The Eclectic Identity as a Battlefield of Ideologies: Edward Said’s Orientalism and a Contrapuntal Reading of Rudyard Kipling’s Kim

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An example of a clash between two nations controlled by hostile discourses is the First War of Indian Independence, called also the Indian Rebellion and the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The ideologies underlying the conflict have determined many aspects of the relationship between India and Britain until our times, as well as inspired many great literary works. Three novels that describe the conflict from different viewpoints are Gora (1906) and The Home and the World (1916) by Rabindranath Tagore as well as Kim (1901) by Rudyard Kipling. The application of contrapuntal reading, a method proposed by Edward Said for the analysis of depiction of warring discourses in literature, to these novels shows the irrationality and cruelty of both colonial and nationalistic ideology. In addition, it demonstrates how people exposed to contradictory ideologies develop eclectic or hybrid identities and often an immunity to prejudice and propaganda.

Keywords: Edward Said, Orientalism, contrapuntal reading, colonial and post-colonial theory, Indian nationalism, British imperialism.

A discourse is “a system of statements within which and by which the world can be known;” thus, our response to the events is determined by the discourse that underlies our interpretation of facts. The depiction of clashing discourses, particularly in literary works, is often analyzed using colonial discourse theory, as well as its extension, post-colonial theory. Colonial discourse theory, discussed at length by Edward Said in Orientalism (1978), “refers to the examination and interpretation of particular colonial texts” and “points out the deep ambivalences of that discourse,”

as well as the way in which it constructs both colonizing and colonized subjects.”

In contrast, “post-colonial theory refers to the political and ideological position of the critic who undertakes this analysis” and “investigates … the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies, and the nature of those societies’ responses.” However, the same theories could be applied to expose not only colonial discourse but also all kinds of ideologies that classify people as superior Selves and inferior, subhuman Others. For instance, it might help detect covert colonization by any power, invasion of ideologies of any kind, “rabid nationalism”8 as the counter-wave of reaction to European conquests, and even radical religious indoctrination. Consequently, a person using these methods of analysis would resist ideological attacks and maintain integrity, objectivity, and rational thinking in the contemporary globalized, multicultural environment. In this study, to avoid controversial topics on which the readers might have ready opinions, the operation of warring discourses and their effects on the identities of involved people are explored using examples from a distant time and place, and namely, the clash of British imperialism and Indian nationalism in India about 150 years ago.

The two warring ideologies, British imperialism and Indian nationalism, developed during the colonization of India. Frequently, the terms “colonial” and “imperial” are used as synonyms because both involve conquest and subjugation of other peoples, while, in fact, they are often contradictory practices. Territories were colonized for the need of gold, raw materials, or living space; usually, this did not happen on political grounds, such as the contest between Spain and Britain for world supremacy. Colonialism, especially British and Dutch, seldom had much ideological basis; the territories were acquired by private trade companies for profit only. For example, India was conquered by the East India Company, a single private trade enterprise, and the Indian Empire appeared as a by-product of its activity; no cultural or religious mission was involved. The ideological basis of imperialism appeared in the late nineteenth century “to redeem the plunder of colonialism precisely at the moment when that plunder had been extended into a hegemonic world political system”; besides, it was neither stable nor definite. Young quotes Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, where the whole theory and practice of imperialism is epitomized in Marlow’s words:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the

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5 Kennedy, p. 11.
6 Ashcroft; Ahluwalia, p. 15.
9 Ibid., p. 25.
idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.¹⁰

Similarly, Kennedy defines imperialism as “ideological adjunct to empire”¹¹ whose mission was “to contribute historical insights into past exercises in overseas power that could be used to inform and inspire contemporaries to shoulder their obligations as rulers of a world-wide imperial system”.¹² Later, this ideology took over the lead and worldwide rule of some political system – rather than profit – became the priority, so “imperialism was a very inefficient form of economic exploitation”¹³ because it, being “subject to the paranoia of the world that is perpetually slipping from its grasp”,¹⁴ often neglected the practical interests of traders and settlers. One part of this new British ideology was religious, similar to Spanish missionary zeal in the Indies, and the other – mission civilisatrice, adopted from the French.¹⁵ These developed into the concepts of racial inferiority of the “niggers”, as soon all natives were called, and, consequently, of “the white man’s burden” – “despotic rule as a form of moral responsibility”¹⁶ the only way to bring the light of Western civilization to underdeveloped nations, who are unable to efficiently govern themselves. As a typical example of such reasoning, Chakrabarty quotes Alexander Dow’s History of Hindostan (1770–1772), in which the natives of Bengal are described as unable to live in freedom: “Their religion, their institutions, their manners, the very disposition of their minds, form them for passive obedience” in other words, they are born slaves and servants, adequate for subjecthood but never for citizenship.¹⁷

