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Representation of Central Asia and Traveling Self in Vambéry's *Travels in Central Asia*

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ABSTRACT

In the course of the nineteenth century Arminius Vambéry, an anglophile travel writer, in the guise of a mendicant dervish with a group of Tartar pilgrims departs to secluded and sealed Central Asia. After six months travel in the Khanates of Central Asia, he undertakes a journey to England where he offers his observations to the Royal Geographical Society and publishes his travelogue, *Travel in Central Asia*. Despite its literary merits and connection with British imperialism, the travelogue has not been scrutinized separately by the scholars of travel writing. To fill the gap, this article by drawing on the theories of post-structuralism: Orientalism and Postcolonialism, endeavors to unveil the political agenda behind the travel writer's representation of his travelees, destination, and his own traveling self. Additionally, it argues that the travel writer in dialogue with other Western travel writers to deterritorialize his traversed region or justify the prospective presence of Britain in Central Asia, represents his journey destination as the locus of barbarity, a region under the grip of despotic rulers, as well as an area with frozen time, while to exhibit his Eurocentrism, he portrays his traveling subject as the a suffering hero and a benign traveler.

Keywords: Travel Writing, Barbarity, despotism, Frozen Time, Suffering Hero, Benign Traveler

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1. Introduction

1.1 History of travel and travel Writing

As a movement in time and space, travel is both praised and condemned by the men of letters. Thomas Nugent lauds it for its power "to enrich the mind with knowledge, to rectify the judgment, to remove the prejudices of education, [and] to compose the outward manners" (as cited in

Goring, 2008, p.48). Conversely in stark contrast, Pascal views it as the main cause of "all mankind's misfortune" (Whitfield, 2011, p. VII). Travel is a multifaceted practice which has been interpreted from different angles. Politically, travel, according to Ian Littlewood, has a tendency to weaken moral absolutes. Thus, tyrants do not like their subjects to travel to another



country with a different political system because a different way of life presents a possible threat to their dictatorship (Youngs, 2013). From the perspective of early Church Fathers, humans' yearning for travel is divine punishment for his perpetration of the original sin, that is to say, "[his] unholy urge to use [his] eye[s]" (Adams, 1983, p.70). Refuting its religious reading, humanists argue that the prime motive for the humans to travel stems from his "curiosity, a healthy desire to seek, to find' to enter ... that untraveled world" (ibid.). Freud looks at travel from a psychological prism and adds that the chief reason for the humans' journeys is the fulfillment of the early desires to flee from the family and in particular the father (Fussell, 1980).

In every period, there has been one dominant form of travel. During the Middle Ages, pilgrimage was the most important and popular (Korte, 2000) since it was "linked to the deepest and most stable patterns of the medieval mentality" (Zumthor & Peebles, 1994, p. 811). In their holy destinations, pilgrims cherished the hope of miraculous cures, the remission of their sins, and the satisfaction of their wanderlust (Safier, 1996 a). In Renaissance when exploring the New World took on an importance (Abrams, 2009), European explorers were hopeful to find there "the fabled Earthly paradise containing a cure for all diseases [and] rivers filled with gold and the Fountain of Youth" (Safier, 1983 b, p.3). Moreover, they viewed this world as a spiritual opportunity to convert its native pagans into Christianity. Nevertheless, traveling to this newly discovered world was interpreted as a spiritual threat too because of the absence of any reference to it in the Bible (Hopkins & Steggle, 2006). In the eighteenth century Grand Tour, a cultural pilgrimage, in the words of

Whitfield, gained currency among "young travelers from affluent classes" (Goring, 2008, p.48), and its goal was "to walk upon classical ground, to visit the shrine of Europe's classical past in Italy... [and to] take inspiration from the soil on which Roman civilization flourished" (Whitfield, 2011, p.154) while in the Romantic period scenic tourism became trendy and its chief object was "the aesthetic perception of landscape" (Korte, 2000, p.77). In radical change in the Victorian era, with technological advances in transportation in particular railways, package tour came to the fore (Youngs, 2013) whereas in the twentieth century, thanks to motorcar and airplane technologies, the democratized and globalized form of travel was paramount (Thompson, 2011).

In each period, only some travelers translate their experiences on their journeys into a travel book or travelogue which by definition refers to,

Any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes have taken place in reality, while assuming or presupposing that the author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical (Borm, 2004, p.17).

This literary genre was effective in the emergence of novel (Adams, 1983) and to some extent in social sciences like Geography, Anthropology, and Sociology due to their "engaging in enquiries that once were principally associated with and articulated in the genre known in English as voyage and travel" (Thompson, 2011, p.4). According to Youngs (2013) Harkuf, Pharaohs' emissary was the first person who left the written narrative of his four journeys. In addition, he believes that the root of modern travel literature lie in "the factual record, as well as the mythical, the legendary, and the ancient epics...including

Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia” (p.19). Travel narratives as literary genre were established as early as the tenth century in the Arab world, Abu Said Siraf was its oldest example and Ibn Battatua’ travelogue which recorded his travels throughout Asia and Africa was its best example (Zumthor & Peebles, 1994) whereas in the West travel writing like other literary genres evolved throughout centuries. In the medieval times, travel narratives were either about pilgrimages to sacred places like the Holy Land or journeys to the Far East. In the former, a travel writer had to curb his/her curiosity about the “topography, flora, fauna and inhabitants” of the Holy Land (Korte, 2000, p.26) because “an enthusiasm for this world rather than the one hereafter-was held by Christian doctrine to be a suspect motive for travelling, particularly unfitting to pilgrimage” (ibid.); instead the travel writer was encouraged to describe biblical sites, their spiritual importance, and his devotional practices. *Pilgrimage of Egeria* is a good example of this mentality (Thompson, 2011). In the latter, the travel writer was permitted to give full rein to his curiosity (Korte, 2000). As a result, he avidly described their travelers’ customs, culture, religion, and their regions. For instance, Marco Polo’s travelogue represents this indulgence of curiosity. In addition, since in this era the “testimony of the ear was preferable on that of eye” (Zumthor & Peebles, 1994, p.817) and “the great emphasis [was] attached to textual authority [of previous works] - as opposed to autobiographical experience” (Korte, 2000, p.22). Therefore, the border between fiction and truth was blurred. Mandeville’s popular travelogue, for instance, exemplifies this trend when he pens about humans with distorted bodies and monstrous qualities. In contrast to the Middle Ages, travel writing in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries was under the influence of not only Christopher Columbus’ discovery of America which emphasized credible eye-witnessing report, but also Francis Bacon’s philosophy which insisted on an empirical cum inductive method (Thompson, 2011). Thus travel writing in this period “centered on the report, or ‘relation’, of someone who actually made the journey [himself]” (p.42). Thomas Harriott’s *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, for example, illustrates this drastic epistemological shift in travel writing. In the eighteenth century, travel narratives recounting Grand Tour became subject-oriented, that is, the subjective experience of a traveling persona assumed importance (Korte, 2000) although information-gathering was its main objective at its early stage. This new tendency in travel writing was indebted to Lawrence Sterns’ novel *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* in which everything was revolved around the central character’s moods and feelings (ibid.). The new emphasis on travel writers’ subjectivity explains why travel books published in this period appeared “in the form of the diary, the journal or the letter [as well as autobiography]” (p.53). Tobias Smollett’s *Travels through France and Italy*, for instance, clearly indicates the change. Travel writing in the Romantic period, according to John Gilroy (2010), “achieved great prominence and its influence was to be detected in many forms of writing aesthetic...religious, [and] imaginative” (p.180). This era witnessed the emergence of two important travelogues: first, William Gilpin’s *Observations on the Wye Valley* in which priority was assigned over visiting and appreciating picturesque scenery as the object of the travel (ibid.); second, William Beckford’s *Dreams, Waking Thoughts and*



Incidents which shared Romantic writers' passion for "self-expression and a subjective-emotional experience of the world [along with manifesting their popular theme, that is,] the discrepancy between self's limited existence and its boundless hope and yearning" (Kalb, as cited in Korte, 2000, p.58).

Travel writing became an extremely popular genre in the Victorian era when European powers were enjoying their imperialism (Thompson, 2011) which is the reason behind the birth of the exploration narrative, "one of the most important forms of travel writings" (Korte, 2000, p.53). This type of travel writing played an important role in collecting useful information about geography, ethnography, and natural history for the centers of powers in the West. They used the collected information to manage and regulate newly discovered regions efficiently. To give an example, David Livingstone's *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* falls into this category (ibid.). Additionally, in this period, some travelogues sprang from the desire for escaping from not only the hustle and bustle of daily life in the West, but also its stifling moral atmosphere, prohibiting "erotic adventures" (p.54), and Nerval's *Voyage en Orient* for example demonstrates two above-mentioned features because he regards France as "the land of coldness and tempests" (as cited in Behdad, 1994, p.24), thereby embarking on a journey to Egypt to "find true Oriental woman" or by extension "Oriental eroticism" (p.68). Moreover, in this period the self-conscious form of travel writing like Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* emerged as well (Thompson, 2011). Travel writing in the twentieth embraced both modernism and postmodernism. The former found its full expression in Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* written between the world wars, the golden era of

travel writing. Similar to James Joyce in his *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* artistically, Robert Byron deployed fragmentation and collage (Fussell, 1980). The latter was exemplified in Jonathan Raban's *Coasting* in which the travel writer denied "his readers an orderly, chronological travel plot" and drew on inter- and meta-textuality (ibid.) to foreground "the literariness of the genre and reveal that travel writing [was] always creative reconstruction of travel experience" (Korte, 2000, p. 149). Furthermore, in this period postcolonial writers invigorated travel writing. The travelogues of V.S. Naipaul, Kincaid and Ghosh are cases in point. V.S. Naipaul in his travelogues "speaks eloquently the sense of homelessness and displacement that can result from a mixed cultural heritage" (Thompson, 2011, p.165), but Kincaid and Ghosh endeavor to "enlighten and challenge [their] readers, by revealing cultural and historical perspectives which have otherwise been overlooked or suppressed" (p.166).

Concerning travel writing in the twenty first century, there may be a sense that it has lost its prestige and value due to the globalization and universal travel (Youngs, 2013); however, this genre adapted itself to cyber world. It explains why Michael Cronin notes "internet is saturated with rhetoric of travel" (as cited in Youngs, p.179). Moreover, in this era, green travel or 'nature writing' enjoys "resurgence with rising concern about the loss of habitats and species, global warming and the future of the planet" (p.184). Furthermore, another popular form of travel writing in this period is footsteps genre in which the travel writer follows the steps of previous travel writers and the best example of the genre is Raban's *Old Glory* (ibid.). Predicting the future of travel writing, Young remarks that "new

technologies will continue to affect how travel is written about, represented visually, and made available in multi-media formats” (p.187).

