How has the West represented the non-West, and what are the political implications of such representations?

The hegemonic control exerted by the West over the non-West has, for hundreds of years, provided the opportunity for the writing of literature, studies and reports about these foreign lands. Controlling what is included in media representation and academic studies, both directly and indirectly, allows governments to exert power over the populations of both the developing countries they remotely rule and their own country. As a result, I believe that most representations of the non-West[1] tend to be inaccurate, unfavourable accounts in turn producing negative political implications for those non-West countries that allow power to be gained and maintained by the West.

Edward Said first defined the idea of Orientalism – "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" – in 1978. (Said 2003, p. 2) He argued that the West used Orientalism as a political tool (e.g., to justify colonialism) and to define themselves by attributing polarisation to the Orient. As a result, he argues they had created false perceptions of the culture and thought within the Oriental, and specifically the Arabic, world. (ibid, p.203) These ideas can be applied to areas outside of the Arabic world, and I believe apply to the three examples I will be discussing in this essay: the representation and treatment of India during colonial times; the causes of the dependency of African countries on the West today, brought about by exploitation; and the effect on Arabs of recent representation of the 'global threat of Islam'. In each of these I will describe how they have been represented, and explore the implications of these portrayals.

To identify the implications of such representation it is necessary to study the consequences of these ideas and stereotypes. Representation is, by definition, biased, and the conscious manipulation of opinion through propaganda or other means is a crucial factor in the process of gaining power. I believe that the West used each of these situations for aggrandisement, by exploiting and extracting land, labour or resources. The

[1] In this essay I use this phrase to refer to the anthropological Orient (The Middle East, India, China etc.) but also to other areas affected by Western legacies of colonialism, such as countries in Africa.

result of this is the perpetuation of the current balance of power – the West maintains the economic and political power, and thus the control of the dominant discourse. Thus, they also retain the ability to represent the non-West in a way most beneficial to them, while the non-West nations remain marginalized and powerless. (Wallerstein *in* Seligson and Passe-Smith 1998, p.290)

The context of these representations is important to the overall understanding of the situation, so I will begin by discussing the historical roots of the anthropological discipline involved in the study and presentation of information about other cultures, before describing the misrepresentation of the three cultures detailed above and the political implications resulting from this. Examples of these political implications include: racism, and the idea of White supremacy; an economic relationship of dependency between the West and non-West; and the gulf created between "Christian" and "Islamic" nations, emphasised of late after cases of Islamic extremism such as 9/11. Public feeling expresses fear of the "global threat of Islam": some would argue that Western governments, through the media, exaggerated this fear, in order to rally support for the War on Terror.

For the best part of 300 years, Britain, and subsequently the United States of America, have considered themselves to be superior to other races, especially those composed of people of colour. Kipling's writings of his time in India – describing the "White Man's Burden" - are characteristic of the opinion in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Said 2003, p. 226) The expansion of the British Empire in the 19th century meant lands were being colonised in Africa, India and the Middle East, and reports were made of primitive, illiterate people. Missionaries travelled to the area in an attempt to convert the people to Christianity, and educate them in modern, British culture. The British government sent anthropologists to the colonies to study the tribes and produce ethnographies, with the theory that the more they knew about these people, the easier it would be to rule them. (Padel *in* Grove et al 1998, p. 903) Their conclusions – based on phenotypic characteristics such as head size and skin colour – suggested that these "savage" people were incapable of ruling themselves, and it was the duty of the Englishman to civilise them and bring order to their lives. (ibid, p. 894) The Europeans therefore set about

transforming their non-European subjects into a life with a more 'modern' direction. (Asad 1991, p. 314)

By the 20th century the discipline became institutionalised and anthropologists studied geographically specific areas of which they gained great expertise. (Trouillot 2003, p. 118) However, the anthropological reports produced at this time were mainly the work of "arm-chair anthropologists", whose experience of the area they were studying was limited to very structured interviews and thus were reliant on sources from missionaries, merchants, and other travellers. Their views were therefore shaped by current public opinion – namely, that their lack of technology proved them 'savages', inferior intellectually; that their lack of Christianity meant they were heathens and that their government structure demonstrated irrationality. Not until Bronislaw Malinowski's work into participant observation did it become normal to live with tribes, learn their languages and observe their customs in order to understand the culture that differed so greatly from the West's. This allows fairer representation of the non-West, as studies were not undertaken in direct comparison with Western society.