Often the idea of Western superiority was supported also by natives profiting from British institutions or receiving education in British schools; thus, some Indian nationalist intellectuals believed that “British rule was a necessary period of tutelage that Indians had to undergo in order to prepare precisely for what the British denied but extolled as the end of all history: citizenship and the nation state”.¹⁸ They needed European science, medicine, and technology; they adored the achievements of Western thought and worshipped the illusory picture of ideal West, often neglecting their own culture. The qualities of English were extolled; for example, in Bengali literature on women’s education of the nineteenth century, there was an assertion that “the British were powerful … because they were disciplined, orderly, and punctual in every detail of their lives, and this was made possible by the education of

¹⁰ Quoted in Young, p. 25.
¹¹ Kennedy, p. 10.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid., p. 27.
¹⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 30.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 38.
¹⁸ Ibid.
‘their’ women who brought the virtues of discipline into the home.”\(^\text{19}\) In the opinion of Gandhi, such overemphasis on Western values and achievements would make “English rule without the Englishman”.\(^\text{20}\) Another kind of reaction to British master narratives was violent, uncompromising nationalism, radical rejection of everything pertinent to the West, and worship of Mother India in the form of Kali-like goddess, Bande Mataram (Great Mother). This form of nationalism promoted massacres of British women and children, burning of European goods, and religious fanaticism. A somewhat milder form of it is depicted in Rabindranath Tagore’s novels *The Home and the World* and *Gora*.

Edward Said explored the operation of imperial discourse in language and culture as well as possible methods for its exposure and deactivation. A look at the theoretical underpinnings of his analysis shows that Edward Said was directly influenced by the works of Foucault and Gramsci, who examined the creation and functioning of various master narratives as well as the vicious circle of action and reaction caused by epistemological violence. One of basic concepts of the theory is hegemony, defined as “dominance by consent” by Marxist Antonio Gramsci: the ruling hegemony class, controlling the education, economy, and media, persuades the oppressed classes to support its interests. This power of persuasion is crucial in controlling vast colonized regions, when the conquerors are too few to maintain the control by force; instead, they promote their culture, which justifies the existence of the empire by establishing a seemingly natural hierarchy of values.\(^\text{21}\) According to Foucault, domination operates through language, because “discourse always involves a form of violence in the way it imposes its linguistic order on the world: knowledge has to conform to its paradigms in order to be recognized as legitimate”.\(^\text{22}\) One of most subtle but powerful ways these norms can be introduced, in Said’s view, is through literature as implied, unquestioned, and indisputable common knowledge, maintained by silent consent of wide masses of people, both the oppressors and the oppressed. The ideology does not even attract attention of the readers because it is not explicitly formulated or discussed; it creeps into the minds while the readers focus on the apparent content of the literary work, which presents quasi-realistic world that in fact is nothing else than embodiment of discourse.\(^\text{23}\) Thus, the duty of the intellectual, in Said’s view, is to expose master narratives embedded in various texts, because texts are ‘worldly’: read in historical, cultural, and social context, they affect people’s thinking, thus actively participating in the creation of the material reality of every moment. Furthermore, to deny a text’s influence on the material world is “to divorce the text, which is a cultural production, a cultural act, from the relations of power within it is produced”.\(^\text{24}\) Consequently, the aim of Edward Said is to unmask the “dense relationship between imperial aims and general national culture

\(^{19}\) Chakrabarty, p. 438.

\(^{20}\) Hind Swaraj, quoted in Chakrabarty, p. 435.

\(^{21}\) Chakrabarty, p. 44 and p. 85.

\(^{22}\) Young, p. 386.

\(^{23}\) Ashcroft; Ahluwalia, pp. 90–91.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 18.
that, in imperial centers such as Britain, is concealed by the tenacious and wide-spread rhetoric about the universality of culture.”

