

BRITISH TRAVELLERS' ACCOUNTS OF PORTUGUESE AFRICA
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY¹

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Introduction: the British Victorian Travel Writer in Africa

Travel writing is one of the most accessible but also one of the most treacherous of all sources for the historian. As a genre it has always been situated uncomfortably close to fiction. Indeed, it has been argued that travellers' tales are one of the principal origins of the novel, the archetypal form of fiction. With few exceptions, the earliest fictional writing — particularly the early novel — took the form of a journey. This was the ideal medium for recounting adventure and for describing character and situation. However, the traveller was often also a pilgrim, a man on a quest or a journey of self discovery. The protagonist in a tale of travel is always a hero² and the greatest early works of poetry and fiction took this heroic form — Homer, the Arthurian romances and the Icelandic sagas, Mandeville, Camões, Rabelais and Cervantes.

So intimately connected were travel writing and fiction that it is often difficult to tell them apart — after all how do we classify Homer, the Icelandic sagas or such works as Fernão Mendes Pinto's *Peregrinação* and the fabulous journeys of Cabeza de

¹ This paper was presented on 23 April 2002 to the Department of Anglo-Portuguese Studies Master's seminar on English Literature lectured by Teresa Pinto Coelho at Universidade Nova de Lisboa and was kindly sponsored by the Gulbenkian Foundation.

² P.G.Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, U. Kentucky Press (Lexington, 1983), pp. 148-160.

Vaca, or, to take a less well known example, Daniel Defoe's *A General History of the Pyrates* or Drury's *Travels in Madagascar*?³

So historians using travel writing as a source must be aware of the extent to which this kind of writing has derived from an essentially literary genre. They should be aware of the conscious and unconscious purposes and devices of the travel writer, how the author's imagination was been at work in constructing the narrative and how the traveller develops an image of himself as a hero embarking successfully or unsuccessfully on a quest. As Edward Ive said, "the man who writes his own journey, is under a necessity... of making himself the hero of his own tale".⁴

For a historian to understand Victorian travel writers three factors have to be considered — the writer's personal objectives, unconscious as well as conscious; the readership with its preconceptions and tastes; and the political context — the public debates and ideologies on which the travelogue inevitably becomes a commentary.

Personal motivation is often difficult to determine but one can begin by looking at how travel writers represent themselves. Whatever the ostensible reason for the journey, the Victorian traveller soon reveals that he is on a quest. This may be a quest to build his reputation and fortune, or to convert the heathen to Christianity or free trade or both. At a deeper level he represents himself as the hero of a fairy story where he sets out to prove himself, to test his virtue or manhood, through meeting and overcoming tests, trials and dangers (as Tamino in the *Magic Flute* or Hercules faced with the twelve 'labours' imposed on him by the Delphic oracle). Or he may be in search of an earthly paradise, the description of which will act as a critique of his own country and its corruption. The English traveller, for example, is often on a quest to rediscover the true nature of 'Englishness'.⁵ In our post-Freudian age we may here also be aware that his journey can be one of psychosexual exploration and fulfilment.

However, travel writing is not all about self. The readership also matters since the book has to be published and sold. Although by the end of the nineteenth century the Victorian appetite for African travel had become almost insatiable, the

³ Captain Charles Johnson [Daniel Defoe], *A General History of the Pyrates*, (London, 1724), new edition ed. Manuel Schonhorn, Dent (London, 1972); P.Oliver ed., *Madagascar; or, Robert Drury's Journal, during Fifteen Years' Captivity on that Island*, Fisher Unwin (London, 1890).

⁴ Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, p. 148.

⁵ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, Columbia University Press (New York, 1996), especially pp. 86-90.

writer still had to take care to provide his public with what it wanted to read. And it is clear that the Victorian public wanted most if not all of the following — scientific discoveries, demonstrations of the superior intelligence, courage and technical skill of the British, hunting stories, descriptions of the moral and physical degradation of Africa (but curiously also descriptions of an earthly paradise and a childlike people naturally innocent and good), vindications of the racial superiority of the whites and the rightness of British imperial policies, and last, but not necessarily least, descriptions of tortures, executions, cruelties and sexual practices, which stayed firmly the right side of the pornographic but which nevertheless stimulated the imagination in regions otherwise forbidden. ED Young was referring to this when he wrote in 1868: “it is too much the custom with some to bring back to Europe a portfolio of nastinesses stored in memory, which can only be collected by the research of a filthy curiosity, and serve the purposes of an antagonism to our common humanity.”⁶

Thirdly, what of the policies and ideologies dominant at the time? As has been frequently described, the prevailing ideology in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century maintained that many, if not most, of the evils of the world stemmed from economic restrictions and the absence of free trade — and from the disastrous effects of the slave trade. Once free trade was achieved, and the slave trade had been abolished, a world would be born in which the virtues of hard work, thrift, peace, the exchange of ideas, and good government would flourish. The native African, once freed from slavery and given the benefit of Christian knowledge, would achieve his full stature as a human being, and become the moral and intellectual equal of the rest of mankind.

Although this current of ideas persisted throughout the century, it was gradually overtaken by another ideological system which held that non-Europeans were inherently inferior, that they were like children, who needed to be held in tutelage until they “had grown up”. The virtues of hard work, thrift and Christian knowledge would not grow of their own accord but had to be taught, or even enforced.

Moreover the idea that free trade was uniquely beneficial was now less self-evident and was beginning to be replaced by a demand for imperial unity, an imperial market, and an imperial

⁶ E.D.Young, *The Search after Livingstone*, (London, 1868), p. 246.

defence force. Colonisation with the plantation of British settlers and British institutions, rather than simply free trade, now seemed the way ahead.

These two, often quite contradictory, ideological systems can be found as theme music running through much of the travel writing of the period accompanied by another theme, a growing sense of self-doubt. British travellers, it has been argued, were often in search of the true nature of Britishness. Aware of the disastrous consequences of the industrial revolution on the social and moral fabric of society in Britain, travellers like J.A.Froude sought to rediscover or to recreate what they believed to be the true, virtuous Britain in the colonies of settlement, or to define Britishness by describing, confronting and frequently denouncing other systems and cultures wherever they found them.

