

Carole McGranahan ©
University of Colorado

Paper presented at Intimacies of War conference, University of Colorado, April 25, 2014. Not for circulation or citation without permission of author.

**Love and Empire:
The CIA, Tibet, and Covert Humanitarianism**

What's love got to do with it?
Tina Turner, 1984

A feeling or disposition of affection and attachment: the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines love as follows: “a feeling or disposition of deep affection or fondness for someone, typically arising from a recognition of attractive qualities, from natural affinity, or from sympathy and manifesting itself in concern for the other’s welfare and pleasure in his or her presence; great liking, strong emotional attachment; a feeling or disposition of benevolent attachment experienced toward a group or category of people, and (by extension) towards one’s country or another impersonal object of affection.”¹ This is the love of my title. Not the love of most anthropologies of love, that of new forms of marriage and kinship found around the world, or of romantic, companionate love.² Instead, what I want to focus is a different sort of love, on love as non-romantic affection and attachment drawing on ideas of sympathy and benevolence, on a connection with another that matters. This is the sort of sentiment I found unexpectedly and repeatedly narrated by both retired CIA officers and Tibetan army veterans in their stories of joint US-Tibet military and intelligence operations in the 1950s and 1960s. Love in the service of

¹ “Love, n.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed 15 April 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/110566?rskey=O4luZb&result=1#eid>.

² See, for example, Laura Ahearn, *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001; Jennifer Sue Hirsch and Holly Wardlow, eds., *Modern Loves: The Anthropology of Romantic Courtship and Companionate Marriage*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006; William Jankowiak, ed., *Intimacies: Love and Sex Across Cultures*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

empire certainly, but also love as something more than that. In this paper, I work toward rethinking histories of the CIA-Tibet relationship by focusing on ethnographic experience and sentiment rather than on either macro-level politics or micro-level details of war and intelligence operations. To turn an ethnographic eye to the CIA, rather than only a political or historic one, requires asking new questions of love as well as of spies and empire.

What would it mean to take the CIA as a subject of ethnographic inquiry? To consider CIA officers as legitimate ethnographic subjects? An ethnographic subject is necessarily a human one in that anthropology is a humanizing discipline. Since its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, the discipline of anthropology has worked to humanize other cultures, to make them intelligible, meaningful, human, to place people on the same analytical scale be it an evolutionary one or a comparative one or a relative one, to offer and defend a system that reckons certain forms of primate life as equally *human*. This requires the turning of humans into the humane, transforming human life from “physiological fact” to “ethical subject” such that compassion, sympathy, and ethics become the ground upon which human connection rests.³ Using this framework of the humane subject, I want to explore the shadow spaces of empire, including projects that were covert or top secret, people who both were and weren’t who they claimed to be, and the range of relationships between and representations of the CIA and Tibet.

Situating the CIA within a humanitarian sphere needs to start with an acknowledgement of U.S. empire. The CIA was an integral component of U.S. empire from the Cold War on through to the current post-9/11 moment, working to make the world safe for American imperialism and especially for U.S. business and political interests. Anti-communist operations have been central to CIA efforts since the 1950s, and the CIA’s Tibetan operations are one of the very few that involved a home-grown partner (versus one created by the CIA as has so often

³ Thomas Laqueur in Feldman and Ticktin 2010, p. 4.

been the case). Tibetans, of course, were not so much anti-communist or even anti-Chinese as they were pro-Tibet, pro-Buddhism, and pro-defending their country, families, leaders, and way of life. And yet through their connections to the CIA and US Department of State, Tibet developed imperial relations with the USA in the 1950s.⁴

It is not anti-communism that is at the heart of CIA-Tibet relations but imperial humanitarianism. That is, anti-communism is not the primary reason the CIA was interested in Tibet. Pretty much the entirety of the literature on U.S. relations with Tibet posits U.S. action as an anti-communist initiative, and thus, as anti-People's Republic of China politics. I want to argue something different. Anti-communism is involved without doubt, but as ideology and political practice it is preceded and thus produced and enabled by a historically-specific form of imperialism. The mid-twentieth century period of the Cold War and post-WWII European decolonization provided an opening for new sorts of imperial formations; these new imperial possibilities were grounded in anti-colonial and anti-imperial rhetoric; in the case of the USA this manifested as anti-communism, whereas in the case of the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, it was expressed as anti-capitalism.⁵ Whether in the form of anti-communism or anti-capitalism, Cold War anti-imperialism enables new forms of empire. One key feature of this form is its invisibility. What sentiments and relationships take form around empire in its invisible, undercover, and covert forms?

I also want to argue that the covert is a space that is deeply human. This is not to say that it is singular. How the covert is conceptualized and practiced is not always the same; it moves with and through different logics, different systems, different bodies. For example divergent

⁴ On Tibet and the U.S. imperial domain, see Carole McGranahan, "Empire Out-of-Bounds: Tibet in the Era of Decolonization," in Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds., *Imperial Formations*, Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2007, pp. 173-209.

⁵ McGranahan, "Empire Out of Bounds." See also Engseong Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes."

structures of feeling grounded, animated, and arose from the two different CIA-Tibet operations I am going to talk about today. One obstacle in getting to covert structures of feeling is not just that they are covert—meaning that they involve not only secrecy but deception—but also the particular difficulty of writing about two such over-determined subjects. Tibet and the CIA both come with a series of pre-set narratives: non-violence, Shangri-La, and the like for Tibet, and pro-democracy, pro-capitalism, anti-communist covert actions for the CIA, just to name a few. With this in mind, my goal is to move toward an ethnographic analysis of the CIA that is critical but not celebratory or contemptuous alongside a discussion of Tibetan political agency in light of readily available, and sometimes deployed accusations of co-optation and compromise for any peoples connected to the CIA.