2. Biography of Arminius Vambéry and His travel in Central Asia

A Turcologist, Orientalist, British secret agent, and expert on Central Asian affairs, anglophile Arminius Vambéry (1832-1913) was born into an impoverished Jewish family in St. Georghen, a small town in Hungary (Gholi & Ahmadi, 2015). Unlike other Jewish parents, his ambitious mother made a bold step by taking her lame son out from the Jewish school and placing him in Christian-run schools, hoping his Catholic-Protestant-secular education would help him go up in the world. But his financial constraints compelled him to leave his school without obtaining any formal degree even though he was a brilliant student and had a good command of Latin, German, French, Italian, and Hungarian. His utter misery taught him that he had to solely rely on his own resources. Thus to craft his life, he turned to tutoring the children of Jewish families or unprejudiced Hungarians in remote villages. To his consternation, he perceived that his teaching was thwarting his cherished dream of traveling and studying Oriental languages and cultures, and this is the reason why he met Baron Joseph Eotovos, an Austrian Orientalist, who kindly equipped him with sufficient money, a passport, and introduction letters to make his journey to Oriental Turkey in 1857. In Constantinople as a private tutor he could manage his way into royal families and enjoyed their genuine favors. Additionally, his five-year-stay there not only afforded him to participate in Islamic lectures and learn Islamic sciences, Persian, and Arabic fluently, but also spurred him to translate Turkish manuscripts and publish his

German-Turkish dictionary. By the virtue of his translation, he could convince the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to grant him 700 Florins to travel Central Asia and “investigate the relationship of Hungarian [language] with languages spoken there” in 1861 (Alder & Dalby, 1979, p.62). To carry out his plan, from Turkey he set off for Persia where he disguised himself as a Sunni dervish and rehearsed the role of a dervish for a year among Persians.

His opportunity for the travel to well-guarded Central Asia arose when he was in the Turkish Embassy. There he met a group of mendicant Chinese Tartar pilgrimages on their way back to their homeland. Thanks to a Turkish passport with the Sultan's seal and his Islamic knowledge, he persuaded the pilgrims to accompany them in their journey. To avoid potential dangers by supposedly xenophobic Central Asians, Vambéry concealed his identity and real motives from both his fellow travelers and travelees. He brainwashed them into this belief that he was a devout Osmanli dervish whose spiritual leader commanded him to visit the tombs of holy saints in Bokhara. As to their itinerary, from Tehran they departed to the North East of Iran, where inhabited by Turkmen who entertained and hosted the pilgrims for a month. Then they joined a caravan heading to Khiva. Their journey to Khiva was hazardous and enervating due to passing an inhospitable desert. There he could observe his travelees' manners and mores and even meet and intercourse with the Khan of the city who suspected him as a spy. To his relief, there no one could penetrate his incognito. Afterwards they moved to Bokhara; their journey to it proved fatal since some of his companions perished out of raging thirst in the desert. In Bokhara he was suspected. As a result, he was summoned to the Emir's palace. The Emir enquired him about the object of his



travel and ordered the priests under his wing to test his Islamic knowledge whom Vambéry satisfied with his answers. His stay there enabled him to witness their culture and life which was inaccessible to Europeans. Their next destination was Samarkand, the city of legendary Tamburlaine. There he visited Tamburlaine's shrine and mingled with its people and experienced their life. It was in this city that his friends parted from him and went to Chinese Tartary. Then with Molla Ishaq, his new companion, he set off to Afghanistan and from there to Persia. He reached Tehran in 1864. His arrival astonished European and Turkish ambassadors who thought he would never return. His ethnographical, geographical, and political information about Central Asia cut no ice with the Hungarian Academy of Science. Consequently, he departed for England with an introduction letter from English ambassador in Persia. In England he presented his political, ethnological, and geographical information to the Royal Geographic Societyⁱ which warmly received his highly strategic and fresh information about Central Asia since in the nineteenth century England was vying with Russiaⁱⁱ over extending its influence on the region. Furthermore, England suspected that Russia was trying to annex Central Asia to wrest her India.

Enchanted with his adventures in secluded and sealed Central Asia, his English friends encouraged him to publish his travelogue in English. Consequently, he commenced writing his *Travels in Central Asia* which proved an immediate success after its publication, and this explains why Charles Mervin (1886) praised it, "*Travels in Central Asia*"ⁱⁱⁱ for its graphic description and forcible diction has few equals in our literature of exploration" (1886, p.53). Later, in the recognition of his

groundbreaking travel, command of key Oriental languages, translation of Oriental texts and philological books, he was appointed as the professor of Oriental Languages in Hungary. Moreover, at the same time he was a British advisor on Turkey and Central Asia until the rest of his life.

3. Review of Literature

Arminius Vambéry's travelogue despite its literary merits and good reception in European countries has not received enough attention from literary critics; the reason may partly stem from the fact that until Edward Said's *Orientalism*, travel writing has been regarded as a secondary genre and unworthy of critical scrutiny, and partly from literary scholars' lack of interest in remote Central Asia; nonetheless, some scholars endeavored to evaluate his work. Some of the critics, in passing, analyzed his travelogue in the light of Said's *Orientalism* which is pertinent to the subject of this study while the other critics either paid attention to the travel writer's ethos or other aspects of his travel.

