Antti Klemola SSEAS BA Thesis 2024

Klemola, Antti

Representation of Sherpas in mountaineering narratives

Bachelor Thesis South and Southeast Asian Studies

A.J. Klemola

S1628976

Content

Chapter 1: Introduction

As the highest mountain on earth, Mount Everest in the Himalayas is a source for special fascination in the world of mountaineering. Due to weather conditions in such extreme altitude, the time window for summit attempts is only roughly a week in late May and another short period after summer monsoon in September. As the May window is considered more reliable, most climbers try their luck at Everest in May. For these reasons the events on Mt. Everest are closely followed by mountaineering media, particularly during the spring season, and 2013 wasn't an exception. That year, however, the stories were not about the usual excitement of climbers at the basecamp, successful summit attempts or tragedies of deceased climbers pursuing their dreams, but a brawl between Sherpas, members of an ethnic group from the Solu-Khumbu region of Nepal, who were hired by commercial climbing outfits, and three professional Western climbers.

The proverbial snowball started to roll when a group of Sherpa specialists, commonly known as icefall doctors, were in process of fixing essential ropes on the route ahead for their clients, a group of three Western climbers passed them while climbing on their own route on the mountain. It had been previously agreed that when a route was being prepared, nobody else was permitted to climb on the same part of the mountain. This was to provide safety for the icefall doctors. Opinions over what exactly happened vary, but what is agreed on is that the Sherpas and the Westerners had an aggressive argument on the mountain, and in the heat of the moment one of the Westerners insulted the Sherpas in their native tongue, after which the Sherpas decided to leave their work unfinished and return to camp II.

The three Western climbers then laid the ropes on behalf of the Sherpas, and upon their return to the camp the situation further escalated. Sherpas who often receive words of praise from Westerners for their generosity, hospitality and cheerfulness, had decided to stand up for their rights and demanded that the safety protocols that are put to place in order to provide safety for the workers in the most treacherous parts of the mountain were respected. What followed is nowadays commonly known as the "Everest Brawl", a fight between a large group of Sherpas and three Westerner climbers.

Tensions in the camp grew and did not ease before the three Western climbers fled from the mountain. The season, however, continued with a string of successes resulting in a record number of 633 successful summit bids in 2013. Whereas the Sherpas remained on the mountain, and focused on their work, the Western climbers, who were forced to give up on their plans for the season, gave bitter interviews about the events on the mountain as high-profile professionals and mountaineering celebrities. They accused the Sherpas of violent and dangerous behaviour, and downplayed their own role in the conflict. The Sherpas' perspective of the brawl was only published several months later, emphasising the disparity of common mountaineering narratives, in which the attention is on the Westerner climbers while Sherpas often are there only to provide support for the protagonists.

The issues and events that had led to the brawl were not addressed after the successful climbing season. Despite Nepali government's initial promises of deploying a team of security officials at the basecamp for the coming seasons, such plan did not come to fruition. The issues were instead

swept under the rug, possibly in the vain hope of these matters correcting themselves on their own over time. But the 2014 season on Everest proved to be even more dreadful. An avalanche in the Khumbu icefall killed thirteen Sherpas and three Nepalis of other ethnic groups. Following these tragic events, Sherpas issued a list of demands in order to improve their working conditions and threatening to end the climbing season with a strike before any attempts to the summit were made.

It has been suggested that the reason why this conflict unfolded the way it did, might have been a consequence of the either leaving the brawl unresolved or perhaps even years of tension building up between Sherpas and foreigners due to lack of recognition for their essential work and unquestionable achievements as mountaineers. Negotiations over the demands did not bear any fruit and eventually the 2014 climbing season on the Nepali side of Everest was, for the first time ever, called off by Sherpas. The events of 2013 and 2014 have been well depicted in various news media outlets as well as Jennifer Peedom's 2015 documentary film *Sherpa* and Mark Horrell's 2016 book *The Everest Politics Show*. In these materials a new notion of "militant Sherpa" emerges as a contradiction to the stereotypical representation of Sherpas that has been constructed over and over again in numerous accounts of Himalayan mountaineering.

In the West Sherpas have been closely associated with mountaineering since Western expeditions in the Himalayas began in 1921 with the British Mount Everest reconnaissance expedition. As the body of literature on Everest climbs is vast, the representations of Sherpas are too numerous to compile for the scope of this paper, but for the sake of my argument I will turn to Sherry Ortner's meritorious book, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest* (1999), which focuses on

relationships between Sherpas and foreigners on Himalayan mountaineering in the 20th century. Some of the stereotypes Ortner mentions, include but are not limited to: kindness, generosity and good nature (Ortner 1999, 276). Ortner also notes, these stereotypes, as the Himalayan mountaineering itself, have changed alongside with the social backgrounds, gender assumptions and structures of desires of both foreigners and Sherpas (Ortner 1999, 23) in the course of the 20th century.

Some of these stereotypes carry a patronising tone, such as 'childlike', 'irrational' or 'primitive' (Ortner 1999, 53), whereas others may be of seemingly positive nature. Problem, however, is that even these positive stereotypes may seem like rewards that are gifted to those Sherpas whose work has most benefited the mountaineering industry often run by foreigners, whereas those Sherpas, who prioritise their own desires and interests ahead of those of the Westerners, or the "mutual" interest, which is often defined by the Westerner's needs, are prone to receive less favourable reactions.

Positive stereotypes, such as 'kind' or 'loyal', often directly refer to Sherpas' usefulness on the expeditions. Since the early 20th century Sherpas have also been known as 'Tigers of the Snow', a nickname given to them as a reward for their excellent performance and loyalty on early British Himalayan expeditions, and ever since their loyalty has been praised for, whereas resistance has been met with discontent, as I will discuss in chapter 3.

The problem is not that these stereotypes are completely out of touch with reality or lack any accuracy, but rather that they have been constructed over decades without many critical

questions asked about the objectives of these authors, or Sherpas having much to say about the way they have been represented for that matter. As Ortner puts it:

> "The second question concerns the power of representations. If sahibs represent Sherpas in certain ways more consistent with their own fantasies and needs than with Sherpa "reality" […] and if at the same time the sahibs have power over the Sherpas then to what extent might sahib representations come to impose themselves on Sherpa reality?" (Ortner 1999, 56)

Both Sherry Ortner (1997 & 1999) and Vincanne Adams (1996) recognise the Orientalist tones of these representations. Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) is a seminal book in the field of post-colonial studies that challenges the Western created representations of Asia and Asians based on stereotypes that have their origins, not unlike that of Himalayan mountaineering, in long tradition of British imperialism, colonial art, literature and academic work. Underlying attitude of Orientalist representations is:

> "The exteriority of the representations is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux,* for the poor Orient." (Said 1978, 21)

These stereotypes then reproduce themselves in contemporary narratives and strengthen the imagined and exaggerated distinctions between "The East" and "The West", which are portrayed as each other's polar opposites.