According to Said, the whole body of mono-cultural knowledge is built on the notion of national superiority; thus, even scholarly studies that appear objective and detached contribute to the creation of such discourse. In *Orientalism*, Said shows that the study of the Orient in Western universities is in no way purely theoretic or scholarly but rather an active attempt of the West “to impose itself on the peoples and cultures who came under its hegemonic sway.” Worst of all, the irreal image of Orient is created in some imaginary space from bits of agreed-on factual or fictitious previous knowledge about it, transferred from work to work in consecutive citations by European writers and scholars. Hence, the Orientalist attitude “shares with magic and mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter.” To shatter Western domination means first to deconstruct this self-sufficient Western discourse about the existence of Occident and Orient as separate, homogeneous entities, as it promotes “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures.” Because of this, “a white middle-class Westerner believes it is his human prerogative not only to manage the non-white world but also to own it, just because by definition ‘it’ is not quite as human as ‘we’ are.” Edward Said concludes, “There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought”.

However, if both Europeans and non-Europeans must be liberated from this ideological oppression, there is a danger that “a decolonizing culture, by becoming mono-nist in its rhetoric, often identifying strongly with religious or national fundamentalism, may tend to take over the hegemonic function of imperial culture”. In this way, the rise of some local resistance or even the “provincialization of Europe” is no valid solution of the problem. On the contrary, a method should be found for the widening of the narrow, arrogant worldview that obstructs the way to respect and understanding of other cultures; at the same time, this should not be done at the expense of losing own culture, nationality, identity, and self-respect. In particular, the stock images of the Orient and Occident, created and maintained by both East and West as lands of “imaginary geography”, “hyperreal terms”, or “no more than discursive phantasm”, hinder genuine understanding between cultures. It appears that a possible solution of this problem is promoting the understanding of the inherent danger of exposure to one-sided literature and one dominant mode of thought,

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25 Ashcroft; Ahluwalia, p. 90.
26 Kennedy, p. 12.
28 Ibid., p. 70.
29 Ibid., p. 7.
30 Ibid., p. 108.
31 Ashcroft; Ahluwalia, p. 88.
32 *Orientalism*, p. 49.
33 Chakrabarty, p. 428.
34 Kennedy, p. 12.
bringing in voices of those too long silenced, and critical attitude to any monologic representation. The argument that as the ultimate truth can never be known, no “truer” representation of other cultures is possible is equal to uncritical acceptance of any ideology, including pure racism. On the other hand, to justify the existence of imperialism, or any other discourse, by the fact that hegemony by its definition implies consent rather than brutal force means to excuse misinformation and propaganda, which might be called direct epistemological violence.

Some criticize Said that he does not show any alternative to colonial discourse; in fact, he does not introduce any monologic counter-discourse but rather proposes a method named contrapuntal reading, a qualitatively different procedure, in which several contradictory representations of the same event are juxtaposed and interwoven like musical themes in a symphony. As any attempt to judge a culture according to the values of some other would result in condemnation and disdain rather than in compromise, Edward Said proposes “to make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other” by “juxtaposing experiences with each other” and “letting them play off each other”. In other words, “contrapuntal reading is a technique of theme and variation by which a counterpoint is established between the imperial narrative and the post-colonial perspective” in the context of feelings and reactions of the colonized; accordingly, the embedded discourse becomes visible by the contrast. In this way, a polyphonic, rich, multifaceted representation is created, which might be the most precise image of reality human mind can create and process.

To read a work contrapuntally does not mean to “say glibly that there are two sides to every question” and avoid moral judgment by ambiguous talk; on the contrary, such reading focuses the attention exactly on the misunderstandings and contradictions between the cultures. In fact, cultures are interdependent and experiences of people, however different, overlap in some points; hence, there is no reason to give a separate status to each and claim that it cannot be understood by foreigners. Classification and division of nations as essentially different will inevitably lead to “a murderous imperial contest between them” and dialogue turn into “intellectual politics of blame”. Therefore, “we must be able to think through and interpret experiences that are discrepant, each with … its own internal formations, its internal coherence, and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others”. The acceptance of this discrepancy is culturally and politically important because, once exposed and understood, it loses its strength as the determining factor of the intercultural conflict; instead, it becomes simply a basis for

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35 Young, p. 391.
36 Ashcroft; Ahluwalia, p. 74.
37 Ibid., p. 33.
38 Ibid., p. 93.
39 Discrepant Experiences, p. 27.
40 Ibid., p. 32.
41 Ibid., p. 33.
42 Ibid., p. 28.
self-definition and beginning of the dialogue between nations, getting “beyond the reified polarity of East versus West”.  