David Mandler (2005) believes that Vambéry's *Orientalism* does not conform to the views which Edward Said postulated against the Western orientalists in his *Orientalism* since Vambéry's "initial (e)valuation as an expert arose from his first-hand, unfiltered, pioneering encounters in Central Asia with the living cultures of those he describes in his works" (pp.65-66), yet he paradoxically claims that "Vambéry very much like Joseph Conrad, viewed Great Britain as pinnacle Western civilization" (84) and "championed the cause of British 'civilizing mission' [in Central Asia]" (94). On the contrary, Surucu (2004) by drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* not only does he point to Vambéry's *Orientalism* but also highlights both his contribution to the systematic

knowledge production of Central Asia and his negative portrayal of his travelees in his travelogue. Similarly, Dabashi (2009) argues that Vambery was “a charlatan Orientalist to the highest degree” (p.50) and a secret agent who “disguised himself as a wandering dervish and traveled throughout Central Asia...to collect detailed and vital intelligence for his British employers”. Last but not least, Gholi and Ahmadi (2015) argue that Vambery as a Western travel writer evinces his supremacist and orientalist attitudes to his travelees in Central Asia by representing “Central Asian as superstitious, viewing their food culture condescendingly, [and] by travelling in disguise for gathering information” (p.183).

In contrast to the aforementioned critics, Landau (2014) does not refer to his orientalist stance towards his observees in Central Asia, instead he portrays him as a scholar and humanist who is “inclined to defend such groups [Central Asians], while condemning [their] bigotry and what he called ‘Seketenhass’, or hatred of religious sects” (p.868). Focusing on political aspect of Vambery travelogue, Bassnett (2012) remarks that although Vambery’s travelogue was received well in Britain in the nineteenth century, his warning of Russians’ ambition to annex Central Asia “failed to convince the British government [to take actions against Tsarist Russia]” (p.31).

4. Methodology

This paper argues that to deterritorialize^{iv} Central Asia or justify the prospective presence of Britain in Central Asia, Vambery in dialogue with previous Western travelers represents his traveled terrain in negative light but himself in positive light to exudes his Eurocentrism. To prove the argument, this study draws on Orientalism and post-colonialism as its analytical framework. Edward Said in his

Orientalism rejects travel writers’ claim of holding up to his Western audience a truthful mirror of his travelees and traversed world due to the fact that their representations are shaped by the cultural depictions of previous travelers before they execute their journeys and encounter their travelees (Young, 2013; El Kholly, 2001). Syed Islam (1996) labels this kind of travelers as ‘sedentary travelers’ (p.59) since they carry their cultural borders on their backs which prevent them from acknowledging, appreciating, and sympathizing with their observees.

In addition, Orientalism like postmodernism holds that the travel writers’ representation of their observees and traveled terrains are rhetorical strategies and textual constructions (Barry, 2009; Ghose, 1998). In addition, this critical viewpoint highlights the close relation of travel writing with politics and its role in the promotion of imperialism. Similarly, post-colonialism which is interwoven with Orientalism is also beneficial in scrutinizing travelogues and disclosing its complicity with imperialism by unveiling its ideologically loaded layers (Youngs, p.9).

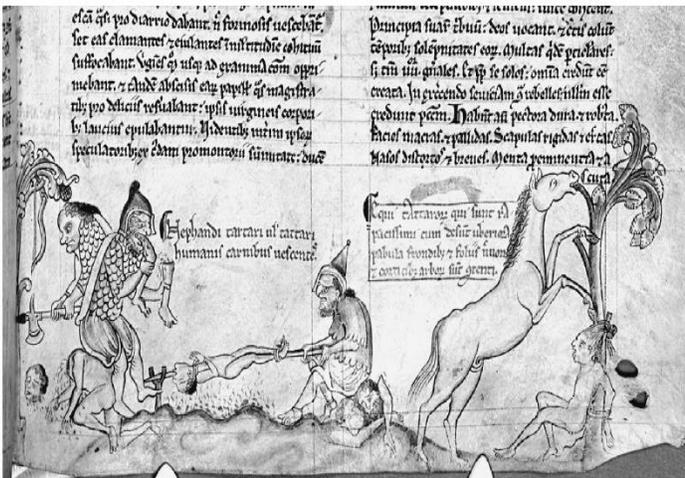
Post-colonialism will prove helpful in analyzing Vambery’s *Travels in Central Asia* written in the nineteenth century when Western travelogues was saturated with Eurocentrism,^v and Vambery exudes it in his travelogue. Even though Hungarian by his birth, Vambery always aligned himself with Britain, “it is the greatest pride of my life to serve ... [this] glorious country...I am Hungarian but my heart and soul is English” (as cited in Adler & Dalby, 1979, p.393). He also firmly believes that “the people of Central Asia are barbarians, the light of our Western culture is there urgently wanted; but if there is a choice of torchbearer, I give preference to the English” (Vambery, 1984, p.365).

5. Discussion

5.1. Central Asia as the Locus of Barbarity

Central Asia, according to Bassnett (2012), in the Western imagination was “the locus of horror and barbarity” (29) and its inhabitants in the West were generally known as ‘Tartars’ who are etymologically connected to Tartarus, the bottom of mythological Hades, and its demon-like dwellers (Phillips, 2014). In the Middle Ages, Central Asians were depicted as cannibals, for instance, Matthew Paris in his chronicle entitled, *Chronica Majora* to portray Central Asians’ barbarity for his Western readers inserted the picture: *Tartar Feast* in which three Tartars are roasting, eating, and cutting their human victims.

