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Immigration Dreams, Gender Struggles, and Disillusionment in the Cosmopolitan Spaces of *The Empress* by Tanika Gupta

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Abstract

In *The Empress*, the British female playwright Tanika Gupta describes the immigrant experience in Cosmopolitan London. Through the narratives of the main protagonists Abdul Karim and Rani Das, the play puts forward the cultural exchange between Indian and English subjects. It depicts both the difficulties and opportunities encountered by these characters as a result of cultural exchange and integration. This study aims to show how cosmopolitanism shapes and is shaped by the immigrant experience, revealing both the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural interactions. Homi Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial concepts will serve as a theoretical basis for this analysis.

Résumé

Dans *The Empress*, la dramaturge britannique Tanika Gupta décrit l'expérience des immigrés dans le Londres cosmopolite. À travers les récits des deux protagonistes principaux, Abdul Karim et Rani Das, la pièce met en avant les échanges culturels entre les sujets indiens et britanniques. Elle représente à la fois les difficultés et les opportunités auxquelles ces personnages sont confrontés du fait de l'échange culturel et de l'intégration. Cette étude vise à montrer comment le cosmopolitisme façonne et est façonné par l'expérience migratoire, en révélant les avantages comme les inconvénients des interactions multiculturelles. Les concepts postcoloniaux de Homi Bhabha (1994) serviront de cadre théorique à cette analyse.

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Introduction

In 1948, the British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed citizenship and mass migration of commonwealth countries to England. From India and other former colonies, Black immigrants arrived in Britain in search of economic and social opportunities. However, this quest became an illusion due to the failure of integration and the intersecting barriers of racism, sexism and classism in the so-called British cosmopolitan society. Cosmopolitanism, understood as the peaceful coexistence and interaction of various cultures in the same space, is challenged in this context. Despite their cultural and economic contributions to the British Labour system, British institutions excluded Asian immigrants. This exclusion led to disillusionment, defined as a state of disappointment when promises of equality and inclusion failed to be fulfilled. The prominent British playwright Tanika Gupta drew on this historical context in her play *The Empress*.

This play highlights the paths of immigrants seeking to achieve their British dreams in England. Through the narratives of Rani, Abdul Karim, and Hari, *The Empress* reveals both the dreams they pursue and the disenchantments they endure. Depending on their gender, male and female characters are subjected to racial, class and gender discrimination in their roles as Lascars, Ayahs and teachers in the British labour system. Based on postcolonial theory, especially Homi K. Bhabha's ideas, this research seeks to examine how cosmopolitanism shapes the immigrant trajectory and the ways immigrants themselves reshape cosmopolitanism. It reveals both the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural interactions.

The portrayal of the experience of immigrants as Lascars and Ayahs in the first part will portray the economic struggles and miserable conditions of these groups as a collectivity in cosmopolitan London. The second part will tackle the personal disenchantment of male immigrants (Hari and Abdul) as Lascar and teacher. The third and last one will be about the journeys of women immigrants through the narrative of Rani who undergoes double oppression (race and gender) as well as her struggle and disappointment in Britain.

I-Cosmopolitan spaces and the Economic Hardships of Lascars and Ayahs

Bhabha's concept of hybridity which refers to the mixture of cultural identities

is a prerequisite for understanding Tanika Gupta's portrayal of the collective stories of Asian immigrants and their cultural exchange with their British employers. In *The Empress*, the settings are portrayed as cosmopolitan places where individuals from diverse multicultural backgrounds exchange and construct identities. These places are also mirrors of the immigrants' various realities. As Bhabha notes, "It is in the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationless, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 2). Act 1, set in 1887, depicts characters of Asian, Chinese, and British descent who cross paths in locations like the ship, the Windsor castle, the Tilbury docks, and Sally's boarding house. In the late nineteenth century, there was a development of maritime traffic from various corners of the empire to London and between different imperial sites (Garnett 19). In 1869, the opening of the Suez Canal facilitated the travel to India and the growing of trade; therefore, there was an increased demand for various labors in board ship (19). Gupta used these historical events to recount the narratives of Asian immigrant groups such as Lascars and Ayahs whose stories are often forgotten in British colonial history.