To this uncertainty about his Britishness, the traveller frequently added an uncertainty about his masculinity. That much travel literature is a transparent, and often childish, assertion of masculine, even macho, values (a phenomenon that can also be seen in the contemporary vogue for public school stories) obviously suggests to the modern reader that many men of the time were profoundly ambivalent about their sexuality.⁷

With these signposts and maps as a guide, I want to look at some of the travel narratives of British men who visited Portuguese Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Britain and Portugal in Africa

The context in which British travel writers viewed Portuguese Africa changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century.

Early in the century the main contact was between officers of the British anti-slave trade squadron and the Portuguese. Portugal was believed to be one of the major obstacles in the way of Britain's policy of ending the trans-oceanic slave trade. This policy was, of course, intimately connected with Britain's industrial revolution and with the campaign for liberalism and free trade. In the case of Portugal the slave traders were all seen as being *Miguelistas* and exponents of the old colonial system of closed markets and monopolies.

⁷ Isabel Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, OUP (Oxford, 1984); J.A.Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, Viking (Harmondsworth, 1986).

It was an article of faith that the slave trade bred, both in the victims and in the slave traders themselves, vice, superstition, bloodshed and war and that it was the enemy of peace, prosperity and civilisation.

As the century advanced Britain's concerns became more complex. There was a revival of naval and colonial rivalry with France in the Indian Ocean and, after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, a concern for the strategic security of the western Indian Ocean. There was also the attempt to maintain control over the Boer Republics in South Africa through controlling their outlets to the sea — a policy which made southern Mozambique an area of great sensitivity for Britain. Britain had annexed Natal in 1844 to prevent independent Boer access to the sea but became alarmed when Portugal and the Transvaal concluded a frontier agreement in 1869 which allowed for free trade through the port of Delagoa Bay and the possibility of a railway. This led Britain to contest sovereignty over the Bay and over the coast south to Natal — a contest which brought to the fore not just legalistic issues of sovereignty but the question whether the end of the slave trade, free commerce, peace and civilisation would ever be achieved except under British rule.

Britain's diplomatic defeat in 1875, when Delagoa Bay was awarded to Portugal, was one of the factors which led to a change in British policies towards southern Africa and to a temporary change in the official attitudes towards Portugal. While Disraeli's government now embarked on an ambitious policy of trying to unite all of southern Africa in a British ruled Confederation — a policy which led to the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and the Zulu War in 1879 — it also sought to cooperate with Portugal over a variety of major issues.

Negotiations between 1877 and 1884 focussed on the need to build a railway to Delagoa Bay, on the organisation of labour recruitment for the diamond mines of Kimberley and on the need to establish the principle of free trade, free navigation and free right of access to the African interior via the Congo and Zambesi rivers, the mouths of which were controlled by Portugal. Portugal ceased, temporarily, to be a target for moral denunciation and, in the person of the Minister for Overseas Affairs, João de Andrade Corvo, was seen as the newest recruit to the cause of liberalism and empire.

However, the Congo and Zambesi treaties were never ratified. They met a wall of opposition within Portugal and Britain and brought about the intervention of Bismarck and the summoning of the Berlin Congress in October 1884.

Following the Berlin Congress, Anglo-Portuguese relations again deteriorated as competition for central African territory led to armed confrontations on the Shire River and in Manica, and to the Ultimatum of January 1890. Once more Portugal appeared to be the obstacle to progress and civilisation in Africa. British perceptions of what constituted progress and civilisation, however, had subtly changed. Now it was no longer a question of ending the slave trade and establishing freedom of commerce, but of opening Africa to British investment, British settlement and direct British rule.

The Ultimatum of 1890 and the treaty of 1891 are often seen as a humiliating defeat for Portugal which led to the financial collapse of 1892 and, indirectly, to the fall of the Monarchy in 1910. In fact, it should have been seen as a considerable victory, for Portugal now controlled the access routes to the Transvaal mines and to British Central Africa. Railways had to cross Portuguese controlled territory to reach Portuguese controlled ports. Cooperation not confrontation was vital, and the building of the Beira and Benguella railways soon led to the rapid growth of two Anglo-Portuguese port cities at Beira and Lobito.

At the same time British entrepreneurs realised that, far from being an obstacle to British enterprise, the Portuguese colonies, particularly Mozambique, presented major opportunities for investment, while Portuguese attitudes towards African labour were no longer demonised as slave trading but came to be seen in a much more favourable light as they enabled British-owned enterprises like Sena Sugar, the Mozambique Company and, of course, the Rand Mines to recruit the labour they needed.

Portugal's possession of Delagoa Bay, of course, still rankled and was to remain an object of South African expansionist ambitions at least until the 1920s, but with the signing of the so-called *modus vivendi* in 1901, Britain and Portugal were once again close partners and allies in Africa.

Dominant Themes

It should now be clear that the dominant themes of British travel writers, apart from their own personal odysseys, would be first 'Paradise Lost' — the disastrous consequences of slavery and the slave trade, the moral failings of the Portuguese and the poor state of the Portuguese colonies — and then the potential for 'Paradise Regained', the contrasting virtues of the British and the potential for progress under British political and moral influence.

All writers played with these themes, though their emphasis shifted markedly from a preoccupation with the slave trade (and the denunciation of the Portuguese as slave traders) to a preoccupation with good government and sound principles of colonisation (and the contrast between “good” British and “corrupt” Portuguese government).

The Anti-slave trade campaign

The earliest British travellers who concerned themselves with Portuguese Africa were deeply involved in the campaign against slavery and the slave trade. They were naval officers, missionaries and consuls and they wrote for a public which, by and large, accepted the rightness and necessity of Britain’s campaign and did not question its motives. The naval officers’ narratives were concerned very much with defending the role of the navy and extolling the traditional virtues of life at sea. The hero of their narratives was usually the navy itself rather than the writer.