In the aftermath of World War II, Anthropology became more dependent on fieldwork, and arguably "fairer" to the people it studied. Yet it was not until the 1960s and 1970s, as Western society became more 'media savvy' and communications developed, that news programmes became more immediate and average people became more politically aware. Conflicts such as Vietnam and the Gulf War highlighted the suffering of the people who bore the brunt of US imperial ambitions (Trouillot 2003, p.119), associated with anthropological studies. By the 1980s and 1990s fieldwork techniques were being criticised for their limitations – studying small communities out of context of the country in which they were situated. As a result of this the development of multi-site studies began, in order to create a more accurate representation of those cultures being observed. (ibid)

The representation of India began at the height of British Imperial colonisation in the 19th century. Around this time, in 1859, Darwin's theory of natural selection "The Origin of Species" was popular, spreading the belief that tribespeople in Africa and India – living in huts with no modern technology – demonstrated a previous state of human evolution,

of which white Westerners demonstrated the most advanced form. After recognising "certain similarities between the political and social institutions of contemporary, 'primitive' peoples and those of the communities which had existed in Europe many years before", (Owen *in* Asad1991, p. 226) Anthropologists believed it would be possible to construct a chronological time line of the world, filling the gaps in our history with the present of the non-West. This comparative method also allowed the countries of the world to be ranked in terms of power, defined by their position in this timeline.

In the Westerner's opinion, these people were inferior intellectually – demonstrated by their limited modernisation - and physically – as proved by their different physique and skin colour. (Hall 2000, p. 14) The West concluded that these people would be eradicated due to the process of survival of the fittest, thus the West were obliged to attempt to educate the non-West wherever possible, and breed out their colour, in order to maintain the superiority of the race. This duty was known as the "White Man's Burden" – a phrase coined by Kipling. The idea of an obligation to the Orient by the Westerners was strong and established due to the "certain knowledge that he belonged to, and could draw upon the empirical and spiritual reserves of, a long tradition of executive responsibility towards the colored races." (Said 2003, p. 226) This idea of the "White Man" was both a literal and ideological creation, implying a certain code of behaviour and a way of thinking.

The British government claimed from this that it was their responsibility to colonise India, to provide the education necessary to modernize the areas. However, Said argues this Orientalist idea was used as justification for an unethical expansion of the empire. (2003 p. 100) He argues the colonies were used as pawns in a larger game – a power struggle between the British, French and Germans to create the biggest empire, allowing geographical control of the area for improved trade to Europe. Although tribes in India had previously lived peacefully alongside Hindi government towns and cities, the rise of colonisation meant this was disrupted. The Indian government referred to the forest villages as the "Shame of India", and encouraged the destruction of them in an attempt to modernise the country. (Padel *in* Grove et al 1998, p. 908) The British government encouraged these negative stereotypes, and enforced them by employing anthropologists to produce negative reports of the people's capabilities. They used these ideas to justify

colonialism, describing attempts to educate and 'Westernise' the tribes people. (ibid, p. 893)

