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Orientalist Representation of Nepali People, Culture and Landscape: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Kincaid's *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya*

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Abstract
Partly drawing on postcolonial rhetorics and partly drawing insights from critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis, this paper basically explores how Antigua-born-American writer Jamaica Kincaid rhetorically constructs Nepal in a disguised form of a travel writer through her travel narrative Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya. Even though Kincaid is best known as an anti-imperialist, the way she longs for the Garden of Eden and represents Nepali landscape, people, and culture posits that her travel to Nepal is threaded with the rhetoric of Othering, metropolitan culture, and imperial politics. In particular, she looks at the travelled places and people with an imperial eye: nomination, surveillance, negation, debasement, and binary rhetoric.

Keywords: *Critical discourse analysis, debasement, naming, Orientalism, the Other, surveillance*

> *"This naming of things is so crucial to possession—a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away—that it is a murder, an erasing, and it is not surprising that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names."*
>
> – Jamaica Kincaid (1999)

Introduction

The Antigua-born-American writer Jamaica Kincaid has been known to the world as a fiction writer, travel writer, gardener, and professor of African and African American Studies in Harvard University, arguably the topmost university of the world. Her literary works are grounded in her close observation and keen understanding of various issues pertaining to colonialism, gender, sexuality, imperialism, gardening, racism, and postcolonialism. In particular, majority of her works and critics represent her as a postcolonial writer who vehemently critiques the absurdity, exploitation, suppression, discrimination, and naming practices of white European middle-class people. For example, in *A Small Place*, Kincaid overtly castigates colonialism and racism and their debilitating effects on the colonized in addition to verbally attacking the corrupt government of Antigua. In their comparison of Kincaid's *A Small Place* with Caryl Phillips's *The European Tribe*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan argue that both travel narratives are "set up in opposition to European norms. Both are extended diatribes against European cultural prejudice and, more particularly, against the destructive value-systems enshrined in hierarchies of race" (48). Explicitly alluding to racism and intended audiences, they further state, "What is most striking about these narratives, though, is not the general quality of their anger but the specific hostilities that they direct against their readers. These readers are identified, in each case, as being white Euro-Americans, of the kind that might read travel writing for the consolations it brings" (49). While Holland and Huggan are critical of Kincaid and Phillips, who "remain complicit with the tourism they denounce" (52), they do consider Kincaid's position to be "vehemently antiwhite" [and] "antitourist" (52).

A similar postcolonial stance is adopted in Kincaid's 1997-published text "In History," an intriguing essay, which invests much of its commentary and description in Christopher Columbus, an explorer and navigator who is famous for discovering America in the European history. Kincaid's particular remark about him expressed at the very outset of her article: "My history began like this: in 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered the New World . . . He, Christopher Columbus, discovers this New World. That it is new only to him, that it had a substantial existence, physical and spiritual, before he became aware of it, does not occur to him" (1) intrigued me because it challenged my belief about the world history. The author further states that giving names to things seems "to have been Christopher Columbus' principle, for he named and he named: he named places, he named people, he named things" (2). What Kincaid is trying to do through this short piece of article is to portray Columbus as an imperialist who, in the name of civilization and 'the white man's burden,' impoverished the indigenous people of America. Her postcolonial perspective from which she probed into the white – European history – Columbus' arrival at the New World was not a discovery for those

indigenous people who had been living here for ages, but a beginning of a new colonization – inspired me to read her travelog *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya*, a book that deals with her journey to eastern part of Nepal. Moreover, as a Nepali scholar interested in postcolonial rhetoric, critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis, I was really curious to go through the travel memoir in order to explore how Nepali social actors are represented in words, phrases, sentences, and discourses of the text.