Frederick Barnard wrote a racy and detailed account of the hunt for slavers off the Mozambique coast in the 1840s. His direct, unsentimental narrative describes the hardships suffered by the navy as well as the horrors of the trade they were trying to suppress. Africa, for him, was “that land of slavery, debased human nature, disease, bribery, and corruption; the grave of many a fine noble fellow who has been sacrificed to the impossible theories of orators who have never been out of England”⁸ and, after a visit to Mozambique Island, he commented, “now, it is all falling into ruins, and house after house seems to be crumbling away; and one cannot help feeling how just is the doom of a place whose merchants flourished by trafficking in the flesh of their fellow creatures, who are even now considered by them as belonging more to the brute than the human species.”⁹

Barnard portrayed the Portuguese town of Quelimane as the centre of slaving activity but also as a scene of burlesque comedy in which the Portuguese players parodied the qualities of European (read British) civilisation. He describes the announcement of the imminent arrival of the governor-general when “all was hurry and bustle; dressing gowns gave place to gold-laced coats and

⁸ F.L.Barnard, *Three Years Cruize in the Mozambique Channel for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, (London, 1848), p. 277.

⁹ Barnard, *Three Years Cruize in the Mozambique Channel for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, p. 70

long beards to cut chins; thin men staggered under fat epaulets and snuff, and butter-coloured artillerymen risked their lives by firing a salute from ghosts of guns of all calibres". One poor artilleryman had his arm shattered by an explosion. "The poor fellow was immediately in a blaze, but, being black, little sympathy was evinced by the bystanders, and although I had to run the gauntlet before the soldiers who were firing a feu de joie, I was one of the first to tear his trousers off". In this humanitarian crisis it was the Englishman, Barnard, and the German, Dr Wilhelm Peters, who took charge and amputated the arm "above the elbow with a carving knife and carpenter's saw, the former of which I sharpened on my boot whilst Peters prepared the latter with a file. I assisted him by holding the arm and afterwards the artery, the gentlemen of the place being in their Sunday clothes and not accustomed to the sight of blood"¹⁰.

The British were not only suppressing the slave trade but were practical, efficient and down to earth. The Portuguese were not only slavers but were unable to cope with the demands of a humanitarian emergency.

With Lyons McLeod and David Livingstone the situation was very different. Livingstone's account of his epic journey to Luanda, and then back across Africa to the Indian Ocean, between 1853 and 1856 became the most influential and widely read of African travel narratives. It was a mirror in which the mid-Victorians could see reflected their strengths, virtues and ideals — scientific curiosity, personal courage and perseverance, a concern for morality, social progress and, of course, free trade — against the background of an Africa, a natural paradise populated with people who had a childlike innocence but scarred with violence, slavery, ignorance and superstition.

Although Livingstone was emphatic in his denunciation of slavery and the slave trade he refused, unlike many subsequent writers, to demonise the local Afro-Portuguese. Indeed, Livingstone belonged to an earlier Victorian generation which prided itself on its lack of colour prejudice. Livingstone's account of Angolan society reflects his belief that progress and civilisation are not dependent on nationality or colour but on ending the slave trade and establishing freedom of commerce. As a result Livingstone often sounds much less hostile to the Portuguese than other writers:

¹⁰ Barnard, *Three Years Cruise in the Mozambique Channel for the Suppression of the Slave Trade*, pp. 62-3.

It is common for them [the Portuguese] to have families by native women. It was particularly gratifying to me, who had been familiar with the stupid prejudice against colour, entertained only by those who are themselves becoming tawny, to view the liberality with which people of colour were treated by the Portuguese. Instances, so common in the south, in which half-caste children are abandoned, are here extremely rare. They are acknowledged at table, and provided for by their fathers, as if European. The coloured clerks of the merchants sit at the same table with their employers, without any embarrassment... nowhere else in Africa is there so much goodwill between Europeans and natives as here.¹¹

Where subsequent British writers would sneer at the mixed race Afro-Portuguese, Livingstone was less crudely racist:

We had a black militia corporal as a guide. He was native of Ambaca, and, like nearly all the inhabitants of that district, known by the name of Ambakistas, could both read and write. He had three slaves with him, and was carried by them in a 'tipoiá' or hammock slung to a pole. His slaves were young, and unable to convey him far at a time, but he was considerate enough to walk except when we came near to a village. He then mounted his 'tipoiá' and entered the village in state.¹²

The Ambakistas he described as "famed for their love of all sorts of learning within their reach, a knowledge of the history of Portugal, Portuguese law etc., They are remarkably keen on trade, and are sometimes called the Jews of Angola. They are employed as clerks and writers, their feminine delicacy of constitution enabling them to write a fine lady's hand, a kind of writing much esteemed among the Portuguese."¹³

Livingstone was willing to accept that the Portuguese were actively seeking to put an end to the slave trade, though they were thwarted by the weakness of their colonial administration — a point which was to be seized on and endlessly repeated by

¹¹ David Livingstone, *Journeys and Researches in South Africa*, Amalgamated Press (London, 1905), p. 346.

¹² Livingstone, *Journeys and Researches in South Africa*, p. 350.

¹³ Livingstone, *Journeys and Researches in South Africa*, p. 411.

future writers who had more clearly defined expansionist objectives:

The Portuguese home Government has not generally received the credit for sincerity in suppressing the slave trade, which I conceive to be its due...The intentions of the home Portuguese Government, however good cannot be fully carried out under the present system. The pay of the officers is so very small, that they are nearly all obliged to engage in trade.¹⁴

While Livingstone was recuperating from his travels, the British government sent its first consul to Mozambique to provide information about the slave trade and to oversee the operation of the anti-slave trade treaties.

Lyons McLeod was pious, opinionated and undiplomatic. He had no doubts about the complicity of the Portuguese in the slave trade nor about their immorality, inefficiency and general lack of Anglo-Saxon virtues. Following McLeod on his travels is to undertake a journey of pious self-justification where it is the very virtues of the hero which become the cause of his victimisation and eventual downfall as the evil Portuguese conspired against him.