In Said’s view, a good illustration of such a discrepancy is the contrast between the depiction of India in Kipling’s *Kim* and the real attitude of Indian independence movement to the Empire; thus, only such contrapuntal perspective can show the full impact and consequences of colonization. Superficially read, *Kim* indeed looks like an adventure story for boy scouts, something similar to *Peter Pan* or American frontier tales. However, the novel contains much more than the story of an Irish orphan, raised among natives in Lahore, who wanders all over India being a Tibetan lama’s disciple and a British intelligence agent at the same time. Said sees *Kim* as a classical ‘colonial’ text, oversaturated with imperial ideology, because Kipling shows no possibility of any anti-imperial resistance; the presence of empire seems natural, unquestionable, and eternal as the existence of air and water. Exactly this way of presentation, according to Said, makes the discourse most powerful and influential, because it is taken for granted and often enters the mind unnoticed. Indeed, Kipling’s *Kim* keeps outwardly silent about most political issues and realities of nineteenth-century India. For example, the very existence of Indian nationalism is never mentioned, Sepoy Mutiny treated as little important, and the reason and cause behind the plots of mountain princes that Kim helps destroy are never revealed; thus, in Kim’s world the explanation of politics is rather neglected.

The pro-imperial theme, noticed by Said, definitely appears in Kim’s thoughtless loyalty and acceptance of the existing order in the very beginning of the novel:

He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-Zammeh ... Who hold Zam-Zammeh, hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror’s loot. There was some justification for Kim – he had kicked Lala Dinanath’s boy off the trunnions, – since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English.  

Kim’s Englishness is unquestionable, though “he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song, Kim was white.” This boy “was hand in glove with men who led lives stranger than anything Haroun al Raschid dreamed of,” called “through all the wards... “Little Friend of all the World””. Being accepted by everyone, Kim feels comfortable in his world and enjoys its adventures. Playfully and casually, Kim delivers a secret message of British intelligence that uncovers mutiny plans of mountain princes; he is given the message by his friend Mahbub Ali, an Afghani horse-dealer. “But Kim did not suspect that Mahbub Ali ... was registered in one of the locked books of the Indian departments

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43 *Discrepant Experiences*, p. 35.
44 Ibid.
47 Ibid., Ch. 1.
However, Kim guesses the importance of the message and eavesdrops on the officers to discover its effect: “Every time before that I have borne a message it concerned a woman. Now it is men. The tall man said that they will loose a great army to punish some one – somewhere – the news goes to Pindi and Peshawur. There are also guns. Would I had crept nearer. It is big news!” The reaction of Kim is boyish pride in his own importance and complete lack of understanding what serious game with the lives of others he is playing. Thus Kim, by doing a little service to a friend, begins work for the intelligence service in India. He likes the feeling of danger and savours nimbleness and dexterity that help him survive and succeed; he works with people of all nationalities, whom he esteem and admires, united by the work for the Empire. Kim and those like him belong to no definite culture and support no definite cause; they perceive the world as an illusion, where all activities are games, all traditions equally inadequate, and identities changed like clothes. This thoughtless approval of violence seems the greatest danger to humanity.

The imperial ideology in its purest form shows in Kipling’s description of the retired soldier:

It was an old, withered man, who had served the Government in the days of the Mutiny as a native officer in a newly raised cavalry regiment. The Government had given him a good holding in the village he was still a person of consequence. English officials – Deputy Commissioners even – turned aside from the main road to visit him, and on those occasions he dressed himself in the uniform of ancient days and stood up like a ramrod.

This man takes pride in his being one of the few who stayed loyal to the English during the Mutiny, even at the price of being outcast among his people and killing his relatives for the sake of English; he is also proud of the medals and honours given him by the Empire and calls the Mutiny madness. Re-reading of the passage reveals the striking fact that of more than six hundred soldiers of the regiment, only three stay in British service, and these are called traitors by their companions and relatives; furthermore, the soldier has significantly profited from the British who have generously repaid him. Thus, he has been paid for turning against his own people; the novel, on the other hand, tells this story casually, as if his choice were matter-of-fact.

Kipling also shows a hill rani – an old, garrulous, ignorant but motherly lady used by a local woman as the right person “to dispense justice” because of her knowledge of “the land and the customs of the land.” In the opinion of this lady, “The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white women and learning our tongues from books, are worse than the pestilence. They do harm to kings” because “an ignorant young

49 Ibid., Ch. 2.
50 Ibid., Ch. 3.
51 Ibid.
policeman … had disturbed some small hill Rajah, a ninth cousin of her own, in the matter of a trivial land case.”^52