The caste system of India was incomprehensible to the "rational" British, and thus the country was deemed naïve and dreamlike. Brahmanism was seen as inherently symbolic and mythical, rather than as an efficient way of governing a country, and the stereotype of the naïve Indian was formed. (Inden 1986, p. 403) This incomprehension of the system meant the British deemed that since "the Orientals were ignorant of self-government, they had better be kept that way [ruled by the British] for their own good." (Said 2003, p. 228) Again, in an attempt to gain and retain power, the British undertook to understand customs in order to better overthrow political ideas – for example, Alfred Lyall, later Home Secretary of the Government of India, concluded from his observations in the 1870s that India had natural divisive tendencies. Breaking caste rules – by divorcing, for example – led to the expulsion of the rule-breaker. The outcast would then proceed to set up a new 'sub-caste', either with close family members or other out-casts. This process perpetuated the caste system and therefore the Indian political structure. Lyall encouraged the government to prevent the formation of these sub-castes, by implementing tougher penalties for leaving a caste. This, he predicted, would result in the break down of barriers and therefore social structures within the Indian society, resulting in unification under British Rule. (Owen *in* Asad 1973, p. 229)

Through propagating the notion that the Indian nation was of an inferior race and using the principle of 'the white man's burden' Western governments were able to justify their presence in the area. It was easy for the first explorers to cast these people as "other", since their lifestyle and culture was so different from their own. In doing so, they created an idea of Indians as the polar opposite to the west. More than just opposite to these people, the experience of conquering these people thus served to define Europeans as coloniser. Without having conquered these people, Europeans would thus lack this perception of themselves. (Hall 2003, p. 13) The tribespeople demonstrated all the qualities the British were not, and created a sense of the "irreducible distance separating white from colored" (Said 2003, p. 228).

Another legacy of colonialism is that of dependency, evident between African ex-colonies such as Kenya and Britain. Political advantages can be gained through representing foreign regions in ways beneficial to the controlling country. The theory of dependency suggests that undeveloped states are exploited by wealthy, developed nations in order to sustain the economic dominance of the latter. The governments of richer nations are able to maintain this relationship, by establishing trade laws, political initiatives, and through media influence in these regions. Attempts to resist such a situation by the developing nations may result in economic sanctions, further disadvantaging the economy of the controlled nation. Dependence develops in a situation where the economy of one country is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. (dos Santos *in* Seligson and Passe-Smith, 1998, p. 252) The result of this situation is that underdeveloped countries trapped in this position fail to modernize due to the restrictions of the arrangement. The trade within the relationship is usually part of a monopolised market, and many businesses in the under-developed country are opened using capital loaned from foreign investors. The interest rates imposed allows the retention of foreign control as the surplus produced, and the profit made, is all returned to the investors and thus the local businessman cannot improve his output. To cope with the increasing outgoings, any profit is invested in increasing manpower to meet demands, rather than developing new technology to keep up with the global market. (ibid, p. 253)

Many of these relationships began in colonial times, when British government controlled labour, imports and exports of areas throughout the Orient. This was justified by the obligation of the "White Man's Burden", described above. As they could not afford to compete in the European market alone, the non-West was forced to allow the West to intervene with investment. Commercial and financial capitals grew in alliance with the colonisers, and therefore dominated the economic market through possession of land, mines and manpower. Production is determined by demand from the hegemonic power – in this case the colonisers. (dos Santos *in* Seligson and Passe-Smith, 1998, p. 253) Hegemonic power is maintained because the local communities cannot evolve as their economic dependence prevents them from using their resources to sustain their own economy, for example Nigeria today due to oil extraction. Therefore, the industries involved benefit; so Western governments continue this relationship. (ibid, p. 254)

This results in the developing countries being portrayed as incapable of running their own economy, when in fact the West subjects them to exploitation. The picture from the outside may be that of generous foreign investors moving their business abroad to create opportunities there, but in fact the unequal trading conditions mean the developing countries are simply exploited. In more modern times the aim of globalisation is used as an ethically justifying argument for maintaining the status quo – in a nutshell, that the long term result will be a more equal economy for all. (Mandaville 2003, p. 214)