Visiting Delagoa Bay, McLeod described the small Portuguese trading town of Lourenço Marques, not yet the bustling capital of the colony:

The town consists of a miserable square of squalid-looking houses, surrounded by huts containing the natives whom the occupants of the ruinous-looking habitations have enslaved... the town is filthy in every sense; even the Governor's quarters being so surrounded with filth and dirt of all sorts, that none but Portuguese and Natives, acclimatized by long usage to the pestilential atmosphere of the place, can approach it without being attacked with fits of vomiting. It is impossible for any one to see the town of Lourenco Marques without being struck with the idea how it is possible for human beings to live there.¹⁵

¹⁴ Livingstone, *Journeys and Researches in South Africa*, p. 370.

¹⁵ Lyons McLeod, *Travels in Eastern Africa*, 2 vols, Hurst and Blackett (London, 1860), vol 1, p. 155.

Note the emphasis on filth (like many Scots McLeod certainly believed that Cleanliness was the next best thing to Godliness), and the bracketing together of Portuguese and 'natives' with the gloss that neither of these can be considered fully human.

As he travelled up the coast the contrast between the potential of Africa and the corrupting influence of Portugal becomes almost a refrain: "In the district of Inhambane, the valleys, the mountains, and the rivers abound in riches. Copper, gold, and iron are found in abundance; nuts, roots and even trees, are found producing dyes".

Rubber, oranges, lemons, grapes, bananas, plantains, pineapples, fruits of Brazil, coconuts, coffee, sugar abound. "Cotton is growing over the whole country", and "the kaffirs bring in plenty of ivory". Even "the sea washes up large quantities of amber."¹⁶

As a contrast he describes the garrison at Inhambane where, "some of these Portuguese soldiers have outraged every law, human and divine; on this side of the grave there is no hope for them. Banished from their country to Goa, they have there, in that sink of iniquity, committed fresh crimes, for which they have been sent, as an additional punishment, to Mozambique."¹⁷

The priest in charge is described as "mais cobicoso e avaro que os seculares, e mais engolfado queelles na vileza dos vicios" [sic].¹⁸

As for Justice — "Here, he who bribes highest wins his suit... In short, all the officers necessary for carrying on a good government are appointed; some without salaries, and others with salaries which are a mockery, and all without even a public place in which they can transact business."

The same picture is painted of Sofala: "Sofala is admirably situated for commerce; and nothing but the baneful influence of the slave-trade could have reduced it to its present state: a melancholy contrast to the flourishing Arab settlement which the Portuguese found there in 1506."

Like all good Victorian travellers, McLeod had to try to establish his credentials as a scientist, but when he tried to obtain the skeleton of a hippopotamus, his endeavours were thwarted:

¹⁶ McLeod, *Travels in Eastern Africa*, vol 1, p. 201.

¹⁷ McLeod, *Travels in Eastern Africa*, vol 1, pp. 198-9.

¹⁸ McLeod, *Travels in Eastern Africa*, vol 1, p. 200.

I even offered a handsome amount for a foetus, which might often be obtained from the females which they kill... but the truth is, the Portuguese all laughed at the idea of troubling themselves with any specimens in natural history as beneath the dignity of man. Of man in all his varieties, male and female, and of all ages, from lisping infancy to decrepid age, I could have had any number at my own price; frequently for two dollars per specimen, and sometimes even for half that price.¹⁹

In McLeod's universe the vices of cruelty, dirt, ignorance and laziness, by implication the opposite of those British qualities approved by his readers, are bracketed with the slave trade and the whole is presided over by the Portuguese. The remedy is not so much Livingstone's plea for commerce and Christianity but a scarcely veiled demand for the removal of the Portuguese from the coast.

The Zambesi Expedition

When Livingstone returned to Mozambique in 1858 it was at the head of a major scientific expedition which spent five years exploring the lower Zambesi basin and the Shire valley. Livingstone's party witnessed the early stages of the Zambesi Wars, the long drawn out conflict between the Portuguese authorities and the powerful Afro-Portuguese *prazo* dynasties. The private diaries kept by members of the expedition were not public documents and in consequence are less carefully crafted and certainly less censored than the published accounts.²⁰

John Kirk was the expedition's doctor. He was a Scot, who went on to have a distinguished career as consul in Zanzibar where he became one of the chief exponents of the idea of informal empire. Kirk was an unsentimental realist about all things African and all things human, and it is clear that he believed that the mixed race Afro-Portuguese were at the root of most of the evils with which he had to deal — a type of racial analysis that was to colour a lot of late Victorian thinking. The idea that the decadence of the Portuguese was closely connected with their sexual promiscuity and with the practice of

¹⁹ McLeod, *Travels in Eastern Africa*, vol 1, p. 171.

²⁰ As well as Kirk's diaries the journals of Livingstone, Thornton, and Stewart have been published. Waller's diaries await an editor.

miscegenation informed many supposedly academic works and was later used by R.S. Whiteway to explain the decline and fall of the Portuguese empire in India.²¹

A diary entry for 14 Feb 1862 shows Kirk at his most forthright:

We have had a good sight of the life of a half cast brute named Joaquin, a drunken blackguard, morally a Baboon with a poor diseased despicable human frame. This fellow, after getting drunk by a deliberate course of dram drinking at 15 minute intervals, made a tall strapping negro sit and fan him. If these natives had any pluck in them, they would soon rebel and kill their despicable masters. Take half-casts as a rule, they are cruel and tyrannical. Not so in general with Europeans, many of them make their slaves comfortable.²²

Note here the juxtaposition of drink, disease, being of mixed race and being "morally a baboon". This catalogue of vice is, of course, also associated with slaving, as can be seen from his description of a man he calls Belshone:

This fellow we had known formerly as one of the very doubtful characters even for this part. He had been a Portuguese trooper and may have come here for his country's good. He married a relation of Bonga... Now at the head of a band of natives, he has taken to marauding. Poor devil, he can do little himself. The day after his marriage, now two years since, I was asked to see him and found him with an abominable gangrenous penis. This disease has gone on and now his eye sight is nearly gone and he remains a wreck. Still, backed by guns and powder, his people are capable of causing great damage among a defenceless race.²³

And superstition is part of the same mixture:

²¹ R.S. Whiteway, *The Rise of Portuguese Power in India*, 2nd edition, Susil Gupta (London, 1967).

