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**How the "Seraphic" Became "Geographic":  
Women Travellers in West Africa, 1840-1915**

by

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A Doctoral Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis brings together two important developments in contemporary geography; firstly, the recognition of the need to write critical histories of geographical thought and, particularly, the relationship between modern geography and European imperialism, and secondly, the attempt by feminist geographers to countervail the absence of women in these histories. Drawing on recent innovative attempts by geographers to construct alternative, contextual perspectives in (re)writing histories of geographical thought, the thesis analyzes the travel narratives of British women travellers in West Africa between 1840 and 1915. Recent attempts by feminists to include women in histories of geography and imperialism have, all too often, failed to analyze critically the role of women in imperial culture, or have reproduced gender dichotomies in their analysis. This thesis seeks to overcome these problems in three ways. Firstly, it explores the contributions of women travellers to imperial culture, primarily through their production of popular geographies. Secondly, it analyzes the ways in which these women were empowered in the imperial context by virtue of both race and class. Thirdly, it frames the accounts of each woman within the specific spatial and temporal context of their journeys in order to explore the complexities in the popular geographies they produced. The thesis illustrates that while gender was an important factor in the construction of images in the travel narratives of Victorian women travellers, this cannot be divorced from the wider context of their journey, nor from other elements in power relations based on difference such as race and class. Using this framework, the study explores in detail the production of popular geographies of the landscapes and peoples of West Africa by British women travellers, and formulates an argument on how women and their experiences can be included in histories of geographical thought.

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii-iv
List of Maps	vi
List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	vii
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1-33
Chapter 2 - Britain and the "Dark Continent"	34-78
Chapter 3 - Travel, Text and Empowerment	79-121
Chapter 4 - Paradise or Pandemonium?	122-156
Chapter 5 - White Women and Race	157-192
Chapter 6 - Slavery, Witchcraft and Cannibalism	193-225
Chapter 7 - Colonised Counterparts	226-254
Chapter 8 - Conclusions: The Geographical Significance of Women's Travel Narratives	255-286
Bibliography	287-310

## LIST OF MAPS

	PAGE
Map 1 - The Sierra Leone Protectorate	39
Map 2 - The Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria	41
Map 3 - Lagos and Yoruba in Relation to the Niger and Benue River Systems	42
Map 4 - The Calabar Mission Field at the Time of Mary Slessor's Arrival in 1876	58
Map 5 - Mary Slessor's Advance into the Lower Cross River Region, 1876-1915	60
Map 6 - Zélie Colvile's Journey Around Africa	65
Map 7 - Mary Kingsley's Second Journey, 1894-5	71

## LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
Figure 1 - Mary Slessor on Furlough in Scotland with her adopted children	62
Figure 2 - Zélie Colvile: Frontispiece from <u>Round the Black Man's Garden</u>	63
Figure 3 - Mary Kingsley	67
Figure 4 - Constance Larymore: Frontispiece and Dedication of the Book to her Husband from <u>A Resident's Wife in Nigeria</u>	75
Figure 5 - "Negress - Accra" [from Colvile, 1893]	182
Figure 6 - "Ju-ju Priest" [from Colvile, 1893]	182
Figure 7 - "Igalwa Women" [from Kingsley, 1982]	184
Figure 8 - "Fan Chief and Family" [from Kingsley, 1982]	184
Figure 9 - "Fans" [from Kingsley, 1982]	185
Figure 10 - "Death Dance Costumes, Old Calabar" [from Kingsley, 1982]	185
Figure 11 - "Caravan For Stanley Pool, Pallaballa Mountains, Congo" [from Kingsley, 1982]	186

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Biographical Information on British Women Travellers to West Africa, 1840-1915	29
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

"I can safely say that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history."<sup>1</sup>

This comment by Alan Quartermain about the exploration of the African continent in *King Solomon's Mines* could, until recently, have referred to the invisibility of women in histories of both geographical thought and British imperialism. However, in recent years there has been a proliferation of studies on the role of women in the British empire, mainly within anthropology, feminist history and feminist literary theory, but increasingly within geography. The role of women in histories of geography and geographical thought, however, remains a largely neglected sphere of analysis within the discipline of geography. What follows is an attempt to write British women into the histories of geographical thought and British imperial culture, using the particular example of women travellers in West Africa during the nineteenth century.

#### **Context: feminism and geography**

This study falls within the broader framework of feminist geography, and it is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to contextualise the subsequent analysis with a brief history of feminist approaches to the discipline. As with other disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, feminism began to have an impact on geography in the 1970s, but this has been a gradual process. It may be argued that geography trailed disciplines such as history, literary criticism and the social sciences in accommodating feminist perspectives,<sup>2</sup> and many feminist research

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Rider Haggard (1885), *Kings Solomon's Mines*, London: Cassell, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> This is reflected in the fact that the first academic journal devoted to feminist geography, *Gender, Place and Culture: a journal of feminist geography*, was only established in 1994, whereas other discipline-specific feminist journals, such as the *Journal of Women's History*, and the multidisciplinary

methods within geography draw extensively on feminist literary theory, psychoanalysis and historical studies. It is only since the 1980s that feminism has begun to evolve from a peripheral concern in human geography to one incorporated as an approach within many of the subdisciplines which constitute academic geography. As this study draws on feminist literary theory and history as well as geography, it is perhaps pertinent to point out that many of the trends outlined below are common across the social sciences and humanities. Thus, the shift from essentialist studies of women, to more profound analyses of gender, subjectivity and the recognition of constructions of difference, is a common trend across several disciplines.

The gradual incorporation of feminism into the mainstream of geographical research was facilitated by a change of direction from the "geography of women"<sup>3</sup> to a consideration of the geography of gender and gender relations.<sup>4</sup> During the 1980s it was argued that the "geography of women", which had developed throughout the 1970s, merely tacked women onto the masculinist framework of geography without challenging the fundamentals of that framework; it was a geography about women, written and consumed by women. In this state, feminist geography remained peripheral. During the 1980s, the move towards a feminist geography distinct from the "geography of women" gained momentum. As Sophie Bowlby *et al* argue:

As well as documenting gender divisions and the inequalities in women's position in both the advanced and less developed economies, feminist geographers became increasingly concerned to *explain* the patterns of

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journals, such as Signs, Feminist Studies, Women's International Studies Forum, and Gender and Education, were established in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> This recognised that the discipline should not exclude "half of the human in human geography"; see Janice Monk and Susan Hanson (1982), "On not excluding half of the human in human geography", Professional Geographer, 34, pp. 11-23.

<sup>4</sup> See Sophie Bowlby *et al* (1989), "The geography of gender", in Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift [eds], New Models in Geography. Volume 2, London: Unwin Hyman, pp. 157-174; Women and Geography Study Group (W.G.S.G.) of the Institute of British Geographers (1984), Geography and Gender, London: Hutchinson/Explorations in Feminism Collective; Wilbur Zelinsky, Janice Monk and Susan Hanson (1982), "Women and geography: a review and prospectus", Progress in Human Geography, 6, pp. 317-66.

inequalities. From their initial interest in describing, rather than explaining, *gender roles* and the ways in which the acceptance of gender roles disadvantaged women, attention began to be focused during the first half of the 1980s on *gender relations* and on trying to identify the reasons for male dominance over women, to document the consequences, and suggest alternatives.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to suggest that the development of feminist geography can and should be constructed in a linear and chronological fashion. Feminist geography has a multiplicity of contested histories, but it is only recently that these contested and situated histories have been explored.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, it can be argued that the alternative approach to feminist geography which evolved in the 1980s has had important impacts upon many areas of academic geography, particularly upon research in social, economic, regional, cultural and development geography. During the 1990s, feminist geography has become increasingly "post-colonial" and "postmodern" in its outlook. For example, feminist development geography has drawn upon the work of black and "Third World" feminists, and has been influenced by many of their criticisms of white, middle-class, Western feminism.<sup>7</sup> This has led to a re-thinking of theories of gender and development since the late 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, gay and lesbian geographers have challenged the position of

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<sup>5</sup> Bowlby *et al* (1989), p. 158. See also Linda McDowell (1992), "Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography", Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 17, 4, pp. 399-416.

<sup>6</sup> The Women and Geography Study Group of the I.B.G. is currently working on a publication which will be the first to challenge the linear, chronological history of feminism and geography in favour of contested *histories*. See *W.G.S.G. Newsletter*, Spring 1994.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar (1984), "Challenging imperial feminism", Feminist Review, 17, pp. 3-19; Hazel Carby (1982), "White women listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood", in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, The Empire Strikes Back, Race and Racism in 70's Britain, London: Hutchinson; bell hooks (1982), Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism, London: Pluto; T. Minh-ha Trinh (1989), Woman, Native, Other. Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, especially pp. 79-118; Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), "Cartographies of struggle. Third world women and the politics of feminism", in Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-47; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), In Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics, London: Routledge.

<sup>8</sup> For an up-to-date account of post-colonial feminisms, see Sarah Radcliffe (1994), "(Representing) post-colonial women: authority, difference and feminisms", Area, 26, 1, pp. 25-32.



gender as the primary theoretical category upon which to base research in both feminist and cultural geography.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, feminist geography has had implications for research methodologies throughout the discipline and has provoked lively debates on the use of qualitative, collaborative and non-exploitative research methods.<sup>10</sup> The importance of the deconstruction of categories and the recognition of "difference" at all scales has been recognised and this has informed other areas of geographical research beyond the scope of feminist geography.<sup>11</sup>

Feminism and feminist methodologies have thus pervaded many areas within mainstream geographical research. The positionality of the researcher, as defined by age, class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on, is recognised as having important influences on the social process of research, and it is recognised that this cannot be divorced from research. The validity of the domestic sphere as an area for research is also acknowledged.<sup>12</sup> In particular, feminists have sought to challenge the "all-seeing, all-knowing" masculine claims to knowledge and "truth". Gillian Rose, for example, has challenged the masculine gaze in cultural geography and its illusion of an unmarked, unitary, distanced, objective, masculine

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, David J. Bell (1991), "Insignificant others: lesbian and gay geographies", *Area*, 23, 4, pp. 323-329; David J. Bell, Jon Binnie, Julia Cream and Gill Valentine (1994), "All hyped up and nowhere to go", *Gender, Place and Culture*, 1, 1, pp. 31-47. See also Linda McDowell (1992), p. 412, on "gender-scepticism" and multiple feminisms.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of feminist research methods, see McDowell (1992), pp. 405-407. See also Radcliffe (1994), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Peter Jackson (1989), *Maps of Meaning*, London: Unwin Hyman, especially pp. 104-131, and (1991) "The cultural politics of masculinity: towards a social geography", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16, 2, pp. 199-213.

<sup>12</sup> This is particularly important in Third World development studies; gender relations within the household are recognised as influencing the reproduction of labour, production, migration patterns, the triple burden of work on women, the rise of young, single women in the informal industrial sector, and so on. For example, see Lynne Brydon and Sylvia Chant (1989), *Women in the Third World: gender issues in rural and urban areas*, London: Edward Elgar; Henrietta L. Moore (1988), *Feminism and Anthropology*, Cambridge: Polity, especially chapters 3 and 4, pp. 42-127; Ann Whitehead (1981), "'I'm hungry, mum". The politics of domestic budgeting", in Kate Young *et al* (eds), *Of Marriage and the Market*, London: Routledge, pp. 93-116.

spectator.<sup>13</sup> Feminist geographers have attempted to explore alternative ways of seeing, allowing for subjectivity of response, challenging hegemonic ways of seeing without imposing a singular, alternative (and equally as oppressive) "feminine" way of seeing. The influence of "post-colonialism" is paramount in these new directions. Dichotomies have been disrupted: there is a recognition that there is no single essential masculinity and no single essential femininity. Gender is an intrinsically geographical concept; the construction of masculinities and femininities vary over both time and space, and are informed by cultural, societal and political influences. The key questions in contemporary theoretical debate among feminist geographers concern "difference" and its conceptualisation, particularly the differences between various groups of women and their feminisms, as well as between *all* women and *all* men generally. Therefore, gender, as an analytical reference point, cannot be separated from other factors which have implications for power relations between people - race, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Such developments in feminist geography, and the discipline as a whole, are intrinsic to, and inform this thesis.

As well as the changes in feminist geography and the evolution of the geography of gender, there is an increasing awareness of the gendered nature of geography as a discipline.<sup>14</sup> As Gillian Rose points out, geography has tended to exclude women as the producers of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Mona Domosh has taken this point further in her argument that women have not been included in histories of geography, and that official histories of the discipline are, in fact, only partial

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<sup>13</sup> Gillian Rose (1993), Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity, especially pp. 86-112. See also Rosalind Deutsch (1991), "Boys town", Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 9, pp. 5-30.

<sup>14</sup> The gendered nature of geography forms the focus of Gillian Rose's epistemological analysis (1993). She points out, for example, that in 1988 only 6.8% of full-time university teachers of geography were women; in 1991, 25.1% of the members of the I.B.G. were women; women work disproportionately in part-time and temporary posts, are consistently paid less and hold positions of less power than men (p. 1). Many of these statistics are drawn from Linda McDowell (1979), "Women in British geography", Area, 11, pp. 151-4, and Linda McDowell and Linda Peake (1990), "Women in British geography revisited: or the same old story", Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 14, pp. 19-30.

<sup>15</sup> Rose (1993), p. 4.

histories because of their exclusion of women.<sup>16</sup> The arguments of Rose and Domosh are ones which have some importance for feminist geography and, indeed, the discipline as a whole; they require further explanation and elaboration. With the exception of the aforementioned discussions, and, to some extent, the work of Dorothy Middleton,<sup>17</sup> feminists within British geography have yet to contribute with any great significance to analyses of women's contributions within historiographies of geography. This thesis is an attempt to elaborate and expand upon some of the points raised by authors such as Rose and Domosh. As women travellers did not always consider themselves geographers, nor did they necessarily contribute to geography as an academic discipline, it is difficult and arguably pointless to make a case for their contributions to geography in the narrow sense. However, this study explores how a few women contributed to *popular* geographies at a particular period in time coincidental with the rise of academic geography.

### **Motivations, objectives, and sources**

The following analysis is motivated by two major concerns. Firstly, following David Livingstone, there is a need to move away from the creation of Whiggish histories of geographical knowledge to analyze critically geography's past, and to explore the ways in which geographical knowledge has been implicated in relationships of power.<sup>18</sup> Of particular importance is the rise of modern geography and its links with imperialism, for, as Felix Driver argues, the relationship between

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<sup>16</sup> Mona Domosh (1991a), "Towards a feminist historiography of geography", Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 16, pp. 95-104. See also Jeanne Kay (1991), "Landscapes of women and men: rethinking the regional historical geography of the United States and Canada", Journal of Historical Geography, 17, 4, pp. 435-452.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Middleton (1973), "Some Victorian lady travellers", Geographical Journal, 139, pp. 65-75.

<sup>18</sup> David N. Livingstone (1992), The Geographical Tradition, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1-31, and *passim*.

British geography and British imperialism has attracted surprisingly few historians.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the importance of popular geographies, such as those contained in travel and exploration literature, have received little attention from geographers. Secondly, there is a need to explore the apparent invisibility of women in histories of both geography and imperialism. Mona Domosh cites women travellers in her argument in favour of a feminist historiography of geography, but she also argues that geography's roots in the imperial past are "inspiring" and should be celebrated.<sup>20</sup> The questions which need to be asked concern the perceived marginality of women in the histories of both geography and imperialism, the part they played in British imperialism, and their contributions to geographical thought during the era of British imperialism. The power matrix of gender, race and class are critical to the exploration of these questions, as well as to the understanding of the differences between various women.

With these questions in mind, this thesis focuses on British women in nineteenth-century West Africa. This was a part of the British empire which seemed to have an extraordinarily masculine history; it was the setting for the great explorations of the mid-nineteenth century, it was not colonised in any large part until well into the twentieth century, and white women were not present in large numbers in West Africa during the preceding century. Few European women lived or travelled in West Africa, and fewer still wrote and published travel accounts during the nineteenth century. This fact meant that the problem of selecting which women to include or exclude from the study could be avoided; the women included in this thesis are seven of only nine I have found to have travelled in West Africa between 1840 and 1915 and published accounts of their experiences.<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Felix Driver (1992), "Geography's empire: histories of geographical knowledge", Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 10, p. 26. See also Neil Smith and Anne Godlewska's introduction in Godlewska and Smith [eds] (1994), Geography and Empire, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Mona Domosh (1991a), p. 95.

<sup>21</sup> The two women not included in this study are "Mary Church" and Mary Gaunt. "Mary Church" is believed to be the pseudonym of Catherine Temple, who was one of several European observers of Sierra Leone in its early years as a Crown Colony in the 1830s. She published her book anonymously, entitled Sierra Leone; or, the Liberated

primary sources of the study are the written narratives by these women in which they recount their experiences. These include both published and unpublished narratives and, in particular, published accounts of their travels, journal articles, private correspondences, reports in missionary magazines, and newspaper articles. The study includes those women labelled "travel-writers", in other words those women who travelled purely for their own pleasure or to publish accounts of their experiences, and women who travelled to, and in, the British empire to undertake specific duties (missionaries, missionaries' wives, and the wives of judicial and military administrators), who also published books and articles about their experiences abroad. The distinction between the two types of woman traveller is an important one; for the former, travel itself was the primary goal, whereas for the latter, West Africa became a temporary home, their duties were paramount, and travel was of secondary importance.<sup>22</sup>

Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest, particularly in literary theory, in travel writing; as Kowalewski argues, "the signs of an invigorated contemporary interest in travel are everywhere to be seen".<sup>23</sup> Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that this interest has, to some extent, captured the

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Africans, in a series of letters from a young lady to her sister in 1833 and 34 (published by Longman in 1835). She is not included in this study because her work belongs to a different body of literature to the other women. Her publication owes a great deal to the era of anti-slavery endeavours in West Africa rather than to the era of travel and exploration in West Africa post-1840. Furthermore, it proved impossible to find any biographical information on "Mary Church"; her only legacy seems to be the thin pamphlet she produced recounting her observations of Sierra Leone. Mary Gaunt was excluded on two counts. Firstly, she was Australian and her narratives could not, therefore, be contextualised against the background of British imperialism. Secondly, she began travelling in the twentieth century and her observations of West Africa were published in 1912 (see Alone in West Africa, London: T. Werner Laurie). Gaunt, unlike the women of this study, thus travelled in West Africa after the unification of Nigeria and during the new phase of imperialism. A traveller who continued travelling until the 1930s, Gaunt belongs much more to the twentieth century than to the nineteenth. On both narratives, see Jane Robinson (1991), Wayward Women, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 205-6 and 181-2 respectively.

<sup>22</sup> To avoid slippage between the terms "travel-writers" and "travellers who wrote", I will use the term "women travellers" when generalising about these women, since the one thing they have in common is that they all travelled abroad.

<sup>23</sup> M. Kowalewski (1992), Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel, Athens (Georgia): University of Georgia Press, p. 6.

attention of geographers, and several have made the case for seeing travel writing, both contemporary and historical, as a form of geography.<sup>24</sup> The inspiration for the recognition of both the enduring appeal of travel writing as a mode of representation,<sup>25</sup> and of the overlaps between geography as a discipline and travel-writing as a poetic, imaginative and occasionally "scientific" *genre* of literature was Edward Said's *Orientalism*.<sup>26</sup> Said constructs a critical reading of what he refers to as "imaginative geographies", the complex production of images of lands and peoples beyond Europe which were reproduced in accounts of the voyages of discovery and journeys of exploration, and in travel narratives. As Derek Gregory argues,

For Said, imaginative geographies are discursive strategies, tense constellations of power, knowledge and spatiality, that are centred on "here" and projected towards "there" so that "the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here"... This fed into his critique of Orientalism as a discourse that worked through a representation of space in which the Orient was constructed as a theatrical stage on which the Occident projected its own fantasies and desires.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the construction of imaginative geographies was fundamental to the imperial discourse of Orientalism, and travel writers played a significant role in the creation of these imaginative geographies. They were an important element in maintaining and affirming colonial relations. As Alison Blunt argues, "Travel writing was particularly important in imperial literary traditions because individual Europeans

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (1992) [eds], Writing Worlds. Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Language, London: Routledge; Peter Bishop (1989), The Myth of Shangri-La, London: Athlone Press; Jonathon Crush, "Gazing on Apartheid: Post-Colonial Travel Narratives of the Golden City", in Paul Simpson-Housley and Peter Preston [eds], Writing the City, London: Routledge (forthcoming); Derek Gregory (1995), "Between the book and the lamp: imaginative geographies of mid-nineteenth century Egypt", Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 20, 2, (forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Sara Mills (1991), Discourses of Difference. An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism, London: Routledge; James Clifford (1992), "Travelling Cultures", in L. Grossberg [ed], Cultural Studies, London: Routledge, pp. 96-116; Felix Driver (1992); Kowalewski (1992); Mary Louise Pratt (1992), Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, London: Routledge.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Said (1978), Orientalism, London: Peregrine.

<sup>27</sup> Derek Gregory, *ibid.* (forthcoming).

traveled between colonized and colonizing worlds, perpetuating mythological otherness".<sup>28</sup> Drawing on Said's *Orientalism*, Peter Bishop makes the point that, "Above all, travel accounts are involved in the production of imaginative knowledges. They are an important aspect of a culture's myth-making, yet this perspective is frequently overlooked".<sup>29</sup> To represent the world is a political as well as an aesthetic-cognitive activity. According to Dennis Porter:

From the beginning writers of travel have more or less unconsciously made it their purpose to take a fix on and thereby fix the world in which they found themselves; they are engaged in a form of cultural cartography that is impelled by an anxiety to map the globe, center it on a certain point, produce explanatory narratives, and assign fixed identities to regions and the races that inhabit them. Such representations are always concerned with questions of place and placing, of situating oneself once and for all *vis-a-vis* an Other or others...<sup>30</sup>

Thus the *creation* of places beyond Europe through such narrative forms as travel writings were located within the wider struggle by Europeans to redefine global geography and their own place within it. Travel texts are, therefore, of particular value to geographers because by their personal nature, "they are a unique record of a culture's imaginative life".<sup>31</sup> Mary Louise Pratt has elucidated how imperial travel writing varied over time and space.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, travel narratives draw together geography and literature, and the popular geographies contained within nineteenth-century travel accounts present a valuable insight into the changing nature of British imperial culture.

In light of this perceived relationship between travel narratives and geography, and of the differences in imperial travel writing over time and space,

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<sup>28</sup> Alison Blunt (1994), *Travel, Gender, and Imperialism*, New York: Guilford Press, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Bishop (1989), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Porter (1991), *Haunted Journeys. Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 14-15, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Bishop (1989), p. viii; quote from p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Louise Pratt (1992), *passim*.

the objectives of the thesis are two-fold; firstly, to explore British women's contributions to imperial culture in Britain through their production of popular geographies and visions of West Africa,<sup>33</sup> their differing roles in West Africa, and their various influences on (or powerlessness in) imperial politics; secondly (and inherently linked to an analysis of their contributions to imperial culture), to explore in detail the differences and similarities in British women's contributions to nineteenth-century visions of West Africa. The production of imaginative geographies allowed those Victorians who had never experienced the British empire at first-hand to imagine what these lands and their peoples were like; these visions were formulated from the textual and visual images to which they were exposed. This study is not, therefore, about West Africa. Rather than being solely concerned with where the travellers were *going*, I want to examine whence they *came* in terms of culture rather than place.<sup>34</sup> The popular geographies and images explored throughout say more about Britain and British imperial culture during the nineteenth century than they do about West Africa. The methodology used is purely qualitative; this is not an exercise based on "fieldwork" in the traditional sense. The thesis analyzes texts that were written and produced in Britain for British audiences during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, texts that, with the exception of Mary Kingsley's work, have been largely ignored by geographers, literary critics and historians alike. The research is, therefore, based primarily on archival materials housed in British libraries and other institutions, rather than on first-hand experience of West Africa.

Qualitative methodologies are, of course, not unproblematic. There is a [valid] concern at present within geography and related disciplines over the use and

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<sup>33</sup> By "popular geographies" I am referring the creation of images of West Africa and its peoples which were outside academic and scientific discourse, but which were available for mass public consumption. This is especially important when one considers that the vast majority of people in Victorian Britain did not have the opportunity to witness overseas territories first-hand.

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Bishop (1989), p. 8.



reproduction of both visual and textual images.<sup>35</sup> Several geographers, primarily those working on historical geographies of imperialism and on contemporary Third World issues, have been accused of "re-presenting" racist images, both visual and textual, in the course of their presentations and publications, thus perpetuating racism, ethnocentrism and colonial productions of knowledge. David Livingstone has dealt with these criticisms,<sup>36</sup> and his arguments are pertinent for this thesis. In exploring the texts of white women travellers and the popular geographies that they contained, the aim of this thesis is not to present the images they constructed as "authentic", but to unravel, understand and explain the prejudices contained within them. It is only by recognising and analyzing these prejudices, and challenging the manifestation of these in travel narratives, that a critical understanding of women's role in British imperial culture can be achieved. Of particular importance to this study is the increasing importance of gender within both critiques of imperialism and histories of geography.

### **Women and the history of geography and imperialism**

As several writers, including Brian Hudson, Edward Said, Felix Driver and David Livingstone, have pointed out, the history of British geography during the late nineteenth century is intimately related to the history of British imperialism.<sup>37</sup> During the nineteenth century the empire was perceived as a masculine preserve and the literature of empire was a male-dominated, heroic literature. Consequently, analyses of the history of the empire have often failed to account for the role of

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Trevor Barnes and James Duncan (1992), *passim*; Clare Madge (1993), "Boundary disputes: comments on Sidaway", *Area*, 25, 3, pp. 294-9; James Derrick Sidaway (1992), "In other worlds: on the politics of research by "First World" geographers in the "Third World"", *Area*, 24, 4, pp. 403-408, the latter two with particular reference to fieldwork in the "Third World".

<sup>36</sup> David Livingstone, "Reproduction, representation and authenticity - a re-reading", paper presented in the *Ecumene: Dwelling and Representation* session, I.B.G. Annual Conference, Nottingham, January 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Driver (1990), pp. 23-40; Brian Hudson (1977), "The new geography and the new imperialism: 1870-1918", *Antipode*, 9, 2, pp. 12-19; David Livingstone (1992), pp. 216-259; Edward Said (1990), "Narrative, geography and interpretation", *New Left Review*, 180, pp. 85-6.

women as agents of British imperialism. As Billie Melman argues:

Historians and students of culture alike relegate women to the periphery of imperialist culture and the tradition of "empire", the assumption being that the female experience of the Western expansion and domination outside Europe had been subsumed in hegemonic and homogeneously patriarchal tradition.<sup>38</sup>

According to Helen Callaway, the history of empire was very often the "history of the greats"; its male figures were imbued with courage, fortitude and heroism.<sup>39</sup> Empire was the preserve of the great explorers, the big game hunters and the adventurers who pitted their manhood against the hazards of unexplored lands.<sup>40</sup> There existed a powerful parallel between geographical conquest and sexual conquest; landscapes were feminised, penetrated, assaulted, conquered and subdued.<sup>41</sup> The empire was also a sexual playground for European men, free of the stifling morality of Victorian Britain, a public, masculine domain exclusive of white women.<sup>42</sup> These imperial views on gender were informed by the belief system of a patriarchal Victorian Britain. Social Darwinism, evolutionary anthropology, medical tracts and treatises on psychology, the myth of chivalry, "muscular" Christianity, boys adventure stories and the literary tradition of empire all contributed to the assumption of the superiority of the English gentleman.<sup>43</sup> Attitudes in Britain towards race, social class and gender were intrinsic in this assumption; women, non-Europeans, the working classes, the deviant and the mentally ill all belonged to the realm of the "other", metaphorically and physically

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<sup>38</sup> Billie Melman (1992), Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East 1718-1918. Sexuality, Religion and Work, London: Macmillan, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Callaway (1987), Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria, London: Macmillan, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Caroline Oliver (1982), Western Women in Colonial Africa, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, p. 189.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Russell (1988), The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt, London: Collins, p. 213.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald Hyam (1990), Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 38-49.

<sup>43</sup> Callaway (1987), pp. 30-1.

excluded from the world of the Victorian gentleman. In the case of women, not only did Victorian notions of femininity and financial restrictions prohibit them from travelling abroad alone, but the colonial governments and private businesses also prevented their access to the empire by refusing employment to married men. According to Ann Laura Stoler, marriage restrictions in Africa, India and South East Asia lasted well into the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these restrictions, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards an increasing number of women took to travelling abroad, writing books about their experiences and presenting lectures at meetings of philanthropic, church and missionary groups, and very occasionally at some of the less formalised learned societies.<sup>45</sup> The women who travelled alone were viewed by many Victorians as oddities, eccentric "globetrotteresses" with little to contribute to scientific and geographical knowledge. Even the publishers and editors of the travel narratives were dismissive of the achievements of these women. For example, William Carey's introduction to Annie Taylor's diary of her journey to Tibet, which he edited and published, presents her trek as "quaintly pathetic in its simplicity and... richly amusing in its unpreparedness". Taylor is reduced to "a plucky and resourceful woman... an unsophisticated pilgrim".<sup>46</sup> Where women were mentioned in contemporaneous accounts of British imperialism, particularly in the anti-colonialist literature, emphasis was placed on the wives of colonial administrators and officials as representations of the worst aspects of colonialism: its racism, snobbery and Eurocentrism.<sup>47</sup> Only those women travellers who were seen to remain within the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour, such as

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<sup>44</sup> Ann Laura Stoler (1991), "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power. Gender, Race and Mortality in Colonial Asia", in Micaela de Leonardo [ed], Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Post-modern Era, Oxford: University of California Press, p. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah Birkett (1992), Mary Kingsley. Imperial Adventuress, London: Macmillan, p. 66 and 123; Dorothy Middleton (1965), Victorian Lady Travellers, London: Macmillan, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> Shirley Foster (1990), Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and their Writings, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 6-7.

<sup>47</sup> Callaway (1987), p. 3.

nurses and the wives of missionaries, were given any credence, Florence Nightingale being the prime example.<sup>48</sup>

The legacy of these attitudes is still to be seen in some recent accounts of Victorian women travellers. For example, in her account of women adventurers, Maria Aitken argues that although women did not travel frivolously, "their vagaries are amusing now".<sup>49</sup> Accounts of such "vagaries" add spice to already colourful biographies but at the same time underestimate the contribution of women to British imperial culture, and undervalue their contribution to popular geographies and to scientific knowledge. The women remain amusing oddities on the peripheries of imperial experience, and it is their extraordinary lives that provide the context for analysis rather than their scientific achievements, or the part they played in British imperial culture.<sup>50</sup> As Dea Birkett argues throughout her biography of Mary Kingsley, women who travelled alone outside Britain are perceived by their biographers as victims of nineteenth-century attitudes towards women, as daring explorers, or as feminist heroines.<sup>51</sup> The major achievement of women travellers in such accounts seems to be their apparent defiance of contemporary conventions regarding the supposed role of women; they are hailed as proto-feminists. Sara Mills argues that although increasing attention has been paid to the texts of women travel writers, much of this has focused upon the women themselves as individual rebels against the constraints of Victorian society. There has thus been little exploration of the relations between the women and the territories through which they travelled, or the part they played in British imperial

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<sup>48</sup> Dorothy Middleton (1973), p. 66; for a detailed analysis of Nightingale's travel narratives on Egypt, see Derek Gregory *ibid.*, (forthcoming).

<sup>49</sup> Maria Aitken (1987), A Girdle Round the Earth, London: Constable, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> For other examples of portrayals of women travellers as essentially eccentric and odd, see Leo Hammalian (1981), Ladies on the Loose. Women Travellers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Dodd, Mead and Co.; Julia Keay (1989), With Passport and Parasol, London: B.B.C. Books.

<sup>51</sup> Birkett (1992), *passim*.

culture,<sup>52</sup> and there has been even less analysis of their contributions to popular geographies of empire during the nineteenth century.

The restrictions on women's access to the empire were paralleled in Britain by restrictions upon their entry to learned societies. Many senior figures in the Royal Geographical Society were resolutely opposed to women Fellows. The Society flirted with the issue of women's admittance in 1892 and 1893, when a total of twenty-two women were elected, but the doors were closed again immediately; it was only in 1913 that the R.G.S. finally admitted women fellows on the same grounds as men.<sup>53</sup> Its attitude towards women fellows at the end of the nineteenth century was succinctly expressed by George Lord Curzon in a letter to *The Times*:

We contest *in toto* the general capability of women to contribute to scientific geographical knowledge. Their sex and training render them equally unfitted for exploration, and the genus of professional female globetrotteresses... is one of the horrors of the latter end of the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup>

It is not simply, as Domosh argues, that the legacy of such attitudes has meant that women have tended to be written out of, or peripheralised in, the histories of both geography and the British empire. One reason for this may also lie with the women themselves. As David Stoddart has argued, it is difficult to incorporate women travel writers into histories of geography precisely because

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<sup>52</sup> Sara Mills (1991), p. 39. One recent publication which analyses the part the white women played in imperialism is Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel [eds] (1992), Western Women and Imperialism. Complicity and Resistance, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>53</sup> See Birkett (1992), pp. 62-3; Mona Domosh (1991a), p. 97; Middleton (1973), p. 67.

<sup>54</sup> In Middleton (1973), p. 68. An anonymous verse in *Punch Magazine* parodied the attitude of the R.G.S. towards women fellows, and it is this verse that provided the inspiration for the title of this thesis:

A lady an explorer? A traveller in skirts?  
The notion's just a trifle too seraphic.  
Let them stay at home and mind the babies,  
or hem our ragged shirts;  
But they mustn't, can't and shan't be geographic!

Cited in Deborah Birkett (1989), and in Alison Blunt (1994), p. 160.

these women did not consider themselves geographers, nor were they remotely interested in anything that may be regarded as geography in the narrow sense.<sup>55</sup> Most of the women, of this study did not regard themselves as geographers, and only two (Zélie Colvile and Constance Larymore) were Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society. Even Mary Kingsley, the most famous of the women studied here, and who perhaps came closest to what could be loosely termed a "geographer", denied the fact that she had in any way carried out research that could be referred to as geography.<sup>56</sup> Thus women travel writers cannot be "claimed" in a disciplinary sense and cannot be viewed unproblematically as geographers.

Women for the greater part, did not contribute to the "heroic" history of economic and political imperialism. They did not discover, explore and conquer new lands, which provided the foundations for British imperialism. Nor did they play a significant role in the establishment of academic geography towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that their role as teachers assumed particular importance. However, the experiences of women travellers are nonetheless of relevance to the histories of geography and imperialism. On the one hand, British women were actively involved in the British empire as sponsors of expeditions or as critics in Britain, or as travellers, teachers, missionaries and the wives of administrators operating within the empire. In a few cases women were able to influence imperial policy. Flora Shaw, as Colonial Editor of *The Times*,<sup>57</sup> and Gertrude Bell, the traveller and explorer of the Middle East who became an important source of information to the British Government during and after the First World War, and who was instrumental in the creation of

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<sup>55</sup> David Stoddart (1991), "Do we need a feminist historiography of geography - and if we do, what should it be?", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16, 4, pp. 484-487.

<sup>56</sup> Kingsley wrote, "as a traveller, though I have travelled further in West Africa than any of my countrymen still I have never fixed a point or taken an observation or in fact done any surveying work that entitles me to be called a geographer", Kingsley to Mrs. Farquarson, Keltie Papers, Royal Geographical Society.

<sup>57</sup> See Birkett (1992), p. xix; Helen Callaway and Dorothy O. Helly (1992), "Crusader for Empire. Flora Shaw/Lady Lugard", in Chaudhuri and Strobel [eds], pp. 79-97.

the Kingdom of Iraq,<sup>58</sup> are examples of such women whose first-hand knowledge of foreign lands gave them a platform upon which to debate imperial policy. On the other hand, if one follows Mona Domosh's proposal to broaden the history and definition of geography and geographical thought, particularly during the nineteenth century, beyond discovery, exploration and mapping,<sup>59</sup> it is possible to explore women's contributions to the popular geographies and images of empire. It is perhaps in this area, rather than in their contributions to "heroic" histories of geography, that the real significance of women travellers lies.

### **British women and images of empire**

Felix Driver has explored the increasing importance of "imaginative geographies" (a term used famously by Edward Said in *Orientalism*) in analyses of geographical knowledge and imperialism.<sup>60</sup> As Driver points out, there have been a number of recent studies concerned with the production of such geographies, many of which have examined the processes by which images and fantasies about the colonial world were created by geographers, anthropologists, explorers, missionaries, novelists and administrators.<sup>61</sup> Two major influences are apparent in many of these studies; Hudson's innovative, but perhaps rather functionalist, argument which explores critically geography's colonial past and the relations between institutionalised geography and the empire, and Said's *Orientalism*, which explores the ways in which European imperialism was constituted socially, culturally and

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<sup>58</sup> H.V.F. Winstone (1978), *Gertrude Bell*, London: Cape, pp. 152-170, 225-248, 262.

<sup>59</sup> Mona Domosh (1991b), "Beyond the frontiers of geographical knowledge", [response to Stoddart], *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 16, 4, p. 489.

<sup>60</sup> Driver (1992), p. 31 and *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Peter Bishop (1989); Patrick Brantlinger (1988), *The Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Michael Heffernan (1989), "The limits of Utopia: Henri Duveyrier and the exploration of the Sahara in the nineteenth century", *Geographical Journal*, 155, pp. 465-480; Mary Louise Pratt (1985), "Scratches on the face of the country; or, what Mr. Barrow saw in the land of the Bushmen", *Critical Inquiry*, 12, pp. 119-143.

politically.<sup>62</sup> While recognising the importance of Hudson's paper in inspiring a more critical analysis of histories of geographical knowledge, Driver cites the importance of *Orientalism* in stimulating the recent interest by geographers in the genealogy of imaginative geographies. He argues:

*Orientalism* reminds us that the representation of the Other (places, people, races, gender) is intimately bound up with notions of the self... Furthermore, this process of representation is simultaneously cultural and political; it thus renders impossible any absolute distinction between "knowledge" (ideas, concepts, texts) and "power" (strategies, institutions, contexts).<sup>63</sup>

Although they were outside the realms of academic geography and were, for a long time, denied access to the Royal Geographical Society, women travellers contributed to nineteenth-century visions of the lands in which they lived and travelled. Despite this, however, as with the exclusion of women from histories of geography, until recently women travel writers have been neglected by literary theorists. Alison Light argues that for many literary critics, the "truly literary culture and the masculine are inseparable" so that "the feminine is implicitly associated with the "middlebrow", a term always bordering on contempt". She cites one example where many of the major women travel writers of the inter-war period, such as Freya Stark, Storm Jameson and Rebecca West, are "given short shrift" because "they fail to conform to, or be interested in, the notions of style" which these critics see as literary.<sup>64</sup>

As stated previously, the texts of women travel writers and those women resident in the British empire have largely been ignored by theorists. According to Sara Mills, women's writing about the colonial situation as a whole has been

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<sup>62</sup> Hudson (1977), *passim*; Said (1978), *passim*.

<sup>63</sup> Driver (1992), p. 31. For discussions of the imaginative geographies of Africa, see Patrick Brantlinger (1985), "Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", Critical Inquiry, 1, 12, pp. 166-203, and Philip Curtin (1965), The Image of Africa. British Ideas and Action 1780-1850, London: Macmillan.

<sup>64</sup> Alison Light (1991), Forever England. Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars, London: Routledge, p. 7.



ignored or negatively viewed.<sup>65</sup> Mills suggests that there is "a tradition of reading women's writing as trivial or as marginal to the mainstream, and this is certainly the attitude to women's travel writing, which is portrayed as the records of the travels of eccentric and rather strange spinsters".<sup>66</sup> Billie Melman supports Mill's contention, arguing that the critics of Orientalism and ethnocentric scholarship continue to write out gender:

The Orient is depicted as a man's place, and the empire as a male space, the *locus* of male character-building and "career"... The imperialist experience and tradition are represented as androcentric. In Edward Said's script of the exchange between the West and the East, the occidental interpretation of the Orient is a symbolic act of appropriation from which Western women are excluded.<sup>67</sup>

There have also been few coherent attempts to analyze the contributions of women to British imperial culture, their roles within the empire, and their impact on policy-making. There are frequent references to the *memsahibs* of India, and several derogatory and negative references to the wives of colonial administrators in Africa and Asia. There are a few colourful accounts of "intrepid" women travellers, but these accounts still relegate women to the peripheries of colonial experience. To some extent, however, the history of women's participation in, and experience of, imperialism has been retrieved in recent years.<sup>68</sup> These contemporary accounts have also opened up a debate as to whether a "woman-

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<sup>65</sup> Mills (1991), p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>67</sup> Melman (1992), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Anthropologists such as Caroline Oliver (1982), Helen Callaway (1987), Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener (1984) [eds], The Incorporated Wife, London: Croom Helm; Mona Etienne and Eleanore Leacock (1980), Women and Colonization. Anthropological Perspectives, New York: Bergin; literary critics such as Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa, Boston: Twayne, and Katherine Frank (1986b), "Voyages out: nineteenth-century women travelers in Africa", in Sharistanian [ed], Gender, Ideology and Action. Historical Perspectives on Women's Public Lives, Connecticut: Greenwood; and feminist historians such as Mary Russell (1988), and Dea Birkett (1989), Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers, Oxford: Blackwell, produced novel analyses of women and imperialism in the 1980s. Most recently Susan Blake (1990), "What difference does gender make?" Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, pp. 347-355, Shirley Foster (1990), Sara Mills (1991), Billie Melman (1992), and Mary Louise Pratt (1992), have written critiques of women's travel writing and have been prominent in writing women into the history of British imperialism. See also Chaudhuri and Strobel [eds] (1992).

centred" approach is a viable one in analyzing women's experiences of empire. Critics have argued that the problem with such accounts is the creation of a dichotomy which places men at the heart of imperialism and women at the periphery: "colonialism is men's business; women do the best that they can within it".<sup>69</sup> Men are perceived as the instigators of the worst aspects of imperialism, and women as both symbolic and real "angels in the home" practising the stereotyped virtues of femininity - kindness, benevolence and tolerance.<sup>70</sup> The active part that women played in the British empire is ignored, and the notion of women's passivity in the imperial project is maintained. Such accounts attempt to create feminist heroines and do not explain the power relations between white women and colonised peoples, which were as much related to notions of race and class as they were to gender. As Dea Birkett and Julia Wheelwright argue, the positive, proto-feminist rendering of the lives of women travellers in the empire ignores the "unpalatable facts" of their relations with the peoples and environments that they encountered, their racism, their Eurocentrism, their complicity in and ambivalence towards imperialism, and their anti-feminism.<sup>71</sup> Haggis goes on to argue:

A woman-centred approach is thus interpreted as replacing the singular, presumed universal, view of European men, with an opposite: the singular, encompassing view of European women. The continuance of such a dichotomy effectively colonises gender for white women and men rather than introducing gender as a relational dimension of colonialism.<sup>72</sup>

This study, while adopting an approach which could be termed "women-centred", attempts to avoid the creation of gender dichotomies, and the focus on an essential "feminine" experience of empire, by exploring the intricacies of white women's responses and the complex interplay of gender with other relationships

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<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Jane Haggis (1990), "Gendering colonialism or colonising gender? Recent Women's Studies approaches to white women and the history of British colonialism", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 1/2, p. 105. Here, Haggis criticises Callaway's Gender, Culture and Empire and Claudia Knapman's White Women in Fiji (1986) for precisely these reasons.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p. 113.

<sup>71</sup> Dea Birkett and Julia Wheelwright (1990), "'How could she?' Unpalatable facts and feminist heroines", Gender and History, 2, 1, pp. 49-57.

<sup>72</sup> Haggis (1990), p. 113.

of power, including class and race. As Laura Donaldson argues:

Historical colonialism demonstrates the political as well as theoretical necessity of abandoning the idea of women's (and men's) gender identity as fixed and coherent. Instead it imbues us with a conception of gender as a site of conflicting subjective processes and makes it impossible to ignore the contradictory social positioning of white middle-class women as both colonized patriarchal objects and colonizing race-privileged subjects.<sup>73</sup>

While it is important to recognise that the experiences of empire of British women were often distinct from their male counterparts, and were also very different to the experiences of colonised women, it is important to deconstruct the idea of a singular, essential "feminine" experience which can be contrasted with a singular, essential "masculine" experience. What is of importance here is the notion of femininity as a complex and contested arena, as a fractured and disputed state in which the women of this study had an important and even formative role to play.

Recent accounts have raised a further significant question: whether or not a separate and distinct "feminine" *genre* of travel writing can be posited. Engaging with discourse theory, Sara Mills and Shirley Foster have both addressed this question, arguing that textual constraints forced women travel writers to use the language of "colonial" and "imperialist" discourses, but that the paradoxes and tensions apparent in their narratives render women's travel writing distinct from the masculine literary tradition.<sup>74</sup> For example, Foster points out the conflict between the adoption of a masculine voice to authenticate the commentary, and the constraints of writing within the canon of "female literature", "with its prescriptions of appropriate subject matter and style - topics of romance and home and family life, emphasis on feeling and sentiment, and delicacy and emotionalism of expression". Furthermore, the confessional nature of women's travel writing and the constant self-effacement and self-mockery renders it distinct from the masculine

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<sup>73</sup> Laura E. Donaldson (1992), Decolonizing Feminisms. Race, Gender, and Empire-Building, London: Routledge, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Foster (1990), p. 18; Mills (1991), p. 62.

tradition.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, although women were constrained to write within the conventions of a masculine, imperialist literary tradition, a distinctive and feminine voice is recognisable within their narratives, suggesting "a covert means of challenging the male norm and of establishing a new female-oriented genre".<sup>76</sup>

Within discourse theory, the recognition of a female-oriented genre of travel writing and similarities between white women's narratives are important. As Sara Mills argues, this does not necessarily mean that women's and men's writing is always fundamentally different, but the imperial context, which was produced as a profoundly gendered environment, created differences in narrative style and content.<sup>77</sup> However, it would be fallacious for these similarities in women's writing to be used to establish an essentialist "feminine" experience and construction of empire. For example, account should also be taken of the different experiences of imperialism of those women subjected to European rule. Furthermore, it is equally valid to draw out the differences between white women's experiences and narratives as it is to seek for similarities in order to posit a separate *genre* of writing. While there are similarities based on gender, travel narratives by women were also shaped by class differences, and they varied according to the time period in which they were written. For example, although Melman discusses the influence of social class on British women's descriptions of the "Orient", this is based on the premise that "Travel was a middle-class phenomenon. Women's travel exclusively so".<sup>78</sup> This premise is not wholly correct when considering nineteenth-century women who travelled purely for pleasure and leisure, for, as this study illustrates, members of the aristocracy also became travel-writers in the British empire. Moreover, as argued previously, not

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<sup>75</sup> Foster (1990), pp. 18-19.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Sara Mills (1994), "Knowledge, Gender, and Empire", in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose [eds], Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies, New York: Guilford Press, p. 30.

<sup>78</sup> Melman (1992), p. 35.

every British woman who travelled in the empire and published accounts of her experiences was a "travel-writer" in the sense that Melman and Domosh use the term; neither were the missionaries, missionaries wives, and the wives of colonial administrators all middle-class. The publications of such women, some of whom had working-class backgrounds, were equally important as the accounts of travel-writers in contributing to the popular geographies of empire. As Mills argues, the "stress on the differences within colonial discourse is important in that it enables... [one] to emphasize the specificity of each imperial relation".<sup>79</sup> Textual constraints on women's writing certainly existed in the nineteenth century, but these evolved as British imperial culture evolved, and this produced certain differences in the style and content of the narratives of women travellers in West Africa.

## Methodology

The approach adopted in this study is to view women individually within the context of their own lifetimes, in order to examine their experiences of empire and their differing visions of West Africa. The thesis seeks to avoid a gender dichotomy, comparing travel writing by men to that by women, by illustrating that there was not a singular "feminine" response to, and experience of, British imperialism rather, femininities were "constructed in a variety of ways, around the power matrix of class, race and gender".<sup>80</sup> The emphasis is not on establishing absolute differences in the way that women, on the one hand, and men, on the other, wrote about the British empire. Obviously there were important differences between these two bodies of literature, but at the same time there were many areas of overlap and similarity. Furthermore, there were important differences in the ways that *individuals* experienced and represented the empire, and these were predicated on their individual life experiences, their motives for writing, the time period and particular areas in which they travelled. This thesis focuses on a range

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<sup>79</sup> Mills (1994), p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

of women whose experiences extended over some sixty years, during which time the nature of imperial travel writing changed immensely; thus the context of their lives is critical to the following analysis. Consequently, this study attempts to bring the women and their narratives to the fore and to explore the complexities in their accounts. It also explores how particular forms of British femininity arose in the late nineteenth century born of overseas, and specifically West African, travel. Such an approach facilitates the avoidance of a problem that Driver found in *Orientalism*. He writes:

Although it is true, as Said maintains, that the very existence of Orientalism is inseparable from the unequal (colonial) relationship between Europe and the Orient (which is why Orientalism is not matched by an equally powerful discourse of occidentalism) this does not mean that all orientalists shared the same visions and ideals.<sup>81</sup>

Melman points out that very often women and men had differing visions and ideals, but what is important to this study is the fact that not all women shared the same visions and ideals about the British empire. As Said himself has written more recently in response to such criticisms, "authors are... very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure".<sup>82</sup> The recognition of this facilitates an understanding of the differences apparent in the attitudes of white women travellers in West Africa, and their representations of the landscapes and peoples that they encountered. Therefore, this study, in exploring the similarities and differences between women's travel narratives about a particular area and over a specific time period, is necessarily modest in its aspirations. In terms of methodology, however, this study is innovative in a number of ways.

Firstly, the regional focus of the study is a departure from previous analyses of women's travel writing and, although the project is essentially inter-disciplinary, this regional focus ensures that the study is overtly geographical. In addition, it allows an exploration of the complexities of both the travel narratives of women

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<sup>81</sup> Driver (1992), p. 33.

<sup>82</sup> Edward Said (1994), Culture and Imperialism, London: Vintage, p. xxiv.

and of the nature of British imperial culture throughout the nineteenth century. By concentrating on West Africa, the thesis explores the intricacies in Britain's relationship with this part of the continent throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, and how the Dark Continent was understood and represented in a variety of ways in Britain over this time period. By recognising the numerous and ever-evolving contexts in which women travelled in and wrote about West Africa from the 1840s onwards, one can begin to explore the complexities in the narratives themselves, and to understand why differences and similarities exist in the popular geographies of West Africa created by women travellers.

Secondly, in addition to deconstructing the notion of the essential "woman traveller" and an essential "feminine" *genre* of travel writing, the thesis deconstructs the notion of the singular "Other".<sup>83</sup> By focusing upon different representations of West African landscapes and peoples this study avoids reference to a singular African "Other", and instead explores the complexities involved in the depictions of West Africa and its peoples by women travellers. In this sense, therefore, this study is informed by contemporary subaltern studies and the issues surrounding representation,<sup>84</sup> and attempts to illustrate how British women travellers, in the various representations of West Africa, created multiple "others" which offer some challenge to a "Saidian" reading of representation in travel narratives.

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<sup>83</sup> A major criticism of Edward Said's *Orientalism* was its construction of a singular Other; by suggesting that Westerners represented the Orient in standard ways Said effectively denied the fact that Europeans constructed a whole variety of "others", and also denied the possibilities of the part played the "Other" in the negotiation and construction of these images (see p. 209 on how Africans may have fostered images of African cannibalism among Europeans).