The opening scene focuses on the Lascars, sailors from India and "different corners of the Asian subcontinent" (Gupta 6). Recruited from various ports "Bombay, Calcutta and Mandanay (6), and lured by their British dreams of employment and cosmopolitanism, these sailors face difficult living conditions and frustration. Their prologue music entitled "Lascar rap" appears as a narrative of their maritime adventure from hope to disappointment. Gupta, through this song written mostly in the rap modern music style, gives voice to the subalterns to express their living conditions and shared grievances. In search of better life, they frequently travel from "the port of Bombay...to Ivory Coast" (Gupta 6) by carrying precious resources such as "opium, spices, tea" (Gupta 5) in the British ship. These travels imply many sacrifices since they lost a part of their culture in order to serve the Empire:

> Head across the Arabian sea,
> Carrying opium, spices, tea…
> So far from home, we serve the throne,
> Kala pani no more will I roam.
> If I ever make it back to the jewel in the crown,

I'll bless them all from solid ground. (Gupta 6)

This lyric describes the ambivalent position of the Lascars in British labor system as both insiders and outsiders. Indeed, they play a pivotal role as they are always moving across the sea, "so far from home" and work in the dirty place from "Bombay to London gutters". They agreed to lose their caste status and subverted their cultural norms in order to serve the crown. "Kala pani" mentioned in the lyric refers to a taboo that forbids Hindus to travel at sea if not they will lose their soul and break the cycle of reincarnation.

Despite these sacrifices, they are marginalized by the British Empire and suffer dehumanization and poverty which leads them to parrot the colonial discourse of glorification with an ironic tone. The lines "Bless them all and serve the Empire", "Queen and country, stoke the fire" imply that serving the empire means at the same time being exposed to his violence and dehumanization. Moreover, like the character Hamlet in *Hamlet*, they faced not a philosophical question of being, but a colonial one: to work or be punished. This underlines Bhabha's notion of colonial ambivalence where the colonial subjects are caught between submission and resistance. Therefore, in Gupta's play music as a hybrid form of art allows them to express their inner conflicts and desire of resistance. The last line "Kala pani no more will I roam. If I ever make it back to the jewel in the crown" is the expression of their willingness to quit this oppressive system and return to India which is metaphorically represented in the lyric as "the jewel in the crown". They want to recover their wholeness in India and flee the hybrid space where they find themselves alienated.

Apart from the ship, where the Lascars express their predicament at sea, Sally's boarding house is similarly a hybrid space where they express their shared complaints. While Britain through its offering of new labor for immigrants promotes cosmopolitanism and economic opportunities, Lascars are excluded from the system. In fact, Sally's boarding house as a shelter represents the only option for the Lascars after being excluded from their ships and abandoned to themselves despite hours of work at sea. Despite its dirtiness, it is a containment zone where they can inhabit in a foreign country after being exploited. It is a counter-narrative space where Lascars recount their colonial adventure as a fiction, but especially in the possibility of being heard. Gupta offers a perspective to this issue by dramatizing the protests of the Lascars on stage. The fact of sharing their histories together evokes their

ability to resist and underlines the therapeutical function of Sally's boarding house.

Likewise, Sally's boarding house functions as a place of prominent importance for Ayahs after their dismissal in British families. By means of this environment, Gupta offers voices to these displaced women immigrants as a strategy to denounce the double oppression Indian women underwent on the basis of both gender and race. They sacrifice their life as women and run away from their miserable conditions in India in order to find a better living condition; but unfortunately, they face disenchantment in Britain. This reveals the colonial system's hypocrisy in exploiting Ayahs, and set them apart when they realize that they "are not quite the same". Firoza, one of them, underlines the fact that after about years of work, she has been dismissed after an accident at sea where she breaks her leg:

> on my last voyage over there was a storm and a piece of ship's masonry fell on my leg. I was badly wounded and could no longer work. Back in London, I fell destitute. If it wasn't for Mary and Charlotte finding me begging on the streets, I don't know what I would have done. They took me to a good doctor and my leg is healed now. (Gupta 76)

By sharing their stories together, Sally's boarding house becomes a place of testimony where subaltern women through their personal narratives form a collective indictment of Britain's fake cosmopolitan society and oppressive labor system. The lack of legal procedure in exchange of verbal promises in the colonial labor system reveals the disregard of the colonial system towards women due to their gender and race. Although the unwritten contracts mimic symbolically the British constitutional system, it rather functions in this context as a means to exclude colonial subjects from legal guarantees in the postcolonial context. It therefore promotes economic vulnerability and fails to honor the promise of economic opportunities.