Apparently, everyone in the novel agrees that India should be ruled by Britain; the only problem is to find qualified people. In reality, there could have been such characters, because India was too vast to be ruled by the Britain by force. Many petty rajas supported British rule, and many people were happy to escape cast segregation, so the Mutiny of 1857 was suppressed mainly by the native army;^53 moreover, loyal talk was what the conquerors expected to hear, so they did. Thus, Kipling might have been telling the truth about his Indian experience, and cannot be blamed for conscious propaganda. However, a large part of the picture is missing in his picture of India, and no English sources of Kipling’s time contain it. Openly nationalistic writings did not appear until India gained independence; furthermore, as few Indians of the time spoke their mind to the conquerors, the ideology and mentality of the movement for Indian independence stayed hidden to the British, who came in contact only with the results, namely, violence during riots and uprisals.^54

A look from the Indian perspective reveals that not everybody liked British rule; for example, mountain princes whose “treacherous” plot Kim helps to ruin, have strong reasons to act as they do, are supported by wide masses of people, and gather armies to fight the invaders. This picture is completed by Trevelyan’s attempt to explain why a European is feared, despised, and attacked by Hindus:

They must be perfectly alive to the knowledge that we have conquered them, and are governing them in a more systematic and downright manner than they have ever been governed before. But, on the other hand, many of our usages must appear in their eyes most debased and revolting. It is difficult to imagine the horror with which a punctilious and devout Brahmin cannot but regard a people who eat the flesh of cow and pig, and drink various sorts of strong liquors from morning till night. It is at least as hard for such a man to look up to us as his betters, morally and socially, as it would be for us to place among the most civilized nations of the world a population which was in the habit of dining on human flesh, and intoxicating itself daily with laudanum and salvolatile… With this impression on his mind the Bengal sepoy desired with a nervous and morbid anxiety to get quit of the Sahibs by fair means or foul…he had convinced himself that, if once the Anglo-Indians of every sex and age were killed off …there did not exist the wherewithal to replace them.^55

Wives, sisters, and mothers of those rebel princes little resembled the rani described by Kipling. In fact, many of them inspired the freedom struggle; they lacked

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^52 Kim, Ch. 3.
^53 Young, p. 38.
neither proper education nor martial training and respected by men. “Young brave queen of Jhansi”, Lakshmi Bai, used to wear military clothes and lead men in battle during the Mutiny of 1857. She “died fighting the British on the battlefield” in “an honest attempt to resist misrule and injustice of the British, who were bent on expanding their colonial interests in India, by harming the native rulers and the ruled alike.”\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, Begum Hazrat Mahal, the wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow, hated the British bitterly, so she became one of the leaders of 1857 Mutiny.

There seem to be no literature about private life and feelings of these ladies; the closest approach to their mentality could be Tagore’s \textit{The Home and the World}, written in the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, in which a local leader’s wife, Bimala, becomes a fanatic of Indian independence. In the novel, she describes her conversion: “My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age... as soon as the \textit{Swadeshi} [independence movement] storm reached my blood.”\textsuperscript{57} She wishes to burn all her foreign clothes, turns out a friend, Miss Gilby, just because she is English, and blames her husband for not being passionate nationalist, while he simply favours rational action.\textsuperscript{58}

Sandip Babu, a nationalist activist, adores Bimala as an embodiment of Mother India – feminine, irrational, and cruel; in a conversation with him, she expresses her credo:

\begin{quote}
I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I would be angry for my country’s sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga – for whom I would redden the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine.

Sandip Babu leapt to his feet with uplifted arms and ... cried: “\textit{Bande Mataram.” [O Great Mother!]}

Sandip Babu cried out: “See ... how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows how to be cruel: her virulence is like a blind storm. It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly, because it harbours in its centre the gnawing worms of reason and thought. I tell you, Nikhil, it is our women who will save the country. This is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin. We must give our women red sandal paste with which to anoint and enthrone our sin.”\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{57} Tagore, Rabindranath. \textit{The Home and the World}. London: Macmillan, 1919, Ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., Ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Home and the World}, Ch. 2.
Such India does not even enter the world of Kim; neither is there fear of cruelty and actual bloodshed, for the terror of the English awaiting their fate in 1857 seems to be entirely forgotten. As if belonging to a different India, Trevelyean describes how the tension mounted shortly before the Mutiny. Sepoys kept saying to each other “Soon everything is to become red” and sending to neighbors the innocent present of two chupatties, or bannocks of salt and dough, which form the staple food of the population,” in fact, a “far-famed token, the fiery cross of India” meaning revolution, while English wives and mothers prepared to meet their end bravely and wrote last letters to their relatives. An excerpt from such letter says,

Mrs. Hillersdon is delightful. Poor young thing, she has such a gentle spirit, so unrummuring, so desirous to meet the trial rightly, unselfish and sweet in every way. She has two children, and we feel that our duty to our little ones demands that we should exert ourselves to keep up health and spirits as much as possible.