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, a collection of articles by various authors (Nast *et al*) entitled "Women in the field: critical feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives", *Professional Geographer*, 46, 1, 1994, pp. 54-102; Liz Bondi and Mona Domosh (1992), "Other figures in other places: on feminism, postmodernism and geography", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10, pp. 199-213; Jennifer Robinson (1994), "White Women Researching/Representing "Others": From Apartheid to Postcolonialism?", in Blunt and Domosh, pp. 197-226. Many of these studies draw their inspiration from subaltern studies; see, for example, Spivak (1988), pp. 241-268; Trinh (1989) *passim*.

Thirdly, the utilisation of qualitative methods of investigation on historical material is a relatively recent development within geography. The use of qualitative methods in geography are well documented,<sup>85</sup> and the use of archival materials to reconstruct the past remain a long-recognised tool of historical geographers. However, the geographical interpretation of such sources as film and literature is a relatively new departure in geographical research, particularly in their application to historical contexts.<sup>86</sup> Although, as stated previously, there has been a renewed interest within geography in travel literature, studies have not attempted to interpret such narratives in terms of the production of popular geographies, nor in terms of the temporal and regional contexts of the journey. The focus to date, therefore, has been much more on text rather than context. Furthermore, the travel narratives of women missionaries and colonial wives, as distinct from those women who travelled in order to write, have rarely been analyzed within such disciplines as literary criticism and history, and even less so by geographers. Thus the nature of the sources, and the ways in which these are interpreted, add to the novelty of this study.

A final point about methodology concerns the difficulty of using, interpreting and editing historical sources. Of importance here is the fact that the meaning and use of language changes over time and is itself dependent upon the context of its production. For example, there are endless passages in the narratives analyzed in this study which would today be considered racist, but at the time of their production would not have been received in this way by most audiences in Britain. Again, what becomes apparent is that the context for the narrative is crucial in its interpretation, and the opinions of women travellers have to be viewed against the background of the dominant scientific and popular theories of the time, such as anti-slavery, anti-colonialism, Darwinism and pro-imperialism. Therefore,

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<sup>85</sup> See, for example, John Eyles and David M. Smith [eds] (1988), Qualitative Methods in Human Geography, Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, William E. Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley [eds] (1987), Geography and Literature. A Meeting of the Disciplines, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press; S.C. Aitken and L.E. Zonn (1994) [eds], Place, Power, Situation and Spectacle: A Geography of Film, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.



by considering the context of the journey one can deal with the complexities contained within the narratives of women travellers, gain an insight into the intricacies of British imperial culture, and attempt to understand the extent to which the popular geographies created by women travellers were both informed by and informed the prevailing theories (both popular and scientific) of the time.

### **Content and structure**

The aim of this thesis is to delineate the different ideals and visions of women travellers, and to analyze how these differences influenced their narratives and produced distinct images of West Africa. In the course of this thesis, the experiences of white women in West Africa are retrieved from the margins of critical discourses on imperialism, so that their contributions to both British imperialism and the popular geographies of empire can be explored. Their narratives are viewed with a critical eye, their racisms and ethnocentrisms are not denied. Such an approach lends itself to a spatially- and temporally-specific analysis of women's involvement in British imperial culture. To cover the great numbers of women travelling throughout the whole of the British empire during the whole of the nineteenth century would be a vast undertaking. This thesis, therefore, focuses upon British women travellers in West Africa between 1840 and 1915, using a spatial and temporal context in which to compare and contrast their narratives, their shortcomings and their achievements.

The analysis centres on the travel narratives of Elizabeth Melville, Mrs. Henry Grant Foote, Anna Hinderer, Mary Slessor, Zélie Colvile, Mary Kingsley and Constance Larymore, who all travelled in West Africa between 1840 and 1915 (see Table 1). It explores, in particular, the visions of West Africa in women's travel accounts in relation to contemporaneous constructions of Africa as the Dark Continent. The discussion focuses on four principal themes which recur throughout these narratives: representations of landscapes, race, customs and West African women. The study is organised around these themes because they represent some

TRAVELLER	DATES	DESTINATION	DATES OF TRAVELS	REASON FOR JOURNEY	SOCIAL CLASS
Elizabeth Melville	? (no data available)	Sierra Leone	1840-1846	Wife of Colonial Judge	Aristocratic
Anna Hinderer	1827-1870	Ibadan	1852-1869	Wife of Missionary	Middle Class
Mrs. Henry Grant Foote	? (no data available)	Lagos	1861	Wife of Colonial Consul	Middle Class
Mary Slessor	1848-1915	Calabar Region	1876-1915	Missionary	Working Class
Zelie Colville	? (no data available)	Oil Rivers and the West Coast of Africa	1889	Wife of Acting Commissioner of Uganda	Aristocratic
Mary Kingsley	1862-1900	Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Portuguese, French and Belgian West Africa, German Cameroon	1892-1895	Independent Traveller/Explorer	Mother Working Class, Father Middle Class
Constance Larymore	? (no data available)	Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria	1901-1907	Wife of Military Colonial Administrator	Middle Class

**Table 1 - Biographical Information on British Women Travellers to West Africa, 1840-1915**

Note: For information on the publications of these women, see Bibliography

of the primary topics of discussion in the travel narratives concerned. The politics of imperialism are important in providing a context for the journeys of British women, and these women were clearly influenced by the imperial ethos of the time. Therefore, imperial politics provide the focus of chapter 2. However, politics do not form one of the themes of the later chapters of the thesis because women travellers, on the whole, did not engage in political debates or commentary. The women of this study wrote in a manner that was acceptable to their readers and, for the most part, avoided entering into political and scientific debate. However, this is not to argue that these topics were completely proscribed; women could, and did, make mention of these debates. For example, there were occasional references in these travelogues to the positive effects of British economic and political imperialism on West Africa (see chapter 3), and Mary Kingsley consciously transgressed the boundaries into the arena of political and scientific debate, although such transgressions occurred primarily in her later writings. Indeed, Kingsley adopted several masculine personae (explorer, trader, ichthyologist, anthropologist) to lend credence to her opinions and arguments on the state of British imperialism in West Africa. Mary Slessor also used her position in West Africa to become politicised in terms of her opinions of, and reaction to, mission policies. However, most of the women of this study, including Kingsley and Slessor, chose to produce passage after passage of description of the physical environment, racial characteristics and cultural practices of the peoples they encountered.

Of importance, therefore, are the external factors which influenced the content of women's travel narratives. For example, unlike many male travellers, women travellers generally did not write in the "quest" *genre*. They did not discover, explore, and claim tracts of territory for Britain, and, for the most part, did not travel through uncharted land (although Mary Kingsley crossed uncharted territory between the Ogowé and Rembwé rivers, and Mary Slessor lived and travelled in the unexplored forests of northern Calabar). As Sara Mills points out, constraints on both the production and reception of the text ensured that the "quest" *genre* of travel writing was not an option for women, and most chose to avoid this

style of writing. If their narratives were to be credible within the confines of the conventions of the time, women travellers could not be seen to be adopting masculine roles in the course of their travels and there was a need constantly to emphasize their femininity in their accounts.<sup>87</sup> This is a major reason for the absence of political observations and commentary in their accounts. The fact of their presence in West Africa, and of their position as travellers, could in itself have been construed as transgressive in terms of the construction of conventional gender roles during the nineteenth century. However, in order to emphasise their femininity and stress the credibility of their narratives, women travellers modified their texts by disclaimers and interjections of humour, or by stressing the difficulties of travel, rather than adopting the position of the adventure hero.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, as is discussed in subsequent chapters, the travelogues of white women in West Africa were often characterised by tensions and complexities within the narrative.

As intimated earlier, the thesis focuses on individual experiences; gender informs these experiences but there are other influences, such as the time and place of the journey. In order to define clearly the geographical and temporal context for the analysis of women's travel narratives, chapter 2 provides a detailed outline of the history of British imperialism in West Africa during the nineteenth century. It traces the increasing involvement of Britain in the affairs of West Africa from the abolition of the slave trade, the period of European exploration and "discovery", the increase in missionary and trading activity, through to the "scramble" for Africa and the imposition of formal imperialism at the turn of the century, epitomised by the creation of the Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria in 1900. Also incorporated into this chapter are biographical vignettes of the women travellers who form the focus of this study. These biographies are framed within the broader picture of the nature of British imperialism in West Africa at the time of their travels. Therefore, this chapter provides a detailed context in which to analyze the

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<sup>87</sup> Mills (1991), p. 7; pp. 106-7.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78. See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of this.

images of West Africa constructed by nineteenth-century women travellers.

Chapter 3 explores the impact of women writers on British imperialism and their empowerment through travel and travel writing. This allows some judgement on whether white women travellers were marginal within the sphere of British imperialism or whether their views had some popular, if not political, impact. Subsequent chapters explore in depth the responses of white women travellers to West Africa and the visions they created in their travel narratives. Chapter 4 explores their relationships with the physical environments and the ways in which they challenged, confirmed or were ambivalent towards prevailing nineteenth-century images of the tropical environment as pandemonium. This chapter explores the prominence of landscape descriptions in travel narratives by women, and elucidates the reasons underlying the differences in their representations of West African landscapes. Chapter 5 examines the attitudes of women travellers towards race during the nineteenth century. On the one hand it analyzes how they responded to the wider philosophical and scientific debates about race in general; on the other, it explores their opinions about West Africans. Closely related to the portrayals of race by women travellers were their depictions of West African customs. The striking differences in responses between the women to various West African customs are made apparent in chapter 6, from the condemnation of these customs as barbarous by some women, to the understanding and justification of even the most violent of customs by others. This chapter also explores the views of those women who wished to see West African customs preserved, despite their position as pro-imperialists. Chapter 7 explores the relationships between white women travellers and their West African counterparts, and the descriptions of the latter by the former. It analyzes the ways in which British women challenged or confirmed prevailing images of West African women.

The concluding chapter summarises the major contentions of the thesis with some thoughts on the imagery created by women travellers in West Africa. It discusses the evolution of images of West Africa in Britain during the nineteenth century. It explores how these powerful images developed with increasing British

involvement throughout the century and with developments in philosophical and scientific thought in Britain, and discusses how the popular geographies created by women travellers fitted in with, informed, or challenged nineteenth-century references to the Dark Continent. Particular emphasis is placed on drawing together the themes of landscape, race, West African customs, and West African women. It also makes some comment on the relevance of studying travel narratives by women to the histories of both imperialism and geographical thought.

## CHAPTER 2 BRITAIN AND THE "DARK CONTINENT"

### Introduction

The nature of British imperialism in West Africa underwent fundamental changes in the course of the nineteenth century. The motives behind economic and cultural imperialism evolved from campaigns to suppress slavery, to attempts by British traders to establish legitimate trade, by British missionaries and others to Christianise West Africa, and the establishment of a vast formal empire towards the end of the century. During this period the image of Africa in the imaginations of many Victorians was transformed. Patrick Brantlinger has referred to this transformation as the "genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", and suggests that it said more about the needs and desires of Victorian middle- and upper-class society than it did about Africa.<sup>1</sup> The creation of the myth of the Dark Continent was not only a part of a larger imperialist discourse that was shaped by political and economic pressures, it was also a product of the psychology of many Victorians and their desire to maintain a sense of cultural dominance. As Brantlinger argues, "For middle- and upper-class Victorians, dominant over a vast working-class majority at home and over increasing millions of "uncivilised" peoples of "inferior" races abroad, power was self-validating".<sup>2</sup>

In Britain, this power may have been threatened by Chartism, trade unionism and the working classes, but in imperialist discourse the culture of the "conquering race" seemed unthreatened, since the voices of the dominated were absent and silent. Thus:

Africa grew "dark" as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Brantlinger (1985), "Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", *Critical Inquiry*, 1, 12, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

ideology that urged the abolition of "savage customs" in the name of civilisation. As a product of that ideology, the myth of the Dark Continent developed during the transition from the main British campaign against the slave trade, which culminated in the outlawing of slavery in all British territory in 1833, to the imperialist partitioning of Africa which dominated the final quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The myth of the Dark Continent, therefore, evolved in Britain in parallel with the changing nature of Britain's involvement in West Africa. Brantlinger's analysis of the changing imagery of Africa during the nineteenth century, and its complex relationship with the changing nature of British imperialism and of Victorian society, provides a useful context for a diachronic study of British women travellers in West Africa. The women of this study travelled in West Africa in every decade between 1840 and 1915, and their narratives can thus be considered within the context of the prevailing ideas of the time. This, in turn, provides a context for understanding the differences in their representations of West Africa, their contributions to the popular images of West Africa, and their participation in British imperial culture.

### **British involvement in West Africa, 1800-1900**

The abolition of slavery in the British empire in 1833 necessitated the greater involvement of Britain in Africa; the seeds of formal empire in Africa were thus sown as a consequence of the abolition movement.<sup>4</sup> Although Africa had exerted a powerful hold on the European imagination since classical times, little was known of the continent South of Egypt and the Mediterranean littoral and stories of men with tails and two heads were common. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the "darkness" of Africa was a reflection of Europe's ignorance of the geography of the continent. Jonathan Swift parodied the unfamiliarity of

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167; Michael Crowder (1981), West Africa Under Colonial Rule, Hutchinson, pp. 23-28; Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher with Alice Denny (1981), Africa and the Victorians. The Official Mind of Imperialism, London: Macmillan, pp. 27-8, 34; Richard Dugate (1985), The Conquest of Northern Nigeria, London: Cass, pp. 18-21.



geographers with Africa, whose lack of knowledge prompted them to fill their maps with pictures of savagery and fantastic creatures. By the end of the nineteenth century, Joseph Conrad wrote, "Africa had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness". However, the image of the blank space, with its implications for excitement and romantic adventure, was so persistent that Graham Greene wrote in the 1960s, "Africa will always be the Africa of the Victorian atlas, the blank unexplored continent, the shape of a human heart".<sup>5</sup> Subsequent discussion will illustrate that although Britain and the other European powers acquired greater knowledge of the geography of Africa during the nineteenth century, European myths continued to be projected onto the continent, and it could be argued that this process continues today.<sup>6</sup>

Economic trade had, of course, initiated Britain's contact with the coast of West Africa in the sixteenth century, but it was the ensuing slave trade which caught the interest of people in Britain. As Philip Curtin argues, since West Africa was at the centre of the slave trade, it was the first part of Africa to attract the attention of Britain, and subsequent images in Britain of "the African", and of Africa in general, were based largely upon the perception of West Africa.<sup>7</sup> The myth of the Dark Continent was, therefore, very much the myth of West Africa. However, even in the early nineteenth century British contact remained superficial, restricted to a few outlets along the coast.<sup>8</sup> Abolition led to far greater involvement

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Swift (1733), On Poetry, 1, quoted in Ali Mazrui (1969), "European exploitation and Africa's self-discovery" Journal of Modern African Studies, 7, p. 675; Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, [ed] Robert Kimbrough (1971), Norton and Co., first published in book form in 1902; Graham Greene (1961), In Search of a Character. Two African Journals, London: Penguin, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 8.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Curtin (1965), The Image of Africa. British Ideas and Action 1750-1850, London: Macmillan, p. vi.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson *et al* (1981), p. 28. With the exception of the explorer Mungo Park, and a couple of speculators, Europeans had not progressed inland. African middlemen brought slaves to the coast. There were tales from the Arabs of the great trading cities of Western Sudan, such as Timbuctoo, but these did not distinguish between former glories and present decline (see Brian Gardner (1968), The Quest for Timbuctoo, London: Cassell, pp. 1-19).

in West Africa than the slave trade itself had done.<sup>9</sup> The Act of 1807 had prohibited British involvement in the slave trade, but foreign slaving increased dramatically in the 1830s. In response, humanitarians in Britain forced the government to take an active stand against the slave trade, culminating in the creation of small Crown colonies on the coast of West Africa: Sierra Leone for the settling of freed slaves in 1808, The Gambia in 1816, and the Gold Coast in 1821. These colonies were intended as bases from which legitimate commerce could operate, and from where British ships could patrol to prevent the traffic in slaves. However, they presented problems to the British Government. The amount of trade was insignificant; the freed slaves in Sierra Leone often enslaved each other; The Gambia had problems with the surrounding African states;<sup>10</sup> the Soninke-Marabout wars occurred towards the middle of the century, and the Gold Coast was threatened by the Ashanti confederacy which controlled the hinterland, and which could thus sever trade routes at will. In attempting to keep trade alive, the merchants were being drawn further into inland affairs, thus increasing Britain's involvement in West Africa.

The 1840s witnessed a peak in the reporting from, and public interest in, West Africa, which was primarily a result of the Niger Expedition. This decade also witnessed the increase in missionary activity in West Africa, with missionary societies using the glare of publicity to highlight opportunities in West Africa.<sup>11</sup> With this expansion of missionary activity, the British public was deluged by an outpouring of missionary literature about West Africa, an essential tool for the survival of the missions since they depended upon voluntary donations. The impact of this literature is aptly summarised by Curtin:

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson *et al*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> These were obviously not states on the Western model, but nevertheless existed as powerful influences in the internal affairs of West Africa.

<sup>11</sup> Curtin (1965), pp. 260 and 312. As Curtin argues, "Britain was not alone in catching the spirit of proselytizing Christianity; but Britain was one of the earliest and strongest centres of the missionary revival, and this fact coloured much of the British attitude towards West Africa". For an account of the spread of missionary activity in West Africa, see also J.D. Fage (1961), Introduction to the History of West Africa, London: Cambridge University Press, p. 119.

The missionaries were not alone to blame for the increasing cultural arrogance of the British public but they bear a special responsibility. The views presented in their popular press were unequivocal, and they were very widely circulated... It is hard to escape the conclusion that the systematic mis- representation of African culture in the missionary press contributed unintentionally to the rise of racial as well as cultural arrogance.<sup>12</sup>

Britain's foothold in West Africa at this time was a tenuous one, and the British Government was reluctant to get involved in West African affairs. Sierra Leone was the only West African territory valued by the British because of the strategic position of Freetown as a naval base (see Map 1). An administrative base was established here, which required that qualified Britons, such as the Melvilles, live for some time in Sierra Leone. The rest of the British West African settlements were considered too costly to govern and defend than was warranted by their value as trading posts.<sup>13</sup> There was strong support for the abandonment of all the settlements outside Sierra Leone, but these opinions conflicted with those of the traders and missionaries who wanted greater protection from the Government.<sup>14</sup> Thus the British Government was honour-bound to meet its obligations in West Africa, even though at this time it was opposed to colonial expansion, and colonial rivalry with France in the region ensured that Britain could not at this time renege on its commitments in West Africa.

Despite the continued opposition to colonising West Africa, and the failure of the 1841 Niger Expedition, the exploration of the African continent continued into the 1850s.<sup>15</sup> Livingstone's advocacy of the "opening up" of Africa by "commerce and Christianity" became increasingly popular towards the end of the

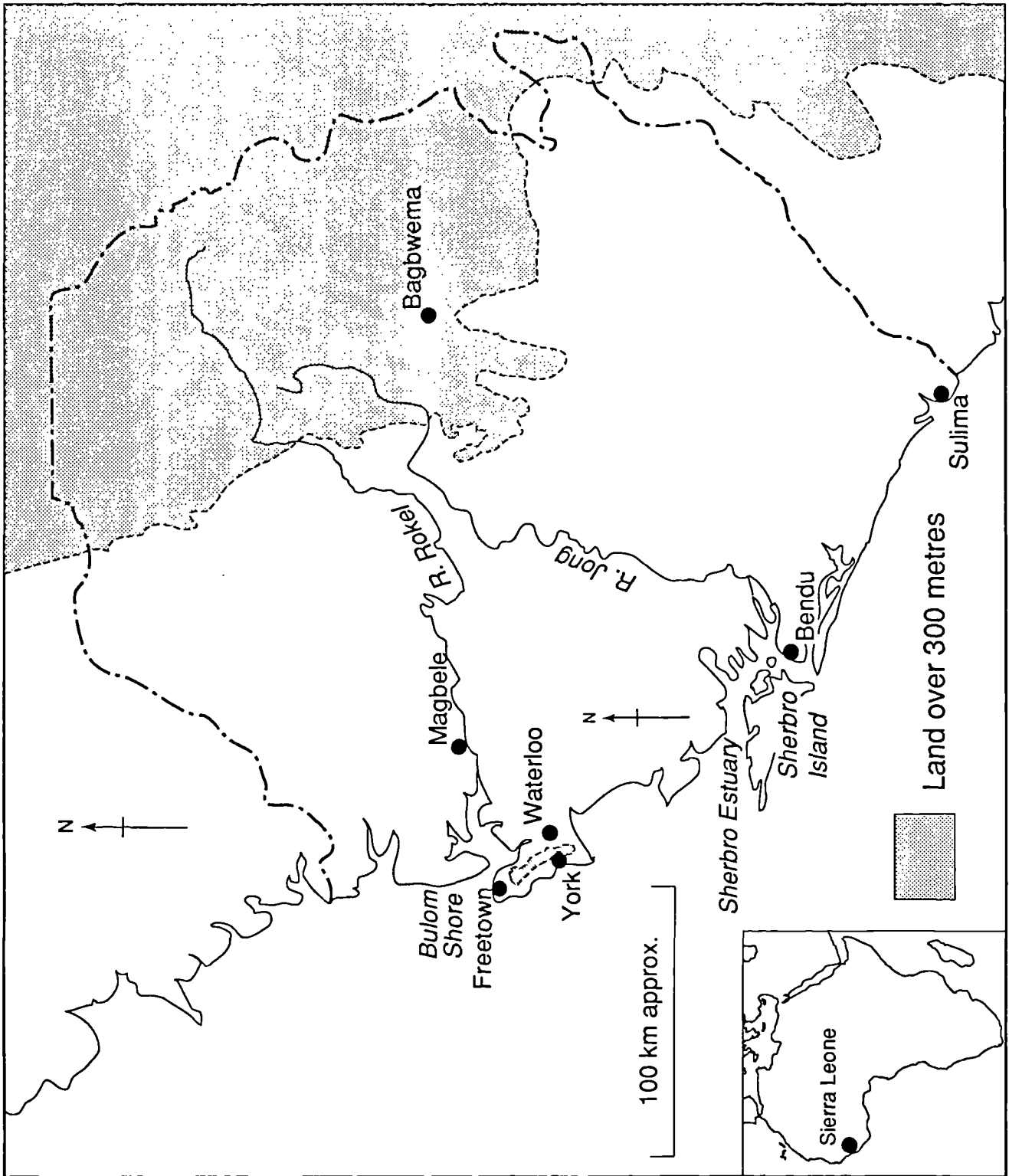
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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>13</sup> Fage (1961), p. 123.

<sup>14</sup> For accounts of Britain's increasing involvement in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast up to the 1840s, see Fage (1961), pp. 125-6 and Crowder (1981), pp. 28-31.

<sup>15</sup> The expeditions of Baikie (1854), Burton and Speke (1856-8), and Livingstone (1857) initiated the final era of African exploration which culminated in the carving up of the entire continent by the European powers by the end of the century (see Patrick Brantlinger (1988), Rule of Darkness. British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914, London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 28).



Map 1 The Sierra Leone Protectorate

Adapted from: Fyfe (1962)

1850s.<sup>16</sup> The British Government, recognising the potential threat from France and the potential advantages of acquiring raw cotton supplies, renewed their support for the British traders and for the continued exploration of the Niger,<sup>17</sup> although it was still unwilling to support colonialism in West Africa.<sup>18</sup>

From the 1850s, trading interests and the missionary effort worked in tandem to maintain an interest towards West Africa in Britain. In the Yoruba hinterland of Lagos and Badagri the spread of the British missions, which included the Ibadan mission founded by David Hinderer, inevitably involved the reluctant British Government in the affairs of West Africa. There existed an intense rivalry between the new town of Abeokuta, with its contingent of British missionaries, and the older power of Dahomey to the West, and when Dahomey invaded Abeokuta in 1851, Britain's policy of non-commitment broke down under pressure from the missionaries. The moral obligation to protect the safety of the missionaries forced Britain to blockade the ports and land a naval force at Lagos, the Government believed that a single action would restore legitimate trade and allow Britain to withdraw. This was not the case and a second landing was required in 1853, and following intervention again in 1861, Britain formally annexed Lagos. Throughout the 1850s, therefore, Britain found itself inescapably involved in the intertribal rivalries in the Bight of Benin (see Maps 2 and 3), and only a decision to abandon its anti-slavery commitment could have reversed this. Through their presence in the Lagos hinterland, the missionaries had ensured Britain's involvement in this part of West Africa.<sup>19</sup>

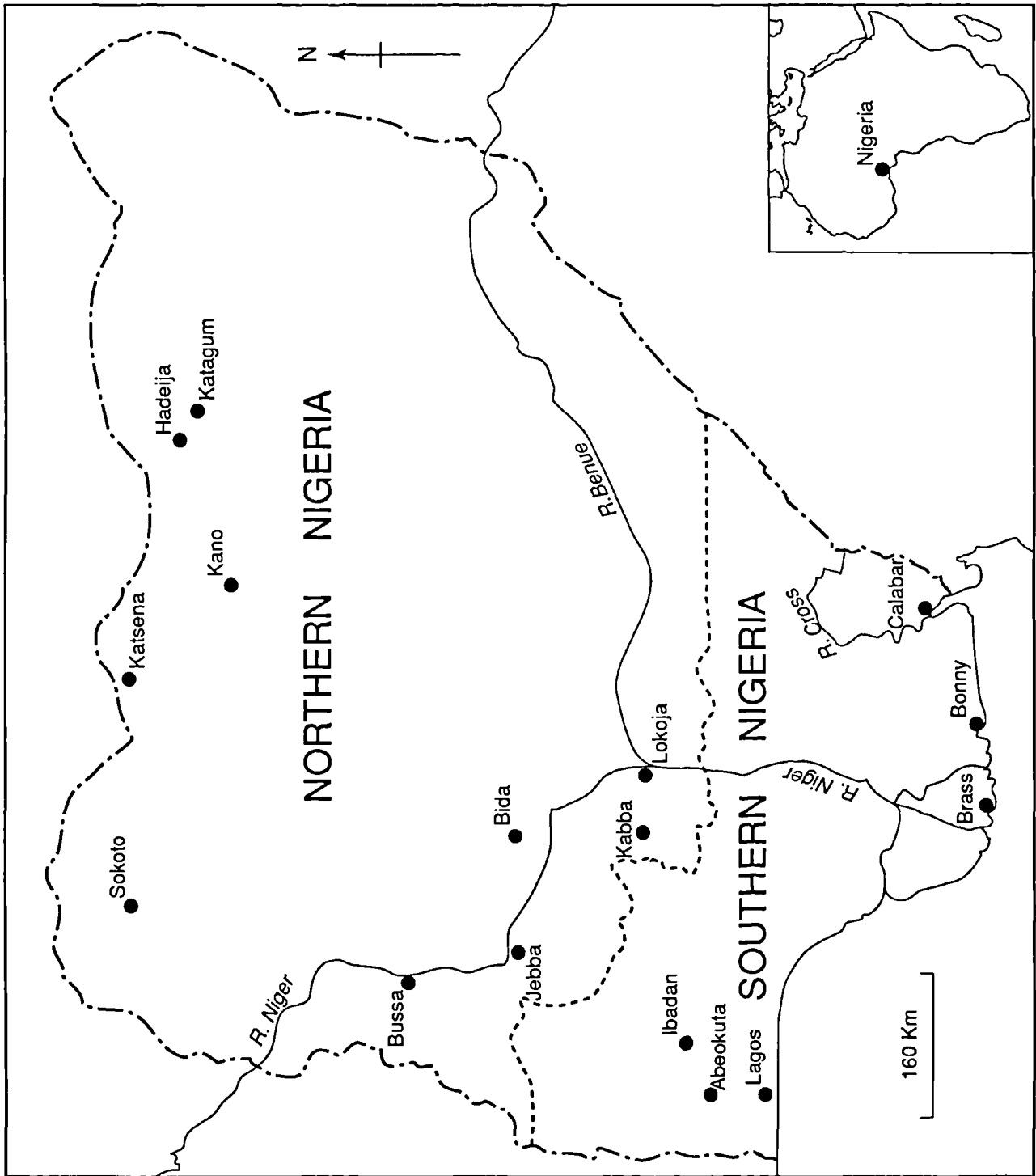
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<sup>16</sup> Patrick Brantlinger (1985), p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> John Flint (1974), "Exploration and Trade", in J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder [eds], History of West Africa, vol. 2, London: Longman, p. 395.

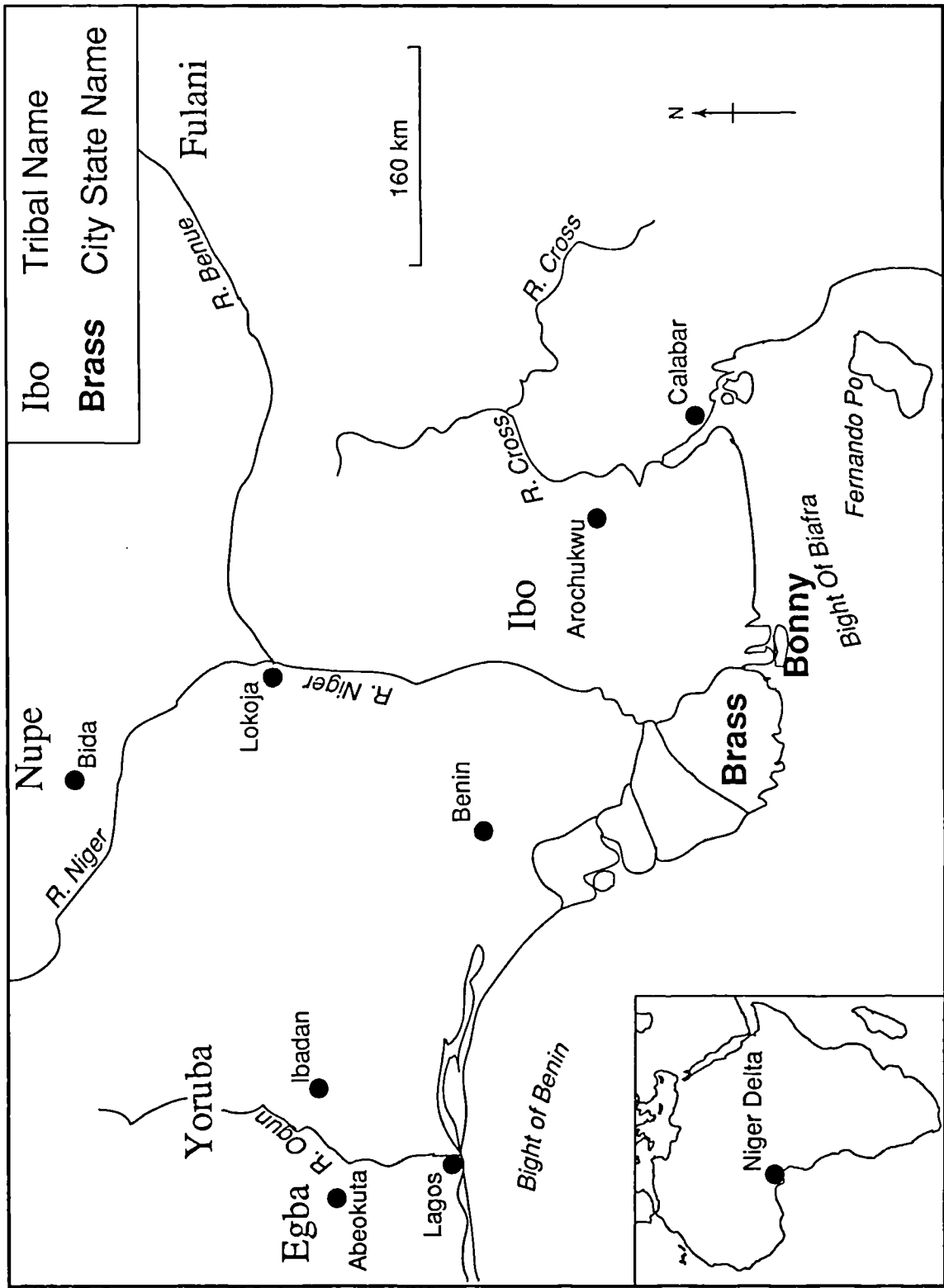
<sup>18</sup> The 1857 Indian Mutiny undermined any complacency regarding the colonies, and hardened opinion against colonial expansion (see Christine Bolt (1971), Victorian Attitudes to Race, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. x).

<sup>19</sup> Crowder (1981), p. 51.



Map 2 The Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria, 1900

Adapted from: Orr (1965)



Map 3 Lagos and Yoruba in relation to the Niger and Benue River Systems

The occupation of Lagos by the British increased its intervention in the interior, and led to estrangement between the Egbas and the British Government, since the former resented the protection granted by Britain to fugitive slaves from Abeokuta, and objected to the prohibition of the export slave trade in which they had been engaged.<sup>20</sup> From Lagos, Britain began to interfere in the Yoruba intertribal wars,<sup>21</sup> using military strength decisively on one side or the other (as discussed subsequently, Consul Foote was actively involved in this). The ill-feeling lasted throughout the 1860s and 1870s, and was to have enormous consequences for the missionaries, particularly Anna and David Hinderer. The missionary effort had preceded the British flag, which increased the vulnerability of those caught up in the wars.

Despite the fact that Britain had been forced to annex Lagos, the prevailing climate in Britain towards West Africa was still anti-colonial.<sup>22</sup> After a peak in the 1840s, reporting from and public interest in West Africa in Britain had begun to decline, reaching a nadir in the 1860s.<sup>23</sup> In 1866, the *Daily Telegraph* commented that Africa was a "bore", for "no one can be really much interested in a black wilderness, inhabited by foul, fetid, fetish-worshipping, loathsome and lustful barbarians".<sup>24</sup> The Government's interest in West Africa declined to such an extent that in 1865 a Select Committee recommended Britain's withdrawal from the whole of West Africa except Sierra Leone. Customs dues ensured that the trade

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<sup>20</sup> Church Missionary Society (1911), The Yoruba Mission, London: C.M.S. Publications, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> See Modupe Oduyoye (1969), The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland, Ibadan: Daystar Press, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> The Colonial Office described Lagos as "that deadly gift from the Foreign Office" (see Crowder (1981), p. 47).

<sup>23</sup> Richard Burton wrote in 1848 that readers were becoming bored with the "monstrous recital of rapine treachery, and murder; of ugly savages... of bleared misery by day, and animated filth by night, of hunting adventures and hairbreadth escapes, lacking the interest of catastrophe". Though Livingstone's report of 1857 revived interest in Africa, it drew attention from the Niger to the Zambesi (in Curtin (1965), p. 319).

<sup>24</sup> In Lorimer (1978), Colour, Class and the Victorians. English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, Leicester: Leicester University Press, p. 12.



returns from the coast remained abysmally low and gave further credence to arguments supporting the abandonment of West African territories. The Ashanti War of 1863-4 was, for many, the last straw. However, the Government recognised its responsibilities to protect the British traders and certain African states, and instead opted to economise by uniting the administrations of the Gold Coast, Lagos and The Gambia under the Governor of Sierra Leone. The British Government adopted a recommendation not to extend its rule or protection over further African territories, and to urge the Africans already under its rule or protection to prepare for their own self-government. Therefore, during the 1860s, trading and missionary ventures continued to precede the British flag in West Africa.

The reluctance to expand on the part of the British Government was partly because of the expense,<sup>25</sup> but also because of the poor environmental conditions and the failure to convert Africans to Christianity. By the 1860s, fierce attacks were launched against the communities Britain had helped to create, especially in Sierra Leone.<sup>26</sup> There was now a body of opinion in Britain which saw Africa as beyond redemption; the White Man's Grave should be left in its state of barbarism. Furthermore, writers such as Dickens and Carlyle, who sympathised with Britain's poor but not with the exploited African, felt that overseas missions detracted attention away from the plight of the working classes in Britain, and that attempts to "civilise" Africa should be abandoned.<sup>27</sup> These opinions, in conjunction with the rise of a more cynical racism during the 1860s, had a profound impact on Britain's colonial policy for the rest of the nineteenth century.

The aversion towards establishing a formal empire in West Africa persisted

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<sup>25</sup> Debates about maintaining constitutional links with Australia and Canada were taking place because of the burden on the Treasury, so West Africa came under heavy fire as soon as it seemed to involve tax-payers' money; see J.D. Hargreaves (1966), Prelude to the Partition of West Africa, London: Macmillan, pp. 65-6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Thorp (1967), Ladder of Bones, London: Collins Fontana, p. 30; Brantlinger (1988), pp. 174-5.

into the 1870s, but by this time Britain was being drawn inexorably towards a more direct form of economic, political and military imperialism.<sup>28</sup> The Disraeli Government did not consider the colonies too expensive, and decided that the "protected" states in West Africa should be annexed, and that together with Lagos they should be constituted into a new crown colony independent of Sierra Leone.<sup>29</sup> It now seemed impossible for Britain to withdraw from West Africa. Events elsewhere in West Africa confirmed this. In 1877, Stanley reached the mouth of the Congo after his great continental journey, and set in motion a sequence of events that was to culminate in the 1884-5 Berlin Conference and the Partition of West Africa. Hitherto, West Africa had seemed to offer limited commercial possibilities, but Stanley, working for Leopold of Belgium, had shown that the Congo could provide many thousands of miles of navigable waterway into the heart of the continent. He embarked on a race with Frenchman Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza to claim access to the Congo,<sup>30</sup> and these events heightened British and Portuguese interest in the area. Britain became aware of the increasing French ambitions in the regions of the Niger and the Congo, and for the first time expressed concern for the future of its trade interests in West Africa. The emergence of German ambitions in this part of the continent culminated in the Berlin Conference.

The survey of the partition of West Africa was carried out between 1885 and 1898, with the result that the whole of West Africa, with the exception of Liberia, came under the imperial rule of the European powers. In 1885, Britain was still in effective occupation of a very small area of West Africa, namely the small island colony of Lagos and a narrow strip of the adjacent mainland, The Gambia

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<sup>28</sup> In 1872, the Dutch pulled out of the Gold Coast, handing over their forts to Britain because of the Ashanti aggression. In 1873, the British Government decided that the only way to deal with the Ashanti was to invade their country, and by February 1874 the Ashanti were defeated. Britain had now clearly accepted the responsibility for the protection of the Gold Coast and its trade (see Fage (1961), p. 136).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of this, see Robinson *et al* (1981), pp. 169-171.

and Sierra Leone.<sup>31</sup> Britain held informal sway over the Niger due to its trade interests, and over Yorubaland because of the activities of the Church Missionary Society. However, after 1885, Britain set about establishing its dominance over West African territory. During the 1880s and into the 1890s Britain began to suppress, and eventually conquered, the empire of Benin, giving it mastery of the whole coastline of the Oil Rivers Protectorate.<sup>32</sup> In Yoruba the fragmented state of the country facilitated the easy establishment of a British Protectorate by the early 1890s; this was controlled by the Royal Niger Company until the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the 1880s, Britain was also interested in occupying the hinterland of Sierra Leone, and the threat from France in the 1890s meant that the colony was eventually declared an official Protectorate in 1896.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the establishment of the Companies and the Protectorates, there was still a certain amount of indifference in Britain towards West Africa until 1895. There existed a greater concern with East Africa as a base from which to protect Britain's interests in the East and Middle East.<sup>35</sup> The British Government recognised the trade prospects in West Africa, but felt no urgent need to develop this part of the continent, relying instead upon the traders to establish Britain's dominance. However, the arrival of Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office heralded a new era in West African policy. He believed that the development of the empire was fundamental to the prosperity of Britain, was quick to recognise the possibilities for Britain in West Africa, and the dangers of losing everything to the expanding French empire.<sup>36</sup> After 1895, therefore, Britain's involvement in West Africa came to be seen as a matter of national importance. British economic and

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<sup>31</sup> Crowder (1981), p. 166.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-121. This became the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893.

<sup>33</sup> Fage (1961), p. 163. See also Flint, in Ajayi and Crowder (1974), p. 397.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

<sup>35</sup> Robinson *et al* (1981), p. 393.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 395-7.

political imperialism in West Africa after 1895 assumed new dimensions which culminated in the acquisition of a vast formal empire; on January 1 1900, the British Government took over the administration of the Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria (Map 2).<sup>37</sup>

The suppression of Northern Nigeria was the ultimate phase of British military imperialism in West Africa. British slave trading interests at the end of the eighteenth century had been transformed into anti-slavery endeavours and a concern for legitimate free trade during the nineteenth century. Following the indifference towards West Africa during the middle decades of the century, Britain was compelled finally to incorporate territories in West Africa into a formal, military empire at the end of the century.

### **Biographical vignettes of British women travellers in West Africa**

Having discussed briefly the history of events in West Africa during the nineteenth century, the subsequent discussion focuses on those women who travelled there at various periods throughout this century, and contextualises their journeys in a specific spatial and historical framework drawing on the above. The following are biographical sketches of those women travellers discussed in this study. They are arranged in chronological order with regard to their journeys, and are framed within the broader picture of the nature of British economic, political and cultural imperialism in West Africa at the time of their travels. It should, perhaps, be emphasised at this point that there is very little biographical or circumstantial information available concerning most nineteenth-century women travel writers,

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<sup>37</sup> For an account of Britain's conquest of Northern Nigeria, see Dugate (1985) *passim*. It was not until 1906 that most of Northern Nigeria was brought under British control, the military strength of the emirs and the unfamiliar terrain making life extremely difficult for the West African Frontier Force. Constance Larymore's husband played an important role in this.

and in many cases it is impossible to locate family archives.<sup>38</sup> As one commentator argues:

One knows very little about many women. If one has biographical notes on some of them, it is because they are often... the daughters of..., the wives of... One can measure at once how much help is, when one wants to publish, the very fact of being the daughter of... or the wife of..., but also how difficult it is for women to make a name, indeed a first name, for themselves.<sup>39</sup>

In many cases, any available information on women travel writers exists as a consequence of the documenting and recording of their husband's lives. However, the writings of these women survive as rich sources of information both about themselves and their visions of the world in which they lived. Therefore, much of the following biographical detail has been reconstructed from documentary evidence about their husbands, but also from their own narratives.

### *Elizabeth Melville*

Elizabeth Helen Melville was born into the Scottish aristocracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. She was the daughter of Randal Callander of Craigforth, County Stirlingshire, a member of the county family which also had estates at Ardkinglas, Argyllshire.<sup>40</sup> In 1840, she married Michael Linning Melville of Hartfield Grove, Sussex, the son of an Irish doctor.<sup>41</sup> The Melville's travelled to West Africa shortly after their wedding, arriving at Sierra Leone on 28 December 1840, where Melville assumed his post as Her British Majesty's Judge in the

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<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly most of the women are not mentioned by name in the Dictionary of National Biography and other sources such as Public Records Office lists, even where entries are included on their husbands, such is their anonymity in official records.

<sup>39</sup> Béatrice Slama, quoted in Bénédicte Monicat (1994), "Autobiography and women's travel writings in nineteenth-century France: journeys through self-representation", Gender, Place and Culture, 1, 1, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Walford (1874), The County Families of the United Kingdom, London: Robert Harwicke, p. 162.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Fyfe (1962), A History of Sierra Leone, London: Oxford University Press, p. 216.

Courts of Mixed Commission. At the time of their arrival, Elizabeth estimated that there were about one hundred Europeans residing in the colony, a population made up of civil and military officers, merchants and missionaries.<sup>42</sup> She was, therefore, quite unusual as a white woman living in Sierra Leone. It was uncommon for wives at this time to accompany their husbands to West Africa, and as mentioned in chapter 1, later in the century restrictions preventing married men from taking up posts in the colonies were enforced. Even by the 1890s, women were discouraged from travelling to Sierra Leone because of the perceived dangers of the climate, and of crossing the bar to reach Freetown.<sup>43</sup> Christopher Fyfe suggests that as a great-granddaughter of an earl and the niece of a Cabinet minister, "Mrs. Melville was invested with social attributes seldom found in Freetown".<sup>44</sup> Melville's descriptions of Sierra Leone during the 1840s were, therefore, unique.

In order to understand Melville's narrative it must be placed within the context of Sierra Leone in the 1840s, and especially within the context of the nature of Britain's involvement in West Africa in the early part of the nineteenth century. Both she and her husband were part of the anti-slavery effort in West Africa; her husband, in particular, was there to see that British justice was upheld in the newly created Crown Colony, and to ensure that former slaves could not be re-sold back into slavery. His primary concerns were to eradicate what remained of the European slave trade and to do what he could to eliminate indigenous slavery in Sierra Leone. These concerns were reflected in the comments in support of Britain's anti-slavery effort in West Africa found throughout Elizabeth's narrative.

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Melville (1968), A Residence at Sierra Leone: described from a journal kept on the spot, and from letters written to friends at home, [edited by Mrs Norton], London: Frank Cass [first published in 1849], p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen Thorp (1950), Swelling of Jordan, London: Lutterworth Press, p. 86.

<sup>44</sup> Fyfe (1962), p. 216.

The Melvilles initially resided in the Registrar's quarters in Freetown, but on 5 April 1841 they moved to a house on "Smith's Hill" overlooking the town, where it was believed the climate was more salubrious.<sup>45</sup> It was here that Elizabeth gave birth to their son, Robert, in 1841.<sup>46</sup> In the same year Melville was promoted to Commissioner of Arbitration, and to Commissary Judge in 1842. According to Fyfe, "Much of his life as a judge was occupied by angry squabbles with his colleagues, unrecorded in the quiet pages of his wife's observations".<sup>47</sup> As with many Europeans living in Sierra Leone at this time, the Melvilles suffered constantly from fever, and in March 1843 they were ordered by their doctor to return home. They departed on 27 March and arrived in England on 12 June. On their arrival Melville was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn,<sup>48</sup> and Elizabeth gave birth to a second child. They began their return journey to Sierra Leone on 16 January 1844, and having experienced the illnesses that afflicted most Europeans in West Africa, decided to leave their children behind in England. They remained in Sierra Leone until July 1846, and arrived back in England on 15 September of the same year. Elizabeth did not return to Sierra Leone, but her husband, to complete the term of office qualifying him for a full judge's pension, remained until 1848, retired and drew £800 per year until his death in 1878.<sup>49</sup>

Melville published an account of her travels in Sierra Leone in a book entitled A Residence at Sierra Leone. This was published anonymously in 1849 under the epithet "A Lady". It was based upon a journal she had kept in West Africa and upon letters she had written to friends in Britain.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>46</sup> Melville (1968), p. 674.

<sup>47</sup> Fyfe (1962), p. 216.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Foster (1885), Men at the Bar; a Biographical Handlist of the Members of the Various Inns of Court Including Her Majesty's Judges etc., London: Reeves and Turner, p. 313.

<sup>49</sup> Fyfe (1962), p. 216.

## *Anna Hinderer*

Anna Martin was born in Norfolk on 19 March 1827. Her mother died when she was only five years old, an experience which affected her greatly and left her restless, with a profound sense of otherworldliness. Hone argues that at a young age she was "pining after something beyond this world, but could not yet grasp it",<sup>50</sup> and it was this facet of her personality that turned her eyes towards the Church. In 1839, Anna moved to Lowestoft to live with her grandfather and aunt, where she came under the influence of Reverend Francis Cunningham and his wife. At the age of twelve she began teaching at Sunday school, which grew into a school of two hundred. She also taught at the workhouse, and had a particular empathy with the poorer workhouse children,<sup>51</sup> which would materialise later as an empathy with the children of West Africa. On 14 October 1852, Anna married Reverend David Hinderer of Schorndorf, Württemberg, a member of the Church Missionary Society who had already worked extensively in Yoruba, in what was to become Southern Nigeria, and who had made significant progress in extending the mission into the heart of the Yoruba area. Anna committed herself to the life of a missionary's wife, and immediately agreed to travel with her husband to Ibadan, a major town of the Yoruba people (see Map 3). Hinderer had been the first white man to enter Ibadan and wanted urgently to establish a mission there before the Muslims reached the town from the north. Therefore, on 6 December 1852, the Hinderers travelled to West Africa, and remained there for seventeen years broken by only two furloughs in Europe.

The Hinderers disembarked at Lagos and set off in canoes up the Ogun River on 26 January 1853, then travelled overland to Ibadan.<sup>52</sup> Anna was stricken immediately with fever, and within her first few months in West Africa she came

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Hone, foreword in Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> Constance Padwick (1916), White Heroines in Africa, London: United Council for Missionary Education [2nd edition], p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Thorp (1950), p. 54.



close to death on several occasions.<sup>53</sup> By 19 January 1855, she was reporting that "of the fourteen who sailed together in one ship two years ago, only four are left to labour here".<sup>54</sup> West Africa at this time was still considered unfit for British colonisation, and Richard Burton expressed succinctly the objections of many at the time to British women travelling to West Africa when he wrote:

I felt truly grieved at the sight of my poor pretty countrywomen at Abeokuta, and anticipated but too correctly what, in many cases, had since proved their sad fate. They looked like galvanised corpses, even those who had left England but a few months before, radiant with pleasure, bright with youth and beauty. It is a crying shame to expose these tender beings to such rude, unworthy trials. But what words of mine would avail? I could only leave with them my wishes, my vain hopes that they may soon be restored to those homely decent lands, which no Englishwoman... should ever be permitted to leave.<sup>55</sup>

The Hinderers established a mission at Kudeti, on the southern side of Ibadan. Anna perceived it her duty in Ibadan to teach the children, and devoted all her energies to this end. In 1860 they were caught up in the Abeokuta wars, a product of Britain's annexation of Lagos and involvement in intertribal rivalries. Various branches of the Yoruba nation declared war on each other, with the Ijebus and the Egbas allied against the Ibadanis. The road to Lagos was blockaded by the Ijebus, and the Hinderers were isolated in Ibadan for almost five years, during which time they both almost starved to death.<sup>56</sup> On one occasion David attempted to get through to Lagos to bring up supplies, despite a death threat from the Ijebus who saw him as the sworn enemy, leaving Anna alone for eight weeks without food, and not knowing when she would see her husband again. The sense of isolation was considerable; they received no mail and were unaware of events in Yoruba. For the next two years hunger was a normality. Had it not been for a relief expedition in December 1862 bringing them food and medicine, David may have

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<sup>53</sup> Thorp (1950), p. 79.

<sup>54</sup> In Odooye (1969), p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup> Church Missionary Society (1911), p. 17.

died.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, Captain Maxwell of the West India Regiment stationed in Lagos broke through the Ijebu blockade to reach the Hinderers at Kudeti.<sup>58</sup> Anna was escorted down to Lagos in 1865 and returned to England; David managed to escape two months later.

The Hinderers returned to Kudeti in 1866, but in the following year there was again the threat of war when the Abeokutans expelled the missionaries from their town under the pretext that they had betrayed them to their enemies, and the Egba and Ijebu peoples closed the road to Lagos once more.<sup>59</sup> By 1868, both Anna and David were suffering declining health. They established a second station at Aremo on New Years Day 1869, but were both too ill to remain in West Africa. They departed for the final time for England; Anna died shortly afterwards on 6 June 1870 at the age of forty-three. In 1872, her journal and letters, which had been written in West Africa, were published by Seeley, Jackson and Halliday under the title Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country.

*Mrs. Henry Grant Foote*

Mrs. Henry Grant Foote is amongst the more obscure women who wrote about their experiences in West Africa. She published her book under the epithet "Mrs. Foote, widow of the late Henry Grant Foote", there are no family archives yielding any information about her background, and she is not mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography. However, more is known about her husband. Henry Grant Foote became Consul at Lagos on 21 December 1860, having previously been Consul in San Salvador. He travelled there alone, but early in 1861 he sent for his wife and daughter to join him from Madeira. As with Elizabeth Melville, Mrs.

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<sup>57</sup> Thorp (1950), p. 210.

<sup>58</sup> Eugene Stock (1899) History of the Church Missionary Society, vol. 2, London: C.M.S. Publications, p. 144.