Despite the predicaments and injustice, they face, Ayahs can count on the refuge located within the boarding house built by colonial white women to share their predicaments. Mary, for instance, see Ayahs as fragile and dependent women. Her presence in the shelter underlines the colonial ideology of white saviorism; because instead of accusing the very system that offend Ayahs; she rather deprives them of agency in order to infantilize them. Mary qualifies the building as an "expression of Christian charity" (Gupta 75). However, although, this place serves as a refuge, it can be symbolically

perceived as a prison or a kind of cage where domestic animals are kept for humans' adoption or ironically for "prospective employers" (Gupta 76). Eventually, under imperialism, white women see themselves superior to Ayahs even though they are both oppressed by the very same patriarchal system. As the play evolved, the narrative shifts from the depiction of the collective path of the Lascars and Ayahs to the individual trajectory of characters such as Hari, Abdul and Rani.

II- Immigrant disillusionment from the Dock to the palace: Hari and Abdul's struggles

The story of Hari and Abdul in Britain reveals the struggle and disillusionment of the colonial subjects in the pursuit of the British Dream. Bhabha notes, "the colonial presence is always ambivalent" (Bhabha 108). The play's settings from the Dock to the palace emphasize Britain's cosmopolitanism while revealing the difficulties faced by Asian immigrants in overcoming the racial, social and economic barriers that hinder their integration.

Hari's path as a Lascar pinpoints the loss of hope of Asian migrant laborers within the British economic system. He perceives Britain and his people in terms of darkness and strangeness despite its big building: "Whole place is covered in thick, thick fog. Their buildings are big and very grand, like the ones in Calcutta. And the people are very strange"; "They like to look down at us from a great height. Sometimes they can't even see us" (Gupta 9). This dark depiction of England and English people is shaped by the oppression he underwent during his work at sea as a Lascar. In fact, as a lower-ranking crew member, Serang, an Asian captain of the Lascar crew mistreated Hari, exemplifying what Bhabha calls "the menace of mimicry". For Bhabha, "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (Bhabha 126). In this context, he appears as an enforcer of imperial power, mimicking the brutality of colonialism through his limited but potent authority.

Rather than upsetting the colonial structure, Serang imitates its violence. He perpetuates the cycle of internal domination against his Asian counterparts by reproducing the colonial oppression. Hari is particularly oppressed and victim of violence. The stage directions: "**Serang** *kicks* **Hari** hard *in the backside*" (Gupta 7) depict the captain as a torturer exercising his power with a sadistic zeal. Hari's inability to speak illustrates Spivak's assertion

that the subaltern cannot speak. Indeed, his limited knowledge exposes him to colonial exploitation and deprives him of power.

Hari's oppression is also verbal. Indeed, Serang uses his knowledge of English as a linguistic weapon against Hari and other Lascars who cannot decipher his speech. The following dialogue justifies this fact:

> SERANG:
> Captain Ingram will be up here in ten minutes to
> inspect. Get this place looking like a ballroom fit for her
> Majesty the Queen! You hear me?
> The LASCARS all murmur.
> SERANG: what?
> HARI: Will the Queen be coming here?
> SERANG: How will the Queen 'be coming here' idiot – fool? Is
> she going to fly like a bird from the moon? I am saying make it fit for
> the Queen or the Captain
> sahib will be asking the cook to cut out your liver and fry it up with
> onions and your shrivelled little bollocks for breakfast. (Gupta 7)

This dialogue portrays language as a tool of power within intra-ethnic relations. Serang's language is abusive and aggressive and reflects a lack of tolerance towards others. The misunderstanding of Hari and the other lascars is the expression of the "unhomely", a concept used by Bhabha to indicate a feeling of being others in an accustomed cultural space (Bhabha 13). His awareness of their linguistic and educational limitations translates his speech into an accessible language. However, his language remains grotesque as a strategy to assert his dominance. He is not the only character of same ethnic background that devalue Hari. Indeed, Abdul, an Asian counterpart, treats Hari as a subaltern out of his lower position of Lascars. For example, when he saw Rani, with Hari, his direct remarks "is this sailor boy bothering you? "get back to your work, lascar" (Gupta 11) indicate his devaluation of Hari's personhood and economic status. The "dirty look" (Gupta 12) he gives to Hari underlines Abdul's mimicry of the British gaze towards Hari.