²² Reginald Foskett, *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk*, 2 vols, Oliver and Boyd (London, 1965) vol 2, p. 417

²³ Foskett, *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk*, vol 2, 13 May 1862, p. 443.

This day we had to pass Lupata, the horror of canoe men where many a trader distributes grog to his men and condescends to the meanness of throwing out food on passing certain rocks, pandering to superstition in order to give his goods the best possible chance. But while hinting darkly a belief professed by many Portuguese in fetish and magic power, I may note that even Europeans are accused by their more intelligent bretheren of having faith in all the witchcraft and superstitions of the negroes, carrying it so far even as to inflict death on those whom they have previously subjected to the Muavi or native ordeal.²⁴

To reassure himself Kirk confides to his diary his confidence in his Britishness: "To be confounded with Portuguese would be bad enough but to be called by a name given to such Portuguese is intolerable."²⁵ And a few days later he writes:

I... had no sympathy with the miserable small minded avaricious system of the Portuguese who, while they ruin their own Provinces and keep others out, would make them a barrier against commerce and civilisation entering in the Centre of the Continent. Happily we belong to a nation sufficiently powerful not to deem the Portuguese much of an obstacle.²⁶

The 1870s and the 'search' for Livingstone

Livingstone returned to Africa in 1866 and disappeared somewhere on the upper waters of the Congo. A number of expeditions went in search of him and, not surprisingly, tried to depict their activities within the moral framework that Livingstone had delineated for the Victorian public.

The imperial context, however, was changing. In 1857 the Indian mutiny had occurred and in 1868 came the Jamaica Rebellion. Belief in the beneficent influence of free trade and British institutions became tempered by a growing racism which,

²⁴ Foskett, *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk*, vol 2, 15 May 1862, p. 445.

²⁵ Foskett, *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk*, vol 2, 13 May 1862, p. 444.

²⁶ Foskett, *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk*, vol 2, 20 May 1862, p. 448.

of course, had always been implicit, but which was now openly expressed and was given a quasi-scientific justification by the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

For Commander E.D. Young who led a Livingstone search expedition in 1867, unspoiled Africa was a kind of paradise:

Acres of azure blue lilies hide the water in places, and for the moment deceive the eye... Hollyhocks and convolvulii are among the reeds, the palm tree's stateliness and the acacia's blossoms are things that fix themselves on the mind; the mists are whiter, the cries of the birds wilder, the largeness larger, and the stillness of the dawn more still upon these lagoons than anywhere else. All nature by consent seems to acknowledge this reign of stillness... Rarely is silence broken and then only by sounds which utter allegiance to the scene.²⁷

However, it was a paradise spoilt by the slave trade and the deplorable Portuguese administration:

News of our presence had got as far as some of the outlying rice farms which are held by the convicts under the Portuguese authority, and we were glad to be able to administer to their poor cadaverous fever-stricken frames. Surely if dissipation, wretchedness, and vice ever were personified to the full in human form, they are to be seen in such men! More sickening examples I never witnessed than amongst these unfortunate wretches.²⁸

The arrival of the British brought a ray of hope to a benighted land, but Young's comment is also one about colonisation with which British opinion was now increasingly concerned. Portugal still used its African territories as penal colonies but Britain had abandoned this practice and was anxious to demonstrate the rightness of its decision with all the fervour of a recent convert — just as earlier in the century it had become an earnest, if late, convert to the anti-slavery cause. Although the Portuguese slave trade had now been abolished, the convicts were all owners of slaves and the object of Young's denunciations was not so much the slave trade as slavery itself:

²⁷ E.D. Young, *The Search after Livingstone*, (London, 1868), p. 83-4.

²⁸ Young, *The Search after Livingstone*, p. 250.

The slaveholder in these dismal mangrove swamps leads a life of incessant terror lest he should be at any moment overpowered by those under him. He is alone with his own conscience, far from any other white man, and ardent spirits and debauchery cannot keep the spectre long away at a time from his mind. His plan is to rule by intimidation... In the code of severe penalties and special modes of death lie horrors perpetrated on the wretched slaves, and on the women especially, that leave it very hard to believe the ingenuity of such men is one whit behind the cruelty of Satan himself.²⁹

At Mazaroon the Zambesi he observes "a stockade of piles driven into the ground to afford security to a few miserable half-castes. They are kept in by this means: I have described how crocodiles are kept out by a somewhat similar contrivance, in order to render a bath safe; but which is the greatest curse to the country, Portuguese impotency or crocodiles? Perhaps it would be hardly fair to ask the natives, although it would draw forth a very unanimous opinion."³⁰

Another Livingstone search expedition was that led by Verney Lovett Cameron. Cameron began his crossing of Africa from Zanzibar and entered Angola, as Livingstone had first entered it, from the interior. There he met up with the Afro-Portuguese slave traders and the Ambakistas, as Livingstone had done twenty years earlier. In Cameron's world the line between whitemen and others was much more clearly drawn than it had ever been for Livingstone, and his account becomes as a daily commentary on the superiority of white civilisation.

Kendele, as the Portuguese trader was called by the natives though his true name was Jose Antonio Alvez, visited me next day. He came in state, being carried in a hammock with an awning by two bearers with belts covered with brass bells round their waists, and followed by men with flintlock muskets, and a boy carrying his gun — a worthless Birmingham double-barrel — and his stool.

I had almost taken it for granted from the manner in which he came, and as I had hitherto only heard him

²⁹ Young, *The Search after Livingstone*, p. 251.

³⁰ Young, *The Search after Livingstone*, p. 67-8.

spoken of as a Msungu, that he was a white man who might possibly give me some information. Great was my disappointment, however, when an old and ugly negro turned out of the hammock.

Certainly he was dressed in the European fashion and spoke Portuguese, but no further civilisation could he boast of, notwithstanding his repeated asseverations that he was thoroughly civilised and the same as an Englishman or any other white man.

