics remarked on the" film's failure to successfully orient itself" (Weaver 18). Rachael Weaver's article, "Adaptation and Authorial Celebrity: Robyn Davidson and the Context of John Curran's *Tracks*(2013) centres around the adaptation of the travelogue in which she discusses "the conspicuous and strategic role played by […] Robyn Davidson in the production, promotion, and cultural positioning" of the adaptation "suggesting firstly that the two texts are uniquely bonded together by her participation and secondly that in speaking foe Curran's film, Davidson mobilizes her own transnational identity to define its 'authentic' Australianness, past and present " (13). Here Weaver reflects upon the synthesis between the two creative genres and their "material embeddedness" which became the key component for the film's wider reception. However, Davidson, although enthusiastic about the way the film turned out, disliked the portrayal of her mother's suicide as a direct motivation for her desert journey, which she felt was too deterministic.

Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica. Travel writing is a significant genre in "literary histories of the polar regions" (Leane 361). Both the Arctic and the Antarctic have stimulated travel as well as a large body of texts-official narratives, memoirs by explorers, celebrated works of fiction and poetry, and travelogues by writers like Barry Lopez and Sara Wheeler. The latter's work, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (1996), is a celebrated memoir based on Wheeler's seven-month stay in Antarctica in the mid 1990s, as the first female writer-in-residence sponsored by the US National Science Foundation. The book was shortlisted for Travel Book of the Year in 1996, and was listed among the Seattle Times' top ten travel books of the

year. The travelogue garnered critical acclaim and interpretations from scholars, ever since its publication. These critical analyses can be roughly categorised under the following themes: genre, gender, postcoloniality, environment, spirituality, inner journey, and the haptic experience.

We must keep in mind the fact that regular opportunities for women to travel to Antarctica opened up only in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Literature surrounding the Antarctic, as well as popular perceptions of the continent as a male-only continent, have given way to recent chronicles of expeditions and memoirs penned by women or of instances of women following in the footsteps of past heroes. Among scholars who have probed into the text from the point of view of gender is Susan Basnett, who in her essay "Travel and Gender" notes that

> Wheeler's travelogue represents another strand of women's travel writing that has grown in importance in the twentieth century: the journey that leads to greater self-awareness and takes the reader simultaneously on that journey […] Sara Wheeler's book recounts a journey not only in terms of time and place, but also in terms of gender relations. […]In her account, Antarctica, with its history as the site on which men tested their endurance skills to the limit, offers a particular challenge to a woman. With great skill and elegance […] Wheeler looks at how different groups stationed on Antarctica reflect the social attitudes of men towards women in different cultures today. (238)

Basnett observes "powerful and original voices emerged during the 1990s," and cites the instance of Wheeler, who confronts the male-dominated environment of the Antarctic base in which she is an inmate, challenging the concept of male heroic figures and heroic imagery. In the last few decades, women's burgeoning opportunities of experiencing the continent in the form of travel or work or writing

have been seen, but despite this, vestiges of resistance to women's presence and inclusion seem to remain. Another distinctive feature, that is journey into the self, differentiates contemporary travel from its forerunners, and unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts, works of travel writers like Sara Wheeler describe inner and outer journeys.

Another criticism revolving around the theme of gender is a review by D. W. H. Walton, who belonged to the British Antarctic Survey, or BAS as it was called. He disapprovingly states that the writer "took advantage of the Writers and artists Program funded by the National Science Foundation to visit US, New Zealand, and Italian stations in the Ross Sea, and then added a visit to a British station to provide a further contrast" (356). As the following chapter will elaborate, the subtle reference here is to Wheeler's misogynistic experiences at the British base, which was in opposition to her treatment at the other stations.

He dismisses her writing style as

> immediately entertaining, and her approach audacious in believing she could encompass the breadth of the Antarctic spirit and activities in her short visits[…]she gropes to understand these strange people and craves acceptance and inclusion in this strange world of beards and beakers. (356-57)

Both the terms 'beards' and 'beakers' are synecdoches. The latter refers to scientists, whereas the former is a satirical reference to males. These remarks reflect the reception of women's writing wherein the value of the work is downgraded in contrast to that of men. Female writers were often questioned about the veracity of their accounts, here, too she's accused of exaggeration or lying as he proclaims condescendingly that it wasn't true that the writer was the only woman at "Rothera ploughing a lonely furrow against masculine intolerance" (356). This criticism

regarding women's written works will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapter.

The tone is clearly misogynistic, but it is no surprise coming as it is from a member of the BAS who was resentful of Wheeler's presence in their all-male environment at the Antarctic base. This aspect of gender is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

The following interpretation is gender based as well as its other distinctive features,

Elizabeth Leane mentions the absence of women in polar travel texts, which she outlines as "an absence that goes beyond the often observed male domination of the genre of travel writing as a whole" (371). Accordingly, challenging the construction of masculine spaces in the polar regions has been an active area of research on polar travel writing. As Leane mentions that Sara Wheeler addresses the rampant sexism in her travelogue *Terra Incognita* which

> directly challenge[s] the image of Antarctica as a continent 'for frozen beards', although she pays homage to explorer/writers such as Scott and Cherry-Garrard, *Terra Incognita* adeptly weaves the narratives of Wheeler's own Antarctic journeys together with observations on the continent's human communities, cultural resonances, historical legacies, and unique environment. (373)

Compared to the Arctic, published accounts of women's travels in the Antarctic are much sparser. Recreational travel only began in the later twentieth century, and women visitors were allowed only if attached to a man, that is, as a spouse. Wheeler challenges the masculine view of the continent, yet acknowledges a reluctant regard for the courage and endurance of the polar explorers, Captain Scott in particular, with a publication of a biography of Apsley Cherry-Garrard.

Since the late twentieth century, the genre of travel writing continues to encompass not only a wider variety of divergent perspectives and voices but also a great variety of styles. As suggested by Nicoletta Brazelli, referring to the distinctive features in Wheeler's text,

> The recent occasions created by women working and living in Antarctica also imply a gendering of the scientific research […] any current 'realistic' Antarctic narrative portraying journeys of personal growth and renewal tends to be a travel narrative. Thus, in *Terra Incognita: Travels In Antarctica* (1996), Sara Wheeler focuses on the people of Antarctica, past and present-the way they live now, the way they lived and died in the past, and how they react to the physical and psychological challenges of the most extreme weather conditions of the world. (136)

This is evidence of changes that came about in the way travel writing evolved, as the focus is on factual, authentic and minute details of how Antarctic communities existed and also on inner meanderings. As Elena Glasberg remarks that "the contemporary process of creating Antarctica through writing is […] connected to memorialization, even the bodies of people moving across or temporarily living on ice" (qtd. in Brazelli 136). Wheeler's narrative combines descriptions of the unforgiving weather conditions, "authorial reflection" (Basnett 238), and, of course, exhibits an awareness of the history of expeditions of the regions she travels to.

One of the reasons for the current boom in travel writing is due to an upsurge in mobility in the world, more than ever, resulting in diverse modes and types of travel writing and generating sub-genres within the large generic label of travel writing. Christopher M. Keirstead, in his article "Contemporary Postcolonial Journeys on the Trails of Colonial Travellers", refers to footsteps travel writing, which is

explained as “author’s attempt to retrace paths laid out by previous travellers: explorers, family members, more distant ancestors, or other writers” (139). The sub-genre is yet again divided into three broad categories, and Sara Wheeler’s *Terra Incognita* falls into the first one, viz. *Forensic footsteps.* This is “most invested in colonial-era exploration” (139). Keirstead points out

> While being a homage to previous explorers such as Scott and Shackleton, a wider sense of history and cultural politics is never far from Wheeler’s text especially the gender politics in this largely male preserve […] Finely attuned to landscape, history, and the presence of fellow travellers, past and present, *Terra Incognita* also fully evidences a fully developed sense of the emotional and imaginative longing to connect that motivates footsteps travel. (143)

As Wheeler herself acknowledges in her interview given to CBC Radio, (posted on May 26, 2023) that she had dealt with a lot of humiliations in Antarctica, that gave her an “insight in all the decades that have passed since then into what’s it like for women in this world” Wheeler’s travelogue depicts an attempt to recover lost times and travellers, which is the core of footsteps travel. Besides this, Wheeler uses her travelogue as a way of connecting to people, places, and cultural memory.

The journey into the self differentiates modern travel from its precursors, one reason being the focus of “Romanticism on inner consciousness and its relationship to the external world” (Youngs 102). In this regard, Maureen Mulligan describes how the trip to Antarctica works as a metaphor for Wheeler’s subjective journey,

> *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* offers a […] profound account of a journey and is a […] satisfying book, possibly because her choice of destination, a scientific station at the South Pole, does not involve the problem of dealing with a local culture or indigenous population. The only people she

> meets are scientists, mostly men […]. The choice of Antarctica represents a deliberate exteriorization of her mental state, as well as being a physical site; this is a very Romantic approach to travel. (12)

Mulligan outlines the importance of the way the traveller/travel writer's subjectivity engages with the experience. Wheeler deliberately chose a destination that is 'off the beaten track', a vast earthly space outside the normal world, lacking natives, not owned by a single nation, and for the writer, the way to fill this space is through the imagination. Here, Geoffrey Moorhouse's remark is apt, "in making the double journey, the trick is to get the balance between the reality of events and the author's imaginative response to them," and he cites *Terra Incognita* as an example (Youngs 111).

The interior voyage has become an important trope in recent times as Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler emphasise in their introduction to their anthology on women's travel writing, "it is the psychological journey that is paramount" (qtd. in Youngs 111). Ana Calvete explores Wheeler's descriptions of nature thus

> as a place that reflects her spirituality and where divinity dwells[…]Wheeler looks at Antarctica with a sense of wonder and conveys the impression that there is more to it than merely tangible and observable stretches of ice. The Antarctic continent seems conducive to the sense of authenticity felt through epiphanies because it looks unearthly and has an aura of the unknown […] the landscapes Wheeler beholds are characterised by their immobility and their permanence. (81-2)

Wheeler's travelogue conveys the idea that one of the most authentic relations one can have with nature is "contemplative and epiphanic" (Calvete 79), which she experiences after she shuns the clutter of urban routines and human interaction. She

learns to appreciate the unique beauty of the landscape, and derives from nature, the spiritual realisation traditionally related to authenticity. The quest for epiphany relates Wheeler with contemporary travel writers for whom a sense wonder is important for resuscitating newness. Simon Cooke thus remarks on this element in contemporary travel writers who emphasised on, "recovering and renewing a sense of wonder" (qtd. in Calvete79), the source of which is to be found in the wilderness. Hence, Wheeler associates nature with divine harmony, suggesting that one should contemplate wilderness with a child-like wonder.

With regard to the distinctive features of contemporary travel writing, Tim Youngs remarks that some travel writers like Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler "are more comfortable than [Geoffrey] Moorhouse and [William] Dalrymple with embroidering (8). This is with reference to the remark by the former duo regarding the genre wherein," A generation of new writers who push the limits of the genre has emerged from the old adventure school […] Travel writers have become more literary and less literal. This fusion of biography, memoir and fiction-let's call it New Travel Writing […] what matters is 'not *what* we see, but *how* we see (8). Here, Youngs feels that the word choices "stereotype both the old and the new, exaggerating the dominance of types in each" (8). However, here it must be kept in mind that despite this "embroidering", women had to chart their own path as the field of travel writing was dominated by men, and they had few role models when they entered this profession.

In a podcast conducted by the Hong Kong Writers Circle on July 4, 2017, (British Council) Sara Wheeler mentions the extreme temperatures of the Antarctic region where technology or smartphones were of no use, and that she depended on notebooks and on transcribing them. In a similar vein, Maureen Mulligan remarking about the metaphorical focus of *Terra Incognita* states that Wheeler chose to

undertake the trip to “hostile, apparently inhospitable regions” which “emphasize the extremes of an environment as far from the comfort of Western civilization as possible, in which the traveler is thrown back on her own mental resources to survive the isolation and the strangeness of the journey” (72). The choice of physically demanding travel is the discerning factor that separates the traveller from a tourist. However, here we must also remember that Wheeler’s presence in the Antarctic precisely relied on technology as she was heavily dependent on insulating suits and modern communications!

The following criticism unpacks the meaning of sound and silence in Antarctica. Philpott and Leane discuss the environment of the Antarctic with reference to the unique soundscapes of the region as included in narratives of the continent. This refers not only to the sounds produced by the glaciers, icebergs and their extreme wind conditions, but above all, silence has become the most prominent theme in the literature right from the initial days of Antarctic exploration. They emphasise the “importance of written texts in capturing the essence and meaning of these experiences” (1), which in extension become important means of “sharing information about the place and what it can be like to actually be there and listen to its soundscapes in person” (2). Silence here means “quietude” and “hearing is most alert” (2) at such times. The article largely follows Schafer, a Canadian writer and environmentalist’s theories on soundscape.

Writers-in-residence like Sara Wheeler, who were allowed freedom of movement within the continent, convey the experiences of silence which were very similar to those mentioned in early exploration texts. She entitled a chapter of *Terra Incognita*, “The Other Side of Silence,” that recalled George Eliot’s description in *Middlemarch.* She describes her encounter with silence, which is total quietude, and

"finds Antarctic silence peaceful and life-enhancing […] By the late twentieth century, then writing about Antarctic silence— whether describing an unnerving or comforting experience— recycles an established series of tropes" (23).

The above reference conveys the necessity of consulting written texts that document subjective responses to silence. Through analysis, we can start to understand some of the different meanings that visitors to Antarctica ascribe to sound and silence, and to the continent. This is with reference to the sounds produced by glaciers, icebergs, and the turbulent winds and to the continent, and the recording of these experiences exhibits what it is to actually experience the environs in person. Sound/silence can either be peaceful or unnerving.

"Touching" by Dr. Sarah Jackson discusses tactile experiences conveyed through language. She outlines how "Antarctic travel narratives now are packed with descriptions of texture" and that "literary representations of the region are themselves 'textured' by the expression of touch and feeling"(229). She gives the instance of *Terra Incognita,* and with reference to Wheeler's prose, which reflects a nuanced engagement with the landscape and is characterised as

> frequently terse, but not without lyricism. Direct and incisive, her prose is also textured by sensitivity to the affective resonance of the landscape […] But there are other ways of touching [. . .] after all haptic experience involves not only an encounter with the natural landscape of its extremes, but also one's contact or lack thereof with other people. In *Terra Incognita,* Wheeler stresses that despite the isolation, close relationships are formed. (230)

The "embodied surface of the prose" (229), as the critic relays, is the acute sensitivity to changes in Wheeler's contact with the people she meets at different bases in Antarctica, and her recognition that not all the males are hostile, as she befriends

some. There are instances of physical touch in the form of handshakes or embraces, which reflect closeness, while a sense of discomfort exists in some other kinds of tactile experiences.

She further mentions that "Wheeler's narrative indicates the difficulties of finding a balance between distance and proximity, between touching and not touching, even in a place where human contact appears so remote" (231). The critic is employing 'touch' literarily by giving illustrations from the travelogue and connecting these tactile experiences to Derrida's 'Law of Tact': from the harsh landscape, from social expectations and by extension to international politics. The latter refers to the "imperial legacies of exploration", and Jackson argues that Wheeler's work "shows us that touch lies at the heart of Antarctic exploration" (233).

The above mentioned analyses attest Davidson's *Tracks* and Wheeler's *Terra Incognita,* which have been examined from various perspectives- regarding the variegated lens of the texts in question, which share certain common critical lenses like genre of travel writing, a stereotypical representation of gender and inner journeys. In the case of *Tracks,* critic duo Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, Christy Collis, and Debbie Lisle have emphasised its intervention into the spatial politics of Australian national identity and mapping practices, which has a relation with gender. Lisle discusses Davidson's negotiation of gender and cultural politics, and she engages with the political context of Australia and also points out her ambivalence in writing about her journey. Holland and Huggan position Davidson as a post-colonial subject navigating the anxiety of gendered authorship and her unease with how her journey was perceived by others, as she resented the romanticised image portrayed by the media. Collis discusses the desert space, which is

traditionally mapped by the imperial eye. Davidson's entry into this space destabilises such symbolic geographies and also remarks about her uneasy positionality as a ‘white woman.’