Trevelyean comments, “That is the temper with which the mothers of Englishmen should die, if die they must.” What followed this suspense is described in a characteristic passage about 1857 Mutiny in Lucknow, when Indians

… had torn infants from their mothers’ breasts, and bayoneted the babes before their eyes … the floor was still black with congealed blood … the walls were covered with bloody finger-marks of little babies and children and delicate hands of wounded females.

However, Kipling casually remarks that when Kim first comes to Lucknow, his native guide describes the buildings of the city, while an English guide would have spoken only about the Mutiny. Is it true, then, as Said puts it, that Kipling is trying to create an illusion of India as an open, welcoming, and harmless country – or is it a common delusion of British who simply fear to face the horror? This question is hard to answer; anyways, the reader must take notice of Kipling’s audience – who would not have tolerated any hint to taboo matters or unconventional approach to Anglo-Indian politics – and blame Kipling less. It might have not been possible to write otherwise.

Yet, not only Edward Said, but also most of the contemporary readers, used to pluralism and freedom of expression, fail to notice how far Kipling, being British and living among the British, has gone in his defence of people and culture of India.

60 Trevelyean, p. 59.
61 Ibid., p. 60.
62 Ibid., p. 72.
63 Ibid.
64 Ruutz Rees, qtd. in Felter, n. p.
65 Kim, Ch. 8, n. p.
66 Culture and Imperialism, p. 192.
Kipling, in fact, almost risked his reputation, because “going native” was scorned by his countrymen. It might be that Kim is never shown in love because relationship with an English girl would oblige him to give up his native friends and the native part of his identity, as it happens in Kipling’s short story “Miss Youghal’s Sais”. Strickland, an English policeman in India who likes to mix with the natives, may marry a girl he loves only on the condition that he never comes too close to them again, not even with the excuse of gathering evidence for his work. Strickland suffers, “for the streets and the bazaars, and the sounds in them, were full of meaning to Strickland, and these called him to come back and take up his wanderings and discoveries.” Kim would never be able to become only English; he says, “I’m not a Sahib…To the madrissah I will go. At the madrissah I will learn. In the madrissah, I will be a Sahib. But when the madrissah is shut, then must I be free and go among my people. Otherwise I die!” On the other hand, loving a native girl would seem abnormal to Kipling’s readers; at that time, a novel showing interracial marriage was received with indignation and disdain.

This unusual loyalty and respect to India becomes apparent only when the novel is read against the background of other colonial literature. Racism, cries to exterminate the Oriental race, slanderous descriptions of ‘nigger’ habits, common in English literature of the time, never appear in Kim. First of all, Kim does not express contempt to the natives, and even makes fun of a drummer boy who knows nothing about India, calls all Hindus “niggers”, and understands no vernacular: “servants and sweepers called him abominable names to his face, and, misled by their deferential attitude, he never understood.” On the contrary, Kim even apologizes to Mahbub, “They say at the madrissah that no Sahib must tell a black man that he has made a fault … but … I am not a Sahib, and I say I made a fault when I cursed thee, Mahbub Au [uncle] … I was senseless.” Kim loves his guru [master or teacher], Tibetan lama, with all his heart and defends him, proudly declaring, “He is not a faquir. He is not a down-country beggar … He is the most holy of holy men. He is above all castes. I am his chela [disciple].” When Mahbub hints that Kim, a student at the prestigious St. Xavier’s, might be ashamed to sit in dust with the lama in front of the school, “A beggar and his bowl in the presence of those young Sa–,” the boy retorts indignantly, in advance calling names any boy who would make fun at him, “Their eyes are blued and their nails are blackened with low-caste blood many of them. Sons of meheeranees [low-caste women] –brothers-in-law of the bhungi [sweeper].” Furthermore, Kim has little respect to Europeans and little wish to live

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68 Kim, Ch. 8.
69 Felter, n. p.
70 Ibid.
71 Kim, Ch. 6.
72 Kim, Ch. 8.
73 Kim, Ch. 4.
74 Kim, Ch. 8.
as they do. He sees them as fools with “dull fat eyes”\textsuperscript{75} wearing torturing clothes that “cripple body and mind alike”, eating insipid food, and having no joy in life.\textsuperscript{76}