Sherpa agency in academic literature

Sherpas have played a crucial part in majority of the Everest expeditions since the early 20th century (Ortner 1999, 11). The position of Sherpas may have improved over the decades from mere coolies to more skilled and respected high-altitude guides, but the colonial undertone of the early 20th century expeditions still echoes in deeply rooted orientalist attitudes in today's commercial climbing.

Ortner (1999) approaches these issues by making a difference between Sherpas and *sahibs* (non-native, often Western, often male) The term sahib (originally a Hindi term, meaning "master" or "boss") has not been used by Sherpas since the 1970's according to Ortner, but Ortner herself uses it since it is "a handy one-word tag for the international mountaineers". It frames sahibs, like their Sherpa counterparts, as categories of people under ethnographic scrutiny and finally emphasises the imbalance of power between sahibs and Sherpas on expeditions (Ortner 1999, 6-7).

Sherpas have been so crucial to Himalayan mountaineering that their name has become synonymous with Himalayan jacks of all trades. This can also be understood from Ortner's division between capitalized Sherpas (Nepalese ethnic group) and lower-case sherpas (a role within climbing expeditions, which can include tasks such as carrying loads, cooking and guiding, which can also be taken by a members of ethnic groups other than Sherpas) (Ortner 1999, 11-13). This should be also kept in mind as a limitation of this paper; from the materials it is impossible to say whether or not the authors have made mistakes when discussing these

categories. This issue is further complicated, as Frydenlund (2019) points out, that despite Sherpas being subordinate to sahibs on commercial expeditions, the status of Sherpas as benevolent collaborators on the expeditions gives them certain privileges, both financial as well as social, in the eyes of sahibs over other ethnic groups, such as Tamangs, making Sherpa identity more desirable or beneficial for non-Sherpa Nepalis.

Ortner researches the fluid relationship between Sherpas and sahibs in the context of mountaineering as an enterprise of mutual dependence and cultural conflict in an environment of heightened risk. Ortner argues that risk in mountain climbing narratives; the awareness that not all those who attempt to summit the mountain come back alive to tell their story, creates value for the ones who do. The risks, however, have not been divided evenly, with Sherpas being responsible for the highest risk tasks, while often rendered invisible in mountaineering literature. Foreign mountaineering outfits often justify their use of Sherpas as an arrangement that benefits both parties. The compensation Sherpas receive on Everest is reported to be up to ten times the average yearly salary in Nepal. So on Nepalese standards their compensation is good, and therefore Sherpas have for decades been quietly playing the second fiddle, while their sahib counterparts have, in terms of both fame and fortune, benefited disproportionately of this having the centre stage in mountaineering narratives.

Vincanne Adams has also researched the interplay between Sherpas and sahibs in her 1996 book *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas*. Adams argues that "authentic" or "ideal" Sherpa identity is only a little more than a mirage created in the process she calls *syncretic mimesis*, in which Sherpas, to their best ability, attempt to fulfil Sahibs' expectations, which have been

shaped as a long intertextual process. In Sherpas sahibs see their polar opposite, subalterns who can help the sahibs to reach their true potential (Adams 1996, 18-19). Ortner, however, disagrees with Adams and claims that Sherpas have, throughout the history of Himalayan mountaineering, pursued to improve their living conditions by their own agency and used resistance in order to achieve their own goals (Ortner 1999, 58).

Ortner's and Adams' ethnographies were written in the 1990's, which were still early years of commercial climbing, but relatively little has been written about Sherpas in the 21st century. Since the writing of those ethnographies, popularity of Everest mountaineering, as well as tourism in Solu-Khumbu overall, have both grown fast. In this thesis I will examine some 21st century Everest mountaineering narratives, but with special attention given to the eventful years 2013 and 2014. I have chosen a documentary film, a book and newspaper and online magazine articles as my source materials, with the research question '*how are Sherpas represented in recent Everest mountaineering narratives, and why?'.*

I will also research the brawl and strike as examples of long tradition of Sherpa agency and resistance and how this has been at odds with the traditional Western representations of Sherpas. Furthermore what kind of role the conflict of interest between Sherpas and sahibs has played in these narratives.

Chapter 2: Orientalism in Everest narratives

In this chapter I will focus on relationship between Sherpas and sahibs, based on early 21st century narratives, focusing on events that took place during two particularly turbulent seasons in 2013 and 2014. In order to analyse these events I will first give Everest mountaineering narratives some historical context, in attempt to understand the nature of these narratives that still emerge from Everest today.

To begin with, I will borrow an anecdote from Bruce Barcott's essay "Cliffhangers" (1996) in which he reviews several contemporary mountaineering books, but also analyses the relationship between mountaineering itself and the narratives it produces:

> "To this day mountain climbing remains the most literary of all sports. No other activity so compels its participants, from the international star to the weekend scrambler, to turn each personal conquest into public tale. […] Mountaineering's greatest athletes are also the genre's best-selling authors. A mountain climb is a ready-made narrative, perfectly suited to story. The characters gather at low altitude and encounter increasingly perilous situations on their way up; some may die. In the end they snatch glory on the mountaintop or turn back, humbled by the brutal force of nature. End of story." (Barcott 1996, 65)

The exception in this case being Sherpas who regardless of their undisputed achievements on Everest; namely Kami Rita Sherpa's record breaking 26 successful summit bids, Lhaka Ghelu Sherpa's fastest ever ascent or Babu Chiri Sherpa's 21 hours spent at the summit, have only

recently started to receive wider recognition within the world of mountaineering instead of them being just anonymous aides for Western mountaineers.

For decades Sherpas on media were limited to the story of Tenzing Norgay, whose biography was ghostwritten by James Ramsey Ullman, and has later on been told by Tenzing's offspring. In 1953 Norgay, together with Sir Edmund Hillary, cemented his name in the mountaineering history by marking the first ascent of Everest. And while through the story of Tenzing, Sherpas have become internationally known, it is, as mountaineering writer Ed Douglas remarks, also the story of Tenzing as a part of the expedition that made the first summit, told with the mouths of the sahibs, that is one of the earliest sources of widely disseminated Sherpa representations: "That's the moment when the word Sherpa has the meaning of brand in the way that we understand it. The world was captivated by Tenzing, and he fixed in our minds the popular image of a Sherpa, as this smiling, friendly, almost heroic figure." (Peedom 2015)

I have picked a few examples of Sherpa representations before Tenzing from Sir Francis Younghusband's book *The Epic of Mount Everest The Historic Account of Mallory's Expeditions* to give an idea of the underlining attitudes of early expeditions and what kind of origins the Sherpa stereotypes emerge from:

> "And they would be paid well, fed well, equipped well - and also ruled well, so that by the childish indulgences to which they are prone they would not risk the success of the expedition. In this part of Himalaya there are plenty of hardy, cheery men, not very venturesome on their own initiative, but ready enough to join an adventure when

> someone would lead them. Among the Sherpas of Eastern Nepal are many such." (Younghusband, 1926, 23)

In the spirit of Saidian Orientalism expertise on the topic of Sherpas is held by a sahib, C.G. Bruce, who had accumulated knowledge about Sherpas which legitimised his authority on the expedition.