Elizabeth Leane situates Wheeler into the tradition of Polar writing. She mentions how Antarctica for centuries has functioned primarily as a symbol and highlights the quality of the pristine. At the same time, she outlines how Wheeler engages with the male-dominated history of Antarctica, which has excluded women. Brazelli discusses the banal details of the scientific community residing in Antarctica, which is juxtaposed with the past that is the heroic era explorers and the way both the present inhabitants and the past explorers dealt with the brutalities of climate change and the fluctuating temperatures and their adjustments to it.

What has not been fully explored, however, is examining the travel texts from the perspective of genre and its relation to gender, and the resultant constraints and anxiety in the selected texts, which this study proposes to do. The limited focus on this aspect represents a vital gap in literature. Addressing this gap is significant to understand how woman travel writers-working in a male-centric genre, use their travels as a medium of expressing spatial and intellectual freedom, even in contemporary times, by concentrating on gender as a significant factor and how the former is an important factor for interpretation, as Mary Gerhart outlines in her work on genre and gender. The instances of both Davidson and Wheeler illustrate the way they navigate and negotiate the traditionally masculine conventions of travel writing and the consequent anxiety and unease they confront, in doing so. The masculine genre aggravates the women writers’ feeling of inadequacy by their trespassing on the male bastion and the professional and identity tensions they experience. Chapter three discusses how the two cope with genre-induced anxiety and the manner in

which their travelogues redefine travel writing, thus assessing the impact of their contribution to the genre of travel writing.

Chapter III: Coping With Constraints of An Androcentric Genre

What happens when Penelope voyages?

What discourse, what figures, what maps do we use?

—Karen R. Lawrence, *Penelope Voyages*

This thought-provoking question by Lawrence points to Penelope or the faithful wife/ woman contesting her confinement to the domestic sphere and her sessility. Instead of waiting patiently for Odysseus, or the archetype of the male traveller/wanderer, Penelope goes on a journey and records it by fashioning her own itinerary. Her act subverts patriarchal norms that expect women to stay home, "the domain of socially instituted norms" (qtd. in Smith x). Lawrence's quote is with reference to the genre of travel writing, which has been historically shaped by masculine norms. I trace the ways in which gender and genre affect each other and how the male-centric genre of travel writing causes anxiety. I also demonstrate the different means which female writers employ to cope with genre-induced anxiety. I first delve into a brief overview of women's travel writing depicting these constraints, and then argue that even today, women travel writers express constraints and the resultant unease due to the crossover between gender and genre. To better understand the critical importance of gender, I need to reflect on other literary genres which are gendered.

For my theoretical framework, I draw upon ideas discussed in Mary Gerhart's *Gender Questions, Genre Choices*, to examine the intertwining of gender and genre. Similarly, I rely upon John Frow's *Genre* to understand the basic concept of genre. Derrida's notion of "Law of Genre" is particularly pertinent to my argument, as he links genre rules with the figure father as the quintessential law giver. As gender is

related to genre in this study, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity forms a significant part of my analysis. Apart from this, insights from travel writing scholars like Carl Thompson, Tim Youngs, Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, Debbie Lisle, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, Sidonie Smith, and Barbara Korte are other reference points in this study.

Despite the extant complexities and implications of gender, for some contemporary critics, academic discussions and debates about gender are unfit in today's post-modern world as Oakley points out "where identities are conceived as performances […] the structural inequalities suggested by 'gender' carry little weight" (qtd. in Pritchard etal.1). After almost four decades of the western feminist movement "women everywhere remain severely disadvantaged compared to men across all social criteria and classifications" (Pritchard et al. 1).

When one tries to understand the concept of gender in relation to genre, it becomes imperative to examine the two words as etymologically both have the same root, referring to "kind" and "sort" according to the OED, which means that both can be comprehended as categories of classification. However, one must also keep in mind that both are ambiguous and changeable terms and pose a challenge for usage. Both are important for "the study of literature and culture, interpretation and meaning at large" (Ragnerstam 9). Similarly, John Frow, outlining the importance of genre, maintains that "Genre functions as frameworks of expectation and recognition, shaping not only how texts are produced but also how they are read and interpreted (5). How does genre and gender intersect or interact is a question to ponder about. However, in "traditional genre theory, gender is often ignored" (Ragnerstam 9). The complexity of connecting the two is due to the fact that genre is based upon aesthetic grounds, and such a connection would make aesthetics a political issue. Mary Gerhart

in *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*, observes that "As more and more women authors are retrieved from oblivion or obscurity, gender as an issue of interpretation becomes increasingly visible" and points out that they "share a history of misreading" (3). Mistaking the genre of the text is misreading it, but it also paves the way to different interpretations. Both genre and gender have been ignored or bound within rigid parameters, impacting literary criticism. Therefore, genre testing and gender questioning help in formulating critical understanding and genuine judgement. History of genre and gender reveals that genres are gendered, as the dominant gender has held sway over the major genres— for instance in Greek poetry— lyric poetry is likely to be attributed to females, or the case of medieval songs, where female authorship is suppressed or one can also say that women authors were excluded from certain genres. However, despite this domination, women's voices have developed into a counter-culture, resulting in a new spoken and eventually in a new written genre.

Mary Gerhart maintains that one of the ways to increase the capacity of critical reading is "to attend to the formal structures by which the gendering of genre takes place" which leads to "two foci—the history and the critical alteration of these structures, or genres […] certain genres such as romance novels, are written for and read by a predominantly if not exclusively male audience, and some genres such as gangster "tragedies " are written for and read by a predominantly male audience" (5). Certain genres have come to be associated with a particular gender and define traits connected to that gender; consequently, this has given rise to cultural hierarchies as genres related to men are given much eminence and regarded with considerable interest as compared to women. Throughout the history of literature and publication, it is the non-prestigious or 'low-brow' form—the romance, the detective story, and

writing for children— generally judged to be 'popular,' which have conventionally been 'open' to women. As late as 1986, Jane Spencer's *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* notices that modern critics have a relatively high opinion of the genre (novel) "but tend to belittle the contributions of women writers in it" (133).

Mary Gerhart emphasises that both genre and gender affect each other as the former is crucial to understand and perceive things; thus, this has effects on gender analysis (132). Transformation in the notions of genre is due to gender theory and feminism revealing the not-so-innocent role of genre, which has a cultural function as genres are "embedded in systems of power, ideology and cultural values that shape what is seen, said and valued" (134). Likewise, John Frow too reflects that genres and power dynamics are intertwined, "where power is understood as being exercised in discourse" (2) and on the categories of genre that are not fixed, are "dynamic" that it is constantly evolving as it responds to "changes in cultural practices and power relations" (12). Both Gerhart and Frow point out the ambiguous and complex quality of genre that can both enable and constrain the representation of gender. Thus, the link between genre and gender is crucial to theories about power, cultural value and identity.

Jacques Derrida in "Law of Genre'' argues that the function of genre is to keep texts pure, preventing contamination from other genres. However, the paradox is that genre is already mixed or impure, and generic classification is unstable and inherently porous, as individual texts resist classification, and they can participate in the genre without belonging to it. To elaborate this point, Derrida emphasises that genre demarcation is breached as every genre already contains elements of other genres, "this supplementary and distinctive trait, a mark of belonging or inclusion,

does not properly pertain to any genre or class" (64-65). A genre's identity depends on what it excludes, so impurity or intermingling challenges the idea of pure genre categories. In other words, although genre norms pursue purity, they are structurally disrupted by the inevitability of contamination. The paradox that is genre can be seen thus: Genres, according to Derrida, "work in a 'parasitical economy' so that a pure or original genre never exists: it is always already contaminated by other (not-quite-expelled) counter-laws, other rules, other traits and other genres. And that contamination is what frames generic instability: […]" (Lisle 61). Similarly, Frow notes that "genre classifications are necessarily unstable and unpredictable" (Frow 25). In the selected texts for this study, both Davidson's *Tracks* and Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* reveal a blending of memoir, lyrical description, self-exploration, and criticism of social norms, resulting in the creation of a hybrid narrative that deconstructs conventional travel narratives, refusing to be tied down by the narrow confines of the traditional male-centric genre.

In 1990, American philosopher Judith Butler published a book, *Gender Trouble* and subtitled it *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, a significant text in gender studies. Her theory focuses on the difference between gender and sex, arguing that gender is completely a social construction open to change and contestation. She proposes that gender is not biological, but socially constructed and performative. Butler disrupts the assumptions that masculinity should be performed by male bodies and femininity by female bodies. This seems to infer that "gender is in no way a stable identity […] it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity constituted through *a stylised repetition of acts"* (Butler 519). She critiques those social and familial norms and historical constraints that force us to conform to heterosexual standards for identity. In *Tracks,* Davidson reflects on her own identity

transformation during the course of her trip as she responds to the desert environment, revealing that gender is not a stable identity. In *Terra Incognita*, Wheeler's encounters in the male-dominated environment and the antagonism she experiences demonstrate how gender norms are enforced through exclusion.

An Overview of Women's Travel Writing

Historically, women have been connected more with immobility and fixity and thereby with home than with physical movement and the road; nevertheless, they are the ones to whom, as Eric Leed notes, "the travelling or 'spermatic' males returned" (qtd. in Roberson 217). Historically, due to the prevalence of patriarchal ideology, the domestic sphere of the home was ascribed to women. The underlying aim being thus –"spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with lesser power" (qtd. in Roberson 217). Movement of women across spatial and geographic boundaries is perceived as a danger to patriarchy and social order. Barbara Schaff points out the androcentric bias and the patronizing attitude towards women travellers thus,

> male travellers were regarded, and marketed in accordance with the objectives of their journeys as explorers, adventurers, or scientists, whereas travelling women were perceived as compensating for their traditional lack of education and scientific expertise with a light touch, sympathy for foreign people, eccentric habits and often a dose of dry, self-deprecating humour—in short, as travellers defined by gender. (1)

The mobile woman challenged the traditional understanding of travel as "a domain of constitutive masculinity" (Smith x), trespassing the male bastion, which was not looked upon kindly by males who were either hostile or condescending as the women failed to conform to the socially acceptable moulds or patterns of behavior, and had to

battle with tarnished reputations. By extension, the woman travel writer contravenes the patriarchal ideology by not only travelling, but also documenting her travel experiences. This explains the hesitation of female travel writers to don the role of author and the scarce presence of published travelogues by women before 1800. When they did publish, they used male pseudonyms and clarified that it was only due to the insistence of close friends and acquaintances that they did so.

Kristi Seigel observes that in earlier eras "women travel writers skirted a delicate course" (2). This can be seen in their preferring minor genres like the diary or the epistolary format, which is suggestive of the fact that their observations were targeted only for private consumption and not intended for publication. Sara Mills adds that what compounded the complexity was social surveillance, as while these genres were revelatory in nature, they were also sites "where the disciplinary forces of society were most at work" (qtd. in Kato 82). They were aware of the fact that they were flouting traditional societal norms by travelling, so their aim was to effect a reconciliation between travelling and adopting a narrative stance of female propriety so as to avoid criticism, and also get their work published. As Carl Thompson notes, "most female travellers and travel writers historically have sought to negotiate the gender norms of their day, rather than confront them head on" (Travel Writing 181).

The psychological need to balance the transgression of gender norms was seen in their keenness to emphasise their adherence to codes of female propriety in their reluctance to forsake their restrictive clothing. Shirley Foster and Sara Mills observe that owing to advice given to women travellers in manuals, which was also mentioned in narratives, "gender awareness was heightened" (8). Both manuals and travel narratives outline the travel-related specifics for the "female Other", the physical problems to master, and constantly stress the ways to manage "an often

hostile external environment" (9). One of the reasons for restrictions imposed on women travellers was the anxiety that they would find themselves in perilous situations.

Most female travel writers maintained a cautious demeanour and adopted a self-effacing stance, reinforcing their status as proper ladies and also "to reassure readers they would not be competing with men" (Siegel 3). They employed rhetorical strategies to combat prejudices, like veiling their narrative agency by downplaying the first-person voice, or commencing their writing with an apology, like Mary Kingsley in *Travels in West Africa*, who begins her preface with an apology. The patterns of prejudice and constraints that women travel writers had to struggle against can be seen in this instance too— comparing the erotic fantasizing of much male travel writing about the 'exotic' East, Susan Basnett notes "the parallel irony that women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had to work to convince readers of the 'truth' of their accounts, 'taking pains to describe scenes realistically, often supplementing their accounts with sketches'" (qtd. in Mulligan 5). This is due to scepticism regarding their writings.

These constraints were also extended to the topics (domestic details) the female travel writers selected as well as the tone and style they employed. "The travel narrator could not […] indulge herself in exoticist narrative tropes" (Smith 19), as sex was a taboo topic for her which bespoke of "degraded femininity" (Smith 19), as was politics, economics, public affairs and Science, which were considered "more properly the preserve of men rather than women" (Thompson182). There are examples of women travel writers like Maria Graham who, despite having established her presence in Brazilian scientific and social networks, understated the level of her expertise and displayed a reticence when fashioning her persona in the published

travelogue. Carl Thompson suggests, "[o]nce again, however, this is a woman travel writer being disingenuous in the way she presents herself in print" (183). I would like to point out that more than disingenuity rather this was indicative of reluctance of female travel writers to adopt an assertive persona for fear of being labelled 'unfeminine' and a dismissive attitude due to the assumption that women lacked necessary credentials to offer significant assessments; as already mentioned they negotiated gender norms by maintaining caution and/or balance.

Historically, an inclination towards "prioritising feeling over intellect" (Thompson 185) and the popularity of picturesque travel was seen in the female travel writer. However Shirley Foster and Sara Mills argue that "Representations which might be considered typically female, then, may be the result of strategic policy — especially if the writers wanted to get published […] womanly subject matter must not be used as proof of gender specificity nor must it be seen as solely biologically derived (qtd. in Thompson 186).

Critic duo Foster and Mills' caveat is to restrain from making essentialising assumptions and touting the differences between how men and women approach travel writing, as so-called 'feminine 'tendencies were also to be found in travelogues penned by men, as can be seen in Lawrence Sterne. We must keep in mind that the circumstances, motivation, and significance of travel were and *are* (my emphasis) also in contemporary times still different for women than for men. Thus Sara Mills argues that women travel writers produced "discourses of difference" (Schaff 2). The basic query still stands, "is there a way in which travel writing is inherently gendered?" (Basnett 227). Shirley Foster and Sara Mills argue that the difference between men's and women's travel writing lies "in the way that communities of readers evaluate and interpret those texts according to their social and historical

positioning" (4). Women's travel writing, in contrast to men was focused more on interior landscapes. This is an aspect that contemporary women travel writers also face, which is a source of anxiety, a point to be discussed later on in this study. For more than three decades, the intricate relations between gender and genre have been the subject of extensive debate among scholars with no clear consensus among them. Additionally, the role of western women during the age of imperialism poses complex questions which I shall deal with again later in the study.

There is, however, an area wherein women had an upper hand as compared to men, the inference is to the unique opportunities available to women travel writers who due to their gender could access spaces generally prohibited to men, for instance the 'harem'or 'zenana' or areas reserved for women only in Middle-Eastern and South Asian elite societies. Inderpal Grewal in *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* mentions that the account of harems creates "distinct gender constructions making women's travel writing attractive to the reading public" (Adair and Filipova xxii). In total contrast to the highly sexualized imaginings of male writers, women travel writers like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Lucie Duff Gordon, and others documented their visits to the harems, presenting the banal everyday lives of these women, thus outlining the sheer misrepresentation of male writers. The former's letters written during her sojourn to Constantinople—where she accompanied her husband— marks a "critical point in the genre of female travel writing" (Banerjee 31) as they debunked previous male-authored narratives on the Ottoman Empire. Dunlaith Bird in her essay, "Travel and Gender" emphasizes this "access to gendered spaces" thus—"the authenticity of her account is guaranteed by her gender, and […] this foregrounding of this femininity risks reducing the traveller

to just another woman amid the masses rather than an omnipotent observer" (qtd. in Adair and Filipova xxii).