<sup>59</sup> Church Missionary Society (1911), p. 8.

Foote was unusual in that she had accompanied her husband to Central America and now joined him in West Africa at a time when few wives travelled there with their husbands. Their arrival in Lagos coincided with the outbreak of the Abeokuta wars, Foote's major intention being to stamp out what remained of the African slave trade in the Lagos area. His position as British Consul at the time of the wars brought him into conflict with David Hinderer, particularly over the role that Britain should take in the disputes.

Consul Foote attempted to tackle the problems in Lagos with force, and acquired instant notoriety in this part of West Africa by ordering the naval bombardment of Porto Novo on 24 February 1861, and then claiming, "We can do anything we like now with the chiefs. They are terrified beyond belief. The rockets are called fearful war fetiches [sic]".<sup>60</sup> However, little came of this attack and Foote was convinced that the easiest way to establish British military influence in the area was to build up the Egba as a military power, backed up by a British naval squadron. There was, therefore, an important contrast between the approaches of Melville and Hinderer on the one hand, who advocated peaceful solutions to the problem of slavery, and Foote on the other, who advocated a military solution; their relationships with West Africans were in direct opposition. Foote wrote:

If the Egba could make themselves masters of the country, the whole of the petty chiefs on the coast would rejoice at their occupation, and certainly the great object we have in view, viz. the abolition of slavery, would be finally secured if our friends the Egbas did extend their possessions to the coast, including Whydah and the other Dahomian slave ports.<sup>61</sup>

This put him in direct conflict with David Hinderer, who did not want to see the power of the Ibadanis eroded. Captain A.T. Jones was appointed by Foote to help the Egba peoples, and he accused the Hinderers of committing an anti-British act by staying on at Ibadan during the wars.<sup>62</sup> However, Foote died before Jones left

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<sup>60</sup> Foote to Foreign Office, 9/5/1861, and 10/5/1861, Public Records Office.

<sup>61</sup> Foote to Lord John Russell, 8/5/1861, Parliamentary Papers 1862, lxi, Public Records Office.

<sup>62</sup> J.F. Ade Ajayi (1964), Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 105.

Abeokuta and was replaced by a trader, William McCoskey, an old enemy of the Egba, as Acting Consul. McCoskey withdrew Foote's command to report on the capabilities of the Egba and instead sent Jones to investigate the possibilities of negotiating a peace treaty with the Yoruba in Ibadan.

Mrs. Foote was only resident in West Africa for six months until the death of her husband, but she wrote an account of her experiences as the wife of a Consul entitled Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa. This was published by Newby in 1869. She almost died of dysentery, which had caused the death of her husband, whilst caring for her two children and being pregnant with a third. The motives for writing her travelogue may have been two-fold. The whole tone of the section on West Africa is in the style of an anti-slavery campaigner, and this was obviously a cause close to the heart of Mrs. Foote. However, it does seem that financial motives came into play. Widowed with three children, Mrs. Foote had no income. The Foreign Office gave her a donation, but this soon ran out. A friend, John Abel Smith, wrote on her behalf to Layard at the Foreign Office in 1863, enquiring if it was in the power of the Foreign Office to grant pensions to the widows of Consuls. He wrote:

There is not often a more sad and pitiable case brought before you than that of Mrs. Foote... Neither Mrs. Foote nor anyone else knows of my application, but if you can do anything you will, do all out of real charity - she is by birth, education, and habits a Lady and has not a shilling of her own.<sup>63</sup>

There is no record of whether Mrs. Foote received her pension, but her book was published probably as a means of providing her with some sort of income.

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<sup>63</sup> Smith to Layard, 20/7/1863, British Library Manuscripts.

## *Mary Slessor*

Mary Mitchell Slessor was born in Aberdeen on 2 December 1848, the second of seven children and the eldest girl.<sup>64</sup> Central Scotland at this time was in transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, and life in the burgeoning towns was characterised by all the privations and hardships associated with this transition. Alcoholism cost Robert Slessor, Mary's father, his job as a shoemaker, and he and his family were compelled to move to Dundee in search of employment. Their home was a "single-end", a one-roomed house without water, lighting or toilet facilities. Slessor's mother found work in the linen factories; the death of her elder brother and her father's growing inability to work as a result of alcoholism forced Slessor to join her mother in the mills at the age of eleven. She initially worked as a "half-timer", dividing her day between work and lessons, but at the age fourteen she worked full-time and took night classes. Home-life was overshadowed by the cruelty and violence of Robert Slessor, who often beat and neglected his children. The streets of Dundee at this time were often places of violence, a product of the frustration of unemployment and heavy drinking, and during the "hungry forties" more and more people sought solace in the Church. Slessor was twenty-seven years of age before she left Dundee, but in the meantime the Church was to have a significant impact on her life.

Slessor's mother was a devout Protestant, and the local church became a refuge from the brutality of home life. It was also the source of Slessor's education. The Church provided her with a window on a wider world, a world infinitely more romantic than the dreary slums of Dundee, and one which appealed to Slessor's imagination. As a child she was exposed to the missionary literature that was pouring out of West Africa, particularly the reports in the Church of Scotland's *Missionary Record*, which brought back news from the new mission at Calabar, in what became south-east Nigeria. Inspired by this missionary literature, by the lectures of visiting Calabar missionaries, and by her mother's desire to see

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<sup>64</sup> See W.P. Livingstone (1916), *Mary Slessor of Calabar. Pioneer Missionary*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, for the fullest account of Slessor's early life.

one of her children become a missionary,<sup>65</sup> Slessor decided at an early age that she would one day travel as a missionary to West Africa. Unlike Anna Hinderer, she would not become a missionary's wife, confined to a separate sphere in which to carry out "good works", but would undertake the missionary effort herself.

As in other parts of West Africa, trading and missionary endeavours in Calabar preceded the British flag. The Presbyterians chose Calabar, formerly the centre of the European slave trade, as the base for their missionary efforts in West Africa. The impetus in founding the mission came not from Scotland but from Jamaica, the destination of thousands of slaves brought from West Africa, and especially from Calabar, during the days of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The intention was to raise an African agency to carry out the work of the Church of Scotland in West Africa, and thus limit the numbers of British missionaries sacrificed to the evangelising effort in the "White Man's Grave". Calabar society had been radically transformed by the European slave trade. The Efik peoples of the coast had split into houses that quarrelled with each other over greater shares of the slave trade, and had created their own feared society, Ekpe (Anglicised as Egbo). They had forbidden European missionaries to travel up the Cross River, and the forest was closed to them by the Okoyong and other warring peoples of the interior.<sup>66</sup> The mission was, therefore, trapped on the coast. During the first forty years of the Calabar Mission thirty Scottish missionaries died of fever, and many more were sent home, their health ruined by the West African climate.<sup>67</sup>

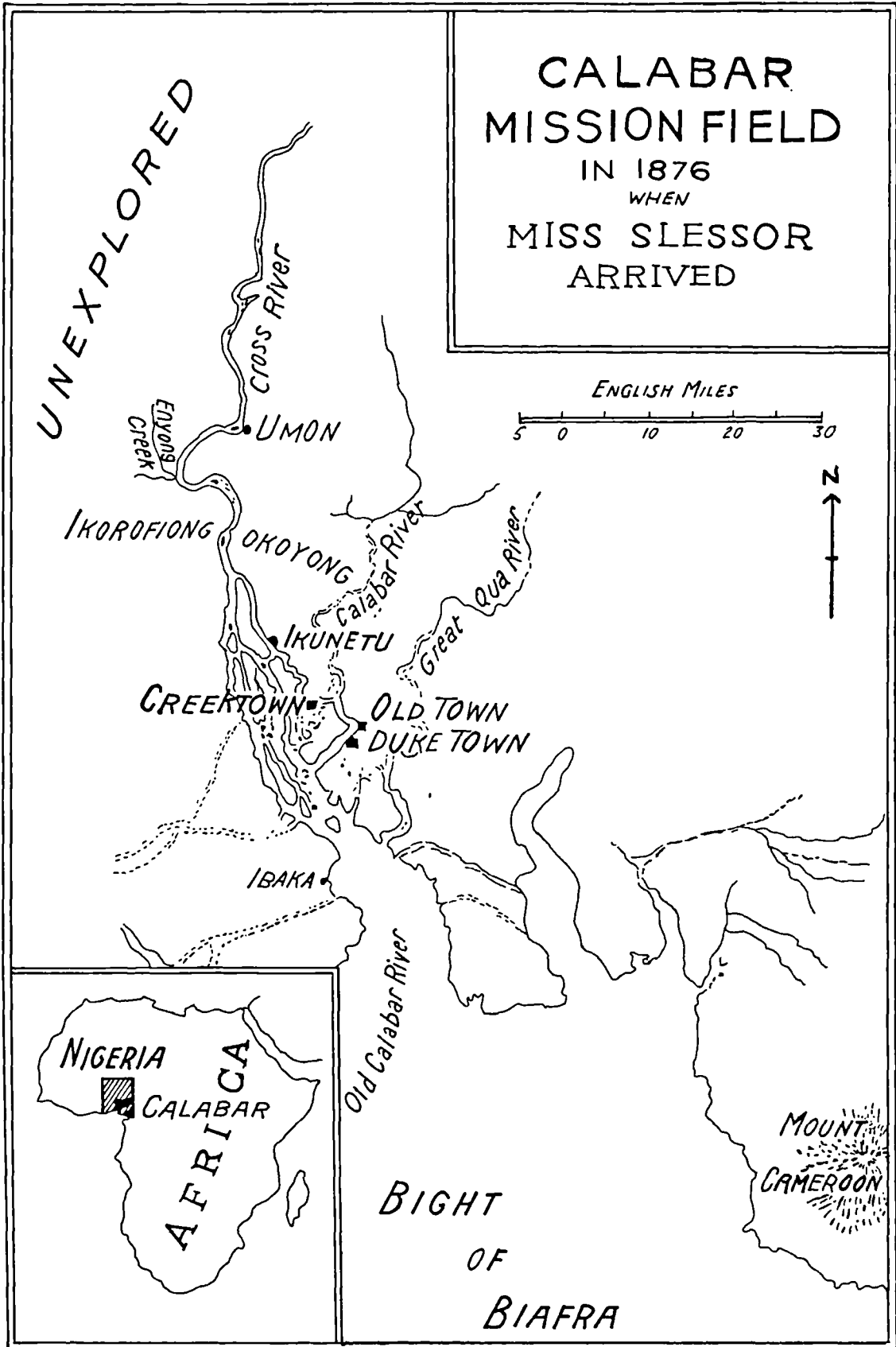
Little was known of the Calabar area when Slessor arrived there in 1876, only the coastal towns were known to Europeans and much of the interior remained unexplored (see Map 4). By 1880, the European presence in West Africa was still confined to the coasts and the valleys of navigable rivers, except for the British in

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<sup>65</sup> Slessor's mother had wanted one of her sons to become a missionary, but both died while still young.

<sup>66</sup> James Buchan (1984), Peacemaker of Calabar: The Story of Mary Slessor, Exeter: Religious and Moral Education Press, pp. 5-6.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



Map 4 The Calabar Mission Field at the Time of Mary Slessor's Arrival in 1876 Adapted from Livingstone (1916)

the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, and the French in Senegal.<sup>68</sup> Even in 1900, the area between the Niger and Cross rivers was still a blank space on the map. Access had been denied by the Delta chiefs and only the slave dealing Aros had free movement. In 1894, Roger Casement had attempted to explore the Aro country and open up trade, but was unable to progress more than fifteen miles west of the Cross River before being driven off; he was lucky to escape with his life.<sup>69</sup> It was not until the expedition to destroy the sacred shrine at Arochuku in 1901 that access to the interior was gained by the British. Mary Slessor was, therefore, very much a pioneer in the Calabar area, travelling from the coastal towns to live alone in the villages of the interior. She was often the first white person to arrive at these villages.

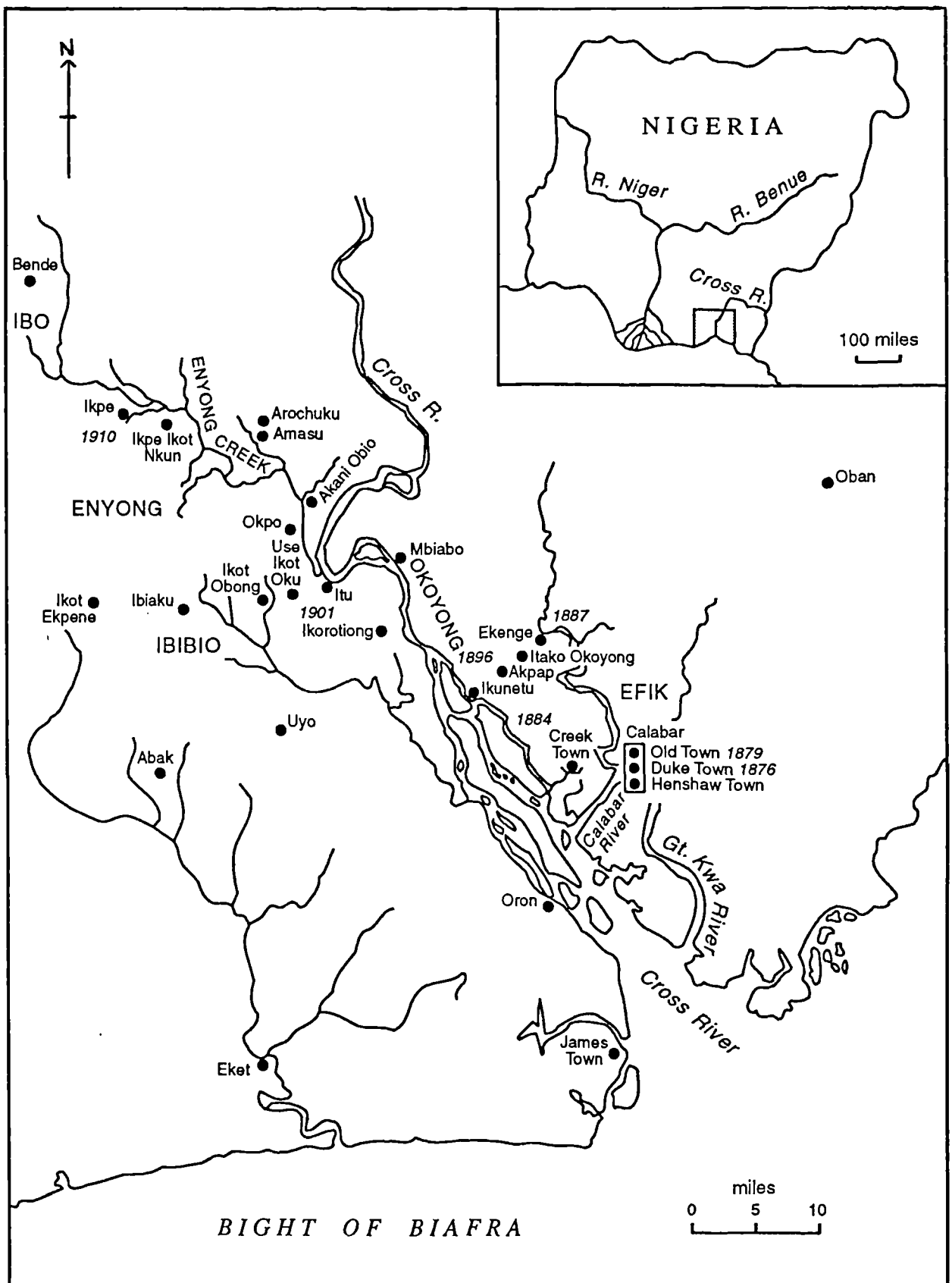
Calabar had a particularly poor reputation in Britain, and was widely perceived as the most nefarious corner of the Dark Continent. It had become associated particularly with images of cannibalism, indigenous slave raiding, cruelty and barbarism. Polygamy, human sacrifice, twin-murders, and poison-bean and burning oil ordeals were featured frequently in the pages of the *Missionary Record*. The presence of a white woman in such an environment must have seemed particularly incongruous to many people in Britain. Slessor was even more unusual in that not only did she travel to an area considered to be the heart of the Dark Continent, but she also left the relative safety of the coastal towns to travel alone into the uncharted interior. Map 5 illustrates Slessor's progress from the coastal towns of Calabar into the Okoyong area in 1887, her movement westwards into Akpap in 1896 which coincided with the spread westwards of the centre of population of the Okoyong peoples, and her final destination among the Enyong peoples. Much of this territory was untravelled by Europeans. As a result of this pioneering style Slessor became one of the most famous of all women missionaries

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<sup>68</sup> J.D. Hargreaves (1974), "The European Partition of West Africa", in J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, History of West Africa, vol. 2, London: Longman, p. 406.

<sup>69</sup> Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer (1970), God and One Redhead. Mary Slessor of Calabar, London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 124ff.





Map 5 Mary Slessor's Advance into the Lower Cross River Region 1876-1915 Adapted from Christian and Plummer (1970)

in the nineteenth century, and as a consequence of several biographers recounting the details of her life she remains well known to this day.<sup>70</sup>

Slessor spent almost forty years of her life in southeastern Nigeria between 1876 and her death in 1915. Her primary intention was to spread Christianity into the heart of the interior, but very often she found herself involved in settling disputes between the various peoples in the Calabar area, her knowledge of indigenous laws prompting Sir Claude MacDonald to appoint her as Vice-Consul and magistrate for Okoyong in 1892. Much of her time was also spent attempting to save the lives of twin babies, which were looked upon as evil by many Calabar peoples. As Figure 1 illustrates, Slessor legally adopted some of the children she rescued, and took them with her to Scotland during her furloughs. During her time in West Africa, Slessor witnessed the transformation of Calabar from a trading station at the heart of Britain's trading interests in the Oil Rivers Protectorate, to its incorporation into the new state of Southern Nigeria and Britain's formal empire in West Africa. Her only published works were letters and articles in the missionary magazines, which had a large readership in the industrial towns of Scotland, and which provide an insight into the changing nature of British imperialism in West Africa between the 1870s and the outbreak of the Great War.

### *Zélie Colvile*

As with Elizabeth Melville, Zélie Colvile (Figure 2) was born into an aristocratic family. Her mother was Georgiana Anna Mowbray, the sister and Heir Presumptive of Major George Thomas Mowbray who owned estates in Leicestershire. Her father was Pierre Richaud de Préville of Château des Mondrans in the Basses Pyrenées.<sup>71</sup> On 29 December 1886, Zélie married Henry Edward Colvile, the son of a Derbyshire

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<sup>70</sup> The more notable biographies of Slessor include James Buchan (1984), and (1980), *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press; Christian and Plummer (1970); Livingstone (1916); and Caroline Oliver (1982), *Western Women in Colonial Africa*, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

<sup>71</sup> Walford (1874), p. 704.



Figure 1 - Mary Slessor on Furlough in Scotland with her adopted children  
(source: Livingstone 1916)



Figure 2 - Zélie Colvile: Frontispiece from Round the Black Man's Garden

landowner, and was suitably impressed, when completing the History of the Colvile Family, to discover that the Colviles traced their ancestry back to Gilbert de Colvyle, who had arrived from France with the Norman Conquest.<sup>72</sup> On 3 October 1887, Zélie gave birth to a son, Gilbert de Préville.

Henry Colvile was educated at Eton and joined the Grenadier Guards, becoming Lieutenant Colonel in 1882. He was employed in 1883 by the Palestine Channel Syndicate to survey and report on the Wady-el-Arabah, and published his account in 1884 under the title The Accursed Land. In 1883, he was employed by the Intelligence Department. In 1884, he joined the Nile Expedition as Intelligence Officer on its arrival at Dongola; he remained on the Nile until 1886 as Chief of the Intelligence Department to the Frontier Field Force, and was promoted to Colonel. Having been actively involved in the Sudan campaigns, Colvile was selected to write the official history, published in 1889. During these years he gained the Companionship of the Bath, and participated in one of the Burma Campaigns.<sup>73</sup> In August 1893, he was despatched to Uganda to assist in laying the foundations for British rule. Colvile remained in Uganda until 1895 as Her British Majesty's Acting Commissioner. During this time he directed the military operations against Kabarega, the King of Unyoro. He also traversed the country between the northern end of Victoria Nyanza and the Albert Nyanza, following which he received in recognition of his services, first the C.M.G., and then a knighthood.<sup>74</sup>

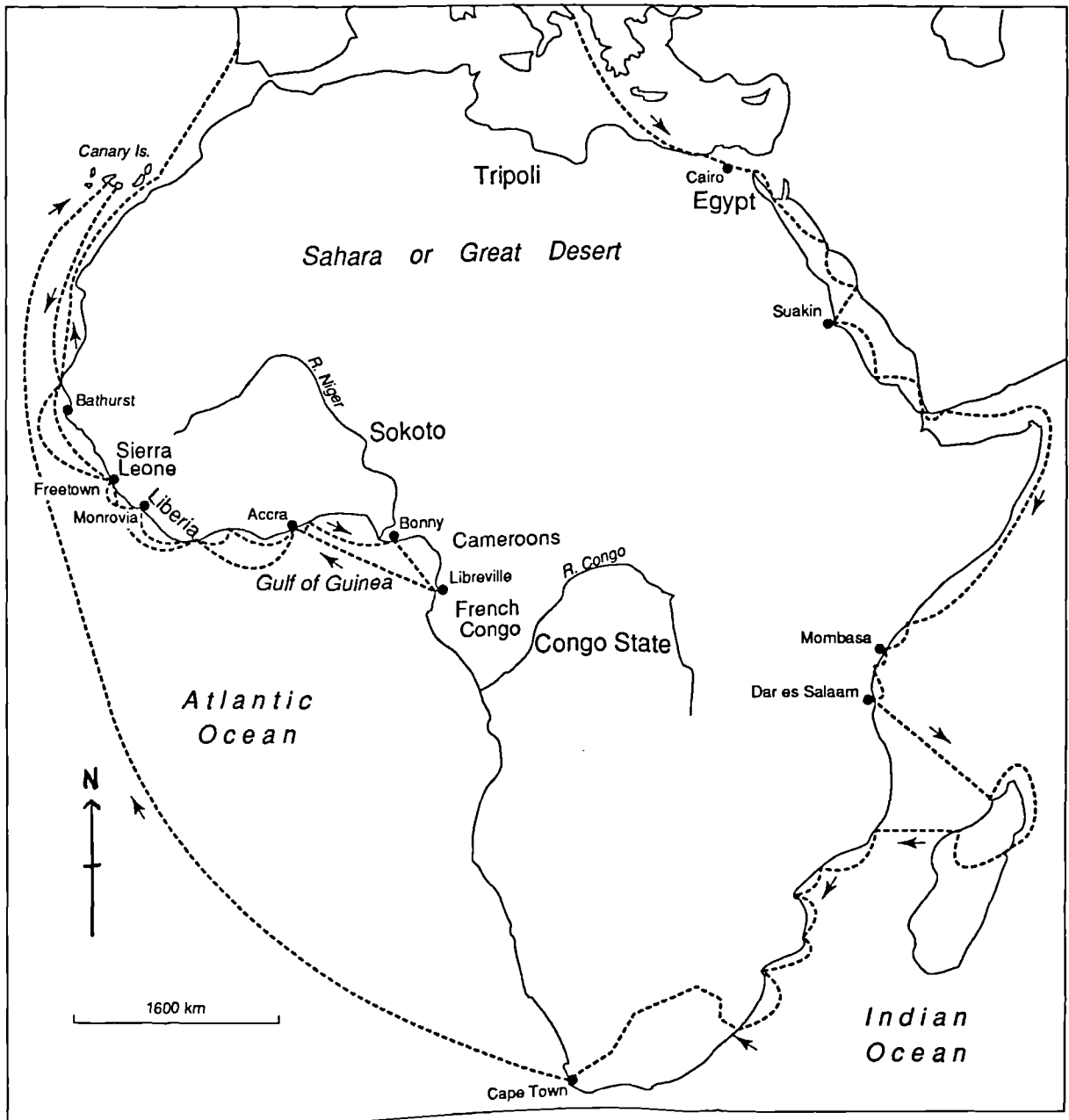
In 1889, Colvile and his wife began a journey around the coast of the African continent from Alexandria to Cape Verde (Map 6). This was to be an extended vacation before Colvile assumed his post in Uganda and his wife returned to England (she did not remain with her husband in Africa and was, therefore, never a resident there). Most of the journey was undertaken on board a steamer,

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<sup>72</sup> Zélie Colvile (1896), History of the Colvile Family, Edinburgh: printed privately, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Obituary (1908), Geographical Journal, 31, p. 113.

<sup>74</sup> Colvile (1896), p. 91; Obituary (1908), p. 113.



Map 6 Zélie Colvile's Journey around Africa

Adapted from: Colvile (1893)

except for excursions into Madagascar and across Cape Colony. They also spent some time in West Africa and travelled in and around the Oil Rivers. Zélie became one of the twenty-two women elected as Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society in 1892-3, the same year that her husband was also elected as Fellow. She published accounts of her travels in a travelogue dubiously entitled Round the Black Man's Garden, published by Blackwood in 1893, and an article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, entitled "Ten days on an Oil River", in March of the same year. Colvile's position as a traveller, and as a woman who had never lived in West Africa, had important implications for her relationship with, and her observations of that part of the continent, and set her apart from the other women who had much greater contact with the landscapes and peoples of West Africa.

It is difficult to determine whether Zélie ever returned to Africa; the likelihood is that she remained in Britain in the comfort of an aristocratic home while her husband conducted further campaigns in Africa. Colvile became Major-General and commanded the Guards Brigade and later the 9th Division in the Boer War, where the nature of the operations that he conducted brought controversy upon him.<sup>75</sup> He died on 24 November 1908 in a motorcycle accident. There is no information on what became of his wife following Colvile's death.

### *Mary Kingsley*

Mary Henrietta Kingsley (Figure 3) is by far the most well-known, and well-researched woman who travelled to West Africa during the nineteenth century. She would, perhaps, be considered an unusual woman in any era, but she was certainly unconventional in Victorian England. Figures 2 and 3 offer a striking contrast between two Victorian women. Colvile was very much the aristocratic lady, dressed in a gown and adopting a suitable feminine pose, reading, eyes averted

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<sup>75</sup> The nature of these operations, and of the subsequent controversy are omitted in Zélie Colvile's biography of her husband, and are not described in any detail in the obituary in the Geographical Journal.



Figure 3 - Mary Kingsley (source: Royal Commonwealth Society)



from the camera. Kingsley, on the other hand, was standing, looking directly into the camera. She was very much a no-frills, no-nonsense type of woman, and the symbols of femininity (the bouquet at her feet, the gloves, and the parasol) seem to fit uneasily with her plain black, mourning dress. The hat was frivolous; Alice Stopford Green wrote that it was "the only thing I ever saw her wear that was not herself".<sup>76</sup> However, Kingsley at this time (the picture was taken in 1898) was a determined professional woman, and she distributed this photograph to her friends to emphasise the point.

Superficial investigations of Kingsley's life convey the impression of a woman born into a prestigious middle-class family, niece of the famous authors, Henry and Charles Kingsley, and daughter of the respected physician to the first Marquis of Aylesbury, George Kingsley. It would appear that she could have lived the conventional life of an upper middle-class Victorian lady, but Kingsley chose to shun the endless rounds of polite socialising that characterised genteel society, and at thirty years of age sailed to West Africa. She returned to champion the cause of West Africa, its peoples and the British traders, becoming embroiled in the politics of imperialism and a much sought-after authority on West African affairs. The key to understanding why Kingsley defied the conventionality of Victorian society lies in the circumstances surrounding her birth and the nature of her parents' marriage.

Kingsley's early biographers missed a significant fact of her life; focusing on the history of the illustrious Kingsley family little was written about her mother. More recent accounts<sup>77</sup> have pointed out that Kingsley's mother, Mary Bailey, was the daughter of an inn-keeper, a cockney servant who had been employed by George Kingsley as his cook. Mary was born four days after her parents' marriage

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<sup>76</sup> In Deborah Birkett (1992), Mary Kingsley. Imperial Adventuress, London: Macmillan, p. 106.

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travellers in Africa, Boston: Twayne; Katherine Frank (1986a), A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley, London: Hamish Hamilton; Dea Birkett (1987a), "An Independent Woman in West Africa: the Case of Mary Kingsley", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, S.O.A.S., University of London, and (1992).

on 13 October 1862. It seems that George Kingsley had kept Mary Bailey in a state of acute anxiety while deciding whether or not to give their child legitimacy. Eventually he married her, and spent the rest of his life escaping the responsibilities that a working-class wife and two children entailed (Kingsley's brother, Charles, was born in 1866). George Kingsley became a naturalist and travel writer and spent most of his time travelling around the world as a physician to the nobility. Kingsley's mother, knowing that she was not loved by her husband, yet constantly worried for his safety, took to her bed and rarely left it. Anxiety and depression turned her into a hopeless invalid. Kingsley's childhood was, therefore, characterised by an absentee father who assumed heroic status in her eyes, and long hours tending to her sick mother. She rarely left the house and had few friends. The Bailey-Kingsleys were ostracised by the rest of the Kingsley family, and Mary was denied access to middle-class society because of her father's absence and her mother's lowly status. Kingsley herself may have not known the truth behind her birth until the deaths of both her parents in 1892, and Dea Birkett argues that the shock of the discovery of her near illegitimacy, the realisation that she was not born from an act of love, but from an illicit and probably exploitative liaison, and the reason behind her mother's melancholy and her father's perpetual absence, were major factors in her desire to escape to West Africa.<sup>78</sup>

As with Mary Slessor, Kingsley was unusual in that she travelled alone to West Africa. She undertook two journeys to this part of the continent. The first, from August 1893 to January 1894 was a reconnaissance journey. She travelled from the Canaries to Sierra Leone, through the Gold Coast ports and the Oil Rivers ports in the Niger Delta, and south to St. Paul Loanda in Portuguese territory. She then made her way back through the Congo Free State to Congo Français where she ended her journey at British Old Calabar. Kingsley learned a great deal about West Africa and its peoples during this time, and made the acquaintance of several important people including Sir Claude MacDonald, the High Commissioner of the Niger Coast Protectorate, Richard Dennett, the famous amateur ethnologist who

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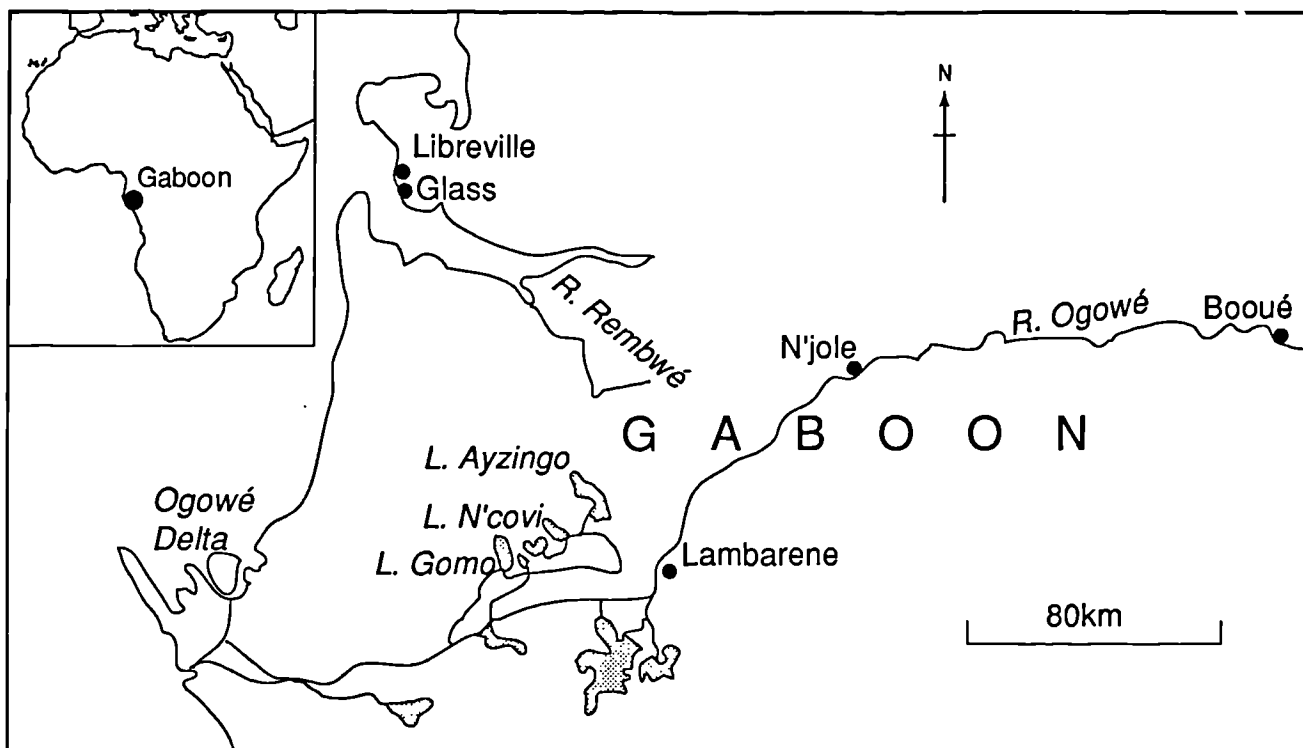
<sup>78</sup> Birkett (1992), pp. 15-16.

taught Kingsley a great deal about research methodology, Mary Slessor, who shared her knowledge of indigenous customs with Kingsley, and the traders on the coast. Unfortunately, Kingsley did not make a map of her first journey, and because her descriptions of it are interspersed with descriptions of her second journey in her publications, it is virtually impossible to reconstruct her exact route. Her second journey, from December 1894 to November 1895, was more extensive, and is more easily reconstructed (Map 7). She travelled to Congo Français and ascended the Ogowé River in the heart of the equatorial rainforest. She then crossed overland through uncharted territory to the Rembwé River, travelled down-river to Glass, visited the island of Corisco and then headed southwards into German territory at the mouth of the Cameroon River, where she ascended Mungo Mah Lobeh (Mount Cameroon).

Kingsley was unique amongst women who travelled to West Africa between 1840 and 1915 in that she became involved in the politics of imperialism on her return to Britain. Once back in Britain Kingsley found herself a celebrity, and her pro-liquor trade/pro-trader/anti-missionary opinions provoked debates that prompted her to go into print to defend her views. She became embroiled in the debates about the nature of Britain's involvement in West Africa, and her opinions about Britain's neglect of West Africa, particularly the lack of support for the traders, coincided with the change of policy towards West Africa in 1895; she thought that she had an ally in Chamberlain. Newspaper articles were followed by the highly successful Travels in West Africa, which was published by Macmillan in 1897. She then became involved in further controversies about the administering of West African colonies; her ideas were a precursor of Lugard's indirect rule, and she campaigned tirelessly in support of the traders and against the Crown Colony system. She also launched a sustained attack on the imposition of a hut tax in Sierra Leone. In 1899, she published West African Studies, a "633-page assemblage of personal narrative, scholarship, and polemics about West Africa".<sup>79</sup> Here she set out her views on African tribes, religions, laws, and property, on

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<sup>79</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899a), West African Studies, London: Macmillan; quote from Stevenson (1982), p. 149.



Map 7 Mary Kingsley's Second Journey, 1894-5

Adapted from: Campbell (1957)

Note: Some of the place names have been altered to Kingsley's spelling. Campbell points out that their travels cannot be clearly delineated as much of the country was uncharted at the time of her travels, and there is great variation in the names given to places on different maps.

imperialism, trade, and the administering of West Africa, relying more on facts to support her arguments than she did in her first publication. Extensive tours of lecturing around Britain also consumed her time.

Kingsley's real desire was to return to West Africa to study the Muslim societies in what became Northern Nigeria. However, her opinions were much in demand; John Holt and the merchants in Liverpool particularly valued her influence, especially her access to Chamberlain at the Colonial Office; George Goldie valued her support of the Royal Niger Company since he too believed in indirect rule, and he knew that Chamberlain regarded the R.N.C. as a liability; Chamberlain himself sought her advice over the Sierra Leone Hut Tax controversy. However, Chamberlain ignored Kingsley's counsel, leaving her to contemplate her failure. Her concern for West Africa was actually preventing her from returning there, and her gruelling schedule was taking its toll on her health. She was constantly ill with influenza, and during her final years in England she often ended her correspondence with an apology for being "dead tired". Her sense of failure towards the end of her life was intensified by her feelings of personal and political isolation. She felt that the traders had abandoned her; "[they] left me on the field of battle and went and chummed up with the enemy".<sup>80</sup> Fellow ethnographers did not share her enthusiasm for Africa and she struggled to maintain any interest. Her African contacts such as Reverend Mark Hayford and the Gambian lawyer Joseph Maxwell, both of whom welcomed her concern for West Africa and respected many of her views, nevertheless attacked her position against the educated African and the "missionary-made man". Maxwell also attacked her stand against the Hut Tax. Furthermore, Matthew Nathan stopped returning her letters: the one man to whom she had borne her intimate feelings abandoned her in pursuit of his career. Ronald Hyam suggests that Kingsley was "quickly dropped when she tried to bring affection into their relationship. Nathan was a dedicated careerist, determined to

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<sup>80</sup> Mary Kingsley to John Holt, 11/7/99, Holt Papers Rhodes House, Oxford.

have no distractions".<sup>81</sup> Nathan eventually became Governor Superior to Lugard at the Colonial Office. Feeling rejected on all sides, Kingsley again made plans to return to West Africa.

However, it was not to West Africa that she returned. In 1899, the Boer War broke out in South Africa, and her profound sense of duty meant that Kingsley could not refuse the call for more nurses to travel to South Africa. In March 1900, she sailed to Simonstown, concluding her final lecture to the Imperial Institute in London with the words: "Goodbye and fare you well, for I am homeward bound".<sup>82</sup> When she arrived in South Africa she was surprised to learn that she would be nursing Boer prisoners, but she set about sanitising the hospital and improving the disgusting conditions that she found there. One of her few letters from South Africa was to Alice Green:

I am down in the ruck of life again. Whether I shall come up out of this... I do not know. It is a desperate game I am playing here, and it is doubtful... All this work here, the stench, the washing, the enemas, the bed-pans, the blood, is my world. Not London society, politics, that pathway into which I so strangely wandered - into which I don't care a hairpin if I never wander again... Remember it is this *Haute Politique* that makes me have to catch large powerful family men by the tails of their nightshirts at midnight, stand over them when they are sinking, tie up their jaws when they are dead. Five and six jaws a night I have had of late to tie up. DAMN the *Haute Politique*.<sup>83</sup>

Exhausted and disappointed by her efforts in England, and battling frantically against appalling conditions in a chaotic hospital, Mary Kingsley herself contracted enteric fever, and died of heart failure following an operation to remove part of her bowel, on 3 June 1900. In accordance to her dying wish she was buried

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<sup>81</sup> Ronald Hyam (1990), Empire and Sexuality. The British Experience, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 38-40.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Kingsley (1900d), "West Africa from an ethnological point of view", Imperial Institute Journal, 6, April, p. 97.

<sup>83</sup> Mary Kingsley to Alice Green, 11/4/1900, Simonstown, Alice Green Papers, National Library of Ireland.

at sea off the coast of Africa.<sup>84</sup>

### *Constance Larymore*

As with Mrs. Foote, there is little information about Constance Larymore and her background, but Figure 4 is revealing of the type of woman she was. As with Colvile, her appearance was very different to that of Kingsley. The portrait was a cameo, and Larymore assumed a demure, feminine pose with eyes averted from the camera; unlike Kingsley she did not confront the camera head-on. The rose was a powerful symbol of her femininity, and like Colvile she wore a low-necked gown. Her travelogue was dedicated to her husband, without whom she would not have travelled to West Africa. Larymore, here, was the very picture of femininity, and had none of the air of awkwardness that Kingsley seemed to have.

Her husband was Major Henry Larymore, who was educated at Westminster and entered the Artillery Militia in 1886. He was promoted to Captain in 1887 and appointed to the Gold Coast constabulary in 1891. He served in the Jebu (Ijebu) expedition as staff officer, and in the Kumasi expedition in 1896 as Assistant District Commissioner. He also served with Royal Artillery in India between 1897 and 1901, and during this period was accompanied by his wife. Constance Larymore went with her husband when he was transferred to the Royal Artillery at Sierra Leone in 1901, and again when he was transferred to Northern Nigeria in April 1902.<sup>85</sup> They remained in Nigeria until 1907.

Larymore was a military administrator in Northern Nigeria and, as part of the Boundary Commission, was responsible for surveying the territories of the newly-formed Protectorate, and for "pacifying" the indigenous populations. He was

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<sup>84</sup> Birkett (1992), p. 163.

<sup>85</sup> Colonial Office List, Public Records Office, p. 536.



Dedication

TO THE VERY BEST OF COMRADES  
AND FELLOW-TRAVELLERS  
'THE SAHIB'

Figure 4 - Constance Larymore: Frontispiece and Dedication of the Book to her  
Husband from A Resident's Wife in Nigeria



involved in a débâcle in 1904, involving the Second Battalion at Lokoja and its inexperienced leader, Captain Browne. Browne was ordered to investigate the smuggling of gin and firearms from Southern Nigeria, but was ordered not to stray over the border. Larymore was ordered to brief him on the terrain and the peoples, but Browne later claimed that he received little information from Larymore. The latter was unfamiliar with the province, having only recently been transferred from Kano. In the course of the expedition, Browne strayed into Southern Nigeria, spreading panic in the villages, and bringing down the wrath of the High Commissioner of Southern Nigeria on Lugard. Having found no evidence of smuggling, the expedition blundered through the rough border country and finally arrived at Igarra, the hill-top stronghold of the Semolikas. Browne was unaware that the Semolikas had vowed never to let a white man enter their village, and he decided to climb the 3,000 feet up to the village. They were ambushed, nine men were killed, fourteen were wounded, and rifles and ammunition were abandoned.

The Semolikas had little time to celebrate their victory; a company was soon dispatched, including Larymore, comprising two hundred Royal Fusiliers, a Maxim, a mountain gun and thirteen gunners. "Dum-dum" bullets were used with devastating results and the Semolikas were easily defeated.<sup>86</sup> Larymore had to bear some responsibility for the massacre, for Browne maintained that he was never briefed about the Semolikas, and did not even know of their existence. The resulting "punitive" expedition was typical of Britain's efforts to suppress Northern Nigeria.<sup>87</sup> By 1906, the peoples of Northern Nigeria gave up resisting British hegemony; as the future colonial governor, Burdon, wrote, "The evidence of slaughter has made a tremendous impression. English prestige is now higher than ever before".<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Dugate (1985), pp. 229-232.

<sup>87</sup> For accounts of this see Arthur Norton Cook (1943), *British Enterprise in Nigeria*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press; Dugate (1985); and Crowder (1981), pp. 132-159.

<sup>88</sup> Dugate (1985), p. 252.

Constance Larymore, therefore, witnessed the transformation of Northern Nigeria and the suppression of the emirates and "pagan" states by the British in the early years of the twentieth century. Larymore accompanied her husband on most of his travels with the Boundary Commission and travelled over 3,000 miles through Northern Nigeria on horseback in her first year in the country. She became the first white woman to experience at first-hand the harems of the emirs. She recounted her experiences in A Resident's Wife in Nigeria, published by Routledge in 1908 (but which had been written in 1902), and her descriptions of the harems, and of life in the walled towns of the north, are unique for this period. Larymore's book said little about the "punitive" expeditions that her husband was involved in, and was unique amongst the narratives of this study in that she devoted the final section of it to "Household Hints", which laid out the guidelines for other women travelling to the colonies with their husbands. It gave information on how to deal with the home, the household, keeping dogs, poultry and cows, growing various types of garden, keeping a stable, coping with camp life, and "what to wear". It thus represented the transition from travel literature to tourist literature that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> It also represented a dramatic contrast to the narratives of other women travellers, in particular, Mary Kingsley.

Larymore's role as the wife of a Resident did not end with the publication of her book, but she did not publish any further travel narratives. After 1907, Larymore was appointed Resident at Nassaraura Province in India, and Constance gave this as her address on her certificate of election as Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1913. Proposed on 26 May by Robert Reid, she was elected on 9 June, thereby becoming one of the new wave of women Fellows elected when the doors to the R.G.S. were finally opened again in 1913. She was elected on the grounds of her travel and residencies in India, Sierra Leone and Northern Nigeria.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Fussell (1982), Abroad. Literary Travelling Between the Wars, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 38-40.

<sup>90</sup> Certificates of recommendation for Fellows, Royal Geographical Society.

The travel writings by these women constitute a fertile source of information about the nature of British imperial culture in West Africa throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. As discussed in the ensuing chapters, as well as providing an insight into the various roles that women adopted in this imperial context, these narratives also contain a body of description that, to varying degrees, informed the construction of popular geographies of West Africa during this period.

## CHAPTER 3

### TRAVEL, TEXT, AND EMPOWERMENT

#### **Travel - Liberation or "Duty"?**

During the nineteenth century there was a substantial increase in the numbers of women, particularly those from the "leisured" classes, travelling throughout the world. This was a product not only of the widening of spheres of travel for Europeans in general as a consequence of the expansion of overseas empires, but also a result of the expansion of opportunities available to middle and upper class women who had acquired the means to travel. During the eighteenth century it became more acceptable for women to travel as tourists, and travel was no longer seen as a threat to femininity. Social restraints and lack of money limited most women's opportunity to travel. Early male explorers had wealthy patrons, and later were sponsored by the geographical societies; both these sources were denied women.<sup>1</sup> However, many [wealthier] women had the initiative, fortitude and money to travel. Their freedom to travel was facilitated by improved communications and modes of transportation, and the gradual loosening of the restrictions on their movements which made it easier for them to broaden their activities.<sup>2</sup> With this freedom came independence. Male chaperones were replaced by expedition advisers, sponsors and bureaucratic decoys.<sup>3</sup> Women embraced the opportunity to travel because it offered them independence and a redefinition of themselves outside the narrow confines of society. As Shirley Foster argues:

...in undertaking their foreign journeys these women were, albeit unconsciously, asserting certain positions with regard to their status and abilities their right to do what men had done for centuries, their capacity to

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<sup>1</sup> See Marion Tinling (1989), Women into the Unknown. A Sourcebook on Women Explorers and Travellers, London and Connecticut: Greenwood Press, p. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> Shirley Foster (1990), Across New Worlds: Nineteenth Century Women Travellers and their Writings, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Robinson (1989), Wayward Women. A Guide to Women Travellers, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2.

meet challenges while still maintaining their female integrity, and their claim to be regarded as individuals, choosing and expanding the channels of their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Thus women travellers began to transgress the boundaries of social activities ascribed to them by much of British polite society. As Maria Aitken argues, many women travellers rejected the submissive position of women in Britain, and had no particular affinity with domesticity; "but if they laid the foundations of women's liberation, most of them did it unwittingly, for they were motivated by the desire for self-improvement".<sup>5</sup> However, the increasing incidence of women travelling was also linked to the middle-class notion of feminine "duty". As Jane Robinson points out, previous to the imperial era women were perceived as too precious and biologically ill-equipped to travel unless they must, but with the advent of imperialism, and especially colonialism, they were required to undertake more and more travelling as part of their duty towards family and country.<sup>6</sup> Whilst travel for most women was a liberating experience, for many the motives behind their journeys were rooted in their sense of social and private duty. The desire to be useful was a particular concern for many nineteenth-century women, despite Ruskin's dictum that the role of women should be confined to reigning as "Queens" over their own hearths.<sup>7</sup> The tensions between personal liberation and fulfilment and public and private duty are often apparent in the narratives of women travellers in West Africa.

All but one of the women of this study felt a need to justify their travels in West Africa and, to varying extents, all expressed this in terms of "duty". (The only exception was Zélie Colvile, who was the only true "tourist" among the

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<sup>4</sup> Foster (1991), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Aitken (1987), A Girdle Round the Earth, London: Constable, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson (1991), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Jane Lewis (1991), Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England, Aldershot: Elgar, p. 6.

women, taking a holiday with her husband before he took up his post in Uganda.) As Katherine Frank argues, "in an age when a woman could scarcely ride alone in a railway carriage from Brighton to London, she would certainly be called upon to explain why she was off to the mouth of the Niger or the source of the Nile".<sup>8</sup> Duty provided such an explanation; it was expressed by women travellers as a "feminine" duty, but the distinctions between public and private obligations were often obscured. For example, Slessor's motivation for travelling to West Africa was defined in terms of her duty to the Church of Scotland, an obligation which she herself felt was a public responsibility. Following the death of David Livingstone in 1873, she felt that it was her duty to continue his work in bringing Africans into the fold of the Christian religion. However, Slessor also considered this a private duty which was grounded in her own family. By becoming a missionary she fulfilled her mother's desire to see one of her children enter missionary work abroad. Slessor's mother had wanted to send her eldest child, John, to Calabar as a missionary until his premature death in New Zealand. With the death of the second son, Robert, Slessor felt that it was her responsibility to contribute to the struggle to spread Christianity in Africa. Her motives for travelling to West Africa were, therefore, a combination of a sense of public duty to contribute to the work of the church, which for Slessor was also motivated by private, personal concerns, and a private duty to fulfil the wishes of her mother. This belief in self-sacrifice and duty was also apparent in Anna Hinderer's reasons for travelling to West Africa, but her motives were also bound to her role as the wife of a missionary. Hinderer's "duty" was very much a public responsibility to the church; she wrote, "I longed to do something. I had a strong desire to become a missionary to give myself up to some holy work, and I had a firm belief that such a calling would be mine".<sup>9</sup> However, her responsibility was also private one to her husband; wherever he went, she was obliged to follow, even if it meant risking her life during the Abeokuta wars.

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<sup>8</sup> Katherine Frank (1986b), "Voyages out: nineteenth-century women travellers in Africa", in Janet Sharistanian [ed], Gender, Ideology and Action, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> In William Olaseinde Ajayi (1959), A History of the Yoruba Mission 1843-1880, (unpublished M.A. thesis, Bristol University), p. 87.

The sense of duty implicit in the role of "wife" was of crucial importance to Melville, Foote and Larymore. In their narratives Melville and Foote did not question their responsibility to travel with their husbands on their assumption of posts in West Africa. Both believed it their personal obligation to support their husbands in the quest to end slavery in West Africa; it was a duty grounded in the family, but at the same time part of a wider public burden to facilitate the "civilising" of Africa. Foote even wrote of spending three months in Madeira awaiting a "summons" from her husband to join him at Lagos.<sup>10</sup> This was also the case with Larymore. She had travelled with her husband to India, and felt it her duty to uproot herself once more and follow him to West Africa. Although essentially a private, familial duty to her husband, Larymore also had a sense of public responsibility towards the British empire in Nigeria. As well as performing the supporting role of "wife", she also undertook what she perceived to be the necessary public service of studying and observing life in West Africa, and passing on her advice to other prospective colonial wives through her publication. She was concerned to inform other women how best to fulfil their domestic duties in an imperial setting, and to contribute to the cause of British imperialism in West Africa.

Thus the roles of these "colonial wives" were defined by the roles of their husbands in West Africa; they were essentially "incorporated wives".<sup>11</sup> Their travels were determined by their husbands' employment, changing responsibilities and new locations; they had little personal control over the nature of their journeys. Furthermore, none of the women of this study were financially independent. Those who were married relied on their husbands to finance their travels. The missionaries obviously relied upon church funding and their travels were constrained to some extent by church policy (although, as discussed subsequently, Mary Slessor did her utmost to free herself from reliance upon church funds in

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<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, pp. 155 and 172.

<sup>11</sup> Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener [eds] (1984), The Incorporated Wife, London: Croom Helm.

order to attain the freedom to travel where she felt her work was most needed). Mary Kingsley had a small inheritance which she used to finance her first journey, but her second journey was sponsored by the British Museum which was interested in her ichthyological research. The need for funding imposed restrictions on where she could travel and how she could spend her time in West Africa.

