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This is an electronic author version of an article published in *New Political Science*, 29 (1). pp. 23-42, March 2007. The definitive copy in *New Political Science* is available online at:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07393140601170685>

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Western colonial representations of the Other: the case of Exotica Tibet

Cultural representation of the non-Western Other lies at the core of Western colonial and neocolonial discourses. A critical political analysis of the Western imagination of the Other involves a recognition at two levels -- the practices of essentialising and stereotyping that provide the backbone as well as various strategies (such as infantilisation, eroticisation, debasement, idealisation, and self-affirmation) that put flesh to the imagined Other. The strategies, that are not ahistorically fixed but nevertheless remain stable over a period of time, are similar to what Edward Said calls 'the techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it' relying upon 'institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.'¹ In this paper, I identify and analyse significant rhetorical strategies that characterise Western representations of the (non-Western) Other, focusing mainly on Western colonial representations, and substantiate it through the empirical study of Exotica Tibet (a shorthand for exoticised Western representations of Tibet).

Representing the Natives

Within the context of European imperialism, the issue of the representation of natives was often considered as belonging to the realm of scientific objective

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Penguin, 1978), p.22.

ethnography, journalistic commentaries, or fiction.² A clear boundary was said to exist between fiction and non-fiction writing. It was presumed that, unlike fiction, non-fiction writing such as literary and popular journalism, exploration and travel writings, memoirs of colonial officials, and so on are unmediated by the consciously aesthetic requirements of imaginative literature. Emphasis was on the recording of observed facts. However, as argued by scholars from fields as diverse as postcolonial studies,³ anthropology,⁴ and international relations,⁵

² David Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London: Duke University Press, 1993).

³ Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question - The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen* 24: 6 (1983); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); Said, *op. cit.*; Ella Shohat, “The Struggle over Representation: Casting, Coalitions, and the Politics of Identification,” in R. de la Campa, E. A. Kaplan, and M. Sprinker (eds.) *Late Imperial Culture* (London: Verso, 1995); Spurr, *op. cit.*

⁴ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (London: University of California Press, 1986); Johannes Fabian, “Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing,” *Critical Inquiry* 16: 4 (1990); John Van Maanen (ed.) *Representation in Ethnography* (London: Sage, 1995).

such views are no longer tenable. Starting with Said,⁶ the enterprise of postcolonial theory has unpacked the notion of neutral academic expertise and highlighted how Western knowledge and representations of the non-Western world are neither innocent nor based on some pre-existing ‘reality’, but implicated in the West’s will to power, and its imperial adventures. The image of a scientific, apolitical, disinterested, knowledge-seeking ‘gentleman’ braving all odds to study non-Western cultures has been revealed as hollow. For instance, Colin Mackenzie, the first surveyor general of Madras in India, was clear about his necessary complicity in the brute realities of colonial power. He conflated the role of the soldier and the scientist and wrote:

That science may derive assistance, and knowledge be diffused, in the leisure moments of [military] camps and voyages, is no new discovery; but ... I am also desirous of proving that, in the vacant moments of an Indian sojourn and campaign in particular... such collected observations may be found useful, at least in directing the observation

⁵ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Rev. Ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998/1992); Roxanne L. Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall (eds.), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁶ Said, *op. cit.*

of those more highly gifted to matters of utility, if not to record facts of importance to philosophy and science.⁷

The mask of objectivity in the colonial discourse hid relations of inequality and domination. Fiction as well as non-fiction writings were permeated with various strategies of representation. These were not epiphenomenal but central to the ways in which the Other was sought to be known. What Rana Kabbani points out about travel writing holds true for non-fictional writings in general: during imperialism, it ultimately produced ‘a communal image of the East’, which ‘sustained a political structure and was sustained by it.’⁸

Various forms of representing the non-West – visual (films, television, photographs, paintings, advertisements, and so on) as well as textual (such as fiction, travelogue, journalism, ethnography, and anthropology) – were closely linked to the production of imperial encounters. Asymmetry of productive power is a common trait shared by these encounters. The contemporary neocolonial world too ‘bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social within the modern world order.’⁹ It is not only the represented (here the colonised, the

⁷ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 84.

⁸ Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe’s Myths of Orient* (London: Pandora, 1986), p. 10.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 171.

third world, the South) who are subjects of and subjected to the process; even the representer (the coloniser, the first world, the West) is constructed by representational practices. This in no way implies similar experiences for the coloniser and the colonised (the representer and the represented). It only indicates that though everyone is subjected to representational practices, the impact differs according to the existing power relations. To illustrate this point, while both the West and Tibetans are subjects of Exotica Tibet, and the latter are not mere victims but exercise their agency through creative negotiations, the West does not have to construct its identity according to the perception of Tibetans. Westerners exoticise Tibet, and in turn, Tibetans exoticise the West. But while Western exoticisation has a defining productive impact on Tibetan identity discourse,¹⁰ the same cannot be said of Tibetan exoticisation of the West. This reflects the asymmetry in their power relations.

A concentration on Western representations does not deny the fact that representational practices were prevalent in non-Western societies too. In fact,

¹⁰ Clare Harris, *In the Image of Tibet: Tibetan Painting after 1959* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); P Christiaan Klieger (ed.), *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002); Frank J. Korom (ed.), *Tibetan Culture in Diaspora* (Wien: Osterreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1997); Frank J. Korom (ed.), *Constructing Tibetan Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* (Quebec: Heritage Press, 1997); Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

historically, all cultures and civilisations have had their own particular representational practices for perceiving those they considered as Other. But – and this is a crucial qualification – it was only with modern European imperialism that the capacity to convert these representations into *truth* on a systematic and mass scale emerged. What makes such representational practices distinctly modern is their productive capacity. Production of knowledge about the Other through representations goes hand in hand with the construction, articulation, and affirmation of differences between the Self and Other, which in turn feeds into the identity politics amongst the representer as well as the represented.

Essentialising and stereotyping the Other

The practices of essentialising and stereotyping the Other underlie different strategies of Western representations. Essentialism is the notion that some core meaning or identity is determinate and not subject to interpretation. Ronald Inden writes that essentialist ways of seeing tend to ignore the ‘intricacies of agency’ pertinent to the flux and development of any social system.¹¹ In colonial context, we find essentialism in the reduction of the indigenous people to an ‘essential’ idea of what it means to be ‘native’ – say Africans as singing-dancing-fighting, Chinese as duplicitous, Arabs as cruel and oppressors of women, Tibetans as religious, and so on. Imperialism drew its strength from representations of natives as quintessentially lazy, ignorant, deceitful, passive, incapable of self-governing, and the native rulers as corrupt and despotic.