By contrast, Rani and Hari's relationship shows solidarity between Asian immigrants. Hari's lack of education is not met with mockery but with Rani's encouragement. According to Loomba, for the colonized to resist colonial supremacy, solidarity between gender and race needs to be emphasized (Loomba 180). After hearing Hari's narrative about his

disenchantment in England and failure as a former apprentice with a carpenter, Rani suggests education as a strategy to obtain success in the country. For her, the more he will be educated, the more he will get important job as a clerk. Therefore, she spends literary activities with Hari and they learn poems and literature about their conditions at sea. This solidarity stems from Daddabai, another immigrant, who encouraged her to pursue education, believing that freedom comes through learning. As a consequence, she mimics Daddabai in her turn to encourage a fellow immigrant to understand the importance of education. Thus, Rani and Hari's moment of learning reveals the transformative power of mimicry. Indeed, she appropriates mimicry not as a strategy to assimilate the dominant structure but rather as an act of agency to empower a fellow subaltern through education, building diasporic solidarity.

Education serves then as path to the reconfiguration of Hari's identity. It creates a political awakening leading Hari to incite resistance among his fellow Lascars. Indeed, he denounces the dehumanization of Lascars at sea and urge them "to make demands" for establishing their rights. The following notice underlines this demand:

> 1. Equal pay with the white sailors
> 2. Equal food and water rations as the white sailors
> 3. No more beatings by the First Officer.
> 4. Rest periods between heavy labour But most of all
> 5. We demand to be respected as members of the human race'.
>
> *The other* Lascars *all cheer*. (Gupta 74)

Their cheers represent an instance of collective empowerment, a moment of agency where subalterns try to speak. Unfortunately, this act of resistance is of short-lived. Being qualify as trouble maker, Hari was bloodly beaten and violently removed from the British ship: "we see Hari being roughly carried off the ship by two fellow Lascars. He is beaten and bloodied. Serang Ali stands over him as Hari is thrown to the ground" (Gupta 84).

As compared to Hari, Abdul's journey in the royal court unveils the cultural representation and racial injustice underwent by immigrant in Britain. The scene three set in 1887 depicts how Indians were seen as objects for the British government. Definitely, the subjects of the court perceive Abdul as a gift for the Queen reflecting Bhabha's notion of colonial ambivalence, where "the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates

between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 95). His objectification is the result of the colonial mindset that deprives black immigrants' humanity reinforcing racial disparities. As a matter of fact, Lady Sarah's perception of Abdul displays racial and cultural prejudices.

At first sight, she perceives Abdul as an illiterate, only able to speak his Indian dialect and dismisses his presence with disdain. Conversely, Victoria welcomes his gifts and embraces the cultural exchange he offers. Indeed, Abdul gives her gifts from his country such as "Precious rubies and pearls" (Gupta 27) and offers a teaching of Indian culinary tradition. Their exchange represents a moment of cultural hybridity, "the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities" (Bhabha 159). However, Victoria's acceptance of his proposal is opposed to Lady Sarah's ethnocentric attitudes who sees Indian cuisine as dangerous for her Majesty: "Curry will not do at all for the royal digestion" (Gupta 27). Abdul in turn, capitalizes on Victoria's sympathy to increase her curiosity about India through the apology of his country in terms of cities and monuments:

> VICTORIA: Tell us about your city. Agra?
> ABDUL: It is a very beautiful city. ma'am.
> VICTORIA: (*impatient.*) … and?
> ABDUL *is unsure how much to speak.*
> ABDUL: Of course, it is dominated by the Red Fort and the Taj Mahal, built by the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. In memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz. A monument to the most highest love, between a man and a woman. (Gupta 42)

This dialogue introduces Abdul as a cultural ambassador and qualified storyteller. He uses metaphoric language and beautiful image to make the queen representing in her mind the different monuments. He even notes: "It feels, it feels… As if Allah himself is watching over us. Filling the air with love and reminding us why we are put on this earth…almost not a building of stone and marble, more a dream floating enticingly, perfectly in one's line of vision" (Gupta 42). For Bhabha, translation is a site of negotiation and power (Bhabha 346). This can be connected to Abdul's storytelling about Indian monuments which appears as an act of cultural translation. By portraying Indian architectural heritage, he appears as a subtle agent of resistance who displays national pride within the empire.