Mary Kingsley's motives for travelling to West Africa were complex, manifold, and rooted in personal desire, but she also needed an ulterior motive to make her escape into the West African forests seem socially useful. As Alison Blunt points out, this motive changed over time as Kingsley became more famous.<sup>12</sup> Freed by the simultaneous deaths of both parents when she was nearly thirty, she could finally realise her dreams of travel. According to Foster:

...both the light-hearted explanation given at the beginning of her Travels in West Africa (it was undertaken on a kind of whimsical impulse) and the more serious ones offered later (she went to study tribal religions and customs in order to complete her father's anthropological work and also collect rare fish for the British Museum) are incomplete and misleading reasons for what she seems to have regarded on the one hand as an opportunity for personal spiritual expansion and on the other as a deliberate courting of danger and death.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, when she was more famous, Kingsley couched her motives in terms of both a public duty to add to scientific knowledge,<sup>14</sup> and a private, "feminine duty" to continue her father's work on sacrificial rites.<sup>15</sup> The expressions by women travellers of private family loyalty, missionary duty, a public responsibility towards the imperial effort, and the desire to add to scientific knowledge, covered their

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<sup>12</sup> Alison Blunt (1994), Travel, Gender, and Imperialism, New York: Guilford Press, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Foster (1991), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Kingsley contributed the following to the British Museum: one new species of fish (which Günther named after her), six modifications of known forms of fish, one fish for which only one specimen of its kind had ever been seen (forty years earlier from the Nile), one new species of snake, one species of lizard which the British Museum had waited ten years for, and forty-three different species of fish (see Stephen Gwynn (1932), The Life of Mary Kingsley, London: Macmillan, p. 112).

<sup>15</sup> Blunt (1994) highlights the fact that her father's unfinished book had not even begun to take shape yet, and Kingsley published two books of her own before she edited a collection of her father's work.



journeys with a veil of respectability. The use of duty as a reason for travelling to Africa, however, did not hide the inner impulses that prompted these women to travel, the personal motivations hidden beneath the veneer of both public and private obligations; these are most recognisable in the narratives of Mary Kingsley, the only truly independent women traveller of this study. The need to escape the stultifying social restrictions of Victorian Britain was most strongly expressed in Kingsley's narratives. However, even Kingsley did not transgress the strict dress code required to maintain her "femininity"; whether in the depths of the rainforest, climbing Mungo Mah Lobeh, or canoeing up the Ogowé River, she remained highly conventional, dressed from collar to toe in her black mourning dresses. On one occasion she fell into a game pit lined with ebony spikes and concluded triumphantly:

It is at these times when you realise the blessings of a good thick skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of a good many people in England who ought to have known better, and did not do it themselves, and adopted masculine garments, I should have been spiked and done for.<sup>16</sup>

Kingsley also carried an umbrella, and argued "one had no right to go about Africa in things one would be ashamed of at home". She also had a strong aversion to trousers, and said she would rather have "mounted a public scaffold" than have clothed what she referred to as her "earthbound extremities" in them.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, therefore, Kingsley's "liberation" as an independent traveller in West Africa was constrained by the demands of social etiquette imposed at home. This is true for almost all the women of this study. The practicalities of travelling over 3,000 miles on horseback required Constance Larymore to wear riding breeches, but she insisted on wearing full-length skirts over these. Her chapter on "What to Wear" in West Africa gave women advice on how to maintain

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<sup>16</sup> Kingsley (1982), *Travels in West Africa*, London: Virago, p. 270.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of Kingsley's conventional attitudes on dress, see Aitken (1987), p. 175.

feminine dress in a tropical climate.<sup>18</sup> According to Callaway, a photograph taken in Nigeria showed her in an Edwardian floor-length gown with long sleeves and a high neck, a daunting prospect in the tropical heat with the necessary petticoats and underclothes. Larymore did not compromise on the need to wear a corset; she wrote "*Always wear corsets, even for a tête-à-tête home dinner on the warmest evenings; there is something about their absence almost as demoralising as hair in curling pins*".<sup>19</sup> Only Mary Slessor transgressed any boundaries concerning dress codes. She discarded European dress for a simple sack dress in keeping with the climate. On special occasions she wore a plain cotton dress.<sup>20</sup> She did not bother to wear a hat and frequently went bare-footed; her no-nonsense attitude did not allow social convention in Britain to dictate how she would dress in the tropics of southern Nigeria.

Despite the constraints imposed by financial dependence and social mores in Britain, for most of these women travel in West Africa was a liberating experience. As Shirley Foster argues, their journeys were:

...the anticipated fulfilment of long-cherished dreams, often awakened in childhood; the desire to enter a fairy-tale or legendary world, glamorised by the romantic imagination; the lure of the unknown and the "uncivilised", with their accompanying challenges; the search for a new self-hood, released from the narrow parameters of home life. But these were less easily articulated than the more obvious motivations, often merely hinted at or becoming evident indirectly.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Her basic list included: "six cambric night-dresses, two flannel night-dresses, twelve cambric combinations, six pairs cambric knickers, twelve spun silk vests, six pairs tan thread stockings, six pairs black thread stockings, three white petticoats, two silk moirette petticoats, two dozen handkerchiefs, six pairs corsets, twelve camisoles..., one woollen dressing gown, four linen skirts, two holland or drill skirts, two muslin dresses, one cloth gown, one tea gown, two evening gowns, blouses *ad lib*, one habit skirt, four riding coats, two pairs riding breeches, two panama hats..., one sun-shade" (Larymore (1908), *A Resident's Wife in Nigeria*, London: Routledge, pp. 290-1).

<sup>19</sup> In Helen Callaway (1987), *Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, London: Macmillan, p. 169.

<sup>20</sup> W.P. Livingstone (1916), *Mary Slessor of Calabar. Pioneer Missionary*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> Foster (1991), p. 12.

For many women travellers, their journeys were psychological journeys of self-discovery as well as physical journeys. Their horizons were widened both spiritually and geographically. Travel for many was an escape from domesticity; however, for others, and particularly for the colonial wives, it was merely domesticity translocated in a foreign country. Although often constrained and compelled to travel by a sense of public and private duty, their journeys ultimately broadened women's experiences and provided them with a new-found liberation. Travel prompted women to write, and gave them access to an audience they would not otherwise have acquired. Furthermore, these women were all empowered to varying extents by their position as white women in Africa.

### **Empowerment in West Africa**

The fact of their white skin meant that British women travellers assumed levels of authority and influence in West Africa that were not available to them in Britain; they were empowered by the fact that within the empire status was determined by race rather than gender. Notions of gender were closely linked to notions of race; Africa as a continent and African people were commonly feminised by the literature of empire; women and Africans were both "othered". For example, drawing on Foucauldian ideas, Cynthea Russett argues that, "Women and savages, together with idiots, criminals, and pathological monstrosities, were a constant source of anxiety to male intellectuals in the late nineteenth century".<sup>22</sup> In West Africa, however, British women often became "honourary men", were treated no differently by Africans than were their male counterparts, and were often referred to as "Sir".<sup>23</sup> The feeling of authority felt by these women manifested itself in a variety of ways. Most striking is the fact that they did not question their right to

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<sup>22</sup> Cynthea Eagle Russett (1989), Sexual Science. The Victorian Construction of Womanhood, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> See Kingsley (1982), p. 502.

be in West Africa, nor to appropriate what they saw. It is also apparent in their attitude towards, and treatment of, the West Africans they encountered.

That all the women of this study were imbued with the ethnocentrism and, in some cases, the racism of nineteenth century Britain is not in doubt, but as with racist attitudes in Britain, their ideas about West Africans were formulated from notions combining theories about both race and class. This is particularly apparent in the narratives of Melville, Foote, Larymore and Colvile, and their attitudes towards West Africans were often predicated upon and informed by their own social status. It is demonstrated in chapter 5 that their racism and upper-/upper-middle class status combined to produce a reaction to West Africans that was not wholly different from their attitudes towards servants in Britain. Their condescending responses to, and representations of West Africans were based on their social status, and their authority derived both from this and their white skin. Susan Blake argues that:

...the substitution of a sense of class superiority undermines the premises of empire. It transforms the cliché that Africans are childlike from a justification of imperialism to an attitude toward servants. It allows... (them) to acknowledge the social distinctions Africans themselves make and to regard African society as parallel to English.<sup>24</sup>

It is Blake's contention that women travellers rejected racial superiority as a source of power because it was inseparable from gender superiority, and instead based their authority on class superiority. While this may have been the case for Mary Hall (the subject of Blake's article) and other women travelling in the early twentieth century, the women of this study present a slightly more complex picture. Their social status was important in their expressions of superiority and power, but they also seemed to have a sense of their own racial superiority. This is important when considering the attitudes of both Slessor, a working class woman, and Kingsley, whose own mother was a housemaid before marrying into the Kingsley family. Neither Kingsley nor Slessor had the necessary social background to

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<sup>24</sup> Susan L. Blake (1990), "A woman's trek: what difference does gender make?", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, p. 348.

predicate their authority on a sense of class superiority; their influence in West Africa was based solely on their skin-colour.

Both Slessor and Kingsley were aware of their authority among West Africans. Kingsley commanded and directed her own expeditions, hiring West African men as guides and porters. These men were employed by her and were thus compelled to abide by her instructions. This level of authority was a novel experience for Kingsley. Slessor's behaviour towards West Africans was, on occasions, quite extraordinary. The Chief Magistrate of Okoyong, Maxwell, was astounded by her behaviour when he first met her in the early 1890s. He wrote:

What sort of woman I expected to see I hardly know; certainly not what I did. A frail old lady with a... shawl over her head and shoulders, swaying herself in a rocking-chair and crooning to a black baby in her arms. I remember being struck... by the very strong Scottish accent. Her welcome was everything kind and cordial... Suddenly she jumped up with an angry growl... and with a few trenchant words she made for the door where a... native stood. In a moment she seized him by the scruff of the neck, boxed his ears, and hustled him out into the yard, telling him quite explicitly what he might expect if he came back again without her consent. I watched him and his followers slink away very crestfallen. Then, as suddenly as it had arisen the tornado subsided, and... she was again gently swaying in her chair. The man was a local monarch of sorts, who had been impudent to her, and she had forbidden him to come near her house again until he had not only apologised but done some prescribed penance. Under the pretext of calling on me he had defied her orders - and that was the result.<sup>25</sup>

This admonishment by Slessor of a local chief was not an unusual occurrence in Calabar. She would often rebuke elders, and physically assaulted chiefs if they ignored her wishes or allowed acts of violence to take place in her vicinity. She was allowed such behaviour because of the respect that she commanded in Calabar, a respect that was predicated on her white skin. As Winifrid Matthews argues:

In many Oriental lands, in many parts of Africa, in the islands of the Pacific, the wife of a missionary [and, in Slessor's case, the single woman missionary] was the first white woman ever seen by the native peoples. We cannot easily exaggerate the importance of this fact or the influence which these Christian white women exerted over primitive peoples...<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Livingstone (1916), pp. 129-30.

<sup>26</sup> Winifrid Matthews (1947), Dauntless Women, London: Edinburgh House Press, p. 5.

Mary Kingsley's comments about Slessor are also revealing of her character and influence in West Africa:

The natives round here have an upside down idea about white women because they have one of the most wonderful of them living among them - Miss Slessor - she came here many years ago built a mud house with a mat roof in their midst and settled down as missionary. She is now a white chief and has the whole tribe under her thumb, but not in the least converted. She herself has lost most of her missionary ideas and bullies the native chiefs in their own tongue...<sup>27</sup>

Of all the women of this study, Slessor exercised the greatest influence in West Africa.

As with the other women travellers of this study, Slessor did not question her own, nor Britain's right to be in West Africa, but she believed that Britain's role should be one of improving education (albeit defined in ethnocentric terms) and the conditions of life, particularly for women, without damaging West African cultures. She often disagreed with both the church and the colonial government over their attitudes towards West Africa, and exercised considerable influence on both bodies. She attempted to distance herself from the church by trading, becoming self-sufficient and reducing her dependency on church funds. (Her mission houses at Okoyong and Enyong were built mostly from her own money.<sup>28</sup>) In this way she could act independently of official church policy which she believed did not take enough account of indigenous cultures. She was a pioneer living on the frontier, and her sense of individualism was particularly strong. She believed she understood the needs of the Calabar people better than the church officials back in Scotland. Her proximity to the Africans, she believed, gave her a greater understanding of their lives and the less her dependency on church funds, the greater her freedom to implement her own policies. The church did not approve

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<sup>27</sup> Kingsley to Günther, Okoyong, Upper Calabar River, West Africa, 15/4/95, Günther Papers, British Museum Library (Natural History).

<sup>28</sup> Livingstone (1916), pp. 83-6, 210-11, 251-3.

of her adopting an African lifestyle, especially her living in a mud-hut,<sup>29</sup> but Slessor ignored its complaints.

Slessor exercised considerable influence over church education policy. In the early days of the mission the least expensive methods of training were sought, avoiding technical and agricultural training which was costly in terms of personnel, money, and equipment. Commercial education was replaced by a system of quasi-religious education.<sup>30</sup> Slessor believed this abandonment of technical and agricultural training was inappropriate, and worked to rectify it. Her influence and command over policies in Okoyong can be detected in a letter to her about her plans, which pleads with her to reconsider her threat to sever completely her ties with the Mission if the church prevented her from carrying out her objectives.<sup>31</sup> The old imperial missionary did not appeal to her since there was too great a distance between themselves and the African peoples.

Slessor believed that British control was necessary to establish peace and justice in West Africa, but she told the Consul-General of the Oil Rivers Protectorate, Sir Claude MacDonald, that the people at Okoyong were not ready to tolerate a government official in their midst, nor to accept without bloodshed the sudden introduction of new laws.<sup>32</sup> She believed destruction would result from the imposition of British institutions upon the people of Calabar without regard for, or understanding of their customs. Her insight into African law prompted the colonial government to appoint her as the first female Vice-Consul in the British Empire in 1892, giving her the powers of a magistrate. However, her sympathy with West

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<sup>29</sup> Buchanan to Slessor 13/1/05 and 21/1/05, United Presbyterian Church Papers, Foreign 3, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>30</sup> K.K. Nair (1972), Politics and Society in South-Eastern Nigeria 1841-1906. A study of Power, Diplomacy and Commerce in Old Calabar, Northwestern University Press, pp. 66-8.

<sup>31</sup> Stevenson to Slessor 4/6/12, United Free Church Papers, Women's Foreign Missions, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>32</sup> Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer (1970), God and One Redhead. Mary Slessor of Calabar, London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 124ff.

African customs brought her into conflict with the colonial administration. She constantly resisted policies that conflicted with West African laws, and was often at odds with colonial officials. For example, in 1910, the people of Akpap complained to her that they were being compelled to build a road through a sacred grove of yams. Slessor was furious, and wrote a letter of complaint to the Assistant District Commissioner, accusing him of violating the sacred grove and ending with the valediction: "I am 'Not' your obedient servant".<sup>33</sup> By this time she had a considerable reputation for belligerence amongst the colonial officials.<sup>34</sup>

Despite her resistance to many of the decisions of the colonial government, Slessor's knowledge of the Calabar region was of undoubted importance to the authorities. She was often a mediator between the government and the West Africans. On many occasions she brought officials and chiefs together to negotiate treaties; for example, in 1894 the villagers of Okoyong agreed to hand twin babies over to the Mission instead of killing them, and she was singularly responsible for establishing more peaceable relations between the Okoyong and Efik peoples. However, her major concern was to spread Christianity without completely destroying indigenous cultures. As a result, she was often critical of British policies. She resented Britain's destruction in 1901 of the sacred grove at Arochuku, the seat of the most powerful oracle in southern Nigeria, and home of the infamous Long Ju-ju. She felt that the violence that took place there could have been prevented using less force. She wrote, "I can't bear those dreadful expeditions, the very sight of force raises their [the Africans'] apprehension and goes to make trouble".<sup>35</sup>

Slessor also resented the illegal arrests that took place, without the necessary

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<sup>33</sup> Slessor to Falk, Assistance District Commissioner at Ikot Ekpene, September 1910, E.M. Falk Correspondence, Rhodes House, Oxford.

<sup>34</sup> Falk to District Commissioner at Ikot Ekpene, September 1910; District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner at the Eastern Province, 12/9/10.

<sup>35</sup> Slessor to Charles Partridge, District commissioner for Eastern Nigeria, 20/1/08, Slessor Papers, Dundee City Public Library.



warrants in her districts. These were so numerous that the people were afraid to venture out, and previously prosperous markets were brought to a standstill.<sup>36</sup> She referred to this as a "flagrant breach of law".<sup>37</sup> Her animosity towards the colonial government erupted in a letter to a friend, where she wrote:

This land belongs to the native and worked by the native, tho' our officers do not believe it... I am not only writing rank treason, but I am doing so unrepentantly as we live in the bush under bush conditions, and I owe nothing to the government.<sup>38</sup>

At other times she described the government officials as "iniquitous sometimes in their methods, or want of method, and heart".<sup>39</sup> She found the lack of consideration for Calabar customs most irksome. She was instructed by the administration to take a census to the chiefs for completion, but scorned the idea. The people were too suspicious to complete it, and were too busy with consular and farm work during the day, and marketing in the evening, to comply. She wrote in her diary, "So [I] was rather angry of white man's arrogant importunity. It is anything but dignified to natives".<sup>40</sup>

Slessor acquired positions of authority that would have been unthinkable for a working-class woman in Britain. As well as becoming Vice-Consul and magistrate for Okoyong, she was presented with a fellowship to the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem in 1913, primarily for her work in establishing the mission hospital and the refuge for women. Perhaps the greatest accolade came from the West Africans, who named her *Eka Kpukpro Owo* - the Mother of all the Peoples.<sup>41</sup> This epithet is indicative of the nature of Slessor's authority in West Africa; it was not based on the assumption of superiority in terms of class, nor was

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<sup>36</sup> Slessor to Partridge 30/5/08.

<sup>37</sup> Slessor to Partridge, 14/8/08.

<sup>38</sup> Slessor to Mrs. Findlay 24/8/12, Cairns Papers, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>39</sup> Slessor diaries, entry for 5/5/12, Macmanus Galleries, Dundee Museum.

<sup>40</sup> Slessor diaries, entry for 3/4/12.

<sup>41</sup> James Buchan (1980), The Expendable Mary Slessor, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, p. xii.

it based solely on race, it was in essence a maternal superiority. She tempered her role as a pioneer by assuming a maternal presence in West Africa. For example, she wrote of her excursion into Okoyong:

I hope to get a room at several of the villages, so that they will feel they are looked after. At first they did not seem to know whether they should repulse me, but the medicine... has made the whole place mine. Every chief, more or less, has been under my care, or some of his people have been, and they have expressed in various ways their appreciation of my services. No white person need fear to go anywhere now.<sup>42</sup>

Slessor was aware that her role as nurse and nurturer gave her the opportunity to exercise some influence over the chiefs and elders of Calabar.

Slessor's adoption of African children was symbolic of her wider adoption of the people of Calabar, who often referred to her as "Ma".<sup>43</sup> She pictured herself as a mother-figure, and her authority derived from this. Ramusack refers to this as "benevolent maternal imperialism",<sup>44</sup> and the conception of the relationship between white women and West Africans in terms of mothers and children is one that was common to many of the women of this study. Anna Hinderer thought of herself as the "white Iyalode" or mother of the town of Ibadan, and in this way was able to command the same respect as the Ibadani Iyalode, the maternal elder of the town.<sup>45</sup> The Ibadani people referred to her as "Iya", meaning "mother".<sup>46</sup> As with Mary Slessor, Hinderer took African children into her home, particularly those that were former slaves whom she wished to educate; this was a symbolic expression of her maternal relationship with West Africans generally. Similarly, Constance

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<sup>42</sup> Slessor (1890), Missionary Record, October, p. 304.

<sup>43</sup> Livingstone (1916), p. xii. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> Barbara N. Ramusack (1990), "Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865-1945", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, p. 319.

<sup>45</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, pp. 110-111. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.

<sup>46</sup> Constance Padwick (1916), White Heroines in Africa, United Council for Missionary Education, 2nd edition, p. 27; Modupe Oduyoye (1969), The Planting of Christianity in Yorubaland, Ibadan: Daystar Press, p. 39.

Larymore became known as "Uwamu", meaning "Our Mother", which Larymore herself referred to as her "country" name. Her recognition of the authority implicit in such an epithet was clear when she wrote, "the title is recognised as the highest expression of respect and affection that the African man can offer to a woman".<sup>47</sup> As Morag Bell suggests, this "maternalism" was also tied in to the notion of women's "duty". Post-Darwinian doctrine asserted that women had well-developed emotional and aesthetic skills that had developed at the expense of their intellectual development, and which derived from the "maternal instinct".<sup>48</sup>

It was the role of women as active citizens of and in the Empire, to put these "natural" skills to good use in the interests of imperial consolidation and expansion. It was, in effect, their imperial duty to fulfil the "female civilising mission".<sup>49</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, it could be argued that "maternal imperialists" were more constrained by Victorian theories of biological difference than they were empowered. However, on the other hand, although their relationships with West Africans were often based on benevolence and philanthropy, the mother-child framework of these relationships was ultimately empowering for white women at the expense of subordinated West Africans. This "maternalism" did not challenge depictions of Africans as "child-like". Furthermore, as Ramusack suggests, these unequal relationships raise questions about the motivations of the "mothers",<sup>50</sup> Slessor, Hinderer and Larymore were all aware of their new-found authority in West Africa, and utilised it to their advantage.

Of critical importance in assessing and understanding the various ways in which white women travellers were empowered in West Africa is the notion of

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<sup>47</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> See also Cynthea Eagle Russett's (1989), discussion of the post-Darwinian psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who identified altruism and an interest in aesthetics as "feminine" characteristics (pp. 57-63).

<sup>49</sup> Morag Bell, "A woman's place in "a white man's country". Rights, duties and citizenship for the "new" South Africa, ca.1902", *Ecumene*, forthcoming.

<sup>50</sup> Ramusack (1990), p. 319.

"separate spheres".<sup>51</sup> Independent women such as Slessor and Kingsley in some ways transgressed the boundaries of recognised "feminine" spheres of activity, Slessor by becoming a single, female missionary (quite a rarity in the 1870s), and Kingsley firstly, by travelling alone and defining herself as a scientist, and secondly, by becoming involved in political debates about British imperialism. However, for many other women travellers in West Africa, despite the new levels of authority they acquired through the process of travel, their influence was still restricted to an essentially "feminine" sphere. That Slessor, Larymore and Hinderer were empowered by their "maternal" presence in West Africa is indicative of this, as is the fact that Foote, Melville and Colvile were empowered in the domestic sphere by their position as "mistress of the house" *vis-a-vis* their African servants. These women were not involved in politics or in the administration of the colonies, they were empowered but only within their own separate spheres of activity. Obviously, their presence in West Africa had implications for the broader impact of British imperialism in West Africa; they were, after all, responsible for transplanting British social values into the colonies. However, their sphere of activity remained an essentially domestic one. As the Honourable Mrs Joyce, President of the British Women's Emigration Association wrote in 1902, "English women make homes wherever they settle all the world over... [they are] the real builders of Empire".<sup>52</sup>

The notion of separate spheres was clearly expressed by the Church Missionary Society, which justified the employment of women as mission workers by arguing that far from threatening the ideal of womanhood, such work could even reinforce it. It described the separate spheres of work of Anna and David Hinderer as follows:

...an observant eye will perceive she was always engaged in her own proper sphere. Her husband was the Lord's chief instrument for gathering disciples, organising the church, and exercising discipline for its government. Besides

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<sup>51</sup> See B. Harrison (1978), Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain, London: Croom Helm.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Morag Bell (forthcoming).

ministering in the congregation, he preached in the open places in the town, planted and watched over the new branches of the church, instructed the converts privately, diffused a knowledge of the Gospel among the teachers, quickened their zeal, and cultivated amongst them firmness and consistence of character, introduced to the inhabitants the art of reading and writing their native language, and moreover conducted exploratory visits to towns more or less remote.

On the other hand her work, as will be seen, was chiefly within their own compound, among its few men and women, and frequent visitors, and still more amongst the happy children whom she was winning by her kindness and love, civilising, training, and teaching, and for whom perhaps she was even doing still more by the silent influence of her Christian character.<sup>53</sup>

Anna Hinderer had a strong desire to become a missionary, but in the 1850s the only way she could fulfil this wish was by marrying one. It was not until the late nineteenth century that single women missionaries were accepted. As Ian Bradley argues:

It was not only the desire to redeem sinners which impelled people to become missionaries. The lure of adventure and excitement in distant lands was probably just as strong a factor in the case of several of the applicants to the C.M.S.... For single women missionary work offered a rare opportunity to make an independent career, and this may explain why at the end of the nineteenth century women considerably outnumbered men as missionaries.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, Mary Slessor (working for the Scottish Missionary Society, which had less restrictions for the employment of women than the C.M.S.), was able to transgress the boundaries of acceptable "feminine" spheres of activity, and to become a pioneer in the mould of David Livingstone, whereas the work of Anna Hinderer, travelling to Africa almost three decades earlier, was confined to the domestic sphere. White women may have been empowered in West Africa, often on the basis of their race and class, but only a small minority were able to break out of their prescribed "feminine" roles which were determined by the social mores of Victorian Britain. Despite this, as has already been discussed, their presence in

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<sup>53</sup> Richard B. Hone (1872), preface to Hinderer, quoted in Dea Birkett (1987), "An independent woman in West Africa: the case of Mary Kingsley", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, S.O.A.S., University of London, p. 47.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Bradley (1976), The Call to Seriousness. The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians, London: Johnathon Cape, p. 91.

West Africa had broader implications for British imperialism; their "separate spheres" were never truly disengaged from the public realm.

### **Empowerment through text**

Travel was a liberating experience for many white women for it gave them the impetus to turn to print. This, in turn, gave them both a voice and access to an audience that they would not otherwise have acquired. Women such as Foote, Melville, Colvile and Larymore may have been "incorporated wives" whose social identities were drawn from their husbands' work and rank, and whose travels were structured according to their husbands' changing duties and re-postings, but they managed to retain some autonomy by publishing books based on their own experiences. It is difficult to assess the extent of the audience that these women were able to reach with their views,<sup>55</sup> but it can be supposed that because of the popularity of the literature of empire during the nineteenth century, these women had access to potentially large audiences. The audiences for the various views of these women were, however, very different. Zélie Colvile broadened her audience by publishing an article in *Blackwood's Magazine*,<sup>56</sup> and she also publicised her book by giving lectures.<sup>57</sup> However, like the travelogues of Melville and Foote, her narrative was aimed as light reading for the general enthusiast. Despite this, the potential for these works was considerable. There existed a fascination with empire among various leisured middle- and upper-class women in Britain, which was an extension of the desire among many Victorians for titillation by tales of adventure in far-off, "exotic" locations. The tales of "the daughters of Albion" establishing

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<sup>55</sup> According to Frank Cass Publications, Melville's *A Residence at Sierra Leone* was reprinted in 1968 at around 400-500 copies, but there is no information for the 1849 edition. Similarly there are no records of publication figures for the books of Larymore, Colvile, Foote or Hinderer.

<sup>56</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), "Ten days on an Oil River", *Blackwood's Magazine*, March, pp. 372-382.

<sup>57</sup> She wrote, "I have hopes there may be a demand for *Round the Black Man's Garden* which I have been advertising by giving a lecture on Madagascar at Liverpool G.D. Society. My first attempt met with a most enthusiastic reception - and they found my lecture too short..." [Colvile to Blackwood, 16/12/98, Blackwood Papers 1893-1900, National Library of Scotland].

little Englands around the world were extremely popular.<sup>58</sup> In Slessor's case, her audience ranged across class barriers, but was restricted to Scottish Presbyterians. Although publication figures for the *Missionary Record* do not exist, it can be assumed that it was very widely read throughout the major industrial towns of Scotland where the Church of Scotland was particularly strong. Its sister publication, the *Women's Missionary Magazine*, for which Slessor was a prolific writer, had an average monthly publication for 1902 of 27,800 and gave her access to a considerable female audience.<sup>59</sup>

There is more evidence regarding the popularity of Mary Kingsley's work. Her audience was a varied one, incorporating those interested in travel narratives from the empire, and those engaged in commerce, science and politics. Deborah Birkett argues that Kingsley's inability to locate herself fully and be located in masculine discourses actually gave her greater freedom to address diverse audiences, and thus gave her greater influence. She writes:

While the tensions of her adoption of white male status often curtailed her freedom of action, the temporary nature of her different professional disguises gave Kingsley a breadth of knowledge and expertise more rigidly identified Africanists of the period lacked. Not fitting easily into available professional categorizations, she could also swiftly adapt her assumed roles as the audience and circumstances demanded.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to a varied audience, Kingsley's readership was quite a substantial one. The first edition of Travels in West Africa ran to 1,500 copies and was reprinted eight times up to 1904, the reprint runs totalling 7,500. West African Studies was published in 1899 in an edition of 2,000 copies. It sold 1,200 copies the week it was published.<sup>61</sup> It was reprinted in 1901 in an edition of 1,500

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<sup>58</sup> Robinson (1989), p. 200.

<sup>59</sup> Women's Missionary Magazine of the Free Church of Scotland, July, 1903, p. 154.

<sup>60</sup> Deborah Birkett (1987a), "An Independent Woman in West Africa: The Case of Mary Kingsley", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, S.O.A.S., University of London, pp. 118-9.

<sup>61</sup> Birkett (1992), p. 135.

copies.<sup>62</sup> Both books were reviewed very widely by both the national and provincial press (the notable exception being *The Times*, which disagreed with Kingsley's stand on many issues concerning Britain's involvement in West Africa), and were also reviewed as far afield as France, Australia and the United States. Kingsley also published articles in the influential periodicals of the time, including *The Spectator*, *The National Review*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Manchester Chamber of Commerce Monthly Record*, *British Empire Review*, and other learned journals such as the *Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society* and the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*. Kingsley broadened her audience even further by embarking upon an exhausting series of lecture tours around Britain, lecturing most notably to the Scottish and the Liverpool Geographical Societies, but also to various audiences in Dublin, Glasgow, Dundee, Harwich, Halifax, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Durham, South Shields, and at various venues in London. She would often address over 2,000 people at these lectures. Potentially large audiences added to the influence that Kingsley, along with Slessor, commanded as a result of their publications.

Despite access to sizeable audiences, nearly all these women prefaced their narratives with some sort of apology for having written them in the first place, re-emphasizing their essential feminine reticence and denying the worth of their attempts at writing. For example, Melville wrote, "In offering this little work to the Public, the Author craves indulgence for the trivial matter it contains".<sup>63</sup> Even Kingsley felt the need to apologise for *Travels*, although her apology contained more irony than it did demureness:

What this book wants is not a simple Preface but an apology, and a very brilliant and convincing one at that. Recognising this fully, and feeling quite incompetent to write such a masterpiece, I have asked several literary friends to write one for me, but they have kindly but firmly declined, stating that it is impossible satisfactorily to apologise for my liberties with Lindley

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<sup>62</sup> Information courtesy of Macmillan Publishers Limited. Both books were reissued in the 1960s by Cass, and *Travels in West Africa* was reprinted in 1972, 1982, and 1987, the latter an abridged version.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Melville (1968), *A Residence in Sierra Leone*, London: Frank Cass, p. v.



Murray and the Queen's English. I am therefore left to make a feeble apology for this book myself...<sup>64</sup>

Although Zélie Colville did not proffer an apology for her narrative, the preface was written by her husband in an effort to validate further the experiences of his wife. The need to apologise for having written a book, or to have their publications validated by their husbands, is indicative of the fact that women were constrained by a set of literary conventions that were predicated upon their sex. As Bénédicte Monicat argues:

In this nineteenth-century discourse women are represented as "naturally" emotional and primarily instinctive. When they are not deemed incapable of intellectual work, they are advised not to engage in it for the good of society. What women learn and write must therefore remain within distinctive boundaries.<sup>65</sup>

Part of this process was the need to offer apologies in the prefaces of their travelogues. These disclaimers denied "any scientific, academic, literary or other merit" of these travelogues.<sup>66</sup>

Sara Mills has highlighted the constraints which controlled the production and reception of texts written by women,<sup>67</sup> and when analyzing these constraints the distinction between public and private writings assumes some significance. The textual constraints that controlled and shaped published narratives were not present in private correspondence, where women were often freer to express their opinions regarding even the most taboo subjects in Victorian society. As discussed in chapter 7, textual constraints shaped Kingsley's narratives; she was compelled to adopt masculine voices in order to describe the physiques of West African women, and her allusions to female circumcision were restricted to correspondence with other women. Her views on miscegenation were also confined to her letters.

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<sup>64</sup> Kingsley (1982), *Preface to the First Edition*, p. xix.

<sup>65</sup> Bénédicte Monicat (1994), "Autobiography and women's travel writings in nineteenth-century France: journeys through self-representation", *Ecumene*, 1, 1, p.63.

<sup>66</sup> Sara Mills (1991), *Discourses of Difference*, London: Routledge, p. 83.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, (*passim*).

Furthermore, Kingsley was constrained by politics. Leo Hamalian makes the point that "though she travelled through the Congo Free State, she did not even hint at the terrible atrocities that the agents of King Leopold of Belgium were inflicting on the natives in a bloody regime of forced labour and monopoly".<sup>68</sup> At first glance this does seem a surprising omission by Kingsley considering her vociferous attacks on British taxation policies in Sierra Leone and southern Nigeria, but what Hamalian fails to consider is the possibility that Kingsley, in order to gain permission to travel through the Belgian Congo, may have given an undertaking not to write anything of what she saw there. Although constrained not to describe the conditions of the Congo Free State in her narratives, there are slight references in her books that leave the impression that she was deeply shocked at what was happening. As Caroline Oliver points out, she became a great friend of Edmund Dene Morel, who led the campaign for reform in the Congo, and it seems clear that she supplied some of the evidence for his reports.<sup>69</sup>

The tensions between public and private writings is even clearer in the work of Mary Slessor. In her reports in the missionary magazines she was a narrator, and as with Larymore, confined herself to describing her environment and her own work, without veering towards the "masculine" world of analysis and critique, politics and science. She made constant references to the state of her health, assuring her readers that she was well. The image she created was of a woman happily carrying out the work of the church in Africa, and enjoying some success. The picture of Slessor one gains from her correspondence, however, was very different. She was often sick with fever, and on occasions close to death. She suffered from erysipelas, lost her hair and had heart trouble. Her discomfort is evident in several of her letters, and in her surviving diaries. However, this was not reported in the *Missionary Record* or the *Women's Missionary Magazine*. This was partly because Slessor felt she had a mission to complete and did not want to be

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<sup>68</sup> Leo Hamalian [ed] (1981), Ladies on the Loose. Women Travellers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., p. 229.

<sup>69</sup> Caroline Oliver (1982), Western Women in Colonial Africa, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, p. 81.

recalled to Britain. On one of her few furloughs when doubts were expressed about her returning to West Africa she announced, "If ye dinna send me back, I'll swim back".<sup>70</sup> She was conscious of her status as one of the few single women missionaries in Africa, and did not want this confused with notions of weakness and unsuitability. Furthermore, Slessor did not wish to represent herself as a heroic figure in the mould of Livingstone. It was important that she was seen to remain within the bounds of acceptable feminine behaviour as defined by the Church of Scotland, which had already voiced its opposition to her proposal to travel inland.<sup>71</sup>

The focus on the domestic realm in the narratives of the likes of Melville, Foote and Larymore may be read as a product of textual constraints. However, as Monicat argues, these narrative strategies may also have been empowering:

By focusing on topics or aspects of life either forbidden to men (the harems) or not valorized by men (domestic life) women distance themselves from the values of masculine knowledge. This is one of women's most important intellectual victories as they present it - a victory materialized by their books, a victory which has crucial consequences on the ways in which they conceive and construct themselves as female subjects.<sup>72</sup>

The act of describing in itself represented the position of power assumed by women writers: they appropriated West African landscapes and peoples, filling their narratives with descriptions of those silenced by the imperialism that had facilitated their own liberation. As Catherine Hall argues, in the debates over Africans:

English men and women were as much concerned with constructing their own identities as with defining those of others, and those identities were always classed and gendered as well as ethnically specific. Furthermore,

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<sup>70</sup> In Buchan (1980), p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> Buchanan to Slessor, 13/1/05, mss. 7661, United Presbyterian Papers, Foreign 3, 394, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>72</sup> Monicat (1994), p. 67.

their capacity to define those others was an important aspect of their own authority and power.<sup>73</sup>

The critical point here is that women travel writers were empowered by their authority to represent other peoples and landscapes, and by being able to construct popular geographies of West Africa for consumption by audiences in Britain. It was, perhaps, the production of textual images and the creation of "knowledge" about West Africa that was the ultimate source of empowerment for women travel writers.

Their published texts gave women travellers access to audiences that would have been difficult to acquire otherwise, and their own liberation in West Africa was achieved at the expense of the liberties of colonised West Africans. However, as several writers have discussed,<sup>74</sup> both imperialist and feminine discourses in nineteenth-century Britain constrained the ways in which women wrote, and the details that they were able to recount, thereby producing tensions within their narratives. Women travellers were caught between the conflicting narrative voices of imperialism and femininity. Drawing on the arguments of Karen Morin, they were part of the imperial system yet not totally of it because they were women; though they were women, in West Africa their white skin gave them access to a broader sphere than that encompassed by the domestic realm.<sup>75</sup> The result of these tensions was an ambivalence of narrative voice and a lack of straightforward authority in the text. As Mills argues, "through elements such as humour, self-deprecation, statements of affiliation, and descriptions of relationships, which stress the interpersonal nature of travel writing, these texts constitute counter-hegemonic

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<sup>73</sup> Catherine Hall (1992), "Missionary stories: gender and ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s", in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treicher [eds], Cultural Studies, London: Routledge, p. 242.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Alison Blunt (1994), "Mapping authorship and authority: reading Mary Kingsley's landscape descriptions" in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, Writing Women and Space, New York: Guilford Press, pp. 51-72; Sara Mills (1991), pp. 21-3; Karen Morin, "A "female Columbus" in 1887 America: marking new social territory", paper presented at the Association of American Geographers conference, Atlanta, 1993.

<sup>75</sup> Morin (1993), p. 4.

voices within colonial discourse". The women of this study were unable to adopt either voice (imperial or feminine) completely and successfully; they asserted and subverted both to varying degrees and at various times.<sup>76</sup> Thus, women travel writers in West Africa were ambivalent about their own authority and self-deprecation; they were both empowered by text and constrained by nineteenth-century discourses which governed the production and reception of their narratives.

### **Impact in Britain**

It is difficult to gauge the impact of the views of most of the women of this study on opinions in Britain. One can assume, however, that although their narratives contributed to the body of literature pertaining to the empire, and are therefore of some import to an analysis of this *genre* of writing, most of these women had very little impact as individuals in Britain. Their narratives were not written to have any great impact on imperial policy, and ultimately these women remained marginal within the sphere of British imperial culture. However, this was not the case with Mary Slessor and Mary Kingsley, both of whom transgressed the boundaries of feminine activity, as defined by an overwhelmingly patriarchal society, to have some impact on church policy (in the case of Slessor) and imperial politics (in the case of Kingsley).

Slessor was very much aware of her importance to the Church of Scotland in Calabar, but also of her own influence over mission policy formulated in Scotland. She was a modest and shy person,<sup>77</sup> but had a great conviction that her own work in Calabar was indispensable. Thus she was at times critical in her letters towards the Church of Scotland for not providing the necessary back-up to allow her to continue her travels into the interior. She wrote, "do you at home

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<sup>76</sup> Mills (1991), pp. 21-3.

<sup>77</sup> Jessie F. Hogg (1915), "Mary M. Slessor", Women's Missionary Magazine of the United Free Church of Scotland, February, pp. 53-4.

realise that while you are giving for extension, we are closing stations for want of workers?"<sup>78</sup> Her influence in Scotland was based primarily upon her publications in the *Missionary Record* and the *Women's Missionary Magazine*. It is significant that following her complaints in the church magazines over the lack of help she received in Calabar, many more single women travelled to West Africa during the final decade of the nineteenth century. Buchanan informed her that her reports were "the means of awakening a new interest in Calabar in the minds of many of our people".<sup>79</sup> The great interest that she inspired as a consequence of these reports, and because of her status as a woman alone in the forests of West Africa, gave her significant influence within the Church of Scotland. The Foreign Missions Board was aware of the authority of her reports in the missionary magazines, and members wrote to her requesting more publications, "a sketch of anything connected with your work - any of your observations or your experiences".<sup>80</sup> Her knowledge of Calabar and her importance to the missionary work of the church meant that she was able to implement many of her own policies. If the church opposed her suggestions, her African lifestyle and independence of church funds, which she deliberately fostered through trading, meant that she could go ahead with her plans regardless of protests from Scotland. This influence can be discerned from the fact that Slessor's journeys into the interior were mapped out by herself, rather than by the Mission; she decided where and when she went. On one occasion when the church opposed her ideas (possibly concerned with "opening up" new villages in Ikpe) she threatened to sever completely her ties with the Mission. The response from the church was conciliatory, arguing that they were "far too proud of you to dream of such a thing, and if there is a difference of opinion there

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Slessor (1908), "Present opportunity in Ibibio", Women's Missionary Magazine of the United Free Church of Scotland, December, p. 256.

<sup>79</sup> Buchanan to Slessor, 10/11/02, United Presbyterian Church Papers, Foreign 1, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>80</sup> Buchanan to Slessor, 7/7/02, 10/11/02, mss. 7658, 7659, United Presbyterian Papers, National Library of Scotland.

will be many a solution thought of before that!"<sup>81</sup> Slessor got her own way and continued her progress in opening up stations in Ikpe.

Slessor's influence on church policy was based more on her position in West Africa than her standing in Britain. The views of Mary Kingsley, more than any other woman of this study, however, had the greatest impact on public opinion in Britain, and were grounded on the status that she managed to acquire in Britain. Following her return from Africa in 1895 and the publication of Travels in West Africa, Kingsley became a celebrity in Britain. She also acquired a great deal of influence. Her first publication ensured that she was widely regarded at the time as *the* expert on the affairs of West Africa, and demands were placed upon her for further publications and lecture tours. She established contacts through a complex process of "networking" with intellectuals such as Edward Tylor and James Frazer, colonialists such as Sir George Goldie, future colonial governors such as Frederick Lugard and Matthew Nathan, representatives of the trading fraternity such as John Holt and Alfred Lyell, and members of the Colonial Office, including Joseph Chamberlain himself. She was also invited to meet the "Balfour Set", which was well-known amongst parliamentarians, and popular with the imperialists who ran the Royal Geographical Society.<sup>82</sup> This networking was enabled by the fame that she acquired through the publication of Travels.<sup>83</sup> It was also enabled by her gendered subjectivity. Kingsley referred to herself as a "maiden aunt" in her relationship with, and influence over, the Liverpool traders.<sup>84</sup> On another occasion she wrote to John Holt, "you men will be men. A Frenchman would not listen to an Englishman talking to him about how to manage his colonies but he don't mind

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<sup>81</sup> Stevenson to Slessor, 4/6/12, mss. 7952, United Free Church Papers, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>82</sup> John E. Flint (1960), Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria, London: Oxford University Press, p. 304.

<sup>83</sup> Deborah Birkett (1987a) discusses Kingsley's "networking" strategy, pp. 219, 268; also in Mary Kingsley. Imperial Adventuress, London: Macmillan (1992), *passim*; Review Article, "Networking West Africa", African Affairs, (1987c), pp. 115-119.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Kingsley to John Holt, 20/2/99, Holt Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.

a woman doing so."<sup>85</sup> Consequently, Kingsley came to exercise considerable influence within political circles, despite being outside them, particularly with regard to the debate surrounding the administration of the West African colonies and the formulation of Indirect Rule.<sup>86</sup> As Robert Pearce argues, "Kingsley had a major impact on official views from the early years of this century onwards. She may be seen as having a seminal influence on all areas of British policy in Africa, and West Africa especially".<sup>87</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, Kingsley, John Holt and Edmund Morel, began referring to themselves as the "Third Party", which they perceived to belong somewhere between those who held imperialist ideas about the "damned Negro", incapable of advancement without British rule, and those expounding the philanthropic but ethnocentric missionary approach to West Africans. Their alternative approach saw the administration of Africans as "a challenging problem of world importance, demanding justice and wisdom but above all an appreciation of ethnological facts".<sup>88</sup> Although the significance of this "sect" was small, and its proposals lacked any solid economic backing or wide public appeal, it was important in advocating reforms in the administration of West Africa at a time when the zeal for imperial expansion was at its highest. Kenneth Nworah argues that even after her death, it was Kingsley's spiritual influence that compelled both Holt and Morel to fight for an imperialism based on moral duty rather than

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<sup>85</sup> Mary Kingsley to John Holt, 13/12/98, Holt Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford. See also Alison Blunt (1994), for a more detailed account of Kingsley's gendered subjectivity.

<sup>86</sup> For accounts of Kingsley's influence in the political arena, see: Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travellers in Africa, Boston: Twayne; Anthony I. Nwabughuogu (1981), "The role of propaganda in the Development of Indirect Rule in Nigeria, 1880-1929", International Journal of African Historical Studies, 14, 1, pp. 65-93; Kenneth Dike Nworah (1971), "The Liverpool "Sect" and British West African Policy 1895-1915", African Affairs, pp. 349-64; Robert D. Pearce (1990), Mary Kingsley. Light at the Heart of Darkness, Oxford: Kensall Press; Bernard Porter (1961), Critics of Empire, London: Macmillan.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Pearce (1988), "Missionary education in colonial Africa: the critique of Mary Kingsley", History of Education, 17, 4, p. 283.

<sup>88</sup> Nworah (1971), p. 349.



jingoism.<sup>89</sup> Morel himself referred to this "moral" approach to imperialism as "Kingsleyism".<sup>90</sup>

Kingsley also had a major influence on debates about education in West Africa. Pearce argues that education policy moved very significantly in the direction that she endorsed. The 1925 White Paper called for education to be:

adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution. Its aim should be to render the individual more efficient in his or her own condition of life, whatever it may be, and to promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement of agriculture, the development of native industries, the improvement of health, the training of the people in the management of their own affairs and the inculcation of true ideals of citizenship and service.<sup>91</sup>

This was very much in line with Kingsley's own ideas. Although there were other influences on colonial educational policy, such as the Phelps-Stoke report of 1922, Kingsley's ideas were both anticipatory of later policy and of some influence upon them. As Pearce suggests, "the unorthodox, radical stance which she had taken up in the 1890s had to a large degree become the orthodoxy of the 1920s".<sup>92</sup> She also laid the foundations for cultural relativism in the field of social anthropology.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Bernard Porter argues that "in many ways she was the first English *social* anthropologist", and as such she exerted a considerable influence upon her

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>90</sup> Catherine Ann Cline (1980), E.D. Morel 1873-1924. The Strategies of Protest, London: Blackstaff, p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa, quoted in Pearce (1988), p. 292.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>93</sup> Robert D. Pearce (1990), p. 145; Paul B. Rich (1986), Race and Empire in British Politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 30-1. Rich also points out that in the realms of politics and anthropology Kingsley, almost single-handedly, shifted attention away from India and Asia towards Africa.

successors.<sup>94</sup> Following her death whilst nursing in South Africa during the Boer War, the renowned critic W.T. Stead wrote in the *Review of Reviews*:

What a pity it is that Miss Mary Kingsley died before the Pan-African Conference was held! It is one more count of the indictment of Humanity against this hateful South African War, that it should have cost us the life of the only Paleface who could make the Black Man intelligible to Europe!<sup>95</sup>

The effects of her writings were not immediately apparent in her lifetime, and she died in 1900 with an enduring sense of failure. However, as John Flint argues, in the years after her death she managed to "revolutionise the attitude towards Africans of British Governments, British officials, and even that informed section of British public opinion which deigned to consider African problems".<sup>96</sup> Kingsley, therefore, was far from peripheral in the imperial debates surrounding West Africa. Although her legacy in terms of influencing imperial policy was small, she did succeed in inspiring a great many thinkers who carried on the work that she had started into the twentieth century. She was also responsible, with the help of the likes of Lugard, for placing West African affairs firmly in the forefront of the public imagination. Perhaps of equal significance is the fact that she succeeded in propelling herself into the public arena, progressing from relative anonymity to become one of the most influential women in the 1890s.

### **Women travellers as pro-imperialists?**

All the women of this study were empowered in various ways, and to differing extents, through British imperial culture and their travels in the British empire, and all of these women were pro-imperialist in their attitudes towards West Africa. However, the term pro-imperialist is rather vague, spanning a variety of complex

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<sup>94</sup> Porter (1968), p. 150.

<sup>95</sup> August 1900, p. 131.

<sup>96</sup> John E. Flint (1964), introduction to new edition of *West African Studies*, p. xxxvi.

responses and attitudes which require further elucidation. Following Edward Said, their travel narratives and the images contained within them were far from being "only literature", they were extraordinarily caught up in and indeed an organic part of the British imperial effort in West Africa. In many cases their audience may have been small, but such narratives written by women about West Africa were rarefied, and this was often the closest that their readers came to Africa. As Said argues, such texts were, therefore, "part of the European effort to hold on to, think about, plan for Africa".<sup>97</sup> That none of the women questioned their right to be in West Africa was not unusual for the times in which they travelled; their presence in Africa was legitimated by British imperial culture. They identified with various aspects of British imperialism, some supported cultural imperialism, others economic, political, or military imperialism; some saw Britain's efforts as paternalistic, others as potentially damaging to West African cultures; some were in favour of an informal type of imperialism, others wanted more a formal empire in West Africa, governed rigidly and controlled by Britain. Each woman pictured herself contributing to what she believed was best for both Britain and West Africa. From this one can argue that to label these women pro-imperialist is too simplistic and their opinions require more profound investigation. The nature of their attitudes towards the British empire in West Africa, being so closely connected to the conventions of the periods in which they travelled, differed considerably.

Elizabeth Melville and Mrs. Foote were both pro-imperialists, but the nature of the imperialism that they wished to see operating in West Africa was shaped by the philanthropic endeavours of the anti-slavery movement, and their belief in the responsibility of Britain to protect the freedoms of others. Both had an unerring confidence in the superiority of British morality and government. Melville expressed such beliefs in a poem, reproduced in A Residence at Sierra Leone, in which she welcomed the sight of an English ship sailing into the harbour at Freetown:

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<sup>97</sup> Edward Said (1994), Culture and Imperialism, London: Vintage, p. 80. For example, Said makes the point that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was bound up in the European "scramble for Africa".

Those upright masts, that hull's stout build, no foreign craft denote,  
Right proudly at her gaff I see the flag of England float!  
Oh! ever may that ensign bright all alien colours brave,  
And Britain reign triumphant still, the empress of the wave!<sup>98</sup>

Both Melville and Foote were pro-imperialists but not colonialists. They saw the presence of British administrators and missionaries in West Africa as a temporary sacrifice, there to eradicate slavery and "civilise" the West Africans into a Christian way of life. Foote was almost resigned to the fact that it was Britain's "burden" to assume responsibility for eradicating the slave trade; she wrote that slavery would endure in Africa "until the civilising influence of Christianity has extended itself over those melancholy tracts of land".<sup>99</sup> To both women, the British effort in West Africa was a heroic one in the cause of freedom and the spread of "civilisation". As Melville wrote:

...while she may well mourn and lament over the fearful loss of human life sustained by her on this pestilent shore, let England at the same time take comfort in the testimony given by these reclaimed barbarians and converted pagans, towards the real and lasting good effected by her heroic and persevering endeavours in suppressing the slave trade.<sup>100</sup>

In this sense, therefore, Melville and Foote supported British economic and cultural imperialism in West Africa because they perceived it in terms of philanthropy and benevolence.

