The Boundaries of Gender in Travel: Andreas Pinxner, *Die hitzige Indianerin* [*The Fiery East Indian Woman*] (1701)

Abstract

After his studies in Wittenberg, Andreas Pinxner traveled to Batavia, the main settlement of the Dutch East India Company, whence he returned five years later. After his travels, he wrote this literary travel account, among other works. In this excerpt, Pinxner describes going beyond the European borders as something for which women are fundamentally unsuited. Those who did so anyway were regarded with suspicion by their contemporaries. The category of "gender" proves to be the key to how and where a "national" identity could be generally mobilized.

Source

It seemed as if luck wanted to lend me a helping hand while still in the Dutch territory and to present several images of women from East India so that I might have a look at them, experience their manner, and deal with them more intelligently further along in India.

I had heard how frequently women of Dutch blood were to be found now and then in India. Lord help me! (I thought to myself.) How is it that such a weak tool that nature has prohibited from leaving is undertaking such a terrible journey? It is a significant matter when a bold and iron-willed man, driven by necessity, despair, or wanderlust subjects himself to the East waves. The women in Holland must indeed be very loyal, because they do not shy away from facing any misery to honor their marital obligations. It seems to me as though from now on it should not be called loyalty that brought the Roman and Greek maidens such great praise above all others, while in Holland similar examples are to be found more frequently and strikingly. In earlier times, the women, for love of their men, undertook difficult journeys to the land of the Saracens when the Christians were engaged in a war against the Mamluks, and traveled around in disguise until they found their husbands, and what is more, saved those who had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the barbarians. But now they travel to the furthest place on earth to please their husbands, on the ocean, where every day a new unlucky star rises. Oh! How lucky are the men of the seven provinces! Posterity will never forget their wives; they will extinguish all the examples of the old heroic wives and lay claim themselves to fame.

My heart was so full with this emotion that it had to be communicated to my tongue. Consequently, I shouted out loud and elevated this female loyalty to the starry heavens.

Many of my accompanying consorts on the ship wanted to investigate the cause of my agitation, as my pale face and my pacing up and down on the ship's deck were more than enough to reveal my sadness. But now they unexpectedly got to hear about it. They clearly understood the spring from which my distress flowed. One of them, whom I shall call Probando, approached me with his usual serious air, gave me a sign, and pointed with his finger in the direction in which I should follow him. I gladly obeyed his order because I knew that he would, as was his custom, wipe the slime of dissolute madness from my eyes. We sat down in silence at the highest point on the front part of the ship, where he addressed me in the following manner: How is it, my Dacier? You travel around in the world and still cannot learn that the whole world is putting on comedies? And that its entire essence is hypocrisy? Why do you talk like the common rabble? Can't you distinguish between a natural color and one made

artificially? Go into yourself and observe this smallness through a microscope; it will seem so big that you will see and understand all the ebbs and flows. Look, you think that this woman who dared to share the dangers of the journey with us, was as you imagined her, namely, that love and loyalty to follow her husband even in difficult circumstances had moved her to undertake this arduous journey. But no! It is very different. Pull this dark cover just a little bit from over your eyes and let the sunshine of wisdom shine upon them. You will see everything painted in a different color and form. We must not get to know people from the outside, because often a fool wears a doctor's coat and a whore can disguise herself in the clothes of an honest woman.

As the result of Probando's speech, I began to cheer up a little, and said, "Your words are outstanding. I want to see with my eyes and understand them. But I am like the people who are lying deep in sleep and would like to rouse themselves but cannot. For, my father (I may fairly call you that), I have sucked in the purulence of the dissolute madness so deeply that it cannot be drawn out except with good instruction. Be my companion and open my eyes of understanding so that I may see what is hidden. Release the bands of affliction so that I may walk unhindered to the high palace of wisdom."

Probando replied to this with a happy face, "Now then, Dacier, because you want to learn, follow me. This ship shall become a stage on which you can learn to recognize the difference between whores and honest women."

At that, Probando took me by the hand and led me down a flight of stairs, where immediately on the right side of the ship, the "babble box," or pub, stood open. In it, we saw a shapely vision of feminine loveliness who had entered into a serious conversation with the water maker.[1] As soon as I saw her, I recognized her, for she was one of the ones who was going with us to East India and had aroused such wonder in me. "There, Probando," I cried, "Do you see that woman? She is the one about whom I became so distressed, when I saw her as another Europa thrown under the waves. Tell me, how can it be possible that such a weak creature, delicate to us, leaves her distaff and voluntarily places herself in danger. It is different with us men, because we must be admonished through gloomy weather to [pursue] virtue."

At that Probando smiled and said, "My Dacier, say whether it is not better to travel to East India than to let yourself be hanged. On this journey, a person still has hope of coming through with his life, while here all hope of living any longer is gone."

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NOTES

[1] Ship's distiller, who makes sweet water from salt water.

Source: Andreas Pinxner, *Die hitzige Indianerin, Oder artige und curieuse Beschreibung derer ost-indischen Frauens-Personen, welche sowohl aus Europa in Ost-Indien ziehen oder darinnen geboren werden, die sein gleich aus vermischten oder reinem heidnischen Geblüte derer Indianer/ aus eigener Erfahrung entworffen / Durch den Dacier*. Cölln: Bey Peter Marieau, 1701, pp. 1–7. Available online at: http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0000226E00000000

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