Notwithstanding her postcolonial standpoint adopted in her earlier works, Kincaid alters her stance on the representation of Nepali landscapes, people, and culture in the present travel narrative, *Among Flowers*. A close examination of the travelog triggers several questions in one's mind: Is travel writing neutral or does it pretend to be neutral? Is travel writing still a camouflaged form of imperialist ideology in the twenty-first century? Can whiteness be perpetuated through black writers like Jamaica Kincaid? What does Nepal look like from the "metropolitan location" (Harvard), especially from the African American eyes? As opposed to Kincaid's claim that her journey to Nepal is oriented towards going hunting for seeds (although seed hunting itself is a part of colonialism), I argue that her pose under the veneer of a travel writer projects European white imperialist desire on Nepali people, culture, and landscape notwithstanding a native of the island of Antigua. This reversal of her position has its roots in her education, scholarship, and her privileged position and profession in the "metropolitan location," to use Aijaz Ahmad's terminology of the US that consciously or subconsciously spurr her to ventriloquize and perpetuate imperial rhetorics. In his postmortem of *Orientalism* by Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad critiques the "turn from a wholesale denunciation of the West, so uncompromising in *Orientalism*, to an equally sweeping desire for a location in the West" (211). Building on Ahmad's concept, I contend that Kincaid has found her niche in Harvard that enables her to forget her beleaguered past on the one hand and to look at Nepal with an imperial eye on the other hand. While Kincaid's imperial desire does not denotatively refer to the basic meaning of imperialism such as the policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization and use of military force, it does refer to the metaphorical meanings associated with negative rhetoric such as orientalism, domination, discrimination, Othering, debasement, surveillance, and panopticism. Scholars argue that imperialism still continues to exist both in the former colonial spaces and never-colonized spaces even in the twenty-first century. According to Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, "People are still influenced by Empire to travel, people still migrate because of Empire and people are still hampered in their travels by Empire. This power, this pull, continues to shape the territories travelled as well as the people travelling in them. Empire is, in other words, still in place, literally as well as figuratively" (9). Partly drawing on postcolonial scholars and rhetoricians such as David Spurr, Edward Said, Mary Louise

Pratt and Aijaz Ahmad and partly taking divergent lines suggested by critical discourse analysts, critical stylistician, new historian and social semiotician such as Lesley Jeffries, Theo van Leeuwen, David Machin, Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl, Michel Foucault and Gunther Kress, I contend that Kincaid's trek to Nepal as represented in *Among Flowers*, like Christopher Columbus' travel to America, is threaded with the rhetoric of nomination, metropolitan culture, Orientalist discourse, surveillance, and imperial politics.

Critics on *Among Flowers*

Published in 2005, *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya* deals with Kincaid's journey to eastern parts of Nepali Himalayas in the company of her friends from her country and Nepali Sherpas who made her journey a success although seed hunting mission was frustrating. The book has drawn a few interpretations and reviews even though it was published fourteen years ago. One of the scholars who probes into the text from the postcolonial perspective is Pallavi Rastogi who in her article "'The Leeches Are the Least of the Worries': Blankscapes and Another Other in Jamaica Kincaid's *Among Flowers* and Biyi Bandele's *The King's Rifle*" argues that "Kincaid's attitude toward Nepalese people is steeped in a distancing, hierarchical, semi-colonial rhetoric even as she seeks connections across cultural and economic barriers" (23). In particular, as suggested in the title of the article, the author contends that Kincaid constructs an image of "blankscapes" and Others Nepal. Whereas Rastogi's research is a powerful critique of Kincaid and Bandele's colonial attitudes projected toward Nepali and Burmese landscapes respectively, her research suffers from "epistemic violence," to use Spivak's terminology, against which she seems to advocate throughout the article. Her article stems from the premise that Nepal, like India and Burma, was a former British colony. At the very outset of the text, Rastogi states, "This essay examines how an Afro-Caribbean and an African writer from two former British coloniesdepict *other non-white British colonies* [my emphasis] and, therefore, diverges from the numerous studies done on white Europeans traveling in the non-European world or of the colonized encountering other colonized people in diasporic spaces" (19-20). She further writes, "Geography is also important here. *Both Nepal and Burma fall under the umbrella of British colonialism*" [my emphasis] (20). Rastogi's assertion about Nepal as a British colony as though it were a fact is not only surprising but also problematic and erroneous. It is a common knowledge that the British never physically colonized Nepal as they did to other Asian countries such as India and Burma. As a matter of fact, every Nepali prides on not being colonized by any foreign power. Rastogi's construction of discourse about Nepal – Nepal as a former British colony – reminds one of Spivak's terminology, "epistemic violence," in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" While Spivak deploys the term to

refer to "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other," I find it still useful and relevant to discuss in the context of Nepal as I feel that Nepali, like the colonial subjects, are subjected to epistemic violence: fact about Nepal as an independent country throughout history has been eliminated (76).