> "And he [C.G. Bruce] had such a knowledge of these hill peoples, such an understanding of them, such a way with them, that he could get more out of them that any other living man. He was devoted to them and they adored him. And as the English climbers would be absolutely dependent on these men to carry a light camp high enough to make the final dash for the top possible, Bruce's influence with them was of priceless value to the expedition. And the same characteristics which enabled him to exert this influence with the simple hill men made him also an ideal leader of any expedition." (Younghusband, 1926, 70)

The problem of absence of Sherpa voice even today is underlined by Garrett Madison in Outside Online 2013, 30 April: "As this story has emerged in the media it has become clear that the Sherpas have not been given a voice. The press releases, the blogging, and reports from the European climbers have dominated the headlines." (Madison 2013) A small deviation on this issue can be seen in Bangkok Posts headline of the brawl: "Foreign climbers blamed for Everest brawl", perhaps as a token of pan-Asian solidarity from Thailand, that has had its own problematic love-hate relationship with foreign tourists.

Regardless of the lack of Sherpa voices Barcott's claim of mountaineering as "the most literary of all sports" seems reasonable. Even if it will most likely pale in comparison to some more popular sports, such as football, the amount of literature on mountaineering is vast, particularly when seen in proportion to the limited number of mountaineering enthusiasts.

The existence of Sherpas in the minds of Western audience is heavily based on their representations in these mountaineering narratives. For a minority comprising of roughly half a million people in Nepal, their international claim to fame is truly a remarkable achievement. But it has given Sherpas more than just international recognition, Sherpa participation in mountaineering has granted them "extraordinary gains in their position" (Ortner 1999, 4). However how the Sherpas have been represented in these narratives have mostly been out of their control, and how the role of Sherpas is seen by their sahib counterparts, may be the root cause for the brawl and strike.

In late 1990's Ortner made a remark of the mountaineering: "But Himalayan mountaineering was originally, and is still, for the most part, defined by the international mountaineers. It is their sport, their game, the enactment of their desires." (Ortner 1999, 4) Same applies to my source material as well, which for the most part is written by Westerners for Western audiences and, save for rare few exceptions, provides the opinions and perspectives of Western climbers and represent their desires.

But besides Said's Orientalism as a theoretical framework, I would also like to acknowledge Patricia Purtschert's (2020) notion of mountaineering reports as colonial literature. In her article

"*White masculinity in the death zone: transformations of colonial identities in the Himalayas*". Purtschert divides the structure of these reports into three parts: journey to the basecamp, beginning of the ascent and dramatic closing phase of the ascent.

> "The first part depicts the journey and the approach to the basecamp. This sequence often serves to frame the expedition in an exoticizing way: foreign food and drinks, unknown rituals, practices of praying, forms of family and kinship, and costumes and mannerisms of the so-called natives are described extensively. This part of the text is full of colonial references to adventure and ethnological literature, often incorporating popularised elements of racial research, and references to women and children." (Purtscher 2020, 32)

The two latter parts, according to Purtschert, have a different kind of nature, as they shift from "colourful portrayal of exotic peoples" towards more technical climbing vocabulary and showing the expertise of the author by discussing the choice of materials, route and campground (Purtscher 2020, 32). In the third part struggle in extreme conditions against the powers of nature takes center stage, or as Barcott more poetically puts it: "…they [the climbers] place themselves in situations where heroism will be summoned."

While Purtschert's focus on the mid-20th century reports may cast a doubt whether this approach is still relevant to more contemporary narratives, I take heed of Barcott's notion of interaction between literature and mountaineers: "the early Everest books were driven by the climb; now the climbs tend to be driven by the books." This, in my opinion, sits well with the nature of Said's Orientalism as a "field of cumulative and corporate identity" (Said 1978, 202) in which Westerners speak on behalf of Orientals with authority gained by expertise.

This polarising division between Sherpas and sahibs is also prevalent with findings from interviews conducted by Mu and Nepal (2016), in which "The trekkers, overall, felt related to some of the famous mountaineers and their tragic stories when visiting memorial sites, and reflected their own identities and personal endeavors."(Nepal & Mu 2016, 508), signifying that not only mountaineers who are attempting ascents in the footsteps of their famous predecessors, but even ordinary tourists who visit Solu-Khumbu are motivated by various mountaineering accounts. Furthermore, if they are familiar with stories of the famous climbers, I think it is fair to presume that they are also aware of the representation of Sherpas in those texts, thus arriving to the region with certain expectations and preconceived ideas of Sherpas.

Rather shocking evidence of persisting colonial attitudes were shown in Jennifer Peedom's documentary film Sherpa (2015), in which Russell Brice, the owner of Himalayan Experience (HIMEX) company, informs his clients about the inevitable cancelling of the season due to the failed attempt of the government delegation as an intermediary to find a solution to the labour dispute. Then a climber named Jeff Brown asks Brice: "There's no way you can talk to their owners? And I mean, if this was one of your Sherpas, you could have him removed from the mountain." (Peedom 2016)

Russell Brice then proceeds to repeat the Orientalist image of Sherpas to his clients due their collective determination to have the season cancelled: "Of course we are upset about people dying, but this is irrational, you know it's entirely irrational. They don't care. Next week, or next month they'll be at home with nothing to eat." (Peedom 2016) Brice has been a member of more

Everest expeditions than anyone else, so it is easy to understand how his words carry the authority of an expert, but statement like this does sound absurd, considering that Sherpas have inhabited the Solu-Khumbu region for well over half a millennium, of which commercial climbing has been providing them income for a few decades only.

The Sherpa "irrationality" over safety concerns is even more confusing, given that Brice himself decided to cancel the HIMEX climbing season for safety reasons just two years earlier (Krakauer 2014). Obviously I am not saying that Brice was in the wrong for calling his team off the mountain in 2012, but this just points out how Sherpas' knowledge of the conditions on the mountain or their safety concerns are secondary to the opinions of sahib experts.

Ortner's analysis of expeditions of the past, feels like history repeating itself:

> "In other words, it was thought that the Sherpas as childlike people could be trained to do a good job not be appealing to their intelligence and rationality (which was in effect denied them) but by appealing to their very childishness, encouraging a childlike personal dependence on the sahibs who, with their superior rationality and intelligence, would guide and protect them. Thus, when Sherpas on expeditions did behave well, this was attributed to the sahibs having correctly elicited this dependence and loyalty" (Ortner 1999, 53)

The unrest among Sherpas was further escalated when Brice together with Phil Crampton, owner of the American company Altitude Junkies, became self-anointed representatives of Sherpas in

2014, as they assumed the role of arbitrators between Sherpas and the Nepali government concerning the labour dispute (Chalmers & Sharma 2014).