¹¹ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 20.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the British officials involved during the 1903-04 invasion of Tibet saw it as something welcomed by ‘ordinary’ Tibetans seeking deliverance from their Chinese and monastic overlords. Captain Cecil Rawling in a military report in 1905 wrote: ‘It seems to be the general wish of the inhabitants of that country (Tibet) that they should come under British administration.’¹² Curiously, Alistair Lamb’s own assessment that ‘when dealing with the *primitive* peoples of Central Asia, the problem often was not how to expand one’s power but how to prevent its indefinite expansion,’¹³ too puts the onus of responsibility for imperial expansion on the victims themselves. This is made possible by their essentialist representations as requiring paternal imperialism – a mix of iron fist and velvet glove.

A stereotype is a one-sided description of a group/culture resulting from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple ‘cardboard cut-out’, seeing people as pre-set image and ‘more of a formula than a human being.’¹⁴ It reduces people to a few, simple characteristics, which are then represented as

¹² Quoted in Alastair Lamb, *Britain and Chinese Central Asia: The Road to Lhasa 1767 to 1905* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 296.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 101, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Seymour L. Gross and John E. Hardy, “Introduction: Stereotype to Archetype: The Negro in American Literary Criticism,” in S. L. Gross and J. E. Hardy (eds.) *Images of the Negro in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 2.

fixed by nature. ‘Stereotyping reduces, essentialises, naturalises and fixes “difference.”’¹⁵ Stereotypes function as a marker between norm and deviancy, between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As Said argues, stereotypical images of the Orient’s separateness – ‘its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability’ – have been part of Western discursive practices for a long time.¹⁶ Stereotyping flourished to justify imperialism as a civilising mission – the restless, honest, active, exploratory, masculine, enlightened, modern spirit of the ‘white man’ stood in contrast to the laziness, deceit, passivity, fatalism, femininity, backwardness, and traditional spiritlessness of the natives. For example, Captain John Noel’s films *Climbing Mount Everest* (1922) and *The Epic of Everest* (1924) developed the ‘contrast between the extroverted, aggressive, and manly British climbers with the introverted, passive, and squalid but mystical Tibetans.’¹⁷

Stereotyping is a simplification not because it is a false representation of a given reality but because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that denies the play of difference. Let me illustrate this with an example from the

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’”, in S. Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publication, 1997), pp. 257-58.

¹⁶ Said, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁷ Peter Hansen, “Tibetan Horizon: Tibet and the Cinema in the Early Twentieth Century,” in T. Dodin and H. Rather (eds.) *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), pp. 92-93.

story of the first two men to reach Mount Everest – Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary. Reaching the summit, Tenzing Norgay says he felt the warm presence of the mountain, buried an offering to the gods, and said in prayer: ‘I am grateful, Chomolungma’; Hillary took photographs to survey the area, urinated on the summit, and later told one of the other climbers George Lowe: ‘Well, George, we knocked the bastard off.’¹⁸ This difference in attitude may be due to cultural factors. But to interpret humility as passivity and fix the identity of Tenzing Norgay (read as representative of sherpas and other natives) as essentially passive in contrast to adventurous, scientific Hillary (read as white man) leads to a reified and fixated form of representation (excluding those who do not ‘fit’ in the image – women for instance). Stereotyping is not about expressing cultural difference, but fixing it in a pre-given socio-cultural milieu with extreme power differentials.

Stereotyping served imperialism at both representational and psychic levels – supporting the idea of paternal domination and acting as a kind of perceptual blinder protecting the colonisers from discomforting consciousness of either

¹⁸ For Norgay see Peter Hansen, “Inventing Virtual Sherpas,” Paper presented at the *Workshop on Outdoor Recreation: Practice and Ideology from an International Comparative Perspective* (Umea, Sweden, September 1998). For Hillary, see Outside Online, “The Man who Knocked the Bastard Off,” *Outside Magazine* October (1999). Available online: <http://outside.away.com/outside/magazine/1099/199910hillary1.html> (28 July 2006).

poverty or guilt.¹⁹ It allowed the participants in the massacre of Tibetans at Guru (31 March 1904) that took place during the British invasion of Tibet to blame it on the ‘crass stupidity and childishness of the Tibetan general,’²⁰ malevolent monks, superstitious Tibetan soldiers – everyone except themselves. We *must* liberate the ordinary natives from their brutal leaders – this sentiment can be seen in Colonel Francis Younghusband’s account of the 1903-04 ‘expedition’ to Tibet where after criticising Tibetans for being crafty, immoral, over-religious, dirty, and lazy, he says ‘there are in them latent potentialities for good, which only await the right touch to bring them into being.’²¹ We may recall Napoleon’s proclamation in 1798 upon entering Egypt: ‘Peoples of Egypt, you will be told that I have come to destroy your religion; do not believe it! Reply that I have come to restore your rights, to punish the

¹⁹ Richard Ned Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), p. 22.

²⁰ Parshotam Mehra, *North-Eastern frontier: A Documentary Study of the Internecine Rivalry between India, Tibet and China*, vol. I, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 223.

²¹ Francis Younghusband, *India and Tibet: A History of the Relations which have Subsisted Between the Two Countries from the Time of Warren Hastings to 1910; with a Particular Account of the Mission to Lhasa of 1904* (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 321.

usurpers, and that I respect more than the Mamluks God, His Prophet, and the Quran.’²²

Though in everyday conversation we tend to use stereotype only for negative images, stereotyping has within it dualism and ambivalence²³ As Michael Hunt in his study of hierarchy of race and American foreign policy points out, the Americans created for ‘Orientals’ two distinctly different images: ‘a positive one, appropriate for happy times when paternalism and benevolence were in season, and a negative one, suited to those tense periods when abuse or aggrandizement became the order of the day.’²⁴ While sometimes a positive stereotype may be politically and socially helpful for a group, in the long run it reifies and imprisons the represented subjects in their own arrested image. This problem can be seen most clearly in the case of Tibetans who seem to be prisoners of their stereotyped images. Alluding to the real effects of the language of stereotype about Tibet, Donald Lopez points out that it ‘not only

²² “History of the Middle East: Napoleon Invades Egypt”, No date. Available online:

<http://www.usna.edu/Users/history/tucker/hh362/Napoleon%20invades%20Egypt.htm> (5 April 2006).