Another research on *Among Flowers* is Zoran Pec´ic´s "Floral Diaspora in Jamaica Kincaid's Travel Writing" in which the author asserts that with the publication of *Among Flowers* and *My Garden (Book)*, "Kincaid's writing takes a horticultural turn" (138). His contention is that *Among Flowers* as a travelog "interrogates the desire to see and to understand the garden as a site of pleasure, but her text also expresses her sense of frustration and displacement as she reflects on her own position as a travelling subject" (138-39). In his discussion of *Among Flowers*, the author draws on Edward Soja's conceptualization of 'trialectics of spatiality' in order to explore various semantic connotations associated with garden and gardening: hybridity, hybridization of cultures, failure of colonial imagination to create pleasure, resistance, self-reflection, ambiguity, imperialism, liminality, mourning, privilege, luxury and memory (139). Even though Pec´ic´s "Floral Diaspora in Jamaica Kincaid's Travel Writing" is a brilliant analysis of "Kincaid's journey through the Himalayas as an ambivalent narrative: the desire to see and experience the visual pleasure of travel is combined with uncomfortable feelings of frustration, alienation and displacement" (Edwards and Graulund 13-14), Pec´ic´ at times completely negates and obliterates Nepali characters from the text. For example, in one of the sections, he vehemently states, "Unlike Kincaid's novels, *Among Flowers* depicts *only* [my emphasis] four people [American: Kincaid and Dan, and British: Bleddyn and Sue], three of whom receive just a few lines of description" (143) with no heed to Nepali characters without whom Kincaid could never have been able to go on her seed hunting mission. In this context, it is relevant to quote David Machin, who, drawing on the concept of recontextualization, contends that representation of social actors or participants, social action, values, goals, and behaviors takes place "through the process of abstraction, addition, substitution, and deletion" (352). The researcher's obliteration of Nepali travelling companions, particularly the Sherpas, who "would make my journey through the Himalaya a pleasure" and "were so important to my safety and general well-being" (*Among Flowers* 26-27) from the scene suggests his discriminatory attitude toward Nepali characters. While some might argue that the researcher's expression "only four people" (143) is basically used to foreground relatively fewer number of characters deployed in the present travelog, his choice of words used to conceal social actors shows his intentions and motivations. Lesley Jeffries states that stylistic choice "whether made consciously or unconsciously and at the whim of dominant pressures, is always ideologically loaded and may also be ideologically manipulative" (3). Likewise, David Spurr considers the rhetoric of negation to be an imperialist's trope that "conceives of the

Other as absence, emptiness, nothingness, or death" (92). Spurr further writes, "The writer is the original and ultimate colonizer, conquering the space of consciousness with the exclusionary and divisive structures ofrepresentation" (93). Seen from the Spurrian perspective, it is evident that the researcher's objective stance is obscured by his dismissive attitude toward marginal characters from Nepal.

Kincaid's ambivalent stance is further explored by Jill Didur in "'Gardenworthy': Rerouting colonial botany in Jamaica Kincaid's *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya."* In this essay, Didur highlights the word "Gardenworthy" and draws readers' attention to its construction as a single word, a hyphenated word and a two-word lexical item – gardenworthy, garden-worthy, garden worthy – and its fluid and slippery semantics in addition to analyzing Kincaid's ambivalent positionalities in the text. Didur observes that *Among Flowers* "attempts to account for the tension between conceptions of the foreign and the domestic that inform the desirability of collecting so-called exotic plants, and to consider what metaphorical implications this tension might have for reading Kincaid's own diasporic subject position in her travel narrative about plant-hunting in Nepal" (173). The author projects Kincaid's ambivalent position – "critique of and complicity with colonial attitudes toward botanical history" (176) through references to her body, previous works, publisher, the National Geographic Society, Antigua, anxiety and pleasure she experiences.

As the literature review demonstrates, unlike Kincaid's other works, very few scholars have written on *Among Flowers*. While the extant secondary researches show interesting findings, they basically foreground Kincaid at the center of the research. In other words, their researches reveal findings from the perspective of Kincaid herself, not from the perspective of the margin or marginal characters. Even if few scholars deal with issues pertaining to Nepal, Nepali and Nepali landscapes, they, like the travel writer herself, misrepresent them either by presenting Nepal as a British colony or by negating Nepali characters from the text. In other words, these researches follow an etic approach: outsiders (Non-Nepalese) look at Nepalese people, places and culture and give areductive representation of them. A few researchers remain detached and distant from the subjects being studied and produce "their" results rather than the results based on facts and data. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the text from an emic perspective: How do the Nepalis feel about and respond to the way they are represented in the travelog? How does the travelog read from the perspectives of critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis? Studies carried out from the outsider's perspectives do not give a full view of the work. Thus, the travel narrative deserves an insider's perspective, a critical perspective that examines the text from the points of views of critical stylistics and critical discourse analysis.