Similar attitude can be found in Mark Horrell's book '*The Everest Politics Show*'. Despite the cancelling of the season was listed as one of four Sherpa demands (Horrell 2016, 107), Horrell writes of sentiments of Sherpas: "Every Sherpa knows that it's important to continue, because they all have families to feed." (Horrell 2016, 93) Interestingly enough, two years prior there had been an avalanche on another Nepalese peak, Manaslu in 2012. Back then victims were mostly sahibs, back then Horrell wrote: "Personally, if I had been on Manaslu this year, then I think I would have abandoned the expedition." (Horrell 2012)

Furthermore even Horrell's reasoning over the safety of the climb seems to depend on his own aspirations and involvement rather than logic. Concerning Manaslu 2012, where Horrell wasn't present, he wrote:

> "It might sound mystical, but for me there are times when you have a bad feeling about a climb and it doesn't seem quite right. As with many Himalayan peaks, the Sherpas believe Manaslu is the home of the mountain gods, and it is only with their permission that we climb it safely. Every expedition begins with a *puja* ceremony to ask for their blessing and safe passage, and the Sherpas won't set foot on the mountain until it's been performed. Of course to our secular western minds this seems absurd, but when you've spent weeks eating and sleeping on the side of a mountain you give it human characteristics. Failure to reach a summit is part and parcel of mountaineering; sometimes

> conditions just aren't right. It seems this year the mountain gods are angry, though I expect there will be summits for those dauntless enough to continue." (Horrell 2012)

It seems to me that Horrell is more willing to accept the fact that aborted ascents are an integral part of mountaineering, when he himself is not on the mountain.Without any irony, later on in his book, Horrell writes about misrepresentation: "Journalists often contacted me when I returned to Kathmandu, but I didn't want to talk. I was still trying to make sense of things, and I didn't want anyone putting words into my mouth." (Horrell 2016, 152), which brings us back to Said's notion of sahibs having the privilege of being allowed to represent themselves.

However among the sahibs there were people who held positions of power with more progressive outlooks, and who showed empathy for the plight of Sherpas, one of them was Tim Rippel, owner of the company Peak Freaks:

> "The ice-fall doctors who put the ladders and routes in through the ice-fall have made their decision that the glacier is not safe. Why wouldn't we listen to them? In addition 300+ Sherpas have put their names on an organized protest to not climb in respect of the recent deaths, why wouldn't we listen to them?" (Rippel 2014)

Virtual Sherpas as self-orientalised reflections

To further complicate the issue of Sherpa representations and "authentic" Sherpas, Vincanne Adams (1996) proposes a theory of a 'virtual Sherpa', which can also be understood as a form of self-orientalism by Sherpas in relation to sahibs:

> "Mirrors of identity originate in the confluence of many interests and desires we see articulated in representations of Sherpas drawn by both foreigners and Sherpas themselves. At the most superficial, Orientalist level, foreigners' representations of Sherpa reflect Western desires for an imagined Other, revealing the invented space beyond the reflective side of the mirror where a "Sherpa" embodies qualities that viewers wish to find in a mirror image of themselves – possessing all the qualities they see and admire in Sherpas. Conversely, Sherpas find their own identities reflected back to them through such representations, as they actively seek relationships with the foreigners standing behind them looking into that mirror." (Adams 1996, 40)

So in other words, Adams sees "authentic" Sherpa as a mirage, thus only virtual. This virtual Sherpa has been constructed in interactions between Sherpas and sahibs since the beginning of Himalayan encounters, and they both have had their own preconceived ideas of each other as well as their own distinct motives for their interaction. On the one hand sahibs expect to witness the famous Sherpas just as they have been represented in the mountaineering narratives, and on the other hand Sherpas themselves are aware of the sahib desires and expectations, and as a part of the interplay they attempt to match the stereotype of sahib's ideal Sherpa.

In this light it may be in place to question if the mimesis has resulted a self-orientalised Sherpa identity, and if it could be seen as an attempt by Sherpas themselves to improve their livelihood within the context of mountaineering and their relationship with sahibs. What is also noteworthy, is that because of the brawl and the successful strike a year later, this image of Sherpas and their identity is going through a transition, which is noted by Lenglet and Rozin (2019); "The Everest

brawl can therefore be understood as a pivotal event in Sherpa actorhood, revealing an evolution of mentalities and frustrations accumulated over the years." (Lenglet & Rozin 2019, 244)

Particularly during the post-avalanche turmoil, Sherpa demands were aimed at the Nepali state and its role and responsibility in the labour dispute, signifying that Sherpas seem to be also looking for new possibilities to improve their life and working conditions, no longer only relying on their relationship with the sahibs who are in control over the expeditions, but as labourers within the framework of Nepal's new post-monarchy era.

In contrast to this neither Ortner (1999) nor Adams (1996) mention government at all in their 1990s books about Sherpas. Therefore I think it is fair to assume that holding the government responsible and as the instance Sherpa demands are aimed at, are a 21st century phenomenon, giving a reason to believe that democratization of Nepal has to some extent changed the way Sherpas use politics as part of the climbing. One possible reason for these demands from the government could be that Sherpas as citizens of Nepal wanted their government to support their cause vis-à-vis foreign sahibs.

After all, each climber has to pay the government a fee of $11 000, and the total estimated impact of the Everest expeditions to Nepal's economy is around $300 million per year (Bloomberg 2020). In the past the government may have gotten away with just taking their cut and left climbing outfits and Sherpas to deal with what happens on the mountain, but now that the Sherpas presented their demands at the government, it signifies that governments laissez-faire approach would no longer be accepted.

Another possibility can be found from Vincanne Adams' article *Reconstruction of Reciprocity* (1997) that explain how Sherpas create "extensive reciprocity networks" as their business model. Adams explains that in exchange for favours, Sherpas expect favourable treatment from government officials and other people who have bureaucratic power (Adams 1997, 544-5). If these networks still are the modus operandi for Sherpas, they may have felt that the government owed them favourable treatment in support of their labour dispute in 2014.

One reason could be the need for more regulation as the number of expedition operators has grown alongside with the number of climbers as well as hazards caused by increased number of climbers, and it is often Sherpas who have to bear the consequences of the irresponsible operators. In the past Sherpas may have relied heavily on their relationship with sahibs, but it seems that Sherpas are now demanding different kind of government accountability as citizens of Nepal, who happen to have a very hazardous occupation.

Chapter 3: Sherpa resistance – "militant" Sherpas as new category

In April 2014, after an avalanche had killed 16 high-altitude workers on Everest, 13 of them were ethnic Sherpas, a question whether the climbing season should be cancelled was raised. Sherpas were divided on this issue. While it seems that some wanted to go on with the ascent, it was also clear that others wanted to abandon the season and go home to their families. There seems to also have been a conflict what the Sherpas said in public to their employers and clients and what they spoke in private (Schaffer 2014[a]). This led to a labour dispute between the

Sherpas, sahibs and Nepali government, and from this conflict emerged a new category: "militant Sherpa" (Peedom 2015 & Horrell 2016, 120). In this chapter I will look at how perception of Sherpas has evolved since the early expeditions along with the mountaineers, and aim to piece together the circumstances in which the notion of "militant" Sherpa, in contrast to the earlier representations of Sherpas, emerged.