Moreover, Abdul's and Victoria's intimacy and moments of dancing and hugs, increases Lady Sarah's anger: "Abdul dances gently with Victoria around the room. Lady Sarah stands and watches in horror. Victoria is like a giggly schoolgirl, hanging on Abdul's every word" (Gupta 43). Furthermore, while Victoria celebrates cultural hybridity, Lady Sarah rejects it. For instance, when Victoria sought medical attention for Abdul, this latter suggested that the doctor has more pressing engagement. For Lady Sarah, Abdul's sickness because of climate is the result of the inferiority of Indian biology as compared to the English: "Indian blood is thinner than the English" (Gupta 41). Victoria rejects this racist pseudoscience, arguing on the universality of human anatomy: "We share all the same human physiology" (41). Her solidarity with Abdul represents an instance of colonial empathy where racial boundaries between the colonizers and the colonized are upset.

Despite the racial prejudice and cultural struggle Abdul faces in the royal court, his growing closeness to Queen Victoria allows him to carve out a unique space for himself. Through his resilience and cultural knowledge, Abdul begins to influence the Queen's perspective on India and subtly challenges the rigid norms of the British imperial hierarchy. This shift not only reveals his personal resistance but additionally emphasizes the tensions his presence creates within the court. Despite the climate of racial prejudice that prevails in the court, Abdul's cultural knowledge and closeness to Queen's Victoria offers him a possibility to subvert the British imperial hierarchy through his influence on the queen.

He uses his position of "exotic pet" (Gupta 59) and the suspicion and perception of him by others as a spy to convince the queen of appointing him as a teacher. For Bhabha exoticism is a colonial strategy that can both elevate and diminish the colonized subjects through the creation of an ambivalent space where the other is desired and feared (Bhabha 240). Therefore, Abdul's exoticism helped him to be appointed as teacher by Victoria: "We wish to raise you from the role of Khitmagar to that of *Munshi*. Instead of cooking curries, you will be our teacher" (Gupta 61). The use of Indian language in Victoria's speech reflects her cultural assimilation and love for Indian culture.

Bhabha thinks that the best way to subvert colonial domination is through cultural hybridity (Bhabha 122). For Doré, Bhabha defines cultural hybridity as the path through which "cultures interact with each other" (Doré 38). Thus, Abdul's teaching creates a hybrid space where Indian and British

cultures interact. He teaches Hindi to Queen Victoria. They start greeting each other in Hindi and use some key Indian expressions to communicate:

> Abdul: *Namaste.*
> Victoria: *Namaste.*
> Abdul : I am delighted to make your acquaintance.
> Victoria (*repeats in Hindi*) *Hame tum se mil ker bohut khushi hui*
> Abdul: Remember to use the formal address of you as in 'aap'.
> Victoria (repeats In Hindi.) Aap ko hamari garmi kesi lagi. Yehe din bohut lambe he. (How are you enjoying our summer? The days are very long in July.)
> Abdul Excellent ma'am. Your pronunciation is almost perfect. (Gupta 68)

They even declare their love in hindi: "Abdul (In Hindi.) Me tum se pyar karti hui. (I love you.) Victoria (In Hindi.) Me tum se pyar karti hui. With all my heart. And I will count the days until you return safely to England" (Gupta 69). These exchanges point out the subversive power of hybridity. The Queen's adoption of Hindi expressions depicts how colonial authority can be influenced by the colonial subject it seeks to dominate. Their love becomes a medium through which identities are reconstructed beyond colonial binaries. These moments of cultural hybridity subvert the hierarchical order within the court. Abdul's influence on Queen Victoria due to his teacher status symbolizes how education can serve as a tool of resistance for marginalized people.