Naming/Nomination

Traditionally speaking, language is considered to be a neutral vehicle of communication. However, when seen from the perspective of critical stylistics, it is never a pure or neutral means of communication. Any speaker or writer of a language chooses certain expressions over others from the vast repertoire of resources available in that language in order to convey an intended message. The choice of particular linguistic terms such as naming used to represent a view of the world is always determined by one's ideologies, beliefs and values. According to Lesley Jeffries, ". . . choice in naming has more obvious ideological potential. That is the choice of a word with pejorative or ameliorative connotations. In other words, where a choice of word not only makes reference to something, but also shows the speaker's opinion of thatreferent" (*Critical Stylistics* 20). For instance, Kincaid in her travelog *Among Flowers* gives different names to the Sherpas, an ethnic group from the most mountainous region of Nepal even though they have already had their names. She writes:

> I then met my other traveling companions . . . there was Cook: his real name was so difficult to pronounce, I could not do it then and I cannot do it now. There was his assistant, but we called him "Table," and I remember him now as "Table" because he carried the table and the four chairs on which we sat for breakfast and dinner . . . there was another man who assisted in the kitchen department and I could not remember his name either, but we all came to call him "I Love You." (26)

What is intriguing in this representation is the selection of nouns to refer to Nepali Sherpas who made Kincaid's journey to the eastern Himalayas of Nepal a great success. While readers understand Kincaid's difficulty involved in pronouncing Nepali names, they also understand the politics of nomination or Kincaid's attitude toward these people. These names "Cook," "Table" and "I Love You" actually reduce the Nepali individuals to objects. Viewed from critical discourse analysis, particularly from the perspective of Theo van Leeuwen, Kincaid here instrumentalizes human beings. According to van Leeuwen, "Instrumentalization is a form of objectivation in which social actors are represented by means of reference to the instrument with which they carry out the action in which they are represented as being engaged" (46). In so doing, Kincaid denies their humanity. In this context, I find David Spurr's statement worth citing. Building on the Barthes' idea of nomination, Spurr forms an argument: "Nomination and substantivisation may also be seen as grammatical forms of appropriation: by naming things, we take possession of them" (32). Spurr's definition of naming as taking possession clearly posits Kincaid's imperialist gesture despite her refusal to do so, "my love of things that are far away, but things I have no desire to possess" (24). Kincaid's linguistic names suggest a rhetorical means by which persons are discriminated against

in a racist manner. Derogative names and denial of human names are the referential strategies by means of which writers like Kincaid exhibit their racist attitude toward the indigenous people of Nepal. Critical discourse analysts Reisigl and Wodak argue that "the simplest and most elementary form of linguistic and rhetorical discrimination is that of identifying persons or groups of persons linguistically by naming them derogatorily, debasingly or vituperatively" (45). Terminologies such as "Table," "Cook" and "I Love You" are more than sufficient to perform racist idea as they connotatively convey insulting meanings. "The racial insult," argues Delgado, "remains one of the most pervasive channels through which discriminatory attitudes are imparted. Such language injures the dignity and self-regard of the person to whom it is addressed, communicating the message that distinctions of race are distinctions of merit, dignity, status, and personhood" ("Words That Wound" *Critical Race Theory*179). Delgado further states, "Not only does the listener learn and internalize the messages contained in racial insults; these messages color our society's institutions and are transmitted to succeeding generations" ("Words That Wound" *Critical Race Theory* 179). Scholars such as these inspire me to assert that Kincaid is no different from Columbus for whom giving names to things seems "to have been [his] principle, for he named and he named: he named places, he named people, he named things" (2).

Some critics might counter-argue that Kincaid's further narrative voice: "This is not at all a reflection of the relationship between power and powerless . . . This was only a reflection of my own anxiety, my own unease, my own sense of ennui, my own personal fragility. I have never been so uncomfortable, so out of my own skin in my entire life, and yet not once did I wish to leave, not once did I regret being there" (27) complicates the issue because it shows her defending herself against it. Her defense reminds me of her 1999-published essay in *My Garden (Book),* "To Name Is to Possess." Referring to the rhetoric of nomination, Kincaid emphatically asserts, "This naming of things is so crucial to possession – a spiritual padlock with the key thrown irretrievably away – that it is a murder, an erasing, and it is not surprising that when people have felt themselves prey to it (conquest), among their first acts of liberation is to change their names" (122). Here Kincaid clearly equates nomination with a "murder" or "an erasing." If naming is equivalent to murdering, she presents herself not as a travel writer but as a murderer in *Among Flowers*. Now the grave question that arises is: can Kincaid be pardoned for the "murder" she has committed in the travelog? Is her justification – "a reflection of my own anxiety, my own unease, my own sense of ennui, my own personal fragility" – valid, sound and logical? Doesn't the last part of the quote, "yet not once did I wish to leave, not once did I regret being there" undermine Kincaid's earlier apologetic tone? In this context I find it pertinent to cite Rastogi's series of interrogations:

> But is "mere" reference of one's own anxiety enough? Can a well-off black woman, based in North America, claim that her relationship with the poorest of the poor in Nepal is NOT about power? Can such hierarchical Othering become solely, or even mostly, about oneself and one's own anxieties? Is existential neurosis a justification for reductive Othering? Indeed, the self-reflexive author may have a greater responsibility to change her representational strategies. Every text has an action, a consequence. Kincaid is well aware of the effects of her writing, which redistributes colonial stereotypes to her global audience. Kincaid – who lives in Vermont, teaches at Harvard, and holds American citizenship – often views Another Other through the lens of first-world, Western rhetoric. Class, geographical location, and nationality fracture the fragile similarity of the colonial experience in the postcolonial world. (27)

Orient's Peculiarity

In addition to looking at Nepal with imperialist eyes, Kincaid gazes at Nepal with Orientalist's eyes. One of the principal tenets of Orientalism is that it constructs binary divisions. In his analysis of how the Orient is represented in the Western scholarship and literature, Edward Said argues that the East is always portrayed as opposed to the West. One of the binary divisions constructed between the West and the Orient pertains to the notion of time. Said contends that the Orient is considered to be timeless as opposed to the West, a place where scientific development and progress take place. Said's emphatic use of the copula "*is*" (*Orientalism* 72) in the italicized form posits that the Orient, since the earliest time, has remained the same: strange, degenerate, feminine, timeless, barbaric, and emotional as opposed to the West that is familiar, civilized, masculine, dynamic, rational, and sensible. Orientalism, in fact, assumes that the Orient is unchanging and has been trapped in timelessness since time immemorial. On the contrary, the West has brought about tremendous change and progress. The following paragraph shows Kincaid's Orientalist attitude toward Nepal and Nepali people:

> I did truly feel as if I was in the unreal, the magical, extraordinary. People seemed as if they had no purpose to being themselves, as if the only reason to be there was just to be there . . . the real was always poor and deprived and self-contained. Just outside the window of my hotel was an area enclosed by concrete, of perhaps forty feet by forty feet. It had pipes, with water constantly pouring out of them – it was a communal place for doing things that required water. (18)

In the aforementioned extract, Kincaid highlights one of the stereotypes of Orientalism: the Orient's peculiarity. In the Orientalist discourse, the Orient is not simply different from the Occident, but oddly different. The expressions such as "the unreal, the magical, [and] extraordinary" show the Orient's bizarre nature. Contrary to the West that is rational, rich, adventurous and ambitious, the Nepalese in the extract are represented in binary terms such as purposeless, poor, deprived and self-contained. This very radical strangeness is what makes the Orient inferior to the West. The qualities of the Nepali people – accepting, spontaneous, leisure and superstition – are just the opposite of the western values of reason, organization, work and science. Their natural qualities signify innocence, past-holding and backwardness. Kincaid's inflated superiority is reflected in the following expressions: "Until then, I would never have dreamt of calling myself anything other than American" (73). Even when she makes reference to her blood, she clearly constructs a division between America and Nepal: "when we realized our shoes were crawling with leeches that were eagerly burrowing into our thick hiking socks, trying to get some of our very expensive first-world blood" (73). Her construction of people is interesting: Americans are put on a pedestal; Nepalis are relegated to the lowest stratum and Europeans are between Americans and Nepalis. According to her, Thamel, one of the tourist attractions in Kathmandu, "is filled with shops and restaurants and native European people, who look poor, and bedraggled. But this is a look of luxury really, for these people are travelers, at any minute they can get up and go home" (73). Her construction of Europeans as "poor and bedraggled" on the one hand and having a "look of luxury" on the other hand is interesting because it suggests their inferiority to the Americans and superiority to Nepali simultaneously.