Regardless of the Orientalist undertones that still persist in mountaineering narratives and sahibs' attitudes, sahibs' perception of Sherpas has not remained unchanged. Sherry Ortner (1999) describes different eras in Everest mountaineering and how the changing attitudes in the West have influenced evolution of Sherpa-sahib relationships.

Changes within the cultures of sahibs have changed the attitudes of those who come to Everest and these changes have shaped mountaineering industry towards a direction in which Sherpas are no longer seen as simple coolies whose reason to be on Everest is only to enable sahibs' summit attempts, but their abilities and achievements are becoming more widely acknowledged, but Sherpas themselves have also become more aware of their importance to the whole industry and thir abilities that are comparable to any elite climber. But for an industry that depends on Sherpa labour, the old stereotypes are slow to change. This becomes evident during the conflict when sahibs' aspirations are no longer served by the Sherpas. Obvious acts of resistance reveal cracks in the narrative and question its legitimacy. They propose that sherpa desires can no longer be dictated by sahibs.

Certain stereotypes of Sherpas have persisted since the large military style expeditions of the early 20th century, even if the countercultural shift in mountaineering started in the 1970s. Influenced by the countercultural hippies, this generation of mountaineers began to denounce the macho culture of the early expeditions, and instead climbers sought camaraderie between themselves and Sherpas rather than maintaining the top-down operations of the past. Furthermore with the fascination for Eastern philosophies adopted from hippies, countercultural shift meant that sahibs in the 1970s were more sympathetic towards Sherpas compared to the colonial attitude of their predecessors. (Ortner 1999, 186-8) An oversimplified example of this is that whereas the early expeditions described Sherpas as able and loyal Orientals who lack the discipline of Western mountaineers, a typical countercultural representation would emphasise their kindness and generosity.

Another major demographic change in sahibs on Everest started in the 1980's with commercialisation of the climbing in form of guided ascents for paying clients with only a little prior climbing experience on high mountains. This meant that sahibs of this era who have less experience became more reliant on Sherpas, whose status as high-altitude guides made them the more experienced and knowledgeable people on the mountain. Before the commercialisation sahibs on the Everest often had years of climbing experience from various high and technically challenging mountains around the world.

Lenglet and Rozin (2019) propose that both categories, Sherpas and sahibs, are evolving in a way that makes Sherpas become more like elite climbers whereas elite climbers seek "a form of

purity in their climbing style", by climbing without the help of Sherpas (Lenglet & Rozin 2019, 233), an attempt to distinct themselves from the masses of the commercial climbing industry.

Lenglet and Rozin see correlation with "militant" Sherpa, which they call "new Sherpa" identity, and rise of new generation of Sherpas, who are better educated, more qualified and fully connected to social networks (Lenglet & Rozin 2019, 245). Similar remarks are made by Sumit Joshi on the improved level of education of Sherpas and Dawa Steven Sherpa on the impact of social media (Peedom 2015). Dawa Steven claims that now that Sherpas can see how much credit westerners get from their climbs on Everest, on which Sherpas have played a crucial role, they want equal credit for their work that makes it all possible (Peedom, 2015). This would signify that this new Sherpa generation does have an improved understanding of what successful ascent of Everest means for sahibs, and Western world at large.

But sahibs also seem to draw comparisons between "militant" Sherpas and other 21st century global events in a very dramatic way. Russell Brice speculates on the impact of Arab spring on the Sherpas:

> "I dare say you, they look at the Arab summer [sic] and things like that, and think that they can do the same sort of things. It's hot headed young guys who really don't have very much experience on this mountain in any case." (Peedom 2015)

Whereas a client named Jeff Brown goes further than anyone else in terms of Othering the Sherpas, by making a direct comparisons between the World Trade Center terrorist attacks of 2001 and the events at the basecamp;

> "Being held captive by terrorists is how I look at it. I mean, when people demand change, and threaten it by violence, that's a terrorist, you know, and we in the States, we know what that is after 9/11. We've got a group here that's terrorising base camp. […] How do you mentally prepare yourself to get up here and then be turned away because a group of terrorists are demanding that Westerners leave base camp?" (Peedom 2015)

What I find peculiar is that Russell Brice's 2014 expedition report, as well as press releases by Ueli Steck and Simone Moro, two of the three Western climbers involved in the brawl, have since disappeared from their websites. While I do understand that online content may vanish for many reasons, but since during this research I have not run to this issue on other websites, it does raise questions on the accuracy of those initial statements, published soon after the incidents, and why have they been removed afterwards. Perhaps not only among Sherpas there were some "hot headed" climbers. Furthermore what is interesting in the demands of the sahibs is that Simone Moro and Ueli Steck did appeal that Everest should be open for *everyone*, but Brice proposes that "militant" Sherpas are a problem that should be "dealt with" (Becker 2014).

Mark Horrell commented on the rally held at puja ceremony at Everest basecamp:

> "I feel sick. The puja is being used by a few militant Sherpas to stage another rally and make demands. This is not the forum to reach an agreement and resolve differences. A puja is supposed to be a religious ceremony to ask the mountain gods to grant safe passage." (Horrell 2016, 119)

He explains to his audience the purpose of puja ceremonies, which "to his secular western mind seem absurd" and how Sherpas, in his opinion, are misusing puja for their own worldly gains, as if Horrell knows the true meaning of pujas better than Sherpas themselves.

Even if the tags that emerged from the conflict are called "new" or "militant" Sherpa, identities and representation are a forever evolving process. That Sherpa resistance lead to this dramatic change in discourse, probably tells more of the fact how strong control sahibs have over the Everest narratives, as the Sherpas themselves do not seem to share notion that their behaviour would justify comparisons to terrorism or that there is any hint of extremism in their way of solving their labour dispute.

With the idea of "militant" Sherpa I would now like to briefly go back to Adams' theory of virtual Sherpa as a reflected Sherpa identity and think of it as a 21st century phenomenon in the context of Nepal as a new democracy, in which its citizens demand more accountability from their government, in this case in form of safety nets for labourers in hazardous working conditions. When their negotiations with the government did not bear any fruit, Sherpas decided to take action, when they knew that the whole mountaineering world was paying attention to what happens on Everest. Conflicting sentiments of Sherpas over calling off the season is summed by expedition doctor Nima Namgyal Sherpa:

> "The officials from the ministry, they came here, but they didn't say the mountain is closed, you know. They left us in a dilemma. I've talked to a lot of people and they cannot say it, but nobody wants to climb. That I can guarantee. The Sherpas they'll never complain. They're just too loyal to the operators, they fear losing their jobs. This is where

> they make the most money, to feed their families for the rest of the year, but just coming to base camp they don't make money, they make money on the mountain carrying loads up there. The higher they go, the more they carry, the more they get paid. Just coming to basecamp they make nothing. But for the last 61 years we've waited. Something had to happen and then we had to raise our voice, and to such a huge loss. They're ready to face the consequences. They'd rather leave than die." (Peedom 2015)

During the 2014 upheaval several anonymous Sherpas were filmed speaking out their disappointment at the government: "The government is supposed to work for the welfare of its citizens, but they just give us false hope." (Peedom 2015), but also called for some support for their cause from their employers: "If company owners don't pressure the government to uphold our rights, then we will." (Peedom 2015) Mark Horrell, too, finds fault with the government, and blames them for happily collecting money from the climbers, but not providing much in return (Horrell 2016, 138).