Some women writers like Martha Graham employed the device of a "double-voiced" quality, characteristic of women travel writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which meant working "within the prescriptive parameters imposed by her culture "while "simultaneously circumvent[ing] and subvert[ing] those prescriptions" (Thompson 191). This involved the usage of the travelogue penned by women as an illustration of female agency and authority, although they did not portray themselves as heroic figures. Going back to the question of whether travel writing is inherently gendered, feminist scholars are still concerned about the complexity of the issue. Due to improvements in transportation and expanding colonial networks, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of activity with regard to mobility of women who stepped beyond the European continent. Female travellers had to negotiate their mobility to establish themselves as transatlantic subjects and thus overcome domestic "gender limitations" (Medeiros 9), who examines this mobility as "'the ability to encounter, connect, and engage in relationships with other agents, objects and places,' resulting in social mobility and social interaction" (13).

Despite the restrictions regarding gendered exclusion these women faced back home, their travel writing evinced diverse and ambivalent attitudes towards their non-Western counterparts. For instance, Isabella Bird's European superiority is evident in her account of China, *The Yangtze Valley and Beyond* (1899). Mary Kingsley, on the other hand, in her account of Africa, *Travels in West Africa* (1897), which is suggestive of an openness in her approach to a foreign culture, constructed herself as a traveller critical of European missionaries for their interference. Both Bird and

Kinsley were conscious of the fact that they could not portray themselves as heroes like Richard Burton or Henry Morton Stanley. However, they emphasised the hardships they underwent and also their competence in collecting significant information and samples for the male-dominated Royal Geographical Society. As Barbara Korte notes in "Western Travel Writing, 1750-1950", by crossing gender boundaries, Kingsley and Bird set an example for "later adventurers and explorers like Isabelle Eberhardt, Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, and Alexandra David Neel" (177) who were all the more confident in doing so.

Travelling women were divided between their desire for freedom and the conventional expectations of their societies, which gave rise to an awareness of gender ambiguity: "as women became able to travel more widely and more independently they had to adopt a position of gender ambiguity, taking on the 'masculine' virtues of strength, initiative and decisiveness while retaining the less aggressive qualities considered appropriate to their own sex" (qtd. in Korte 118). This explains the oscillation of the women between feeling confident about their accomplishments and anxiety about not portraying themselves as masculine, as Janet Wolff points out that women travellers themselves were conscious of the ways in which their activities placed them in complex positions with regard to gender identities (qtd. in Kato 78). Their writings often reflect anxiety about the "constitutive masculinity of travel" that is manifested through intricate negotiations of "such an unbecoming subject position" (Kato 78).

Similarly, Sara Mills argues that their writing displayed textual unease as they were divided in their struggle between "the discourses of imperialism and femininity, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt" (3).

However, the key debate in recent criticism is analysing the relationship of female travellers/ female-authored travelogues to colonialism. The explicit criticism of Kingsley (mentioned above) or certain female travellers of the nineteenth century indicated a willingness to express their disapproval of imperialism, in the long run, however, they remained obligated to the colonial discourses of their times. Women were in an ambiguous relation to the colonial ambitions of their nation; their contradictory position is demonstrated as in the instance of Isabella Bird, who displays an imperialist attitude by being patronizing but is also critical of her own culture as Daniela Kato argues, she "travelled not only as a woman but also took on the traditional role of the 'white man'" (85). This paradox is aptly elaborated by Barbara Korte. "it was precisely the fact that women travelled as representatives of their imperialist homeland which put them in a position to break free of traditional gender roles abroad" (125).

Feminist literary criticism in the 1970s was aimed at analysing and revising what was viewed as a male-centred genre and the recovery of neglected female-authored travelogues. Twentieth-century women travel writers like Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark, Rebecca West, besides some writers of the nineteenth century, who had attracted the attention of readers, seemed to be on the wane. Studies on travel writing, like Paul Fussell's Abroad*: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (1980), *or* Eric Leed's *The Mind of the Traveller: from Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (1991), perpetuated the myopic view of travel as a male endeavour. The initiatives of feminist publishing houses like Virago Press reprinted classic travel books by Mary Kingsley and Isabella Bird, among others. Shirley Foster and Sara Mills suggest that besides gender, other determinants such as race, age, class, education, and historical period and the interaction between them, also need attention to get a proper understanding

about women's travel narratives. This accounts for the diversity in women's travel writing—that is, the different means adopted by women to travel and document it for readers. That "travel writing is always necessarily a product of a particular time and a particular culture" (Basnett 239) is reflected in the changes in women's writings before and during colonial involvement and in the period of feminist awareness, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The comprehensive research done in women's travel writing reveals that women have written about their travel experiences "from within a tradition that denied them a role" (Basnett 231). In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, female-authored travelogues have become a discernible presence with names like Christina Dodwell's *Travels in Papua New Guinea* (1982); Fionna Pith Kethley's *Journeys to the Underworld* (1991); Dea Birkett's *Serpent in Paradise* (1997) or the most recent Noo Sara Wiwa's *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), to name only a few. Although women have greater opportunities to travel and write, their constraints regarding gender expectations or sexual violence still remain a pressing concern.

The essentialist framing of women's writing that was mentioned earlier still seems to be the bone of contention among critics and scholars. Indira Ghose rejects the biographical focus of women's travel writing and argues that women's travel writing is "constrained by the web of conditions of production and reception for these texts" (Youngs 133), that is, how readers evaluate those texts according to their social/historical positioning. Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan provide cultural contexts of circulation of women's writing, and point out the essentializing of women into a single category and "of the commodification of women writers, women's writing, (113), The critic duo warn against essentializing women's travel writing as they see it as a subversive strategy but Indira Ghose suggests that these very

subversive strategies employed by women writers should be scrutinized. The marketing strategy of how the question of gender impacts the content of the narratives and the way they are marketed and received will also be dealt with while discussing Robyn Davidson's *Tracks.*

Ana Alacovska discusses the anxiety female travel writers face as abiding by genre norms means perpetuating masculine ideologies, while departure would risk professional marginalisation. Reiterating Sara Mill's description of the "discursive pressures" faced by women travel writers, Alacovska assigns a genre-wide anxiety to the implied barriers constructed by a "culturally granted masculine authority" (133). She further points out that publishers assign female writers topics such as cuisine or fashion rather than physically/mentally demanding assignments, as they are sceptical of aesthetic and economic detriment, thus reinforcing gendered genre limitations (138). Alacovska argues that "female writers succumb to a sort of self-perpetuating angst with which they reinforce the gender stereotypes" (139).

Carrie Speaking cites instances of male travel writers dominating the scene as against women, as any volume of *The Best American Travel Writing* has a "very limited amount of female travel writers included in these anthologies", and that "women got to edit five of the seventeen volumes" (Speaking). In yet another instance of sexism in publishing is illustrated by Emma Cueto with regard to Joanne Rowling. She chose to use a male pseudonym, Robert Galbraith, for her new crime series *The Cuckoo's Calling* and the sequel *The Silkworm.* Although it was Rowling's personal choice to adopt a male pseudonym, revisiting the time when she used the initials J.K. revealed the fact that publishers initially *demanded* (emphasis in original) it. They were worried that if it was revealed that the series was penned by a woman, it would

deter young boys from reading them. But the fact stands true that Rowling has been consistently writing "books that publishers think are best written by a man" (Cueto).

Women travel writers still find themselves facing gendered expectations and stereotypes due to which "the challenge […] is how to manage the discourse of masculinity that is so prevalent in travel writing as a whole" (Lisle 97). Sara Mills cites the case of Robyn Davidson, the only woman to win the Thomas Cook Travel Book award, and the discriminatory attitude as "no attention is paid to the 'literary' qualities of Davidson's book. It is simply presented as an excellent book since it confounds the stereotypes of the content of women's travel writing: that is, what is thought possible for a woman to do" (111-12). Consequently, recurrent themes of negotiating this weight of expectation and intentional disruption of spaces identified as male are exhibited in recent female–authored travelogues, as in the case of the selected narratives *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita*. As Debbie Lisle argues, "The very presence of women in the genre destabilises the masculine gaze of the travel writer" (99).

Anxiety and Ambivalence in Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*

In 1977, Robyn Davidson, then in her mid twenties, embarked on a perilous journey from Central Australia culminating in the Indian Ocean with four camels and her faithful dog Diggity as company. The journey spanned 1700 miles of harsh desert terrain, and lasted about nine months. Her sojourn captured global attention when it was published as a memoir, *Tracks,* in 1980, sold a million copies and was translated into twenty languages and has never been out of print. It was adapted into a film in 2013, of the same name, starring Mia Wasikowska as Davidson. Later books, among others, include *Desert Places* and the recent *Unfinished Woman*. As Simone Hattenstone observes, "it is a trip that few experienced travellers would consider

taking". Home for Davidson (b.1950) was a cattle station in Queensland, her mother, Gwen, was a gifted pianist, loved the arts, while her father had fought in wars and was a dominant presence in her life.

Robyn was only eleven years old when she lost her mother, Gwen, to suicide. Soon after this, Davidson suffered from depression, but never saw the connection between the two. She was largely raised by her aunt, Gillian. She attended school in Brisbane, and in 1968 at the age of 18, she moved to Sydney then returned to study in the University of Queensland but did not complete her degree She worked as a croupier, as an artist's model and member of the Push (a group of bohemian intellectuals) She moved to Alice Springs where she first encountered camels and formulated ambitions for a desert trip but this required extensive preparation. With financial assistance from *National Geographic,* she was able to embark on her journey. Since then, she has travelled extensively, living in London and Sydney and writing, and is recognised as the only female travel writer to have won the Thomas Cook Book award.

Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* begins with the arrival of the narrator in the small outback town of Alice Springs with her dog Diggity, a small suitcase and six dollars. She reveals that although she has none of the skills or experience, but has this outlandish plan to train with camels to take along with her on a trip through the Australian desert. She works tirelessly in low-paying jobs in order to find funds for her trip, fuelled by her determination to fulfil her dream. Her first impression of Alice Springs is not favourable as she describes her frustrations with men and their crude behaviour in addition to a prevalence of anti-Aboriginal racism in the Outback. The first section of *Tracks* details her preparations for the journey. She had a gruelling two years of training under her mentor Kurt, and managed to survive the verbal abuse and

his misogynistic behaviour. She lived on a meagre $.50 per week, learning to work with camels, meticulously planned her routes, the ways to cross the desert and survive it and the related skills –under Sallay Mahomet—of loading and unloading camels, packing and unpacking supplies. She is finally able to earn herself four camels: Bub, Dookie, Zeleika and Goliath. She forges a close bond with them outlining that each possessed distinct personalities Time for the departure loomed ahead, she needed equipment and essential supplies for the journey and she is left with insufficient funds, *National Geographic* comes to her rescue and provides sponsorship offering her $4000 in lieu of exclusive rights to her story after with which comes the presence of the photographer, Rick Smolan who meets up with Davidson multiple times throughout the trip. Her desire for a solitary journey remains unfulfilled as she has to give in to regular contacts with Smolan and photo sessions, and in 1977, aged twenty-seven, Robyn sets off from Alice Springs onto her epic journey.

This compromise weighs heavily on her as she feels that everything that the trip means to her is lost. The initial phase of the journey is full of misadventures. She has learned all the difficult skills necessary to manage the camels, and also encounters wild camels, she learns it the hard way, and a confrontation with the harsh desert environment, which she learns to navigate. During her two years of training, she befriended a few Aboriginal women, and children, and also those involved in Aboriginal land rights. She learns a lot from the indigenous people, especially with relation to the environment, and gains a deeper understanding regarding the poverty, disease and displacement affecting the Aboriginals at that time. The late 70s were a period of intense social and political changes in Australia. The deeper she penetrates into the Australian desert, the more she understands and appreciates the cultural legacies of indigenous people and appreciates the sanctity of these disappearing,

ancestral lands. She develops a close companionship with Eddie, a Pitjantjara elder with whom she travelled a section of the journey, despite the language barrier. This partnership provides her with a unique perspective on the sacredness of the land. Through Eddie, she learns about the spiritual connection Aboriginal Australians have with their territory. She critiques the treatment of the Aboriginal people, bringing to notice of the readers the struggles against colonial practices and the racism they face throughout the journey. She goes through conflicting emotions of loneliness and existential thoughts. Many unexpected events happen, for example, she had to go after the camels that had disappeared the previous night, and how she managed to track them. The difficulties added with the strain of the scorching sun and her battling dehydration characterise a remarkable transformation that takes place as she enters deeper into the journey, each day brings a new revelation of Australia and ultimately herself. She discovers her hidden strength of survival techniques, which can only be learned when one steps into the unknown. Relationship with the camels receives a powerful blow when she must make an agonising decision to put down a camel, which is a very poignant moment in the text. She goes through another moment of heartbreak when her pet dog Diggity suffers from accidental poisoning and she is forced to put him down too. As the journey nears its conclusion, she manages to reach the intended odyssey, which comes to a fitting climax.

Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* challenge the androcentric genre of travel writing, which has been characterised predominantly by narratives that have historically privileged masculine perspectives that celebrated conquest, overtly heroic voyages of discovery, and domination of virgin unknown regions. This tradition marginalises female travellers and experiences as spectators, rather than active agents. However, women travel

writers, such as Davidson and Wheeler disrupt and reshape these conventions by foregrounding female experiences and extreme environments – the Australian desert and Antarctica, respectively, challenging, as well as dismantling, gender stereotypes, related to travel and adventure, as special, ideological, and narrative norms which is aptly expressed by Yale Schlick thus, "Sara Wheeler rejects her status as 'honorary man' in *Terra Incognita*, and Robyn Davidson rejects her mythic status as a heroic female traveler in *Tracks* (128-29). Likewise, Carl Thompson, in his essay "Travel Writing Now, 1950 to the Present Day" refers to both Davidson and Wheeler who negotiate their place within this male dominated literary tradition by adapting "such overtly adventurous risk-taking travels (which) was once the preserve of male travel writers, (207). Here Mary Gerhart's argument comes into consideration, "genre and gender as concepts shape a history of misreading that ranges on the one hand from their being completely ignored to their being cast into unbreakable stereotypes on the other […] once these two concepts are together open to inquiry, they become central to the process of interpretation and their changing relationships afford a key to understanding" (Gerhart 3). In other words, both are important for the study of literature, culture and interpretation. The following section explores how both texts engage with and subvert the gendered expectations of travel writing, employing hybrid narrative forms that blur memoir, cultural and social critique, coupled with a lyrical observation of the environment. By examining critical responses to these works, and with reference to the theoretical framework, this section situates *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita* within ongoing scholarly debates about the intersections of gender and genre and the resultant anxiety.

The concept of "genre anxiety" applies to Robyn Davidson and Sara Wheeler as they experience the professional and identity tensions when working within the

traditionally masculine travel writing genre, since travel writing has been historically a male domain, which culturally positions women as outsiders or " out of place."Movement and travel as narrative strategy by these authors deconstructs the traditional dichotomy of male mobility and female stasis. *Tracks* negotiates the tension between traditional travel narrative conventions and a desire for autonomy and physical endurance, which is exhibited by her unconventional and unique position as a lone woman crossing the outback. This creates a form of genre anxiety as she plays a double role of conforming to and resisting the masculine conventions, underlined in travel writing, while asserting her female identity and agency. The text challenges the androcentric genre of travel writing by foregrounding issues of gender and cultural engagement.

Holland and Huggan aptly point out,

> *Tracks* contains the classical ingredients for a woman's survival narrative: the courageous solitary traveler, defying the restrictions placed on her sex; the fearless confrontation of total strangers and 'hostile' surroundings; the gradual adaptation and communion with the environment. Yet Davidson […] counteracts these easy clichés. (121-22)

The other symbolic aspect is that it is a narrative that deals with the political history of the land and dwells on the responsibilities of representing cultural differences or rediscovery of Aboriginal knowledge. In a minute analysis of the travelogue, Holland and Huggan observe that Davidson's journey is not only a physical one, but also a quest for self-discovery. The narrative deals with the important equation between gender and genre in her desert sojourn and how Davidson confronts this anxiety in *Tracks* — by challenging the masculine ethos of the Australian outback, "where men are men and women are an afterthought" (Davidson 5). Sidonie Smith describes

Tracks as a "muscular myth" (56), which emphasises the subversion of gender expectations in a genre defined by male heroism. Smith discusses the renegotiation of Davidson's identity, thus

> Robyn Davidson journeyed close to the ground as Australian feminist, taking, like her foremothers, the measure of self transformation in the challenge of the journey through her arduous mode of travel by foot and camel across the red center in the interior of the Australian continent Davidson would escape the motorized postmodernity at the urban edges of Australia's coastal region, and with the constitutive constraints of the disabling femininity in Metropolitan centers. (56)

Davidson confronts the "masculinist logic of the bush", where the Australian outback is ciphered as a male domain, "had everyone been trying to put the fear of God into me just because I was in urbanite in the bush?" (7). questions the narrator (incidentally, questioning is considered to be a man's prerogative). She must negotiate this space, which complicates a journey wherein gender self-fashioning more than mere survival becomes important. "I hated myself for my infernal cowardice in dealing with people. It is such a female syndrome, so much the weakness of animals who have always been prey" (15). Sidonie Smith observes that Davidson recalls as she describes her relationship with the often violent Kurt, on whose ranch she works gratis in exchange for his (undelivered) promise of camels" (Smith 60). Her genre-induced anxiety is reflected in her ambivalence about writing her travel experience, although she is on the lookout for freedom and celebrates it also as further analysis will show. In her interview with Tim Youngs, she states that initially, she "had no intention of writing a book" (Youngs 26). The commitment to write was due to the sponsorship from *National Geographic,* and *Tracks* was written two years later.