Another example of misrepresentation is associated with the rise of Islam in the 18th century. It had already created a strong divide between the Occident and the Orient, and missionaries began travelling to these lands to convert the people and educate them in Western ways. Europeans' first encounter with the Arab race was during the Ottoman Empire, which began the painting of the picture of Arabs and Muslims as tyrannical due to a fear of the Turkish power. The absence of Muslim gentry and the subordination of women was seen as unsophisticated and crude. (Asad 1973, p. 116) The result of these historic Christian experiences of aggressive Islam, meant that the Orientalist image created is that of repressive relations between Islamic rulers and their subjects, resulting in the conclusion that Islam is "unprogressing and fanatical". (ibid)

The modern day idea of the Arab is synonymous with that of Islam, and that in turn is automatically associated with extremism and therefore 'terrorist'. Early reports of Arabs by Westerners, from around 1918, state that Arabs were "dishonest, uneducated and greedy" (Said 2003, p. 306). The British claimed they were attempting to rule them fairly, but that the Arabs were simply too arrogant to admit they required outside help to govern them. As a result of this they were doomed to remain in a state of anarchy, too uncivilised to even organise a rebellion and begin a revolution – as Vatikiotis states in *Orientalism*: "The major source of poltical conflict snf potential revolution in many countries of the Middle East, as well as Africa and Asia today, is the inability of the so-called radical nationalist regimes to manage…independence" (ibid, p. 314)

After the Second World War, the Arab race became more prominent, especially after their resistance to the creation of the state of Israel. The anti-Semitism associated with

Islam also made it a natural target for the West. As the academic interest in the Middle East moved from Europe to America, European scholars were deemed to be very respectable sources of knowledge in this area. One in particular – H. A. R. Gibb - was never shy about reporting his dislike for Islam. He suggested that the Middle East produced no cultural features of interest and that the region would have no political influence on global issues or develop technologically in a fashion to rival the West. His writings now seem so ridiculously naïve, especially for a so-called "expert" on the subject; yet he remained uncontested, his views simply accepted due to his eminence as a European scholar. He argued that Orientalists study the Orient as it is the duty of the West to preserve its memory – despite the lack of interest it offers. (Said 2003, p. 106))

During the years of the Gulf Wars, Arabs were depicted by the American media as greedy oil barons, attempting to ruin the US economy. (Said 2003, p. 286) In 1973 it became economically and politically viable for OPEC to increase their prices, due to an increase in demand. (Wallerstein 1984, p. 61) This resulted in a negative stereotype of the Arabs due to American resentment towards the price rise, and also more determination on the part of the West to maintain control in order to retain access to the natural resources the area hold. (Mandaville 2003, p. 214)

The ideas that arose are perpetuated today by media portrayal – Muslims continue to be marginalized in Western media, with the little projection provided demonstrating degrading footage: for example, Muslims burning books or forming threatening mobs, (Ahmed 1992, p. 228) or simple footage of large crowds of people in Arab dress, which suggests individual personality is non-existent and Arabs think and act only as group. The association between Jihad and the "global threat of Islam" all encourage Western society to fear Islam. (Bailie and Frank 1992, p. 83)) As a result of the media coverage of the recent resurgence of Islam and its associated extremists, the opinion has developed that the dichotomy between the West and non-West is based on the idea that the developed world is secular whilst the developing world is fundamentalist. The presence in the public eye of the 'global threat of Islam' acts to 'Orientalise' all followers of the religion, as well as any people suspected to be from the Orient and also surrounding areas. (Biswas *in* Chowdhry and Nair 2002, p. 188) This creates and emphasises an 'us' and 'them'

scenario, falsely cast, with repercussions being the difficulty in developing peaceful relationships between White and Asian populations, both in Britain and America.