Two CIA-Tibet stories will ground these arguments. The first is that of the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees (AECTR). The AECTR was a CIA “front” that presented itself publicly as a legitimate non-governmental humanitarian organization. The AECTR was organized by a group of well-connected, wealthy conservative businessmen, doctors, and politicians in the USA, and was publicly funded by private donors, and privately funded by the US government. From 1959 through 1967, it provided conventional humanitarian aid to Tibetan refugees in India: foodstuffs, clothing, medicine, skill-based training, education, and so on. Now as then, the AECTR has flown very low under everyone’s radar. We have no histories of this group, just the briefest of mentions here and there of them being suspected of CIA links or comments of their “mysterious” disappearance from India in 1967.

The second story is of the grassroots Tibetan army called Chushi Gangdrug which fought against the Chinese People’s Liberation Army from 1956 through 1974.⁶ Their military defense

⁶ Carole McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

of their families, communities, country, and political and religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama was funded in part by the CIA. In addition to providing relatively modest funding for the army, the CIA also flew several thousand Tibetans to Colorado where they trained them at Camp Hale from 1958 through 1964. Camp Hale is located at 11,000 feet in altitude, and thus as close as the CIA could get to the Himalayas in the continental U.S., and was the former military training site for the Army's 10th Mountain Division ski corps during World War II—just a footnote here: I recently learned that anthropologist Eric Wolf served in the 10th Mountain Division during the War in Italy. This operation was top secret in both the USA and Asia. I've written extensively about the Chushi Gangdrug army, but have done so almost exclusively from a Tibetan perspective. The CIA is part of the story, but my writings so far have purposefully emphasized Tibetan experiences and interpretations of the war, rather than subsume this history into one of US Cold War politics. What I now seek to do is to join with other scholars to rewrite Cold War history via ethnography, or as Taiwanese scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen suggests to “de-Cold War” histories and experiences and narratives just as much as we decolonize or deimperialize them.⁷ My efforts to do so focus on this question of covert humanitarianism, sentiment, and the CIA.

HUMANITARIANISM, EMPIRE, AND SYMPATHY

What makes something humanitarian? According to Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss “for many in the contemporary age, to be a humanitarian is to respond to the suffering of others regardless of their identity, to act selflessly, to do what can be done to save lives, and to

⁷ Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

place humanity above all other considerations.”⁸ Anthropologists Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin further explain that genealogies of humanity as a universal category posit the commonality of human beings as a “starting point for elaborating the political and social obligations that humans have to each other—the humanitarian connection.”⁹ And in his book *Humanitarian Reason*, Didier Fassin describes humanitarianism as the governing of the precarious, an operation that “involves nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, states, and individuals” and that “mobilizes sympathy and technology, physicians and logisticians.”¹⁰ Selfless obligation, human connection, and cooperative governing: collectively, these definitions traverse possibilities of the political, from the politically-neutral to the politically-grounded. However, humanitarianism rarely, if ever, exists in a domain of pure altruism outside of politics. This is not about just a politics of access or of position, but about recognizing humanitarianism itself as a political project.

Humanitarianism’s narratives of rescue and rehabilitation, of benevolence and transformation are not new. These are the same narratives that underlie empire, discourses that legitimate imperial as well as humanitarian interventions and practices. Both rest on a genealogical politics of sympathy and its suffering other. In this project I am interested in looking at humanitarianism as a part of empire. If, as Ann Stoler has demonstrated, empire has long been an affective project, then what can we learn from analyzing the CIA within the domains of empire, affect, and humanity?

⁸ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, “Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present,” in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 6.

⁹ Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin, “Introduction: Government and Humanity,” in Feldman and Ticktin, eds., *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 3.

¹⁰ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason*.

Since the Cold War, most U.S. military interventions have not been operations of war, but have been in response to “humanitarian crises.”¹¹ At present, the U.S. military claims to occupy spaces of care and humanity through numerous military humanitarianism or armed social work projects. One such project is Operation Continuing Promise—the US Navy’s humanitarian mission as a “seagoing medical treatment facility” providing free health care in countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.¹² Such very public projects serve U.S. imperial expansion as part of the “cultural turn in late modern war.”¹³ Here we see military humanitarianism “provid[ing] cover for the raw power ambitions” of empire in “a kind of partially arrested dialectic, whereby the transnational humanitarian identity becomes an important articulation point of imperialism” albeit one that is “never fully contained or exhausted in the imperial project.”¹⁴ So, if empire is articulated in part through a transnational humanitarianism that is not only of empire, but also precedes and exceeds it, what sentiments are generated within imperial humanitarianism? What sentiments articulate, but perhaps also precede and exceed imperial expectations? Michel Foucault contends that “every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history.”¹⁵ Critical histories of such noble and disinterested sentiments of empire and humanitarianism are now plentiful. But what of humanitarianism not in the hands of MSF or local NGOs or even USAID, but the CIA? What

¹¹ Robert C. DiPrizio, *Armed Humanitarians: U.S. Interventions from Northern Iraq to Kosovo*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 2.

¹² The USNS Comfort’s Continuing Promise ran from 2007 through 2011, until being halted in 2012 as part of the U.S. government sequester. Plans are under way to relaunch the mission in 2015. See also, Nosheen Ali, “Books vs. Bombs”: Humanitarian Development and the Narrative of Terror in Northern Pakistan,” *Third World Quarterly* 31(4): 541-559; see also DiPrizio, 2002; and Nathan Hodge, *Armed Humanitarians: The Rise of the Nation Builders*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2011.

¹³ Derek Gregory, “The Rush to the Intimate: Counterinsurgency and the Cultural Turn in Late Modern War,” cited in Ali 2010.