Her identity as a woman travelling alone evokes social anxieties about danger and feminine propriety, highlighted by local warnings and prejudices that she faces constantly. Her conversation with a stranger in a railway car is a case in point, which is dripping with stereotypical assumptions about gender, as a woman is supposed to have a male chaperone and not be moving about on her own.

> Wher's your old man?
>
> I don't have an old man.
>
> (Faint gleam in bleary, bloodshot eye, still fixed at chest level) Jesus Christ, mate you're not going to the Alice alone, are ya? (…) them coons'll rape you for sure. You'll need someone to keep an eye on ya. Tell you what, I'll shout youze a beer, then we'll go back to your cabin and get acquainted, eh?. (5)

Women travellers over the centuries have undergone harrowing physical and psychological ordeals during the earlier eras. It has often been culturally unacceptable for women to travel unescorted or beyond the standard itineraries, due to the anxiety of finding themselves in sexually perilous situations. It would be quite naïve to presuppose that women travel writers today face no such constraints and gender expectations, which they have to negotiate either as they travel or write. The fear of sexual violence is a pressing concern for female travellers, as Mary Morris writes, "the fear of rape,[…] whether crossing the Sahara or just crossing a city street at night, most dramatically affects the ways women move through the world" (qtd. in Thompson 195-96). Here we could point out Julia Kristeva's analysis of the second wave of feminism mentioned in Gerhart, wherein "male and female categories are viewed as culture- and interest-bound, and the privileging of male over female is judged to be largely the result of the manipulative use of power on the part of males" (117). Throughout the text, Davidson's resistance to conformity is exhibited as she

rebels against the traditional concept of the docile woman, as she is a product of the times. The second wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s were enormously influential in Australia, as women began to challenge the sexist structures blatantly present in Australian society. Instances of prejudice and gendered expectations are strewn throughout the text. She remarks about "the Australian cult of misogyny" (Davidson 18) present in Alice Springs, "characterised by an aggressive, masculine ethic and severe racial tensions" (8). She is warned to restrain her amiable nature by one of the regular clients at the pub where she works, as she had been "nominated by some blocks as the next town rape case" (19). This tension is expressed in her constructing a "bad girl" rugged identity that resists normative femininity, hence disturbing expectations regarding female travellers. Megali Sperling Beck comments on Davidson's narrative persona,

> Davidson's narrative also raises important questions about the interrogation between genre and gender in geographical crossings. Besides a 'rediscovery' of Australian Spaces, a journey in the desert is an opportunity for gender, self refashioning […] *Tracks* can also be read as a narrative that challenges the constraints of gender through a narrator that does not easily fit into the image of the domestic and sessile female". (95-6)

The narrative structure is interspersed with moments signifying solitude and independence "there was no one but myself to rely on now" (Davidson 18). Davidson wanted to cross the desert on her own as she wanted "to be alone to test, to push, to unclog my brain of all its extraneous debris, not to be protected" (91). She treasures her solitude—"I was on my own. For real. At last" (104). For Davidson, independence equates to reminiscences "of that first day alone was a feeling of release; a sustained, buoyant confidence I strolled along" (109). She identifies

complete isolation as the answer to a true connection with the landscape she finds herself addicted to."[M]y aloneness was a treasure which I guarded like a jewel. If I saw people driving up to see me, I would most often hide" (40). Tim Youngs points out that "Twentieth-century travel writing is characterised by this emphasis on the lone traveller […] Being alone is esteemed by some as a valuable and enriching condition of travel" (Youngs 80). Davidson's "aloneness" provides her an opportunity for self-discovery and assertion of female agency.

While solitude is central to Davidson's self-reinvention, the genre's gender limitations are also displayed as her sense of independence comes into conflict with societal anxieties about women travelling alone, which is demonstrated through her encounters with gendered expectations. Judith Butler's argument on complex social expectations is worth considering, "culture so readily punishes or marginalises those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that […] there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled" (Butler 528). Butler regards gender as a performance wherein a wrong move invites punishment and the opposite a reassurance that is displaced by anxiety. This double edged attitude embodies the tension between personal liberation and expectations. Thus, by entertaining family critique with travel, *Tracks* exposes the genre's ideological constraints. She defines solitude as empowerment, as she wanted to be stripped of all "social crutches." This tension reflects broad anxieties as travel literature by women is often filtered through societal fears rather than their accomplishment, thus, the narrative strategy employed by Davidson— ambivalence, redefines the broad spectrum of travel writing.

Her reluctance to romanticise her journey reveals her anxiety about the genre's tendency to exoticise her experiences. She takes the "myth of freedom on the road" by

mentioning how her trip was interpreted through the projection of others. Davidson confronts this pervasive misogyny and social doubts in this harsh masculinist environment. The typical cliché is to label her journey as reckless or dangerous simply because she is a woman. They are reflective of deep, cultural and social anxieties about female autonomy in traditionally male spaces, most people are sceptical about her plans of travelling solo. Sidonie Smith observes, most of them discourage her from making the trip, "fearing that her success might effectively undermine the constitutive masculinity of life in the Red Centre and the bush. Others see her project as an attempt to commit suicide, or 'as penance for my mother's death' or as a gesture 'to prove a woman could cross a desert,' or as a sign of her craving for publicity (Smith 57).

The complexities of her motivations for the journey are something that Davidson herself does not make clear, as is revealed in the interviews that she gave to media houses like *The Guardian* and other tabloids. Most of the interviewers like Simon Hattenstone believed (as is made obvious in the film adapted from her book) that the journey was a corollary which was linked to her mother's death. Most reviews have that question lurking in their minds as to why Davidson decided on such a unique experience and a daring one at that. Davidson, of course, denied these remarks, "It feels so deterministic […] There were a million reasons why I made that journey. It wasn't just one thing leads on to the other" (Hattenstone). In the narrative, Davidson herself is assailed by doubts and uncertainty regarding the immensity of the trip as the later portion of this study sheds light on her introspection.

An encounter with a Marxist activist in Utopia who regards her decision of walking across the desert with camels as "the self absorption with the inner life that a true revolutionary understands as retrograde" (Smith 57) Davidson insists that "the

project had to do with “taking control of my own life” (Davidson 89), and takes singular exception to the remark made by the Marxist –‘‘bourgeois” and his comment about her entry “into the morbid internal landscape as traditionally at least, the realm of the female” and therefore as counterproductive” (Smith 57). The Marxist projected his fear as Smith labels “unruly otherness within” (58). These presumptions regarding female endeavours is aptly argued by Sara Mills in *Gender and Colonial Space* that “gender is a salient factor for a lone woman in a landscape or cityscape, and has an effect on one’s behavior and their perception of others” (4). Consequently, a form of genre anxiety is created as Davidson must both conform to and assist the masculine conventions embedded in travel writing while searching for female identity and agency.

As already discussed in the section covering the outline of women’s travel writing about female travel writers navigating and negotiating the constraints of the androcentric genre of travel writing through innovative approaches, similarly, women travel writers of the late twentieth century, Davidson and Wheeler, navigate the constraints through genre hybridity and critical engagement with gender expectations. The two texts serve to qualify the stress laid on hybridity as a distinguishing feature of the ‘New Travel Writing’. Carl Thompson notes, “travel writing today probably accommodates a greater range of voices and divergent perspectives than at any point in its history” (197).

Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* merges desert exploration with introspection – subversion of the genre’s masculine conventions – framing her journey as a process of self-discovery rather than territorial conquest. Here Davidson blends her narrative with other forms, like memoir, autobiography, and the quest narrative. This challenges the genre’s focus on external adventure over internal growth, a deeply

personal introspection rather than a description of the journey and vulnerability and the labour behind a journey rather than romanticising adventure, thus navigating the traditional genre of travel writing. This exemplifies Derrida's "Law of Genre", which argues that genres are not to be mixed, implying an essential purity of genres which is disrupted by contamination within the law itself. As Davidson herself acknowledges in her interview with Tim Youngs with reference to the genre of travel writing describing it as a "slightly anachronistic genre" and that it's a "genre, not dealing with this new world that we're in which isn't about center and periphery" and that "you just continue to try to subvert it" (28-29). Davidson believes that it was necessary to broaden the definition of travel writing and wonders where it fits in today's rapidly changing world structure. She feels that it is important for peripheral cultures to describe the one at the centre, so there is a necessity to pave the way to a new paradigm.

She goes through a seesaw of emotions regarding the trip, many a time, her uncertainty rises to the fore, and she goes into introspection, questioning her own motives, confronting personal fears and vulnerabilities. Although there were many doubting Thomases, she single-mindedly continues in her pursuit of her aims. Her graph of emotions begin from overcoming "debilitating fear" (59) to being "a dreadful coward" (77) "always returning to the central fact that (she) was involved in a pointless ludicrous farce" (138) to "it was changing me in a way that I had not in the least expected. It was shaking me up, and I had not even noticed" (133). The constant unease and tensions of the journey "between exaltation or dread, and usually a combination of both" (122), coupled with her conflicting approach, bring her to almost a mental collapse. At the same time, there is another cause for tension—the traversal of the major portions of the desert, which are Aborigine land, hence, during

her encounters with them, she records how she negotiates her interaction and "how she is perceived, received, or observed" (Beck 98). Shirley Foster and Sara Mills observe that a traveller, intending to break away from gender stereotypes, cannot control how her work is read by an audience with essentialist notions of gender. As mentioned earlier, it is in the reception of their travelogues that the distinction between men's and women's travel writing are seen (4).

Davidson frames her journey as a series of struggles that she outlines in the text, describing them, and accepting her limitations in contrast to conventional male-centred narratives where the hero/explorer comes across highly dangerous or death-defying situations and conquers them. Thus, Davidson demystifies the hero's journey by talking about her everyday mundane experiences rather than discussing them as epic triumphs. Her self-reflexive tone and introspective prose contrast with the detached tone of a typical male travelogue as Davidson prioritises emotional and psychological transformation. She must contend with the brutality of the Australian desert, "the desert was larger than I could comprehend" (123); the unpredictable nature of the camels, and vast stretches of isolated terrain; the way she learns all the knacks of dealing with camels (33), in case of sick camels, "how to jab needles into muscles…jugulars" (51); the disappearance of the camels (74); a decision to do away with Kate who was infected due to blood poisoning -"I was determined not to get soppy about it… I had successfully steeled myself to that" (57); controlling Dookie who had "transmogrified" (64); castration of bulls (83); The struggle with packing – "both the camels and I were totally inexperienced at packing up and going on long journeys (84) her first encounter with a wild bull and with three more which she shoots and kills but not without feeling remorse (141). Besides, she picks up "survival mechanism" (79) and has "learnt to live with the flies […] ants […] mosquitoes"

(125) and even snakes. She realises that she is a changed person, “It wasn’t so much strength I had gained, as tenacity–bulldog tenacity” (35). She even discovers the “otherness” or what she terms as the “Kurtishness” in her behaviour, “when she beats the living daylights out of him” (Bub). She realizes [t]his weakness, my inability to be terrified with any dignity came to the forefront often during the trip and my animals took the brunt of it” (123). Here, the identity of Davidson is suggestive of “a complex mixture of masculinity and femininity […] these juxtapositions are worked out primarily in relationship to camels” (Lisle 128). Aligned with this, Judith Butler’s take on identity that “gender is no way a stable identity […] it is an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* (emphasis in original Performative 519). Her physical stamina and resilience is made obvious as she has been able to battle dehydration, temperatures of 130°C, and load and unload fifteen hundred pounds of equipment onto camels, cover thirty miles in a day, and it is but natural that she has constant mood swings or “seethe[s] with rage” (137).

She describes herself as a person who, before she came to Alice Springs, had never “held a hammer… changed a lightbulb, sewn a dress, mended a sock, changed attire, or used a screwdriver” (81). The transformation that she undergoes during her journey is a remarkable one, although she goes through a lot of soul-searching in the beginning where she questions her decision of undertaking the journey, “a lunatic idea” (3), “the foolhardiness of the trip” (35) and “of dreaming about the trip without ever coming to terms with the reality of it” (50). By calling into question her own purpose, is the genre-induced need to step into traditional male itineraries.

She finds herself negotiating the gendered politics before her journey, she develops strategies to fight –‘I was ready to pounce on anyone who looked like they might be going to give me a hard time” (34), in order to survive in an environment

where “I was surrounded by people who, for some reason, found my very presence a threat. And had I not been able to stand up to them on their terms, I would be somewhere back on the East Coast, my tail between my legs” (68-9) She develops ‘range war mentality” as she has arrived from urban Australia she needs to adapt for her own purpose, the masculinist logic of the bush, even though she is critical of the sexism and racism present in the outback. Since Davidson is reliant on her own ingenuity for survival, so in this sense, as Sidonie Smith argues “Davidson becomes a conventional adventure hero, who meets the defining test of endurance […] even as she adopts the convention of heroic travel, Davidson adopts the conventions to her particular purpose” (62), as she navigates her place—which Debbie Lisle describes as “awkward negotiations of feminine traits”— as a woman in this toxic, masculine atmosphere. Lisle states, “Davidson, like other women travel writers, struggles to represent moments in her journey where being a woman opens up previously uninscribed observations and experiences—but she is continually constrained by the prevailing discourse of masculinity” (98). The stereotypical assumptions and prejudices that Davidson had to cope with in order to establish her agency in a genre associated with maleness are referred to in the aforementioned quote.

Towards the latter portion of the text, Davidson represents herself as a “wild woman” who “walked along naked usually, clothes being not only putrid but unnecessary. My skin had been baked deep terra-cotta brown […]. My nose had peeled so often […] I honestly could not remember […] etiquette […] menstrual blood […] ran down my leg” (Davidson 209). She didn’t feel the importance of social graces and female modesty anymore—she was “learning the gentle art of farting” (210). Sidonie Smith argues that she “thereby un-becomes feminized woman trapped in her reliance upon the rituals, spectacles, and degraded embodiment of normative

femininity" (61). This fluidity in identity or non-fixed nature of identity, especially in relation to gender roles and norms aligns with Judith Butler's theory that gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a reconstruction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Performative 273), that is, gender is solely a social construction that is open to change and contestation, constituted through repeated performances rather than of a stable nature. Davidson thus presents the female traveller as an adventurer, who is distinctly different from a man as an adventurer-traveller. Smith observes that "she becomes other to herself" (61) in the sense that Davidson rejects the feminine woman who is confined by performative rituals and constrained by gendered expectations.

