Western European travel narratives from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mary Louse Pratt argues in her book *Imperial Eyes*, perpetuated the worldview of the Europeans as benevolent conquerors of foreign lands who would bring civilization to the people who needed it most. Accounts published as the result of travels abroad to places considered “exotic” or “wild” rarely included any sort of accurate description of the native people there, and when they did, the stories were often sensationalized to the point of becoming fiction. Nature studies, popularized in the eighteenth century, focused on plant and animal life so heavily as to ignore the people in nonwestern nations altogether, further suggesting that these lands were unsettled and ripe for takeover by European powers. This journal is an attempt to uncover the stories that European travellers would have found if they had abandoned their colonialist mindsets, rejected prejudice, and attempted to really understand a different culture. For this project, I have focused on a collection of photographs taken in the northern part of British India, or what is now mostly Pakistan and Kashmir, in the years leading up to the third Anglo-Afghan War. After this point, I will adopt the voice of the photographer. I will not, however, attempt to capture the details of the real Randolph Bezzant Holmes who lived in British India for nearly half his life and wrote two books about his experience that covered events occurring long after these photographs were taken. The events of the journal will be told from the perspective of the years between 1910 and 1919, when these photographs were actually captured, and will explore the stories of those who history has largely ignored.

Katherine Coric
05.01.15
Since I have arrived in Kashmir, I have been eager to learn its history, for although part of British India, the region is home to very few British men and my knowledge is quite limited. A man by the name of Henry Peroe, who has lived in the nearby city of Srinagar for the past fifteen years as a journalist, has offered to show me around. He informed me that in the mid-eighteenth century, the region of Kashmir was part of the Afghan Empire under the rule Ahmad Shah, but resistance under Timur Shah’s reign was followed by decades of conflict and rebellion in Kashmir and nearby regions. Just before the start of the First Anglo-Afghan War, Kashmir and the other eastern principalities were lost to the empire, and they remain separate to this day. Since British rule of India has begun, the cattle herders of the Kashmir region, such as those seen here, seem to have
barely changed their routine lives by this offshoot of the river, which is a product of the melting of the Kolahoi glacier.

Nanga Parbat 26,660 ft. –
The east aspect across the Astor River (British India)

I have been here for just over a year, but I am staying in Kashmir for now, away from the violence that has broken out in the Afghan provinces for the sake of my dear sister Mary, who begged me not to get too close. I do think that war could be upon us in a few years’ time, however. Although I do rather prefer to capture natural scenes, I cannot help but feel that I am distancing myself from the excitement. Lest she think I am not having any fun, however, I have photographed the ninth highest mountain in the world, Nanga Parbat, located in the Himalayas. After the distance that I travelled to take such a shot, I am beginning to believe that I might have
been safer in a warzone. Truthfully, the mountain is intimidating; how can I forget the news of the tragic loss of the A.F. Mummery expedition just twenty-odd years ago? Regardless, it is a sight to behold.

On the Dal Lake – Srinagar, Kashmir

Springtime here never ceases to amaze me each year. Srinagar, although technically a city, is covered in water. Fishing is not a pastime but a necessity; the community around the Dal Lake is completely dependent on the lake for its existence and survival. Looking at a scene so peaceful, it’s difficult to ignore the fact that back home, they are dealing with such a terrible war. For the Kashmiri people, however, the war is a distant occurrence that most of them know little, if anything, about.
Talking to the locals reminds me that most of them have nothing resembling what the British consider a formal education, and they are more concerned with the rising tension between our government and the Afghans so close to their borders. Many of them react by expressing admiration to us for engaging the Afghans in the last war, but others warn me of the futility in creating more conflict with their people.

A man I did not know approached me while I was painting over this photograph of the valley I took recently and asked about my work. I learned his name, Aaditya, and we talked for quite a while. When he told me that he had to get back home, he invited me to go with him and offered some black tea. Here is a record of our conversation once inside his stone house: “The boy we saw on our way in is Sashi, my oldest son, whose name means ‘moon.’ He helps me with the farming all year round, and we grow rice, corn, and wheat. We usually have enough to store for the whole year to come and sell in the village as well. Most years, my wife and my younger children tend a small crop behind the house of beans and cabbage to use in our own meals. My wife was taught by her own mother how to weave silk, and in the past few years, she has amused our children by speculating as to how far the pieces of silk she works on have travelled.