The missionaries, Anna Hinderer and Mary Slessor, were cultural imperialists in a similar sense, in that they believed it the duty of Britain to "civilise" and Christianise West Africans, but they were drawn further into British imperial policy than were the wives of administrators. This is particularly the case with Slessor. Her progression from the coast to the interior can be constructed as

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<sup>98</sup> Melville (1968), p. 102.

<sup>99</sup> Foote (1869), pp. 220-221.

<sup>100</sup> Melville (1968), p. 303.

a parallel to colonial conquest;<sup>101</sup> Mary Slessor was, to a certain extent, building her own "empire" in Calabar, independent of both the British administration and the Church of Scotland. Here, Slessor "reigned" as *Eka Kpukpro Owo*, mother, magistrate and vice-Consul. Not only did she assert her own influence in Calabar, but she (albeit unwittingly) laid the foundations for the future imposition of a British administration in this area. By helping establish the so-called "native courts" in her districts, which combined both West African indigenous laws with British justice, Slessor ultimately aided the British imperial effort in southern Nigeria. As Adewoye argues, the "native courts" were very much part of the process of the subjugation of southern Nigeria by the British. They were not merely judicial institutions, but instruments for bringing large tracts of land under effective administrative control.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, although Slessor was personally opposed to the extension of territory carried out for reasons of profit or aggrandizement, she found herself a reluctant advocate of British political imperialism.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, by their very presence in Ibadan, Anna and David Hinderer helped lay the foundations for, and were therefore implicated in, British penetration into Yorubaland. This area was one of the last in southern Nigeria to be "opened up" to trade in the late nineteenth century; the presence of the missionaries and their stations in Yorubaland facilitated the advance of the traders, which were succeeded by an administrative framework based on law courts. Thus, although their own aims were based on the spread of Christianity in West Africa, which sometimes put them in direct conflict with the imperialist aims of successive British governments (for example, the Hinderers' support of the Ibadanis against the Egbas in the Abeokuta wars, and Slessor's obstructive attitude towards census-taking in Okoyong), the missionaries were unwittingly involved in aiding the British

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<sup>101</sup> For an analysis of the parallels between evangelical enterprise and colonial conquest in South Africa see, Jean and John Comaroff (1988), "Through the looking-class: colonial encounters of the first kind", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1, 1, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Omoniyi Adewoye (1977), *The Judicial System in Southern Nigeria, 1854-1954*, London: Longman, p. 41.

<sup>103</sup> For an explication of the tensions implicit in the evangelical effort in the British empire, see Ian Bradley (1976), pp. 88-93.

expansion into southern Nigeria.

Despite this, as intimated in this chapter, many of Slessor's personal opinions were revealing of an anti-imperialist attitude, particularly towards the abuses of the British administration in West Africa. In later years, as George Eliot had bemoaned the increase in the pace of life facilitated by the steam-engine, so Slessor, in 1903, bemoaned the passing of "the romantic Old Calabar of my youth". She wrote:

What a rush of memories... The changed conditions from the days when we lived among the natives, and they and we were free as the air to pursue calling under more than Bohemian licence, the advent of the steamers, with their old and kindly if rather rough and exaggerated criticism from skipper and man. The great hospitality on hulk, and in Mission House, the general bond of camaraderie and bond of friendship, which a stay on the Coast invariably conveyed. How changed it is now... The advent of the British Government has brought all the freedom of the native and the European to an end, and just as if a cannonball had exploded and shattered us and scattered us as so many different particles, and sent us off into different locations, the old community of feelings is at an end, and the rush and competition and conventionality which makes life in Europe such a strain has come here to stay.<sup>104</sup>

This passage is revealing not only of Slessor's resentment of the more formal imperialism imposed on Nigeria and its peoples after 1900, but also, one would argue, of the erosion of her own influence as the British government took a more active role in administering the Protectorate. Thus her anti-imperialist comments must be framed within the context of the loss of freedoms brought about by formal imperialism, both for the peoples of Calabar, and for herself.

Mary Kingsley's position on imperialism was also complex, and she shared Slessor's ambivalence. She was undoubtedly an imperialist, but many of her opinions were in opposition to the prevailing wisdoms emanating from the Colonial and Foreign Offices. In West African Studies and other publications, she laid out

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<sup>104</sup> Slessor to Irvine, Okoyong 12/12/03, Saint Andrew's Hall Missionary College Library, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

her opposition to the plans for the British administration of Nigeria.<sup>105</sup> She believed that missionary propaganda provoked the government into a policy of destroying African states and the power of the African ruling classes through a policy of predatory wars.<sup>106</sup> However, as Nworah points out, it was not this destructive imperialism that she was opposed to, but the lack of constructive government and statesmanship in West Africa.<sup>107</sup> Her opposition to the Crown Colony System emanated from these considerations. She wrote:

I have attempted to state that the Crown Colony system is unsuited for governing Western Africa, and have attributed its malign influence to its being a system which primarily expresses the opinions of well-intentioned but ill-informed officials at home, instead of being, according to the usual English type of institution, representative of the interests of the people who are governed, and of those who have the largest stake in the countries controlled by it - the merchants and manufacturing classes of Britain.<sup>108</sup>

Kingsley also deplored the imposition of the hut tax on Sierra Leone, which she perceived as costly and interfering in local institutions. She understood that from an African perspective, payment for any item meant that it no longer belonged to its owner; she also questioned the legality of such a tax where the authority of the British government was based entirely on treaties with local rulers which made no mention of taxation, but which did guarantee the protection of property, precisely that, in the eyes of the Africans, which was being taken away.<sup>109</sup> Thus, between 1895 and 1900, she became the symbol of dissent from certain imperial attitudes towards West Africa (especially those expressed in *The*

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<sup>105</sup> Kingsley (1899a), *passim*; (1899b), "The administration of our West African colonies", Journal of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, 10, pp. 63-5.

<sup>106</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 322.

<sup>107</sup> Nworah (1971), p. 352.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>109</sup> See Cline (1980), pp. 18-19; Pearce (1990), pp. 114-142; Kingsley (1899b), pp. 63-5. Throughout 1898, Kingsley contributed a whole series of articles on "West African Property" to the *Morning Post*, in which she outlined her protests against the hut tax. She also detailed her objections in correspondence with Joseph Chamberlain (Chamberlain Papers, British Library) and John Holt (Holt Papers, Rhodes House).

*Times*<sup>110</sup>), and championed the cause of the traders, by virtue of their experience, justice and humanity, as the best qualified men to govern British interests in this part of the continent.<sup>111</sup> The wealth and prosperity of the traders and, subsequently, of the British economy, depended upon good relations with the West Africans, and this idea shaped Kingsley's ideas on economic imperialism.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, while standing in opposition to the jingoism of the 1890s, Kingsley retained conservative and traditional imperialist attitudes. However, what endeared her to the African intelligentsia of the time, men such as Edward Blyden and Mark Hayford,<sup>113</sup> was the fact that she insisted on the need to apply what she called "the African principle", the idea of "the government of Africa by Africans" as far as the conditions of the time allowed.<sup>114</sup> This was certainly a radical break from much of the jingoism apparent in the 1890s, and anticipated Lugard's own visions for indirect rule in Nigeria, implemented after Kingsley's death in 1900.

### **Women travellers and women's rights**

It is perhaps ironic that the women who were themselves empowered on the imperial stage, both on a personal level and in the public realm, were often vociferously anti-suffrage. Despite their own liberation in the course of their travels and through the subsequent recounting of their experiences in their publications, none of the women of this study championed women's rights in Britain. This is

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<sup>110</sup> Kingsley to Holt, 21/2/98, 16/4 Holt Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.

<sup>111</sup> Nworah (1971), p. 352.

<sup>112</sup> See Kingsley (1899a), pp. 294-297.

<sup>113</sup> Edward Wilmot Blyden (1901), The African Society and Miss Mary H. Kingsley, London; Reverend Mark C. Hayford (1901), Mary H. Kingsley From an African Standpoint, London. Such men respected her for advocating the cause of African culture, reviewed her books, reproduced her speeches and constantly employed her ideas in attacks on missionaries (see Emmanuel A. Ayendele (1966), The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914. A Political and Social Analysis, London: Longman, Green and Co., p. 251).

<sup>114</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 419; see also Thomas Hodgkin (1960), Nigerian Perspectives. An Historical Anthology, London: Oxford University Press, p. 18.



perfectly understandable for those women travelling before the 1870s, when the campaign for women's rights had yet to gain any great momentum. However, it is perhaps more surprising of women such as Mary Kingsley, who had acquired a public platform on which to air their views. Kingsley denied vociferously reports in the *Daily Telegraph* that she was a New Woman,<sup>115</sup> but this denial may have been further evidence of the constraints shaping her texts, and cannot be viewed without consideration of her great desire to be taken seriously in scientific and political circles. She felt that association with the women's rights movement would undermine her position of influence with the men of trade, science and politics who had become her acquaintances and allies. She could not afford to alienate her audience by being identified with radical "shrieking females and androgens".<sup>116</sup>

Kingsley also expressed her opposition to women becoming Fellows of Royal Geographical Society and other learned societies, despite the fact that she herself was a member of the Anthropological Society. Despite being a popular lecturer, Kingsley was careful not to overstep prescribed boundaries of femininity. For example, she had her lecture to the Scottish Geographical Society read for her by a male Fellow, and her first lecture to the Liverpool Geographical Society was read by the trader James Irvine. When presenting her second paper in Liverpool she announced:

Personally, I confess I wish what I have to say to you tonight was again being read by Mr. Irvine, as my last address here was, and I feel certain that before I have finished you will wish it were so too.<sup>117</sup>

As Birkett argues, Kingsley was supportive of the distinctly female contribution to the imperial endeavour, particularly the role of the wives of administrators and, later, of overseas nurses,<sup>118</sup> but continuously agitated against women joining the

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<sup>115</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, December 3 1895; letter from Mary Kingsley, *Daily Telegraph*, December 5 1895.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Kingsley to John Holt, n.d., Holt Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.

<sup>117</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897b), "West Africa from an ethnologist's point of view", Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society, p. 58.

<sup>118</sup> See Mary Kingsley (1990c), "Nursing in West Africa", Chambers Journal, 3, pp. 369-71, 393-6.

élite ranks of male imperialists.<sup>119</sup> From 1897 onwards, she began formulating ideas about forming an African Society, but she was adamant about not allowing women to become members. She wrote, "I am not a Believer in women in learned societies... Ladies *must* not be admitted".<sup>120</sup> Despite being the inspiration behind the Society, she would not be present at its meetings; she wrote, "I am not going to show my own petticoat in it but will be represented by a gentleman".<sup>121</sup> In correspondence with Marion Farquharson, the botanist who was agitating for women's admittance to the R.G.S., Kingsley wrote:

I feel I cannot add my name to your influential list. I have for many years heard this question about admitting ladies to learned societies discussed and my personal feeling is that I would not ask any society to admit me... As for the Geographical Society I have never understood the desire of the ladies to force themselves on it as Fellows. I am myself excluded from it because I am a lady but I have received the greatest courtesy from it and have been told that any information at its command is at my service...<sup>122</sup>

In order to indicate that she did not represent a threat to the male establishment, Kingsley sent a copy of her reply to Farquharson to Scott Keltie, Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, and two days later wrote "these androgynes I have no use for".<sup>123</sup> However, Kingsley did argue that women were invaluable as "ethnological bush workers" as they had access to knowledge denied to men. She wrote to Keltie:

I sincerely hope that if the big Scientific [sic] ever let them [women] in they will make a separate Department - or let the ladies have a separate council-chamber in which they can speak their minds... Women like your own

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<sup>119</sup> Birkett (1992), p. 129.

<sup>120</sup> Kingsley to Edward Clodd, 7/1/98, Kingsley archive compiled by Beth Urquhart, Eugene, Oregon, U.S.A.. The African Society was formed in Kingsley's honour after her death by Alice Green.

<sup>121</sup> Kingsley to Tylor, 10/12/98, Rhodes House, Oxford.

<sup>122</sup> Kingsley to Marion Farquharson, 26/11/99, Royal Geographical Society Correspondence 1881-1910, R.G.S..

<sup>123</sup> Kingsley to Keltie, 27/11/99, 29/11/99, Royal Geographical Society Correspondence, 1881-1910, R.G.S..

Isabella [Bird Bishop] and myself know lots of things no man can know about the heathen and no doubt men do ditto.<sup>124</sup>

Kingsley was a firm believer in separate spheres for men and women, and just as she believed that Africans were a separate species from Europeans, different in "kind not degree", and able to progress along their own lines,<sup>125</sup> so she believed that women were different from men. She wrote, "A great woman, mentally or physically, will excel an indifferent man, but no woman has ever equalled a really great man".<sup>126</sup> She was also opposed to women's suffrage, believing that politics were the business of men; women's responsibilities were to exercise their influence upon these men in the private sphere. This mirrored her own engagement in politics, networking in order to exercise her own influence but without becoming directly involved in the politics surrounding the debates. She wrote, with typical humour, to Sir Matthew Nathan in 1900:

I have been opposing women having the parliamentary vote this afternoon, and have had a grand time of it, and have been called an idealist and had poetry slung at me in chunks. Argument was impossible, so I offered to fight the secretary in the back yard, but she would not.<sup>127</sup>

In terms of women's rights, therefore, Kingsley's attitudes corresponded with the more conservative ideas about gender relations apparent among some intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century.

Constance Larymore made no claims on behalf of women in her narrative, and encouraged other women to follow her example of remaining loyal to her husband, supporting him in his efforts on behalf of the empire, and making herself of some use whilst accompanying him on his travels. Mary Slessor perhaps did most to empower women in Britain, albeit within the constraining context of the missionary effort. As has been discussed, at the end of the nineteenth century it

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<sup>124</sup> Kingsley to Keltie, 01/12/99, Royal Geographical Society Correspondence, 1881-1910, R.G.S..

<sup>125</sup> Discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

<sup>126</sup> Kingsley (1896a), p. 71.

<sup>127</sup> In Stephen Gwynn (1932), The Life of Mary Kingsley, London: Macmillan, p. 149.

was still relatively unusual to find single women Protestant missionaries in Africa, and as Nancy Hunt argues, their presence was actively discouraged.<sup>128</sup> However, not only was Slessor an inspirational figure to other Scottish women, she also vigorously encouraged them to work in West Africa. She complained in the missionary magazines about the lack of women volunteering to continue her work at the stations she had founded; it was imperative that others took over these stations in order that she continue her progress into the interior. As a result of such complaints, Charlotte Crawford at the Women's Foreign Missions Board agitated on Slessor's behalf in Scotland to send more women to West Africa. Several women answered Slessor's call, including her four protégées, Martha Peacock, Beatrice Welsh, Mina Amess and Agnes Arnot. Slessor believed that Africans should run their own out-stations, under the initial supervision of travelling white missionaries, and the presence of these women not only consolidated her own work but proved such ideas tenable. Moreover, she was able to provide a valid reason for other British women to broaden their horizons, take the opportunity to travel beyond the shores of Britain and assert their own independence. In defence of women missionaries she wrote, "women are as eager to share in all the work and sacrifice of the world as men, and it is their privilege to share in it".<sup>129</sup>

Despite this, Slessor did not perceive the missionary's life as one of liberation, rather as one of service, and despite devoting a great deal of energy to the cause of West African women, she remained remote from debates over the rights of British women. In a letter to a friend concerning a book she had read, she wrote, "I have enjoyed the old world gentlewomen, who after all are more to my taste than the new woman. I'm far too old for the new clever independent hand I fear".<sup>130</sup> While not overtly opposing women's rights, Slessor, after thirty-five

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<sup>128</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt (1990), "'Single ladies on the Congo': Protestant missionary tensions and voices", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, pp. 395-403.

<sup>129</sup> In Christian and Plummer (1970), p. 165.

<sup>130</sup> Slessor to Partridge, Use, 1/1/08, Slessor Papers, Dundee City Library.

years in West Africa, simply felt too removed from the debates taking place in Britain to be able to comment on the subject.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the existence of textual and societal constraints, to some extent the women of this study broke out of the mould prescribed for them by the mores of a patriarchal Victorian Britain. All were empowered to some extent through their travels. "Duty" may have been a primary motivation, or, indeed, a justification for their travels in West Africa, but the experience of travel itself must have been in various ways a liberating experience. The very opportunity to travel beyond Europe was rare for Victorian women. Once in West Africa, women travellers were empowered by virtue of their white skin and, in some cases, by their social class. Furthermore, they exercised an authority, often based on their gender and their position as "maternal imperialists", which they would not otherwise have had at home (except, perhaps, for the likes of Elizabeth Melville and Zélie Colvile who were used to exercising authority over domestic servants). Therefore, the basis of their empowerment in West Africa was not only predicated upon racial difference, but was also informed by class and gender difference.

Travel itself gave the women of this study the means to a voice in the public realm, since all were inspired to recount their experiences in published narratives. Slessor and Kingsley used the voice they acquired through their printed narratives to further their own ideas about West African affairs, and to have some impact on mission policy and political debate in Britain. Others, such as Melville, Foote and Colvile, merely added to the body of literature emanating from the empire, but their narratives were still of some significance since they were among the few written by women about West Africa during the nineteenth century. They were, therefore, of considerable interest at the time of their publication, if only, in several cases, for their novelty. More importantly for this study, the popular

geographies contained in all the narratives provide an insight into white women's experiences and understanding of West Africa during the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARADISE OR PANDEMONIUM?

"A wonderful stillness pervades these West African creeks. Except for the gentle ripple of the water among the mangroves, hardly a sound was to be heard, and the only sign of life was afforded by an occasional crane, which, startled by the sound of oars, reluctantly abandoned his fishing and flew heavily away."<sup>1</sup>

"[We] set out on our river journey, under a full moon, threading our way along one of the labyrinths of creeks - a liquid silver path, walled on each side with straight lines of mangroves, dense black shadows, and weird, bare white roots and stems - a scene suggestive of mystery, and full of a strange beauty of its own."<sup>2</sup>

"The West Coast of Africa is like the Arctic regions in one particular, and that is that when you have once visited it you want to go back there again; and now I come to think of it, there is another particular in which it is like them, and that is the chances you have of returning from it at all are small, for it is a *Belle Dame sans merci*."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Introduction: British women travellers in West African landscapes**

Landscape description was a subject to which women travellers chose to devote extensive passages. Textual constraints on the production and reception of the text may have influenced the construction of copious descriptions of the physical environment in the narratives of Victorian women travellers, but at the same time there was a certain amount of self-determination on the content of their narratives. The fact that Kingsley was able to enter into scientific and political debate suggests that, even if these textual constraints had not existed, many women travel writers would still have avoided more robust and modern, and by implication more directly political and, therefore, feminist forms of writing. What becomes important, therefore, is a recognition of the constraints on the production and reception of the

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<sup>1</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Constance Larymore (1908), A Resident's Wife in Nigeria, London: Routledge, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), Travels in West Africa, London: Virago, p. 11.

texts, but also the significance of differences between the women, based on personality and experience, and the ways in which these differences produced variations in their landscape descriptions.

The conventions of the time exercised some influence on the language employed in landscape descriptions by women travellers. For the most part, they did not employ in these descriptions the sexual metaphors often found in travel accounts by men at this time;<sup>4</sup> the language of penetration, conquest and domination was a language generally not employed by women. Instead they "attempted to combine the excitement of the unpredictable attaching to exploration" with "the pleasure of knowing where one is".<sup>5</sup> From their narratives it is clear that white women travellers considered themselves observers and describers of the physical environment, rather than confronting and doing battle with their surroundings in an effort to establish dominion over them. However, the very acts of observing and describing have implications for the relative positions of power attained by white women abroad; observation and description were also means of mastering and appropriating the landscapes of West Africa.<sup>6</sup> Landscape descriptions in the travelogues of British women give an indication of the varying levels of their attachment to and involvement in West Africa, and the different ways in which these women related to the physical environments they described. Among the women of this study there is a stark contrast between Melville, Foote, Larymore and Colville on the one hand, who placed themselves outside the physical environments they observed and commented on, and Slessor and Kingsley on the other hand, who positioned themselves very much within the landscapes they described. While the latter travelled into the interior of West Africa, the former were to some extent geographically external to West African environments.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Rebecca Stott (1989), "The Dark Continent: Africa as female body in Rider Haggard's adventure fiction", *Feminist Review*, 32, pp. 69-89 *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Fussell (1977), *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Louise Pratt (1992), *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, pp. 119-143.



Landscape descriptions in the narratives of Foote and Colvile were drawn mainly from their observation from the sea in the course of their travels around the coast, and both Melville and Foote lived in coastal towns (Freetown and Lagos respectively), rarely travelling inland. In the narratives of these women there is a strong sense of their externality to the landscapes they described; they did not appear to have felt comfortable in West Africa and seem not to have identified with the landscapes they encountered. West Africa was perceived as Other.

In the case of Melville, the fear of the climate of West Africa and its supposed debilitating effects on Europeans, a belief which was prevalent in the 1840s at the time of her travels, kept her indoors for much of the time, further enhancing the sense of distance between herself and the West African environment. She wrote:

A person may live for years here, but... return to Europe at the end of that time with the impression of having merely had for so long, a moving panorama of tropical scenery and figures before him... This will be the case with me; for it is quite impracticable... to tempt braving the climate.<sup>7</sup>

When compelled to move to the hills outside Freetown in an attempt to find a more salubrious atmosphere, Melville's sense of distance and loneliness was heightened. She wrote after one of her few excursions outdoors:

On coming within view of our own house again, the smiling plain below still open to our gaze, the house so strange and solitary, perched on the very pinnacle of that oddly-shaped hill, so unlike the social dwellings which shelter our fellow creatures in the Sierra Leone capital, I felt more than usual what a complete out-of-the-world place our present habitation is, eight hundred feet above the level of the sea.<sup>8</sup>

Intrinsic to Melville's relationship with the physical environment was her sense of the imperial frontier, her belief that Sierra Leone was a small island of "civilisation" in a sea of barbarism and slavery, and that she and the other Britons in Sierra Leone were responsible for extending the frontier of "civilisation" further

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Melville (1968), A Residence at Sierra Leone, London: Frank Cass, p. 267.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

into West Africa. This notion of the imperial frontier heightened her sense of displacement and lack of identity with the surrounding physical environment; such feelings were often revealed in her landscape descriptions. On several occasions she contrasted the order and familiarity of the European settlements to the natural landscapes beyond. For example, she wrote:

There lay... immediately beneath us the race-course, ...the many little bays on our own side of the estuary, several villa-like mansions, with their cultivated grounds formed a pleasing contrast to the vast continent beyond, where, as far as the eye could reach, nothing was to be seen except forest and jungle, among which partial glimpses of creek and river shone like so many embowered lakes.<sup>9</sup>

For Melville, West African landscapes were attractive, but remained above all strange and unfamiliar.

Zélie Colvile was also struck by the strangeness of her surroundings. In the course of her voyage around Africa, one of her few excursions from the coast inland took her into the Oil Rivers and the creeks around the trading town of Bonny. Her descriptions of the mangroves along the Bonny River were almost Conradian in their evocation of mystery and impenetrability:

[D]ark-green foliage, perched on top of a framework of earthless roots present a strange and unnatural appearance even by day; and in the twilight, magnified and rendered indistinct by the rising mist, these tangled roots look like bunches of some writhing reptile pendant from the dark walls that hem the narrow stream on either side.<sup>10</sup>

Although Colvile alluded to the "wonderful stillness" of the creeks and the "glorious vegetation" that lined their banks,<sup>11</sup> she seemed less comfortable among the swamps and dense vegetation than she did when viewing West Africa from the decks of a steamer. She found the Bonny estuary bewildering and disorienting. She wrote, "[T]he creeks [became] narrower, and much more intricate; and in the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>10</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), pp. 313-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

utter absence of landmarks, one wondered how anyone could find his way about this watery labyrinth".<sup>12</sup>

The sense of dislocation from the physical environment is also found in Constance Larymore's narrative. Larymore is somewhat unique among the women of this study in that she tended to adopt what Mary Louise Pratt refers to as the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position in her landscape descriptions. Pratt argues that "it is hard to think of a trope more decisively gendered" than this approach to describing landscapes; "explorer-man paints/possesses newly unveiled landscape-women".<sup>13</sup> The "promontory descriptions" that Pratt sees as an inherent part of the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope, however, occur throughout Larymore's text, and, on occasions, she made exaggerated claims about her achievements. For example, she described her procession through the forests of northern Yoruba as "a very interesting experience, penetrating this silent forest, where *no human being* had passed before".<sup>14</sup> Larymore's adoption of this particular narrative style stemmed from the fact that she positioned herself as a female "discoverer/explorer" of vast areas of Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria. She wrote, "It certainly was a step in the darkest dark; no Englishwoman yet had gone where I meant to go, or done what I hoped to do: we knew little or nothing of the conditions of life before us except that it was "rough, very rough!"<sup>15</sup> As with Elizabeth Melville in Sierra Leone, Larymore positioned herself on the imperial frontier in Northern Nigeria, a frontier that her husband was partly responsible for rolling back through the imposition of a British administration. Although white men had travelled through Northern Nigeria for decades, Larymore emphasised her position as the first white woman to travel from the southern forests to the deserts in the north, and thus was able to depict herself as discover/explorer. In this guise, the "monarch-of-all-I-

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 319.

<sup>13</sup> Pratt (1992), p. 213.

<sup>14</sup> Constance Larymore (1908), p. 21 (my emphasis).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

survey" trope, which Pratt suggests is an essentially masculine *genre* of travel writing, became accessible to Larymore. As part of a military expedition to suppress indigenous populations, she was also aware of her relative position of authority within Nigeria. Her sense of her own superiority and of her presence on the imperial frontier are apparent in her landscape descriptions. For example, she described the view at Egga:

I had a glorious and uninterrupted view of mile upon mile of grassland, flanked in the distance by the curious flat-topped hills at Padda. The distance was marked only by the "wire road", the telegraph line leaving Egga and disappearing into the pearly iridescent Harmattan mists in an ever diminishing perspective - the one link with civilisation.<sup>16</sup>

Mary Louise Pratt argues that within the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope three conventions can be identified which create qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer's achievement. These conventions are recognisable in Larymore's landscape descriptions. Firstly, the landscape is "aestheticized", the view is seen as a painting and the description is ordered in terms of background and foreground. Secondly, "density of meaning" is sought, particularly through the modification of nouns. Larymore's "pearly" mists (and on other occasions, "pearly blue haze" (p. 71), and "emerald green" plains (p.112)) tie the landscape to her home culture, "sprinkling it with little bits of England". Finally, the metaphor of the painting is important in terms of Larymore's "mastery" of the scene. Larymore became a verbal painter reproducing a scene for others; what she saw was all there was. The landscape was ordered with reference to her vantage point. The "ever-diminishing perspective" to which she referred privileged her position as observer. As Pratt argues, the observer has the power "if not to possess, at least to evaluate this scene".<sup>17</sup> These conventions are repeated throughout Larymore's narrative. She even advised her readers on the best time to obtain this panoramic view of the landscape:

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>17</sup> Pratt (1992), pp. 204-5.

autumn is almost the best time of the year to "see the country"; in the farms the guinea-corn was just beginning to ripen and droop its massive plumes of grain, ...and we got magnificent views of miles of wooded hill and plain unrolling themselves into the dim blue distance.<sup>18</sup>

Pratt suggests that the panorama is a device for seeing the country as a future colonised country, and thus by including panoramic scenes Larymore arrogated to herself the power of the coloniser.<sup>19</sup> She also used other conventions of exploration narrative which perhaps were not as readily available to the women who travelled in the nineteenth century. She described herself surmounting geographical barriers such as the rapids on the Upper Niger:

At the worst point, where the whole face of the river appeared to be barred with a rush of falling waters, and no smallest passage was visible amidst the tumbling foam, the canoes were hauled under the steep bank, and their entire contents bundled out thereon, we, the passengers, clambering, by the aid of roots and branches, to a place of some security, where we sat on the warm sand and watched the manoeuvres down below.<sup>20</sup>

Here Larymore confronted the landscape, the rapids were obstacles which she must overcome in order to progress on her journey. On other occasions, she described herself as "marching" into the towns of Northern Nigeria, identifying herself with the British military expedition that had facilitated her travels. Furthermore, whilst in Kabba she wrote, "Outside the town, there is a little stretch of forest belt, and, as no one has ever disputed its possession with me, I am pleased to consider it exclusively my own property".<sup>21</sup> She referred to this forest as "my "kingdom"". Significantly, Larymore "claimed" this land not for Britain but for herself; she claimed it not for its potential wealth, but because of the beauties of both flora and fauna that were contained within the forest. Thus the convention of laying claim to territory, which Pratt views as a masculine convention, was tempered by her

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<sup>18</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> See also Timothy Mitchell (1988), *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, for further discussion on the "imperial gaze".

<sup>20</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

delight in the physical environment; her desire to possess was rooted in the aesthetic beauty of the landscape she encountered. However, this metaphorical claiming of land indicated how Larymore placed herself in a position of power and authority in relation to the landscapes that she described.

Despite the presence of such conventions in Larymore's narratives, there was a certain ambivalence in her text. For example, she wrote:

Picture to yourself a green - truly emerald green - plain, holding an area of, roughly, ten square miles, dotted with palm trees, their tall slender stems crowned with crests of graceful drooping plumes, and bearing a respectable fortune in the palm-oil contained in the closely clustering bunches of nuts on each tree. Hundreds of acres are under cultivation... Away, beyond, rise the blue hills, in a huge circle, jealously shutting in this little green paradise from the tiresome world of restless white folks, who would take count of time, make roads, try to introduce sanitation and otherwise employ themselves in fruitless and unnecessary works to the dire discomfort of the peaceful denizens of peaceful places!<sup>22</sup>

Larymore's ambivalence is clear in passages such as this. As a wife of a military administrator in Nigeria she acquired freedoms and a degree of authority that would not have been available to her in Britain, yet she expressed her worries about the impact of British economic and cultural imperialism, and the colonial administration her husband was helping to impose, upon the very landscapes and peoples she was observing. Larymore was clearly a romantic and wished to see the landscapes she encountered remain unchanged, yet she realised that British imperialism, in which she played a part, would have a drastic effect upon the pace of life in Nigeria.

As with Larymore, Mary Slessor and Mary Kingsley were also romantics, but their relationship with the physical environments of West Africa was on a more personal and spiritual level than the other women of this study. Whereas the likes of Melville, Colvile and Larymore were geographically distanced from the landscapes they observed, Slessor and Kingsley travelled deep into the West African forests, placing themselves within the landscapes they described. A

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

panoramic view was impossible in the dense rainforests of southern Nigeria.

Mary Slessor's movement away from the coastal towns into the unexplored forests of Calabar gave her the opportunity to construct epic visions of her local landscapes, and of her own achievements within these landscapes, much in the style of Constance Larymore. Slessor envisaged herself on the frontier between "wilderness" and "civilisation". Beidelman suggests that it was the overland progression from the coast to the interior that was the *rite de passage* into African reality and thus a journey that was constructed in epic terms.<sup>23</sup> Missionary literature in West Africa added to these heroic narratives; the epic accounts of missionary endeavours had, by the late nineteenth century, become an established European *genre*, alongside popular travel and exploration narratives. "This was a literature of the imperial frontier, a colonising discourse that titillated the Western imagination with glimpses of radical otherness which it simultaneously brought under intellectual control".<sup>24</sup> Reports told that, "The print of the Missionary's foot is as yet only in the sand of Africa's shore. Oh there is not in the entire world a field more needful than this. Its numerous millions, lying in the blood, appeal to us for sympathy and help".<sup>25</sup> Later, David Livingstone came to embody the spirit of the frontier in West Africa, combining both religion and commerce in his fight against the "darkness" of Africa. The frontier sense of personal freedom and independence was of fundamental importance to Slessor. However, her accounts of her progression inland were rarely heroic and she seldom depicted the physical environment as a series of obstacles to be confronted and overcome. Instead, Slessor saw West Africa as a land of magnificent beauty, but with a climate of some hardship for Europeans. Her romanticism led her to view the countryside as a sanctuary, and the notion of the "wilderness" was an important part of her thinking. Having lived in the slums of Dundee, she yearned for the peace of the

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<sup>23</sup> T.O. Beidelman (1982), Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Comoroff and John Comoroff (1988), "Through the looking-glass: colonial encounters of the first kind", Journal of Historical Sociology, 1, 1, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Missionary Record, January 1846, pp. 3-4.

countryside, and initially found it in Calabar. Her mourning for the passing of "the romantic Old Calabar of my youth"<sup>26</sup> illustrated that there was an element of ambivalence in Slessor's position, for her presence in West Africa helped to "open up" the interior to British officials, and she was part of the imperialism that had changed the pace of life in Nigeria which she now lamented.

Slessor's relationship with the physical environment was on a personal and spiritual level. She arrived in Calabar for the first time during the rainy season, but the brilliant sunshine and the beauty of her surroundings misled her into describing the climate as "delightful".<sup>27</sup> As one of her biographers put it, "The warm luxuriant beauty of Calabar contrasted strangely with the grey streets of... Dundee".<sup>28</sup> Though she would soon change her opinion of the climate, Slessor remained captivated by the effulgence of the natural environment. During her first months in Calabar she took long walks into the bush and delighted at the tropical plants, brilliantly plumaged birds, flaming sunsets and the noises from the forest at night. The landscapes of Calabar appealed to the romantic side of Slessor's nature, and she was even moved to write poetry about her surroundings.<sup>29</sup> Her love of nature was deeply rooted in her upbringing. For her the countryside represented an escape, both from the demands placed upon the urban poor, and from the confines of an unhappy home. As a Sunday school teacher in Dundee, she often took her charges into the countryside,<sup>30</sup> which suggests that her training may have exposed her to Victorian ideas about the education of the poor and their

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<sup>26</sup> See p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> James Buchan (1980), The Expendable Mary Slessor, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> D.M. McFarlan (1946), Calabar. The Church of Scotland Mission, 1846-1946, London: Nelson, p. 93.

<sup>29</sup> Basil Miller (1946), Mary Slessor. Heroine of Calabar, Michigan: Zondervan, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> W.P. Livingstone (1916), Mary Slessor of Calabar. Pioneer Missionary, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 10.



relationship with their physical environment.<sup>31</sup>

Although she was a romantic, Slessor held contradictory views about the physical environment of Calabar. She wrote to friends, "I feel drawn on and on by the magnetism of this land of dense darkness and mysterious, weird forests".<sup>32</sup> Despite her delight in her surroundings, Slessor's descriptions of "terrors" in the bush, and the "dark" and "mysterious" forests are reminiscent of depictions of West Africa as the heart of the Dark Continent, a land of intense beauty concealing hidden dangers to those attempting to penetrate its secrets. Furthermore, when describing her progress into Aro country Slessor wrote, "First Itu, then the Creek, then back from Aro, where I had set my heart, to a solitary wilderness of the most forbidding description, where the silence of the bush has never been broken..."<sup>33</sup> Here, Slessor constructed an epic vision of the landscape and framed herself within it. As with Melville, she envisaged herself on the imperial frontier, carrying the torch of enlightenment into the "wilderness". However, an important consideration in understanding Slessor's landscape descriptions is the fact that for almost forty years West Africa was her home. If West Africa was a "wilderness", it was also a sanctuary. Scotland had only ever been "home" whilst her mother and sisters were alive; by 1895 all had died, and Slessor's home now, more than ever, became Calabar.<sup>34</sup> Her subjective responses to the landscapes she experienced were thus informed by her identification of these landscapes as "home".

Although Anna Hinderer lived as a missionary in West Africa for seventeen years, she did not share Slessor's identification of West Africa as "home". Hinderer is unique among the women of this study in that the landscape descriptions *within*

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<sup>31</sup> See David Matless's discussion of Vaughan Cornish in "Nature, the modern and the mystic: tales from early twentieth century geography", in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 16, 3, 1991, pp. 272-286.

<sup>32</sup> Miller (1946), p. 97.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Slessor at Ikot Obon, 28/2/06, Women's Missionary Magazine, June 1906, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer (1970), God and One Redhead. Mary Slessor of Calabar, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 109.

her narrative are very few and far between. The reason for this is that for most of their stay in Yoruba, the Hinderers were preoccupied with their own survival in the midst of illness, wars and the threat of starvation. Hinderer's narrative, therefore, focused more upon the difficulties of everyday life than it did on observations of her surroundings. However, one gains a sense of her romanticism from her comments on first arriving in West Africa:

Fancy the most lovely summer evening, our noble vessel at anchor in the stillest water possible, the little town of Bathurst lying before us, the most glorious sunset behind those little old houses, the sweetest breeze that ever blew passing over us. Imagine all this, and then you will have a picture of me.<sup>35</sup>

Romanticism was a common factor in the women's responses to the natural environment of West Africa, and this had its roots in the wider philosophical trend that was developing in Victorian Britain. As suggested, within nineteenth-century exploration literature not only were the landscapes of West Africa depicted as wild and chaotic in opposition to the ordered and controlled landscapes of Europe, they were also among the few places that could still be referred to as "the country" in contrast to an increasingly urbanised Europe.<sup>36</sup> However, it was in the works of Mary Kingsley that this romanticism was most strongly represented. Kingsley's beliefs were more akin to an eighteenth-century romanticism, which was characterised by "the delight in, and wonder at, the beauty and beneficence of nature", and "the ascendance of emotion and intuitive perception over reason"<sup>37</sup> than they were to Victorian romanticism. Her responses to the landscapes were on a deeply personal and aesthetic level. Her claims to be an objective observer of West Africa were undermined by the subjectivity of her responses.<sup>38</sup> However, as

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<sup>35</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, pp. 24-5.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Williams (1973), The Country and the City, London: Chatto and Windus, pp. 281-3.

<sup>37</sup> Donald Koster (1975), Transcendentalism in America, Boston: Twayne Publishers, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Alison Blunt (1994b), "Mapping authorship and authority: reading Mary Kingsley's landscape descriptions", in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose [eds], Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies, New York: Guilford Press, pp. 51-72.

Alison Blunt argues, Kingsley claimed subjective authority by stressing the individuality of her response. For example, she wrote:

To my taste there is nothing so fascinating as spending a night out in an African forest, or plantation; but I beg you to note I do not advise anyone to follow the practice. Nor indeed do I recommend African forest life to anyone. Unless you are interested in it and fall under its charm, it is the most awful life in death imaginable. It is like being shut up in a library whose books you cannot read, all the while tormented, terrified, and bored. And if you do fall under its spell, it takes all the colour out of other kinds of living.<sup>39</sup>

The beauties of the natural environment were accessible to Kingsley because she was "interested" in West Africa, and she allowed the landscapes to exercise their almost magical powers over her rather than seek to impose herself upon her surroundings. Kingsley located herself within the forests and attempted to blend with them instead of "mastering" them. She was emotionally connected to the landscapes through which she travelled, and insisted, "I am more comfortable there than in England".<sup>40</sup> Although raised by agnostics, her experiences in West Africa had instilled within her a deep private faith in pantheism; her favourite poem was Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*; she had read the works of Spinoza, whom she claimed was the "greatest European philosopher we have had",<sup>41</sup> and derived her spiritual beliefs from his works. For Kingsley, as with Spinoza, God was the immanent, not the transcendent, cause of all things; God was not the creator of things, but the things themselves.<sup>42</sup> After her journeys, Kingsley identified these beliefs as "firm African", and she maintained that she was happiest when among the "non-human things" of nature. She wrote of the Ogowé rapids:

The majesty of the scene fascinated me, and I stood leaning with my back against a rock pinnacle watching it. Do not imagine it gave rise, in what I

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<sup>39</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), 102.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, preface (p. xxi).

<sup>41</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897b), "West Africa from an ethnologist's point of view", Transactions of Liverpool Geographical Society, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> On pantheism, see Thomas McFarland (1969), Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 63.

am pleased to call my mind, to those complicated, poetical reflections natural beauty seems to bring out in other people's minds. It never works that way with me; I just lose all sense of human individuality, all memory of human life, with its grief and worry and doubt, and become part of the atmosphere. If I have a heaven, that will be mine.<sup>43</sup>

Here, her experience was almost transcendental, and very often in the forests of West Africa she would, as Wordsworth wrote, be "asleep in body and become a living soul". As one author puts it, "her innate pantheism attuned her to the spirituality of Africa; her innate loneliness was consoled by its solitudes".<sup>44</sup>

The transcendentalism evident in Kingsley's responses was also experienced by Mary Slessor and Constance Larymore. Slessor delighted in the Enyong Creek area, perhaps the most luxurious part of Calabar. The banks of the creek were covered in lillies, orchids and ferns, and blossom sometimes cascaded down from the trees above. Slessor particularly enjoyed travelling up and down these waterways. Describing one such occasion she wrote, "We turned the boat's head and glided into such a lake of aquatic plants and flowers as I believe could not be surpassed anywhere... On we ran as if in an extravagant dream..."<sup>45</sup> In less poetic moments, she described the scene as "awful bonnie!"<sup>46</sup> Where a panoramic view was impossible, Larymore's responses to her surroundings were on a more subjective and personal level. For example, she described her experience by a small pool in the middle of Kano as "one of those special moments that come to us all, perhaps only once in a lifetime",<sup>47</sup> and, whilst travelling upriver to Bussa, she described the Niger and its rich vegetation as "bringing to mind that strange indefinable world that is neither dream-land nor fairy-land, but which very surely

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<sup>43</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), p. 178.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Claridge (1982), preface to Virago edition of *Travels in West Africa*, p. xiv.

<sup>45</sup> In Christian and Plummer (1970), pp. 128-9.

<sup>46</sup> In Buchan (1980), p. 175.

<sup>47</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 79.

exists, and is sometimes momentarily revealed to most of us".<sup>48</sup>

On occasions, Kingsley's landscape descriptions are revealing of her views on imperialism. For example, she wrote:

these pioneer mangrove heroes may be said to have laid down their lives to make that mud-bank fit for colonisation, for the time gradually comes when other mangroves can and do colonise on it, and flourish, extending their territory steadily; and the mud-bank joins up with, and becomes part of, Africa.<sup>49</sup>

Inevitably, as other species colonise the mud-bank, the mangrove is doomed, but the great stretches of dead mangrove trees are the life-blood to succeeding generations of colonisers, and to Kingsley, this was the essence of its heroism. To her, the traders were probably the human embodiment of the mangroves, struggling to survive on the coasts of West Africa to establish a foothold upon which others could build, very often sacrificing their own lives in the process. In Kingsley's narratives, inanimate objects such as mangrove trees frequently take on human characteristics, reflecting her belief in animism and the living presences in nature. For example, she wrote of the Ogowé rapids:

it was a scene to make one believe in ghosts... [T]here from Boue and Lope to Otala Amagonga are the fearful spirits of the rapids and the Okanda gorge, ever quarrelling with each other, and with the rocks and with the whirlpools in between; ever ready to kill the man who comes near them; but there are other spirits there who are kinder to him and who call him off from danger, and these are the singing sands of Okanda.<sup>50</sup>

Kingsley's personal identification with the landscapes of West Africa seems contrary to the imperial strategies contained in Larymore's narrative, and whereas the latter privileged vision, Kingsley's descriptions included other sensual responses such as sound. As Alison Blunt points out, Kingsley's descriptions were less likely to "establish the landscape as a stage for the exercise of the imperial viewers'

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>49</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 90-1.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897c), "The forms of apparitions in West Africa", *West Africa*, 14, p. 341.

power" than they were to prompt self-questioning, "further highlighting her personal and reflexive sensitivity to landscape".<sup>51</sup> For example, Kingsley wrote that while she was sat on her verandah overlooking Victoria and taking in the scenery beneath her, she thought, "Why did I come to Africa?... Why! who would not come to its twin brother hell itself for all the beauty and charm of it".<sup>52</sup> The extent to which she identified with the landscapes of West Africa was revealed in a letter written shortly before she died, where she wrote:

I am no more a human being than a gust of wind... My people are mangroves, swamps, rivers, and the sea and so on - we understand each other. They never give me the dazzles with their goings on, like human beings do by theirs repeatedly.<sup>53</sup>

However, as with Larymore, Kingsley's position in West Africa was one of ambivalence. For example, in her ascent of Mungo Mah Lobeh, Kingsley sought a panoramic view. As Blunt argues, Kingsley's account of her ascent "illustrates the ambiguities of being constructed as inside and outside and moving between patriarchal and imperial discourses".<sup>54</sup> However, her ability to identify with the masculine, imperialist trope of the panoramic view was undermined by the vista being obscured by mist. Disappointed that her efforts to climb the mountain were unrewarded with a view from the top, Kingsley nonetheless appreciated the aesthetic effects of the mist which was "exceedingly becoming to the forest's beauty".<sup>55</sup> As Blunt argues, the landscape was feminised, "but its attraction lay in it being veiled rather than being unveiled".<sup>56</sup>

It is clear that differences existed in the ways in which various women

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<sup>51</sup> Alison Blunt (1994), Travel, Gender, and Imperialism. Mary Kingsley and West Africa, New York: Guilford Press, p. 97.

<sup>52</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 608.

<sup>53</sup> Kingsley to Matthew Nathan, 12/3/99, Nathan Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>54</sup> Blunt (1994), p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 570.

<sup>56</sup> Blunt (1994), p. 102.

positioned themselves in relation to the various landscapes through which they travelled. However, despite these differences, with the exception of Anna Hinderer, descriptions of the physical environment were of paramount importance in the narratives of all these women, and are often revealing of the personalities of the women themselves.

### **Challenges to the image of pandemonium**

The "quest" *genre* of travel writing featured prominently in the works of nineteenth-century explorers, and within these narratives there was a common style of landscape description. As Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow argue, "though florid in style, the descriptions are matter-of-fact and more analytical than romantic",<sup>57</sup> for many explorers the landscape was incidental to their exploits and provided only a backdrop for their adventures. Thus landscape descriptions were most eloquent when evoking the hazards and threats facing the explorer. For the explorers of West Africa, the image of the Dark Continent was often used as the backdrop for the heroic deeds of the protagonist. The dangers and uncertainties facing the explorer of West Africa meant that the physical environment was often depicted as a pandemonium lacking order and familiarity.<sup>58</sup> It has been asserted that women travellers in West Africa were denied access to the "quest" *genre* of travel writing, and, as a result, their relationship with their physical environment tended on the whole to be more harmonious and non-confrontational. As a consequence of this, their landscape descriptions offer up several challenges to the notion of a pandemonic West African environment.

A major feature of landscape descriptions by white women travellers in

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<sup>57</sup> Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow (1977), The Myth of Africa, Library of Social Studies, p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Brantlinger (1985), "Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", Critical Inquiry, 1, 12, p. 196.

West Africa was their recognition of order in the natural environment, and this is particularly evident in the narratives of Mary Kingsley. For Kingsley, West Africa was not a homogeneous confusion of nature, but a series of ordered physical environments, coastal, riverine, montane and forest environments, each presenting its own hardships, but all dramatic in their beauty. To her, the horizontal bands of colour in the landscape when viewed from the coast - the blue of the sea, the white of the surf upon the yellow of the sand, the brown and green of the mangroves, the deep green of the rainforest, and in the distance the purple of the mountains, were evidence of natural order rather than of pandemonium. Other women travellers remarked upon these bands of colour which formed their first impressions of West Africa from the Atlantic Ocean, and, although bereft of the poeticism of Kingsley's descriptions, still conveyed the impression of order. Colvile noticed the "long low line of palms, the strip of sand, and the fringe of breakers which are characteristic of this part of the African coast";<sup>59</sup> Larymore described the "sunshine, sapphire water, the fringe of low grey coast-line... [T]he huge swell swept shorewards, to break in its thundering surf, away by the grey palm-trees and the yellow sand".<sup>60</sup> The common perception was one of order rather than chaos. The layers of colour occur several times in Kingsley's descriptions, and even when she was in the rainforest she was able to recognise order in her surroundings. She wrote:

on either side there... [are] banks of varied tropical shrubs and ferns, behind which rise, 100-200 feet high, walls of grand forest; ...behind this again are the lovely foothills of Mungo, high up against the sky, coloured the most perfect, dark, lambent blue. The whole scheme of colour is indescribably rich and full in tone; the very earth under foot is a velvety-red brown, and the butterflies that abound show themselves off in the sunlight with their canary coloured, crimson, and peacock-blue liveries to perfection.<sup>61</sup>

Kingsley intimated that she felt more comfortable in West Africa than she did back

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<sup>59</sup> Colvile (1893), p. 285.

<sup>60</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896c), "The ascent of Cameroons Peak and travels in French Congo", Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society, p. 40.



in the crowds and traffic of London, and once back in England she yearned to return to West Africa. She wrote:

The charm of West Africa is a painful one. It gives you pleasure to fall under it when you are out there, but when you are back here, it gives you pain, by calling you. It sends up before your eyes a vision of a wall of dancing, white, rainbow-gemmed surf playing on a shore of yellow sand before an audience of stately cocoa palms, or of a great mangrove-walled bronze river, or of a vast forest cathedral, and you hear, *nearer* to you than the voices of the people around you, *nearer* than the roar of the city traffic, the sound of that surf that is beating on the shore down there, and the sound of the wind talking in the hard palm-leaves... and everything that is round you grows thin in the face of that vision, and you want to go back to that coast that is calling you, saying, as the African says to the departing soul of his dying friend, "Come back, this is your home".<sup>62</sup>

It seems that it was her perception of the natural order and organisation of the physical environment that Kingsley found most alluring about West Africa, and it could thus be argued that she employed a scientific, ecological "trope" in her landscape descriptions. This can be observed in her descriptions of Corisco Island, off the coast of Angola. For Kingsley, Corisco Island was not only very beautiful, but was also an exquisitely ordered physical environment. She wrote:

I have heard much of the strange variety of scenery to be found on this island: how it has, in a miniature way, rivers, lakes, forests, prairies, swamps and mountains, and our walk demonstrates to me the baldness of the truth of the statement... [Leaving the beach] we clamber up the bank and turn inland, still ankle deep in sand, and go through this museum of physical geography. First, a specimen of grassland, then along a lane of thickly pleached bush, then down into a wood with a little (at present) nearly dried up swamp in its recesses; then up out onto an open heath which has recently been burnt and is covered with dead bracken and scorched oil palms... There is such an elaborate completeness about this museum, and we have not even commenced the glacier or river departments.<sup>63</sup>

Similar descriptions are found in the narratives of other women travellers.

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Kingsley (1898c), "A lecture on West Africa", Cheltenham Ladies College Magazine, 38, p. 280.

<sup>63</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 385-6.

Although Elizabeth Melville's landscape descriptions frequently alluded to "wilderness", and she sometimes found the physical environment of West Africa threatening, she portrayed the landscapes around Sierra Leone as inherently ordered. She wrote:

There are three distinct phases of landscape here. The first is hill and dale, clothed in all their original exuberance of stately forest, and appearing in their primeval grandeur, as it were, fresh from the hands of their Maker; the second is the first denuded and laid waste by fire and hatchet... and that is the scenery I would gladly see changed; the third is the second rich in partial cultivation, and which, with the first, constitutes the peculiar beauty of the tropics, and in it I certainly desire no variety.<sup>64</sup>

Melville perceived those landscapes that remained in their natural state, and those that were only partially cultivated, as the most aesthetically pleasing; those landscapes which remained untouched, or "wildernesses", were equally ordered as those under cultivation. Constance Larymore was assured by a friend that "Nigeria was just like Accra - not a tree, not a blade of grass anywhere!" to which she responded, "I have often smiled to myself over that pithy saying, while marching through magnificent forests, and miles of open, grassy, park-like country!"<sup>65</sup> Larymore used the adjective "park-like" on several occasions to describe the landscapes of Nigeria, which suggests that she also perceived these landscapes as inherently ordered.