The transformative journey of Davidson is not only with regard to her adaptation of the outback environment, but she learns a lot through "black -white contact as Davidson seeks some kind of at-oneness with the indigenous people of Australia, and some kind of atonement for the brutal history of conquest, colonialism, and persistent racism (Smith 62). She is aware that she bears a responsibility as a white woman crossing Aboriginal lands due to the legacies of colonial relations in Australia; she listens to their stories and seeks to understand Aboriginal people and their culture. She experiences unease as she feels that she would be perceived as a parasite on their culture. What she realises is the "Aboriginal feeling for their land. It is everything – their law, the ethics, their reason for existence, they are not separated from the land when they lose it, they lose themselves" (Davidson 167). Instead of following the genre's typical linear adventure, *Tracks* highlights the political responsibilities of representing indigenous communities and colonial histories, the

moral pressures of a commitment to authenticity over polished storytelling. The exchange between Davidson and Rick Smolan is evidence of this sentiment,

> Whatever justification for photographing the aborigines, I had come up with before, now were totally shot. It was immediately apparent that they hated it […]. I also realized that coverage in a conservative magazine like *Geographic* would do the people no good at all no matter how I wrote the article. They would remain quaint primitive to be gawked at by readers who couldn't really give a damn what was happening to them. I argued with Rick that he was involved in a form of parasitism […]. He came up with all the old arguments, but was torn, I knew because he recognized it was true. (Davidson 141)

Holland and Huggan observe that "*Tracks* is better seen through as a self-consciously critical examination of the media sensationalism that continues to dog and partly to define books of its genre. In this respect, it ranks alongside Catherine Luz and Jane Collin's recent critique of *National Geographic*, which lambastes the popular magazine for its media imperialism, and its voyeuristic appreciation of photogenic 'primitive' people" (122). Davidson's hesitation also arises from the ethical weight of responsibly discussing indigenous communities and the history of colonial occupation. The collaboration with *National Geographic,* which incidentally came to her rescue with the funds which she was in need of, is a platform that she criticises as conservative. She is forced to accept that her journey might be commodified or stripped of its political context.

For critics like Tim Youngs, Davidson's narrative is "open to the charge of exploitation." (Youngs 93). However, Holland and Huggan absolve her of "cultural voyeurism" as they note her support for the aborigines, which is based on an understanding of their material situation, in contrast to Bruce Chatwin in *The Song*

Lines (Holland and Huggan 123). Davidson, in her interview with Tim Youngs, insists, "if there was any insight into aboriginal culture in *Tracks*, it was through that complete transparency and openness and honesty" (Youngs 23). Despite this stance taken by the author, one cannot help but see that her position as a white Australian was one of unsolvable contradiction hence, ambivalence is but a natural outcome. The counterpoint, that the traveler -cum -writer establishes with the travellee that is a native in what Mary Louis Pratt calls the contact zone which is "[…] the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples' geographically and historically separated, come into contact with each other, and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 6). This has influenced reconceptualising the dynamics of travel writing in terms of human interaction and exchange. Pratt also defines two types of narratives common to most travel narratives. The first is more impersonal, while the second is the "sentimental narrator," she's concerned with people as individuals. The sentimental narrator acknowledges gaining information through contact with the native to a certain point. In *Tracks*, Davidson gains new sensitivities after meeting Eddie, which brings about a transformation in her.

Davidson's presence is welcomed in the Aborigine community as she was travelling with camels, and the Pitjantjara people shared a special relationship with camels (Incidentally, camels were a part of the colonial history of Australia) as they had been used for transport by this community. Another reason was "[h]aving Eddie with me was magic in terms of being accepted by Aboriginal people" (177). However, she is conscious that she might be intruding into their business. As Megali Sperling Beck notes, "the narrator is extremely aware of the fact that she is traversing historical spaces, which leads her to constantly question and revisit her own purposes" (95).

Davidson interpolates in the narrative 160 years of colonial occupation and oppression and the injustices faced by the Aboriginal population, such as usurpation of Aboriginal land, their rights, and facts regarding their health and education, hence the feeling of unease of crossing the Australian outback. She also mentions the government policy of assimilation used as a "means of getting aboriginal people off their land" (47) and how "the government allowed missionaries to rule many of these reserves and to confine and control the people" (118).

Comparatively, the Pitjantjara communities were better off and were the ones who tried to keep "their cultural integrity intact" (119). Megali Sperling Beck observes that "much of her unease comes from a questioning of the limits and possibilities of representation, as she is aware of the fact that after she finishes her trip, her experience of it will be available only through her memories" (99). The reason for this is her distrust regarding other people's accounts of her journey. Davidson's position is of a "white fellow tourist on the outside looking in" (Davidson 146). She is not only a woman in a masculine space but also a white person in indigenous lands. However, her close friendship with Eddie, the elderly aboriginal man is the reason for her "epiphanic transformation" and "through his company, she represents as a coming to knowledge about the desert itself, about aboriginal, people, and about aboriginal history" (Smith 64). Already she learns how to see differently—"He made me notice things I had not noticed before—noises, track […]. The land was not wild, but tame, bountiful benign, giving, as long as you know how to see it, how to be part of it" (Davidson 174). Carl Thompson outlines that the familiar trait of the travel writing genre is "now the recounting of a process of personal transformation, an inner journey that ostensibly runs alongside the literal journey described in the text" (198).

During the journey to Warburton, she is accompanied by Eddie "who was sheer pleasure to be with" (159), for two weeks. Even language constraints were not a barrier as Davidson just knew a smattering of the Pitjantjara language.

The transformative process in which Davidson positions herself thus, "I was becoming involved with it in the most intense and yet not fully conscious way […] my environment began to teach me about itself without my full awareness of the process it became an animate being of which I was a part" (191). She has become more connected to the environment, so she feels reconciled to the land, resolving her perceptions of encroaching Aboriginal territory.

The new consciousness that Davidson achieves in which she recalls and reviews "events with a kind of emotional detachment" produces a cathartic effect – "it was a giant cleansing of all the garbage and muck that had accumulated in my brain" (188). She has acquired a new perspective towards life, which is letting go of the "encrustations of the mind" (Smith 65) after her separation from Eddie she walks along the Gunbarrel Highway of the Gibson desert, which is the first real test of (her) survival skills as now she would be covering a vast isolated terrain "where no one had ever walked before" and had about a month before the trip would come to an end. She reviews what she had attained, evaluating her strengths and capabilities, which was a kind of rediscovery. The most important thing was developing moral energy, the acceptance of one's weakness and breaking free of established habits and ways of thinking. She treasures all that she has learnt and keeps it entrenched in her memory.

The encounter between human and desert in which all boundaries fade, makes her reflect on the "capacity for survival maybe the ability to be changed by environment" (192). The knowledge that she had gained through Eddie is related to the "aboriginal reality, their vision of the world" (193). Sidonie Smith notes that

Davidson‘s depiction of Aborigines “harkens back to certain anthropological discourses that romanticised Aboriginal people as ‘primitive’, outside and therefore less corrupted by the processes of modernisation” (66), representing them as more connected to the natural environment than westerners. Likewise, Carl Thompson points out that the “common trope [of recent travel writing] is that of personal transformation through contact with the primitive” (198

Initially, the desert for Davidson was “larger than I could comprehend. And not only was space an ungraspable concept, but my understanding of time needed reassessment […] I simply could not rid myself of this regimentation” (123–24). Her attitude towards food is “[f]ood had become something you put in your mouth to give you energy to walk, that’s all” (177). She doesn’t care about” bug-infested flour” or “part-cooked rabbit, dripping grease and blood, fur singed and stinking (155). Rune Grauland, in her essay “Deserts”, refers to T.E. Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), that he “felt neither hunger nor surfeit, and was not distracted by thoughts of food or hunger” (438).

Her reciprocity with the desert is exhibited when she throws off her clothes and participates in a romp in the dirt, joining the camels that begin to play. Covered in “thick caked orange dust” and with “matted hair”, she confesses, “it was the most honest hour of self-conscious fun I ever had” (Davidson 196). After the loss of Diggity to strychnine bait, another encounter with dirt brings her the much sought for reprieve—“ in that searing,[…] dry heat, I took off my clothes and danced” (231), “like a dervish, howling and shouting until exhausted, covered in ‘grime and sweat, shaking with fatigue, dust in [her]ears and nose and mouth ’she falls asleep […]. Her immersion in the dirt of the desert serves as a kind of communion with it, that brings her physical and spiritual release” (qtd. in Rawlins and Hooper 6). She redefines her

solitude (one of the ways in which she attempts to avoid other people‘s interferences), which proves a boon for her as through self-discovery, she empowers herself challenging the trope of women as damsels-in-distress, in need of protection. “Even for 20th century women”, argue Shirley Foster and Sara Mills, like Ysenda Maxtone Graham, who “was unable to navigate without the help of a male companion and when he is injured, she finds it almost impossible to find her way through the desert to get help” (Foster and Mills 255).

In the case of Davidson, the major difficulty that looms large in front of her is dealing with the publicity largely due to her sponsors, *National Geographic,* who capitalised on her image as ‘camel lady,’ a tag she fiercely disliked as she “felt that it distorted reality.”The media attention is responsible for the invasion of sanctity of her journey and relationships with the Aborigines; she finds her “new adventurous identity, kit, ill-fitting and uncomfortable” (Davidson 252). For *National Geographic* and other media outlets, the image of the eccentric, glamorous ‘camel lady’ was a good marketing ploy, the lone woman travelling on foot through the outback is now a tourist attraction. Debbie Lisle aptly points out, “[w]hen journalists initially covered Davidson’s story, it was certain ‘feminine’ attributes that were focused upon, such as her long blonde hair, her ‘available’ status and her special intuitive connection with both nature and her camels” (qtd. in Lisle 98).

> A myth was being created where I would appear different, exceptional […] had I been a man, I’d be lucky to get a mention in the *Wiluna Times* let alone international press coverage. Neither could I imagine them coining the phrase ‘Camel gentleman.’ ‘Camel lady’ had that nice patronizing belittling to it. Labeling pigeonholing— what a splendid trick it is (237). She acknowledges that accepting to write for the magazine was “a stupid but unavoidable mistake

> […] would therefore be a subtle, controlling factor" (91). She takes exception to the fact that Rick Smolan, the magazine photographer, assigned to document parts of her journey, also romanticizes the trip, She objects to the way the trip was turning out to be and is profoundly affected by his encroachment of her personal space, with Smolan and the "steady clicking of his camera" (Davidson 133). When Eddie's photos are taken, "he lifted his hand and said in English, 'No photograph,' then in Pitjantjara, 'It makes me feel sick'[…] Rick captured that one moment and then desisted" (186). Apart from Smolan, tourists and journalists "piled out with their cameras" to keep track of her, who she despises as she feels that they are insensitive, "sell me to newspapers when the story broke" (127) Davidson is resistant to the "mythical being" that she has become, with the concept of being a feminist icon, and the combination of four salient ingredients—"woman, desert, camels, aloneness," which has turned her into a celebrity. The media has put an end to her decision of being just an ordinary woman traveler who could traverse the desert by foot and camel, "And that was the antithesis of what I wanted to share. That anyone could do anything […] And this was especially true for women, who have used cowardice for so long to protect themselves that it has become a habit". (236)

Indira Ghose protests against such approaches of women's travel writing that "tends to […] concentrate on constructing a myth of the intrepid, autonomous heroine braving all odds in the wilds […] [I]n the case of female writers all critical faculties, so acutely deployed in the analysis of men's texts are […] suspended (Youngs133). Likewise, Holland and Huggan point out Davidson's anxiety in *Tracks* thus

> *Tracks* raises unanswered questions about Davidson‘s collaboration in the mythologies of ‘exceptionality’ she seeks so urgently to disclaim. Nevertheless, her uneasiness with the genre in which she is working and her readiness to expose that genre to internal critique, a valuable corrective to those travel narratives– and here both women and men are implicated that draw attention to themselves (and their writers) as saleable commodities and that profit unashamedly from marketable romantic myths. (Holland and Huggan123)

Here, critic duo Holland and Huggan point out the genre anxiety of Davidson, with relation to her commodification by *National Geographic*, and the fact that a romantic touch was given to her personal odyssey in the desert. Sidonie Smith terms this unease—“ironic self-scrutiny” (Smith 67). The question of the gaze is also a point of reference wherein media exploit exoticism, in this case, the Aborigines of Central Australia. Here I would like to add that apart from Davidson’s unease of genre, there is also an anxiety with regard to traversing the Aboriginal land and overcoming the barriers between herself as a “white fella” and the Aborigines, as she acknowledges “but the wall was always there” (141). In contrast to this criticism, Rune Grauland in her essay, “Deserts”, argues that the overall message of *Tracks* is “somewhat ambiguous.” Davidson’s sojourn to the desert with the aim of testing herself against an environment that is unique—“does she not diminish the very environment, the very environment she wants to elevate? Also, if literally ‘anyone’ can cross the desert, why go there in the first place” (441)? The very fact that Davidson in her postscript does not pinpoint any one reason that could explain her motive to embark on her journey could be the answer to this query.

Her ambivalence and contradiction are portrayed in the final page of the narrative—"try to relive those memories that have been buried so deep […] I knew even then that, instead of remembering the truth of it, I would lapse into a useless nostalgia. Camel trips, as I suspected all along […] do not begin or end, they merely change form" (Davidson 254) Davidson wrote *Tracks* two years later and after the book was published "the memories began to fade" (Postscript 2012). Davidson acknowledges in the interview with Tim Youngs in 2004, that the journey was "visually strongly embedded" that "made the reliving possible" and putting it into words "transformed it into something else […] I might just have a sudden flash of being in the desert and remembering it." (26-27). In other words, Davidson recognises her role as well as her responsibilities as a writer.

Genre and Gender Tensions in Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (1996)

Terra Incognita documents Wheeler's time in Antarctica, a vast frozen terrain with extreme weather conditions, with few kinds of marine life devoid of native inhabitants, where she spends a period of about seven months as a writer in residence. Before delving into the given text, it is important to understand the contextual reference of Antarctica. Antarctica is a region which is historically been dominated by male explorers and was considered a terrain physically and literally hostile to women. It was only in the last two decades of the twentieth century that women could get an entry into the male-dominated space of Antarctica. One of the reasons is the physical difficulty and economic expense to reach destinations where "travellers", as Janice Cavell in her essay, "The Polar Regions", states, "without a formal scientific political mission were rare" (432). Prior to this, women's relationship with Antarctica was non-existent. Among the regions of the world, the physical restriction of women to

Antarctica makes it unique among the continents as a place physically closed to women. Although still a minority, women began to make their presence felt in different professions as scientists, doctors and radio operators. Antarctic female-authored narratives did not start appearing until after 1948, which "developed a different form to the heroic-journey narrative: one in which the gender of the writer looms large" (Blackadder 20). Many of the recent chronicles of expeditions and memoirs about Antarctica have been written by women, which exhibits a major shift in literature that has been dominated by male writers. An instance of this being a work, *My Antarctic Honeymoon* (1956), by Jenny Darlington, that was only possible because her husband was a scientist. However, it was in the last few decades that one finds a burgeoning number of opportunities for women in the Antarctic region. Scholars turned their attention to the interaction of women with the southern continent, which included recovering female history in Antarctica. Janice Cavell points out, "the mystique of the Poles was preserved, mainly through re-readings of older texts rather than literary innovation. Indeed, in an effort to recapture some of that mystique, new books were often laden with references to earlier journeys" (432). Sara Wheeler, a prominent writer who was one of the first to be appointed as writer-in-residence in Antarctica, narrates her experiences in the male-centric world of Antarctica, peopled by scientists and their hostile reactions towards her. The narrative challenges the traditional gender roles associated with male-dominated polar exploration, and Wheeler navigates this genre anxiety by creating a hybrid narrative, which blends personal reflection with historical and scientific discourse, myths and the lives of its temporary inhabitants— or the scientists and staff, resulting in a text which both honours and critiques the travel writing tradition.