Positive Construction of the Self and Negative Construction of the Other

Critical discourse analysts probe into the ways sexism, racism, classism, and discrimination are perpetuated in the society. In particular, they draw readers' attention to the ways self and the Other are constructed through discourses, linguistic, and semiotic resources. One of the ways discourse operates is through a positive construction of the self and a negative construction of the Other. Contrary to the negative portrayal of Nepal as mentioned in the previous section, Kincaid constructs her hometown Vermont with positive modifiers and adjectives:

> I could still remember the feeling of living in a village in the mountains of Vermont. I could remember that when I spoke, everybody I knew, everybody I was talking to, understood me quite well. I could remember the school building in my village, a nice, very big red brick building that was properly ventilated and properly heated and had all sorts of necessities and comforts, and yet I had found much fault with it and had

> refused to send my children to school there. I could remember the firehouse just down the hill from where I live and the kind people who volunteer their life to taking care of it and rescuing me if I should need rescuing. I could remember my house with its convenient and fantastic plumbing and water to be had any time I needed it, just by opening the tap in my fantastically equipped kitchen. (24)

As the above quotes show, Vermont is defined by the rhetoric of sufficiency, familiarity, comfort, luxury, and affluence as opposed to the Orient that is often defined by lack, strangeness, discomfort, and poverty. When it comes to the description of shops in Nepal, she depicts them as "filled with exactly the same amount of dirt and disorder or dirt and order" (172). Her encounter with men "in the same little hats" is described as the source of suspicion, discomfort and uneasiness: "some of them seemed pleased to see us (and that made us suspicious), some of them seemed angry at us (and that made us uneasy), some of them seemed indifferent to us (and that made us suspicious), in other words, we were not feeling comfortable being there" (172).

Juxtaposition of these people with those from Vermont reveals an interesting contrast: suspicious, furious, indifferent, unfamiliar people from east and familiar, trustworthy and caring people from west. Her construction of nature, particularly the bank of the river as defiled by humans and animals is rather interesting. She describes:

> We walked down a bank littered with feces, human and animal, to the river and washed ourselves, knowing full well that it brought with it whatever the people above us had deposited it. But we were desperate to renew ourselves and water always offers the illusion of that renewal. And so we walked through the stench and tried to clean ourselves. We were not clean and we felt it. (172)

The aforementioned quote reminds one of David Spurr who argues that in colonial discourse, "social problems in health and sanitation, unemployment, or population growth come to be associated with individual filth, indolence, and sexual promiscuity" (76). One interesting thing about the portrayal of the river is that the author clearly mentions the river has been defiled but she does not specify who has littered it. While she mentions that humans in addition to animals are responsible for the defilement of the river, she does not say whether the international tourists are involved in the defilement. The references to urination "I left my fellow travelers and went off to find a place to pee," "I proceeded to pee" and "while squatting and peeing" (*Among Flowers* 175) evidently posits that travel writers and tourists themselves are responsible for littering the traveled places like Nepal.

As to the motive behind debasing the non-west, Hayden White relates it to "the need for positive self-definition in times of sociocultural stress. When notions such as

"civilization" and "reason" are in danger of being called into question, their definition, as well as their identification with a particular people, is established by pointing to their supposed opposites, to what can be designated as "savagery" or "madness"' (qtd. in Spurr 76). Likewise, Gunther Kress, a renowned semiotician, argues that writing is a projection of one's interests, intentions and motivations. Signs, contends Kress, are "motivated conjunctions of meaning and form, that is, the form of the sign is the best available indicator of the meaning which the children wanted to represent" (144). Similarly, the shape of the sign that sign makers use suggests a "strong indication of the interest of the maker of the sign, at the moment of the making of the sign" (144). Kincaid might have seen positive traits of Nepali people, culture and places during a three-week long journey in Nepal. Why did she choose negative qualities of Nepal over neutral and positive ones? Her discriminatory construction of Nepal compels me to cite Reisigl and Wodak, who discuss discourse historic approach in terms of five types of strategies – nominational, predicational, argumentation, intensifying and mitigating, – all of which are related to the positive construction of self and the negative presentation of Other (*Discourse and Discrimination* 44).