Moreover, some would argue that the fundamental rules of Islam make it impossible for Muslims to co-habit peacefully in Western Society with non-Muslims. Tariq Ramadan argues against this, stating that Islam has always preached multi-culturalism between Muslims and non-Muslims; that it is the responsibility of the Muslims to take a pragmatic approach to these teachings, to allow an opportunity to experience greater diversity. Ramadan suggests that being present as an ethnic minority can be used as a strength; that by viewing Europe as a 'space of testimony' rather than an enemy it is possible to show responsibility to the non-Muslim others and educate them by accepting the differences of Islam whilst transcending the incompatibilities. (Mandaville 2003, p. 216) However, the opinion that it could be impossible altogether shows that dominant discourse presenting the possibility of the incompatibility of the Islamic and non-Islamic world overrides with the mis-representation of these ideas.

Suggestions that this secularisation is an inevitable consequence of modernization also perpetuate the view that Oriental cultures are less advanced and thus more primitive due to the national faith they follow, and question whether it is indeed possible to "embrace Western Technology without Western values" (Turner 1995, p. 8). Yet Britain is itself not strictly a 'secular' country, as demonstrated throughout the 'Rushdie Affair'. (Biswas *in* Chowdhry and Nair 2002, p. 196) Salman Rushdie published his views of shortcomings within British law, listing hypocrisies of blasphemy laws, the branding of Islam as 'fundamentalist, intolerant and fanatical' leading to bad treatment of Muslims through ignorance of the British public. He argued that Britain was a secular country who should accept all faiths, and embrace ethnic diversity. But the British response to this was the opposite to that intended – instead restricting further Muslim rights to prayer time at work, as Britain was overall a Christian state. It appears that Britain may take its secularisation for granted, using religion in defence only when its identity may be threatened. (ibid)

Secularisation of the modern world leads to a tendency to look down on religion in the developing world, therefore reproducing a "racialized and gendered construction of the

3rd world that was material effects for people of colour in the 1st and 3rd world." (Biswas *in* Chowdhry and Nair 2002, p. 200) The implication of all of these stereotypes have resulted in greater suspicion and tighter immigration regimes surrounding people appearing Asian, as well as retaliation attacks for any negative events thought to have been performed by Islamic extremists – for example, revenge attacks were carried out on mosques immediately after the Oklahoma bombings, for it only to be shown later that the incident was carried out by a 'home-grown', white, American bomber.

Representation will never be accurate because by its very nature it is biased – indeed, "the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of representations, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions and political ambience of the representor." (Said 2003, p. 272) As long as people continue to believe the representations provided by their Governments, so the Governments can continue to control those represented for their own political gains. The political implication of the negative stereotypes described above – naïve, lazy Indians; needy, incapable Africans; evil, tyrannical Arabs – is the perpetuation of the power balance between the West and the non-West. The Western governments can maintain their hegemony through the control of other governments, and continue to direct the dominant discourse and the repression of the non-West.

The link between these three examples is that of a lust for resources by the West – and so they exploit their non-West counterparts to gain these. Western knowledge of the rest of the world has been shaped by this greed for power, (Clifford 1988 p. 255) and gained through a struggle to obtain land. By 'othering' the non-West, and creating an 'us' and 'them' divide, the West creates an atmosphere in which arguably unethical actions against others seem more legitimate. But it is important to consider the consequences of such stereotyping on groups caught between the dichotomy of West and non-West – for example, what of the second and third generation Asian population in Britain? Caught between a Muslim home life and white peers they cannot relate fully to either group, and thus identity crisis is commonplace – and can be preyed on by extremists (http://digital.guardian.co.uk.ymogen.net/guardian/2007/05/12/pages/ber33.shtml). This misrepresentation will continue as long as the public continue to accept the stereotypes

created by these Western powers. The polarisation between the West and non-West must be removed, or at least, as Clifford states, "[all dichotomising events should] be held in suspicion" (1988, p. 255), through the questioning of representation and the demand for fairer treatment in the media and politics to allow the World to become more equal. It is important for the public to encourage this "norm against noticing" racist behaviour (Vitalis 2000, p. 332); but it is up to the government to alter the dominant discourse: to demonstrate that it is not only the non-West that are 'others' – to them, we as the West are 'others' also.

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