Figure 1. *Tartar Feast*^{vi}



In addition to this, in the Renaissance Martin Waldseemüller, a German cartographer, in his *Carta Marina* (1516) fills Central Asia with monsters (Arjana, 2015) and these monsters were regarded as the enemies of Christians who were seeking to subjugate or annihilate them (Connell, 1969). For the people living in the Renaissance Genghis and Tamburlaine exemplified this monstrosity in the sense of their extreme violence and carnage. In the same era, Christopher Marlowe drew on this monstrosity in his *Tamburlaine the*

Great, “we lead you to the stately tent of war,/ where you shall here the Scythian [Tartar or Central Asian] Tamburlaine/ threatening the world with high stounding terms, and Scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword” (Part one, Prologue).

This negative attitude towards Central Asia in the Romantic period resurfaces in Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan*, which he produced under the influence of Opium after reading Purchas’ *Pilgrimage*, in which in the middle of confusion, “Kubla heard from far/ ancestral voices prophesying war!” (as cited in Abrams, 2005, p.440). In the nineteenth century before Vambery’s journey to Central Asia, the murder of two English officers: Connolly and Stoddart in Bokhara by its Khan convinced the English once more that Central Asia was the locus of savagery (Bassnett, 2012). Said (1979) believes that the Orient for the Orientalists (and by extension travel writers) was the land of barbarity, and they linked it to their religion, Islam. In conjecture with Western travelers before him, Vambery in his travelogue (1864) notes that “in whole Central Asia, wanton cruelty is unknown [because] the whole proceeding is regarded as perfectly natural” (p.139).

In his travelogue, by brutality Vambery means ill-treatment and murdering of slaves and prisoners. For example, to show this in his travelogue he recounts his experiences in Khiva. When Vambery and their caravan reached to the entrance there, his fellow Afghan traveler announced that Vambery is not Dervish from Turkey, but a foreigner intending to map deserts in Central for the easier conquest of the region. However, Vambery’s Tartar companions wholeheartedly defended him and refuted his fellow traveler’s claim by pointing to his addiction indicative of his dishonesty. However, it was enough to arouse the suspicion of the Khan of Khiva, and as a

result, he invited him to his palace to examine whether he was a sincere dervish or not. To do so, he asked many political and religious questions which Vambery cleverly answered, thereby dispelling his suspicion. When leaving the palace, he witnessed how war prisoners were treated and punished by the Khan's officers which for him functioned as the synecdoche for Central Asian's barbarity,

I found about three hundreds...prisoners of war, covered with rags; they were so tormented by the dread of their approaching fate...they looked as if had just risen from their graves. They were separated into divisions...While several were led to the gallows...I saw how at the sign from executioner, eight aged man placed themselves down to their backs upon the earth. They were then bound hand and foot, and the executioner gouged out their eyes in turn, kneeling to do on the breast of each poor wretch; and after the operation he wiped his knife, dripping with blood, upon the white beard of the hoary unfortunate. Ah! Cruel spectacle! (Vambery, 1864, p.136).

In the same city, to display that Central is rife with brutal acts, the travel writer refers to the act of giving Khilats (robes of honor) as a reward by the khan to those warriors who cut more heads of their enemies. Tempted by the precious gift from the khan, his soldiers brought many heads in their sacks which they opened as if they were potatoes,

Accordingly, the next morning, the next morning I did really see about a hundred horsemen arrive from the camp covered with dust. Each of them...buckled behind him a large sack containing the heads of enemies... then [he] loosened his sack, seized it by the two lower corners, as if he were about to empty potatoes, and there rolled the bearded or beardless heads before the accountant, who kicked them together

with his feet until a rage heap was composed (pp. 140-141).



Figure 2. vii

Lastly, to reiterate the scale of savagery in Central Asia in particular Bokhara, the travel writer like previous Western travel writers alludes to the murder of two British officers and spies: Conolly and Stoddart whom he calls them martyrs. Adler and Dalby (1979) give a graphic summary of the event in their book, *The Dervish of Windsor Castle*,

After a long spell in prison, the two men were transferred to a well or 'pit', twenty-one feet deep, in which the Emir kept a selection of specially bred reptiles, enormous sheep ticks, and other vermin...after masses of flesh had been gnawed off their bones, they were taken out of their and beheaded in front of the citadel, the corpses of [them] were placed in one grave which had been dug before their eyes (p.147).

5.2. Central Asia under the Grip of Despotism

According to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 'despot' is a Greek word which consists of two parts: *dem* meaning house and *potis* master. The etymology of the word points to the fact that it was not a pejorative term in the past. Aristotle, for example, "equates the Hellenes [the Greek] with the master, *despots*, the head of household exercising appropriate rule over



the slaves who, because of their nature, were not capable of ruling themselves” (Curtis, 2009, p.52) or in “early Christian liturgy...Jesus was referred... ‘In the name of the Lord (*Tou despotou*) Jesus Christ”” (p.53). But in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the word in question acquired its derogatory connotation, and was applied to censure the style of absolute ruling (p.51). By definition, despot refers to the ruler who is “absolute, arbitrary, and corrupt... [ruling] societies that were stagnant” (p.52). According to Curtis (2009), Western travelers, intellectuals, and orientalist unanimously in their works promulgated the idea that despotic governments were the distinctive characteristics of Oriental states and they called it Oriental despotism, and one can safely regard Montesquieu as the representative of this style of thinking since he builds his theory of Oriental despotism in his *Persian Letter* by drawing on the political views of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Bodin, Adam Ferguson, and Chardin (p.83) as well as the travelers’ accounts of the Oriental lands (p.80).