²³ Bhabha, “The Other Question”, *op. cit.*; Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Hall, “The Spectacle”, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Michael Hunt, *Ideology and U. S. Foreign Policy* (London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 69.

creates knowledge about Tibet, in many ways it creates Tibet, a Tibet that Tibetans in exile have come to appropriate and deploy in an effort to gain both standing in exile and independence for their country.’²⁵ However, these stereotypes legitimise only certain goals and actions geared toward achieving them – the prevalent stereotypes paint Tibetans mainly as passive victims requiring outside help. And this outside support comes at a price. As Jamyang Norbu says, ‘however hopeless their cause or marginal their survival, Tibetans are better off living their own reality than being typecast in ethereal roles in the fantasies of the West.’²⁶

Strategies of Representation

In spite of commonalities and consistencies, it is complexity, oppositionality, and ambivalence that lie at the heart of Western colonial representations. Imaginative practices through which the imperial West came to represent the Other can be interrogated through the various strategies of representation involved. Though there was always a will to reify the represented, this was undermined by the nature of representation – it was not a singular act, but one necessitating repetition. There always was a paradox in the Western representations of other cultures – an unresolvable tension between transparency and inscrutability, desire and disavowal, difference and

²⁵ Lopez, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁶ Jamyang Norbu, “Behind the Lost Horizon: Demystifying Tibet,” in T. Dodin and H. Rather (eds.) *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), p. 378.

familiarity. Therefore Exotica Tibet is not a distinct phenomenon devoid of contrariety; rather, it is defined by a ‘true *complexio oppositorum*, a rich complexity of contradictions and oppositions.’²⁷ So near, yet so far! As Slavoj Zizek puts it:

The very inconsistency of this image of Tibet, with its direct coincidence of opposites seems to bear witness to its fantasmatic status. Tibetans are portrayed as people leading a simple life of spiritual satisfaction, fully accepting their fate, liberated from the excessive craving of the Western subject who is always searching for more, AND as a bunch of filthy, cheating, cruel, sexually promiscuous primitives... The social order is presented as a model of organic harmony, AND as the tyranny of the cruel corrupted theocracy keeping ordinary people ignorant...²⁸

The following section of the paper identifies the most common discursive strategies marshalled in the representation of the non-Western Other in the context of Western imperialism and uses Exotica Tibet as the main empirical site of investigation.

Archive

²⁷ Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of a Sacred Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 63.

²⁸ Slavoj Zizek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 64-66, capitalisation in original.

Archive is commonly understood as a place or collection containing records, documents, photographs, film, or other materials of historical interest. But archive can be taken to refer to a repository of stored memories, information, myths, rumours, and legends.²⁹ Encounter with the Other did not take place in vacuum – it was understood within pre-given images. What was knowable then was shaped by imperial prerogatives as well as pre-existing ‘knowledge’. This included those found in classical writings, religious and biblical sources, mythology, traveller’s tales (which in any case made little distinction between description and legend), and fictional writings. These provided the cultural framework through which others were seen, described and represented. Orientalism itself performed an archival function – generalisations abounded as the attitude was ‘pick an East, any East’³⁰ (Sardar 1999: 66) and the story will be the same. As Said puts it: ‘In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held.’³¹ In

²⁹ For different views on the conceptualisation of archive, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, E. Penowitz (trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Dirks, *op. cit.*; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Tavistock: London, 1972); Thomas Richards, “Archive and Utopia,” *Representations* 37 (1999); Carolyn Steedman, “The Space of Memory: In an Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11: 4 (1998).

³⁰ Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p. 66.

³¹ Said, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

situations where the culture was relatively unknown – like the Tibetan – hearsay, legends, and fantasies performed an ever more important archival function.³² Representers of Tibet especially before the nineteenth century often drew upon these archives, supplementing the rare missionary and travellers’ accounts. Hugh Richardson’s argument that the early allusions of Westerners reveal little more than that the Tibetans had a reputation in neighbouring countries for ‘strange ways and rare magical powers’³³ holds true even for the twentieth century. Evaluation of Tibet and its people was based on an archive that made very little distinction between myths, legends, hearsay, and facts. Western writers constructed ‘facts’ not by referring to the place of Tibet but through repetition and cross-reference.

Gaze

Surveillance is a technique through which, under an over-powering gaze, the non-Western subject is rendered ‘a knowable, visible object of disciplinary power.’³⁴ The gaze is not mere innocent curiosity: ‘to gaze implies more than to look at – it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the

³² Dibyesh Anand, “Archive and the Poetics of ‘Exotica Tibet’,” in P. C. Klieger (ed.) *Tibetan Borderlands* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006).

³³ Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and its History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 61.

³⁴ Doty, *op. cit.*, p. 11

gazer is superior to the object of the gaze.’³⁵ Through observation, examination and interpretation objects are differentiated, categorised, and identified, and made ready to be acted upon. Objectification (fixing its essence) of the gazed goes hand in hand with its subjectification – gaze and surveillance are productive of identity of the gazed.

Surveillance as a strategy for representing the Other and rendering it disciplined is characterised by the all-knowing gaze of a white ‘man’, the colonial master, the West. It enables both the visual possession of the body of the gazed and an interposition of technique which safely conceals the body of the gazer.³⁶ Observations then are presented as dispassionate, objective facts. The gaze is disembodied – statements are made as if there is no seer behind the observations.

This is not to say that non-Westerners are visually impaired, powerless to gaze back at the West. But, the authority of imperialism for a large part of the modern period ensured that mastery and control remained a possession of Western ‘man’. The ‘monarch of all I survey’ rhetorical gesture remained peculiar to the West.³⁷ Establishment of mastery through surveillance, gaze,

³⁵ Jonathan E. Schroeder, “Consuming Representation: A Visual Approach to Consumer Research,” in B. B. Stern (ed.) *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 208.

³⁶ Spurr, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

³⁷ Mary Louis Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 201.

and observation were accompanied by consolidation of shades of political dominance over the object of the gaze. Appropriation was done in the name of scientific curiosity, ethnographic material gathering, protection of simple masses from their own despotic rulers, or the spread of progress.

British colonial and military officials who went inside Tibet often wrote their accounts as scientific exploration, or as exciting adventure,³⁸ or simply as ‘everyday’ observation.³⁹ Behind the innocent sounding descriptions of travel like the ‘narrative of a plant hunter’s adventures and discoveries’⁴⁰ lay the violence of imperialism. Though their gaze might be considered as one of adventurer or romantic in Europe, the effect on the natives was the same as some steely-eyed militarist – the establishment and institutionalisation of control through political rule and knowledge formation. To know is a prelude to possess, especially if there is a huge asymmetry of power. Such asymmetry led to situations where it was perfectly acceptable for a participant in the Tibet mission of 1903-04 to say: ‘In fact the visible riches and treasures of Lhasa

³⁸ See for instance, Frederick Markham Bailey, *No Passport to Tibet* (London: Travel Book Club, 1957); Harrison Forman *Through Forbidden Tibet: An Adventure into the Unknown* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1936).

³⁹ Thomas Gordon, *Roof of the World: Being the Narrative of a Journey Over the High Plateau of Tibet to the Russian Frontier and the Oxus Sources on Pamir* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1876), p. v.

⁴⁰ Frank Kingdom Ward, *A Plant Hunter in Tibet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934).

fairly made our mouths water. The Tibetans however would not sell, and to our honour be it said; although *Lhasa was a fair object to loot*, and lay in our power, not a farthings worth was *forcibly* [author adds this word in pen in a typed text] taken from it.⁴¹ Securing priceless artefacts through coercion and displaying them in the private and public collections in the West was an essential feature of Western imperialism.