A further method employed by women travellers to dispel the myth of pandemonium was their attempt to familiarise their readers with unfamiliar landscapes. These attempts to "domesticate" West African wildernesses were by no means exclusive to women writers, but it is a theme that seems to run through many of the narratives by women travellers in West Africa. They alluded to familiar aspects of Western art and literature in creating their imagery. For example, Kingsley wrote of the scenery of the forest of the Ogowé, "It is as full of life and beauty as any symphony Beethoven ever wrote; the parts changing,

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<sup>64</sup> Melville (1968), p. 225.

<sup>65</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 2.

interweaving and returning".<sup>66</sup> Her publications and lectures abounded with such descriptions of the forest, "a vast, seemingly limitless cathedral with its countless columns covered, nay, composed of the most exquisite dark-green, large-fronded moss, with here and there a delicate fern embedded in it as an extra decoration".<sup>67</sup> Here climbing plants became "coverlets" spread over the forest to keep it dry; bush-ropes and lianas became "some Homeric battle of serpents that at its height had been fixed forever by some magic spell";<sup>68</sup> sunshine lit up the red sand-banks which then glowed like "Nibelungen gold" and the sun played with the mist in a vision of "Turneresque" beauty.<sup>69</sup> These frequent literary and artistic allusions provided a frame of reference through which her readers could familiarise themselves with the landscapes of West Africa. Kingsley also referred to popular authors of the time (Dickens, Twain, Dr. Johnson, Stevenson, Goethe, Kipling), and made unfamiliar landscapes recognisable by comparing them to the works of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites, re-emphasising her own romanticism. She even compared the sounds of the forest to symphonies by Beethoven and Handel.

Although West Africa was strange and exotic to her, on occasions Elizabeth Melville adopted similar techniques to Kingsley in relating the surroundings of Sierra Leone to her readers. She compared the "soft quiet beauty" of the beach landscape to paintings by Claude and Poussin,<sup>70</sup> and an approaching tornado was described as "great fleecy clouds rising above Mount Oriel; their curled outlines forming many a Hogarth-like portrait against the sky".<sup>71</sup> As with Kingsley, Melville sought to familiarise the sounds of the forest to her readers. She wrote, "When darkness sets in, the hum of millions of insects arose - and a very

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<sup>66</sup> In Cecil Howard (1957), Mary Kingsley, London: Hutchinson, p. 86.

<sup>67</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 570.

<sup>68</sup> Kingsley (1898c), p. 272.

<sup>69</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 239.

<sup>70</sup> Melville (1968), pp. 6-7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

unsentimental memory it brought along with it, being exactly like the noise of a large manufactory where spinning machines are constantly in motion".<sup>72</sup> White women travellers also used the technique of drawing analogies between British and West African environments in order to render them more familiar. Melville compared the deforested hills around Sierra Leone to those in Scotland, "where green herbage, heather, and furze appear in alternate patches",<sup>73</sup> and Mary Slessor compared the sunsets of Calabar with those in Scotland.<sup>74</sup> Zélie Colvile described a scene approaching Bonny Town in a similar manner: "Two minute's walk brought us to the margin of a deep pool surrounded by gigantic cotton trees, whose heavy shade and buttressed roots would almost have made one imagine one's self in some early English cloister".<sup>75</sup> Constance Larymore described a scene at Jebba in Northern Nigeria which:

...changed abruptly from low-lying grassy marsh land and warm sand-banks, where the wild duck and geese were wont to gather, to great beetling cliffs and walls of rock, which rose sheer from the still water, seemingly shutting in the river altogether, and giving the impression of one end of a highland loch.<sup>76</sup>

By painting their own pictures of West African landscapes and making them recognisable to their readers, women travellers challenged the image of the exotic and frightening pandemonium which characterised many descriptions of West Africa during the nineteenth century. The landscapes in the narratives of these women were ordered and, to some extent, familiarised and demystified.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Missionary Record, February 1887, p. 337.

<sup>75</sup> Colvile (1893), p. 303.

<sup>76</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 153.

## The pastoral myth and West Africa as "garden"

If there were similarities in the ways in which women travellers represented the physical environments of West Africa as ordered and familiar, there were also great differences in their designs upon their immediate surroundings. Kingsley and Slessor attempted to blend in with their surroundings, and related to them in a personal and subjective way. Kingsley, on occasions, felt that she was part of the landscape and identified with the physical environment on a deeply spiritual level. Sara Mills describes this more personalised form of writing as "going native", arguing that it was a challenge to male Orientalism and a different way of representing non-European landscapes.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Mary Slessor, this phrase is particularly apt. She lived in African huts, grew and ate African food, drank unboiled water, and attempted to become assimilated into the West African way of life as much as possible.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Kingsley and Slessor intended having as little impact upon the natural environment as was possible. This was not the case with some of the other women travellers in West Africa.

On occasions, and to differing extents, Larymore, Melville and Foote perceived West Africa as a potential garden which must be cultivated. In Victorian Britain suburbs were developing rapidly, and gardens came to be perceived as refuges amidst the enormity of urban sprawl, "bowers and oases in a desert of brick and mortar".<sup>79</sup> In West Africa, the garden was a retreat from the surrounding "wilderness", a small area of "civilisation" on the imperial frontier. If the urban gardens of England could only be imagined in relation to the city, which shaped and defined them by surrounding and threatening them, then the gardens in West

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<sup>77</sup> Mills (1991), p. 99.

<sup>78</sup> See Cheryl McEwan (1995), "'The Mother of all the Peoples': Geographical Knowledge and the Empowering of Mary Slessor", in Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Michael Heffernan [eds], Geography and Imperialism, Manchester: M.U.P. (forthcoming).

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Griffin (1977), "The Interior Garden and John Stuart Mill", in V.C. Knoopfmacher and G.B. Tennyson [eds], Nature and the Victorian Imagination, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 171.

Africa could only be imagined in relation to the surrounding "wilderness". Both survived under seige, "a passive persistence emphasized and symbolized, here, by closure and concentration".<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, "The garden served as a rich metaphorical link; English order and productivity amid the tropical chaos of overgrown jungle or scrubby savannah".<sup>81</sup> Sections within the narratives of Larymore, Melville and Foote were illustrative of attempts by white women to impose their own personalities as well as British order upon the landscapes of West Africa. They were all impressed by the creation of gardens and farmland in the forests of West Africa, and remarked upon the contrast between these ordered features and the surrounding wilderness. Melville particularly delighted in the gardens in Freetown which, despite their exoticism, reminded her of home:

I was enchanted by the luxuriance of the trees... Innumerable blossoms shone in all directions; one resembling a branch of red coral; another, still more gorgeous, with its festoons of orange and scarlet, reminded me of the feathers of the bird of Paradise; while the pale lilac colours of a third recalled the image of more northern gardens, and claimed a kindly remembrance of old familiar flowers, although the perfume of orange and lime trees was all around us.<sup>82</sup>

Here, Melville derived pleasure from a landscape that had been appropriated and transformed by the agents of British imperialism, but she also drew pleasure from natural landscapes. For her, the beauties of the surrounding vegetation were a consolation for what she perceived as the vagaries of the climate, and a source of comfort to her during her frequent illnesses. She found both the natural vegetation and the gardens and cultivated hillsides alluring. She wrote of the richness of her surroundings where:

fruits and flowers, which attain to but a dwarfish height when coaxed in our home hothouses, spring up and flourish spontaneously in all their own native loveliness... [W]here the broad-leaved plantain and banana form a natural arcade that breathes coolness even under the sun of Africa; there the paw-paw raises its slight shaft, which you wonder can support the green and

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>81</sup> Helen Callaway (1987), Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria, London: Macmillan, pp. 178-9.

<sup>82</sup> Melville (1968), p. 8.

golden load at top, while its yellow blossoms perfume the air... But it is not *here* and *there*. Mingled in one rich mass of harmonious colouring, and flinging their sweet scent to the welcome sea-breeze, orange and lime trees, spangled with snowy flowers, and bending under the weight of their gorgeous fruit, vie with those of the luxuriant mango, the bay-leaved coffee, the pale-stemmed guava, the densely-foliaged rose-apple... and many hundred others in the bush.<sup>83</sup>

The profusion of references to flowers in Melville's descriptions is significant. Gillian Rose makes the point that flower painting was the one *genre* in which women were well-represented as artists during the nineteenth century. She writes:

Women were accepted as artists in this area because there was thought to be some sort of reciprocity between artist and subject; women were often described as flowers by Victorian gallants, and the flower analogy places both women and their work in the sphere of nature. The encoding of nature as feminine not only gave rise to a series of visual representations of women as passive and fertile as nature itself then; it also limited the possibilities for women as artists.<sup>84</sup>

The same argument can, therefore, be applied when considering the landscape descriptions of women travel writers. By placing an emphasis on verbal portraits of flowers, Melville was ensuring that she did not transgress acceptable boundaries, and that she maintained a vision of her own femininity. Floral description was a particular narrative style that was accessible to her, and acceptable to her audience, and she used it extensively where other narrative styles, such as political discussion or scientific considerations, may have been deemed inappropriate by the conventions of the time. Furthermore, as both Pratt and Mills point out, this type of description, and the emphasis on naming vegetation and assembling knowledge about it, was a product of the process of imperial expansion. It depicted the landscape of West Africa as a "storehouse of random flora and fauna waiting for

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>84</sup> Gillian Rose (1993), Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 186.

the civilizing ordering of the narrator with her Western science".<sup>85</sup>

As with Melville, Foote tended to perceive the environs of Sierra Leone as a garden. She wrote, "Sierra Leone looks like one large garden, with its broad, red gravel walks, and groups of trees". Like Melville, she could admire both the forests (albeit from a distance) and the cultivated and "tamed" landscapes. She also took pleasure in her garden at Lagos, "full of oleander and acacia trees".<sup>86</sup> That both Melville and Foote portrayed the natural vegetation as "garden-like" in its appearance may be linked to the fact that they both travelled to West Africa with husbands who were involved in the anti-slavery effort. A good deal of anti-slavery literature tended to invoke the image of an Arcadian Africa, and both Melville and Foote were of the opinion that, were it not for indigenous slavery, Britain would have little reason to be in West Africa, British administrators would no longer have to suffer in a climate unsuited to Europeans, and West Africans could be left alone to live in peace. The romance inherent in the anti-slavery movement thus informed the landscape descriptions of Melville and Foote.

Constance Larymore had rather a different attitude. In her narrative, West Africa was not a "garden" but a "wilderness" which required taming. She took the theme of the garden a step further than both Melville and Foote, insisting that it was the duty of every Englishwoman resident in Africa to attempt to grow a garden as a constant reminder of England amid this "wilderness", if only for the benefit of future residents. She wrote whilst looking over her Preperanda at Lokoja, "I then and there took to heart the lesson which I have tried to practise ever since - the absolute *duty* of planting trees everywhere for the benefit of one's successors".<sup>87</sup> She even attempted to grow gardens in the most inhospitable of surroundings, such

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<sup>85</sup> Quote from Sara Mills (1994), "Knowledge, Gender and Empire", in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose [eds], Writing Women and Space. Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies, New York: Routledge, p. 41; see also Mary Louise Pratt (1992), pp. 29-31.

<sup>86</sup> Mrs. Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, p. 189.

<sup>87</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 7.



as her residency in Kano during the dry season.<sup>88</sup> Certain parallels can be drawn at this juncture between those women, such as Larymore, living on the imperial frontier in West Africa and the experiences of women living on the North American frontier. As Annette Kolodny writes:

After initial reluctance at finding themselves on the wooded frontiers..., women quite literally set about planting gardens in these wilderness places. Later, they eagerly embraced the open and rolling prairies of places like Illinois and Texas as a garden ready-made. Avoiding for a time male assertions of a rediscovered Eden, women claimed the frontiers as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity. Massive exploitation and alteration of the continent do not seem to have been part of women's fantasies. They dreamed, more modestly, of locating a home and a familial human community within a cultivated garden.<sup>89</sup>

Larymore was certainly attempting to create a "sanctuary for an idealized domesticity" on the imperial frontier of Nigeria. As mentioned in chapter 2, she devoted an entire section of her book to advising her readers how to grow a flower garden, a verandah garden, a vegetable garden, a lawn, and trees and shrubs in the climate of West Africa. The imposition of English order upon the physical environment appealed to Larymore. She described the changes at Lokoja from her first visit, when the white settlement was surrounded by "a waste of swampy ground, thickly covered with coarse, rank grass", to her visit five years later, when she found:

numbers of neat bungalows, well-tended little gardens, the swamp drained and converted into recreation ground, containing tennis courts, cricket pitch etc., good roads, and flowering trees and hedges, it is as pretty a little cantonment as one could wish to see...<sup>90</sup>

Larymore's intention was to create "little Englands" wherever she went in Nigeria, and believed it was the duty of the wife of the Resident to ensure that this task was undertaken, both for the increased comfort of their husbands, and for the

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> Annette Kolodny (1984), The Land Before Her. Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860, London: University of North Carolina Press, p. xiii.

<sup>90</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 9.

wider benefit to British imperialism in Africa. In her chapter on creating a lawn, she wrote:

It is said to be very dear to the heart of every Englishman to own a lawn, and it certainly should be doubly so to John Bull in exile; in a tropical country well-kept turf is much to be desired, there is nothing as cool and refreshing to tired eyes dazzled with the glare of the sunshine and baked earth, and perhaps, nothing that gives such a home-like and cared-for look to a West African compound.<sup>91</sup>

Such responses to the landscape were in marked contrast to the more harmonious relationships sought by Kingsley and Slessor.

### **"Edenic" West Africa or "The Land of Death"?**

This chapter has argued that the descriptions of the physical environment by white women travellers were extremely complex, and it is virtually impossible to define a single "feminine" response to West African landscapes. However, despite the preoccupation with the notion of the "garden" amongst some women travellers, most, with the exception of Larymore, avoided the Western preoccupation with establishing control over the physical environment. They also avoided what Susan Greenstein refers to as the "Conradian appropriation of Africa as a metaphor for Western decadence".<sup>92</sup> Popular authors such as Henty, Haggard, Conrad and Cary sent their heroes to Africa to find a career, to make their fortune, to hunt big game, or simply to have fantastic adventures; as the work of the great explorers and the diaries of colonial administrators testify, historically Africa was the playground in which European men could fulfil their childhood fantasies. The protagonists of the literature of empire sought to test their manhood in the wildernesses of Africa, and they always returned victorious. This chapter has argued that, on the whole, white women travellers did not depict the landscapes of West Africa as a series of tests

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>92</sup> Susan Greenstein (1982), "Sarah Lee: the woman traveller and the literature of Empire", in A. Dorsey, K. Egejuru and N. Arnold [eds], Design and Intent in African Literature, Washington: Three Continents Press, p. 138.

and obstacles to be overcome on their adventures. In general, women travellers also avoided depicting West Africa as an earthly paradise, a facet of the myth of the pastoral which was particularly prevalent in the works of anti-slavery advocates and the early missionaries.

The women of this study were aware of the vagaries of the West African climate, and one can derive from their descriptions their perception of the beauties of the physical environment, but also of the hazards they held for Europeans. For example, Zélie Colvile's chapter on West Africa was entitled rather sensationally "The Land of Death"; Mary Slessor spent the greater part of her thirty-nine years in West Africa suffering from fever and disease; Elizabeth Melville, whose descriptions of the cultivated hillsides of Sierra Leone perhaps came closest to evoking Edenic images of the landscape, was convinced that disease and death were the price to be paid for the exquisite beauty of West Africa,<sup>93</sup> and as a consequence of illness she was often homesick. Despite her pantheism and, at times, transcendental relationship with the physical environment, Mary Kingsley recognised the psychological malaise that could affect Europeans in West Africa, and although she felt at home in the forests, she realised that for those who could not identify with their surroundings, life there was a living hell. She wrote:

A more horrible life than a life in such a region for a man who never takes to it, it is impossible to conceive; for a man who does take to it it is a sort of dream life... Mind you it is intensely beautiful, intensely soothing, intensely interesting if you can read it and you like it, but for a man who cannot and does not it is a living death.<sup>94</sup>

Anna Hinderer encapsulated the dangers of the climate when she wrote, "Its like a tiger, the way it leaps on one".<sup>95</sup> After five years in West Africa she wrote, "It seems at times almost a question whether we can still be in the land of the living...

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<sup>93</sup> Melville (1968), p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899a), West African Studies, London: Macmillan, p. 39.

<sup>95</sup> Hinderer (1872), p. 91.

the heat and oppression is terrible".<sup>96</sup> The climate of West Africa, which was believed during the nineteenth century to be the cause of fever, disease and death, was the one aspect of the physical environment which drew the darkest descriptions from women travellers.

Sickness was often the cause of these sour meditations on the climate. As a consequence of their long duration in West Africa, the missionaries suffered most from the effects of the climate, and Mary Slessor particularly so. Her final destination was Ikpe, located on a mosquito-laden creek. Slessor's house was too close to this creek and, consequently, she was constantly fever-ridden. Her discomfort was exacerbated by periodic affliction with erysipelas; on one occasion she lost all of her red hair as a result. On another, when she was covered in boils from head to foot, she wrote, "Only sleeping draughts keep me from going off my head".<sup>97</sup> Her spirits were often low during the wet season, and at these times her descriptions of the physical environment lost their enthusiasm. She wrote:

The rain is drizzling down again, and I have a heavy dose of cold on my chest, and must go inside. One blink of sunshine comes, then a drizzle of rain and then a blink, and again a downpour, and all the time we are in a mist for it is never dry under the bush... I wish this month were past, to let us get a dry day now and then.<sup>98</sup>

However, the dry season brought greater hardships, with the dust-laden harmattans blowing down from the Sahara and draining her energy. She wrote of her longing for a "wee blink of home", and then declared, "But though the tears are coming at the thought, you are not to think for one moment that I would take the offer were it offered to me! A thousand times no!"<sup>99</sup> Her homesickness never lasted long, and despite the insalubrity of her surroundings she could still evince the beauty of

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<sup>96</sup> Anna Hinderer to C.M.S., Ibadan, 17/5/55, David Hinderer Collection, Yoruba Mission/C.M.S. Papers, Birmingham University Archives.

<sup>97</sup> In Livingstone (1916), p. 253.

<sup>98</sup> Slessor to Mrs. Findlay, 19/8/13, Cairns Papers, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>99</sup> In Livingstone (1916), p. 62; Mary Slessor, "A missionary's testimony", extract from a letter to friends, Women's Missionary Magazine, March 1910, p. 67.

Ikpe. The town was surrounded by stately palms, of which Slessor wrote, "These palms are my first joy in the morning when the dawn comes up, pearly grey in the mist and fine rain, fresh and cool and beautiful".<sup>100</sup> At other times she compared Africa favourably to Britain. She wrote, "how would you feel if you never had a breath of wind? never a leaf stirring, and everything reeking with heat? It is very trying, but infinitely more preferable to your cold".<sup>101</sup>

Although the climate was often a source of fear and trepidation for women travellers, there was sometimes a certain fascination with its emanations. For example, the typhoons on the coast were particularly hazardous but at the same time beautiful. Melville wrote that the tropical storms "now make me tremble, though at first I used to watch their progress with admiration".<sup>102</sup> Foote described them as "a wonderful and beautiful thing to witness". She wrote:

The sky became inky black, and the sea was of the same murky hue, making the crested waves gleam like snow. I stood on the verandah watching the approach of the wild wind, and was lost in awe and admiration of the beautiful sight presented by the harbour. In a moment the wind seemed to burst from above and lash the waves into fury. They sped before the typhoon at lightning speed, in a white line of foam, and the whole sheet of water, before so dark and quiet, became violently agitated. I was so absorbed in the beauty of the spectacle that I forgot how near the wind was upon us, when suddenly it clapped against the side of the house with a rushing sound, indescribably grand, and I found myself nearly blown off the verandah.<sup>103</sup>

Therefore, even the supposedly deadly climate of West Africa produced spectacular sights and beautiful experiences that were recounted in travel narratives by British women. Although all these women had deeply aesthetic responses to the landscapes they encountered, they did not gloss over the very real dangers they believed the

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<sup>100</sup> In Miller (1946), p. 123.

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Slessor at Ikot Obon, 25/1/14, Women's Missionary Magazine, February 1915, p. 78.

<sup>102</sup> Melville (1968), p. 69.

<sup>103</sup> Foote (1869), pp. 214-5.

climate posed for Europeans. To them, West Africa was neither paradise nor pandemonium.

## Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that various literary traditions in Victorian Britain influenced the ways in which women travellers wrote about the physical environment of West Africa. Victorian romanticism, ideas about the imperial frontier, and notions of the "wilderness" and "sanctuary" all exerted powerful influences upon the narratives of these women, and it could be argued that these were standard ways of representing the physical environment in travel literature at the time. However, to a certain extent women's descriptions of the physical environment were different from standard Victorian travel texts. Their romanticism was overtly expressed because they were constrained to emphasise their landscape descriptions rather than to engage in scientific observations or political comments. As Sara Mills suggests, the scientific narrator figure was not unavailable to women travel writers, but was constantly undermined by other elements within their texts.<sup>104</sup> Nineteenth-century convention held that women's travel narratives were not supposed to be "scientific" and authoritative, but, rather, supposed to be amateurish.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, an emphasis on landscape description was a means of maintaining this amateurish style. This is recognisable as a common characteristic in travel literature by women travellers in West Africa (only Anna Hinderer did not dwell to any great extent upon descriptions of her surroundings), as are their attempts to familiarise landscapes rather than exoticise them.

Women's experiences on the imperial frontier were different from those of male travellers; on the imperial frontier they confronted not only unfamiliar Others

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<sup>104</sup> Mills (1991), pp. 77-8.

<sup>105</sup> The presence of disclaimers within the prefaces to travel narratives by women is discussed in chapter 3.

(vegetation, landscapes and peoples), but also "unfamiliar selves".<sup>106</sup> For many of these women, travel was a liberating experience, and their travels were psychological journeys of self-discovery as well as physical journeys in West Africa. The most obvious example of this was Mary Kingsley and her deeply spiritual meditations on, and identification with, the West African environment. Furthermore, the depiction of West Africa as a "garden" in travel texts written by women after 1840 was unique to women travellers such as Melville and Foote, for by mid-century West Africa had come to be popularly perceived within Britain, and particularly by explorers, travellers and the formulators of imperial policy, as the heart of the Dark Continent. Women travellers tended to avoid depictions of West Africa as pandemonium, and relied more upon evoking the intricate beauties of their surroundings. They also avoided depicting West Africa as Eden. However, as Annette Kolodny argues, although they "shied away from paradisaical projection, they nonetheless seemed eager to tend the garden".<sup>107</sup> Therefore, although they often portrayed West African landscapes in standard ways, white women travellers made important contributions to visions of the physical environment of West Africa.

Despite the common emphasis on landscape description in the narratives of white women travellers, it cannot be argued that there was a single "feminine" response to West African environments. This chapter has highlighted some of the major differences in the responses of women travellers in West Africa. Some of the women, such as Larymore, Foote, Colvile, and to a certain extent Melville, felt the need to maintain a distance between themselves and the landscapes they observed. Others, such as Slessor and, particularly, Kingsley, had much more personal relationships with the physical environment. Indeed, John Flint has commented on Kingsley, "No other writer, in my estimation, has so successfully evoked the beauty of the African forest, the steady tempo of the rivers, or the sounds and stirrings of

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<sup>106</sup> Mary Louise Pratt (1985), "Scratches on the face of the country; or what Mr. Barrow saw in the land of the bushmen", *Critical Inquiry*, 12, p. 121.

<sup>107</sup> Kolodny (1984), p. 47. Kolodny discusses women on the American frontier, but her theories can be equally applied to women travellers on the imperial frontier in Africa.

the African night".<sup>108</sup> The clarity and depth of Kingsley's imagery was inspired by her intimacy with her surroundings. Landscape descriptions were often revealing of the different circumstances in which the women travelled, and their views on British imperialism in West Africa. Elizabeth Melville depicted West Africa as almost Edenic, but believed that its climate was unfit for Europeans, who were making sacrifices for the sake of eradicating slavery, and that it should be left alone once this had been achieved. Foote and Colvile shared Melville's feeling of not really belonging in West Africa. Constance Larymore was the only woman to adopt the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" trope in her landscape descriptions. She was able to do so because Nigeria had been conquered by the British, she was part of a colonial expedition, and she was perhaps more aware of her power as a white woman in West Africa. Her attempts to impose British style gardens upon the landscape were an emanation of this feeling of power. Furthermore, the miasmatic theory of disease in West Africa had almost died out at the time of Larymore's travels, and there was less fear of the physical environment. It was now perfectly feasible to encourage the creation and enjoyment of gardens in West Africa.

It is possible to detect a certain amount of ambivalence towards the physical environment in the narratives of some women travellers, particularly in those of Larymore, Kingsley and Slessor. All these women expressed a desire to see the landscapes of West Africa remain unchanged. In her narratives, Kingsley even attempted to disguise her own presence in these landscapes by placing herself within them and attempting to blend with them. However, these women could not blend into the landscapes through which they travelled simply because they were British and white. They knew that their very presence in West Africa was facilitated by the same British economic, cultural and political imperialism that was altering the landscapes of West Africa. Furthermore, these women did not question their right to be in West Africa, nor the implications of their description and textual appropriation of the landscapes through which they travelled. This ambivalence can

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<sup>108</sup> John E. Flint (1965), "Mary Kingsley", *African Affairs*, 64, pp. 156-7.



also be observed in descriptions of West African peoples and their customs by white women travellers.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHITE WOMEN AND RACE

"With this final experience of the simple black man we bade adieu to the confines of his garden."<sup>1</sup>

"A few negroes came on board, but they seemed a far more civilised set than those farther down the coast, and therefore not half so amusing and interesting."<sup>2</sup>

"One boy, who was a slave said "You can't kiss me, because I am black and you are white", and I gave him immediately two or three kisses, which amused him immensely."<sup>3</sup>

#### Introduction

In order to elucidate the different portrayals of West Africans by women travellers it is necessary to compare how they related to those whom they observed. As with their relationships with the physical environment, enormous differences existed in the amount and form of contact that Victorian women had with the various peoples of West Africa. For example, the missionaries, Hinderer and Slessor, had by far the most contact with West Africans over a long period of time, and they lived in close proximity to them. This is in direct contrast to the residents, such as Melville, Foote and Colvile, who tended to be more physically removed from local populations. In the course of their travels, Larymore and Kingsley had more direct contact with West Africans who acted as their guides, and, on occasions, both

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<sup>1</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, p. 124.

women lived in African settlements.<sup>4</sup>

Mary Kingsley, in particular, advocated close contact with the peoples of West Africa in order to comprehend more their cultures and customs, and this was facilitated by her status as an independent traveller in West Africa. Unlike, Constance Larymore who travelled with military expeditions, or Zélie Colville who travelled in the company of other tourists on board steamers around Africa, Kingsley only ever travelled with a small entourage, her guides never exceeding nine men.<sup>5</sup> This meant that she had greater opportunity for direct personal contact with the peoples she encountered on her travels. She believed that it was only through this proximity that an accurate understanding of West African peoples could be formulated. She wrote, "how impossible it is to understand the African, how unjust it is to judge him unless you will go and tackle him on his native bush-path".<sup>6</sup> For Kingsley, the only way to understand African peoples was to abandon any pre-conceived notions spawned by the rhetoric in Britain, and observe from the inside. She wrote of the intricacies of West African cultures:

Unless you live among the natives, you never get to know them; if you do this you gradually get a light into the true state of their mind-forest. At first you see nothing but a confused stupidity and crime; but when you get to see - well! as in the other forest - you see things worth seeing.<sup>7</sup>

Kingsley, therefore, argued that many of the prevailing views about West Africans were based on misconceptions through a lack of intimate contact. The preconceptions that she had of West Africans, which had been formulated in the context of the post-Darwinian debate about race in Britain, and from reading the

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<sup>4</sup> The relationships between white women and the women they encountered in West Africa is discussed in Cheryl McEwan (1994), "Encounters with West African Women: Textual Representations of Difference by White Women Abroad" in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose [eds], Writing Women and Space, New York: Guilford Press, pp. 73-100.

<sup>5</sup> Deborah Birkett (1987), "An Independent Woman in West Africa: The Case of Mary Kingsley", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, S.O.A.S., University of London, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Kingsley (1898c), "A lecture on West Africa", extracts of an address given at S.P.G. and S.P.C.K., from Cheltenham Ladies Magazine, 38, pp. 264-280.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Kingsley, (1982), Travels in West Africa, London: Virago, p. 103.

accounts of the likes of Richard Burton, were soon dispelled when she encountered West Africans first hand. Fyfe argues that Kingsley did not spend as much time among West African peoples as she herself liked to claim, instead spending the majority of her time in West Africa at European trading and missionary stations.<sup>8</sup> However, she did travel with West African guides and stayed in the villages of various ethnic groups, including the Fang, living in close proximity with the peoples of West Africa. Many of her observations were based on this close contact.

As mentioned previously, missionaries, by the very nature of their motivations for travelling to Africa, had the greatest proximity to the peoples of West Africa. Mary Slessor, in particular, made efforts to increase her contact with the peoples of the interior of Calabar. While she was in the coastal towns she visited the women's compounds, and often found herself sleeping overnight in one of the overcrowded huts. To increase her contact with the Calabar peoples, she moved from the coastal towns of the Cross River estuary into the villages of the interior, firstly to the Okoyong areas and then further north into the Enyong villages.<sup>9</sup> She quickly became assimilated into the pattern of life of the villages in which she relocated. She abandoned European clothing in favour of a simple sack dress, and cut her hair short for convenience. She ate indigenous foods, drank unboiled and unfiltered water, and lived in an African-style dwelling. As one source writes: "she quickly became a native... The old imperial type of missionary did not appeal to her and she was determined to get near to the natives. How better to accomplish this than becoming one".<sup>10</sup> Slessor's policy of living as near as possible to the peoples she was attempting to convert allowed her to live in the villages of Okoyong and Enyong for almost all of her forty years in West Africa.

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<sup>8</sup> Christopher Fyfe (1962), A History of Sierra Leone, London: O.U.P., 505-6.

<sup>9</sup> See Map 4, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Grampian (1965), Great Scot, issue 482.

Anna Hinderer lived for seventeen years in the Ibadan area of Yoruba, and also lived in close proximity to the Ibadani people. On several occasions, when David Hinderer was stranded in Ijebu and Lagos as a consequence of the Abeokuta wars, she was completely dependent upon the towns-people for food. Without a strong relationship with the Ibadani people she would probably have starved. She wrote, "So here I am alone. I think it says much for a town in Africa, of one hundred thousand inhabitants, that one white woman can be left alone, in perfect safety, and with no fear".<sup>11</sup> One particular comment by Hinderer summarises succinctly her opinions, and, it could be argued, those of Slessor, on the issue of race:

I feel that if I had twenty lives I would gladly give them to be the means of a little good to these poor but affectionate and well-meaning people, who, though black enough their skins may be, have never-dying souls... their black skin makes no difference to me.<sup>12</sup>

The wives of colonial administrators had the least contact with West Africans, the very nature of their roles in West Africa placing limits on their experiences. As Beverley Gartrell argues:

Women's range of contacts with Africans was often very much narrower than that of their working husbands... Thus the fear of the unfamiliar remained greater for wives than for their men. Whether through fear or other factors, many women remained profoundly ignorant of, and uninterested in, the life of those beyond the enclave, and even resentful of its penetrations. The very heaviness of the role-demands may have contributed to this narrowness. To be a successful wife, mother, home manager, hostess, mentor and guide to junior wives... with perhaps a little volunteer work added on, could easily fill one's days.<sup>13</sup>

The domestic responsibilities that these women had, therefore, conspired to keep them within the locality of the colonial enclave, and maintained the physical and emotional distance between themselves and the local populations. Unlike the dwellings of the missionaries, these colonial enclaves were not easily accessible to

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), p. 110

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> Beverley Gartrell (1984), "Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?" in Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener, *The Incorporated Wife*, London: Croom Helm, p. 182.

West Africans, and British women had little close contact with the local people. The same fears that prevented Melville from experiencing the landscapes of Sierra Leone to the full, the fear of the unknown, also prevented her from experiencing close contact with African peoples. Once she had moved out of Freetown to the sanctuary of Smith's Hill she was even more isolated. The only close contact that she, Foote and Colvile had with West Africans was through their household servants. Many of their jaundiced opinions of West Africans were based on the class snobbery involved in this relationship.

The differences between the women and their experiences of the peoples of West Africa lead one to expect that there were differences in the ways that they portrayed these encounters, and this is certainly the case. However, similarities are also apparent. One common factor amongst these women was that they were all observers from the outside; the fact of their white skin and the unequal power relations in the imperial setting ensured this fact. Even the likes of Mary Slessor, who, to some extent, became assimilated into the Calabar lifestyle, was by virtue of her skin colour an outsider. West Africans, through travel narratives and missionary reports, were to varying degrees objectified and appropriated by women travel writers. However, despite this fact, the distance between the women and the local peoples varied greatly. The residents were only ever able to view West Africans from an objective, removed vantage point. They very rarely mentioned conversations or close contact with West Africans. In contrast the missionaries and travellers established more personal relationships and were able to respond to West Africans on a personal, subjective level. Consequently, and as a result of the influence of the prevailing imperialist and racial theories of the various periods in which they travelled, portrayals of West Africans by white women varied greatly.

## Representing West African peoples

### *The denial of African individuality*

The very notion of the "African" in travel narratives testifies to a cultural bias which blinded the reader to ethnic and individual character. The construction of a mythical "African" meant the denial of any diversities of individualities within this category. During the nineteenth century all black people were placed in the "Negro" category, and little distinction was made between the differing populations of Africa, or indeed between Africans and Afro-Americans.<sup>14</sup> To deny the existence of difference was to create a homogeneous mass of people to which the same stereotypes could be applied. It also denied the existence of distinct African cultures and traditions; when stereotypes were applied, they applied to all.

The predisposition to generalise about Africans was strong during the nineteenth century. As the *Anthropological Review* put it, with reference to both the landscape and the peoples of Africa, "A sad monotony prevails".<sup>15</sup> It was generally believed that all Africans resembled one another physically, and they possessed "...no more individuality than other creatures which live in herds: examine a thousand minds, and you will always find the same cunning, curiosity, sloth, and... good-natured dishonesty".<sup>16</sup> In Victorian discourses on Africa, missionary reports, travel narratives and consular despatches, few Africans emerge as anything other than generic beings, and individual uniqueness is accorded only Europeans "whose activities are carried out against a background of comparatively indistinguishable Africans".<sup>17</sup> The only admittance of some African individuality came from those who admired the more war-like ethnic groups, in whom they

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<sup>14</sup> Douglas Lorimer (1978), Colour, Class and the Victorians. Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, Leicester University Press, pp. 82-86.

<sup>15</sup> In Christine Bolt (1971), Victorian Attitudes to Race, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>17</sup> H. Alan C. Cairns (1965), Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society, 1840-1890, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 115.

could recognise some similarities with the presumed British pluck and stoicism. "Those tribes who enslaved or raided neighbours, though criticized by Britons as a bar to their own influence, were infinitely preferable to those who allowed themselves to be victims".<sup>18</sup> In general, however, the individual was lost in the "tribe", and the "tribe" within the race. All Africans were alike, and all were equally inferior.

As would perhaps be expected, the women residents of this study were those writers most imbued with cultural bias and were most likely to deny the individuality of West African peoples. The women who had most contact with West Africans, the missionaries and the travellers, were able to relate to the people they met on an individual level and, for the most part, avoided the construction of a generic West African. The lack of contact by residents with local people, and their observations from a detached position, meant that their assertions were often sweeping and generalising.

This style of observation is most striking in the narrative of Mrs. Foote. Written in the late 1860s, her descriptions were heavily influenced by the developments in racial theory in Britain at this time, particularly the rise of scientific racism and the depictions of Africans as "bestial savages".<sup>19</sup> Foote's descriptions were overtly racist, but were not unusual for the time of her writing. For example, she wrote of encountering in Liberia "real *bona fide* savages, men adorned with feathers stuck in their wool... with no other clothing worth speaking of... wild looking men, all grinning and gesticulating like monkeys".<sup>20</sup> Such descriptions were typical of the 1860s. On several occasions she referred to

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<sup>18</sup> Bolt (1971), p. 146.

<sup>19</sup> The transition from depictions of Africans as "noble savages" to "bestial savages" during the nineteenth century is examined fully in chapter 6, since this transition is intimately connected to depictions of African cultures and customs.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), p. 182.



"excited gesticulating savages" with "wild piercing eyes",<sup>21</sup> constantly reemphasising the "savage" nature of the West Africans. Individuals did not feature in the text. She did write that, "The variety of races to be met with in Lagos, is very interesting to a stranger",<sup>22</sup> but then expanded only to draw comparisons between the muslims from North Africa, the coastal groups and the peoples of the interior.

The tone of Foote's language contrasts with that used by Elizabeth Melville, but the inability to differentiate between ethnic groups is common to both. Written in the 1840s, Melville's narrative was more in keeping with the philanthropic style of the anti-slavery literature. She ignored the individuality of the peoples of Sierra Leone, but her descriptions were couched in very different terms. She was "amazed" that her "waiting-woman" could distinguish people of different ethnic groups visiting the house, "for, excepting the Jollofs and Mandingoes, all the black people seem alike to me".<sup>23</sup> This was certainly reductionist; however, through dress and attitude she was able to differentiate the African settlers and the liberated Africans (former slaves), and at the end of her narrative she was able to make some comments on the differences between the Maroons, the Timmarees and the Foulahs.<sup>24</sup> Thus sweeping generalisations about West Africans were balanced to some extent by attempts to recognise differences between the many ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, and unlike Foote, Melville avoided framing her descriptions in overtly racist language.

In the course of her travels throughout Nigeria, Constance Larymore encountered many different ethnic groups, including Ashanti, Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani. Although observing from the outside, Larymore commented extensively

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 205, 207, 208.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Melville (1968), A Residence in Sierra Leone, London: Frank Cass, p. 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-277.

throughout her narrative on the differences between the various groups, their appearances and cultures. She also remarked upon the universal friendliness of the people she encountered. She wrote that she felt:

...infinitely more alone in Bond Street, where almost every brick and stone is familiar, than I could ever be in the busy streets of Kano, or any other city of Nigeria, which I might enter for the first time, where I should find two hands and one willing tongue all inadequate for the due return of the ceaseless shower of smiling salutations and greetings that would be poured upon me from every side. And this is by no means a tribute to any personal charms of mine. Any traveller, black-skinned or white, receives the same treatment as a matter of course.<sup>25</sup>

However, her only individual contact with West Africans was with her porters, and the emirs to whom she was introduced in Northern Nigeria. Her's was very much a "habits and customs" type of travelogue, and she was unable to make any comments based on individual relationships with West Africans.

Mary Kingsley was perhaps the most adept at highlighting the complex nature of West African ethnic groupings, and the distinctions between various indigenous peoples, although at times she supported her belief in essential racial difference by referring to "the African character". Deborah Birkett has accused Kingsley of reducing the individuality of her guides by giving them names which reflected idiosyncratic physical characteristics or mannerisms. For example, she named her companions on her journey up the Ogowé "Grey Shirt", "Silence", "Pagan" and "Duke".<sup>26</sup> This is a fair criticism, but it does illustrate that Kingsley observed and related to West Africans on an individual level, and ascribed to them some individuality which was perhaps lacking in the narratives of other women travellers. Moreover, she adopted the guise of the anthropologist to elucidate the differences between the many racial and ethnic groups in West Africa. In both Travels in West Africa and West African Studies she outlined the differences between Negroes and Bantus and the sometimes vast, sometimes subtle, differences that existed between ethnic groups in each category. An interviewer for *The*

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<sup>25</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 118.

<sup>26</sup> Dea Birkett (1989), Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 76.

*London Review* asked Kingsley to explain the difference between Negroes and Bantus, to which she replied:

There is an enormous difference, both racial and cultural, and there are climatic differences to be considered as well. It is too big a question to go into on this occasion but if you think of the difference that obtains between the East European and the West, that will give you some idea of what I mean.<sup>27</sup>

However, she challenged even this reduction of Africans to a two-fold classification. She wrote:

It is entirely unscientific to go on referring to the Africans under even the two great divisions of Negro and Bantu, because there is quite as much difference between tribes in either division as there is between a canny chiel frae Glasgie and a Tipperary boy.<sup>28</sup>

Kingsley was particularly knowledgeable about the religious beliefs of West Africans, and wrote, "When travelling from district to district you cannot fail to be struck by the difference in character of the native religion you are studying".<sup>29</sup> She was able to gain an insight into the complexities of West African religions in an area where numerous different languages were spoken, and where West Africans were often suspicious of any outsiders. Her knowledge of German anthropological studies, her contacts with the likes of missionary Dr. Nassau, who had intimate knowledge of indigenous religions, and the results of her own research allowed her to develop a detailed picture of West African religions.<sup>30</sup> In these ways, therefore, Kingsley challenged the representation of Africans, and West Africans in particular, as a homogeneous mass of people to which stereotypes could be applied. Sara Mills argues that elements such as these in women's writing may act as a critique of the colonialist enterprise, "since there is a stress on personal involvement and

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Kingsley, *The London Review*, May 21, 1898.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896a), "The development of Dodos", *National Review*, March, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899a), *West African Studies*, London: Macmillan, p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> For example, she identified four different "schools" of "fetish", the Tshi and Ewe, the Calabar, the M'pongwe, and the Nkissism or Fjort schools ((1899a), p. 115). She also wrote extensive chapters in both her books on the differences between such ethnic groups as the M'pongwe, the Igalwa, the Ajumba, the Fan and the Bubi.

investment on the part of the narrator". She argues:

The stress on people from other countries as individuals is in marked contrast to much Orientalist work, where the divide between "us" and "them" is carefully policed. It is this lack of demarcation in women's writing which constitutes the point at which colonial discourse is most unstable, and which women's writing helps to expose.<sup>31</sup>

Though Mills's contentions cannot be applied to all the women of this study, particularly the residents in West Africa, they can certainly be applied to the narratives of Kingsley, and to those of Hinderer and Slessor who, by the nature of their roles in West Africa, all enjoyed interpersonal relationships with West Africans on individual bases, and rarely denied the individuality of West African peoples.

#### *The denial of African history*

Of fundamental importance to the notion of African inferiority, and the right of Britain to colonise or exploit Africa, was the denial by many Britons of an African history. It was also a further means of emphasising the supposed primitive nature of African societies. As the explorer Samuel Baker argued:

Central Africa... is without history. In that savage country... we find no vestiges of the past - no ancient architecture, neither sculpture, nor even chiselled stone to prove that the Negro of this day is inferior to a remote ancestor. We find primeval races existing upon primitive rock formation... We must therefore conclude that the races of man which now inhabit [this region] are unchanged from the prehistoric tribes who were the original inhabitants.<sup>32</sup>

Many nineteenth-century authorities maintained that Africans had not invented an alphabet and were unable to grasp the letters of other nations. It was believed that Aryan Europeans had invented writing which the Africans held in reverence, thus Europeans were far superior. The lack of a written history attested

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<sup>31</sup> Sara Mills (1991), *Discourses of Difference*, London: Routledge, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> In Cairns (1965), p. 86.

to the barbarity of the African; the absence of numerals and abstract terms in those African languages which were understood by Britons was widely held to prove their inferiority. A lack of a complex language structure was further evidence of this. Since the histories of African peoples were not written down, the British could deny that they had a history, that this was insignificant. Therefore, Britain could justifiably colonise Africa and write its own history of the continent.

Mary Kingsley's opinions contradicted these ideas. Although she believed African languages to be inferior to European languages, she did not doubt the intelligence of African people. She wrote:

West African languages are not difficult to pick up; nevertheless, there are an awful lot of them and they are at best most imperfect mediums of communication. No one who has been on the Coast can fail to recognise how inferior the native language is to the native mind behind it...<sup>33</sup>

Kingsley did not believe that the lack of a written language, and the lack of complexity of spoken languages, made the African intelligence in any way inferior to that of the European. Neither did she believe that an absence of a written language meant the absence of African history. She argued that the Spanish geographer, El Bekri, wrote a book on Africa in 1067, and in it he argued that African history was written down from this time. Kingsley believed that there was a possibility that Africa was affected by a Dark Age similar to that which afflicted Europe, and that the resulting slavery and Arab invasions plunged the continent into darkness and put an end to the writing of books.<sup>34</sup>

Kingsley herself had a profound knowledge of the history of ethnic migrations across the continent, and not only did she argue the case for a unique African history, she also envisaged its future. She wrote:

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<sup>33</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 431. She also wrote that "the African's intelligence is far ahead of his language" (p. 504).

<sup>34</sup> Mary Kingsley to Edward Blyden, Bay of Biscay, 14/3/1900; see The Reverend Mark C. Hayford (1901), Mary H. Kingsley: From an African Standpoint, London: Bear and Taylor, pp. 7-8.

Not only do the negroes not die off in the face of white civilisation in Africa, but they have increased in America whereto they were taken by the slave trade. This fact urges upon us the belief that these negroes are a great world-race - a race not passing of the stage of human affairs, but one that has an immense amount of history before it.<sup>35</sup>

Such passages illustrate Kingsley's admiration of the West Africans, and though she believed that the future of Africa would be determined by a technically superior Europe, she was adamant that Africa had a rich and varied history before its "discovery" by Europe. Her attitude is captured in the following:

We English are not stepping on to Africa out of Noah's ark. We have been in touch with it since 1553. West Africa has not just been blown up from the bed of the ocean by a submarine volcano. It is a very old bit of the world with well-established ways of its own, ways it is not going to alter in five minutes, ways that must be understood before they can be properly altered. It is a grand region, and its natives are an uncommonly fine kind of human being.<sup>36</sup>

### *Infantilising West Africans*

A particularly prevalent negative image of West Africans during the nineteenth century was their representation as indolent children. As Cynthea Russett argues, this infantilising of non-Europeans formed part of the process of defining the Other. She states:

Anthropologists taught that primitive societies represented cultural stages that fell short of the complete civilization exemplified by the societies of western Europe. In the phylogeny of the human race the nineteenth-century savage, together with his pre-historic forebear, was assigned the role of child.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Kingsley (1900a), The Story of West Africa, London: Marshall and Son, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899b), "The administration of our West African colonies", Manchester Chamber of Commerce Monthly Record, 30, March, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Cynthea Eagle Russett (1989), Sexual Science. The Victorian Construction of Womanhood, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, pp. 51-2. In Chapter 2, Russett draws out the connection between the process of othering non-Europeans, women and children through science: "That women, children and savages shared many traits in common was a finding that appeared to emerge from the evidence of physical anthropologists and psychologists" (p. 51).

The implications of this are clear. If West Africans were perceived as permanently child-like, then it could be argued that it was natural and just that the more "advanced" nations (especially Britain) should become permanent guardians. If Africans were incapable of exploiting their own resources, then surely Britain was justified in governing and developing Africa itself. As Blaut argues:

Non-Europeans... were seen as psychically *undeveloped*, as more or less *childlike*. But given the psychic unity of mankind, non-Europeans could of course be brought to adulthood, to rationality, to modernity, through a set of learning experiences, mainly colonial.<sup>38</sup>

The image of infantilism was thus, to a certain extent, used to legitimate colonialism and imperialism under the guise of paternalism. If the perceived responsibilities of the European powers were strongly paternal, however, they also had implications for unequal power relations. The preference for strong rule in the latter half of the nineteenth century sprang not only from notions about savagery, but also from the myth of infantilism, and the general incompetence of the non-white inhabitants of Africa. In the process of "othering" Africans, an association was made between blackness and madness. It was intimated that the "simple nature" of Africans, their "child-like essence" did not "permit them to function well in the complexities of the modern world and predisposed them insanity".<sup>39</sup> The extension of empire and "civilisation" was perceived as a duty for Britain: the "White Man's Burden" to control and enlighten. As Alan Cairns argues:

The child analogy was useful to whites for it denied to Africans the privileges reserved for adults. It both reflected and strengthened the idea that African cultures did not represent worthwhile achievements and were too loosely formed and inchoate to offer any significant resistance to an inrush of westernisation. Most important, the analogy acted as a sanction and preparation for white control, for its main implication was paternalism which denied the African the right of deciding on his own future.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> J.M. Blaut (1993), The Colonizer's Model of the World, New York: Guilford Press, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Sander L. Gilman (1985b), "Black bodies, white bodies: toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth-century art, medicine, and literature", Critical Inquiry, 12, 1, p. 140.

<sup>40</sup> Cairns (1965), p. 95.

The main exponents of this image were not only the explorers and the missionaries; the infantilising of West Africans also had its roots in scientific racism which insinuated that Africans had advanced in evolutionary terms no further than a European child. As Broks argues:

Evolutionism brought a new dimension and a new scientific authority to racial distinctions and hence to racial stereotyping. It provided a new language to express old prejudices. A timescale was added to racial descriptions where the black man was now seen not simply as "savage", but as "primitive" and "less evolved" than the civilised white man.<sup>41</sup>

On occasions the infantilising of West Africans is apparent in the narratives of the women residents of this study. For example, references were made to the "simplicity" of West Africans, and Constance Larymore referred to the people of Bida as "light-hearted children".<sup>42</sup> However, these references were rare, and their descriptions, for the most part, avoided reference to these particular stereotypes. In her travelogue, Elizabeth Melville adopted a sympathetic attitude towards the causes of the behaviour that Europeans found frustrating in West Africa. She argued throughout her narrative that any flaws in the character of the West African peoples was a result of their oppression, first as slaves and then as forced settlers in the colony of Sierra Leone. Thus, although she confessed to being "totally ignorant of the national usages and habits of the negroes", Melville displayed a willingness to understand - and not stereotype - the people among whom she lived.<sup>43</sup>

Mary Kingsley's narratives, however, went further in that they deliberately opposed the "established wisdom" about West Africans. She disagreed strongly with those who depicted Africans as innocent children, and condemned forcefully the missionary influence in expounding the infantilism of Africans:

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Broks (1990), "Science, the press and empire: Pearson's publications, 1890-1914", in John M. MacKenzie [ed], Imperialism and the Natural World, Manchester University Press, p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> Foote (1869), p. 175; Colvile (1893), p. 341; Larymore (1908), p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> See Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa, Boston: Twayne, p. 18.