¹⁴ Gil Gott, “Imperial Humanitarianism: History of an Arrested Dialectic,” in Berta Esperanza Hernandez-Truyol, ed., *Moral Imperialism: A Critical Anthropology*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, p. 30.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.”

sentiments ground, precede, and exceed experience and interpretation by those involved in such covert humanitarian projects as those involving the CIA and Tibet?

In a 1993 interview with the *New York Times*, the Dalai Lama stated that unlike earlier U.S. support for Tibet which was motivated by anti-communist politics, current U.S. support is “truly out of sympathy and human compassion” and thus is something “really precious [and] genuine.”¹⁶ I want to focus on his first word: sympathy, and to do so in dialogue with Amit Rai’s insightful work on sympathy as a part of the European civilizing mission.¹⁷ Rai understands sympathy in two, related ways: first as a paradoxical mode of power in that in order “to sympathize with another, one must identify with that other,” and such an identification requires bridging the very cultural or racial differences that enable the ground of sympathy in the first place;¹⁸ and, second as a form of subjectivity “instrumental in ... marking off populations in need of benevolence, and thus of normalizing subjects into better citizens.”¹⁹ This is sympathy as a “principle of sociality and cohesion ... as a mechanism of differentiation and normalization ... [and as] a way of establishing affinities as relations of power.”²⁰

This productive, interested work of sympathy is clearly a technology at work across empires. Building on Stoler and Hume, anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford argues that sympathy is rooted in inference, in apprehending and responding to the sentiments of another, and thus relies on notions of familiarity, recognition, and habit, all components of knowing another person

¹⁶ Quoted in John Kenneth Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War: American and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival*, New York: Public Affairs, 1999, p. 313.

¹⁷ Amit Rai, *The Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power, 1750-1850*, New York: Palgrave, 2002. See also Ann Laura Stoler, “On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty,” *Public Culture* 18(1), and Danilyn Rutherford, “Sympathy, State Building, and the Experience of Empire,” *Cultural Anthropology* 24(1).

¹⁸ Rai, p. xviii.

¹⁹ Rai, p. xix.

²⁰ Rai, p. xix.

or people.²¹ As such, she suggests that this materialist concept of sympathy foregrounds “the embodied, impassioned encounters involved” in colonial practice.²² In imperial inferring across cultures, across habits, colonial officials “stake their sense of self.”²³ Sympathy is not, Rutherford cautions, “proof of the colonizers’ good intentions,” but it is also “equally important to avoid turning sympathy into a fleeting sign of imperialism subverting itself from within.”²⁴ Thus, despite its imperial legitimation, it is too easy to consider sympathy as insincere, as a form of privilege enabled by power. Instead, I want to follow Rutherford’s charge to avoid presumptions about the character, tenor, or direction of sympathy in imperial relationships. The Tibetan involvement with US empire came at a very specific moment in world history—the Cold War and period of decolonization, that historical moment when empires necessarily appeared in the world as anti-imperial.

STAND DOWN MARGARET: THE CIA AND THE COLD WAR

In 1950 President Truman authorized a new type of political action and propaganda via the top secret National Security Council Report 68. NSC 68 specifically advocated supporting anti-communist regimes, including constructing a private sphere to support explicit as well as covert ideology and policies.²⁵ Thus enabled, the U.S. government created a network of supposedly citizen-led organizations that would promote what we now know as “the American

²¹ Danilyn Rutherford, “Sympathy, State Building, and the Experience of Empire,” *Cultural Anthropology* 24(1), pp. 1-31.

²² Rutherford, p. 4.

²³ Rutherford, pp. 8-9.

²⁴ Rutherford, p. 21.

²⁵ On NSC 68 in relation to Asia, see Jodi Kim’s *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

way of life.”²⁶ Such organizations were funded by the CIA and were kept covert, including to their members, the overwhelming majority of whom had *no idea* about their group’s connections to the CIA.

Some of the groups and projects involved were the following: Air America during the Vietnam War, propaganda efforts such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, the covert backing of supposedly neutral international organizations such as the International Commission of Jurists, citizen groups the CIA either created or supported such as the National Student Association and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Cold War publications on both the right and the left such as the *Partisan Review* and the *Kenyon Review*, philanthropic organizations such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the National Endowment for Democracy, cultural institutions such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, student diplomacy initiatives such as the Fulbright Program (the first agreement for which was with Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist China in 1947) and the Foreign Student Leader project, which was billed as a Department of State endeavor, but which was really run by the CIA and of which Cold War maven Margaret Thatcher was a 1967 alumna. Although these connections were made public over forty years ago through the 1967 *Ramparts* magazine expose, and despite recent revelations about NSA spying on US citizens, the American public remains mostly unaware of former or current CIA penetration into domestic U.S. society including into seemingly apolitical cultural spheres such as humanitarian endeavors.²⁷ The 1960s CIA front organization the American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees is one of these groups.

²⁶ See Helen Laville’s “The Importance of Being (In)Earnest: Voluntary Associations and the Irony of the State-Private Network During the Early Cold War,” in Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford, eds., *The US Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 47-65.

²⁷ Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford, eds., *The US Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State-Private Network*, London: Routledge, 2006.