Additionally, he describes the salient characteristics of the supposedly Oriental despotic governments, albeit in scattered fashion. The governments in question are hedonistic since their princes devote themselves to pleasures, corrupt by nature for ruining the gifts of their subjects, devoid of fundamental laws because the despotic rulers’ wills are laws, as well as arbitrary, unstable, cruel and inhuman (pp.90-91). He also demarcates two main factors for this form of government structures: climate and Islam. Firstly, like aforementioned political analysts, he ascribes despotism in the Orient to the hot climate which “enervates the soul, make people so slothful and dispirited...[it] also produces an indolence of mind naturally connected to

...timidity...[therefore] despotic government appropriate for them” (pp. 83-84).

Secondly, he believes that Islam by its “ritualism, laziness of the soul, fatalism, apathy, lack of concern for the future” (pp.87-88) is responsible for despotism. Nevertheless, from the perspective of post-structuralist critics, “Oriental despotism has been used less for understanding and analyzing the realities of Eastern societies and politics objectively than for buttressing arguments for colonial or imperialist control by the West over those societies, or for internal Western political purposes” (p.67). Accordingly, Edward Said (1979) argues that Oriental despotism for many Europeans is an essential aspect of the Orient which they themselves have fashioned it. Likewise, for Spurr (1993) Oriental despotism which originated in the eighteenth century was strengthened in the nineteenth century by orientalist. Similar to orientalist, many Western travelers to the orient highlighted the so-called Oriental despotism (al-Hajri, 2003). In the same vein, Arminius Vambery in accord with other travelers in the nineteenth century depicts Central Asia under the grip of Oriental despotic rulers by painting the picture of the Khan of Khiva as a sensual and arbitrary tyrant, and that of Bokhara as a capricious one.

In Khiva, Vambery made friends with Hadji Ismael who claimed that he had seen him in Istanbul and knew his father. But Vambery in lieu of charging him with dishonesty corroborated his claim. Concerning his occupation, Hadji Ismael had tried different jobs in Turkey before coming to Khiva. But in his hometown only his knowledge of chemistry was highly esteemed. Mostly, he had used his profession for healing impotence by means of his decoctions made by oil

(extracts) of leaves, fruits, and other similar materials. For a long time, he has placed his art at the disposal of the Khan but,

His Majesty had neglected the requisite of diet, for the simple reason that he was too weak to resist the darts of the boy God. Debility and gout naturally ensued. The Khan grew angry with the court physician, gave him disposal, and named in his place a matron renowned for her marvelous success with her patients (Vambery, 1864, p.135).

In above fragment, to represent the Khan of Khiva as an Oriental despot to the core, he focuses on his sensuality and arbitrariness. With regard to the sexuality, it can be inferred that the Khan has been drowning himself in the life of sex and pleasures which here was signified by his yielding to the arrows of Cupid, the god of love. His hedonism explains why he cannot avoid the pleasures of eating delicious and gourmet foods which are vital for restoring and enhancing his sexual potency. Since it is difficult for the king to forsake his hedonism, he disregards his court physician's advice on taking simple food for his speedy recovery. Considering his other characteristic, the khan indiscriminately and capriciously replaces his physician with the matron, assuming that the doctor is accountable for his gout and weakness, while the reason for his disease results from the khan's neglect of the medical advice.

As to the despotism of Emir of Bokhara, Vambery highlights his capriciousness; that is to say, the Emir's will is law and no one can constrain his power and overturn his decision. To this end, the travel writer relates the story of Shahrukh and his elegant house. Emir confiscated and ruined his house and sent him into exile since he violated the Emir's order of living modest life and shunning lavish and luxurious lifestyle,

It is singular what pains the Emir takes to throw obstacles in the way of his subject whenever they seek to depart from the simplicity and modesty of their present, in *his opinion, happy condition*. Introduction of the articles of luxury, other expensive merchandise, is forbidden, as also employment of sumptuousness in house...his commandment in chief, Shahrukh Khan...had ordered, at great expense, a house to be erected...in this besides other articles of luxury, glass windows were inserted...The Emir had been informed of this from beginning, but he waited until the whole was quite finished, and *suddenly* Shahrukh Khan was accused of an offense against religion, thrown confinement, and then exiled. The house was confiscated and reverted to Emir...[then] he directed to be demolished (pp.179-180).

5.3. Central Asia Frozen in Time

Fabian in his book, *Time and the Other: How anthropology Makes his Object* holds that "anthropology emerged and established itself as an allochronic discourse; it is a science of other men in another time. It is a discourse whose referent [is] removed from the present of the speaking/writing subject" (1983, p.143). Rubies (2002) points that the emergence of ethnography (anthropology) as a branch of science is indebted to travel writers' observations. Similarly, Huggan (2015) in his article *Anthropology/Travel/Writing: Strange Encounters with James Clifford and Nicolas Rothwell*, highlights the similarity between travel writing and anthropology.