Some critics might ask whether the whole travelog is about the positive construction of the West and negative construction of the East i.e. Nepal. Specifically speaking, isn't there a paragraph in the whole book that highlights the positive aspects of Nepal? Doesn't the travel writer also talk about the negative sides of the West? As to the first question, the answer is certainly in the affirmative but as to the second one, we could hardly find one. The following paragraph certainly aestheticizes the Nepali landscape:

> That afternoon also we saw some white-haired monkeys' way above us in trees, and they made the most wonderful sounds to each other. I was so happy to see them; and this suspicious thought crossed my mind, that I was happy to see them because to see them is to claim them. Claiming, after all, was the overriding aim of my journey. (71)

As the aforementioned quote illustrates, the landscape is invested with high voltage aesthetic power. The construction of the white-haired monkeys in the jungle, particularly the sound they made to each other, is certainly positive. This is perhaps one of the rarest sights that made her happy in Nepal. But a closer look at the later part of the extract, "Claiming, after all, was the overriding aim of my journey" clearly justifies her imperial desire on the Nepali landscape. Moreover, if we investigate the aforementioned text along the lines devised in *Imperial Eyes* by Mary Louise Pratt, particularly the trope of aestheticization, Kincaid certainly presents herself as an imperialist. According to Pratt, aestheticization, one of the constituents of the imperial trope, "monarch-of-all-I-survey" refers to the pleasure travel writers or imperialists receive from the vision of the

discovery. Pratt notes, "within the text's own terms the esthetic *pleasure* of the sight singlehandedly constitutes the value and significance of the journey" (200).

Debasement

In the Orientalist discourse, the Orient is portrayed as degenerate or debased. Some of the stereotypes that define the degenerate Orient are laxity, cowardice, violence, lust, and laziness. According to Spurr, the rhetoric of debasement concentrates on "the active production of images inspired by the fear and loathing that lie at the heart of classificatory systems presented as the products of rational thoughts" (77). Colonial discourse requires the constant reproduction of the images such as disease, famine, superstition, physical suffering, misery, and poverty. The rhetoric of debasement is concerned with possible dangers, crimes, annoyances that might occur to tourists. Since it aims to illustrate the lowest qualities of the colonized, this rhetorical strategy justifies the western intervention or domination of other countries. Kincaid creates a horrifying picture of Nepal, a country where accident and aeroplane crash are commonplace. The following question addressed to the readers at the beginning of the text, "Have you heard of the plane crashing and the bus going off the road in the floods, all in Nepal?" (13) arouses in the readers feelings of fear and danger on the one hand and feelings of humiliation and debasement in the Nepali people on the other hand. Likewise, the writer constructs Nepal as a war-prone country where conflict may escalate any time between the government and the Maoists. This expression "We passed by an army outpost, and that was frightening, for everything associated with the government was a potential target of the Maoists" (179) poses threat and danger to the travelers, discouraging them from visiting Nepal. Kincaid's comparison of the Maoists with the leeches is another interesting way by which Nepal is debased. The dehumanizing of the Maoists as blood sucking leeches as expressed in the sentence, "At some point I stopped making distinction between the Maoists and the leeches, at some point they became indistinguishable to me, but this was only to me" (90) further degrades the image of Nepal in the international arena.

Surveillance of Body

Surveillance or Panopticon is the next rhetorical strategy through which Kincaid observes Nepali landscape and bodies. The word surveillance indicates looking, which, according to Spurr, is "never innocent or pure, never free of mediation by motives which may be judged noble or otherwise" (27). Spurr further contends that the "writer's eye is always in some sense colonizing the landscape, mastering and portioning, fixing zones and poles, arranging and deepening the scene as the object of desire" (27). Bearing a strong connection to Foucault's panopticon, a metaphor of the encompassing eye of

power, surveillance of landscape paintings, architecture, sites of tourism, scientific research and hypnotizing places offers the onlooker aesthetic pleasure on the one hand, knowledge and authority on the other (15). "For the observer," according to Spurr, "the sight confers power; for the observed, visibility is a trap" (16). The examination of the sweeping Oriental landscape and the "staring-down" of Oriental peoples by Western travelers reveal the colonial desire to establish knowledge of and authority over the cultural Other.

Because surveillance enables visual possession of body, the traveler, like the journalist, visually penetrates into the human body. In other words, the traveler "so faithfully relies" on visual observation and gaze "for knowledge" (Spurr 13). Spurr writes:

> Under Western eyes, the body is that which is most proper to the primitive, the sign by which the primitive is represented. Thebody, rather than speech, law, or history, is the essential defining characteristicof primitive peoples. They live, according to this view, in their bodiesand in natural space, but not in a body politic worthy of the name norin meaningful historical time. The bodies, not only of so called primitive peoples but of all the colonized peoples have been a focal point of colonialist interest which, as in the case of landscape description, proceeds from the visual to various kinds of valorization: the material value of the body as labor supply, its aesthetic value as object of artistic representation, its ethical value as mark of innocence or degradation, its scientific value as evidence of racial difference or inferiority, its humanitarian value as the sign of suffering, its erotic value as the object of desire. (22)