One point upon which he specially insisted was that he never lied, his word being as good as his bond; and, indeed, that he was altogether the most honest man on the face of the earth.³¹

Another Afro-Portuguese trader, Coimbra, is described in a way that clearly indicates the moral qualities that are associated with his mixed blood:

His attire and general appearance were worthy of his character. A dirty, greasy and tattered wide-awake hat, battered shapeless... crowned this distinguished person. His shirt was equally dirty, and a piece of grass cloth bound round his waist trailed its end upon the ground. His hair was short and kinky, and his almost beardless face, where not covered with filth, was of a dirty yellow colour. Even had he not been always in a half-drunken state, his bloodshot eye would have told the tale of debauchery. In short, he was true to his appearance, an unmitigated ruffian.³²

Here, as with Kirk, dirt, drunkenness and villainy are the inevitable qualities of those of mixed-race, and Cameron never hesitated to demonstrate to his readers, as he had already demonstrated to the Africans, the power of Britain — “I told him that my chief was greater than he, and, indeed, that he could have no idea of the magnitude of her power. We had ships the size of islands, and although carrying more than a thousand men each they could remain away from land for months”³³ — and his

³¹ Verney Lovet Cameron, *Across Africa*, 2 vols, Daldy Isbister (London, 1877) vol 2, p. 57-8.

³² Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, p. 96.

³³ Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, p. 109.

own personal prowess — “Upon my picking up a half-load consisting of ten pieces and holding it out at arm’s-length the people were greatly astonished and declared I had made a ‘great medicine’ to be enabled to do this... I am of the opinion that the average muscular power of the native is decidedly less than that of the white man.”³⁴

Put simply, Cameron’s message was that the slave trade was alive and well:

On this march with Alvez I was disgusted beyond measure with what I saw of the manner in which the unfortunate slaves were treated, and have no hesitation in asserting that the worst of the Arabs are in this respect angels of light in comparison with the Portuguese and those who travel with them.

Had it not come under my personal notice I should scarcely have believed that any men could be so wantonly and brutally cruel.³⁵

Moreover, the pretensions of Portugal to be able to sustain a civilizing mission were without foundation as they were every bit as ‘superstitious’ as the African population:

Before Alvez and his people would consent to march they declared that ‘medicine, must be made as a precaution against fire... Alvez, though nominally a Christian, appeared to be a firm believer in divination and incantation and had engaged a fetish man at Bihe to do this service for the whole journey at the same rate of pay as a porter...³⁶

As for Coimbra:

His Christianity, like that of the majority of the half-breeds of Bihe, consisted in having been baptized by some rogue calling himself a priest, but who, being far too bad to be endured either at Luanda or Benguella, had retired into the interior, and managed to subsist on fees

³⁴ Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, pp. 149-50.

³⁵ Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, p. 106.

³⁶ Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, p. 117.

given him for going through the form of baptizing any children that might be brought to him.

Indeed, the cruelties perpetrated in the heart of Africa by men calling themselves Christians and carrying the Portuguese flag can scarcely be credited by those living in a civilised land; and the Government of Portugal cannot be cognizant of the atrocities committed by men claiming to be her subjects.³⁷

The 1890s

The 1880s and 1890s saw an increasing number of travel narratives. Missionaries ascended the Zambesi en route for the Scottish missions in the Shire Highlands, the British consuls, Elton and O'Neill, traveled widely in northern Mozambique while, in the south, the Transvaal gold rush, which began in 1886, led to intense interest in Delagoa Bay. A wide variety of different groups found they had a vested interest in discrediting Portuguese colonizing efforts and, although the frontiers of Mozambique were drawn in 1891, the belief that Portugal could be persuaded or compelled to relinquish Delagoa Bay or other parts of its colonies remained a live issue. In 1898 the British and Germans actually signed an agreement providing for the future partition of the Portuguese African empire.

Wallis Mackay's *The Prisoner of Chiloane* was published in 1890 and is now a totally forgotten work. Although ostensibly a travel account it is deliberately crafted as a work of the imagination — the self-consciously elaborate prose and the descriptions of the trials and tribulations of the hero easily taking precedence over the desire to impart any factual information. It is nonetheless a profoundly ideological work.

Arriving in Delagoa Bay Mackay takes up a familiar refrain of *Paradise Lost*:

'Dear dirty Dublin,' they say of the capital of the Isle of Saints. Let me here write 'Confoundedly dear, dirty Delagoa Bay,' set in a land of loveliness, surrounded by rich, luxuriant vegetation, cursed with malaria, and given over to a lazy people who wallow in their filth, and cause the place to be a truly most undesirable one to sojourn in.³⁸

³⁷ Cameron, *Across Africa*, vol 2, p. 137.

³⁸ Wallis Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, (London, 1890), p. 19.

Note the juxtapositions — filth, disease and laziness have corrupted a potential Paradise. And the comparison with Dublin is deeply instructive about contemporary English attitudes to Ireland (clearly also a colonial territory inhabited by 'natives'). Contrast with this the little enclave of Britishness represented by the vice-consul's house where "I have spent many happy healthy days and delightful evenings, innocent of the existence of the physical and moral foulness lying beneath us at the foot of the hill."³⁹

To the now familiar catalogue of vices which characterise Portuguese colonialism, Mackay adds two more — sexual immorality and lying. He describes:

a view of the well-built yard and out-houses, where a thriving trader of Portuguese nationality keeps, or kept when I was there, a large assortment of fine-looking Kaffir 'wives' ('a large assortment always kept on hand').⁴⁰

...

Those better informed than I am upon the subject bear testimony that the Portuguese are a valorous people, in no way lacking in courtesy and courage. I can only say that I have found in those of the higher class that I have come in contact with that this is the case; but I must add that a rooted objection to telling the truth — though lying may be a poetical accomplishment with them — is a universal failing. Even in the representatives of the Portuguese Government far afield, the courteous bearing is to be found, but only in the higher grade; but even then it is so imbued with the fictitious that it becomes to those who are misled by it an irksome ignis fatuus upon which to depend.⁴¹

This 'unBritish' inability to tell the truth is, of course, a quality normally attributed to native Africans with whom the Portuguese are here equated, and Mackay finds the black Portuguese to be worse even than the white:

The Portuguese black soldier is, perhaps, not excepting the black rhinoceros, the most hateful denizen of East Africa. He is a cross between a negro convict and a gaol

³⁹ Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, p. 26.