Likewise, Holland and Huggan (2000) argue that there is a resemblance between travel writers and anthologists since both of them "occupy positions of power" (p.12). Additionally, anthropologists like travel writers are "complicit with imperialism" (Conquergood, 1991, p.183). Equally, Lewis notes that "anthropologists must



worry that their own words and works will be seen as complicit with...colonialism” (p.777). Moreover, similar to anthologists, travel writers capitalize on the trope of temporalization by “denying the Other [travelees] coevalness, [through] placing the object [travelees] in a time other than the Western Present” (Behdad, 1994, p.6) via labeling them as primitive, traditional, ancient, animistic, underdeveloped and developing despite sharing time with them (p.182). Likewise, Said believes orientalists described the Orient “a pragmatic fossilization” (as cited in Tavares & Bosseau, 2006 p.310), that is, the Orientals are static and timeless. In tune with imperialist anthropologist and other orientalists, not only did Vambery in his other book, *Sketches of Central Asia: Additional Chapters on my Travels and Adventures and on the Ethnology of Central Asia*, explicitly stated that “the people of Central Asia particularly the nomadic tribes are... the same as how they were two thousands ago” (1868, p. 283), but also in his *Travels in Central Asia*, implicitly alluded to it by deploying the trope in question.

Accordingly, to depict Central Asians in particular nomadic people as anachronistic, the travel writer portrays them as hard primitives and superstitious. Considering hard primitivism, when in Gumeshtepe, the threshold of Central Asia, Kolkhan, an influential Turkmen in the region and the traveler writer’s host, invited the travel writer to walk down the banks of the Gorghen River to wait for Kolman, his son, and his friends who were due to return from their marauding expedition. Taking up the invitation, the travel writer along with the other Turkmen impatiently waited for them. He witnessed the moment of their arrival and described it in this way,

At last eight mounted Turkomans appeared on the opposite bank, bringing ten led horses with them...the latter [the group of young horse riders] dashed into the Gorghen, across which in an instant they swam to the bank on our side...extended their hands with earnestness to their relatives...the young heroes were occupied in arranging their dress. Lifting their heavy fur caps, they wiped the sweat from head and forehead...the whole spectacle was splendid... my eye fell still with particular pleasure upon these young men, who, in their short riding dresses, with their bold looks, and their hair falling to their breasts in curly locks as they lay aside their weapons, were admiration of all (1984, p. 69).

In this excerpt, the travel writer’s portrayal of young Turkmen is not dissimilar to what Thompson (2011) calls “hard primitivism”, that is, young Turkmen symbolizing (nomadic) Central Asians, “were deemed to embody a manliness and courage that was supposedly lost in the more effete, civilized cultures” (p.151). Here their masculinity was demonstrated by their ability to undertake the dangerous predatory expedition without getting help from their elders, horse-riding skills, swimming in a wild river, bold looks, and their long curly hair. Even though the travel writer here valorizes the young Turkmen heroes as brave and manly by describing their heroic appearance, he in a deeper level conveys to his Western audience that they have remained unchanged. In other words, they have not been subject to progress and modernity.

Furthermore, the travel writer denies his travelees’ coevalness by highlighting superstition in Central Asia. To do so, he relates the anecdote of a young Turkmen whom he utilizes as synecdoche (Gholi & Ahmadi, 2015) of the whole inhabitants of Central Asia owing to the fact that they share same religion, language, and life

style. Thompson (2011) notes that using synecdoche is common among travel writers since they cannot survey the whole traversed region. In the anecdote, Yakob requests from Vambéry thirty drops of Meccan rose oil necessary for writing a talisman by a local sorcerer to transform his unresponsive beloved to a passionate one. Giving his object of desire, the travel writer comments on Yakob's belief in the written magic formula,

The superstition of this son of desert did not so much astonish me as the trust he had in the words of the cunning [magician] ...and as my traveling friends had really brought with them such attar [oil] of roses wish was soon gratified. The joy that he displayed was almost childish (1864, p.36).

Dixon notes that pointing to superstition "as [one of] the essential characteristics of the Oriental is] the common denominator of the travel writing in ...the nineteenth century" (as cited in Gholi & Ahmadi, 2015, p.186), and thus in line with other travel writers, here the travel writer deliberately sheds light on his travelers' belief in the power of written magic formula/superstition to indicate that they have still remained unchanged in their past. This explains why he addresses his observees in Central Asians as the 'sons of desert' implying that Central Asians' lack of progress due to their clinging to illogical practices like belief in the power of superstition. Therefore, it is not mere coincidence that he calls Yakob as a son of desert and describes his joy as childish.

5.4. *Traveler as a Suffering Hero*

According to Barbara Korte, male travel writers in the Victorian period depicted their traveling selves as "heroes every bit as courageous and enduring as the protagonists of the contemporary adventure novel" (2000, p.88). Likewise, Andreeva (2010) states that "the theme of obstacles and hardship encountered during travel

becomes crucial because it turns into the [suffering] traveler into a hero" (p.84). Moreover, Sell (2007) in his article *Embodying Truth in Early Modern English Travel Writing* argues that the textualization of suffering body confers credibility to travel writing. Vambéry in chime with the other Western travel writers, in his journey to sealed Central Asia presents his traveling persona as a suffering hero to demonstrate his racial superiority; that is, a Westerner is psychologically and corporally brave enough to penetrate in disguise into the region which is jealously guarded by the spies of its Khans and Emirs and notorious in Europe for its barbarity and severe climate. In this regard, he places great emphasis on his endurance of the unbearable corporeal and psychological agonies on the course of his travel despite being a lame himself. For example, on their way to Bokhara with their caravan in an inhabitable desert, he narrates how in retrospect he has suffered from the raging thirst which he ultimately braved it even though some of his Oriental fellow travelers died because of it, "my pen has no power to describe the tortures of thirst unalloyed which I underwent at that moment, nor do I think there is any more painful mode of death" (1884, p.219).