Wheeler (b. 1961), English travel writer, and biographer best known for vivid accounts of the polar regions, was raised in Bristol in a "homogeneous" blue collar, working class conservative Tory family, as Sara Wheeler herself admitted in a radio conversation, under Writers and Company, (CBC Radio) with Eleanor Wachatel, "there was no unconscious bias. It was all conscious. We didn't like anyone who wasn't like us". It was a time, she says, when fathers worked and mothers didn't. She mentions that post-war xenophobia was endemic, and as a child, she absorbed it all and when she questioned her mother, she wasn't given any answers. She insists that travelling was a way to get away from all that. Most of the countries she visited were discarding their colonial shackles and gaining independence. She went on to work at a ladies fashion shop in Paris for a year and studied ancient and modern Greek at Oxford, graduating with honours. Wheeler has extensively travelled in Greece and Chile and penned books based on her travels. She became the first female writer–in–residence at the South Pole, sponsored by the US National Science Foundation, a seven-month tenure in Antarctica in 1994-95, living among scientists and explorers, and her experiences form the basis of her acclaimed book, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica.* She is recognised as one of Britain's foremost travel writers, and has documented her adventures in eleven bestsellers. The article, based on the radio interview, describes Sara Wheeler thus-"Covering seven continents, she's brought a fresh perspective to what has historically been a male dominated genre" and that she has "established herself as 'the queen of Intrepid travel'" Her books include accounts of journeys as well as biographies as the one on Apsley Cherry-Garrard. Besides *Terra Incognita*, some books among others include *The Magnetic North: Notes from the Arctic Circle*, and *Mud and Stars: Travels in Russia with Pushkin, Tolstoy and*

Other Geniuses of the Golden Age. She has been recognised as a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Wheeler chronicles her journey to the Antarctic continent, one of the most remote places on earth with an austere climate and unforgiving conditions, and retraces her physical and her spiritual explorations. Her interest in Antarctica was fuelled when travelling through Chile, for a book that she was writing. A brief trip to the Chilean Antarctic station on King George Island was followed by an application which was accepted by the US National Science Foundation, The first part of the book describes the time majorly under the wing of the United States Antarctic program and her visit to multiple research stations including the US stations at the South Pole, diverse locations in the Ross sea area, McMurdo, the New Zealand Scott base, the Italian Mario Zucelli Station, the west and east Antarctic ice caps, and both ends of the peninsula. The next part centers around her sojourn in the southern part of the Antarctic peninsula that is the British facility or the BAS (British Antarctic survey), at Rothera, with a suffocating male-dominating class culture, and her journey back to the American station, The final part depicts Wheeler being given her own hut out on the sea ice which she shares with artist Lucia De Leiris from Rhode Island. This portion of the text portrays her poignant visit to Scott's hut. Wheeler shares insights into the daily life of the international community of scientists and researchers in Antarctica and their sense of camaraderie. She revisits historic sites of Scott's and Shackleton's huts, at the same time, she interweaves stories from and historical information about the heroic age of Polar exploration in order to contextualise and enrich her narrative. Wheeler is conscious of the feat of past explorers who have shaped the mysterious image of the continent that the writer takes with her on her journey. A sizeable portion of the text is devoted to the history of the polar expedition

in which nations like the United Kingdom, Norway, New Zealand, Australia, vie for honours. The Antarctic Treaty of 1959, which was signed by twelve nations, came into force in 1961, by which Antarctica was supposed to be used "for peaceful measures only" and for scientific experimentation or discoveries, largely beneficial for mankind. She discusses in length the expedition of Scott and his team, who, despite their heroic efforts, tragically perish before they were able to make it. The letters and diaries by Scott, which were recovered, took the form of a narrative and became the constant source of reference by later travellers. "Scott's exploration narrative has become an iconic text of Antarctic history, overshadowing other narratives" (Blackadder 12). Wheeler admires the heroic era explorers, like Robert Falcon Scott, Roald Amundsen or Earnest Shackleton, Donald Mawson and sees their texts, superimposed on the Antarctic landscape she experiences, all the while comparing her experiences with theirs and interrogating the myths that surrounded them. The hybridity of the narrative is evidenced in the fact that it is fragmented into discussions of quotidian experiences on polar bases, accompanied by snippets about scientific research conducted at the bases. This is coupled with intertextual pieces of journals of the past explorers, and self-exploration tinged with humour and irony. Wheeler describes in detail the panoramic scenes of Antarctica and fascinating minute details of how the camps in the different bases existed. For instance, different modes of transportation used at the bases, from the layers of protective clothing used- the insulated jackets-to combat the extreme weather conditions; the use and operation of toilets and its ordeals, the showers restricted to two minutes twice a week; the creative preparation of dishes, and how the residents indulge in leisure activities and also pranks. The tiny international communities living in the Antarctic are facilitated with restaurants, bars, and libraries. They have a different way of living in which they have

to do without many of the comforts that they are generally used to. Wheeler, like Davidson, embarks into reflections on travelling as a woman, and criticism of toxic, British masculinity, and epiphanic experiences about the mythical landscape of Antarctica.

In Wheeler's *Terra Incognita,* the narrator embodies genre anxiety as she enters Antarctica, a landscape with a history of male heroic exploration. Susan Basnett maintains " The sense of adventure lies in taking risks and exploring the unknown […] men journeyed in search of fortune and renown [which] was explicitly gendered" (225). Wheeler's writing reflects the pressures to establish authority in a genre that privileges adventures, colonial exploration narratives of national identity, which became firmly ensconced in a male discursive field, perceived mainly through the images of the Heroic-Age Explorers and the narratives. Right from the beginning, and throughout the text, she is conscious of the fact that she is in the shadow of the heroic-era explorers "the designation itself privileges a particular kind of story—the heroic journey narrative in which the masculine hero overcomes the challenge of nature to win a physical or moral victory" (Blackadder 13). Wheeler had done prodigious historical research, taking "two years' planning involves prior contact with several countries' scientific Antarctic programmes" (Hulme 92), which included "psychological preparations too" (Wheeler 5). Maureen Mulligan points out that "Antarctica emphasize[s] the extremes of an environment as far from the comfort of Western civilization as possible, in which the traveller is thrown back on her own mental resources to survive the isolation and the strangeness of the journey" (Mulligan 72). The "big freeze" as Wheeler admits is her initial response to Antarctica, however her gradual initiation into the landscape changes her conception of the continent "as a space of the imagination." She acknowledges that "Antarctic

existed most vividly in the mind. It was a metaphoric landscape […] Mythical for centuries, so it remained" (3). She seems to be aware of just about everything which was written about Antarctica "by the men who gave Antarctica a history" and that "reading them all was like looking at an object through the different angles of a glass prism" (4). As Sara Mills points out, "This close intertextual relation with other travel accounts can be seen in the fact that travel writing has always appropriated other writing" (73). Her sojourns across Antarctica are to places explored and described by the prominent four—Scott, Shackleton, Amundsen and Mawson —and she weaves this into her narrative and for the most part, her narrative is structured around her observations on the expeditions of yore, which introduce her personal reflections of the places that they had explored. Wheeler seeks in Antarctica "a landscape of the mind", as she notes Shackleton's comment, "we all have our own white South" (1)

At the time of visiting Antarctica, Wheeler was a young writer with two travel books to her name, she observes," I was a young writer when I was at the Antarctic, […] and the Antarctic was pristine, a perfect symbol of hope (Halliburton). She describes her relationship with Antarctica before the journey, it had nothing to do with Shackleton or any kind of "metaphorical illusions […] as far as I was aware, the continent was a testing ground for men with frozen beards to see how dead they could get" (Wheeler 1). The extreme environment of Antarctica and the brutal weather conditions were an endurance test for males to the furthest point. Sara Wheeler's initial reaction upon arriving in Antarctica is because of the uninhabited landscape, which is "the perfect tabula rasa", as she points out that "Antarctica is the highest continent, as well as the driest, the coldest, and the windiest, and nobody owns it. Seven countries might have 'claimed' a slice for themselves, and there might be almost two hundred little research camps, but the continent is not owned by anyone"

(Wheeler 2). Antarctica's apparent emptiness and pristine environment holds an indescribable appeal for Sara Wheeler. As Elizabeth Leane describes Antarctica as "the continent- as- canvas, the wide white page"; and a terrain of "inexpressible extremes"(1). Its purity relates, partly to the fact that the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 came into force to ensure that the continent would remain free of military conflict and be used only for purposes of scientific investigation. It is a continent which, according to Wheeler, "blunts the edges of nationality" (2). Throughout the text, Wheeler constantly refers to the Antarctic being an unowned continent and unpolluted without an indigenous population. The few remaining wildernesses in the post-modern world are sought as avidly as ever […]. As [they] get paved over, travel writing increasingly emphasises the inner journey" (Hulme 565).

Janice Cavell, in her essay, "The Polar Regions", states that "polar literature written in recent decades is remarkable for the ubiquity and denseness of its intertextuality with all exploration narratives. In many cases, the reason is an individual's admiration for a particular explorer. Numerous modern journeys have followed the route of a chosen hero, attributing a timeless value to his achievement through reenactment." (432).In a sense, Wheeler's journey can be regarded as a second journey in which she is following the footsteps of the heroic era and retracing their steps by re-visiting all the sites they had visited Maria Lindgren Leavenworth analyzes some of the features found in second journeys arguing that, "Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* illustrates an attempt to pay respect to first travellers, simply by trying to see what they saw." (56). Wheeler navigates and challenges the traditionally masculine conventions of travel, writing and reclaims female authority in the historically exclusionary Antarctic exploration narrative through personal memoir and intertextuality as she acknowledges "many images of the heroic age of Antarctic

exploration have burned themselves into the imagination, […] I was longing to see the huts. I wanted to pay homage" (Wheeler 19). Maria Lindgren Leavenworth argues, "[n]ot only does the second journey supply a new mode of travelling in an over-travelled world", but it also establishes links to the past and an opportunity to juxtapose and to compare, […] the past and the present […] [which] make room for […] intertextual references […] and a higher degree of self-reflexivity" (36). As is demonstrated in *Terra Incognita,* Wheeler is acutely aware of earlier travellers/ writers to the continent, and is keen to find their footsteps and follow them.

Nicoletta Brazzelli describes *Terra Incognita* as "portraying journeys of personal growth and renewal […] Sara Wheeler focuses on the people of Antarctica, past and present –the way they live now, the way they lived and died in the past and how they react to the physical and psychological challenges of the most extreme weather conditions of the world. She juxtaposes her banal routines and those of the Antarctic community living in the different stations with grand historical accounts of the heroic explorers.

The Antarctic is, as Francis Spufford explains in the introduction to *The Antarctic: An Anthology,* a place of "sensory extremes" (Jackson 226). There are constant references to the extreme weather conditions with detailed accounts of the relative temperatures at different sites in Antarctica and its effects as depicted by Wheeler. Joanna Price suggests, "in choosing to go to Antarctica, (she is) electing to have embodied experience of its landscape" (2). The description of the wind—"it sliced through any number of layers like a pneumatically driven carving knife" (100) when the narrator describes the wind blowing at about twenty five miles an hour and how the exposed flesh between her "goggles and balaclava" immediately felt a burning sensation. Although she was getting used to the subzero temperatures, she

admits that if she took off her gloves, even for a minimal five seconds, she would invariably lose sensation in one or two fingers (21-2). The temperature at Antarctica ranges from “minus fifty at McMurdo in winter” and minus thirty-nine at Rothera (194). The challenging conditions of the effects of the weather are thus described—“I threw a mug of boiling water into the air, and it froze in mid-flight. When the mercury hit minus forty, our eyes froze shut if we blinked for too long” (264). Wheeler describes the “continent’s Janus characteristic, switching abruptly from seduction to destruction […]. We would be trapped inside for days, the windows mute white sheets, listening to wind which never relented” (270), with strong wind like a “violent blast” which would keep Wheeler and Lucia awake, and on such mornings, “the door was always frozen shut” (271). The “brutalising effect of the wind […] can freeze exposed flesh in seconds.” In case of frostbite, which, if untreated, can be fatal. Wheeler becomes acclimatised to the unrelenting weather conditions but is also aware of the “limits of physical endurance” (Jackson 226).

Wheeler's representation of the Antarctic landscape also incorporates her bodily experience, which is partly produced by the recollection of the explorer’s accounts. She then goes on to compare herself to the old explorers, which is an empathetic response due to recognition of their physical effort – “I couldn’t begin to imagine what the old explorers had suffered when they pushed further south, month after crucifying month. I saw them with fresh eyes then (22). This is evidence of the fact that the text *Terra Incognita* conveys the sublime nature of Antarctica through a visceral and personal experience which is not mere historical recounting. This is a significant departure from the usual masculine narratives, focused on conquest and physical struggle. As Patrick Brentlinger argues that “the great explorers’ writings are nonfictional quest romances in which the hero–authors struggle through enchanted

bedevilled land towards an ostensible goal (qtd. in Leavenworth 80). Heroic masculinity often emphasises pushing boundaries and challenging limits. Scott's retrieved letters and diaries were thought to display an extraordinary moral victory, although he failed physically. And hence Antarctic exploration is filled with male heroic figures and imagery sustained by a male discourse. In contrast, Wheeler by prioritizing vulnerability and relationality over conquest, dismantles the heroic explorer trope, which is the core of traditional male narratives That she is familiar with Cherry - Garrard's account is evident from her indebtedness to him, as she lies down in the shelter," I felt something approaching awe, as he had taught me so much" (139). Wheeler's narrative reflects her deep respect towards the legend of Scott and his team, acknowledging the extreme challenges and hardships that they had endured. She reiterates her desire to "pay homage" to the Antarctic travellers she has encountered in the narratives that she has read (136).

When visiting Scott's hut at Cape Evans, she expresses closeness to the early Explorers, "I saw them everywhere" (56). She visits the "Crozier pilgrimage", having an overpowering desire to lie in what was left of the shelter after having "purposefully inflamed the crew with stories of epic heroism". The rock shelter had been built by Cherry-Garrard, Bill Wilson, and Birdie Bowers on their winter journey. She responds with empathy, imagining their physical condition. "When I spotted the remains of the shelter, my heart contracted […] my eyes filled with tears. I hadn't realised how close we had become, these dead explorers and I" (138). As Maria Lindgren Leavenworth argues, "by situating herself in the environment she has read about, Wheeler approaches an understanding and experiences a connection with the past, even though this is the past of male travelling that she as a woman would not have gained access to

in the early 20th century" (61). The emphasis is on making connections with the writing subject of the first text.

Wheeler's narrative or category of "forensic footsteps", as Christopher M. Kirkstead refers to the sub-genre of footsteps travel to which it belongs (139), and other travel accounts like Wheeler's, which retrace the accounts of earlier travellers, demonstrate a significant diversity in tone and style. Some display nostalgia for an earlier age of heroic travel, while others, as Thompson states, like Wheeler, "explore the gap between past and present travel more critically or ironically" (207). Wheeler in *Terra Incognita,* as Thompson elaborates, adopts an "ironic perspective" and "interrogates the masculinism traditionally associated with polar travel" (208). Thus, the text is interspersed with humorous interventions and the element of self-deprecating humour directed at herself, as well as others around her, in order to bring innovation to a genre that is based on conquest and male virility by talking about vulnerability and failures, as seen in the text, which is sprinkled with many such instances. We can relate this to Derrida's 'Law of Genre,' wherein he outlines that pure genres do not exist and cannot exist, and that "every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (65), that the law of genre is essentially a principle of contamination. Likewise, Frow's theory also applies here, — "genres are necessarily unstable and unpredictable" (25).

At the US Antarctic Program in Christchurch, Wheeler, along with other fellow travellers, is issued Extreme Cold Weather Clothing. "The safety video began optimistically with Scott's 'Great God this is an awful place' […] and accompanying footage of well clad individuals crashing into crevasses […]. [O]ur room was bare […] except for overstuffed orange fabric bags the size of medium suitcases" (12). The

irony is very obvious with reference to the “optimistic” (12) statement of Scott and what was being shown on the video footage. To combat the cold, they are given heavily insulated thermal garments. She describes in a light-hearted tone a serious situation, “slipped, the dog tags around my neck, so that in the event of a crash, my charred remains could be air-mailed to my parents” (14).

An instance of irony levelled at a scientist (who has a beard like Trotsky and is named so) who was described “as one of the most brilliant scientists of his generation and in line for a Nobel Prize” comes up to her complaining “I’ve got this new alarm clock, and I can’t work out how to use it” (30). Wheeler is very much aware and observant about the cultural differences that existed between different units. She remarks about the technical abilities of the Italians, who are also very conscious about their identity. One such humorous instance of this difference is noted when the narrator makes bread -and -butter pudding, and the Italians, who were, “enthusiastically seasoning it all with salt, pepper, and olive oil” (44). Brian, a coastal ecologist working at Lake Fryxell, is a revered figure in his team, however, the narrator notes that the only time she “saw him exerting authority” was “when he stood outside the back door of the Jamesway beating a large frying pan against an even larger saucepan in order to wake up LD and Roland” (66). The heavy atmosphere of scientific experiments and research is broken by lighthearted banter between community members, such as the one between LD and Roland –

“That’s cable now“, he was saying to Roland. “Stop! For Christ sake stop! What’s your

problem?’’

“I have stopped,” whined Roland.

“Why didn’t you stop when I first asked? Got a wedgie or something?”