⁴¹ Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, p. 25.

bird... This brute, should he covet a ring, a pipe, a pair of boots, or anything you may have, would not hesitate in sticking you in the back and doing you to death for its possession. It is an easy matter, even in a small island like Chiloane, secluded from the observation of the civilised world, to prove that you were found dead; and, after all, the death of an Englishman is a consummation to be devoutly wished for by the Portuguese in these convict-slave settlements.⁴²

Mackay's description of Portuguese East Africa is designed to make its impact not so much by the accumulation of sober fact and evidence as by inducing cynical contempt in the reader. Take for example his description of the activities of the church:

The spiritual welfare of the Portuguese at Chiloane was (and is, I should surmise) looked after by a little clean-shaved priest, or "padre". This little pillar of mother Church in this out-of-the-way corner of the vineyard was a person of considerable importance, and busied himself with much more profitable and tangible affairs than the sterile souls of his flock. In short, he was the chief vendor of the horrible concoction, Caçhu, and in it did a roaring trade... After his [the Bishop's] departure more representatives of the Church arrived. These were two female "missionary teachers," who had been up to Gungunanae's kraal, to spread the Gospel, and had found such favour with the monarch himself, that both were in a highly interesting condition... Verily with the aid of gin and female "missionary teachers", Portugal ought to work wonders in lightening the darkness of the benighted negro.⁴³

This denunciation of Portugal's colonising record, all the more vicious for being couched in facetious, semi-humorous language, was part of a sustained campaign aimed at convincing the British public that Britain should take action to replace Portugal as the principal imperial power in south-eastern Africa.

However, while the public was being fed a daily diet of Portuguese cruelty, corruption, and incompetence, in contrast to

⁴² Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, p.66

⁴³ Mackay, *The Prisoner of Chiloane*, pp. 138-9

the robust virtues associated with the British, the Foreign Office in London was receiving information of another kind. A sample of this will serve to put some of the almost hysterical denunciations of the Portuguese into some kind of contemporary perspective.

Take for example some internal Foreign Office memoranda relating to the year 1880. The affair concerns the mission of the Church of Scotland at Blantyre in the Shire highlands which had been founded to carry on the work of Livingstone. An African, called Chagunda, had been caught having sex with two women. Details of what followed eventually reached London. The British vice-consul, Henderson, reported on 11 September 1880. The women were caught "and tortured in a terrible manner, their heads being crushed between two poles... Chagunda was soon caught and his head, leg and arms cut off in the presence of two men sent to intercede on his behalf". The Foreign Office minutes on this report reads, "I not remember to have heard this case before. Where is Blantyre? Have the Portuguese any claim to it?... What does Pauncefote think of this case?"⁴⁴ and later, "I am not aware of us having any means of preventing British subjects from torturing and murdering people in Central Africa, if the Central Africans will let them do so".⁴⁵ Then, fully aware of the dangerous position in which Britain, having tried to occupy the moral high ground, found itself, "I think Consul O'Neill should be instructed to go there... for our inactivity may damage us in the estimation of the Portuguese at Mozambique who know all about it and may be difficult to defend here bye and by."⁴⁶

Cruelty, injustice and the misbehaviour of Christians bent on civilising the Africans was not, it seemed, a uniquely Portuguese characteristic.

Delagoa Bay

In 1899 Montagu Jesset published an account of Delagoa Bay which summed up a whole century of writing about British relations with the Portuguese in eastern Africa. The book was published just as relations with the Boers were deteriorating and when secret negotiations with Germany in 1898 appeared to have paved the way for a British take over of southern

⁴⁴ PRO FO 28 April 1880, Henderson 11 Sept 1880, 'Events of Nov 1879'.

⁴⁵ PRO FO 31 May 1880, Lister to Consul O'Neill.

⁴⁶ PRO FO 2 June 1880, Minute by Pauncefote.

Mozambique. Indeed, the book is written as though the transfer of Delagoa Bay had already been agreed and was imminent.

Unlike most earlier writers, Jessett developed the theme of a once great Portugal which had now fallen sadly into decline (incidentally a view to which many Portuguese of the time subscribed):

The Portuguese — those grand old adventurers — were the early pioneers of exploration of new and far-distant lands. To their hardihood, their enterprise, and their insatiable love for exploration, we are indebted for many of the early discoveries that were made... Unfortunately they became gradually tinged with an inordinate desire for riches.⁴⁷

As for the deplorable state of Lourenço Marques, “most of this was due to two prime causes, viz., the poverty-stricken state of the Portuguese and their confirmed dilatory, procrastinating natures”.⁴⁸ On this theme he begins to grow almost lyrical. “The generality of the Portuguese officials in East Africa are bad in the extreme, corrupt, lazy, avaricious, and totally without conscience. They are the ne'er-do-wells whom the Government are only too glad to get rid of by giving them posts in their colonies.”⁴⁹

Portugal's colonial regime, far from civilising Africa, had been able only to communicate the vices of western society. Colonies in Portuguese hands were not only a wasted opportunity, they were positively an evil:

The untutored natives in many respects resemble the monkey tribe very closely. They are extremely imitative, but are unfortunately more adept in acquiring the white man's vices than in emulating his virtues. In land, where there are many petty tribes under small chiefs, who have not come into contact with the Portuguese to the same extent, the natives are fine fellows, with simple tastes, and a fairish code of morals. Of course, one must not expect too high a standard of morals from people who are practically savages, but at the same time they can put to the blush(if that be possible) some of the neighbouring

⁴⁷ M.G. Jessett, *The Key to South Africa Delagoa Bay*, Fisher Unwin (London, 1899), pp. 1, 4.

⁴⁸ Jessett, *The Key to South Africa Delagoa Bay*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Jessett, *The Key to South Africa Delagoa Bay*, p. 41.

tribes who have taken a lesson from their Portuguese masters in civilisation.⁵⁰

Note here that Africans who are “practically savages” and in many respects “resemble monkeys” have nevertheless a higher standard of morality than those who have had contact with the Portuguese. The racial tone of these remarks is of course typical of the era but very different from the attitudes towards Africa of travellers writing earlier in the century.