He also vividly recounts the excruciating pain which he went through and bore it courageously when a scorpion stung him while he was lying down near to a building, "I was suddenly roused by a painful sensation. I jumped up screaming; I thought a hundred poisoned needles had run into my legs" (p.245). With regard to his psychological pain, that his incognito might be discovered by the suspicious Khans of Khanates or their subjects was the constant source of his mental suffering. However, he claims that thanks to maintaining his composure and playing his role in best way,



he could deal with this situation successfully; the following paragraph clearly illustrates the point,

In entering through the main gate of the city I could not shake off a certain fear of being found out or suspected by the Khan of Khiva... I heard that the Khan makes a slave of every stranger suspected by him...but by this time I was accustomed to brave almost any danger without losing my presence of mind. I therefore kept perfectly cool (p.197).

By alluding to the difficulties of his journey, he constructs his image as a Western masculine hero. Kassis (2015) notes that “it is a recurrent motif in travel literature” (p.297). This masculinity in fact bears remarkable testimony to the power and perseverance of Western traveling self who can conquer the hardships which he encounters in an alien world even though he may be lame in the case of Vambery.

5.5. Traveler as a Philanthropic Man

In his travel in Central Asia, Vambery always shows compassion for the slaves who are subject to their owners' mistreatment to present his image as a humanitarian Westerner. Thompson (2011) remarks that this type of attitude towards the observees is common among Western travelers especially among the female ones. Similarly, Vron Ware is dubious about the sincerity of this sort of kindness, thereby calling it as “the dominant ideology of imperialism” (as cited in Thompson, p.193), that is, only people from Western civilization are capable to share miseries in their traversed destinations. In the case of Vambery, only the civilized English can put an end to the inhumane treatment of the slaves in Central Asia. In fact, by constructing his traveling self in this fashion, the travel writer is alluding to moral superiority of the Western people or his latent Eurocentrism. By way of illustration, when among Turkmen he

witnessed how an old slave was suffering from thirst. Thus, he took the risk of giving water to the slave although the traveler knew well that he was not permitted to do so because his act for the slave owner might mean audacity which could lead to severe consequences, “luckily I was alone in the tent; the sight of the beard man [the slave] bathed in tears made me forget all risks: I handed my water-skin, and he satisfied his thirst” (1864, p.80). To give another example, in another occasion in Gumeshtepe when he caught the sight of the young slaves in the fetters, he wrote that “to behold these unfortunates, in the bloom of their youth, in fetters made me feel indescribable [sic] emotional, [and their tortures were] repeated every day” (p.59). Lastly, as he saw the arrival of new slaves, he expressed his sadness in this manner “my heart bled at the horrid sight” (p.60). The strategy of expressing sympathy towards the miserable slaves in Central creates this sense that solely the English to whom supposedly benevolent and morally superior traveler is affiliated can terminate this brutality and rescue the innocent from the talons of their captors in Central Asia.

6. Conclusion

From the stand point of orientalism and postcolonialism, travel writing is not the factual reportage of travelers and their world. Instead, they view it as a genre which is mediated by a traveler's cultural baggage and political agendas which renders objective portrayal of the observees and their culture impossible. In addition, they charge it with complicity in promoting imperialism by recording observations which ends in power production even though some conservative historians simplistically look at it as a transparent window to an alien culture and people. In this regard, Anglophile Vambery in his *Travels in Central Asia* in the second half of

nineteenth century when Britain was at the height of her political rivalry with Russia over dominating Central Asia and protect India from Russian's annexation departs to less known Central Asia. Since the travel writer was aware that Central Asians mistrust Western travelers' motives, he disguised himself as a poor dervish claiming to visit the shrines of holy saints in Bokhara. In dialogue with former travelers, to deterritorialize Central Asia or substantiate the prospective political

ⁱ. The Royal Geographic Society was affiliated to British imperialism even though it justified its mission solely scientific.

ⁱⁱ. This rivalry between Britain and England is called Great Game.

ⁱⁱⁱ. Like many travelogues in the nineteenth century, *Travels in Central Asia* is linear and Chronological. In this work, the travel writer relies on "sheer egoistic powers of Europeans consciousness" (Said, 1979, p.158).

^{iv}. "Deterritorialization...amounts to the denial of rightful claims to spatial extension, which consequently produces a terra nullius [unowned land], opening it up to fresh inscription of power...deterritorialization has been one of the classic tropes of colonial discourse (Islam, 1996, pp.165-166).

^v. Eurocentrism is "characteristic of travelogues: everything is seen through and judged from the European point of view, because that is perceived the only correct way of doing things and sole criterion by which anything has to be judged" (Andreeva, 2010, p.78).

^{vi}. The picture is taken from Arjana's book, *Muslims in Western Imagination*, page 46.

^{vii}. This picture was taken from Vambery's *Travels in Central Asia*, placed between p.140 and p.141.

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presence of Britain as the sole deliverer of Central Asians from their supposedly horrible conditions, he deliberately fashions the configuration of Central Asia the as historically static land of barbarians which is ruled by despotic rulers while he portrays his own traveling self not only as a sensitive Westerner who sincerely sympathizes with the oppressed slaves and prisoners, but also a suffering hero who overcomes physically and mentally challenging problems to demonstrate his Eurocentrism.

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