"What's a wedgie?" I interrupted, keen to learn a new scientific term.

"It's when your underwear rides up" said LD. (67)

Here, the narrator is also directing the humour at herself along with LD and Roland. The welcoming atmosphere of Lake Fryxell urges her to stay in the Taylor Valley visiting camps instead of returning to McMurdo immediately. Before she leaves she whips up her 'famous' bread -and -butter pudding with the result that the three fell asleep on the table itself after the "seditious meal" to be only woken up by their sentinel Brian at two in the morning with a shout "time for the after -dinner entertainment (68). The narrator remarks about her linguistic barriers and that she was becoming more "acculturated to Americans." Despite this, she mentions about mistaking Kool-Aid for an Antarctic charity, but it turned out to be a raspberry flavoured dessert (90). Another hilarious encounter is one with a seal. The narrator accosts Mike, one of the graduate students, "with his pants around his ankles" as he was startled by a seal which had emerged through a hole, while using an ice hole toilet! (132).

An instance of her not very impeccable driving skills is revealed as she drives the trailer for three hours while returning to camp, but she wanders into a reverie, excessive use of gas, and is given a reminder by the actual driver 'too tall Dave'. The question of marriage comes up when Jose, a Mexican-American biker, discloses that he had married his Harley-Davidson. This information was digested by the narrator "in an English kind of way."The "ceremony" was performed by the owner of Joseph's local bike shop, "he does it a lot." The narrator found it difficult to maintain her composure however, more was in store. Dave wanted to know if Captain Scott was a bit of a dude, followed by yet another serious query by Chuck, "hey, is that the guy they named Scott's hut after?" (158). The narrator discloses the mail that she received

from Jeremy, “the patron of my expedition, wanted to know more about incinolet toilets, details of which had been included in my last letter. He was troubled by the distinction between solids and liquids, and was anxious to know what one did about diarrhoea. “I privately vowed never to send a child of mine to public school” (247). The adoption of “dry washing“ system is explained at length by the narrator to Lucia, the artist with whom she is sharing the hut, “you put away dirty clothes until the ones you’re wearing are even dirtier, then the old ones seem clean, so you can change them around. […] Admiral Byrd used to wash a different third of his body each night, and I had heard an engineer on station explaining how to make a pair of underpants last a month. (Switch them back to front for a week, then turn them inside out and do a week each way round)” (276).

The narrator acknowledges her inability to comprehend certain basics like – “if the water temperature is below freezing,” I asked, feeling – and sounding – stupid, why doesn’t it freeze?” “The salt lowers the freezing point,” said the diver (286). These instances revealed that it was not only the narrator who indulged in self-irony or self-deprecating humour, but it also targeted researchers and staff and others at the Antarctic. These instances of slapstick hilarity deflate the otherwise serious tone in the intertextual references of traditional heroic-era exploration and passages dealing with self-reflexivity. Thus, this subversive strategy employed by Wheeler is to negotiate her place as a female travel writer in a historically exclusionary field. Barbara Korte discussing twentieth-century travelogues outlines that, “an emphasis on the heterogenous, in both experience rendered and modes of expression” characterises them and that “fragments of narrative are mixed freely with descriptions, sketches, dialogues, scenes, passages of reflection, short essays—or even poetry” (Korte 142).

In contrast to the subzero temperature and the sombre and tragic history of Antarctic exploration, the narrator gives in to some moments of cultural divide that she describes when relating to her companion Lucia, who is from America. “I must have some Windex”, she said, narrowing her eyes as if in pain. I began rummaging through the first aid kit in search of an anti-flatulent. But she was only being American. She wanted to clean the window” (287). Wheeler’s allusions to British class stratification are something that Lucia cannot grasp, and this is shown in their conversation, also in the surroundings of the Scott Hut, towards the end of the book. Lucia questions the narrator about Englishmen often dressing up in costume, and looking puzzled about it the narrator replies, “it’s a class thing, I suppose – it was a kind of male upper-class ritual”. This fueled Lucia‘s interest in the class system, and the narrator had a trying time to give her “a comprehensible picture.” The conversation ends when Lucia poses questions about her accent. Wheeler deliberately positions this conversation in contrast to the solemn and intense environment of Scott’s hut and her own feelings of reverence. Carl Thompson in “Travel Writing Now, 1950 to the Present Day,” observes,”[s]uch self-ironising represents one of contemporary travel writing's most characteristic modes. Born in part from the sense of belatedness […], the deliberate staging of the author’s inadequacy as an intrepid traveller is now fundamental in the flourishing tradition of comic travel writing as practised by figures as varied as Eric Newby, Redmond O’Hanlon […]. With their emphasis on moments of bathos, farce and failure, travelogues of this type from one perspective, undercut and subvert the epic quest and macho personae often associated with travel in earlier eras” (208).

Another feature of travel writing, as noted by Barbara Korte, reflects on the “genre's particular potential to assemble a wealth of observations, experiences,

and reflections. More than any other genre, travel writing is defined by the interaction of the human subject with the world" (5) The different personnel, and researchers she meets intermittently at different bases, are given humorous names—Bill, who gives a demonstration about frostbite and preventions for the same is named 'Frozen Sausages', the Texan seismic geologist has "come- to -bed eyes and been- to- bed clothes" is named Seismic Man (with subtle references of a closeness) or she uses descriptive phrases like-The Norwegian, American graduate student Lars –" reminded me of a big shaggy dog" (26); Italian climatologist, Claudio, "beaming like the Cheshire Cat" (30); Little Dave or LD "was short, with a cloud of tangled black hair and a hat like a thermal doughnut" (63); Nann, a large woman from Chicago "who looked as though her hair had been arranged with a blow torch" (116);The narrator describes herself and her group landing in Christ church as " a shaggy tribe of overdressed primates with matted hair and exhausted faces" (181). As Yael Schlick comments, "[Wheeler] migrates from one national station to another, providing social and cultural commentary" (22).

At the penultimate end of the narrative and experiencing Antarctic research bases of Americans, Kiwis and Italians she comes across the proprietary and misogynistic attitude of the British station at Rothera with their lewd banter and states, "British men doing what they did best – reverting to childhood and behaving like gits" (Wheeler 196), that is their behavior and interactions are described as juvenile by Wheeler, and by their characterization as throwbacks to an earlier historical time, this reveals a desire to retain the gender division of earliest centuries by keeping Antarctica a male domain.

Their crude form of sexual harassment can be measured here –

> A man approaching the end of a two-and-a-half-year tour of duty as a member of base support staff announced that he had remembered a good joke.
>
> "Why do women have periods?" It went.
>
> Nobody knew the answer
>
> "Because they deserve it!" the man burst out, no longer able to keep this - splitting information to himself. Everyone laughed
>
> It was as if I had entered a time capsule, and then been hurtled back to an age in which Neanderthal man was prowling around on the look-out for mammoths. (200)

It is quite ironic that the writer acknowledged that the Italians had "treated [her] like a doll" (44), whereas she had to face such discrimination, among her own countrymen, that too at the end of the world. Yael Schlick argues that "Wheeler's exasperation is with the structural exclusion of women, whose achievements in Antarctica are either belittled or likened to male endeavours" (128). Wheeler tries to navigate a place for herself within a male tradition of adventure, to the heroic era of exploration.

In spite of this noble spirit of the heroic myth, the narrator encounters antagonism in the pristine setting of Antarctica, dominated by men, mostly "beakers" (scientists). The use of the moniker, "heroic era", refers to late 19th and early 20th century exploration of Antarctica. This infers a particular kind of story – "the heroic journey narrative in which the masculine hero overcomes the challenges of nature to win a physical or moral victory […] Scott's narrative has survived and been reinvented to a greater degree than other narratives of the time achieving iconic status within polar literature" (Blackadder 13-14). The death of Scott and his men elevated the journey to a transformative one, emphasising it as a spiritual success. Although recent years have witnessed female travellers and staff members in scientific

expeditions, resistance to women's inclusion does not seem to wane. As Wheeler notes, "men had always wanted to keep Antarctica for themselves, and since the Norwegian Caroline Mikkelsen became the first woman to set foot on the continent on February 20, 1935, the course had advanced with the speed of a vegetable garden" (202). It was only the Americans who had taken this seriously, yet in spite of this, in 1995, only 25% of women were working at McMurdo. Wheeler quotes a 1966 magazine with the headline *Women = Worries*, with Antarctica being referred to as "the womanless white continent of peace" and a US commander remarking, "I think the presence of women would wreck the illusion of the frontier man – the illusion of being a hero" (202). The virility that was attached to British explorers of the heroic era was knitted with the legacy of England's imperialism.

Wheeler is very aware right from the beginning that Antarctica was "male territory […] it was like a gentleman's club, an extension of boarding school and the army" (6). Wheeler has to combat not only genre anxiety as mentioned earlier, but also gender anxiety and expectations. As Susan Basnett notes, "through reported conversations and occasional authorial reflection, Wheeler looks at how different groups stationed on Antarctica reflect the social attitudes of men towards women in different cultures today. Her account of her arrival on the British base, described with irony but also with anger, shows the extent to which she felt unwelcome, in contrast to the warm response from US and European men on other bases (238). "Men were coming and going along the corridors, engaged in a variety of activities, but united by the fact that they all ignored me. Short of erecting a sign outside the base saying GO AWAY they couldn't have made it clearer that I was unwelcome" (195); Postcards of women's bottoms adorned the drinking area of the British research base; an

assistant of BAS enlightens her, “they don’t want the complication of a female in such a pristine place”, as, “it’s visceral” in other words, her status is that of an “outsider”.

Wheeler wishes the men at the BAS would realize her discomfort during her periods however, on the contrary, someone remarks that her face resembled a bowl of porridge, angrily she retorts loudly “it’s because I have serious menstrual cramps” which is followed by immediate silence and Wheeler's remark demonstrates her rejection of “I didn’t want to be an honorary man” (236). Here, Debbie Lisle’s argument is worth considering, women are busy, shedding their negative coded traits of femininity in an effort to be taken seriously as travel writers. In fact, women travel writers must become ‘honorary men’ in order to be recognised within a genre that is shaped so powerfully by a discourse of masculinity” (98). Accidents and setbacks are treated with self deprecating humor, and acceptance of physical inadequacy, for instance the struggle to light the Coleman stove; forgetting to weigh down the toilet lid; and Lucia’s pinpointing Wheeler's despair and questioning her own attitudes, physical ability/strength to get the generator to work “you think we can’t do anything” and the feeling of shame that washes over Wheeler. Wheeler's attitude of adopting a comic approach is very reminiscent of Mary Kingsley in *Travels in West Africa, “*who set[s] herself up as a comical character who is couched in irony through the narrative voice,” that is, if she would fail to do something or have an accident. This can be looked at as a contrast to traditional heroic narratives; males rode over accidents to display their strength and quick-wittedness.

Thompson observes, “contemporary travel writing is a form at once more subjectivised and more aestheticised than its generic precursors” (199). Wheeler is filled with a sense of wonder when she looks at Antarctica, which “was a metaphorical landscape” (3), but the initial phases of the journey has her expressing

her feelings of loneliness, “I felt very alone at that moment, in a strange country bound for a stranger continent” (11). Her friend, Cindy, in a conversation over the phone, expresses that “she felt as if I were disappearing into a black hole” (14). Her reaction “towards the topography of the island” after she had just arrived in Antarctica is “a tease” or “the real Antarctica”, is yet to be unravelled, but “in some bizarre way I had an atavistic sense that I had come home” (28). While in Antarctica, Wheeler is asked, “What’s your impression then? Of Antarctica? Her reply is “I have a million impressions […] it’s like having a love affair” (75). Wheeler's record of these impressions is interspersed with descriptions of the Antarctic landscape as she observes it from the flights between the bases,” “shafts of sunlight fell on the creased surface of an ice tongue” (35), “pearly blue sky […] in front of the scene, shimmered the lake, sheets of cracked and ripped frosted, blue, and ribboned crystals imprisoned in the ice glimmered like glow worms. It was swathed in light as an unripe lemon” (72). According to Joanna Price, “Wheeler, like [Jenny] Diski, seeks in Antarctica an antidote to life, and her psychological disposition, back home. She associates ‘home’ with the frustrations and ‘clutter’ of every day, urban life” […] (94). By contrast, as stated above Antarctica appeals to Wheeler as it is unowned. Wheeler admits, “the landscape drew my thoughts away from worldly things, away from the thousand mechanical details of my outward life” (68), that is she wants to get away from the materialism of her own society, with “no cities, no bank managers, no pram in the hall” (1). Robert Louis Stevenson’s, Travels with a Donkey (1879)similarly “emphasizes the importance of travel as an escape from the familiar feather bed of civilization” (Korte 102). In the interview with Tim Youngs, Sara Wheeler mentions that since “there’s no terrestrial life in the Antarctic, [so] it’s a perfect metaphor for the absence of all that other stuff that clutter up our lives […]. [T]here's this kind of

energy that comes off that much ice, and people talk about it a lot like a spiritual power station. It suited me metaphorically and attracted me very much" (Youngs 79). She stresses the spiritual side of the journey, which is "reaching beyond the temporal and the physical" and mentions that "reaching out towards the transcendental has been part of the human experience since the dawn of time" (79).

Before coming to Antarctica, the question of fear had come up during an interview in Manchester, and her reiteration that she never felt frightened. However, she alluded to the depression she underwent, what she termed as "Nomadic Thoughts" related to the misery of the human condition, her "melancholic nature," "despair" She associates this with the fear that she felt that she would "lose her faith". This unhappy restlessness was assuaged by experiencing "a certainty," in Antarctica which "emanated from a sense of harmony," of the presence of a "higher power […] and "didn't sense fear prowling around behind a locked door inside my head" (Wheeler 93-4). This is a shift in her life as Anna Calvete notes that "Wheeler conceives of the landscape as a place that possesses a redemptive power" (Calvette 83). For Wheeler, Antarctica was a symbol of idealism and purity as Tim Youngs observes "Wheeler's narrative has its epiphany in the spiritual" (Youngs 113). The intense transcendent emotions or epiphanies that she reports are conditioned as Antarctica is devoid of human culture and clutter or removal of material elements (bills, bins, cars) of daily life. Victoria Rosner observes that Wheeler's travel narrative represents a search for "never-ending primordial moment of childhood […] joyful innocence and freedom from responsibility" (qtd. in Calvette 72). Wheeler reiterates her distance from economic matters, and this can be related to Scott's mention of – "no shopkeeper will look at research, which does not promise him a financial return within a year" (Wheeler 135). In other words, what is highlighted is the "response of the spirit"

rather than material gain. I recalled Andrew Marvell's 'The Garden' where the poet emphasises spiritual and intellectual renewal in nature's innocence and withdrawal from the demands of society, which is quite akin to Wheeler's rejection of imposed responsibilities, or one could say they are different articulations of retreat from societal pressures. Wheeler experiences frustration when she has a "brief reentry into the real world that made me disorient irritable" (Wheeler 186) and later on she refers to the Frank Hurley quotation on her kitchen wall 'civilization seemed disappointingly, narrow, cramped, superficial and empty'" (253). Ana Calvete argues that this kind of retreat in nature does not suggest any solutions or any action as "they largely set politics aside," I agree with her, when she points out that the focus of Wheeler's travelogue seems "mostly aesthetic and the aim of [her] journey, personal" (77), and that she relishes her detachment from society. Robyn Davidson also experiences a similar emotion of detachment in *Tracks.* In the middle of her physically demanding trek in the Australian outback […] Davidson enjoys "the sloughing, like snake-skin, of the useless preoccupations and standard of the society [she] had left" (qtd. in Calvete 37). However, Wheeler in her interview with Tim Youngs acknowledges that she was a young writer when she wrote *Terra Incognita* that "how my own trajectory has shifted" she accepts the fact that "as an older writer, I realize that there aren't any solutions or answers, it's just a question of how you phrase the question. " After she wrote a book on the Arctic, she feels that it's a duty as a writer, "to find hope amidst horror, which I didn't used to. I was looking for the pristine before, but now I am looking more for reality" (Youngs 79).