Paradoxically, the project of rendering the Other knowable and the image of it as primitive and simple went hand in hand with recognition that there are elements of inscrutability and mystery that eluded complete understanding of the Other. While discussing his own failure to fathom the unease of Phuntsog, a Tibetan who is seen no longer as ‘authentic’ native as he has learnt the language of the imperialist, Edmund Candler, an early example of embedded reporter (a *Daily Mail* reporter accompanying the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-04), calls him a ‘strange hybrid product of restless western energies,

⁴¹ Herbert Augustus Iggulden “An Undated Account of Lhasa and its Inhabitants by Brigadier-General Herbert Augustus Iggulden (1861-1937), Chief Staff Officer Tibet Mission Escort, 1903-04,” *MSS Eur C 270/FL2/E/1/144* (London: Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, No Date), p. 6, emphasis added. This contrasts with historical works that have shown widespread looting and forcible ‘securing’ of objects that accompanied the British invasion. See Michael Carrington, “Officers, Gentlemen and Thieves: The Looting of Monasteries During the 1903/4 Younghusband Mission to Tibet,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 1, 2003).

stirring and muddying the shallows of the Eastern mind. Or are they depths? Who knows? I know nothing, only that these men are inscrutable, and one cannot see into their hearts.’⁴²

Frustrated with the inaccessibility, invisibility and inscrutability of ‘the Orientals’, Western desire subjects them to a relentless investigation. Veil becomes a metaphor for all that invites, titillates, and yet resists Western knowing. It is ‘one of those tropes through which Western fantasies of penetration into the mysteries of the Orient and access to the interiority of the other are fantasmatically achieved.’⁴³

Surveillance and gaze facilitate other representational strategies that fix the Orient, the Other, particularly those that seek to classify, differentiate and provide identity to the Other (and in turn to the Self).

Differentiation - Classification

Differentiation and Classification, two crucial factors in the formation of the modern subject,⁴⁴ are also evident in Western representations of the Other. The ideational differentiation between the West and the Rest underpins these representations. The need to articulate one’s personal and collective self in

⁴² Edmund Candler, *Unveiling of Lhasa* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), p. 206.

⁴³ Maya Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 39.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow (ed.) (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 7-11.

terms of identity comes from an internalisation of this principle of differentiation. Classification occupies a central place in any account of non-Western people. It polices discourses, assigns positions, regulates groups, and enforces boundaries.⁴⁵ What Lobsang Rampa⁴⁶ says about his own treatment in the West reflects the dominant Western attitude toward the exhibition of Oriental curiosities: ‘Unfortunately, western people looked upon me as a curio, as a specimen who should be put in a cage and shown off as a freak from the unknown. It made me wonder what would happen to my old friends, the Yetis, if the westerners got hold of them- as they are trying to do.’⁴⁷ Given the taxonomising predilection and conceit of Western imperialism, we can hardly disagree with Rampa’s conjecture about the fate of the yetis: ‘(If) Western Man

⁴⁵ Spurr, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁶ Author of several popular books on the theme of Tibet such as *The Third Eye*, Rampa claimed to be a Tibetan monk in an Englishman’s body. Tibetan specialists considered him a fraud (see Lopez *op. cit.*) and revealed that he had never been to Tibet or even outside England when he wrote his first book in 1956 opening with: ‘I am a Tibetan. One of the few who have reached this strange Western world’ (9). This revelation did not prevent his works from becoming best sellers and from reputable newspapers hailing his accounts as authentic. T. Lobsang Rampa, *The Third Eye: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Lama* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956).

⁴⁷ T. Lobsang Rampa, *Doctor from Lhasa* (London: Souvenir Press, 1959), p. 9.

had his way, our poor old yetis would be captured, dissected, and preserved in spirit.’⁴⁸

While some classifications may be essential for understanding, often the classification of non-Western peoples went hand in hand with the hierarchisation and racialisation of cultures. Classifying the Other as barbarian or savage validated its dehumanisation and was seen as justification for use of violence to impose European norms.⁴⁹ At the top were the white Europeans and at the bottom were ‘primitive’ Africans and aboriginal populations in the ‘new world’. Chinese, Arabs, Indians, and others occupied different positions in the hierarchical table. The nineteenth and twentieth century obsession with racialising culture can be seen in the case of Tibetans too where different commentators sought to identify characteristics of the Tibetan ‘race’. A typical example was Graham Sandberg who was unflattering in his comments about the ‘Tibetan race as “a weak and cowardly people, their pusillanimity rendering them readily submissive.”’⁵⁰ The fact that racism has less to do with colour and more to do with power relations becomes evident in the British treatment of

⁴⁸ Rampa, *The Third Eye*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁴⁹ Paul Keal, *European Conquest and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The Moral Backwardness of International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mark B. Salter, *Barbarians and Civilizations in International Relations* (London: Pluto, 2002).

⁵⁰ Chris Bonnington and Charles Clarke, *Tibet’s Secret Mountain: The Triumph of Sepu Kangri* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 209.

Irish as ‘coloured’, as ‘white negroes’⁵¹ during the nineteenth century. Captain William Frederick O’Connor observation at the start of the twentieth century about Tibet is illustrative: ‘Common people are cheerful, happy-go-lucky creatures, absurdly *like the Irish* in their ways, and sometimes even in their features.’⁵² On the other hand, French traveller Alexandra David-Neel finds that *dobdobs*, the Lhasa monk ‘police’, looks like a ‘real negro.’⁵³

Differentiation, classification and identification, when combined with racialisation, evolutionism and hierarchisation lead to the debasement and negation of most non-Western natives and idealisation of some.

Debasement - idealisation

The seemingly opposite techniques of debasement (and its corollary negation) and idealisation (and its corollary affirmation) have similar rhetorical structures; these involve processes of decontextualisation and othering. In terms of Western representations of the non-West, the binary of the noble/ignoble savage has been a product of such discursive practices. The ease with which writers and observers have switched between highly negative and eulogising appraisals of Tibetan culture is illustrative. Throughout the

⁵¹ McClintock, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Lebow, *op. cit.*

⁵² Quoted in S. K. Sharma and Usha Sharma (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Tibet* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1996), p. 191, emphases added.

⁵³ Alexandra David-Neel, *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* (London: Penguin, 1936/1931), p. 105.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries Tibetans were seen as either ‘backward and barbaric or noble and charming.’⁵⁴

Natives have been debased and associated with filth and dirt numerous times. The discourse of contamination and disease was used to enforce colonial oppression and to inculcate a sense of inferiority in the colonised peoples. This has particularly been the case with the representations of Tibet and Lhasa where physical dirt was seen as symbolically standing for an inherent weakness in Tibetan character. Thomas Manning, the first Englishman to visit Lhasa in 1811 wrote:

There is nothing striking, nothing pleasing in its appearance. The inhabitants are begrimed with dirt and smut. The avenues are full of dogs, some growling and gnawing bits of hide which lie about in profusion and emit a charnel-house smell; others limping and looking livid; others ulcerated; others starved and dying, and pecked at by ravens; some dead and preyed upon. In short, everything seems mean and gloomy, and excites the idea of something unreal. Even the mirth and laughter of the inhabitants I thought dreamy and ghostly.⁵⁵