THE AMERICAN EMERGENCY COMMITTEE FOR TIBETAN REFUGEES

The American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees bent over backward to appear apolitical. However, politics were at its core. In March 1959, the Dalai Lama escaped from Tibet to India. One month later, in April 1959, a very exclusive, elite group of men in New York City formed the AECTR for the CIA. The head was the five-term Minnesota congressman *Dr. Walter H. Judd* who had been a medical missionary in China and who was the leader of the pro-Nationalist, anti-communist China Lobby, a governmental-private sector group which strongly advocated on behalf of Chiang Kai Shek's Republican China. Other members included *Suydam Cutting*, the extremely wealthy explorer who had been the first westerner to enter Lhasa, *Angier Biddle Duke* of the aristocratic Duke family and who is noted for having had a long career as a "gentleman diplomat," *Lowell Thomas*, the writer, broadcast journalist, media personality, and explorer who had traveled to Tibet in the 1940s, *B.A. Garside*, a former Protestant missionary to China and anti-communist relief executive, *Harold Oram*, a public relations and fundraising legend long associated with social justice causes, and *Marvin Liebman*, a conservative activist, fundraiser, and key private sector member of the China Lobby who would later go on to be a founder of the Log Cabin Republicans and, with his friend William Buckley, founder of *National Review*. Suffice it to say this was a powerful group of men. They immediately got to work: privately raising funds, securing massive donations of medicines from pharmaceutical companies, making official arrangements with the Government of India for the AECTR to conduct aid work there, and recruiting an Old Boy to serve as the AECTR's Field Director in India. The man they recruited had several decades of experience working in US government security and intelligence, and was at the time involved in a Hong Kong-based CIA

front called Aid Refugee Chinese Intellectuals. His name was Travis L. Fletcher and he more than rose to the occasion.

Fletcher was the consummate undercover agent. He played his part well, fastidiously avoiding any connection of the AECTR with the US government, and instead presenting it as a privately funded organization. Over the years he hired a staff composed of both American and Indian citizens who all thought they were working for an “independent, private organization,” what we would today call a legitimate NGO. In Fletcher’s terms, the AECTR/US government relationship was “a matter of confidence.” He worked tirelessly to be “scrupulously humanitarian” so as to leave no openings for criticism from “communists and critics of America.” Being scrupulously humanitarian meant actively coordinating and delivering a wide range of aid programs in various Tibetan refugee settlements throughout India. Publicly and privately, Fletcher performed the sympathy expected of a humanitarian while simultaneously secretly monitoring the refugee situation and relations between Nehru and the Dalai Lama. He worked closely with his Government of India counterparts on the Central Relief Committee which coordinated and led aid efforts. He sparred with European aid providers, and wrote proudly, gloatingly even about AECTR being the first to deliver medicine and aid to Tibetans when other organizations had only been able to promise but not deliver. To his compatriots back in New York and DC, he delivered report after report about aid operations, and letter after letter of behind-the-scenes political commentary.

Fletcher’s correspondence is full of complaints about how the Dalai Lama’s brothers Gyalo Thondup and Jigme Norbu Rinpoche were more interested in Tibetan independence than helping Tibetan refugees. He fully dismissed their political activities, which I interpret as a component of his pro-Nationalist China leanings, i.e., in terms of the split in U.S. politics at the

time, Fletcher was an old school pro-democratic China, pro-Chiang Kai-shek guy versus a newfangled anti-communist, anti-PRC guy, but again this was second to being in service to his own country in securing U.S. position and power in Asia and the world at large. In order to spy, however, he had to do a decent job providing aid to Tibetan refugees and what he found was that the political concerns of some Tibetans got in the way of his meeting the humanitarian needs of other Tibetans. Thus, in addition to the Dalai Lama's brothers, he frequently criticized wealthy Tibetans in his letters, advising the AECTR group back in the USA not to provide any financial assistance to such Tibetans. Like any other society, Tibet was one stratified by class and the refugee community included Tibetans from all class positions from rich to poor. Yet, the audacity of some Tibetans to not be poor clearly unsettled Fletcher. How does a recognition of class or of Tibetan political desires disrupt the narratives of rescue and aid that necessarily ground humanitarianism even when it is merely a front for spying? How pervasive is the sentiment of selflessness when one is undercover? Does Fletcher's suspension of sympathy for wealthy Tibetan political elites confirm the hypocrisy of the AECTR aid work or confirm its sincerity in that they were focused on the truly deserving refugees?

In public, Fletcher was the consummate paternalistic humanitarian, performing the expected combination of selflessness and service. He spoke of Tibetans as if they were children, writing about how his disgust with Tibetan aristocrats dissipated when he saw "the faces of the kids and the poverty stricken people." His concern was with the *real* refugees, of whom he publicly proclaimed: "Surely no group of refugees were ever more deserving, none more courageous—none more grateful."²⁸ For their part, as individuals and as a community, Tibetans learned to perform their gratitude to their donors, a requirement embedded in the humanitarian

²⁸ "The Role of the Voluntary Agencies in the Tibetan Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Programme," by Travis Fletcher, Field Director, American Emergency Committee for Tibetan Refugees, posted April 18, 1961 to B.A. Garside, Hoover Institution Archives.

project that Tibetans recoded in their own cultural terms around the concept of *jindak* or sponsor and that is still operative today.

In the AECTR files we meet one such deserving individual, the young Tibetan student Deke Dolkar. The AECTR encouraged and even cultivated private US citizen support for Tibetan refugees; in this regard, the involvement of Lowell Thomas, a popular media figure was instrumental in soliciting support over the radio and TV. There was, for example, a local branch of AECTR in Seattle composed of what we would today call “Tibet supporters,” and other groups more or less active, more or less formal throughout the USA. One was the Women’s Club of Westfield, New Jersey. The members of this club, who as far as I can tell were all housewives, held dessert and bridge parties and fashion shows to raise funds for Tibetan refugees which were all routed through AECTR. In 1964, for example, the club sold crystal bracelets to raise money to furnish a home with the name “Woman’s Club of Westfield” in the Lowell Thomas Hospital complex for Tibetan refugee children in Mysore, India. The Woman’s Club also sponsored a young Tibetan boy named Thupden for three years, then began sponsoring the young Tibetan girl Deke Dolkar at Travis Fletcher’s suggestion. The head of the club, Mrs. George W. Mann, corresponded frequently with both Fletcher and Deke Dolkar. As reported in the local *The Westfield (N.J.) Leader* newspaper, “Deke ... [is] an outstanding student, [who] has always been at the top of her class.” We are told that she calls Mrs. George W. Mann “Auntie” and “deeply appreciates the friendly interest and substantial assistance” given to her by the international relations department of the Women’s Club. The Woman’s Club sponsored Deke for twelve years, right through her graduation from college in 1979, and marked the graduation of this