In addition, his new title of teacher empowered him as he involves himself in conversation concerning political affair; what upset Lady Sarah. She thinks that in his position of "Indian Alphabet" he has not the right to give his voice on political affairs implying the crown: "you should know your boundaries" (Gupta 82). Abdul also questions Victoria about the inaction of the monarch's vis-à vis the suffering of the subjects: "Every day, as we speak, in Africa your subjects are gaining more land in your name. True, the Africans are not enslaved anymore but how can your power as a monarch be kept just and fair?" (Gupta 83). Victoria's silence confirms her disappointment while Lady Sarah defends the crown by stipulating that the British crown does not oppress people but rather negotiates treaties with African leaders. Abdul's transformation from a mimic man to a transgressive agent and its participation in political discourse shows that mimicry is not just a simple repetition but

rather a strategy to upset colonial authority. It allows a hybrid space where the colonizers can have a voice and appear as intellectual equal.

By challenging the crown, many subjects of the court try to rebel against Abdul. For instance, the prince threats to boycott a trip because of Abdul's presence. This reflects a kind of discrimination and non-acceptance to other cultures. Moreover, this racism reveals the fear of the colonizer to lose their power through conspiracy. Even though Abdul's creates anxiety among the colonial subjects, his resistance similarly to that of Hari is short-lived. Indeed, after the death of Victoria, he was obliged by the court to return home and deprived of all the privilege he earned with the queen: "they strip Abdul of his royal livery, his turban, jacket etc. They re-dress him as an ordinary civilian. As the letters pile up around him, we hear the sound of a huge crackling bonfire which intensifies and fills the stage with a red glow. All of the Munshi's letters from Queen Victoria are burned" (Gupta 108). Abdul's decrease of power and return to poverty reflects the limits of hybrid identities in spaces dominated by colonial authority. This diasporic disillusionment shares similarities with Rani's story as Ayahs in England.

III- From dreams to personal realities: Rani's experience as Ayah in the English Diaspora

Rani is described as a lovely Ayah who really loves her job. She illustrates the archetype of Bhabha's mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). She reflects the "recognizable other" since she displays British domestic values as a devoted worker for her British employers. This devotion is a heritage from her mother whose memories and adventures as Ayah have been transmitted from mothers to daughters. Therefore, her position of Ayahs gives her a sense of pride and autonomy. In a flirting conversation with Hari, she rejects his demand of marriage arguing that she can "look after herself" (Gupta 10).

However, Rani's agency and optimism will be quickly altered by her dismiss at her arrival in England. Despite her devotion at work, she was fired by her employers because of her presumed inability to educate British children she keeps. Indeed, for her boss, English ayahs are more educated than Indians. This new creates a frustration in Rani not only because of her proximity with the kids but especially because she expected to start a new life in England and

earn a lot of money for her family. Her dismissal makes her anxious; England that should be a place of her professional emancipation reveals itself as a place of disappointment and abuse. She feels lost: "I am a complete stranger in this country" (Gupta 22). This special moment illustrates (Bhabha 13) notion of "the unhomely" where the colonized subject realizes that the colonizer place is not a new home but rather a place of alienation and disenchantment.

Furthermore, her boss does not conform herself to their agreement: "No written contract you understand" (Gupta 22). This highlights the naivety of immigrants and also parents from the first generation. They trust European on the basis of verbal agreement that are not "legally binding". Moreover, her dismissal foreshadows the fact that she is "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Despite her devotion and hardworking qualities, her Indianness deprives Rani of not enough being properly included in the British labor system. Her employers as a representative of the British labor system deconstruct the British dreams she nourished; and reinforces the marginalized position of "colonized subject". Hari attempts to defend her, only to be insulted and reduced to a subaltern position by Susan: "I do not talk to vagabond sailors" (Gupta 22). Rani realized then the wickedness of the British: "I cannot believe that they could be cruel" (Gupta 24). Homeless, the perception of people around her in London deepens her suffering. A man perceives her as a prostitute: "does she like two at time?" (Gupta 32). This decreases Rani's desire of being in England, a dark place filled of bad people: "This place, bad people, bad women, I am not that kind of woman" (Gupta 35). Therefore, Rani's painful ordeal gives her a feeling of nostalgia of her culture and country where people, as opposed to the British, who deserve good treatment to strangers or host: "In my village, guests are treated as gods" (Gupta 36). She sees the gap between her culture and that of England. Hari shares her grief by depicting the racism that prevails in London: "This is London, it is full of rats" (36). He even notes the disappointment felt by Asian immigrants: "Young men and women…. we come like idiots hoping for a better life" (Gupta 24). For him, Sally's boarding is the only place to host Asian immigrants: "Lascar's Sally's is the only place that would take us for the night, so I had no choice" (Gupta 36). However, beyond that it is a dirty place that leads Rani to fly away. She wants to return in India but does not have enough money: "I wish I would swim back" (Gupta 45).