The portrait painted of the African by the majority, not all, but the majority of West African mission reports, has been that of a child, naturally innocent, led away and cheated by white traders and grievously oppressed by his own rulers. I grant you, the African taken as a whole is the gentlest kind of real human being that is made. I do not however class him with the races who carry gentleness to a morbid extent...<sup>44</sup>

In her first article written upon her return to England, Kingsley penned an ironic parable attacking the infantilising of West Africans:

There was once upon a time a certain country, and in this country lived birds called Dodos. Many excellent ladies and gentlemen heard of them, and from what they heard they feared the birds were not in a satisfactory spiritual state... When they came to the Dodos and found how patient and cheerful... the birds were, they called this state of mind "child-like", and said, "My dear Dodos, you are very sweet, you are our Brethren, and all you have got to do is to learn to sing hymns, and put on some Hubbards and trousers, and then you will be perfect gems quite as good as we are."<sup>45</sup>

Here, Kingsley ridiculed the notions of African infantilism and backwardness that were prevalent in Victorian Britain. Her statement was also an attack on the missionaries; she was derisive of their attempts of convert Africans to Christianity in the belief that this would advance them up the ladder of civilisation. Kingsley perceived such efforts to be destroying African cultures, in the same way that Europeans destroyed the Dodos. She remarked sardonically that Africans and their cultures, unlike Dodos, did not become extinct because "the whole flock have not strictly attended to all they have been told" by the missionaries.<sup>46</sup> She was determined to challenge the image of West Africans as helpless victims of savagery, who required the "civilising and Christianising" influence of British rule, and advised:

...you must recognise that these Africans have often a remarkable mental acuteness and a large share of common sense; that there is nothing really

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<sup>44</sup> Kingsley (1899a), pp. 273-4.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896a), "The development of Dodos", National Review, March, p. 66.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

"child-like" in their form at all. Observe them further and you find they are not a flighty-minded, mystical set of people in the least.<sup>47</sup>

The notion of African drunkenness was a common theme during the nineteenth century which was linked intimately to the perceptions of Africans as infantile. As Birkett argues, from mid-century onwards the stereotype of African manhood "had been successfully conquered by an image of the African as a drunk and weakened child, unable to stand up to the ravages of slavery and alcohol".<sup>48</sup> The missionaries, in particular, portrayed West Africans as the innocent victims of unscrupulous traders who could not resist the evils of drink. Kingsley, however, challenged this image, bringing her into conflict with both the anti-liquor lobby and the missionaries. She did not deny that West Africans enjoyed a drink; she wrote of the Bubi of Fernando Po, "Rum is held in high esteem, but used in a general way in moderation as a cordial and a treat, for the Bubi is, like the rest of West African natives, by no means an habitual drunkard. Gin he dislikes". She argued that the missionaries, on the whole, "gravely exaggerated both the evil and the extent of the liquor traffic in West Africa",<sup>49</sup> and used alcohol as an excuse for their failure to convert more Africans to Christianity, realising that public opinion was being swayed by anti-liquor sentiments.<sup>50</sup> She opposed the missionary depiction of the African as "an innocent creature who is led away by bad white men", and challenged the picture of the extent of drunkenness in West Africa propagated by the missionaries. She argued:

I have no hesitation in saying that in the whole of West Africa, in one week, there is not one quarter of the amount of drunkenness you can see any Saturday night you chose in a couple of hours in the Vauxhall Road; and you will not find in a whole year's investigation on the Coast, one seventieth part of the evil, degradation, and premature decay you can see any afternoon you chose to take a walk in the more densely-populated parts

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<sup>47</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 439.

<sup>48</sup> Dea Birkett (1987a), "An Independent Woman in West Africa; The Case of Mary Kingsley", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, S.O.A.S., University of London, p. 156.

<sup>49</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 62-3.

<sup>50</sup> Kingsley (1896a), p. 71.

of any of our towns...<sup>51</sup>

Kingsley, therefore, adopted a pro-liquor stance<sup>52</sup> in order to defend West Africans against the charge of infantilism, and to challenge some of the popular stereotypes of the 1890s.

Mary Slessor was one of the few missionaries whose opinions were not attacked by Kingsley. The two had met on several occasions at the time of Kingsley's travels and they established a firm friendship based on a common understanding of West Africa. Slessor was unusual among nineteenth-century missionaries in that she rarely depicted West Africans as infantile in her publications. On occasions she referred to West Africans as "simple and affectionate",<sup>53</sup> but she referred to the people of Calabar as her "true and intelligent friends", at a time when British perceptions of Africans were generally extreme and crudely racist.<sup>54</sup> She also repudiated the view within the Church of Scotland that the people of Calabar were "not ready" to be taught carpentry and other crafts to allow them to develop local industries. A letter from Slessor to the *Missionary Record* expressing these opinions led to the Church of Scotland founding the Hope Waddell Institute in Calabar, where these very skills were imparted to the local population.<sup>55</sup> By challenging notions of African infantilism Slessor thus had an impact on Church missionary policy.

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), pp. 663-4. The fact that Kingsley lived in London during the 1890s is of importance to her perception of the state of British urban areas. *Travels* was written shortly after the Ripper murders in Whitechapel, which Kingsley would have been familiar with, not least because her father had been a close friend of Sir William Gull, who today remains one of the most likely suspects (see George H. Kingsley (1900), *Notes on Sport and Travel*, with a memoir by M. H. Kingsley, London: Macmillan, p. 205).

<sup>52</sup> Kingsley's pro-liquor stance is analyzed in greater detail in chapter 8.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Mary Slessor to the Church in Scotland, Ikot Oku, 20/5/1908 (Dundee Museum).

<sup>54</sup> James Buchan (1980), *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, p. xii.

<sup>55</sup> Caroline Oliver (1982), *Western Women in Colonial Africa*, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, pp. 118-9.

Although Slessor rarely *represented* West Africans as infantile, the relationship between herself and the people of Calabar was one of inequality. As discussed in chapter 3, Slessor was a "benevolent maternal imperialist".<sup>56</sup> She was known as "Ma", and her adoption of abandoned African children was symbolic of her wider adoption of the people of Calabar.<sup>57</sup> On occasions she adopted a "mother-knows-best" attitude, rebuking chiefs and elders as a mother would a child. This mother-child relationship thus involved elements of inequality - she was British, her "children" were African, and Slessor believed in the superiority of British morality. Although Hunt argues that women missionaries "mediated [their] ethnocentrism through the use of maternal idiom",<sup>58</sup> this "maternal imperialism" involved disparities in power. Slessor's sense of her own superiority was deflected only slightly by the fact that this was based on a sense of moral superiority as opposed to racial superiority.

### *Feminising West Africans*

Along with people designated as backward, degenerate, uncivilised and retarded, Africans were often viewed by racial theorists within a framework constructed out of biological determinism; as with elements of British society - delinquents, the insane, the poor, women - Africans had to be controlled and managed by British men. The depiction of Africa as "feminine" was a potent tool of imperialism, and

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<sup>56</sup> Barbara Ramusack (1990), "Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865-1945", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, p. 319.

<sup>57</sup> Cheryl McEwan (1995), "'The Mother of all the Peoples': geographical knowledge and the empowering of Mary Slessor", in Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Michael Heffernan [eds], Geography and Imperialism, Manchester: Manchester University Press (forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Rose Hunt (1990), "'Single ladies on the Congo': Protestant missionary tensions and voices", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, p. 397. See also Barbara Ramusack (1990), "Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865-1945", Women's Studies International Forum, 13, 4, pp. 309-321. These inequalities existed between all these women and the peoples they encountered, and are explored in greater detail in chapter 3.

was used to support the notion of its domination by a superior, "masculine" Britain.<sup>59</sup>

Although she did not portray the landscapes of West Africa as "feminine", Mary Kingsley did render West Africans "feminine", and the ideas which informed these representations were intimately linked to her opinions on sexual equality. Kingsley was staunchly anti-suffrage, and believed that women were ultimately inferior to men. She also believed that Africans were inferior to Europeans. This belief led her to designate Africans as a "feminine" race, but in so doing she allied herself to them. As a woman she felt akin to Africans. She wrote, "...the mental difference between the two races is very similar to that between men and women among ourselves. A great woman, either mentally or physically, will excel an indifferent man, but no woman ever equals a really great man".<sup>60</sup> She wrote to Matthew Nathan:

I will impart to you in strict confidence my opinion on the African. He is not half devil and half child any more than he is our benighted brother... *He is a woman.* I am certain that old Herodotus' division of the human race has more in it than meets the eye. Take the white races. Your Hebrew and Teuton are masculine... Take your coloured races... Your Negro and Melanesian are feminine.<sup>61</sup>

However, despite believing that Africa was a "female nation", she also believed that Africa was a great world race. She refused to accept that West Africans were passive victims of circumstance. By feminising Africans she could identify with them; in identifying with them she was able to fight their cause in Britain. Thus, although she accepted and promoted these nuanced images of Africans as a feminine race, she used these images to argue passionately on their

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<sup>59</sup> The depiction of African landscapes as feminine is well-documented; see, for example, Mary Russell (1988), *Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt*, London: Collins, p. 213; Rebecca Stott (1989), "The Dark Continent: Africa as female body in Haggard's adventure fiction", *Feminist Review*, 32, pp. 69-89.

<sup>60</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 659.

<sup>61</sup> In Matthew Nathan (1907), "Some reminiscences of Miss Mary Kingsley", *Journal of the African Society*, 7, 25, p. 30. My emphasis.

behalf.<sup>62</sup>

*West Africans as labourers/servants*

A change in attitude towards Africans occurred after mid-century. Previously, missionaries and philanthropists had sermonised on the "noble savage" and "poor slave", and evinced their belief in the capacity of Africans to fulfil positions of leadership and responsibility. After mid-century, and the growing importance that was placed on gentility, the assumption was made that Africans could only perform labouring tasks and could never approach gentlemanly status. "Respectable Victorians simply applied to all men with black skins the same judgements, manners and bearing that they adopted towards their social inferiors within English society."<sup>63</sup> When these attitudes concerning social status were combined with racist and xenophobic attitudes, racist portrayals became more rigid and more emotive. However, as with other images of Africans, their depiction as labourers or servants was problematic. The portrayal of West Africans as workers contradicted images of indolence inspired by theories of environmental determinism during the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>64</sup> "The tropics evoked stereotypes of sensuality and indolence in contrast to cold climates which signified puritanism in morals and diligence in work".<sup>65</sup> Thus the representation of Africans as productive labourers contradicted presumptions of indolence induced by climatic conditions.

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<sup>62</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>63</sup> Lorimer (1978), p. 60.

<sup>64</sup> See Allen D. Bushong (1984), "Ellen Churchill Semple 1863-1932", in T.W. Freeman [ed], Geographers: Bio-Bibliographic Studies, Vol. 8, London: Marshall Publications, pp. 87-94; Richard Peet (1985), "The social origins of environmental determinism", A.A.A.G., 75, pp. 309-333; Ellen Churchill Semple (1911), Influences of Geographic Environments. On the Basis of Ratzel's System of Anthropo-Geography, New York: Holt.

<sup>65</sup> Cairns (1965), pp. 75-6. For a comparative study of colonial depictions of Malays, Filipinos and Javanese, see Syed Hussein Alatas (1977), The Myth of the Lazy Native, London: Cass.

The opinions of Elizabeth Melville illustrate the tensions of writing in mid-century when this shift in attitude was beginning to take place. For example, she wrote:

They are undoubtedly a lazy and indolent race naturally, yet it must be borne in mind that the same degree of exertion can never be expected from them, as from the inhabitants of more temperate climates, for under the fiercely burning sun of these latitudes, the strength *even of the black man* flags."<sup>66</sup>

Here, she suggested that Africans were, on the one hand, strong and fit for manual labour, yet, on the other hand, she argued that they were naturally indolent. Her connection of this supposed indolence with the climatic conditions preempted the rise of environmental determinism as an established science later in the century. Many of her opinions on West Africans were formed from her experience of them as domestic servants, combining both her ethnocentric prejudices and her upper class prejudices towards the working classes. She wrote:

However philanthropically disposed you may be towards the negro on taking up your residence at Sierra Leone, so soon as the first novelty of the situation wears off, the indolence, stupidity and want of tidiness (to say nothing the graver faults) of the only persons you have to depend upon as domestic servants, throw you into a sort of actual despair. You teach, persuade, remonstrate, lecture, by turns; your words are listened to with a good-humoured apathy, but neither your rhetoric nor example effecting the slightest improvement, you begin to doubt whether the negro be gifted with any good quality or mental capacity whatever, and feel irresistibly led to include the whole race in a most sweeping kind of condemnation.<sup>67</sup>

Melville was imbued with a certain amount of cultural arrogance and a sense of her own superiority, undoubtedly a product of her aristocratic background as well as contemporaneous attitudes about race, but despite this she retained a sense of maternalism towards West Africans. Although her ethnocentric and racist comments often seemed rooted in class prejudice, she resisted overt comparisons of West Africans with the working classes of England. For example, she wrote:

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<sup>66</sup> Melville (1968), p. 253, my emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

As a people they have been enslaved and oppressed for upwards of four hundred years and even this solitary consideration tells us, that to form an unbiased judgement of the liberated Africans, we must not institute comparisons between them and the lower classes of our own free England.<sup>68</sup>

She also challenged unfavourable comparisons between West Africans and the working classes, writing (and revealing her own "classist" prejudices), "The younger people and children whether liberated or colony-born, show a much greater aptitude and fondness for learning than you commonly find amongst the lower classes at home".<sup>69</sup> Despite her understanding of the legacy of slavery, Melville failed to recognise the possible association in the minds of West Africans between *work* and *slavery*. This is particularly pertinent when one bears in mind that Melville based her opinions on her experience of African domestic servants. Margaret Strobel argues that *A Residence in Sierra Leone* "communicates a common attitude toward African servants, found with little variation everywhere".<sup>70</sup> One could argue that this was simply an attitude towards *all* servants, black or white.

Melville's attitude was common to other women travelling in West Africa throughout the nineteenth century. In 1860, Anna Hinderer wrote in her journal that "the natural idleness of Africans in general is trying."<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Foote argued that, "an unusual number of servants are required in the family household, however small the family, on account of their incorrigible laziness, which exceeds anything I ever saw in other countries".<sup>72</sup> Constance Larymore referred to her servants as "all lazy and stupid... ignorant of the first principles of order and cleanliness, and, unmistakably, considering Missus rather a bore when she insists on trying to

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>70</sup> Margaret Strobel (1991), *European Women and the Second British Empire*, Indiana University Press, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> Hinderer (1872), pp. 251-2.

<sup>72</sup> Foote (1869), p. 195.



inculcate these..."<sup>73</sup> Zélie Colvile's class snobbery was more in evidence than the other women, and was exacerbated by her aloofness and desire to maintain a distance between herself and African peoples. She described a Syrian she met on board a steamer as "a sly, thin, cringing, despicable piece of humanity, like most of his class".<sup>74</sup> Henry Colvile suggested that Zélie substitute the term "Gentleman of Colour" for "Black Man" in the title of her book; she "objected that she could not describe as a gentleman a person who was in the habit of hanging his relations, by hooks through his heels, over a pit full of snakes, as someone she met at Bonny did".<sup>75</sup> In this sense, therefore, the responses of these women to West Africans were predicated more on attitudes towards social class than they were on attitudes towards race. The maternalistic, philanthropic attitude towards West Africans apparent in the narratives of Melville, Foote and Hinderer, and the prejudices associated with this, were based more on a sense of class superiority than they were on racial superiority.

#### *Visual representations of race*

Although this study is primarily concerned with textual representations of West Africans, some mention must be made of visual representations in the travel narratives of white women. As James Ryan argues, geographers have only recently begun to:

consider the role of visual imagery in the making of cultural landscapes and identities. They have hardly begun to explore the complex relations between practices of visual representation and geographical knowledge, particularly in the context of British imperialism.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 207.

<sup>74</sup> Colvile (1893), p. 279.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Colvile (1893), preface to Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, pp. viii-ix. I suspect this comment is meant to inspire some mirth in the reader.

<sup>76</sup> James R. Ryan (1994), "Visualizing imperial geography: Halford Mackinder and the Colonial Office Visual Instruction Committee, 1902-11", Ecumene, 1, 2, p. 157.

Using Malak Alloula's terminology, women travellers did not represent West Africans, but their own "phantasms" of West Africans.<sup>77</sup> Only two women, Colvile and Kingsley, used visual representations of West Africans, and these are in the form of photographs. None of the women used sketches, and photography was not available to the women travelling in the early part of the century. However, the differences between the images presented by Kingsley and Colvile are revealing. Travelling at roughly the same time, and encountering the same ethnic groups, their methods of representation were in stark contrast. Although images in both narratives effectively appropriated West Africans, this appropriation was far more explicit in Colvile's photographs.

While Colvile's few landscape photographs were taken in Africa, her portrayals of West Africans themselves were taken in Britain, using backcloths and models. A photograph of an African woman and child, entitled "Negress, Accra" (Figure 5)<sup>78</sup>, shows a model, naked to the waist and holding a calabash on her head, posing in front of a backdrop of a forest scene. The child is seated on the ground slightly behind the woman, who, with her heavy breasts and protruding stomach, may be pregnant. A similar depiction of a "Ju-ju Priest" (Figure 6)<sup>79</sup> depicts a semi-naked man, dressed in a grass skirt, holding a bone in one hand and African plants in the other, against a similar backdrop. The phantasms in these images are increased by the semi-nakedness of the models, and are meant to appeal to the voyeurism of the reader. The images themselves draw on powerful stereotypes of West Africans: the barbaric witch doctor with his tools of witchcraft, the bone in his hand suggestive of cannibalism and primitivism; the lascivious, fecund, yet alluring African women. The presence of the child reinforces the image of fecundity. As Alloula argues, the addition of children evokes the idea of a "birthrate perceived as being out of control, which the colonial ideology attributes

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<sup>77</sup> Malak Alloula (1986), The Colonial Harem, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. xiv.

<sup>78</sup> Colvile (1893), facing p. 292.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, facing p. 314.

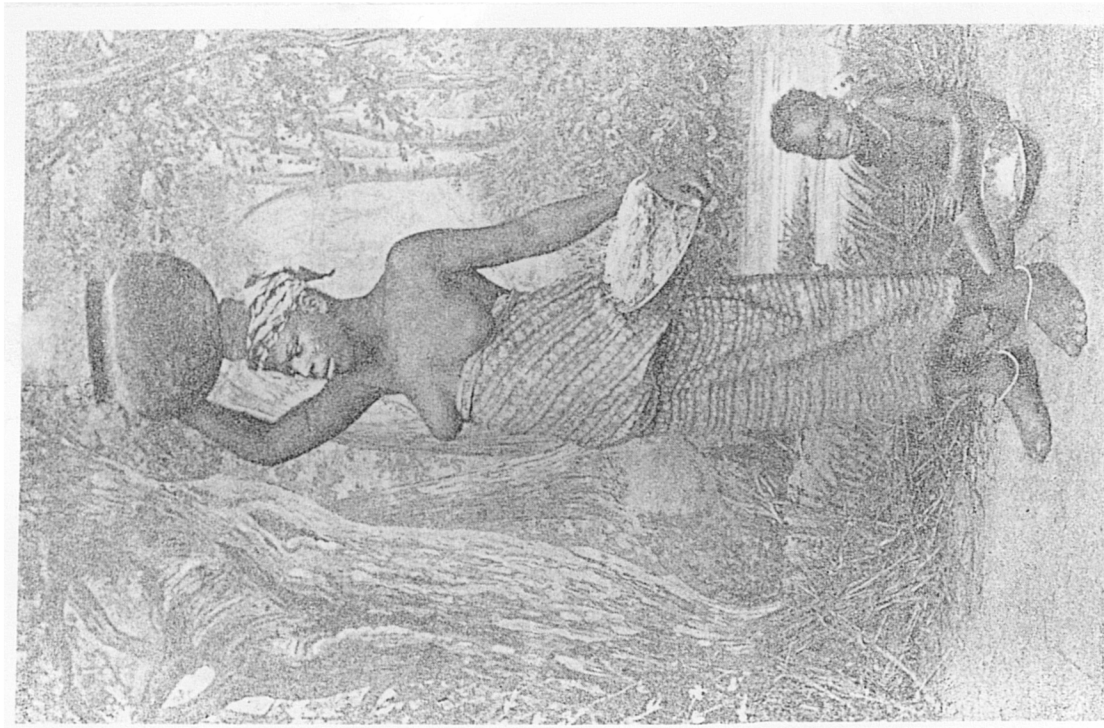


Figure 5 - "Negress - Accra" (from Colvile, 1893)

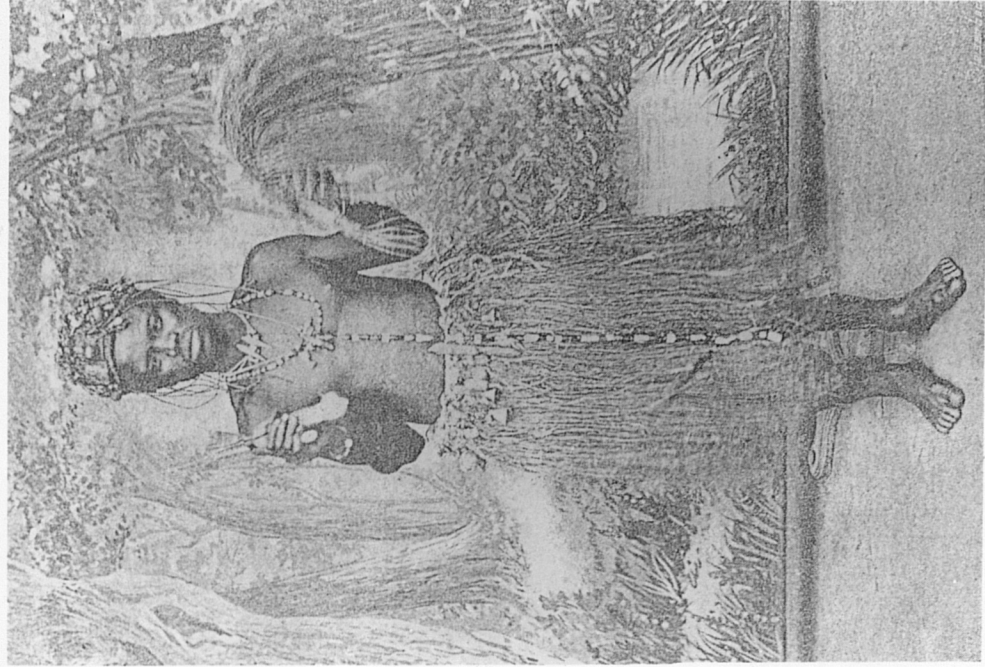


Figure 6 - "Ju-ju Priest" (from Colvile, 1893)

to "cultural belatedness" and to stagnation".<sup>80</sup> In these images the model is "essentially a *vagrant* and *unformed* individual", whom Colvile alone can attach to a site (Accra) and endow with an identity ("Negress", "Ju-ju Priest")<sup>81</sup>. The model is meant to represent a part of reality, but says more about Colvile's willingness to appropriate West African peoples to decorate her narrative. The photographic images speak for the silences in the text; they convey powerful images to Colvile's audience.

Kingsley's use of photographs was very different. All were taken in West Africa. While some of the photographs were synthesised, with groups of West Africans posing for the camera (Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10),<sup>82</sup> others showed scenes of activity, such as craftmaking, fishing and trading (Figure 11).<sup>83</sup> Although these images also appropriated West Africans, they were not overlain with symbols in the same way as Colvile's photographs. However, Kingsley's representations were no more authentic than those of Colvile, they were merely portrayals that Kingsley perceived to represent West Africans and their lifestyles. As Ryan argues, images of exotic "others" functioned ultimately to distinguish the "typically native" from the "'super-added" (and superior) European civilisation".<sup>84</sup>

### **Mary Kingsley's philosophy on race**

Although the women of this study both challenged, and conformed with, many of the images of race manifest in popular and scientific Victorian literatures on

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<sup>80</sup> Alloula (1986), p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, between pp. 358 and 359. Many of these photographs were not taken by Kingsley, but were reproduced in *Travels* with permission from the Mission Evangelique of Paris.

<sup>83</sup> Other such photographs not reproduced here include, "An Angola Fisherman at Home" and "A Typical West African River Bank", *Ibid.*, between pp. 358-359.

<sup>84</sup> James R. Ryan (1994), p. 166.

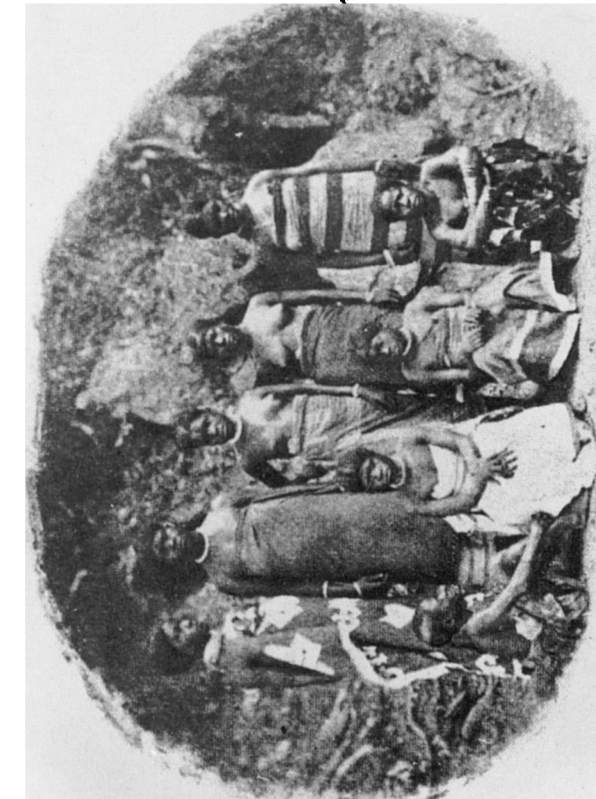


Figure 7 - "Igalwa Women" (from Kingsley, 1982)

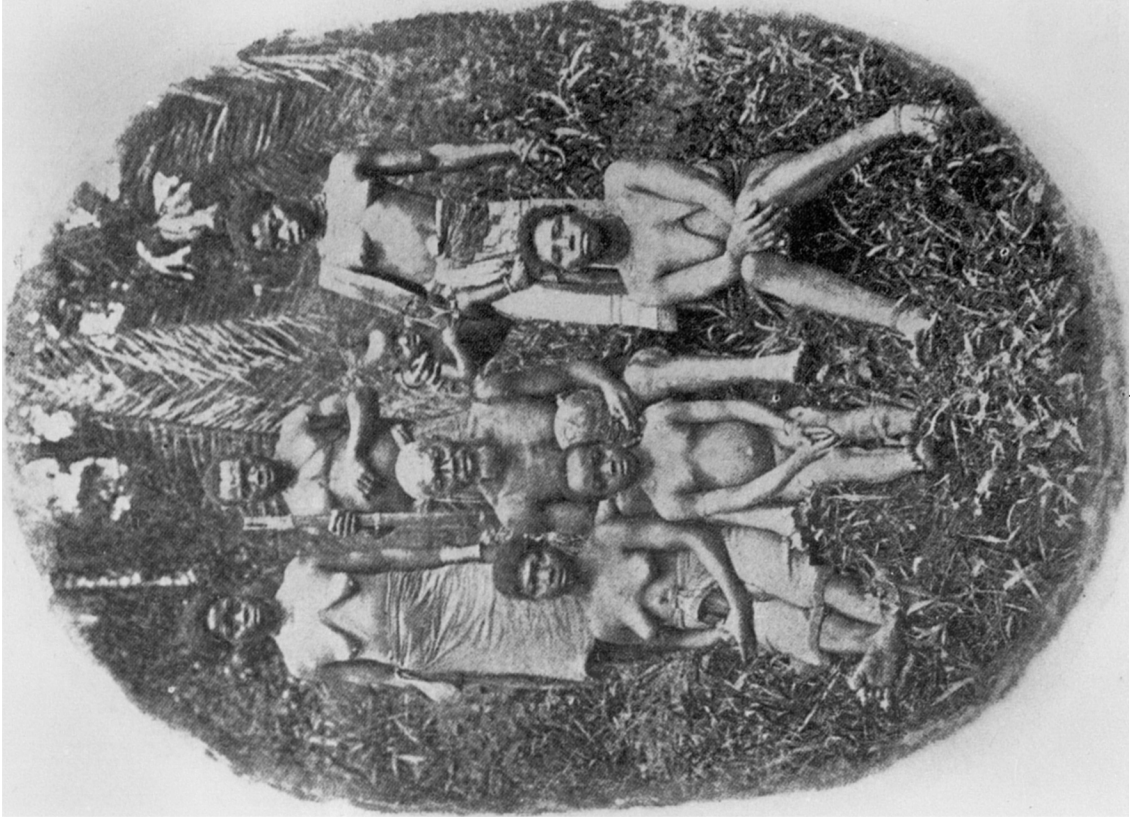


Figure 8 - "Fan Chief and Family" (from Kingsley, 1982)

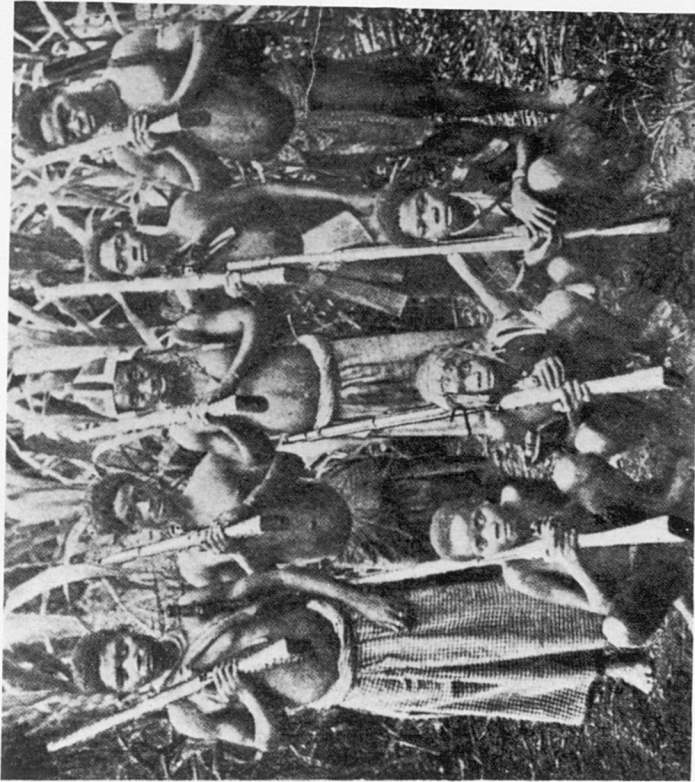


Figure 9 - "Fans" (from Kingsley, 1982)

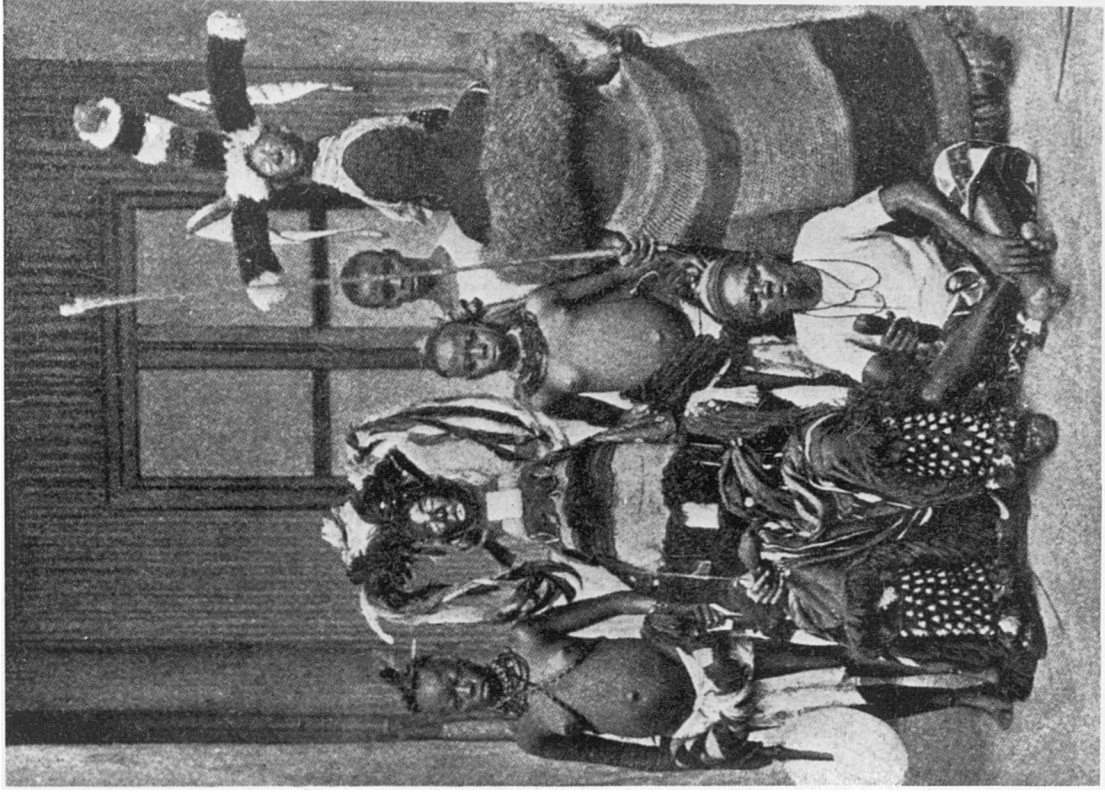


Figure 10 - "Death Dance Costumes, Old Calabar" (from Kingsley, 1982)

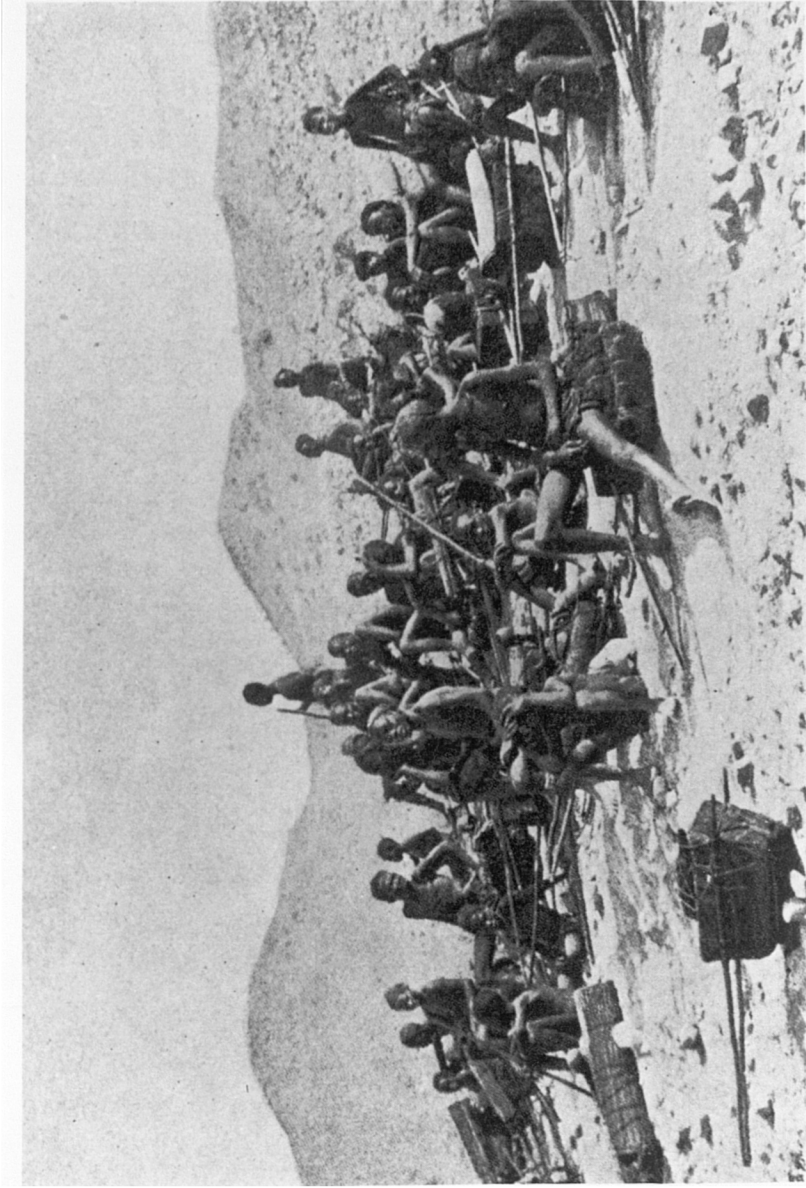


Figure 11 - "Caravan For Stanley Pool, Pallaballa Mountains, Congo"  
(from Kingsley, 1982)



empire, many of the views they expressed were influenced by the prevalent attitudes at the time of their travels. However, Mary Kingsley stood alone in that she flew in the face of established "wisdom" on racial theories. Her's was very much a backward-looking philosophy, out of sync with attitudes at the time of her travels. For this reason, Kingsley's views on race merit further exploration.

The depiction of Africans as "noble savages" in missionary literature, travel narratives and colonial fiction gradually lost credence during the nineteenth century, and was replaced by more explicitly racist images of barbarism and savagery. Furthermore, social Darwinism and scientific racism eclipsed both monogenist and polygenist theories of the origins of races. While Kingsley's views were very different from prevailing scientific theories during the 1890s, they were not new; rather than expounding progressive and radical concepts relating to racial theory, Kingsley's philosophy had as its roots the humanitarian, romantic theories of the early nineteenth century.

Throughout Kingsley's narratives on West Africa there was a constant evocation of the image of the "noble savage". This was most apparent in those chapters of Travels in West Africa which recounted her experiences of the Fang<sup>85</sup> peoples of Gabon. Her response to the Fang was a profoundly aesthetic and sensual one. She wrote:

They are on the whole a fine race, particularly those in the mountain districts of the Sierra del Cristal, where one continually sees magnificent specimens of human beings, both male and female. Their colour is light bronze, many of the men have beards, and albinos are rare among them. The average height in the mountain districts is five feet six to five feet eight, the difference in stature between men and women not being great. Their countenances are very bright and expressive, and if once you have been among them, you can never mistake a Fan.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Kingsley preferred to refer to the Fang peoples as Fans, possibly to reduce the sensationalism which could arise in association with their reputation as cannibals.

<sup>86</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 328-329.



Kingsley's admiring descriptions concentrated on the physiques of the Africans, the muscular shoulders and chests of her bearers and canoe paddlers, and the beauty of young girls on the brink of marriage. Such beauty appealed to Kingsley's romantic nature. She believed that West Africans were inferior to Europeans, but she subscribed to the view that unadulterated West Africans were thriving without the influence of Europe, and were even resisting Europeanisation and preserving their own rich cultures. Kingsley's descriptions evoked the image of the "noble savage" living healthily and peaceably in Arcadia, and thus had more in common with the images expounded by late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century anti-slavers than with the dominant images of the 1890s. Thus Kingsley's views were ultimately unoriginal and outdated.

As Deborah Birkett argues, Kingsley's unorthodox ideology was a product both of her early education and her early experiences in West Africa. As a young woman, desperate to educate herself, her sole reading material was that contained in her father's library. She was, therefore, imbued with the scientific beliefs of an earlier generation. She referred to herself as a Darwinist but subscribed to polygenist theory, accepting the supposed superiority of the white races. She believed in the separate origins of the races, that because of technological inferiority Africans could only advance up the ladder of "civilisation" with the aid of Europe, but that Africans were inferior "in kind, not degree". She wrote, "I have *never* said I believe the African to be a low form of human being... so when I say the African is different from the European and Asiatic forms of humanity, I mean *different*".<sup>87</sup> She reserved most of her criticism for the partially westernised African, who no longer fitted into her image of the "noble savage", and was, to her, a parody of civilised people. She believed that technology, particularly the steam engine, was a "manifestation of the superiority of my race", and accused the Africans of mechanical ineptitude. She wrote that the African had never made an even fourteenth-rate piece of cloth or pottery, or machine tool, picture, sculpture,

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<sup>87</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897b), "West Africa from an ethnologist's point of view", Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society, 5, p. 66.

and had never even risen to the level of picture writing.<sup>88</sup> Kingsley was unaware that some of the world's greatest sculpture was either stored or buried within a hundred miles of the Oil Rivers Protectorate.<sup>89</sup>

Despite these pronouncements, Kingsley's views seemed to mellow over time. When she first went to West Africa she desired to be identified with the great explorers, but she soon began to challenge their views, to break down the popular images which she believed to be erroneous. She postulated that these false images of West Africa were based upon the opinions of people who had never been there. Moreover, she argued that too many travellers took their neat theories to Africa and looked for confirming instances.<sup>90</sup> Shortly before she died she wrote a letter to the Liberian editor of *The New Africa* pleading for mutual understanding between the races. She regretted that:

The stay-at-home statesmen think that Africans are all awful savages or silly children - people who can only be dealt with on a reformatory penitentiary line. This view you know is not mine, nor that of the very small party - the scientific ethnologists - who deal with Africa; but it is the view of the statesmen and the general public and the mission public, in African affairs.<sup>91</sup>

Kingsley's philosophy was one of enlightened colonialism rather than altruism. As Sarah Milbury Steen argues, she was eager for colonial administrators, once they became aware of African values, to permit West Africans to develop along their "own lines", according to their own racial destiny. "Her primary fear as a racial determinist was that colonial policy, failing to observe that races evolve very differently from each other, would destroy aspects of African culture that

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<sup>88</sup> Kingsley (1899a), pp. 330 and 670.

<sup>89</sup> Oliver (1982), p. 89.

<sup>90</sup> She was a particularly fierce critic of James Fraser and his influential book, *The Golden Bough*. She wrote to Tylor "When I come across those fairy palaces of theory like the *Golden Bough*... I yearn to heave half a brick through their snowy window", 27/10/96. See also letters to Anna Tylor, 1/10/96, 23/6/98, Rhodes House, Oxford.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Mary Kingsley to Edward Blyden 14/3/1900, reproduced in Mary Kingsley (1899a), pp. xvii-xviii.

should be preserved."<sup>92</sup> The correlation of Kingsley's philosophy with the ideas of the likes of Livingstone and Stanley, and with the opinions of the racial theorists such as Knox, presented a static, frozen image of West Africans by the end of the nineteenth century. As Birkett argues, "Although questioning many of the popular images of Africa, Mary Kingsley was steeped in the racial theories used to justify and support the expansion of British interests in West Africa".<sup>93</sup>

There were, therefore, elements of Kingsley's philosophy which were both distasteful and contradictory, and they bring to light both the complexity of her views and her own confusion and ambivalence. For example, she confessed to a friend that tales of inter-racial marriage in West Africa made her "mentally sick", and yet she was supportive of Nassau, who had a long-term relationship with an African woman.<sup>94</sup> She had inherited the Victorian assumption that white skin meant racial superiority, she did not seek to challenge differences constructed on the basis of race, and instead she sought to emphasise these differences. In her plans for encouraging more nurses in West Africa, she argued that there should be "white hospital orderlies for the white patients, black for the native wards".<sup>95</sup> Paradoxically, while she was undoubtedly racist, her adherence to polygenist theory allowed her to slough off the "evolutionary straitjacket"<sup>96</sup> and challenge the notion that Africans were suffering from some state of arrested development. Erroneous theories of polygenesis allowed her to "look at Africa on its own terms, without

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<sup>92</sup> Sarah L. Milbury Steen (1980), European and African Stereotypes in Twentieth- Century Fiction, London: Macmillan, p.12.

<sup>93</sup> Deborah Birkett (1987b), "West Africa's Mary Kingsley", History Today, May, p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Kingsley to Violet Roy, *S.S. Lagos*, off Liberia, 17/8/93. For an account of Robert Nassau's relationship with his nurse, Anyentyuwa, which brought him into conflict with the Church, and of Kingsley's support, see Caroline Alexander (1989), One Dry Season, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 36-142.

<sup>95</sup> Mary Kingsley (1900c), "Nursing in West Africa", Chambers's Journal, 3, p. 370.

<sup>96</sup> Bernard Porter (1968), Critics of Empire, London: Macmillan, p. 147.

comparison and judgement".<sup>97</sup> The irony lies in the fact that whilst she exaggerated and relied on the construction of racial difference, she was also a staunch defender of West Africans and their cultures.

## Conclusion

It is apparent from this study that great differences existed in the ways in which white women related to, and portrayed, the peoples of West Africa. The views of these women were often influenced by powerful racial theories in Britain, and as these theories evolved and changed, so the views of women travelling at different times varied and contrasted. However, on a few occasions, white women travellers challenged some of the prevailing views pertaining to race and racial theory. Kingsley was the prime example of this. Her adherence to the racial tenets of an earlier generation may have made her portrayal of West Africans less radical than would at first appear. Her views on the "inferiority" of Africans would today be regarded as racist; however, they were less extreme than the racist views of many of her contemporaries. She challenged many of the opinions apparent in other popular discourses on West Africa. She was one of the few writers to acknowledge the existence of an African history, and to study Africans from the "inside". In this way she was able to relate to West Africans on an individual basis; this, in turn, had profound effects on her representation of the cultures of West Africa.

Individual circumstances, class and gender relations all influenced the descriptions of these women. Catherine Barnes Stevenson argues that women travellers often displayed a sympathy for, and understanding of, peoples whose skin colour distinguished them, as these women often found themselves distinguished as "other" in Britain.<sup>98</sup> This was certainly true for Kingsley who became a staunch

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<sup>97</sup> Robert D. Pearce (1990), Mary Kingsley. Light at the Heart of Darkness, Oxford: Kensale, p. 77.

<sup>98</sup> Stevenson (1987), pp. 143-145.

defender of West Africans, and for Slessor, who wrote, "What a strange thing is sympathy. Undefined... yet the greatest power in human life". This encapsulates Slessor's relationship with West Africans; it was based on maternalism and philanthropism, and had as its roots the evangelical belief in racial equality which gained popularity throughout the Victorian period.<sup>99</sup> This attitude of sympathy was also a pervasive one in the narratives of those women travelling around mid-century, particularly those involved in the anti-slavery enterprise. Many of the jaundiced views expressed about West Africans by women travellers were based, to a large extent, on class prejudices rather than racial prejudices. This is particularly true of those women from aristocratic backgrounds, and those women residents whose opinions of West Africans were based solely on their relations with their African servants. This is not however, to deny the existence of racism and ethnocentrism among white women travellers in West Africa. All these women represented and appropriated West Africans in their narratives so that the voices of the latter remained silent, and all had preconceived notions about the peoples they encountered. An understanding of the different ways in which these women mediated and expressed their opinions is of particular importance to critiques of women and imperialism. This can be expanded further in an analysis of the portrayal of West African customs by white women travellers.

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<sup>99</sup> See Ian Bradley (1976), The Call to Seriousness. The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians, London: Cape, p. 88.

## CHAPTER 6

### SLAVERY, WITCHCRAFT AND CANNIBALISM

"Although it is an open question whether the West African negro has yet arrived at a stage which fits him for the reception of our religion and civilisation, ...there can be no doubt that the world at large can no longer tolerate the cruelties and abominations attendant on ancestral and devil worship..."<sup>1</sup>

"The Lagos Travelling Commissioner, who we met at Aiede, seemed to have grave suspicions of the people there in the matter of twin-murder and human sacrifices - they certainly looked capable of both."<sup>2</sup>

"I subsequently learnt that although the Fans will eat their fellow friendly tribesfolk, yet they like to keep a little something belonging to them as a memento... [T]hough its to their credit... still its an unpleasant practice when they hang the remains in the bedroom you occupy..."<sup>3</sup>

#### **Introduction: objectives of description**

There were profound differences between those women who travelled to West Africa with open minds, with an expressed desire to learn and understand, and those who travelled merely to confirm their preconceptions. Mary Kingsley, for example, would certainly have agreed with the statement that "the darkest thing about Africa has always been our ignorance of it".<sup>4</sup> She placed great importance on understanding aspects of West African cultures; she wrote, "Africa might well become another Ireland if it was left to the kind of men sent out by the Colonial Office, for they knew little or nothing of the people they ruled and their main

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<sup>1</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> Constance Larymore (1908), A Resident's Wife in Nigeria, London: Routledge, pp. 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), Travels in West Africa, London: Virago, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> George Kimble, quoted in Dea Birkett (1992), Mary Kingsley. Imperial Adventuress, London: Macmillan, p. 57.

preoccupation was to gain promotion to another, healthier, colony".<sup>5</sup> Kingsley emphasised her desire to paint an accurate picture of West African customs when she wrote, "I have tried to *honestly* and *fairly* understand the West Africans by studying them in their native homes".<sup>6</sup> On another occasion she wrote, "all I am concerned in is that I should give you as clear and unbiassed [sic] an idea as lies in my power of the spirit world as an African sees it". She believed that she could do this because her "mind was carefully kept swept of preconceived notions".<sup>7</sup> While travelling in West Africa she attempted to learn a few African languages; she wrote:

I feel sure that we cannot thoroughly understand the inner working of the African mind until this department of the study of it has been efficiently worked up; for the languages contain, and are founded on, a very peculiar basis of figurative thought, and until that is thoroughly understood we cannot really judge the true meaning of native statements on what is called totemism, and other sundry subjects.<sup>8</sup>

Kingsley, perhaps in deference to the masculinist scientific community with which she was often at odds, did not make any claims to know the "truth". She wrote, "I do not set myself up to tell the truth. I can only say, look at my series of pictures of things which I faithfully give you, and I hope you will get from them the impression which is the truth".<sup>9</sup> She was also aware of the subjectivity of her responses, but she highlighted this to demonstrate the fact that she was observing West Africa from the inside, and thus to add validity to her descriptions. Unlike many women travellers she claimed not to rely upon hearsay and tales that she heard in West Africa. She wrote:

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<sup>5</sup> In Cecil Howard (1957), Mary Kingsley, London: Hutchinson, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Kingsley (1898c), "Lecture on West Africa", Cheltenham Ladies' Magazine, 38, p. 267 (my emphasis).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897c), "The forms of apparitions in West Africa", West Africa, 14, pp. 332 and 342.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Kingsley, introduction to R.E. Dennett (1898a), Notes on the Folklore of the Fjort, London: Nutt, p. vi.

<sup>9</sup> In Margaret Tabor (1930), Pioneer Women III, London: Sheldon Press, p. 89.

I have written only on things that I know from personal experience and very careful observation. I have never accepted an explanation of a native custom from one person alone, nor have I set down things as being prevalent customs from having seen a single instance. I have endeavoured to give you an honest account of the general state and manner of life in Lower Guinea... In reading this you must make allowances for my love of this sort of country, with its great forests and rivers and its animistic-minded inhabitants, and for my ability to be more comfortable there than in England.<sup>10</sup>

The attitude of abandoning pre-conceptions and attempting to learn African languages in order to facilitate a greater understanding of West African customs was also shared by Slessor. This may seem surprising when one considers the nature of the missionary propaganda to which she had been exposed during her formative years, and the particular images associated with Calabar in this body of literature. The survival of the missions on the coast depended upon the flow of funds from Britain, and for this they relied upon powerful images of West Africa and their peoples. The Church of Scotland mission at Calabar was no exception. Conditions in Calabar were undeniably harsh; it had been at the heart of both European and indigenous slave-trading and its effects had permeated the whole society. The Efik peoples of the coast had split into Houses that quarrelled with each other over greater shares of the slave trade, and had created a feared secret society, Ekpe. They had forbidden European missionaries to travel up the Cross River, and the forest was closed to them by the Okoyong and other warring peoples of the interior.<sup>11</sup> The Mission was trapped on the coast. Such conditions provided ample scope for revelations in the *Missionary Record*, the mouthpiece and propaganda tool of the Church of Scotland. It was such revelations that helped form the picture of Calabar in the imagination of Mary Slessor, and these were all the more important as at this time the missionaries were amongst the few *residents* in West Africa. Their knowledge was gained *in situ*, rather than by fleeting visits in the course of travel or trade. This added greater weight to their claims and

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>11</sup> James Buchan (1984), Peacemaker of Calabar: the Story of Mary Slessor, Exeter: Religious and Moral Education Press, pp. 5-6.



validity to their observations. The images they created made a lasting impression on Slessor, and it was the image of the brave missionary, surrounded by peril and adventure, that first encouraged her to become a missionary.