“Tibetan protégé” with a fundraising party—homemade dessert at 1:00 with bridge playing through 4.²⁹

Such sponsorship of Tibetan students remains an important part of the Tibetan exile community to this day, and has important origins in the covert humanitarian efforts of the CIA and more broadly the reinforcement of US imperial hegemony through domestic citizen support of issues of “liberation, rights, and democratization” abroad. Although I can’t get into it today, such citizen initiatives were an important part of U.S. politics of this period and one other place where U.S. women’s participation—U.S. housewives’ participation—was important was the reconstruction of Japan after WWII and the calculated emergence of the modern Japanese woman.³⁰ The construction of an international network of citizens to support Tibet, to build person-to-person ties, relies on a specific sort of imperial model of benevolence, volunteerism, progress, and humanity. It relies also on the figure of the refugee as the quintessentially-available humanitarian subject.³¹

In 1965, Congressman Judd made a trip to India to observe AECTR operations; in his official report of the trip, he specifically praised Fletcher’s “humanitarian and totally important work” with these “needy people,” helping them move toward “freedom,” and providing them with an “‘image’ of the American Way.” One way Fletcher helped meet Tibetans’ needs was by improving their diet. Perhaps the greatest non-political excitement in his papers is when he proclaims that Tibetans are “taking to noodles like hot cakes.” He had bought a noodle making

²⁹ According to numerous reports in *The Westfield (N.J.) Leader*, always in the society pages among engagement announcements, Deke Dolkar is said to have attended St. Mary’s School in Kasoulie, India, and then a Catholic convent school in Isauli, Uttar Pradesh, India where she studied to be a teacher serving her Tibetan community. Once Deke Dolkar graduated from college, the Woman’s Club of Westfield began to sponsor a boy in Cali, Colombia who was recommended to the club by a local Christian missionary.

³⁰ On the role of U.S. housewives in securing U.S. imperial rhetoric at home and abroad, see Lisa Yoneyama’s “Liberation under Siege: U.S. Military Occupation and Japanese Women’s Enfranchisement,” *American Quarterly* 57(3): 885-910.

³¹ On refugees as a homogenized category of humanity, see Liisa Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11(3), 1996, pp. 377-404.

machine for experimenting with donated American surplus wheat and, as he told an AP reporter, the experiment was such a success that he intended to buy more machines.³² Among the AECTR group back in New York, the noodle excitement is contagious but the applause of Fletcher's humanitarian genius misses something very telling: Tibetans were already noodle eaters. All sorts of homemade noodles—*thukpa*, *tenthuk*, and so on—were then (and remain today) staples of the Tibetan diet. For Fletcher, and in ways distributed throughout AECTR efforts, Tibetans were not individuals who potentially possessed a cuisine, but were instead a category of people—refugees—who had been converted into a project that sustained, legitimated, and burnished a certain sort of self-congratulatory imperial humanitarianism. The cover of refugee aid enabled a covert American presence in India at a politically-charged global moment; non-aligned India was friendly with both the USA and the Soviet Union. Would the Soviets also approach the Dalai Lama? If so, Fletcher was determined to find out. Monitoring this situation via humanitarian action was part of the US project of winning both Indian and Tibetan “hearts and minds” in the 1960s.

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL: ETHNOGRAPHIC SEDUCTION AND HUMANIZING THE INHUMANE

Travis L. Fletcher died in May of 1968. I never met him or any participants in the AECTR, CIA or civilian. As far as I can tell, they have all passed away, including Mrs. George W. Mann of the Westfield NJ Women's Club. It was not until I found her obituary in a Denver newspaper that I learned her first name was Angeline. In all of her correspondence with Fletcher as well as newspaper articles she is referred to as “Mrs. George Mann.” My knowledge of the AECTR is thus almost entirely archival, and I want to emphasize that it still feels distant to me,

³² “Noodles Solve a Tibetan Problem,” *The Straits Times*, 27 May 1964, page 2.

hard to gain ethnographic traction in unlike other archival work I have done; there is no easy ethnographic “in” to this material, and at times it even gets to the point where the individuals feel like stereotypes come to life: the emotionally cold undercover spy, the devious masterminds back in NY, the bumbling but well-meaning civilian couple who are the AECTR’s field officers, the citizen-housewives, the greedy Tibetan aristocrats and so on. While I have done extensive archival research before, including on earlier historical periods, I’ve never encountered the same inability to connect ethnographically with my subjects, especially my lead subject, in this case Fletcher. He remains ethnographically flat to me, even in those moments when he is writing to people who know who he really is.

In contrast, my research on the CIA and the Tibetan resistance army involved interviews, conversation, shared meals, and relationships with retired CIA officers, including relationships that continue to this day. Since 1999, I’ve spent time with these men in their homes, in California, Florida, Maryland, and Massachusetts, and spoke with them and others on the phone. I’ve also spent time with these men and their families at two group events—one at CIA headquarters in Virginia in 2009, and one at Camp Hale in Colorado in 2010. As a result, I’ve gotten to know their grown children, most of whom are a decade or so older than me, and a number of whom are now my friends on Facebook.