The following paragraph shows the writer surveilling two Nepali women:

> It was then that I began to notice this phenomenon. I saw a girl, about the same age my daughter was then, seventeen, combing the hair of someone else with much carefulness; she was combing through her familiar's thick head of straight hair because it was riddled with lice. This was done with a loving fierceness, as if something important depended on it. The person combing the hair used a comb that was fine-toothed and carefully went through the hair again and again, making sections and then dividing again the sections into little sections. This engagement between the delouser and head of hair made me think of love and intimacy, for it seemed to me that the way the person removed the lice from the head of hair was an act of love in all its forms. I saw this scene over and over. (42-3)

As the extract demonstrates, the travel writer visually penetrates into two human bodies. Their body parts become the object of examination and commentary. At a first glance, the passage may appear to show an intimate bond between mother and daughter as suggested by the writer herself in the words "combing the hair of someone with much carefulness," "love and intimacy" and "act of love in all its forms." However, the "familiar's thick head" "riddled with lice" posits dirt or filth often associated with the third world. Moreover, nomination strategy is interesting here. Unlike the dehumanizing names that she gave to the Sherpas in the beginning of the text, she denies a name to the mother whose head "riddled with lice" is foregrounded. Even the daughter who is known to the readers as a girl in the opening sentences becomes a "delouser," a person who rids lice. This certainly reflects the writer's racist attitude toward Nepalese women. This particularly reminds me of Mary Louise Pratt's imperial trope: anti-conquest pose of the traveler. The expression "anti" in the word "anti-conquest" appears to convey the message that travel writers' trip to nonwestern world is not driven by the imperialist desire to conquer the world. Nonetheless, according to Pratt, this anti-conquest stance is in fact a European tactic of claiming innocence while consolidating hegemonic control. The way the writer seems to glorify the Other (in this case the glorification of love between mother and daughter as reflected in the combing of hair) might posit neutrality and purity. The author's own words, particularly "seemed" in the following sentence "it seemed to me that the way the person removed the lice from the head of hair was an act of love in all its forms" clearly suggests her false naivety. Thus, anti-conquest pose is in fact a strategic move of travel writers to conquer the world.

Contrary to the aforementioned situation in which surveillance offers the travel writer from USA a subjective position and power from which to observe the Nepali women, the following passage presents a reverse surveillance in which the locals react to Kincaid, an African America:

> They came to see us, boys and girls in equal number, so it seemed to me; a man carrying a baby, but he could not have been its father, he seemed so young. An old woman came over to me and literally examined me. She picked up my arm and peered into my eyes and touched and poked my skin; then felt my braids and loudly counted them out in her language, a language which Sunam, I am grateful to say now, told me he did not understand. (67)

Here, Kincaid is clearly entrapped by the surveillance and gaze of the old woman from Nepal. Her position is just the reverse: she is in the object position, being scrutinized and affected by the woman's close examination of various parts of the body: skin, eyes, arms and hair. Even more interesting thing is that Kincaid cannot react to the way she is "literally examined." Kincaid passively and helplessly receives everything done to her.

Visibility means a trap to Kincaid whereas it is power to Nepali old woman even though her "staring-down" of Kincaid is not necessarily motivated by the colonial desire to set up authority over foreigners. What stimulated the old woman to closely observe the author was arguably her sheer surprise and curiosity as many Nepali women in villages rarely have access to a world, where they can view people from diverse races, ethnicities and geographies.

Conclusion

As the analysis shows, Kincaid's travel to Nepal is clearly threaded with the rhetoric of metropolitan culture and imperial politics that provide the Orientalist lens through which the representation of the travelled places and people of Nepal is made. Unlike her earlier works such as *A Small Place*, "a postcolonial narrative that harshly criticizes the ongoing colonization of the Caribbean through the tourist trade" (Chansky 135), the present work *Among Flowers* demonstrates the reversal of her earlier position. The fact that her expedition to eastern part of Nepal was "funded by the National Geographic Society, an organization fraught with the complexities of its own imperial associations" (Chansky 135) speaks to imperial gesture reflected in the reductive representation of Nepal. Nepal is defined and described through the rhetoric of nomination, debasement, and surveillance or panopticon. These rhetorical modes manifest Kincaid's Orientalist and racist attitude toward Nepali landscapes, people and culture. This shift from postcolonial stance to imperial one is mainly impelled by her locational change from her native land Antigua to metropolitan location i.e. Harvard.

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