I propose that we take into consideration that the demands aimed at the government could suggest that Everest is no longer a stage on which only sahibs and Sherpas interact, but it has become a tripartite worksite, in post-monarchy Nepal, where negotiations include a new sense of government responsibility for its citizens. Furthermore the process of mirroring identities between Sherpas and sahibs, that Adams suggests, would indeed be very different if the counterpart of Sherpas would no longer be just sahibs, but the Nepalese government or other Nepalese ethnic groups. What kind of virtual Sherpa would the Sherpas reflect on them?

The image that the government or other ethnic groups see, when they look at Sherpas may appear very different from what the sahibs see, and in the context of new democratic Nepal, perhaps the image Sherpas would like to reflect back, is not the self-orientalist image of cheerful collaborators, but a different one, which is not shy to demand improvements to their working conditions and that their government would take a stand for its citizens.

Situational Sherpa identity

Throughout the last few decades not only has mountaineering on Everest gained popularity, but tourism in Nepal and Solu-Khumbu region have grown a lot as well. The growth of tourism sector has provided Sherpas with ample of job opportunities and has become a significant part of Sherpa economy, and meanwhile has brought Sherpas international acclaim as mountaineers. In Nepal this has meant that Sherpa "brand" has become attractive for other ethnic groups.

Shae A. Frydenlund (2019) has written on situational Sherpa identity and how in the context of mountaineering members other ethnic groups adopt "Sherpa" label "among Westerners to penetrate the Hindu and Sherpa-dominated world of mountain business." (Frydenlund 2019, 17) Frydenlund found that members of ethnic groups other than Sherpas may at times adopt the label of Sherpas in order to benefit from the positive image of Sherpas among sahibs (Frydenlund 2019, 17). This could on the one hand dilute the power of Sherpas as expert mountaineers, but on the other hand also create tensions between different groups who compete for better paying jobs on the expeditions. If "militant" Sherpa is considered a newly emerged category, distinct from the traditional Sherpa brand which can be adopted by non-Sherpas in order to benefit from their positive reputation, could the new "militant" Sherpa be a reflection of ethnic pride and

heightened awareness for Sherpas' expertise on the mountain and resistance as a way to claim authenticity of Sherpas on Everest?

Brawl, avalanche, earthquake and covid-19 have all had massive impacts on climbing Everest in the past decade. From the available material it is difficult to say how much the lives of Sherpas have been affected economically, but according to Dawa Steven Sherpa several cancelled seasons have made a significant dent on the Sherpa livelihood (Sherpa 2015), thus weakening the leverage they have in terms of negotiating better terms for themselves. Moreover the ambitious project by the Chinese to develop climbing from Tibetan side (Schaffer 2016 & Sherpa 2015) may further jeopardise the position of Sherpas within Everest climbing industry. However their firm collective decision not to climb in 2014, and the reaction to it from sahibs, signifies that the "serious games" Sherpas and sahibs play, are still driven by different desires, but as Ortner has written, it is not an unprecedented even in the history of Everest:

> "In sum, Sherpas have died on expeditions, witnessed others (Sherpa and sahib) die, and have had terrifying close calls. Little wonder, then, that they have occasionally broken down and refused to go on in a situation of potential of actual fatality. The sahibs themselves have been upset by Sherpa, as well as sahib deaths, sometimes extremely so. Yet they have often had little sympathy for the surviving Sherpas' reactions, responding to Sherpa shows of fear or demoralization with contempt or worse. Their contempt, not surprisingly, has consistently been framed in terms of the Sherpas' childishness or primitiveness, their lack of bravery and self-control, their excessive vulnerability to fear" (Ortner 1999, 51)

Chapter 4: Why do Sherpas climb?

In this chapter I would like to propose a fundamental question, which in the context of mountaineering and representations should not be overlooked: 'Why do Sherpas climb?' Sherry Ortner proposes the idea climbing as "serious games", which she bases on Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description":

> "Human experience is never just "discourse," and never just "acts", but is some inextricably interwoven fabric of images and practices, conceptions and actions in which history constructs both people and the games that they play, and in which people make history by enacting, reproducing and transforming those games." (Ortner 1999, 22-24)

I would like to state, that I do not intend to approach this as a question which I can provide a definite answer for, but rather with an intention of looking into the "serious games" Sherpas play in order to find discrepancies between sahib created Sherpa representations and Sherpa desires. How did Sherpas perceive the events of 2013 and 2014? What does mountaineering represent for Sherpas? What are their purposes and desires?

Himalayan mountaineering has been changing over the years, together with "social backgrounds, gender assumptions and structures of desires" (Ortner 1999, 23) of everyone who participates in these "serious games", which "can only be understood in terms of the different ways in which each other entered into the reality and the imagination of the other, in relation to the games they brought with them and the games that evolved in place." (Ortner 1999, 24)

Sherpas and sahibs both understand “mountaineering” in relation to their own purposes and meanings that have emerged from distinct structures and desires (Ortner 1999, 22). Therefore different structures influence the actions of different groups within the outwardly same game of “mountaineering”. That is to say that notions of “money” or “strike” bear different meanings for Sherpas than for sahibs, and perspectives of each group should be understood to emerge from the structures of their own culture. Whereas Sherpas may see Everest as a potential stage for labour disputes, anti-colonial struggle or politics, for sahibs it remains a site of conquest, adventure and self-actualisation.

For Sherpas, who live in harsh conditions in one of Asia’s poorest countries, to have access to Everest as a well-paying work opportunity has been a way towards development. Climbing on Everest is still a hazardous job, and to compensate for the risk, mountaineering outfits often like to point out how much money Sherpas can earn during the two-month climbing season. Numbers ten times the national annual average have been quoted, so it would be futile to try to argue against the relative purchase power that money earned on expeditions has. On Nepalese standards Sherpas on Everest earn a good income.

Sahibs’ understanding of Sherpas and money has fluctuated over the last century. Anthropologists started to study Sherpas in the 1950s and during 1960s the idea that Sherpas did not climb for the money was refuted (Ortner 1999, 204). Climbers, too, began to accept this as a part of the countercultural shift in 1970s (Ortner 1999, 248).