In doing this research, I would think often of Antonius C.G. Robben’s writings on ethnographic seduction, on his visiting with an Argentine general in his home, and on what happens when historical figures are humanized, when violence is softened.³³ One of the CIA officers from Camp Hale who I interviewed was a hardened, infamous man who was widely, albeit wrongly considered to be the model for Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*. He is now

³³ Antonius C.G. Robben, “Ethnographic Seduction, Transference, and Resistance in Dialogues about Terror and Violence in Argentina,” *Ethos* 24(1), pp. 71-106.

deceased but his name was Anthony Poshepny, although he went by Tony Poe. I met with him in his home in San Francisco and he told me stories of war in his living room. Memories of how hard-core the Tibetans were, stories of their physical bravado and ability to subsist anywhere. Stories of his time later in Laos, of his penchant for ears cut off of dead enemy bodies and for women and his inability to suffer either fools or bullshit. Both, he told me, were reasons why he liked the Tibetans: they also had a low tolerance for these things. As Roger McCarthy, his former boss at Camp Hale, would later say, Tony was “a rebel with a cause,” and he appreciated others who fought with purpose and passion.³⁴

As we spoke, we sat in side-by-side chairs facing a tv that was on and his narrations competed with a steady stream of infomercials—Richard Simmons’ diet products, Pokemon products, and the like—until his Lao wife switched the channel to ballet. Earlier, on the phone while setting up our meeting, he told me that the problem with the CIA was “we sell out everyone we work with. They’d thank me, and I’d say, no, you made me. They didn’t understand. Those Tibetans killed a hell of a lot of Chinese. We trained them and improved their resistance abilities. But it was an impossible situation. There was no hope.” He told me about his health, which was failing and his triple bypass surgery the year before, saying he had maybe only two years left, a sobering reflection on the very real bodies involved in making and telling this history. His job, he said, had been military training at Camp Hale as well as escorting the soldiers back to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) from where they would secretly transit into India and on to their base in Nepal.

“I wasn’t involved in the politics after, but went back to Laos [where he spent the bulk of his career]. I jumped around a lot. I spent over thirty-five years in Asia. It was like the British,

³⁴ Peter Waldman, “A Cold War Coda: Of Severed Heads, Hill Tribe Gratitude,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 12, 2000.

build relationships. We took care of local people, of families. The British do this well, MI5.” In person, Poe was loquacious although clearly in ill health. As he told me his story, he fleshed it out with people from his past, names of friends I should contact, folks to whom I should mention his name, a genealogy of the making of a CIA guerrilla warfare expert. His first CIA assignment was in Korea where he was introduced to guerilla warfare, stayed for three years and “got a reputation for being an idiot” after which “the directors always sent me wherever interesting things were going on: Tibet, Indonesia, the Thailand border. They would send materials to read up on for background. I already knew some of the Tibet material from Kipling. He’s one of my favorites. *Kim* is one of the Agency training manuals.” Of his time in Camp Hale he explained, “There were as many as two hundred men per group. Every five to six months we would graduate them. Then drop them in East Pakistan. It was a big operation. We’d give them medals, awards, and they’d have their whole life’s treasures around their neck. It was difficult, though. Food was tough. In the beginning there was no cook. I was the cook, cooking out of the Army Manual. All of them gained weight.”

Tony Poe was not really the cook, but the on-the-ground guerrilla ops guy, teaching Tibetans about demolitions, picking locks, burning bodies, getting information through collecting wallets and IDs, sniper training. “On Sundays, I would take them on field trips. Divide the group in half. One group would ambush the other, then we’d do the reverse the next week.” One time, he said, “I got two mules for them. The mules hated me. But those Tibetans? They’d say something in the mule’s ears. They loved the mules and the mules loved them.” Sinking back into his chair, ballerinas twirling on the tv in front of us, he concluded our conversation with “We learned a lot from the Tibetans. Man, they knew how to go in the snow. They put sticks in their hands. They’d work the snow down to a path, and then the horses and troops would

follow.” He narrated this technique with a voice and demeanor appreciative of its brilliance, some forty years later still clearly impressed.

I gathered my things to leave and he told me it was just about time for Baywatch. As I left he said to me, “I used to be somewhat of a rounder. But not all written about me is true. I used to drink a lot in Laos. It was to be able to shoot a machine gun. It was necessary.” The literature on Tony Poe is colorful; he was a character foreign correspondents loved. He wasn’t a sailor but he swore like one, and he lived in the field as a larger-than-life caricature of who he was. He did so, however, in his own often repeated words: while taking care of his people. He also often repeated his sentiments about the Tibetans, or more specifically about the Khampas or eastern Tibetans who comprised the bulk of the Tibetan resistance army. In our conversations, he spoke several times about how central Tibetans were worthless and it was the Khampas and Amdowas who were the real fighters.³⁵ Earlier, in an interview with a journalist about the CIA in Laos, Poe was asked about the Tibet operation: “We don’t talk about that. No comment, no comment. ... No fucking comment, but those Khampas are the best people I ever worked with.”³⁶

If the AECTR was the paternal side of empire, then the Camp Hale operation was the fraternal one. CIA officers and Tibetan soldiers lived together in a small, secret military camp. In their down time the CIA officers played Monopoly and Scrabble, drank Schlitz beer, drove to nearby Glenwood Springs to meet girls, and hung out with the Tibetans on site: shooting slingshots, playing practical jokes on each other, learning to take snuff Tibetan-style. Theirs was a shared experience in ways that the AECTR’s aid work never was, and so was generative of

³⁵ Khampas are Tibetans from the eastern region of Kham. Amdowas are Tibetans from the northeastern region of Amdo.

³⁶ Roger Warner, *Backfire: The CIA’s Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995, p. 93.

different performative registers of sympathy, sincerity, and human connection that remain personally activated and felt today. In the military operation, the covert was a shared space; in the humanitarian operation, it was solely American. I now want to move us to the present, to a recent CIA-Tibet ceremony at Camp Hale.