The Liddar Valley - Kashmir
Some of them, I’m sure, have reached your city of London. Our daughter helps her to make the meals each day. Oh! Sometime you have to visit us when she has made dum aloo. It may have more spices than you are used to, but the potatoes this year have been quite good. Trust me, hers is the best in the village!” I yearn to test that claim, as much of the food I have tried so far, though different from what I know, has been delicious.

By Tannin River and Mountain heights in mist – Kashmir

As it turns out, for the past several months Sashi has taken quite an interest in me, the foreigner his father brought home one day. I have picked up quite a bit of the Kashmiri language so that I might be able to communicate with the vast majority of the population here that does not speak any English. Pereo says that I am learning even faster than he did, but I am not so sure. I have not studied another language since university, and learning outside of the classroom without books or any written tools whatsoever is much more difficult than I anticipated. On days when his father does not need his help, Sashi is able to accompany me on my small photographing expeditions. He knows all the best and most beautiful places, and just this week he brought me to such an amazing view of the mountains in the early morning when they were still covered with mist. Sashi is always awake early because, at sunrise, his family must be
ready for the Islamic prayer. I have learned much about their religion since I’ve arrived. If anything, the most prominent aspect of religion here is how sharply divided the villages are. Although Sashi and his family are not in conflict with the Hindus here, they are very aware of which of their neighboring villages house fellow Muslims, and on religious festivals, they gather and pray together.

Sind Valley – Kashmir

This past year has brought me away from Srinagar and much closer to the coastline of the Arabian Sea, although now I am on my way back. I have travelled hundreds of miles, but I have never really been lonely. The stretches in between villages have given me ample time to think about all that I’ve seen in the time that I’ve been away. Many of the people that I come across live such a nomadic life, herding cattle and moving from place to place, and others have a very strong sense of community within their village but no real concept of the larger province, state, or empire to which they belong. Barely any of the men have a comprehensive idea of what it means to be a British colony. To them, it simply means that a foreign power has taken control of the production of salt and tea and has forced them to labor for much less than they should have to. I have heard so much about Mahatma Gandhi recently, however, and I believe that, whether our British government cooperates with him or not, he will really change things, at least for India. I am certainly impressed with the number of people he has been able to reach with his ideas, as many of the villages I
have come across are primarily illiterate and, yet, they all know of Gandhi. I will have to see what news of him has reached Srinagar. When I get back to what I have now come to consider my home base, I’ve decided that my first adventure will be to visit the glacier Kolahoi.

Glacier Valley and Campsite – Sonamy, Kashmir

They call the glacier “gwash brani” which translates to “goddess of light.” Before I left, Peroe told me that he had heard of several Buddhist monks living there, some of the very few still remaining in the area. I was determined to find them, and once I did, I was delighted to discover that one had studied English and was willing to share his story. I began to listen, and what I heard is transcribed as follows: “Our people used to have a very strong presence in this part of the world. Great men from as far as China came to deepen their understanding of the Buddhist tradition from Sarvastivadan monks who dwelled here many centuries ago. The stories of the famed Adi Shankara and the opening of the forth temple door all indicate that the temple was located here in Kashmir. In fact, several of the most influential figures in our religion hailed from Kashmir. Some of my fellow monks believe that our area is destined to once again rise to the theological greatness it had in the past, but I wonder if too much time has passed. For many years, the Afghans ruled over the Kashmiris, and
our people were torn apart by both the Sikhs and the Muslims in equal measure. Buddhists mostly lived in the east, but those of us who stayed during the last century remained attached to the area, despite being outnumbered in our own villages. I was only a boy when the Indians engaged in war with your people, but I know that the outcome has left little impact on my life. We have been ruled by others before, and we will continue to

thrive despite political disagreements until the end of time.”

**Untitled**

Soon, I will return to London for a short visit. I cannot imagine what it will feel like, after nine whole years away. I suppose I will never be able to fully describe this place back home or express how it feels like this has become my home, in a way. After all, most of my university friends and other acquaintances have scarcely left Britain. Although I am sure that I will come in contact with several men who have been stationed in India, my experience will no doubt differ greatly for theirs, for how could they possibly really understand the place that our nation inhabits while their job is enforcing foreign rule? I will surely miss the mountains and the wide-open spaces, but even more I will miss the people.
I know nostalgia is a bit out of character for me, and certainly not warranted given that I will be back here so soon, but I have greatly appreciated the candor of everyone I have met throughout my travels. So many people have been friendly to me, and those who have not have good reason to distrust any British man for fear of unwanted change. I certainly feel that these “foreigners” living in the British Empire should no longer be so foreign to us, and that even Londoners could benefit from learning more about their culture.
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