After this analysis it is not difficult to guess what Jessett will be saying next:

If it [Lourenço Marques] has flourished, as it has to a limited degree, under Portuguese rule, what, then, must be its future condition when in English hands! Truly the place will be speedily altered and improved, and will quickly become a thriving, healthy, and busy port, working in harmony with all the other British ports, to the benefit of the Colony and the mother Country.

A British acquisition of Delagoa Bay would, therefore, be justified by all the moral standards of the day as well as by political expediency.

After the Ultimatum

A final writer to be mentioned is R.C.F. Maugham, another British consul, who spent many years in Nyasaland and Mozambique and wrote three books on his travels in the region. Maugham was writing at a time when Britain and Portugal had reached an understanding covering the building of railways and ports, the recruitment of labour and the investment of British capital in the chartered companies and the new *prazo* concessions. British and South African businessmen, like Hornung, Marks and Oury, were investing in Mozambique and British labour recruiters were busy assigning tens of thousands of labourers for work in mines and farms in the Rhodesias and South Africa. Portugal was no longer the colonial power that the British wanted to dispossess. Instead it had become the faithful ally whose compliance was allowing British interests to flourish.

⁵⁰ Jessett, *The Key to South Africa Delagoa Bay*, pp. 90-1.

In Maugham we once again have the image of Africa as Paradise. At Villa Bocage on the Shire,

after an early breakfast... I take a shot gun and stroll away along the bank to plunge almost immediately into the thickly growing forest. Here, at this time of the year, the vegetation displays a vast wealth of colour and detail, whilst the water reflects a sky all dappled with fleecy clouds terminating in edges of luminous straw colour... Forest trees have always had an extraordinary fascination for me, whether at midday stretched out for my siesta beneath their shade, or camped for the night in their purple shadow... I never see one felled without experiencing a vague feeling akin to grief, whilst the pleasure one feels after crossing some wide plain or expanse of scrub country and again finding oneself in the sylvan depths of the true forest is not unlike the satisfaction one experiences on reaching camp at the end of a weary march... We see an amusing sight — a score of yellow chacma baboons have come down to drink. Their antics are indescribably diverting. The old men sit or recline a little apart, watching with a slightly bored air of complacent superiority the amusements of the younger animals, who play together like so many small children... This singular compact between widely different members of the creation is noticeable in the case of several animals,... and one asks oneself in vain whence originated the amazing understanding whereby the approach of a common danger became the basis of a compact for the compassing of a common security... It is a peaceful scene of a beauty and interest which few who have looked upon it could ever forget. One hesitates to disturb it, seeing that there is nothing edible to tempt one's gun; but even as this resolve shapes itself in the mind, other destructive agencies are at work. A sudden scurry among the baboons, followed by a yellowish flash, and a leopard springs from the cover behind, and striking one of the younger animals a lightning-like blow with its paw which dashes him senseless to the ground, snatches him up and disappears at a bound. Now the beautiful picture is at an end... ⁵¹

⁵¹ R.C.F. Maugham, *Zambesia*, Murray (London, 1910), pp. 67-70.

Of course this paradise had been threatened by the activities of the Afro-Portuguese, the corrupt product of Portuguese miscegenation. The Zambesi trade of former times,

had fewer competitors to contend with, less tiresome, embarrassing regulations to get in the way of their rough-and-ready methods, and far more incitement, arising from deadly climate and daily funerals, to make as much money as possible in the shortest time... a rough-and-ready type, whose integrity was elastic, and whose ideas of the fitness of things were bounded by a horizon which stood for gain... [They] were, unconsciously perhaps, doing the country more injury than they had any idea of. They were taking everything out, and putting nothing back. These were the days of which very old residents still speak reverently, with many a reminiscent sigh, and, I doubt not, many an inward pang at the bitter recollection of opportunities lost...⁵²

But:

... with the effective occupation by Great Britain in the later eighties of those neighbouring colonies now known as Nyasaland and Rhodesia, a method was shown to Portugal whereby she might do likewise, and this we must do her the justice to admit she has not been slow to adopt.⁵³

As a result Mozambique, and the colonising effort of the Portuguese has, in general, become almost something to respect, while Portuguese labour policies are wholly admirable — a considerable admission for a British consul brought up on an ideological diet of Portuguese slavery and corruption. Of his visit to the Zambesi island of Inhangome he wrote:

Here, by the kindness of Captain A. de Portugal Durão, the Zambezia Company's capable and energetic manager in Africa, we are enabled to leave the steamer... close to the headquarters we are shown about twenty acres of cotton... Large numbers of well-set-up, well-fed,

⁵² Maugham, *Zambesia*, p. 6.

⁵³ Maugham, *Zambesia*, p. 7.

contented-looking natives are employed by the Company, and here it is quite evident, that there is no chance of the African being permitted to fall into those habits of slackness which beget famine and pestilence in neighbouring territories.⁵⁴

And of Tete:

There is one thing upon which this town and district are to be most cordially congratulated, namely the high character of the officials and functionaries by whom their destinies are guided. Seldom in my fairly wide knowledge of Portuguese East Africa have I found myself among such a consistently cordial, entertaining and capable governing body. His Excellency Governor Bettencourt has long been known and esteemed by all classes for his unvarying courtesy and kindness, his great personal tact, and that ready approachableness which is the unmistakable sign of a first class official; but added to all this I found myself conversing with a student, a thinker, a man with a firm grasp of the situation and its needs. I do not remember that any portion of our conversation was uninformative — certainly none was uninteresting.⁵⁵

What, one might well ask, has happened? How has the British traveller's perception of the Portuguese altered so radically? The answer, as always, is that the traveller sees what he wants to see and writes a narrative to justify his own personal quest or to substantiate his ideological view of the world. The travel writer grapples with the contradictions of the human psyche and the ambiguities of the human condition in largely the same way as the writer of fiction, even to the extent of having to convince the reader to suspend disbelief while the tale is told.

⁵⁴ Maugham, *Zambesia*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Maugham, *Zambesia*, p. 87.