As a sign of the times the 1980's and 1990's replaced countercultural hippies with wealthier yuppie mind-set on Everest. Countercultural ideas of renouncing materialism and seeking refuge from mountains were out of fashion, and instead the clientele of commercial expeditions consisted more of career-oriented people who paid had tens of thousands of dollars to be part of an expedition. This change is sardonically epitomised by Jon Krakauer in his book "Into Thin Air" (1997) on Everest disaster of 1996 and in particular in his description of a New York socialite Sandy Hill Pittman who had Sherpas carry his beloved espresso machine to the basecamp.

With the rise of Everest's popularity, average sahib on Everest has become wealthier, less experienced and less invested in mountaineering as a lifestyle. This has been made possible by the work of Sherpas and technological advancements that have improved safety on the mountain. A greatly increased number of climbers dependent on Sherpas has provided lucrative jobs for Sherpas but in order for the machinery to bring clients to the top year after year, stability has been found from hierarchy in which Sherpas are not considered equals to their sahib counterparts. For the sahib to remain the main protagonist of the narrative of the ascent, Sherpas need to remain in the background, and this seems to cause tensions on the mountain.

That is to say that even if sahibs have their own "serious games" to play and they are distinct from those of the Sherpas', the category of sahibs itself has not remained as unchanged as the Sherpa-sahib hierarchy on expeditions. Moreover changes within sahibs as a category and their culture has led to changes in their perspective about, and therefore their representations of, Sherpas, but this does not mean that their understanding of Sherpas is any better than that of their

predecessors. If countercultural values of renouncing materialism created Sherpa representations of camaraderie and kindness then more material oriented yuppies of the economic boom period were fond of the idea of Sherpas climbing for money.

> "To say that most Sherpas climbed (and still climb) primarily for money is the beginning, not the end, of understanding why they climb. For money as a sign points to the Sherpas' own desires, their own notions of the good life, their own senses of what they would do and how they would live if they had the means." (Ortner 1999, 66)

In the era of commercial climbing, money remains a hot topic. After the 2013 brawl, famous Swiss climber Ueli Steck gave some bitter comments about Sherpas: "These guys make a lot of money. Of course it's hard and dangerous work, but Sherpas are the rich people in Nepal. If you make so much money you can somehow lose reality." (Neville 2013) Needless to say that the earnings of Steck as a professional climber were not comparable to those of the Sherpas.

But the idea that money has "spoiled" Sherpas is not new. The Orientalist idea of Sherpa as an "other" for modern sahibs (Ortner 1999, 45), means that modernity and money have a way of corrupting Sherpas, and in the process they lose something essential of themselves (Ortner 1999, 248-9). But unlike sahibs since the counterculture era, who may have had noble ideas of finding asylum in the mountains, Sherpas did not necessarily share their negative sentiments concerning money (Ortner 1999, 248-9), but instead saw it as a "means of buying into modernity-as-freedom (Ortner 1999, 206).

However, as Ortner notes, regardless of sahibs' seeing Sherpas as "spoiled", she still finds that much of the Sherpa stereotype has remained unchanged:

> "Although sahibs have lamented, and continue to lament, that the Sherpas have been "spoiled" by money and modernity, if one looks at the actual account of expedition behaviour, or descriptions from tourists' treks, one finds virtually no difference between contemporary and earlier accounts of Sherpa kindness, generosity, and good nature, not to mention occasion outright heroism." (Ortner 1999, 276)

But Sherpas have their own ideas on money, that do not associate wealth as a source of corrupting individuals by default. Traditionally Sherpas have had hierarchy that distincts those who are well-off, or so-called "big people" from "small people". "Big people" have had the privilege of not having to carry heavy loads in the rugged mountains of Solu-Khumbu. They have hired "small people", most commonly servants, tenants and hired labourers, instead (Ortner 1999, 66). Therefore since the beginning of Himalayan exploration, carrying loads in the mountains for foreigners was seen by the poorer Sherpas, particularly those who did not own land, a possibility to accumulate wealth within relatively short time, while it simultaneously carried a demeaning symbolism for the "big people". Considering that carrying loads was considered unworthy of "big people", money only worked as an incentive for those Sherpas who did not deem themselves to be above the task of carrying loads (Adams 1996, 112).

However, when Sherpas collectively decided to cancel the climbing season 2014, and forfeit their earnings, it is only fair to concede that regardless of how good the income relatively is, it

seems that in time of conflict and crisis, other values than just financial gains prove to be more important for the Sherpas. So if not for money, then what?

Sherpas had inhabited Solu-Khumbu for centuries before the first British expeditions and there isn't any evidence, that they had any desire to reach the summits they were surrounded with for recreational or any other purpose. Mountaineering did not have any indigenous value for Sherpas. Everest, or Qomolangma as Sherpas call it, is a deity, and is to be respected, not climbed. So it seems that Sherpas became involved with mountaineering by odd coincidence. Yet, climbing mountains, and doing it extraordinarily well, is what Sherpas are known for. Therefore how Sherpas have been, and still are, represented in context of mountaineering, is also a question how Sherpas are perceived by people around the world who read about them.

> "Everest and her flanks are blessed with spiritual energy, and the Sherpas say that one should behave with reverence when passing through this sacred landscape. Here, the karmic effects of one's actions are magnified, and even impure thoughts are best avoided. When climbing, opportunities for fateful mishaps abound." (Broughton 2013)

In an interview in Jennifer Peedom's "Sherpa" children of Tenzing Norgay: Jamling Tenzing Norgay and Pem Pem Tshering call for respect for Sherpas and their culture. Pem Pem even recalls their father, the most famous Sherpa of them all, having lamented "I think Qomolangma must have punished me, when I come to think of this politics, because I stepped on top of her". But Sherpas, too, just like their deities, demand respect. Pem Pem continues on the recent Sherpa/sahib altercations on Everest: "They are angry for lack of respect. Now they're demanding it." (Peedom 2015)

When it comes to Sherpas demanding due respect from sahibs, they demand it for sacred and profane alike. Disrespectful behaviour of sahibs towards the Sherpas who were fixing the route for clients in 2013 started a shouting match that became known as the infamous brawl. In the aftermath Simone Moro insulted not only the Sherpas, but their deity as well by shouting obscenities at Sherpas in their own language on the holy mountain. Many lines were crossed, the brawl is proof of that. So in 2014, when Sherpas felt the anger of their mountain goddess in form of the avalanche, they thought the only rational thing to do was not to climb, but to go home. They had the choice and in the end, they chose respect for themselves and their mountain deity, over money.