The British Foreign Office report of 1920 in its section on ‘geography’ felt under compulsion to allude to the poor sanitary conditions and the ‘gruesome

⁵⁴ Thierry Dodin and Heinz Rather (eds.), *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), p. 397.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Frederick Spencer Chapman, *Lhasa the Holy City* (Delhi: Bodhi Leaves Corporation, 1992/1940), pp. 146-47.

custom' of the disposal of the dead by cutting them into pieces and leaving them to be devoured by vultures, dogs, and pigs.⁵⁶ George Knight, the leader of the 1922-23 British expedition to Tibet 'affirms' the truth of various labels attached to Tibet: 'it is a land of mountains, monasteries and monks, land of women, dogs and dirt, country of the great unwashed.'⁵⁷ However, the unequivocal condemnation of Tibetans for being 'dirty' began to change as some visitors started re-evaluating the dominant Western stance. Chapman, visiting in late 1930s, amended his preconceived conclusions about Lhasa: 'It is true that the common people do not wash, that their houses are, by our standards, filthy, and that they live in a state of serfdom – but what a delightful folk, nevertheless.'⁵⁸

Debasement of the natives often accompanied the strategy of negation by which Western writings conceive of the Other as absence, emptiness, nothingness, thus denying Other its agency, its history, and often, its language.

⁵⁶ Foreign Office, *Tibet (Number 70)* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1920), p. 22.

⁵⁷ George Knight, *Intimate Glimpses of Mysterious Tibet and Neighbouring Countries* (London: Golden Vista Press, 1930), p. 25.

⁵⁸ Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Interestingly, British supermarkets since 2002 started selling 'Tibet' range of haircare (with names such as 'rebirth' and 'balance'), promising 'beauty through balance' (<http://www.tibetbeauty.com>). Indeed, 'Tibet' has come a long way from being a 'country of the great unwashed'.

Negation serves to erase what one sees in order to clear ‘a space for the expansion of the colonial imagination and for the pursuit of desire.’⁵⁹ This, in colonial times, led to ground clearing for the expansion of colonial rule in places including Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa. Use of the metaphor of ‘virgin’ for most territories, despite the fact that they were home to many cultures and people, facilitated their appropriation by the colonisers. Within these ‘blank spaces the West may write such things as civilization, progress, modernization, and democracy. Imperial encounters become missions of deliverance and salvation rather than conquests and exploitations.’⁶⁰

Idealisation and self-affirmation often exist along with negation and debasement as evidenced in the present day positive exoticisation of Tibet in Western popular imagination. Paradoxically, despite its difference, Tibet was often seen as the non-Western culture with which Europeans could identify. Hugues Didier, when discussing the *tibétophilie européenne* emerging before nineteenth century, points out that it is founded upon two poles: ‘On the one hand, Tibet is the least accessible, most mysterious, and most foreign country of Asia; on the other hand, Tibet is paradoxically the only Asian culture with whom Europeans can identify so much that they seem surprisingly intimate and

⁵⁹ Spurr, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁰ Doty, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

related – truly a sort of *coincidentia oppositorum!*⁶¹ While early Christians sought traces of forgotten community of Christians here, theosophists looked for the lost brotherhood of wise hermits. In the mid-nineteenth century, Joseph Wolff popularised the idea of a long-lost population of Jews in the Himalayas.⁶² On the other hand, the Nazi SS sent an expedition in 1938-39 to ascertain whether Tibet was an abode of true Aryans or not.⁶³ Thus, we can see that there are various ways in which often conflicting desires of the West got invested in Tibet. One such set of conflicting desires is expressed through the strategies of eroticisation/ moralisation.

Eroticisation - moralisation

Eroticisation and moralisation are central to Western representations of the Other. Reference to the licentiousness and voracious sexual appetite of Arabs/Africans, feminisation of Asian males, availability of docile and yet elusive Oriental women – such motifs are conspicuous in many Western fiction and non-fiction writings, and in films. The Orient becomes the ‘fertile’ ground on which the sexual fantasies of Western ‘men’ (mainly though not exclusively) is played out. The ideas of sexual innocence and experience,

⁶¹ Quoted in Rudolf Kaschewsky, “The Image of Tibet in the West Before the Nineteenth Century,” in T. Dodin and H. Rather (eds.) *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001), pp. 6-7.

⁶² Lee Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet: Unlocking the Secrets of the Land of the Snows* (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 1996), pp. 14-15.

⁶³ Christopher Hale, *Himmler’s Crusade* (London: Bantam Books, 2004).

sexual domination and submissiveness play out a complex dance in the discourse of 'the West and the Rest.'⁶⁴

The very language of exploration was marked by strong gender distinctions and drew much of its subconscious force from sexual imagery. Discovery of America was often seen literally as 'dis-covering' of the unknown land, uncovering of the naked, available, desirable and primitive female body of America by the clothed, civilised European man (for instance, Jan van der Straet's 1575 depiction *The Discovery of America*). The feminised landscape titillated and provoked explorers and discoverers to take control of her, to possess her – this was a common sentiment expressed in exploration literature from fifteenth century onwards. Edward William Lane's described his first sight of Egypt in 1825 thus, 'As I approached the shore, I felt like an Eastern bridegroom, about to lift the veil of his bride, and to see, for the first time, the features that were to charm, or disappoint, or disgust him.'⁶⁵

These erotics of imperial conquest evident in the evocation of feminised space were linked to the Enlightenment's pursuit of truth. After all, 'study, understanding, knowledge, evaluation...are instruments of conquest.'⁶⁶

European consciousness is encoded as masculine and the object of knowledge as feminine.

⁶⁴ Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in S. Hall and B. Gieben (eds.) *Formations of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 302.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Kabbani, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁶⁶ Said, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

All too often, Enlightenment metaphysics presented knowledge as a relation of power between two gendered spaces, articulated by a journey and a technology of conversion: the male penetration and exposure of a veiled, female interior; and the aggressive conversion of its ‘secrets’ into a visible, male science of the surface.⁶⁷

The combination of knowledge and eroticisation is illustrated strongly in Charles Bell’s statement when he talks of Lhasa as practically ‘untouched by white men’ – ‘Shut off from their outer world by their immense mountain barriers, Tibet still presented a virgin field of inquiry.’⁶⁸ Fernand Grenard regrets Tibet’s closure, her foiling of attempts by Europeans to pry her open: ‘In truth, the Tibetans are one of the nations that have changed the least in the course of the centuries and it is greatly to be regretted that they are so difficult to access and so obstinately opposed to enquiries.’⁶⁹ This resonates with Said’s analysis of the Middle East in Western imagination: ‘The Middle East is resistant, as any virgin would be, but the male scholar wins the prize by bursting open, penetrating through the Gordian knot despite the “taxing task.”’⁷⁰

⁶⁷ McClintock, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁶⁸ Charles Bell, *The People of Tibet* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), p. viii.

⁶⁹ Fernand Grenard, *Tibet: The Country and its Inhabitants* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1904), p. 373.