In addition, *Kim* is surprisingly liberal in the description of religious and ceremonial matters. This attitude, common in our time, was almost scandalous at the end of the nineteenth century. One can only wonder how the book was not banned for a passage like the following, “He showed nothing of what was in his mind when Father Victor, for three long mornings, discoursed to him of an entirely new set of gods and godlings – notably of a goddess called Mary, who, he gathered, was one with Bibi Miriam of Mahbub Ali’s theology”\textsuperscript{77} and describing God’s ministers as “the camel-like fool” and “the fat fool” to the lama.\textsuperscript{78} Kim’s vision of European rituals and authorities borders with downright mockery:

> For aught he knew, and Kim’s limitations were as curious and sudden as his knowledges, the men, the nine hundred *pukka shaitans* [proper devils – soldiers] of his father’s prophecy, might pray to the beast [the Red Bull of the regiment banner] after dark, as Hindus pray to the image of the Holy Cow. That, at least, would be entirely right and logical, and the padre with the gold cross would be therefore the man to consult in the matter … It was as he suspected. The Sahibs prayed to their god; for in the centre of the mess-table – its sole ornament when they were on the line of march – stood a golden bull fashioned from old-time loot of the Summer Palace at Pekin – a red-gold bull with lowered head, stamping upon a field of Irish green. To this god the Sahibs held out their glasses and cried aloud confusedly.\textsuperscript{79}

In the novel, no religious preference is shown at all; characteristically, Kim’s own religion remains indefinite: “What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard nut.” The answer of Mahbub expresses an opinion, often repeated in the novel:

> Thou art beyond question an unbeliever, and therefore thou wilt be damned. So says the *Canoon* of my Law – or I think it does. But thou art also my Little Friend of all the World, and I love thee. So says my heart. This matter of creeds is like horseflesh. … Each has merit in its own country.\textsuperscript{80}

Christianity plays little role and is defamiliarized in the novel; on the other hand, Buddhist wisdom in lama’s words accompanies every event. He advises Kim not to become soldier, saying, “These men only follow desire and come to emptiness.

\textsuperscript{75} *Kim*, Ch. 7.
\textsuperscript{76} *Kim*, Ch. 6.
\textsuperscript{77} *Kim*, Ch. 7.
\textsuperscript{78} *Kim*, Ch. 5.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} *Kim*, Ch. 8.
Thou must not be of this sort,” comments on the rule of desires and passions over people, “And they are all bound upon the Wheel … from life after life. To none of these has the Way been shown”, and summarizes his opinion of this world, “Alas! It is a great and terrible world.” In addition, the lama is openly presented as equal to any Christian priest, and this position is defended, especially in the scene with the Russians who want to buy his drawing of the Wheel:

The lama, of course, would no more have parted with his chart to a casual wayfarer than an archbishop would sell the holy vessels of a cathedral. All Tibet is full of cheap reproductions of the Wheel; but the lama was an artist, as well as a wealthy abbot in his own place … The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out half a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama’s grip.

Next, Kipling shows how the disrespectful actions of the Russian cause a rebellion of native servants, good Buddhists, thus stressing the lama’s high status.

Such involvement in the life of natives and acceptance of their values is exceptional, if compared to examples shown in other colonial literature, including even other works of Kipling himself. For example, to Strickland knowledge of the native life is both a source of amusement and a weapon: “He held the extraordinary theory that a policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves”, so the natives “hated Strickland; but they were afraid of him. He knew too much”. Thus, Strickland is similar to travellers described by Said in Orientalism, such as Burton, Lawrence, Lane, and others, who explore and report, but never, even partially, identify themselves with the natives. In contrast, for Kim life with natives is no “outlandish custom” or “particular amusement” for it is his own way of life. Kim is the new hero, half Irish and half Indian, adapted to live and rule in India, his only home. Kipling enumerates both Kim’s Oriental and Irish qualities; nevertheless, Kim’s strong side appears to be his eclectic being. For instance, he resists hypnosis and irrational fear by thinking in English, being able to tolerate hunger, fatigue, and perpetual travel like an Oriental. Still, the boy keeps questioning himself, “Who is Kim – Kim – Kim?”, in a Buddhist meditation failing to solve “the tremendous puzzle”.