Of course the Sherpas on the mountain do not make their decisions in a vacuum. They have parents, partners, children and relatives, whose opinions influence their decision-making. Even in the 1970s, during the sahibs' countercultural awakening to Sherpa perspectives, a Sherpa named Nima did not seem doubtful of what Sherpas would choose, if their economical situation was more secure: "Oh, I think if Sherpas have money, they prefer to stay home with wife and children." (Ridgeway 1979, 142-143)

The importance of families is also highlighted in footage from one of the political rallies held at the base camp, in which an anonymous Sherpa raised a question: "Even if nothing happens to us, we would be betraying our families in the villages. Does anyone want to climb, blatantly ignoring their family's request?" (Peedom 2015)

But family as a social unit is a complex one, while simultaneously it may be the family members at home who wish that their beloved ones would stay away from danger, their decisions to climb can also be guided by wishful thinking of development and hope for a better future for their offspring. Tenzing Norgay's son, Jamling, recalls his father's motives for risking his life on mountains: "My father said he climbed so that we wouldn't have to. He wanted to give us the best education so we could continue our lives in some other careers rather than climbing, because climbing was dangerous." (Peedom 2015)

Sherpas refusal to carry on with the climb after the avalanche in 2014 was a statement that the money that they earn from climbing is just one of many factors why Sherpas climb. While money is not an insignificant incentive, the avalanche made Sherpas very aware of the ever-present hazards of mountaineering. As a collective they were forced to face serious questions of life and death, and contemplate on their fundamental values. While Sherpas are not a homogenous group and certainly there were conflicting opinions on the issue, and reasons to climb or not to climb should not be simplified, but when push came to shove, being able to go home to their families and struggle for better working conditions for themselves as well as all future Sherpas on Everest tipped the scales in favour of calling off the season.

On my final point concerning the sahib representation of Sherpas, I take my cue from Sherry Ortner who argues that changes such as rise of counterculture and feminism have changed mountaineering by shaping the world views of the average sahib, or memsahib (a female sahib) for that matter, who comes to Everest. Perhaps recent widespread social justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter or Stop Asian Hate, will bring about the next shift within sahibs own

culture that will shape mountaineering and Sherpa representations in the 21st century. With a new generation of climbers and writers, who are willing to accept the idea that Sherpas have their own reasons climb, and those may well be very different from, and in conflict with, the desires of sahibs, but that those reasons are equally valid and not secondary to them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Mountaineering has created a vast body of narratives of climbers pursuing their passion in conquest of summits. From these narratives on Mt. Everest a Nepalese ethnic group, Sherpas, have risen to global awareness. As these narratives are traditionally told from the perspective of sahibs to their audiences back home, roles and hierarchies between Sherpas and sahibs on these expeditions are reproduced in the discourse and Sherpa representations in mountaineering has been externalised to sahibs. Sahib representations of Sherpas reflect values of each generation that writes on Everest. Therefore Sherpa representations created by sahibs have changed over time, the two main movements being early military style expeditions often told in the manner of conquest of the mountain, and its anti-thesis, the hippie era countercultural shift, during which old fashioned colonial attitudes and machismo were critically reflected on and authors found kindness, generosity and camaraderie between themselves and their Sherpa counterparts.

Everest narratives are not only objective descriptions of actual events and experiences but are constructed stories depending on what kind of stories the authors, often sahibs, have wanted to

tell, and are based on what kind of stories their predecessors have told in the past. Together form a body of knowledge on Everest. Changes in Sherpa representations in these sahib written narratives seem not only to tell the story of changes within Sherpa culture, but are equally influenced by changes in sahibs' own culture as well.

Sherpas emerged in the imagination of the rest of the world through these representations. During the era of the early expeditions sahib authors produced an orientalist representation. Sherpas were represented by the sahibs in a way that fit the purpose of sahibs' narratives based on their own needs and desires. In these early narratives Sherpas always remained anonymous and voiceless, and usually worth only a few brief remarks bearing the weight of colonial attitudes.

Over the last century mountaineering has undergone several changes alongside with cultural changes in The West. As sahibs' understanding of Sherpas and their culture has evolved from the colonial attitudes of early expeditions, representations of Sherpas on Everest narratives have evolved, too. After the early military style expeditions, a countercultural shift followed and perception of Sherpas changed from the colonial stereotypes of subordinate Orientals to that of camaraderie between Occidentals and Orientals that was more suitable for the generation that was inspired by travellers on eastbound magic buses on the Hippie trail.

Commercialisation of Everest in the last couple of decades has not only brought an ever increasing number of people to try their luck on the mountain, but created a new type of sahib: less experienced in mountaineering, less invested in it as a lifestyle, more driven just to tick

Everest off their bucket lists and more dependent on Sherpa assistance in order to achieve that. Modern commercial climbing outfits and their clients still need Sherpas as the workforce that makes it possible for relatively inexperienced climbers to have a decent shot at making it to the summit and back alive. Clients do provide much needed and well-paying jobs for Sherpas in their native Solu-Khumbu region for years. With the help of technological advancements climbing Everest has become relatively much safer, but increasing number of people on the mountain means that when risks materialise, numbers can be high as was seen in 2014, and result in bursts of discontent.

Even if modern commercial expeditions are very different from the early military expeditions, sahibs remain at the top of the hierarchy of these expeditions, and when narratives of ascents are told, this hierarchy is reproduced, and sahibs remain in the limelight whereas Sherpas, whose presence on the expeditions is often barely even mentioned, are not much more than nameless props.

So as I have discussed in this paper, when Sherpas' and sahibs' interests clashed during the brawl in 2013 and after the avalanche in 2014, and Sherpas called for a strike in order to call for attention to their struggle and improvement of their working conditions, the reaction they received revealed the underlying attitude that mountaineering is still very much a sahibs' game., When Sherpas refused to collaborate and opted for resistance instead, a new category of "militant" Sherpa emerged as a distinction to childish colonials or cheerful comrades.

Sherpas organized unprecedented rallies at the basecamp, demanding that their opinions as experts on the mountain would be respected and their concerns over safety issues would be heard, and that Nepali government would live up to its promises concerning compensations for injuries and insurance payments to the families of the deceased. There seemed to be demand for a systemic change on climbing on Mt. Everest on behalf of the Sherpas. The conflict revealed crack in the narrative, a disruption in the hierarchy which the whole industry is based on.

When Sherpas went on strike and clients were informed that they would not be climbing that year, Sherpas were compared to terrorists and an appeal was made that the "owner" of these "militant" Sherpas could have them removed from the mountain. Sherpas were not seen as workers in extremely dangerous conditions executing their right to go on strike, fighting for better working conditions.

An old orientalist perception of Sherpas as childish and primitive, incapable of logical thinking re-emerged. All of a sudden generous and kind Sherpas, so often praised by sahibs, of whom the vast majority would not even get close to the summit without Sherpa assistance, were deemed "irrational". Sherpas were simultaneously thought to be spoiled by the money they make from mountaineering and too poor to afford to lose a season's earnings. Sahibs thought they failed to understand the benefits of continuing the climb regardless of the risks they saw. Risks that the sahibs seemed to consider worth taking. Proving that many sahib created representations of Sherpas had led to false assumptions about motives for Sherpas to climb in the first place.

In the end Sherpas stood their ground and left the sahibs flabbergasted, by turning down season's earnings and deciding not to take any further risks after the avalanche, proving that while there is no denying that the financial compensation for climbing is on Nepalese standards high, there are things that are more valuable to Sherpas than money.

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