THE MAN-TEARS OF EMPIRE

On September 10, 2010, an unusual event took place in Colorado. In a ceremony at Camp Hale, the U.S. Government publicly acknowledged for the first time ever the CIA's secret training of Tibetan resistance soldiers during the years 1958-1964. Hosted by U.S. Senator Mark Udall, the ceremony included the installation of a plaque acknowledging the operation, and speeches both prepared and impromptu by the handful of former CIA officers and Tibetan veterans who were able to make it to Camp Hale for the ceremony. Most of these men had not seen each other for fifty years. Also present were many of their descendants, especially on behalf of those American and Tibetan participants who could not be there in person or who were deceased. It was a glorious day, one filled with intense high-altitude sun and deep emotion. Clearly evident were the sentiments both Tibetan vets and retired CIA officers had privately shared with me about each other over the years. Again and again, each would tell me of the mutual admiration and respect they had for each other, about how for the Tibetans the CIA teachers were *mi yakpo red* or "good people," and for the CIA officers how the Tibetan operation was one unmatched in the rest of their career in terms of how well they got along with the Tibetans and developed relations of true commitment. On both sides, these stereotypical tough guys narrated their relationship to me with great sentimentality.

“We cried.” Thinking back to the moment of departing Camp Hale to return to Asia, Tibetan veteran Lobsang Jampa told me of how the American teachers and Tibetan soldiers both shed tears despite their best efforts not to for different cultural reasons. The plaque installed at Camp Hale used this very theme to memorialize the relationship. It reads:

CAMP HALE

From 1958 to 1964, Camp Hale played an important role as a training site for Tibetan Freedom Fighters. Trained by the CIA, many of these brave men lost their lives in the struggle for freedom.

“They were the best and bravest of their generation, and we wept together when they were killed fighting alongside their countrymen.”

Orphans of the Cold War, by John Kenneth Knaus

This plaque is dedicated to their memory.

Speeches at the ceremony were deeply emotional. One Tibetan veteran spoke poignantly about the closeness between the Tibetans and Americans: “We would cry when we left here, so would the instructors.” Several speakers, Americans and Tibetans both, had to pause in their talks, overcome with emotion. The daughter of one of the Tibetans trained there thanked all of the unsung Tibetan heroes, and explained that the covert nature of the operation was on the Tibetan side as well as the American side: when she was a young girl, she said, “We thought our father

had an American accent from watching movies. We didn't know what he did. ... [We didn't know why] he was really good at reading maps." The most moving tribute was by the son of Roger McCarthy, the late head of the Camp Hale operation. In a prepared speech, delivered with great emotion and humility, he read a list of all the CIA officers involved in the project and also spoke directly to the Tibetan veterans: "For all the Tibetans involved in the program, my father deeply admired your courage, character, determination, and desire to excel in any challenge. He couldn't help but to fall in love with each of you."

Love is not a sentiment often associated with the CIA. This love was homosocial, what we might today call bromance, grounded in respect and shared experience, and part of a social relationship narrated by both parties as a form of solidarity. As with sincerity, solidarity is a sentiment grounded in sympathy. Tibetans were sincerely committed to their mission, and thus sincerely engaged in their training. The CIA officers were sincerely impressed with the Tibetans. For Tibetans, sincerity of their American counterparts, that is, of men who they knew personally did not necessarily translate into a presumption of similar sincerity at higher levels in the US government. As time went on, it became clear to (at least) some Tibetans that American interest in Tibet was really self-interest in antagonizing, if not defeating, communism in China. Differentiating between the government and its representatives, however, was not a problem for those Tibetans who trained in Colorado. For those CIA men who lived and worked with the Tibetans, and with those Tibetans who lived and worked with the Americans, a sense of solidarity grounds interpretations of Tibet-US relations as collaborative and cooperative rather than as coercive or compromised.

The September 10 ceremony at Camp Hale started with a speech by retired CIA officer Ken Knaus and his statement that the "U.S. promise to Tibet remains unfulfilled." This sense of

commitment was felt on both sides, an obligation and responsibility born of shared experience. As a Tibetan veteran put it: “The word America is magic in Tibet. ... We are still hopeful America will do something for Tibet.” This hope that Tibetan veterans have resides in a different emotional genre than either expectation or entitlement.³⁷ His use of the word hope matches the sentiments I heard repeatedly from veterans. What they had for the U.S. was hope, a different sentiment from expectation and a different genre than entitlement.³⁸ This hope continues to be borne patiently, albeit with a new engagement in the last two decades as more Tibetans migrate to the U.S.A. from South Asia. For those CIA men who lived and worked with the Tibetans, and with those Tibetans who lived and worked with the Americans, a sense of solidarity grounds interpretations of Tibet-US relations as collaborative and cooperative rather than as coercive or compromised.

In his speech at the Camp Hale ceremony, a Tibetan veteran emotionally declared, “I am very happy to be here. This is like coming to my own home.” His words were preceded by those of Senator Udall who shared that he and others were working to turn Camp Hale into a national park. The national parks belong to all Americans, they are “home” for all citizens, and in the case of Camp Hale, for those foreigners for whom geography, politics, and sympathy convert to honorary “brother” status. While fraternity is a familiar military theme, such conversions are composed of multiple cultural logics. Tibetan practices of reincarnation provide a different, but related framework for Tibetan brotherly love: as Doma Norbu explained, speaking in tribute to her late father Athar Norbu, one of the first Tibetan CIA trainees, “He talked about the teachers as Khampas reborn as Americans.” This is a different sort of kinship from the paternalism of the

³⁷ Ann Frechette, *Tibetans in Nepal: The Dynamics of International Assistance Among a Community in Exile*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004.

³⁸ Ann Frechette, *Tibetans in Nepal: The Dynamics of International Assistance Among a Community in Exile*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004.

AECTR. In important ways, the constituent parts of the CIA military and refugee aid operations look the same—the people involved, the imperial sympathy underlying the operations, the requisite performances of gratitude, and the importance of sincerity and solidarity in grounding or claiming to ground “real” human connection. But sentimental experiences vary wildly between the two operations such that while AECTR reveals the CIA performance of humanitarian sincerity, Camp Hale shows the sincere performance of CIA humanitarianism. What do these differences mean, and how does they matter?