A similar story of double identity is told in the Indian counterpart of Kipling’s Kim, Rabindranath Tagore’s novel Gora (first published in Bengali between 1907

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81 Kim, Ch. 5.
82 Kim, Ch. 4.
83 Kim, Ch. 2.
84 Kim, Ch. 13.
85 Sais, p. 87.
86 Sais, p. 88.
87 Ibid.
88 Kim, Ch. 9.
89 Kim, Ch. 11.
and 1909), which is believed to be written as a response to Kipling. The novel tells the story of an orphan, adopted by a Brahman family. The boy does not know that his real parents were Irish killed in 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, believes that he is Brahman, and observes all restrictions and rites of Hindu orthodoxy; moreover, he is a fervent Indian nationalist. He is told the truth during a serious illness of his adoptive father because Gora has no right to perform the funeral rites, not being Brahman by birth. Being an outcaste, Gora is not able to live as an orthodox Hindu, so he loses his religion; however, he retains his love to India and never tries to return to the English. Thus, Tagore explores an alternative version of Kim’s story, based on Indian nationalistic ideology instead of the imperial discourse. In a parallel reading of both novels, these contradictory ideologies destroy the impact of each other, appearing shallow and ridiculous in their dogmatic approach.

Such reading also exposes a surprising common trait of Kim and Gora, their eclectic identity that frees them from restrictions obligatory to mono-mental people and their un-belonging to any society or hierarchy resulting in extraordinary freedom to bring about change. People like them can transgress rules and return to the basic humanity, as they understand and reject prejudices of both sides. For example, Gora, having lost his Brahman identity, is at last able to express his sympathy to a Christian outcaste servant, considered unclean by the orthodox Hindus, and accept a glass of water from her hands. He enjoys being free from caste-judgment and contempt, free to live and love. At the same time, Gora is more Indian than the natives are because he is able to see the essential things while they often concentrate on formalities and rituals. Likewise, “Kim’s hero is Irish; in spite of an effort of British-style schooling, throughout the book he is more “Indian” than any of the natives, who remain irretrievably local”. In their complex, unusual relationship with their foster-homeland, they are both colonized and colonizers, indeterminate products of intercultural mixing, bound by love to their only relatives – adoptive parents. Such an “impossible Irish/Indian foreigner” scorns both “loyal colonial subjects” and white intruders. Spivak sees Gora as having almost magic power to change and fight the evil, immune because un-belonging, indefinite, error. Thus, both Gora and Kim are characteristic postcolonial figures of indefinite identity who belong to the space between two worlds rather than to two worlds simultaneously. They are comfortable in this “in-between”, because it gives yet inexperienced freedom of non-belonging and non-obeying various hierarchy and caste rules that are obligatory to the natives. It appears, “as if Gora himself can usher in Indian modernity because he is not legitimate, a fictively produced foster-child”. This appears to be the only

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92 Resident Alien, p. 53.
93 Resident Alien, p. 54.
94 Resident Alien, p. 53.
95 Resident Alien, p. 58.
96 Resident Alien, p. 48.
97 Resident Alien, p. 8.
possible answer to Kim’s question, “Who is Kim?” – Or, more precisely, “Who must be Kim?”

Comparing the situation described in Kipling’s and Tagore’s novels to the realities of the contemporary world, it appears that what was an exception then has become a rule today. Many are caught between two warring ideologies just like Kim and Gora because of multicultural marriages or emigration; in addition, travel and free access to information from the whole world expose people to extremely different mentalities and opinions. Today, juxtaposition of various value systems leaves one lost in a labyrinth of contradictory axioms, chasing the mirage of final truth. The traditional concept of monocultural identity is challenged as well, as “in a world tied together as never before by the exigencies of electronic communication, trade, travel, … the assertion of identity is by no means a mere ceremonial matter”.\(^98\) Doing it the wrong way might be “especially dangerous,” as “it can mobilize passions atavistically”.\(^99\) Yet, learning to display one’s identity in a way that would not lead to conflicts with people holding different opinions needs a proper understanding of their views that leads to co-existence of at least two value systems in one mind.

Thus, the application of analysis demonstrated in this study appears to be no more an academic matter but rather an everyday survival skill. In addition, the formation of Kim- or Gora-like mentality that is based on conscious or subconscious reasoning of this kind might be both the inevitable result of life in multicultural environment and the optimal solution for survival and success. The habit of continuous ‘contrapuntal reading’ of all that is seen, heard, and read might be highly useful to avoid following age-old prejudice, falling into ideological traps, and trusting propaganda. At the same time, a composite, hybrid, or eclectic identity embodies the awareness of master narratives that govern the warring sides, as the Other is no more some distant exotic creature but often one’s own \textit{alter ego}, arguing inside one’s own mind. This kind of multiculturalism, paradoxically, might help to retain both sanity and national identity; however complex and cumbersome such a way of thinking would seem, it might be the most proper in our globalized world.

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\(^98\) \textit{Discrepant Experiences}, pp. 31–32.
\(^99\) \textit{Ibid.}\n


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