⁷⁰ Said, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

Not surprisingly, after the British invasion of Lhasa in 1903-04, Lord Curzon wrote that 'I am almost ashamed of having destroyed the virginity of the bride to whom you aspired, viz. Lhasa' in a letter addressed to Sven Hedin (a famous Swedish explorer) as the latter described the expedition as 'the rape of Lhasa.'⁷¹ On his part, Hedin lost 'the longing that had possessed [him] to penetrate the Holy City.'⁷² These writers and commentators draw upon a long tradition of what McClintock calls 'European porno-tropics' treating 'male travel as an erotics of ravishment' in which uncertain places were figured as 'libidiously eroticized.'⁷³ The most prevalent metaphor for the British invasion of Tibet was that of 'unveiling'. Edmund Candler titled his account as the 'unveiling of Lhasa'.⁷⁴

Eroticisation was not the only representational technique deployed by the West when gendering the Orient. Moralisation was an effective tool too. Morality was seen as a sign of progress. European bourgeois morality came to represent the pinnacle of civilisation. This was contrasted with a 'lack' of morality amongst natives, 'Orientals', and the domestic working classes. The policing of morality primarily involved policing women's bodies. Hence, cultures (like that of Tibet) where this sort of policing was negligible were seen as immoral.

⁷¹ Orville Schell, *Virtual Tibet: Searching for Shangri-La from the Himalayas to Hollywood* (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt, 2000), p. 201.

⁷² Quoted in Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁷³ McClintock, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Candler, *op. cit.*

A common idea amongst travellers and commentators was that Tibetans ranked low in terms of morality and the ‘freedom’ accorded to women was both a cause and an effect of this low moral standard. A discourse of filth and contamination was attached to that on morality and the status of women. A member of the British expedition to Lhasa makes the observation:

Tibetan morals are not of a very high order and there seems to be a good deal of promiscuousness in the relations of the lay population. I twice came across parties of men and women bathing together in a small stream behind the Potala, which struck me as most unusual as the majority of Tibetans are filthy and grimy to a degree.⁷⁵

Chronopolitics

Chronopolitics, or the politics of time, has played an important role in Western representations of the non-Western Other. The Other has been imagined as socially and culturally backward (in time) – medieval (feudal like pre-Renaissance Europe), archaic (like ancient Egyptians or Mesopotamians), pre-historic (primitive), or simply beyond the matrix of time (timeless). The colonial journey and travel of contemporary Western commentators is often figured as proceeding forward in geographical space but backward in historical time. This technique renders non-dominant groups out of present and legitimises control in the name of modernity. Natives as backward requiring rule/control/guidance/assistance of more advanced ‘foreigners’ to enter the modern times was seen as an uncontested fact.

⁷⁵ Iggulden, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

The Other is both a prisoner of time (frozen in certain stage of history) and an escapee (outside the time grid, timeless, outside history). The West is the present, the now and it has the duty/right to bring Progress to the Other. The entire range of timeframe available under chronopolitics can be illustrated through European representations of Tibet and Tibetans during the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The world is divided into chronological reserves, and when we enter Tibet, we reach a different age, as if the ‘tracts of past time persisted here and there which could be visited.’⁷⁶

The most prevalent representation of Tibet was that it was medieval. Candler mused: ‘The Tibetans are not the savages they are depicted. They are civilized, if medieval’ and his feelings were ‘confirmed’ as a result of the only incident in 1904 in Lhasa when a Tibetan monk attacked the soldiers of occupying British-Indian force. He described how a lama ‘ran amuck outside the camp with the coat of mail and huge paladin’s sword concealed beneath his cloak, a *medieval* figure who thrashed the air with his brand like a flail in sheer lust of blood. He was hanged *medievally* the next day within sight of Lhasa.’⁷⁷ The monk was hanged in full public view to act as a deterrent to any other Tibetan contemplating resistance. It is ironic that British justified their own barbarity by blaming it on the medieval quality of their field of operation, by putting the responsibility on the victims.

⁷⁶ Francis Spufford, *I May be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 212.

⁷⁷ Candler, *op. cit.*, p. 246, p. 265, emphases added.

We also see ambiguity and nostalgia as the twentieth century unfolds: ‘The political and social order of Tibet is several hundred years behind that which now holds in England. Tibetans have an instinct for orderliness and this helps them establish hierarchy on a firm basis which in turn aids in the maintenance of order.’⁷⁸ Ambiguity is mixed with nostalgia in Chapman’s account too:

‘Tibet is in the position of European countries in the Middle Ages - in many ways a position which we are bound, nowadays, to envy.’⁷⁹

Apart from medievalism, Tibet also was imagined as parallel to the ancient archaic world. Potala palace, for Perceval Landon, was ‘an image of that ancient and mysterious faith which has found its last and fullest expression beneath the golden canopies of Lhasa.’⁸⁰ As in the writings of theosophists, precursors to New Age movements, Tibetan Buddhism began to be imagined as forming a direct connection with Ancient Egyptian religion. Western imagination of Tibet also flirted with the prehistoric and the primitive. During this period, primitive meant uncivilised form of human life, lower on the scale of social evolution. Hensoldt wrote:

⁷⁸ Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

⁷⁹ Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁸⁰ Perceval Landon, *Lhasa: An Account of the Country and People of Central Tibet and of the Progress of the Mission Sent There by the English Government in the Year 1903-04*, Vol. II (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1905), p. 262.

It would be folly to shut out eyes to the fact that the Thibetans occupy a very low position in the scale of human advancement... Their culture is inferior to that of the most semi-barbarous races, comparing unfavourable even with that of certain Indian tribes of the American continent, such as the Pueblos, Zunis, etc.⁸¹

Grenard was reminded of 'American Redskins,'⁸² while Chapman wrote, 'I sang an Eskimo folk-song and Norbhu [a Tibetan companion] said it was exactly like Tibetan music – a doubtful compliment, but interesting, seeing that the Eskimos and Tibetans are, ethnologically speaking, fairly closely related.'⁸³

One significant emblem of Tibet's association with the prehistoric in the Western imagination is the figure of *Yeti*, made popular through works such as *Tintin in Tibet*.

Chronopolitics entails not only a fixing of cultures and groups of people in particular chronological reserve, but also detemporalising, escaping the imagination from confines of time and history. In Western representations, places such as the Potala Palace of Lhasa represent the timelessness of Tibetan life: 'To me the Potala represents the very essence of the Tibetan people. It has a certain untamed dignity in perfect harmony with the surrounding rugged country; a quality of stolid unchangeableness – it seems to say: "Here I have

⁸¹ Quoted in Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁸² Grenard, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁸³ Chapman, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

been for hundreds of years, and here I intend to stay for ever.”⁸⁴ The idea of Tibet as located back in time, and hence lower on the scale of evolution, as well as timeless offered space for two mutually contradictory representations – Tibet as repository of wisdom and Tibet as irrational and child-like.