At the end of her stay in Antarctica, Wheeler has a vivid dream about her own death. She goes into a lot of soul-searching in which she recalls a friend who has recently become a Buddhist. She talks about Buddhism, which is different from the

Western concept or culture, “which strives to divert these thoughts and mask the concept of mortality so we don’t have to confront it” (228). She recognises the importance of resolving this question as there was a possibility that if left unresolved, it could lead to alcohol abuse, as Tim Youngs remarks that Wheeler uses “the distance she has gained from her homeland to reflect and criticise its repressive culture” (Youngs 113). Wheeler has undergone changes in her personality by the end of the text, as she discloses that she has given up alcohol, “I didn’t need it anymore” and that, “the demons hadn’t disappeared, but they had shrunk” (Wheeler 284), referring to the fact that she has found a kind of tranquility that is, her fear of depression has appeased and likewise death and losing her faith. (288-89). Victoria Rosner notes the cliché that “men are outer- directed, women inner- directed”, which refers to the introspective and personal view of Antarctica, that Wheeler “despite everything I had gone through to get where I was – the years of preparation and anxiety – it seemed to me then that the external journey meant nothing at all” (Wheeler 289) or in other words, it is the interior journey that matters,

Graham Greene’s travelogue, *Journey without Maps* (1936), exhibits a similar inward journey as pointed out by Barbara Korte, “referring to Freud, Greene’s text, makes this parallel between outward and inner journey into the subconscious explicit: ‘Freud has made us conscious as we have never been before of those ancestral threads which still exist in our conscious minds to lead us back’” (qtd. in Korte 140). As Wheeler, referring to the inner self states that, “the geographical questions may have been answered, but the metaphysical ones remain and the most important will always lie within” (Wheeler 250). When Tim Young’s in questions Wheeler about her inner journey, she refuses to say anything more about it and its factual details. However she insists that “one sees everything through the prism of the

self" and feels that this is what makes an artist differ from a scientist, as "one is inevitably exploring ideas which are sloshing around in one's conscious and subconscious through the prism of the external world and one's own eyes" (Youngs78-9).

In *Amazonian: The Penguin Book of Women's New Travel Writing,* editors Dea Birkett and Sara Wheeler discuss the inner journey, thus, "the writer's inner journey is the most important part — and certainly the most interesting part— of any travel book. It doesn't make any difference where you go, it's your interpretation of it that matters […] the journeys writers make are slip roads to the private colonies of the imagination […] It is the psychological journey that is paramount" (ix). Wheeler concludes her travel memoir by her account of her final visit to Scott's Terra Nova hut at the end of the journey she lies with the head on Scott's pillow and recounts how she lay awake for many hours, my head on his pillow as he Scott, weighed down by his heavy responsibilities, must often have done" (Wheeler 297). Wheeler observes how "the distended shadows shifted along the old wooden walls as the sun wheeled across the sky" The emptiness of the hut that Wheeler senses is reminiscent of Cherry-Gerrard's feeling of loss when he realizes the polar party was missing which he mentions in his book, *The Worst Journey in the World*. Both Gerrard, and Wheeler redeem their Antarctic experience; the former by the celebration of "the response of the spirit" the latter by expressing, "on top of the snowhill, on Scott's bunk, in what was about to become my future. It had allowed me to believe in paradise […] Then I laid my head on his pillow, and went to sleep" (298). The text ends in stasis and rest. Christopher Kirkstead observes that, "sleeping in Scotts hut, Wheeler admits to a strong, effective, even spiritual response, finally tuned to landscape, history, and the presence of fellow travellers past and present, also

a fully developed sense of emotion than an imaginative longing to connect that motivates footsteps travel" (143).

The identities of the travellers (Davidson and Wheeler) are revealed by the bodily transformation, which is described with triumph, but not in an exaggerated manner, as it gives evidence that they have not shied away from any difficult conditions, nor have they overemphasised it. Their clothes, which are worn out as in the case of Davidson, their matted, unkempt hair, weather-beaten faces and questionable hygiene are described in the travel narrative and used as motifs by the authors. I go by Susan Basnett who pinpoints to the intricacies of female travel writers portrayal thus, "although many [female travel writers] strove to create an image of themselves that emphasized their physical stamina and emulated the endurance of male counterparts, there is a clear assertion of femininity [in their travelogues]" (qtd. in Calvete 135).

To summarise, in *Terra Incognita,* we see not only genre, but also gender anxiety as well that female writers like Wheeler face when navigating the traditional exploration travel narratives, which were dominated in the large part of the 20th century by heroic-era narratives. This anxiety is due to the fact that women's Antarctic travel memoirs do not match or fit the heroic-journey framework, which valorises masculine physical endurance, hardships and conquest. Sara Wheeler negotiates her representations of the Antarctica experience by discussing the authentic personal exploration bordering on the spiritual; however, there are slight exceptions where in spite of herself, she tries to replicate the masculine tropes, or we can say mimic the explorers by postponing laundry, (although she has extra clothing), and attempting to sleep in an igloo although she has the comfort of the Jamesway. Finally,

the extreme cold is too much to bear, and she gives in. “In the end, the igloo defeated me” (165), expressing her physical inability to combat the cold.

One of the important aspects of travel writing is the distinction between traveller and tourist. The former stresses on authenticity which is pointed out by Maureen Mulligan, “the implicit message that travel has to involve pain for it to be authentic” (qtd. in Calvette 37) is endorsed by contemporary travel writers, as one of the ways to distinguish the traveller from the tourist. The pain could be defined as life-threatening situations to sleep deprivation to physical tests of hardships, lack of hygiene, or willingness to take risks. In Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks,* Davidson refuses to wash during her camel trip although she had enough water at her disposal. Physical feats, fearlessness in the face of impending danger, are standards to assess the merit of travellers today, regardless of their gender. Due to the effects of globalisation and proliferation of tourism, there are very few places on the map to be discovered, hence the sense of unease to make it new among travel writers, and their insistence to differentiate themselves from tourists, as Davidson refers to them—“loud, insensitive, litter-bugging oafs” (126). However, it is their disdain for tourists that encourages visitors to the unspoilt settings the travellers describe.

Taking into account both Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler’s *Terra Incognita*, we see how both narratives reveal the persistent challenges women encounter in masculine exploratory spaces of the androcentric genre, constantly navigating and negotiating to reclaim their agency and redefine femininity in the genre of travel writing. The genre of travel writing, according to Manfred Pfister, “it’s very hybridity […] has protected it from normative generic rules and thus preserved for it a greater freedom of experimentation” (qtd. in Korte 108). This flexibility and its ability to “reinvent itself for each period” (Youngs 11) has enabled both Davidson

and Wheeler to cope with the androcentric genre by reworking strategies through its hybrid nature and to ensconce themselves firmly in it. Thus, both authors redefine the boundaries of travel writing, signifying, embodied experience, relationality, and critique of patriarchal and colonial frameworks.

In Davidson's *Tracks*, the narrator explicitly confronts patriarchal norms and expectations of conventional femininity and embarks on her journey defying all odds, symbolising independence and courage despite anxieties of social conditioning regarding gender. The physical and emotional demands of crossing the harsh desert terrain at the same time, indulging in social critique as well as reflecting on self-exploration, embracing failures and vulnerability, defying traditional narratives of heroism and male endurance.

In a similar vein, *Terra Incognita* Wheeler navigates Antarctica's male-dominated history by the usage of humour, self-irony and intertextuality, as well as the fact that she confronts not only the external challenges of the inhospitable environment, but also her own fears relating to mortality, melancholy, and the misery of the human condition. Her blend of literary epigraphs, biographical references and cultural commentary on books, poems, art, and music poses a challenge to the traditional understanding of travel writing as a male domain and its detached observational style.

In both Davidson and Wheeler, the presence of ambivalence is noticeable. In the case of Davidson, her ambivalence as a white woman in her relation with the aborigines analyses her complex negotiation of gender and cultural politics. She initially seeks to understand Aboriginal people; she feels that she is being perceived as a parasite on their culture, ambivalence reflects her struggle with belonging and identity. Here we must recall Jas Elsner and Joan Pau Rubies' statement that "the

desire to map is never innocent" (Youngs 12). Her resentment against the media, particularly her sponsors the *National Geographic,* for harping on her exceptionalism and selling the gender quotient, but the fact that she had after all accepted the funding in lieu of writing cannot be denied. Her penning her experiences after two years is also a form of commodification after all!

The central ambivalence in *Terra Incognita* revolves around the heroic-era myth. Wheeler has a huge admiration yet is critical of female exclusion in the sense that she looks for a place for the female traveler/women. She contends with the possible conflicts between her feminist agenda and her admiration as Mary Gerhart maintains," the gender question makes explicit the tension between the so-called masculine values and so-called feminine values in the consciousness of anyone who has to make choices in these matters" (183). Another ambivalence that is exhibited in her attitude is her consciousness of her nationality and the history of its imperialist past, with sly digs at American or Italian cultures as mentioned in the analysis. Finally, it could be observed that notwithstanding its challenges, travel writing has been an attractive genre for women as through travel and travel writing they have established a sense of empowerment.

Chapter IV: What it Means to Write Travel as a Woman

The study by analyzing women's experiences in the selective travel narratives namely Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* by analyzing the angular relationship between genre and gender in female author, travelogues the genre of travel writing historically dominated by masculinist conventions, created anxiety arising out of entering a male bastion where conquest detachment mastery over to a narrator is depicted. This thesis showcased the efforts of the two writers above in bringing innovation to a genre, which has always been the domain of males from time immemorial.

Women have always been at a disadvantage despite the fact that they have significantly contributed to the travel writing genre. The extensive research done in women's travel writing exhibits the range and diversity in terms of topics and narrative positions and experiments. It becomes all the more commendable because they were writing from a marginal position with no role models which gave rise to a variety of travel discourses. Women, to a certain extent, usually feel the proliferation of anxiousness when occupying space, to be a woman is to live as an 'other' inscribed by the patriarchal order, is to feel consciously or unconsciously being constantly aware of one movements in relation to entrenched norms and structures.

Sara Wheeler in *Terra Incognita* discusses the tension between the freedom of traveling that is being on the road and the contrast of domesticity that is being with family on the other hand. She points out the fact that usually male travellers of the genre who travel alone with no family in tow, but with the wife remaining behind taking care of the children. Male travellers like Paul Theroux or Patrick Leigh Fermor found it thrilling of being alone while on their sojourns. This depicts the fact that male travel writers did not want to mix the practical obstacles of domesticity and its banal

details with the travels/adventures of the author which depicts the privileges of males versus females Few exceptions in the case of traveling mothers are Dervla Murphy who traveled on a bicycle, taking her daughter Rachel along with her on her journeys and Wheeler herself, who traveled with the children as she did not think domesticity and having babies was in any way related to the lack of female travel literature. The examples clearly show how females, despite association of mobility with masculinity have continuously been on the move. This has been further explored in the selected narratives used in the thesis, wherein both Davidson and Wheeler are participating in and interrogating the conventions of the travel writing genre. An analysis of the texts reflects a complex negotiation with the genre that historically marginalized female voices. The authors as shown in the analysis challenge, reconfigure, and expand the structures of traditional forms of travel writing in subtle and also explicit ways using a range of rhetorical strategies.

The constraints and restrictions imposed on women during the earlier eras prevented them from traveling freely and documenting their experiences. As I have already mentioned in the overview of women's travel writing in the third chapter, despite these limitations, women have always traveled extensively, gradually expanding the scope in independence, and have also significantly produced a large body of texts. Most women travel writers during the 17 and 18 centuries, sported a self-effacing cautious demeanor to avoid any kind of unwanted attention and maintain a low profile which they preferred as being assertive or authoritative would be considered inappropriate for women and misinterpreted, especially in the patriarchal society of the times. When they travelled abroad during the 19th century, that is, when improvement in transportation and rising literacy enabled more women to travel and even publish their accounts. Within an imperial and colonial context, women

travellers negotiated their gender identities as they straddled a complex position, both as explorers and products of the Empire.

They shared one common point—an urge for adventure and knowledge, and also an anxiety about constraints (similar to men to escape for various reasons). Certain travelling women, too, wanted to escape being a dependent woman, and for this, they needed to transgress the gender norms of their times, and travel was the only way which gave them an opportunity for self-definition and a sense of freedom. Yet a woman on the road is already a challenge to society's norms as it means women trespassing on domains, necessarily that of the male. Thus, their activities put them in a problematic position with regard to their gender. Their travel narratives depict the complexities of their negotiations due to their gender. Notwithstanding these constraints, as already mentioned, women recognised travel to be a source of authority and empowerment. They realised that writing was the means to assert that authority, and this is how they turned their narratives to reimagine themselves away from the constrictions of femininity that tied them to domesticity. By the 20th century, the ease of travel networks and the rise of first-wave feminism also saw a rise in travel narratives written by women that were not only physical journeys, but also touched upon gender experiences and cultural encounters.

By the late 20th century, women, travel writers were able to write in authoritative roles that were once the monopoly of men as we seen the case of the two writers under study in this thesis Robyn Davidson and Sara Wheeler who exemplify the shift in 20th century travel writing wherein importance was given to a journey, which was more honest and reflective, blending personal narrative, sociocultural, critique, and political awareness. *Tracks* and *Terra incognita* represent what it means

to write travel as a woman, and that too in a genre that has always sidelined women or displaced the female subject.

The unease and anxiety that surfaces in both texts is not only personal, but also structural. Davidson, in the text and also in her interviews, was reticent to reveal the motives of undertaking the audacious solo journey with many tabloids and newspaper articles, wondering about her motives; even in her postscript written in 2012, that is two decades after her journey, reiterates the same position as mentioned earlier. She had come to Alice Springs with only six dollars, and the dream of this epic journey it was but natural that she would be in need of funds. *National Geographic*, which came to her rescue at the opportune moment, naturally wanted its pound of flesh in the form of a promised article. We see her very critical about the way the magazine, which she considered conservative, capitalised on her image. In her relationship with the aborigines, she reiterates the fact, whether in the text or her interview with Tim Youngs and other tabloids, that she did try to bring about a definitive change in their condition. But as we all know that the gaze can never be an innocent one, the unease is there in her position as a member of the white Australian community with the complexity of the colonial history of the 1960s and 70s. Her avoidance of tourists and paparazzi displays her social misidentification and also personal unravelling.

The awkward position or unbecoming subject position that I mentioned in chapter 3 of the study is applicable to both Davidson and Wheeler. In the case of Davidson, she deals with the misogynistic, rugged, deeply entrenched male dominance related to survival and identity in the environment, which is intertwined with Australian national identity, which she is very critical about. Some of her experiences are depressing, as above or exhilarating as she escapes gendered

expectations, but she is a complex mixture of masculinity and femininity. In the case of Wheeler, she navigates the gender codes of Antarctic exploration myth that privileges masculine heroism and survival struggles, marginalising female experiences and voices by critiquing and interrogating the Scott myth. Here we find contradictions as adulation for the legendary explorers may stand in opposition with her feminist agenda. Wheeler negotiates the tension between traditional, masculine-driven genres, and her own experiences or in other words, she struggles to fit in the dominant heroic era narratives, which stand for masculine virility, physical endurance and conquest. Thus we see how both Davidson and Wheeler employ a range of strategies that of self irony, introspection, episodic structure, social, and cultural critique that simultaneously inhabit and disrupt the genre's conventions. Wheeler indulges in humour too to deflate the sober and tragic environment of the Scott myth, and the serious scientific environment, so in this way, both authors bring about an innovation and hybridity in the travel writing genre, which is known for its fluid and dynamic nature. Genre gender Nexus in the selected narratives brings about creativity from the authors in the refreshing of a new narrative space so the authors do not simply try to fit into the existing tradition, but bring about subtle changes and expand the boundaries of the genre as I mentioned in the third chapter that the journey in *Tracks* and *Terra Incognita* are not just powerful individual narratives of physical journeys but inner journeys bringing about transformation in the two narrators. It could be said that both the travellers can be seen as kind of voluntary nomads as there communion with nature, whether in the Australian desert or the harsh terrain of Antarctica provides them a sense of wholeness which offers to them escape from either technology, ironically of course, in the case of Wheeler, or daily responsibilities giving into epiphanic moments through physical hardships.

A word of caution, though as reading women's travel writings like that of Davidson and Wheeler should not only be seen as representative of gender, but also as members of their particular society and culture; we should not restrict our readings to only questions of gender as works, are shaped by intersections of race, class, culture, and history These travelogues are spaces where gender genre and identity are in constant negotiation.

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