What I see here is sentimental imperialism embedded in realpolitik, such that sentiment is substantive of experience and action rather than just embellishment to them?³⁹ And yet, just because sentiment is sincerely felt does not mean it is void of the violence of empire. The major difference between the AECTR and the Camp Hale operation was that the level at which the CIA officers interacted with the Tibetans. The AECTR was relatively high-level CIA officers providing aid to Tibetans whereas the CIA officers at Camp Hale were lower level, who not only lived in the camp with Tibetans for months, even years at a time, but who worked *with* the Tibetans; theirs was a shared project in ways that the AECTR never was. Both were covert, both were designed top-down to gain intelligence against China and India more than anything else, and both involved thousands of ordinary Tibetans. Given the comradeship that so often develops in military situations, it is perhaps not surprising that close bonds developed between Tibetans and Americans in that shared space of a secret military camp. And yet what history do we write for these noble but interested sentiments? In so doing, we need to get at the violence endorsed by imperial sympathy, at the violence that can constitute both sincerity and solidarity in unexpected directions, toward not only Tibetans but also perhaps to American CIA officers.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Affective States,” 2004, p. 5-6.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Ann Stoler for pushing me on this particular question.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, state assessments of the contents and distributions of rogue CIA sentiments of love and sympathy in the 1960s and present day are, as with many things related to the CIA, not easy to access. There are clear continuities and disjunctures in how the CIA theorized humanitarianism and conceptualized humanity as a part of its operations in the 1960s and now, and between the many individuals within the CIA from the very highest levels at Langley on down to the “seasonal” workers such as the mostly college-aged group of smokejumpers from Montana who flew CIA planes over Tibet in the off-season. As with any imperial formation, the CIA is composed of agents, officers, and contract employees who participate in imperial ventures in ways that are not always regular or predictable.⁴¹

To return to my opening question: What would it mean to take the Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA, seriously as an ethnographic subject? It is much easier and less fraught with tension to engage the CIA as either an historical or political subject than it is to situate them within a domain in which the ethnographic is foregrounded. To foreground an ethnographic subjectivity for the CIA is to bring questions of sympathy and humanity to an institution and actors who are often considered to be devoid of both. To humanize the CIA is to reject internal and external efforts to place the CIA outside of knowable, namable, analyzable domains. It is to reject its claims to exist outside the norm, in the shadows, in domains where rules may be suspended, and to instead argue that the covert is deeply human and must be engaged with as such. This is not to romanticize the CIA or to privilege the CIA over those they co-opted or lied to or killed, or in those rare cases such as the one I discuss here, over those with whom they

⁴¹ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 7.

collaborated. Tibetans fought against the Chinese independent of both the CIA and anti-communist rhetoric; their struggle was driven by other issues, and yet, because their struggle was with the People's Republic of China, the CIA supported it in an imperial reach, in a stretch of empire that should absolutely not be taken for compassion.⁴²

Empires have always had secrets, but not all empires have been covert. What changes when empires go underground? Covert empire includes the concentration of power in the hands of intelligence officers, of an informal and invisible imperial rule that runs parallel to official foreign policy, an apparatus that “barely” exists on paper, that is specifically conceived for an anti-imperialist world, and that involves the cultivation of certain types of domestic sentiment and participation.⁴³ In the case of Tibet, covert empire also rested on a politics of sympathy that simultaneously legitimated and masked violence—representational violence, structural violence, and physical violence. Travis L. Fletcher and Company provided humanitarian aid to Tibetan refugees in covert exchange for spy access to India and the Dalai Lama's exile government. Tony Poe and the CIA Camp Hale teachers provided military support and emotional solidarity to Tibetan resistance soldiers in exchange for Tibetan intelligence gathering in and warfare against the People's Republic of China.

Sympathy is a key part of each of these imperial humanitarian missions. Sympathy works to establish affinity and sincerity as a relation of power, to forge sociality and trust, to differentiate between and to normalize suffering and deserving subjects. But this is only one of the registers in which one might experience or receive empire, covert or not.⁴⁴ Heonik Kwon has critiqued cold war history as “fundamentally an anthropological problem” in that we need to

⁴² Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire*, 2006, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁴³ On British covert empire in the Middle East, see Priya Satia *Spies in Arabia: the Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴⁴ Rai 2002.

uncover and understand “the human dimension of the geopolitical order” rather than resting at the level of a political-historical engagement of the central players and their truths.⁴⁵ For me, this human dimension must be both American and Tibetan, and situated at a grounded, experiential level of those individuals who participated in this covert empire, thus putting in Barney Cohn’s sense, colonizer and colonized into the same analytic framework.⁴⁶

If humanity has become a means of organizing global community⁴⁷ in that “the doctrine of action has become essential to our recognition of other people’s humanity,”⁴⁸ and if we can locate such action and humanity within the CIA, then how does this re-orient discussion of political participation and the always-compromised nature of agency? Answering this question in the case of Tibet is to write with and against particular politics and literatures. It is to write in between celebration and castigation, but is not necessarily to walk some sort of middle ground (be it a middle way or a demilitarized zone). It is to refuse guilt by association, to reject blunt force analysis, while operating within a critical and imperial framework. It is to acknowledge that a self-proclaimed “anti-imperialist” China drew Tibet into the U.S.’s anti-communist orbit. It is to recognize that to dwell squarely in the U.S. imperial sphere is a position circumscribed in various ways none of which close down all possible options or strategic needs for thinking, for being, or for sharing relationships of sympathy, sincerity, or solidarity, including love with CIA officers.

⁴⁵ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁶ Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁷ As argued in Feldman and Ticktin 2010, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Talal Asad 1996: 272, quoted in Keane 2007:3.