Infantilisation - gerontification

The Orient is the space for the ‘wisdom of the east’ in some representations, while in others it is essentially irrational, emotional, uncivilised, child-like. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam write, ‘Africa can be a child and Asia a shriveled old man, but Europe always maintains a relational advantage. Both Asia and Africa are seen as constitutively deficient, while Europe always keeps its place at the apex of a value-laden hierarchy.’⁸⁵ Infantilisation is a crucial representational strategy through which the Other is rendered incapable of making decisions for itself. Not surprisingly, Rudyard Kipling, exhorting Americans to take up their ‘responsibility’ of civilising Philippines, in ‘The white man’s burden’ (1899) wrote: ‘Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.’⁸⁶ As Doty points out, complementary to the childlike attributes attached to the Filipinos in

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ Ella Shohat, E. and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 139.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Epifanio San Juan, *After Postcolonialism: Remapping Philippines—United States Confrontations* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 99.

the American counterinsurgency discourses were ineptitude and inefficiency.⁸⁷ Infantilisation justifies guardianship, patronage by the adult, more enlightened, rational West. As pointed out earlier in the paper, Tibetans would prosper ‘under British auspices and assistance’⁸⁸ – such sentiments were rife during the time of British invasion. The ordering of the world into various binary opposites such as civilised/uncivilised, modern/backward, developed/undeveloped, and so on, ‘is readily framed as a relation between adult and child, and the processes of colonialism and neocolonialism in which such binary taxonomies have been instantiated have involved both subtle and very unsubtle practices of infantilization.’⁸⁹

During lengthy negotiations preceding and accompanying the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-04, it is common to come across Tibetans being compared to obstinate, illogical children. Younghusband found them ‘very much like big children.’⁹⁰ While discussing the Tibetan attitude during the pre-Lhasa

⁸⁷ Roxanne L. Doty, “Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37: 3 (1993), p. 313.

⁸⁸ Graham Sandberg, *The Exploration of Tibet: Its History and Particulars from 1623 to 1904* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1904), p. 14.

⁸⁹ Randolph Persaud and Rob B. J. Walker (eds.), “Apertura: Race in International Relations,” *Alternatives* 26 (2001), pp. 374-75.

⁹⁰ Uncovered Editions, *The British Invasion of Tibet: Colonel Younghusband, 1904* (London: The Stationary Office, 1999), p. 105, p. 148.

negotiations, Peter Fleming observes that ‘Logic was a concept wholly alien to the Tibetan mind’, their ‘power of reasoning did not even extend to that of a child’; they did not evade issues, they simply declined to recognise their existence.⁹¹ Landon qualifies this by saying that Tibetans have their own sense of morality in that they are industrious and capable of ‘extraordinary physical activity’ though ‘(i)t is true that this activity finds its vent rather in the muscles of the legs than in those of the fingers, but this is only to be expected.’⁹²

A good illustration of the effectiveness of infantilisation in clearing the conscience of European imperialists as aggressors, as perpetrators of violence, comes from the massacre of Tibetans at Guru. In his own words, Younghusband found ‘Tibetans huddled together like a flock of sheep’⁹³ and later put the blame on the ‘crass stupidity and childishness of the Tibetan general... who had ‘completely lost his head’⁹⁴ and on the Lhasa priest: ‘Ignorant and arrogant, this priest herded the superstitious peasantry to destruction.’⁹⁵ The imagery of Tibetans as children or as dumb animals (sheep), allows British to visualise that if it had not been for some ‘selfish’ elite (priests in the case of Tibetans), ordinary people would welcome European dominance.

⁹¹ Peter Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa: The First Full Account of the British Invasion of Tibet in 1904* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p. 221.

⁹² Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹³ Younghusband, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Mehra, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

⁹⁵ Younghusband, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79.

The Orient is not only a place where the mental development of people is arrested at the level of a child; it is also a place of sages, an old place. As Slavoj Žižek writes,

What characterizes the European civilization is...its *ex-centered* character – the notion that the ultimate pillar of Wisdom, the secret *agalma*, the spiritual treasure, the lost object-cause of desire, which we in the West long ago betrayed, could be recuperated out there, in the forbidden exotic place.⁹⁶

Association of the East with wisdom and spirituality, through the technique that may be called *gerontification*, is well exemplified in the case of Tibet. It is often the place, not the people, which is rendered wise on account of its age. Though Madame Blavatsky and Rudyard Kipling (through his lama figure in *Kim*) were instrumental in bringing together the idea of Tibet with the search for wisdom and spirituality, it is in the twentieth century that this association gathered a momentum of its own. After living the life of Tibetan mystic for few years, David-Neel felt that the natural edifices like mountains and valleys in the Himalayan region conveyed a mysterious message to her: ‘What I heard was the thousand-year old echo of thoughts which are re-thought over and over again in the East, and which, nowadays, appear to have fixed their stronghold in the majestic heights of Thibet.’⁹⁷ Describing his escape from the Spanish

⁹⁶ Žižek, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68, emphases in original.

⁹⁷ Alexandra David-Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa* (New Delhi: Time Books International, 1991/1927), p. 24.

prisoner camp to Tibet, Riencourt equated it 'as an escape from the inferno of wars and concentration camps, searching for this forbidden land of mystery, the only place of earth where wisdom and happiness seemed to be a reality.'⁹⁸

Many well-intentioned liberals in the West today are likely to agree with Robert Thurman's extolling of the virtues of Tibet as a uniquely spiritual civilisation:

While Western and Tibetan personalities share the complex of modernity of consciousness, they are diametrically opposed in outlook, one focused on matter and the other on mind ... While the American national purpose is ever greater material productivity, the Tibetan national purpose is ever greater spiritual productivity.⁹⁹

Self-affirmation – self-criticism

The various strategies identified so far have been characterised by a sense of affirmation; affirmation of narcissism in the name of moral superiority. The Orient is seen by the Europeans as 'a pretext for self-dramatisation and differentness', a 'malleable theatrical space in which can be played out the egocentric fantasies' thus affording 'endless material for the imagination, and

⁹⁸ Amaury de Riencourt, *Roof of the World: Tibet, Key to Asia* (New York: Rinehart, 1950), p.4.

⁹⁹ Robert A. F. Thurman (trans.), composed by Padma Sambhava, discovered by Karma Lingpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation Through Understanding in the Between* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), pp. 10-11.

endless potential for the Occidental self.’¹⁰⁰ Authority and control was justified by affirming inherently racist and self-serving ideas like the ‘white man’s burden’ and ‘manifest destiny’ in the colonial period. Representation of the Other as irrational, immoral, inefficient, and duplicitous affirms self-representation as rational, moral, efficient, and honest. The sense of affirmation can be seen not only in overtly aggressive imperialist writings, but also in those with more humanitarian and liberal content. The significance of essentialist and stereotypical representations of the Other lay not in the intentions of the representer but the effects on the represented. In their own different ways, aggressive as well as liberal imperialist impulses established and institutionalised control through mobilisation of similar yet contradictory representations, production of knowledge, bureaucratic modes of governance, and use of coercive force.