In her despair, she met an Indian woman named Firoza, who brought

her help and emotional support. For Firoza, there still exists a chance for Rani to succeed in India. She thinks that people behave coldly with Rani because of her dress (sari). It means that the lack of knowledge and acceptance of each other (British and Indian) makes people behaves strangely and condemn others. Therefore, she argues that the best way to integrate cosmopolitan London is assimilation by downplaying difference, marketing domestic skills, and shedding the sari. Rani applies the advice, lets down her sari and wears an apron. Rani's change of clothes allows her to negotiate her Indian identity in British society creating what Bhabha calls "third space" (Bhabha 143). Her hybridity and cultural adoption reflect her desire to survive new environment. Successfully, her ability of cooking and being an Ayah in an apron helps her to be selected at the Oakham's. Although his boss Lord Oakham is appreciative of Indian food: "He sniffs the food and takes a mouthful" (Gupta 54). Rani's apron however displeases him. He wants her wearing a Sari. Lord Oakham's love for Indian culture is the result of his past living in India where his Ayah used to give him Indian food: "my Ayah Jamila weaned me on rice" (54). Rani serves then as an object of remembrance, a trigger of his imperial nostalgia.

In addition, Lord Oakham's interest in Indian culture then created a moment of cultural exchange that pinpoints colonial sympathy. For instance, like Victoria was curious about the description of Indian city, Lord Oakham wants Rani to describe her village and life with her parents. Eventually, he learned that her parents gave her an education, which is unusual to women.

Yet, this exchange and sympathy turn into a flirt whose consequences have been harmful for Rani. Indeed, under economic pressure she accepts the advance of her boss: "Lord Oakham kisses Rani on the lips. She looks afraid" (Gupta 57). As she needs money, she believes in his promise of offering economic support for his family and they make love. As a consequence, she becomes pregnant and rejected by her employers. Indeed, Lord Oakham denies paternity and attack both Rani and her baby verbally: "You and your damned lies", "whore", "bastard child" (Gupta 66). Pregnancy outside marriage makes her dishonored following Indian culture. Thus, on the street, Rani filled of despair and disillusionment attempts to abandon her baby. Her words "I have been abandoned by everyone I ever met here" (Gupta 73) reveal her emotional break. Fortunately, Firoza and Sally, two women of the refuge for Ayahs convinced her to retake her baby. Despite Rani's traumatic

adventure as ayah in Britain, this moment puts forward the importance of female solidarity in the face of abandonment and trauma.

Conclusion

Using the postcolonial theory, this article investigated how cosmopolitanism shapes and is shaped by the immigrant experiences and identity in the cosmopolitan spaces of Britain. Through the depiction of Britain's cosmopolitan spaces from London to the palace, the analysis mirrored the multicultural interactions that prevailed between immigrants from the commonwealth countries and British citizens in the context of British nationality act of 1948. By means of the narratives of immigrants as collective group (Lascars and Ayahs) and the individual stories of Hari, Abdul Karim and Rani, the research highlighted the disjunction between immigrants' dreams and the predicament they faced upon arrival in Britain. Although the British labor system offered a promise of opportunity and prosperity, the multicultural interactions between black immigrants and British citizens put forward racial prejudices, class discrimination and gender oppressions. Moreover, the interactions between members of the same community also underlined the impact of colonial oppression on the colonial subjects in terms of mimicry. Ultimately, in today's world seeking to come to terms with colonial legacies, Gupta's *The Empress* serves as a reminder of the necessity to challenge the idealized narrative of Britain's cosmopolitan society. Even though some immigrants succeed in achieving their British dreams, many others experience disillusionment, exclusion, especially depending on their gender, race and class.

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