Though affirmation of the Western Self was the ultimate force behind most representations, some also used specific representations to question the Self. That is, representations of the non-Western Other has sometimes been deployed in the service of self-criticism. For instance, this can be seen in the case of Western representations of Tibet, especially since after the turn of the twentieth century. ‘I delightedly forgot Western lands, that I belonged to them, and that they would probably take me again in the clutches of their sorrowful civilization’, said Alexandra David-Neel.¹⁰¹ However, the use of the Other to

¹⁰⁰ Kabbani, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ David-Nell, *My Journey to Lhasa*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

offer criticism of the Self is not necessarily emancipatory for the represented Other. The differing, and even noble intentions of some of those who practised positive stereotyping of the Other does not deny the fact that their impact on the exoticised represented was often predictably the same – a prelude to control, dominance and exploitation. They function in a variety of imperial contexts as a mechanism of aesthetic substitution that ‘replaces the impress of power with the blandishments of curiosity.’¹⁰² Thus, Tibet remains a service society for the West, offering resources by which the West can criticise itself, question its values. As Heinrich Harrer reminds, Tibetans have ‘a heritage superior to ours...[they] might bring succour to the pessimism of the West.’¹⁰³ More recently, Hollywood actor Richard Gere, known for his advocacy of the cause of Tibetans, lamented: ‘I would say that the West is very young, it’s very corrupt. We’re not very wise. And I think we’re hopeful that there is a place that is ancient and wise and open and filled with light.’¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

¹⁰² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.159.

¹⁰³ Heinrich Harrer, *Return to Tibet*, E. Osers (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 52.

¹⁰⁴ Frontline, “Interview with Richard Gere,” *Dreams of Tibet: A Troubled Country and its Enduring Fascination*, 1998. Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tibet/interviews/gere.html> (26 November 2005).

Several strategies of representing West's Other during the period of European imperialism remain integral to Western representations of the Other even in this post-colonial world, sometimes in more subtle ways. Blatant racism is couched in more acceptable liberal marketable terms.¹⁰⁵ An approach that sees representation as a process as well as a substantive is better placed to examine the ways in which the Western discovery and consciousness of the east went hand in hand with Western imperial rule over it. Today, the close link between knowledge production and 'national interest', between knowledge and power, remains as close as ever and requires more research and analysis from progressive intellectuals and academics. How the West represents its Other continues to be intertwined with its perceived interests and its sense of identity and has a productive impact on the represented.

In the case of Tibetans, Western representation has been a crucial factor in shaping the identity of Tibet as a geopolitical entity as well as identity of the Tibetans. The framing of the Tibet question in terms of Chinese sovereignty and Tibetan autonomy has been a direct result of the Europeanisation of Sino-Tibetan relations through the agency of British imperialism.¹⁰⁶ Representation

¹⁰⁵ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001); Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (London: Westview Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Dibyesh Anand, "The West and the Tibetan Issue," in B. Sautman and J. T. Dreyer (eds.), *Contemporary Tibet: Politics, Development and Society in a*

of Tibetans as excessively religious has facilitated Western states to call for protection of ‘religious and cultural rights’ of the Tibetans while acknowledging Chinese political rule. In recent years, several authors have highlighted the impact of Western representations on different aspects of Tibetan life inside Tibet and in diaspora.¹⁰⁷ Tibetans, especially in the diaspora,

Disputed Region (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 2005); Alex McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1907-1947* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997); Dawa Norbu, “The Europeanization of Sino-Tibetan relations, 1775-1907: The Genesis of Chinese ‘Suzerainty’ and Tibetan ‘Autonomy,’” *Tibet Journal* XV: 4 (1990).

¹⁰⁷ Various studies of cultural and religious ‘revival’, Lhasa protest movements, and identity articulations by Lhasa-Tibetans have revealed that the political and cultural expressions by Tibetans is a result of negotiations with the dominant vocabulary offered by Western as well as Chinese representations. See, Vincanne Adams, “Karaoke as Modern Lhasa, Tibet: Western Encounters with Cultural Politics,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11: 4 (1996); Vincanne Adams, “Suffering the Winds of Lhasa: Politicized Bodies, Human Rights, Cultural Difference, and Humanism in Tibet,” *Medical Anthropology* 12: 1 (1998); Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds.), *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Delhi: Motilalbanarsidass Publishers, 1996); Melvyn C. Goldstein and Matthew T. Kapstein (eds.), *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Martin A. Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press, 2002); Ronald

have appropriated some of these representations to deploy them as tools for political, cultural and economic survival.¹⁰⁸

While in this paper the focus is on Western colonial discourse operating in a part of the world that did not come under direct Western colonialism, similar representational practices remain central to the production and reproduction of contemporary neocolonial international relations.¹⁰⁹ For instance, one can study

D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising* (Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass Publishers, 1996). Interaction with Western audience is also a very important dynamic shaping Tibetan identity/Tibetanness in the diaspora. This is an area that has received substantial attention from scholars only since the last decade of twentieth century. See, Dibyesh Anand, “A Guide to Little Lhasa in India: The Role of Symbolic Geography of Dharamsala in Constituting Tibetan Diasporic Identity,” in P. C. Klieger (ed.), *Tibet, Self, and the Tibetan Diaspora: Voices of Difference* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002); Dibyesh Anand, “(Re)Imagining Nationalism: Identity and Representation in Tibetan Diaspora in South Asia,” *Contemporary South Asia* 9: 3 (2000). Also see fn. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Bishop, *Dreams of Power: Tibetan Buddhism and the Western Imagination* (London: Athlone, 1993); Peter Bishop, “Caught in the Cross-fire: Tibet, Media and Promotional Culture,” *Media, Culture & Society* 22 (2000); Lopez, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Doty, *Imperial Encounters, op. cit.*; Hunt, *op. cit.*; Albert Paolini, *Navigating Modernity: Postcolonialism, Identity and International Relations*

the American ‘War on Terror’ as a war of representations where the fanatic, barbaric, evil Islamic fundamentalist Other is contrasted with democratic, open, peace loving ‘US’. We can identify essentialist and stereotypical representations that are marshalled say during the recent Anglo-American war against Iraq. Here we come across the legitimisation of violence in the name of liberation – many liberals have been complicit with the state in portraying the occupation of Iraq in dualistic terms – protecting ordinary Iraqis grateful to the Anglo-Americans for liberating them from their despotic leader vis-à-vis crushing and exterminating the fanatical terrorists and Saddam loyalists. An understanding of the way the non-Western people were represented within the colonial discourse can therefore assist in identifying similar processes that continue in the contemporary world. It will highlight the essentially politicised nature of representations of the Other and representational practices within the political. The representations of the non-West within Western discourses – both academic and popular – remain enmeshed in asymmetrical power relations and progressive scholarship needs to challenge this.

(London: Lynne Rienner, 1999); Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).