The reputation of the people of Calabar was the poorest in Nigeria, they were considered by the British to be intractable, their societies unorganised, and their customs barbarous.<sup>12</sup> Cannibalism and human sacrifice were believed to be widespread, associated with indigenous slavery and the burial rites of kings and chiefs. Widows were subjected to trial-by-ordeal on the death of their husband, twins were murdered and twin-mothers persecuted. These were the customs that were portrayed in graphic terms in the *Missionary Record*, and which informed Slessor's opinions before she travelled to West Africa. However, once she had seen West Africa for herself, Slessor made a point of challenging some of the assumptions about the peoples of the interior. On first going inland into the Okoyong territory she wrote, "I am going to a new tribe up country, a fierce and cruel people, and everyone tells me that they will kill me. But I don't fear any hurt".<sup>13</sup> Slessor's insight into the customs of the peoples of Calabar was facilitated by her adoption of an African lifestyle, and also, as with Kingsley, by her knowledge of local languages. Not only did she speak Efik, but she understood its every shade of inflection and accompanying gestures.<sup>14</sup>

Efforts such as those made by Kingsley and Slessor to acquire knowledge of local languages provide an important context for their descriptions of the customs of West Africa. Such attitudes were in direct contrast to those of many other women travelling in West Africa who took with them their preconceived notions about the customs of the area, and looked for confirming instances. What they found often confirmed their prejudices.

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<sup>12</sup> A.I. Nwabughuogu (1981), "The role of propaganda in the development of Indirect Rule in Nigeria, 1880-1929", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14, 1, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Slessor to Hart from Use Ikot Utu, 6/7/12, Slessor Papers, Dundee Museum.

<sup>14</sup> Jeannie Chappell (1927), *Three Brave Women*, London: Partridge, p. 16.

## Slavery: an African problem?

Accounts of indigenous slavery in West Africa completed the picture of savagery in the Victorian imagination. The image of slavery was a powerful facet of the myth of the Dark Continent.<sup>15</sup> The first abolitionists had placed the blame for the slave trade mostly on Europeans, but by mid-century, the blame had largely been displaced onto Africans themselves. "When the taint of slavery fused with sensational reports about cannibalism, witchcraft, and apparently shameless sexual customs, Victorian Africa emerged draped in that pall of darkness that the Victorians themselves accepted as reality".<sup>16</sup> As Moira Ferguson argues, images of Africans as slaves or ex-slaves helped propagate the "energizing myth" of British imperialism.<sup>17</sup> For those women travelling around mid-century, slavery figured quite prominently in their accounts.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, slavery was such a fundamental aspect of Yoruba society that Anna Hinderer could remark that, "there are no riches in Africa; slaves and wives make a man great in this country."<sup>18</sup> As Agiri argues, various statements of observers suggest that she was correct in her assessment of the importance of slavery.<sup>19</sup> At the time of the travels of both Foote and Hinderer in West Africa, the British Government was more concerned with trade, both in suppressing the slave trade and encouraging the export of other products, than it was in spreading Christianity. As a consequence, Christian communities were

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<sup>15</sup> See Edward Said (1978), Orientalism, London: Peregrine, p. 208; Moira Ferguson (1992), Subject to Others. British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834, London: Routledge, pp. 303-7.

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Brantlinger (1985), "Victorians and Africans: The genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", Critical Inquiry, 12, 1, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> Ferguson (1992), p. 303.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> Babatunde Agiri (1981), "Slavery in Yoruba society in the 19th century", in Paul Lovejoy (ed), The Ideology of Slavery in Africa, London: Sage, p. 126.

sometimes protected by military forces, though not always. Against this background, Mrs. Foote made a passionate plea at the end of her narrative in support of the missionary effort, a plea that was couched in the rhetoric of Victorian anti-slavery discourse. She wrote:

The whole land rings with tales of bloodshed, oppression and wickedness of every kind, and as long as the native rulers are uncivilised and unchristianised, slavery will never cease. The natives consider exchanging men for goods a perfectly fair sort of barter, and in war the victorious party makes slaves of their prisoners as a legitimate part of their success. The love of enslaving his fellow beings is also so innate in man, that even freed slaves, if they get on in this world, spend their first spare money in buying a slave...[S]lavery will, I fear, still exist in Africa... until the civilising influence of Christianity has extended itself over those melancholy tracts of land...<sup>20</sup>

Foote defined her *raison d'être* in West Africa in terms of the anti-slavery effort. Thus she defined her presence in West Africa in terms of an accepted feminine pursuit, for, as Clare Midgley argues, from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, middle-class women in Britain were very much involved in the anti-slavery effort.<sup>21</sup> Foote was concerned not only with eradicating what remained of the European slave trade, but also in eliminating indigenous slavery. Thus the same rhetoric which had been applied to the European trade was now applied to West African social systems, but the blame for slavery lay with the West Africans themselves. Only through the "civilising" influence of Britain could this slavery be eliminated. This fact suggests that Foote and Hinderer were unaware of the fundamental differences between European slavery and slavery in West African societies. As David Northrup suggests, much of the slavery in pre-colonial Nigeria was based on a kinship idiom, where slaves were treated almost as family members, and could hold the same positions of status as free-born

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<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, pp. 220-1.

<sup>21</sup> Clare Midgley (1992), Women Against Slavery. The British Campaigns, 1780-1870, London: Routledge.

people.<sup>22</sup> Many of the slaves in sub-Saharan Africa were women, and were quickly assimilated into these kinship units.<sup>23</sup> Thus slavery was an essential part of the structure of pre-colonial Nigerian societies. It was only during the colonial period that the misconception about the subordinate status levels of slaves was perpetuated, and it was only with the penetration of market economies during the colonial period that the notion of slaves as subordinated status objects began to increase.<sup>24</sup> The descriptions of the legacy of indigenous slavery in the narratives of Foote and Hinderer, therefore, did not reflect accurately the ideological framework of this slavery. Instead, they used the same emotive and sensationalist terms of reference that had been in use in the anti-slavery propaganda of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The descriptions of slavery by Foote and Hinderer differed from those of Elizabeth Melville, who, writing a generation earlier in the 1840s, was more concerned about the effects of European slavery than she was about indigenous slavery. Rather than condemning West Africans, Melville concentrated her attacks on the European slave trade and exhorted sympathy for the West Africans amongst her readers. In 1843 she wrote:

A feeling of patriotic pride always mingles with my pity on seeing a slaver brought in, to think that - thanks to Britain above all the other kingdoms on the face of the globe - how soon these, our so unjustifiably oppressed fellow-mortals, will be blessed with a happier freedom than they ever knew in their heathen homes of the far interior...<sup>25</sup>

Melville insisted that indigenous slave raiding only occurred as a consequence of

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<sup>22</sup> David Northrup (1981), "The ideological context of slavery in southeastern Nigeria in the 19th century", in Paul E. Lovejoy, The Ideology of Slavery in Africa, London: Sage, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Claire Robertson and Martin Klein (eds) (1983), Women and Slavery in Africa, University of Wisconsin Press, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Northrup (1981), p. 119. As Northrup explains, nineteenth-century sources stress the relative equality between the freeborn and the slave in certain West African societies before the mid-nineteenth century. This was because the kinship idiom was most prevalent at this time (as opposed to economic and status conceptions of slavery, which assumed greater significance later in the century as the palm oil trade grew. The picture is complicated by the fact that economic conceptions often served to reinforce the kinship idiom).

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Melville (1969), A Residence at Sierra Leone, London: Frank Cass, p. 136.

the demand for slaves in Brazil and the Caribbean; if the trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished, indigenous slavery would also diminish. However, despite her philanthropic concerns, Melville's anti-slavery tracts formed part of a wider discourse which subsumed the voices of Africans, and her belief in Britain's role as the guardian of freedom in Africa encoded the continent as one to be controlled and aided by conquest and rule.

### **Portrayals of West African spiritual beliefs**

As contact with West Africa increased after mid-century, more knowledge was acquired about indigenous spiritual beliefs. Much of this, however, was comparative knowledge, and viewed from the standpoint of European religions. There was little effort to understand these beliefs from the point of view of those Africans who practised them. Indeed, there was little real interest in understanding or recording the spiritual beliefs of Africans until the turn of the century. Paradoxically, although there was little concern for understanding African spiritual beliefs, the cultural practices which emanated from them provided the Victorians with a rich source of fascination.

West African spiritual beliefs were termed "fetishism" by the Victorians. Comte had identified fetishism as the first stage of religious development; Lubbock dismissed it as "mere witchcraft".<sup>26</sup> This fetishism was testimony, according to the Victorians, to the inferiority of Africans:

The inhabitants of that world were backward and inferior. This was not an aspersion, it was a fact - for if they had not been backward and inferior, would they have chosen to live in a world governed by fear and magic? They had fashioned their bondage by themselves, long before any European arrived to discover, exploit and increase it. They were bound not only to the past, but in some cases... actually to the dead, to ancestors who still conditioned their thought and action.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In Dorothy Mermin (1982), "Browning and the primitive", *Victorian Studies*, 25, 2, p. 224.

<sup>27</sup> A.P. Thornton (1965), *Doctrines of Imperialism*, London: Wiley and Sons, pp. 154-5.

These attitudes were often apparent in the narratives of women travellers. Mrs. Foote was dismissive of West African spiritual customs. She described offerings to a fetish idol at Lagos as "all sorts of rubbish, bits of bone, old beads, shells, scraps of crockery and coloured rags, the poor men believing that the fetish will be pleased by such delicate attentions, and preserve their lives from the fury of the waves".<sup>28</sup> Foote expressed her opinion that West Africans would soon be converted to Christianity and so be rid of such "superstitions". Zélie Colvile, writing later in the century was more pejorative in her comments about West African customs. She wrote:

Although it is an open question whether the West African negro has yet arrived at a stage which fits him for the reception of our religion and civilisation, with their attendant liberties in the matter of gin, gunpowder, and forms of worship, and restrictions as to sexual relationship, there can be no doubt that the world at large can no longer tolerate the cruelties and abominations attendant on ancestral and devil worship, nor live cheek-by-jowl - as it must be nowadays with all seaboard populations - with a people which practises them.<sup>29</sup>

Colvile adopted the typical late-Victorian attitude that the fault for the failure to convert West Africans to Christianity lay not with the missionaries, but with the inferiority of the West Africans themselves; they were simply not advanced enough to understand Christianity and forsake their superstitions. Indeed she argued that the missionaries should be thanked for having "stamped out the outward and more objectionable forms of West African superstition".<sup>30</sup> In the narratives of both Foote and Colvile there were no attempts to understand and relate to the spiritual practices of West Africans.

Constance Larymore was more sympathetic. She argued that although she was interested in fetish, she never ventured to discover which "schools" the various peoples belonged to, for she held the "belief in treating any man's religion with as

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<sup>28</sup> Foote (1869), p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), p. 305.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

much reverence and reticence as he himself does".<sup>31</sup> Unlike Foote and Colvile, Larymore recognised that African spiritual beliefs approximated to religious beliefs, they were not merely superstition, and she expressed a certain amount of respect for these beliefs. She also expressed her amusement at the lack of understanding of West African religious customs amongst colonialists. She repeated a story that she had heard of an English soldier in Northern Nigeria, who, on seeing a red ant hill, "took it to be a "heathen fetish", and, plunging his sword through and through the imaginary idol, exclaimed to the astonished villagers and his troops, "Thus does the Great White Queen destroy the Black Man's Ju-ju!" The villagers, of course, thought him mad..."<sup>32</sup> This ridiculing of an incident of British misunderstanding undermines imperialist discourse on West African spiritual beliefs; the figure of fun is not the African steeped in superstition, but the Englishman ignorant of both the landscapes and the religions of Northern Nigeria.

Mary Kingsley's portrayal of "fetish-worship" also challenged, to some extent, the images constructed in imperialist discourse, in that she attempted to negate the image of barbarism in West Africa. She contended that "fetish-worship" was as viable a religion as any practised in the West, and she also attempted to familiarise it by writing:

...you white men will say, "Why go on believing in him then? but that is an idea that does not enter the African mind. I might just as well say "Why do you go on believing in the existence of hansom cabs," because one hansom cab driver malignantly fails to take you where you want to go, or fails to arrive in time to catch a train you wished to catch."<sup>33</sup>

Kingsley pointed out that the word "fetish" originated amongst the Portuguese explorers, who named the objects worshipped by West Africans *Feitico* after the images of saints that they themselves worshipped.<sup>34</sup> Thus Kingsley drew a parallel

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<sup>31</sup> Constance Larymore (1908), p. 122.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 506.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

between an interpretation of European Christianity and West African spiritual beliefs, undermining any claims to the superiority of Christian belief. She argued:

The final object of all human desire is a knowledge of the nature of God. The human methods, or religions, employed to gain this object are divisible into three main classes:

*Firstly*, the submission to and acceptance of a direct divine message;

*Secondly*, the attempt by human intellectual power to separate the conception of God from material phenomena, and regard Him as a thing apart and unconditioned;

*Thirdly*, the attempt to understand Him as manifest in natural phenomena. I personally am constrained to follow this last and humblest method...<sup>35</sup>

As discussed in chapter 4, Kingsley equated her own beliefs with those of Spinoza, but she also recognised that the beliefs of Africans fitted into this third category, and further identified her belief in animism with that of West Africans. Fundamental to her understanding of West African spiritual beliefs was her comprehension of their worship of spirits. This comprehension led to Kingsley's defense of African beliefs. She wrote:

You will often hear this religion of fetish called a religion of terror and painted black with crimson patches. Well, facts are facts; find me a more cheerful set of human beings... than the West Africans, and then, and not till then, will I say fetish is a horrible thing. I will grant you there is human sacrifice under it from Sierra Leone to the Niger; I will grant you there is sending down with the dead of their wives, slaves, and friends; I will grant you it kills witches, that it produces cannibalism in this region; but before you write down the men who do these things as fiends, I ask you to read any respectable book on European history, to face the Inquisition and the fires of Smithfield, and then to go and read your London Sunday newspapers. West Africa could not keep a Sunday newspaper going in crimes between man and man; its crimes are those arriving from a simple direct absolute belief in a religion. From no region that I know can so truly go up the sad cry to God, *Doch, alles was dazu mich trieb, Gott, war so gut! ach! war so lieb!* as in West Africa. The mere fact of the Bantu doing little or nothing in the way of human sacrifice or sending-down killing, does not make me prefer him to the Negro.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899a), West African Studies, London: Macmillan, p. 95.

<sup>36</sup> Kingsley (1897c), p. 342.



Kingsley, therefore, argued that West African spiritual practices were no more barbaric than those that had taken place in Europe, and that there was, in fact, less crime in West Africa than in Britain. "Fetish-worship" and "witchcraft", with all their attendant brutality, were not violence for the sake of violence, but arose from deep-seated spiritual beliefs. Kingsley understood that everyday life for the West Africans was dominated by their belief in the spirit world, and, consequently, they had a profound belief in witchcraft and its effects. She elucidated the African belief that witchcraft could act in two ways, witching something out of a person, or witching something into a person.<sup>37</sup> West Africans believed that they were born with four souls: the soul that survives death, the shadow on the path, the dream-soul, and the bush-soul.<sup>38</sup> Witches, who could be hired by any member of a village, continually set traps for the soul that wandered from the body during sleep, and if this was caught the owner would sicken as the soul withered. West Africans also took great care not to offend their bush-souls which lived in some plant or animal in the forest. They also believed in other spirits, such as disembodied human spirits, ghosts, spirits resident in inanimate objects and spirits causing sickness. These spirits could be witched into charms which would provide protection for the wearer. Kingsley emphasised that such a proliferation of spirits meant that every event in a person's life was controlled by some form of spirit; the belief in witchcraft was thus a fundamental aspect of social control in West African societies.<sup>39</sup> From her knowledge of indigenous spiritual beliefs, Kingsley attempted to understand, and thus portray objectively, the fact that at almost every death the suspicion of witchcraft arose, which meant trial-by-ordeal for unpopular men, or the wives and slaves of the deceased.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 462-3, 518.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897a), "The fetish view of the human soul", *Folklore*, 8, p. 144.

<sup>39</sup> In Mary Kingsley (1899c) "Life in West Africa", in W. Shoewring [ed], *The British Empire Series*, 2, p. 366-71. Kingsley argued that West African religion and law were intimately connected. She wrote, "remember that in those great regions under fetich [sic] rule there are no unemployed, no paupers, no hospitals, workhouses, or prisons, and the African chief keeps order therein" (pp. 372-73).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

For Kingsley it was such a profound belief in the spirit-world, and the fear that witchcraft inspired, that produced what the West regarded as a savage blood-lust and a delight in gore. She argued that Africans did not take pleasure in violence, but that this violence was a manifestation of the terrible burden of fear that they carried around with them. She wrote, "An African cannot say, as so many Europeans evidently easily can, "Oh, that is alright from a religious point of view, but one must be practical, you know", and it is this factor that makes me respect the African deeply and sympathise with him".<sup>41</sup> Kingsley tried to remain objective about the violence that seemed inherent in West African societies; she withheld any opinions that she had on the matter, and neither condoned nor condemned it, except to say that there was a "strange element of common-sense in apparently rank superstitious folly".<sup>42</sup> However, she went beyond the usual ethnocentric response of shock and abhorrence, and attempted to avoid sensationalising these aspects of West African life. She delved deeply into the minds of West Africans in an effort to understand their customs. For her, those customs which were inherently violent were not a product of the barbarity of West Africans, but a manifestation of their profound spiritual beliefs. Kingsley attempted to persuade her readers to avoid condemning West Africans as barbaric on the basis of their spiritual practices, for although these practices could be considered violent, they were no different to the witch-hunts, persecution and mass-murders which had taken place in Europe in the name of religion.

Kingsley went further in attempting to defend West Africans from the charge of barbarism, and undermined images of the "bestial savage" by portraying West Africans as affectionate and noble. She wrote:

That the Africans are affectionate I am fully convinced. This affection does not lie precisely on the same lines as those of Europeans, I allow. It is not with them so deeply linked with sex; but the love between mother and child, man and man, brother and sister, woman and woman, is deep, true, and pure, and it must be taken into account in observing their institutions and

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<sup>41</sup> Kingsley (1899a), pp. 127-8.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896a), "The development of Dodos", National Review, 3, p. 69.

ideas, particularly as to this witchcraft, where it shows violently and externally in hatred only to the superficial observer.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of an affectionate African was a contradiction in terms to many Europeans who expounded their views on the barbarism of Africa; for others, as discussed in the preceding chapter, this affection was a manifestation of infantilism. Kingsley, however, represented the affectionate nature of West Africans as testament to their nobility. Thus she challenged the image of the "bestial savage" by reinvoking images of the "noble savage". Constance Larymore also alluded to similar images of the "noble savage". On arriving in Hadeija, she and her husband were greeted by a cavalry of African soldiers, whose "military precision would not have disgraced any regiment of British cavalry". Larymore wrote:

I was myself [interested] at seeing this spectacle of truly barbaric African splendour... amid so much brilliance and colour! It seemed to take one back centuries in the world's civilisation, and, with a gasp, came the realisation that we had stepped into a world where time had stood still, and the ages passed over without leaving a mark!<sup>44</sup>

These representations by Kingsley and Larymore were, of course, deeply ethnocentric and still represented West Africans as Other. The least "noble" of West Africans for both women were those who had been influenced by Europe, those who had adopted aspects of what Kingsley termed "second hand rubbishy white culture - a culture far lower and less dignified than that of either the stately Mandingo or the bush chief."<sup>45</sup> As has been pointed out throughout this thesis, many of the women were influenced by nineteenth-century romanticism. Kingsley, in particular was influenced by the late nineteenth-century romantic movement in Britain, with its emphasis on spiritualism, but her depictions of West Africans owed less to the ideas of atavism and primitivism (as expressed in the works of Haggard, Conrad, Wells, and Bram Stoker) than they did to late eighteenth-century portrayals of West Africans. For Kingsley, the most noble of West Africans were

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<sup>43</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 20.

the unadulterated groups such as the Fang peoples. Unlike the late nineteenth-century romantics, Kingsley did not wish to see West Africans "civilised" and Christianised but wished to see their customs protected from Europeanisation. She admired the Fang because they had resisted and rejected completely any missionary influence, preserving their ancestor cults, witchcraft and secret societies which were fundamental to the nature of their society. It was these qualities of resistance in the Fang that appealed to Kingsley's vision of the "noble savage". They had fought back successfully the invasion of Western cultures, and continued to mint their own currency (in the form of miniature axe-heads or *bikei*) in order to maintain the independence of their trade networks. According to Kingsley, they were "full of fire, temper, intelligence, and go, very teachable, rather difficult to manage, quick to take offence"; they epitomised Kingsley's "noble savage". She wrote, "I like him better than any African".<sup>46</sup>

Despite drawing on earlier, ethnocentric images, Kingsley's depictions of West African spiritual beliefs challenged the image of the "bestial savage" apparent in many other imperial literatures. The missionaries were among the major contributors to this image, and their reports in the missionary magazines were full of graphic images of violence. In the *Missionary Record*, fetish rites were of "the most sanguinary character"; the priests were "frightful monsters, whose weapons of rule [we]re terror and the knife"; "the mangled limbs of the victims [we]re hung on the branches of the horrid fetish tree"; and the skulls of the dead were "seen scattered in all directions".<sup>47</sup> Mary Slessor's descriptions, however, avoided these graphic images. Although she was often depressed and appalled by incidents of violence that she witnessed in Calabar,<sup>48</sup> she did not see anything fundamentally wrong in the nature of Calabar societies. Her obvious mission was to spread the Gospel and to eradicate many of the violent customs inherent in indigenous

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896b), "Travels on the Western Coast of Equatorial Africa", Scottish Geographical Magazine, 12, pp. 121-122.

<sup>47</sup> "Report on the state of the missions", Scottish United Presbyterian Church Missionary Record, January 1846, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Mary Slessor to her sister Maggie 17/4/77, Slessor Papers, Dundee Museum.

religious beliefs. However, Slessor believed that it was important not to destroy indigenous cultures. Like Kingsley, she had a profound understanding of West African religious beliefs, and recognised that they were fundamental to the maintenance of social order. She believed that the marriage of West African customs, without their attendant violence, with a belief in Christian morality would improve the quality of life in West Africa. As discussed in chapter 3, Slessor actually devoted more effort to the protection of Calabar customs from British encroachment, and to the peaceful settlement of local disputes, than she did to spreading Christianity. Her respect for the spiritual beliefs of the peoples of Calabar, and her adaptation of Christianity to a form more suited to accommodate West African customs, was a visionary idea for its time, and one which became a policy of British missions in the 1920s.

### **The mystique of West African cultural practices: images of cannibals, killings and secret societies**

Of all the perceived atrocities in West Africa, cannibalism was the most sensational. The Victorian imagination was constantly titillated by tales of anthropophagy in far-off regions of the world, particularly West Africa and New Guinea. Exaggerated claims of cannibalism were used to elucidate the supposed debasement of "bestial" West Africans, and cannibalism was a much exploited theme from mid-century onwards. The apparently disparate traits of paganism, nakedness, and cannibalism formed a syndrome. Nakedness often implied cannibalism and fetish-worship; a clothed cannibal was a contradiction in terms. Such images were favourites with travellers in West Africa.<sup>49</sup> However, as Arens argues, the Victorians were probably far more obsessed with cannibalism than the

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the works of Stanley, Winwood Reade, Ward and Johnston. Cannibalism was also a popular theme in fiction, for example, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* continually evokes images of cannibalism. On the cannibal syndrome, see Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow (1977), *The Myth of Africa*, Library of Social Studies, pp. 36-7.

West Africans ever were.<sup>50</sup> Modern anthropology casts considerable doubt on the existence of cannibalism in Africa, and suggests that any instances were linked to witchcraft rather than to the gustatory cannibalism of Victorian imperial discourse. Arens argues that while there was a vast amount of literature alluding to the existence of cannibalism, there is no satisfactory first-hand account of it as a socially approved custom ritually practised anywhere in the world. He writes:

...the widespread African belief that Europeans are cannibals or use human blood for evil intent is interpreted as an indication of African ignorance. As a correlate, the "fact" of African cannibalism is thought to be the result of African ignorance of civilised standards.<sup>51</sup>

Few writers have analyzed the possibility that the West Africans themselves may have spread rumours of their own cannibalism either to maintain social order, to prevent attacks from other ethnic groups, or to discourage the European powers from penetrating further into the forests of West Africa. However, the theme of African cannibalism remained an extremely popular one during the Victorian period, and one which was guaranteed to attract an audience.

Despite this, few women travellers mentioned cannibalism in their narratives, and only Mary Kingsley discussed it at any length. Despite ascribing the image of the "noble savage" to West Africans, Kingsley did not deny the existence of cannibalism in West Africa. This may seem an anomaly, but it appears that initially she did not wish to make an issue of cannibalism. She subscribed to the views of Burton, de Brazza and du Chaillu in considering that certain groups in West Africa

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<sup>50</sup> For example, the report on Franklin's disappearance whilst searching for the North-West Passage was spiced up by stories of the crew resorting to cannibalism (see C.C. Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime", in V.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (eds) (1977), *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 95-112); in 1816 the wreck of *La Meduse* evoked images not of noble suffering, but of murderous, cannibalistic panic, and the Dracula stories of the late nineteenth century were based on a renewed interest in the gruesome exploits of Vlad V the Impaler (see Reay Tannahill (1975), *Flesh and Blood. A History of the Cannibal Complex*, Hamish Hamilton, London).

<sup>51</sup> W. Arens (1979), *The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 20-1.

were cannibals.<sup>52</sup> Alison Blunt argues that Kingsley used the notoriety of the Fang "to establish herself within the masculine tradition of exploration",<sup>53</sup> and this certainly fitted with her identification of herself with her heroes. However, she attempted to play down the subject rather than to sensationalise it. It was mentioned in chapter 5 that she referred to the forest peoples of Gabon as Fans rather than Fangs as her predecessors had done. In the index to *Travels in West Africa* there are only two page references to cannibalism. She wrote of the Fang, "He has no slaves, no prisoners of war, no cemeteries, so you must draw your own conclusions. No, my friend, I will not tell you any cannibal stories."<sup>54</sup>

Kingsley wanted to avoid the sensational but, in defending West Africans in the face of the racism of late-Victorian England, she was forced to defend cannibalism, to argue that although it did exist it was practised for nutritional purposes only and was not a threat to white people.<sup>55</sup> She expressed an indifference to cannibalism when questioned about it, and consequently her critics accused her of flippancy.<sup>56</sup> What these critics failed to appreciate was that by instilling a little humour, Kingsley was attempting to forestall any immediate ethnocentric response to West African customs. She attempted to encourage her reader towards a more sympathetic response rather than one that was culturally conditioned. She wrote:

The Fan is not a cannibal from sacrificial motives... He does it in his commonsense way. Man's flesh, he says, is good to eat, very good, and he

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<sup>52</sup> On European fascination with the Fang peoples, see Christopher Chamberlin (1978), "The migration of the Fang into central Gabon during the nineteenth century: a new interpretation", International Journal of African Historical Studies, 2, p. 429.

<sup>53</sup> Alison Blunt (1994), Travel, Gender and Imperialism, New York: Guilford Press, p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> Kingsley (1882), p. 330.

<sup>55</sup> Many of her comments on cannibalism were in response to an article in the *Spectator*, probably written by Meredith Townsend and entitled "Negro Future", detailing the evil cruelty of Africans.

<sup>56</sup> She did tell an interviewer from *The London Review* that her uncle Gerald had been eaten by cannibals, but that this had not deterred her from travelling to West Africa (*The London Review*, May 21, 1898). She repeated this story in her memoir of her father in the preface to G.H. Kingsley (1900) Notes on Sport and Travel, London: Macmillan.

wishes you would try it. Oh dear no, he never eats it himself, but the next door town does.<sup>57</sup>

This amused objectivity pervaded Kingsley's work. For example, when she found a bag in her hut filled with various parts of human bodies, she commented that though it is "touching" that cannibals kept such "mementoes", "its an unpleasant practice when they hang the remains in the bedroom you occupy".<sup>58</sup> Kingsley could be accused of a certain amount of unfounded presumption in her depiction of Fang cannibalism. These "mementoes" were not necessarily evidence of cannibal feasts. She never saw a Fang eat human flesh, yet she accepted that they were cannibals without any hard evidence. She took the Fang's filed teeth as evidence of cannibalism without analyzing the cultural significance of this custom.<sup>59</sup> She interpreted the lack of burial places as possible evidence for cannibalism, but did not consider that the Fang might bury their dead beneath their huts, which she knew to be the practice of other ethnic groups. However, she did not seek to sensationalise the issue of cannibalism and it featured hardly at all in any of her publications. She even challenged the picture of the supposed violence of West Africans in the Victorian imagination; she wrote:

...the English public mind has a sort of tired feeling about the African. A feeling that it is really impossible to understand the creature that turns up in mission literature as a Simple Child of Nature, our Unsophisticated Brother, &c. [sic], and in newspapers as an Incarnate Fiend wallowing in blood, in Benin, Ashantee, and Dahomey, given to cannibalising round corners whenever the white eye is off him, and a lazy brute when the white eye is on.<sup>60</sup>

When she was forced to defend cannibalism she portrayed it in a humorous light designed to elicit a sympathetic response. Thus, while not dispelling the myth of

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<sup>57</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 330.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>59</sup> Garry Hogg (1958), Cannibalism and Human Sacrifice, London: Pan Books, p. 115.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Kingsley (1898b), "The liquor traffic with West Africa", Fortnightly Review, 4, pp. 538-9.



cannibalism, she went some way towards challenging the image of African savagery which prevailed at the time of her travels.

Of the other women travellers, only Zélie Colvile mentioned cannibalism. In a chapter entitled *The Land of Death* it could be expected that Colvile would sensationalise the supposed violence inherent in West Africa. However, she wrote, "Many were the stories told to us of cannibalism..., I fancy mostly exaggerated; for, as far as I know, cannibalism has never been practised in this region except as part of a religious ceremony".<sup>61</sup> Colvile, therefore, refused to believe any of the rumours that she heard whilst travelling in West Africa without first-hand evidence. The notion of cannibalism was intimately connected to images of secret societies, especially in Sierra Leone and what was to become southern Nigeria. As Mary Kingsley wrote:

It is needless to say that cannibalism is not allowed nor practised, in districts close to the Government stations. I myself doubt whether there is half as much cannibalism near a station of the Congo Français as there is in the stations in the Oil Rivers. Of course it is more difficult to suppress in the Rivers, because it is connected to the secret societies...<sup>62</sup>

The secret societies were viewed with suspicion by both the British and by Africans themselves. However, what had been a local annoyance was transformed by imperialist discourse into an international threat aimed at the very roots of British imperialism. As Douglas Johnson argues, "European perceptions of African "secret societies" were partly moulded by the history of European response to their own secret societies, but there were parallels to the European situation in the African experience".<sup>63</sup> The suspicions of African rulers about subversion and uncontrolled meetings, even when they themselves were members of the societies, combined with the paranoia of the colonial powers, often led to exaggerated reports about the activities of the "secret societies". That little was known about these

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<sup>61</sup> Colvile (1893), p. 306.

<sup>62</sup> Kingsley (1896b), p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> Douglas H. Johnson (1991), "Criminal secrecy: the case of the Zande "secret societies", Past and Present, 130, p. 174.

societies heightened their mystique, making them "harder to fathom and easier to shudder at".<sup>64</sup>

Mary Kingsley, however, attempted to separate West African secret societies from the notion of witchcraft. She argued that they were "not essentially religious, their action is mainly judicial";<sup>65</sup> in other words, secret societies existed to maintain law and order, and to ensure that justice was preserved. This was true, for example, of the Ekpe in Nigeria which existed to settle trade disputes and debt palavers. Kingsley believed that without the existence of a police force, law courts and prisons, the methods of the secret societies were perfectly logical in the context of West Africa. Some of these societies, she argued, practised cannibalism and human sacrifice, particularly the various leopard and alligator societies, but again, these were mainly for judicial purposes rather than being linked to witchcraft.<sup>66</sup> For this reason she exclaimed her support for their existence; she wrote, "I am absolutely for Secret Societies".<sup>67</sup> On another occasion she complained to Joseph Chamberlain at the Colonial Office about the images associated with secret societies and what she believed to be the fallacious accounts of these by people who knew little about them. She wrote that reports of the secret societies of Sierra Leone were:

...a piece of madness we have I fancy to thank the Bishop of S.L. [sic] for who I am informed is the only person out there that the Govt. [sic] will listen to. I am not speaking on this matter merely as an ethnologist but as one influenced greatly by Sir Claude MacDonald... a private friend of mine. He regarded the great... law keeping society of Egbo as a valuable aid in keeping internal law and order - a thing requiring regulation not suppression. There are Secret Societies and Secret Societies - some are law keepers like Purroh - others law breakers. When you next see a Sierra Leone official or trader - you ask them the difference between Purroh and Kufong

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<sup>64</sup> V.G. Kiernan (1969), *The Lords of Human Kind*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 205.

<sup>65</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 526.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 526-543.

<sup>67</sup> In Howard (1957), p. 225.

and if he does not know, do not listen to him on Secret Societies - its not his line.<sup>68</sup>

Here, Kingsley not only presented herself as an expert on the subject of secret societies in West Africa, but also attacked the Government for drawing information about such matters from people who were not experts and who were often misinformed. Furthermore, she censured the sweeping condemnation of all secret societies by those who did not understand the critical differences between the functions, constitutions and activities of the many secret societies in West Africa. Kingsley believed that British administrators should suspend judgement on such cultural practices until they had a deeper understanding of them, and this was very much in line with her attitude towards West African customs in general, and which has led to her being acclaimed as one of the pioneers in cultural relativist approaches to anthropology.<sup>69</sup>

Tales of ritual sacrifice were also bound up with stories about cannibalism and secret societies, and European travellers in West Africa had long expressed their horror of human sacrifices and public executions.<sup>70</sup> Women travellers were not exempt from alluding to ritual sacrifice. Zélie Colvile, for example, whilst dismissing the existence of cannibalism in Bonny, accepted that human sacrifice was widespread. She wrote:

Only a few weeks before our arrival... thirty slaves were killed at a place not fifty miles from Bonny, in order that their late master might not be unattended in the land of the spirits; while the relations of another deceased chief, also in the immediate neighbourhood, had buried alive two of his slaves in his, and had hung up two more, head downwards, by hooks passed through their heels; in which position they remained until the flesh rotted away, and the poor wretches, still alive, fell into a pit full of spikes, on which they were impaled.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Kingsley to Joseph Chamberlain, 5/8/98, Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University Library

<sup>69</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

<sup>70</sup> Hammond and Jablow (1977), p. 65.

<sup>71</sup> Colvile (1893), pp. 306-7.

At first sight these were images of seemingly gratuitous violence based on hearsay and exaggeration. However, Colvile's comments suggested that she was aware of the spiritual beliefs underlying the practice of human sacrifice. She went on to say:

Horrible as this religion is, it has the advantage of putting enormous power into the hands of the rulers, and thus enabling them to maintain a degree of order which our milder methods fail to effect. Men who had travelled in the interior told me that, in point of honesty, the civilised compared most unfavourably with the uncivilised parts.<sup>72</sup>

What is apparent from Colvile's comments was her perception of West African society as inherently barbaric, requiring equally barbaric methods of punishment in order to maintain some semblance of order. The milder, more "humane" methods of the British were ineffectual in the face of this barbarity. Thus, while Colvile believed that human sacrifice was unacceptable violence in the eyes of the British, it was an acceptable, if not inevitable, means of maintaining social order in West Africa. In other words, it was symptomatic of the violent nature of West African societies.

Mary Slessor perhaps had most first-hand encounters with incidents of violence related to West African customs, and she attempted to prevent such incidents as far as she could. She may have learned from the failed attempts of her predecessors to eradicate such customs through proselytising, and instead attempted to prevent individual episodes by reasoning and pleading with the protagonists, and by establishing close relationships with village leaders over whom she hoped to exercise some influence. An example of this occurred in 1888, when she intervened at the burial of an Okoyong chief's son to prevent trials-by-ordeal. He was buried after two weeks of pleading, arguing and belligerence by Slessor without a single attendant death; this was previously unheard of in Okoyong.<sup>73</sup> Such interventions

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>73</sup> For accounts of this incident see Carol Christian and Gladys Plummer (1970), God and One Redhead. Mary Slessor of Calabar, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 72; W.P. Livingstone (1916), Mary Slessor of Calabar. Pioneer Missionary, London: Hodder and Stoughton, pp. 91-99; Caroline Oliver (1982), Western Women in Colonial Africa, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, pp. 113-5.

by Slessor were commonplace. She avoided condemning African practices outright in her publications, and on one occasion reconciled African fears of offending the spirits with Old Testament fears of a vengeful God as a motive for believing, honouring and obeying "all the tabus [sic] and sacrifices and ceremonies of his native god". According to Slessor, therefore, "fear for the vengeance of the offended deity" was usually the motive for the persistence of customs such as human sacrifice, "the same as runs through the history of the Old Testament".<sup>74</sup> Thus, although Slessor wanted to see such customs eradicated, she understood why they prevailed, and attempted to draw parallels with European beliefs.

The fear of the spirit world among many West Africans to which both Colvile and Slessor alluded was, for Kingsley, fundamental to understanding West African customs. Kingsley argued that human sacrifice was only comprehensible if the fear which pervaded African society and dominated everyday life was properly understood. However, it was one of the few customs that Kingsley wished to see eradicated in West Africa. She wrote:

This killing at funerals is a custom that, from every civilised point of view, must be stamped out, although at present the stamping-out process merely means adding another to the escort accompanying the original deceased, but it is not fair to the Government to expect the immediate and wholesale eradication of the custom, because of the deep root it has in the Negro mind.<sup>75</sup>

Kingsley, therefore, did not condone the custom of ritual sacrifice, but she attempted to communicate to her readers why it occurred, to persuade them to suspend judgement and to refrain from condemning West Africans on the basis of their beliefs. Constance Larymore went a step further in undermining the images of violence associated with West African customs. Whilst in Kabba she wrote:

There are many minor ceremonies and festivals, connected with matters agricultural, the ultimate success of the crops, the coming of the new yams, etc., but there is little variety in the proceedings, the main point being apparently, the making of a "cheerful noise" and the sacrifice of nothing

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<sup>74</sup> In J.K. MacGregor (1917), "Mary Mitchell Slessor, 1848-1915", The East and the West, 1, 15, p. 162.

<sup>75</sup> Kingsley (1896a), p. 68.

more dreadful than a few fouls!<sup>76</sup>

Here Larymore questioned Victorian assumptions about West African customs; she was aware of the depiction of West Africa as a place of extreme violence in other colonialist discourse and attempted to undermine this image with this description of local customs in Kabba. These occasional, seemingly frivolous remarks were used by both Larymore and Kingsley to disrupt stereotypical images of West African customs in the minds of their readers, and, in this way, presented a significant challenge to Orientalist discourses about West Africa.

One aspect of West African customs that was particularly appalling to people in Britain was the killing of twins. Travellers and missionaries alike used its existence as evidence of the wanton cruelty and barbarity of West Africans.<sup>77</sup> Some West African peoples believed that the occurrence of twins meant that the mother had committed adultery with an evil spirit, and this spirit manifested itself in the form of one of the twins. Since there was no way of telling which child was the evil spirit, both were killed, often along with the mother. Kingsley understood that for the African:

Twins are a sin not a crime, hence the horror of them - sin as... [you know] in our own parts is an offence against a spirit - twins are an adultery - wherever you find adultery worked up with a very serious affair, you find him [the African] killing.<sup>78</sup>

As with human sacrifice, Kingsley maintained that it was the profound fear inspired by the belief in spirits that provoked such extreme actions, and again she avoided judging the custom in terms of Victorian morality.

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<sup>76</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 126.

<sup>77</sup> For example, Hope Waddell, the founder of the Calabar mission, perceived the killing of twins as "proof of the darkness and deadness of heart and mind which ignorance of the Gospel and prevailing sin produced, when women and mothers like them could advocate and practise the murder of new-born infants, contrary to natural feelings, and worse than brutes", Missionary Record, September, 1852.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Kingsley to Edward Tylor, 16/4/98, Tylor Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.

Slessor also understood the source of the fear of twins in West Africa, and committed herself to dispelling this fear. She walked miles to rescue twin babies from the bush, adopted them as her own, and raised them to adulthood. The communities in which she lived could see that these babies grew into normal adults, and in this way Slessor made some inroads into the superstition. By the time of her death in 1915 the killing of twins was considerably reduced in the Calabar area.<sup>79</sup> It was this humanitarian work in saving the lives of twins that evoked uncharacteristic praise from Kingsley, who normally had very few positive comments to make about missionaries. As Mary Russell argues, the two struck up an immediate friendship and an unlikely partnership, for they were both intent on promoting a better understanding of West African customs.<sup>80</sup> Slessor's renown was increased in Britain as a consequence of Kingsley's description of her deeds in Travels in West Africa.

### **The preservation of West African customs**

Several women travellers expressed their desire to see the customs of West Africa remain, for the most part, intact. Mary Kingsley, in particular, campaigned for the respect for and understanding of these customs amongst British imperialists. Although the following letter, written to Liberian Edward Blyden, highlights the ethnocentrism contained in Kingsley's polygenism, it also illustrates her concern for the preservation of West African cultures:

I believe that no race can, as a race, advance except on its own line of development, and that it is the duty of England, if she intends to really and truly advance the African on the plane of culture and make him [sic] a citizen of the world, to preserve the African nationalism, and not destroy it; but destroy it she will unless you who know it come forward and demonstrate African nationalism is a good thing, and that it is not a welter of barbarism, cannibalism and cruelty... I beg you, Sir, to do your best and prevent this fate falling on your noble race. I believe you can best do it by

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<sup>79</sup> Chappell (1927), p. 41, argues that by 1898, seventeen years before her death, Slessor had rescued fifty-one twins; the final figure must have been much higher.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Russell (1988), The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt, London: Collins, p. 43.

stating that there is an African law and an African culture; that the African has institutions and a state form of his own.<sup>81</sup>

Kingsley believed that it was erroneous to regard African religions, customs, law society, and political organisations as mere childish gropings towards a supposedly higher - European - set of concepts. Instead they were natural expressions of the West African personality. Such institutions had arisen from a process of historical development, and should be intensively researched and understood before any attempt to change them was made. Ideas such as these lay behind Kingsley's intensive, and perhaps unbalanced, dislike of missionaries and educated Africans, whom she believed to be destroying the indigenous cultures of West Africa. A particular hatred of Kingsley's was the imposition of western garments, such as the Hubbard, on West African women. These were made in Europe, often did not fit, and were completely unsuited to the climate of West Africa. With her usual Swifitean humour, Kingsley wrote:

...what idea the pious ladies in England, Germany, Scotland and France can have of the African figure I cannot think, but evidently part of their opinion is that it is very like a tub... It is not in nature for people to be made to fit these things. So I suggested that a few stuffed negroes should be sent home for distribution in working-party centres, and then the ladies could try the things on.<sup>82</sup>

Kingsley often used humour to "force her readers to acknowledge the legitimacy of African cultural institutions and to startle them out of complaisant assumptions of cultural superiority".<sup>83</sup> Thus, when one of her guides, Kiva, was seized by a creditor in a Fang village, who intended to settle the debt that Kiva owed by (according to Kingsley) eating him, Kingsley drew a powerful cultural comparison:

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<sup>81</sup> In Mark C. Hayford (1901), Mary H. Kingsley: From an African Standpoint, London: Bear and Taylor, pp. 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 221.

<sup>83</sup> Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa, Boston: Twayne Publishers, p. 132.



Evidently this was a trace of an early form of a Bankruptcy Court; the court which clears a man of his debt, being here represented by the knife and the cooking pot; the white-washing, as I believe it is termed with us, also shows, only it is not the debtor who is whitewashed, but the creditors doing themselves over with white clay to celebrate the removal of their enemy from his sphere of meretricious activity. This inversion may arise from the fact that whitewashing a... [person] who was about to be cooked would be unwise, as the stuff would boil off the bits and spoil the gravy. There is always some fragment of sound sense underlying African institutions.<sup>84</sup>

Kingsley's humour and satire disrupted conventional images of West African customs, and she drew further cultural parallels when she claimed that the West African was:

a logical, practical man, with feelings that are a credit to him, and are particularly strong in the direction of property... His make of mind is exceedingly like... [that] of thousands of Englishmen of the standing-nonsense, ...house-is-his-castle type.<sup>85</sup>

Despite her belief in polygenesis, Kingsley was one of a few travellers who were little weighed down with the presumptions of their own culture, and according to Holmes, "it is unlikely that any other woman ever penetrated so deeply into the savage mind".<sup>86</sup> She was convinced that the often violent customs which she studied in West Africa were the result of the harsh conditions of African life. All natural forces were the enemy of the West Africans; they believed that the spirits must be appeased, and a constant and ruthless war must be waged against those who used the spirits for evil purposes. This fundamentally spiritual outlook appealed to Kingsley's own pantheist beliefs, and she thus exhibited a rare sympathy for West African customs. According to Dorothy Middleton, her travels were a:

campaign to interpret all things West African and to break through the apathy and ignorance of her countrymen who were faced, at the turn of the century, with the responsibility of administering great tracts of the so-called

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<sup>84</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 285.

<sup>85</sup> Kingsley (1899a), pp. 318-9.

<sup>86</sup> I.M. Holmes (1949), *In Africa's Service. The Story of Mary Kingsley*, London: Saturn Press, p. 145.

"Dark Continent" which the European powers were carving up into "spheres of influence".<sup>87</sup>

Kingsley believed that interference by missionaries and administrators, who failed to realise or understand the nature of African beliefs, would upset the delicate balance of societies without seriously affecting indigenous beliefs and practices. As one critic argued:

Her understanding of the African mind caused her to be firm in her conviction that wise rule must be built up within the framework of African tribal laws and customs, and that it would be nothing short of national murder to attempt to impose on an ancient people an imitation of European government.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, she expressed her own fundamental belief that:

all members of Parliament and officials at the Foreign and Colonial Offices should be compelled to join the Folk-Lore Society; for I am sure that the work it would do in the careful and unprejudiced study of African beliefs and customs would lead to a true knowledge of the Africans.<sup>89</sup>

Essential differences, therefore, existed in the ways in which women travellers approached West African customs. Clearly, Mary Kingsley wanted to understand these customs in order to preserve them. Although the missionaries contributed to the overall understanding of African cultures, they wanted to understand in order to change.<sup>90</sup> This was perhaps less true of Mary Slessor than it was of Anna Hinderer. Slessor was to some degree "a child of her time"; on first encountering aspects of the more bloody of West African customs she wrote, "it is impossible to love these people for their own sake, one can only do it for it for

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<sup>87</sup> Dorothy Middleton (1973), "Some Victorian lady travellers", Geographical Journal, 139, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> No author cited, British Commonwealth Leaflets, 1948; courtesy of the British Commonwealth Society.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899d), p. 138.

<sup>90</sup> Ali Mazrui (1969), "European exploration and African self-discovery", The Journal of Modern African Studies, 7, 4, p. 671.

Christ's sake".<sup>91</sup> However, she quickly gained an understanding and appreciation of the fundamentals of Calabar customs, and when she became a magistrate<sup>92</sup> she used the local Mbiam oath rather than a Christian oath, and worked within a framework of African law rather than British law. She believed that a marriage of Christian morality with West African customs would eradicate the worst aspects of Calabar societies whilst preserving the essence of their cultures and lifestyles. She did not think it desirable to completely destroy indigenous West African cultures. In contrast, the likes of Melville, Colvile and Foote made very little effort to understand West African customs at all; therefore, their representations tended to be coloured by their own prejudices. Although Melville confessed to knowing nothing at all about West African customs, she was still able to make absolute judgements about the nature of those societies. She argued that the:

...impossibility of rooting out the idolatry, superstitions and barbarous practices of those grown up ere they come here, or of teaching humanised habits to any except the mere infants among them, is perfectly beyond comprehension to those who have never tried to tame or teach an ignorant savage.<sup>93</sup>

For the most part, the travels of the women residents served only to reinforce their ethnocentrism, they saw solely what they were expecting to see. The only way that West Africans could "advance" was through Westernisation and Christianisation. The opinions of these women contrasted greatly with those of Mary Kingsley, who concluded that West Africans could not be Westernized and should not have an alien system imposed upon them. Existing cultures were viable ones that should be improved through education rather than destroyed.<sup>94</sup> For Kingsley, the error of the earlier government officials (and their wives) arose from

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<sup>91</sup> S. Hudson, T.W. Jarvie and J. Stein (1978), *"Let the Fire Burn". A Study of R.M. McCheyne, Robert Annan, Mary Slessor*, Dundee: Hansell, p. 57.

<sup>92</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3.

<sup>93</sup> Melville (1968), p. 272.

<sup>94</sup> For an appraisal of Kingsley's views on education in West Africa, see Robert Pearce (1988), "Missionary education in colonial Africa: the critique of Mary Kingsley", *History of Education*, 17, 4, pp. 283-294.

the conditions that surrounded them in West Africa, and the nature of their restricted experience and influence. Her evocation of the "noble savage" may have had its roots in the uncertainty about the value of civilisation at the turn of the century, and whether a "civilised" person was an improvement on a "primitive" person. It may also have been purely aesthetic; she "saw the diversity of race and custom spread out in front of [her] like an artist's palette and resented any movement which reduced that picturesqueness".<sup>95</sup> However, it was also a recognition of the uprooting effects of Westernisation and, from a superior but solicitous standpoint, she regarded the assimilated Africans as objects of pity. In attempting to convince people in England that West Africans were not inferior, she found herself having to make a spirited defence of such customs as cannibalism, witchcraft, and even slavery - "the very things that distorted ideas about Africa and which she would therefore have liked to play down".<sup>96</sup>

As John Flint has argued, it is certainly possible to find fault with Kingsley's theories.<sup>97</sup> Her evocation of the "noble savage" was an essentially backward-looking philosophy, and it would have been impossible for Africa to remain a preserve for indigenous cultures once the forces of modernisation (such as trade, of which Kingsley was a great supporter) had been introduced into the continent. As Catherine Cline argues, she was equally naive in her failure to recognise that trade would be just as disruptive to African cultures as Christianity.<sup>98</sup> However, her romantic views of West Africans meant that she was the first to espouse the idea of the separate cultural worth of African societies. At a time when West African customs were regarded with condescension in Britain,

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<sup>95</sup> Hugh Ridley (1983), Images of Imperial Rule, London: Croom Helm, p. 93.

<sup>96</sup> John Keay (1985), Explorers Extraordinary, London: John Murray, p. 122.

<sup>97</sup> John E. Flint (1963), "Mary Kingsley - a reassessment", Journal of African History, 4, pp. 95-104.

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Ann Cline (1980), E.D. Morel 1873-1924. The Strategies of Protest, London: Blackstaff, p. 17.

her "long, continuous, steady fight for native institutions and native law in West Africa"<sup>99</sup> was a valuable challenge to prevailing assumptions.

## Conclusion

The images of peoples and customs were of fundamental importance to the popular geographies of West Africa. Portrayals of West Africans as "savages", and of their customs as barbaric and violent, added to, and confirmed, the metaphor of the Dark Continent. Apart from Kingsley and Slessor, however, white women travellers did not go into any great detail about the customs of West Africa. This was primarily because of the lack of contact between themselves and the people of West Africa. All of the women tended to avoid the graphic reporting found in other imperial discourses on West Africa; only Kingsley went into any detail about potentially sensational indigenous customs, and did so only when she was forced to defend West Africans. The absence of graphic imagery may well have been due to the fact that constraints controlled the subjects these women felt able to write about, and may also explain why landscape descriptions are much more prominent in their narratives than accounts of cultural practices.<sup>100</sup> However, this is not to say that when they did describe West African customs these women all wrote in the same manner. Kingsley, Slessor and Larymore, to varying degrees and in different ways, challenged the misconceptions about these customs, and thus, on occasion, undermined images of West Africans as savages. This was, perhaps, because they took an interest in understanding West African cultural practices, rather than in merely having their preconceptions confirmed. Foote and Melville, who travelled earlier in the century, and Colvile, who travelled as a tourist, had less contact with West Africans, and tended to rely on their preconceptions of indigenous customs rather than first-hand experiences when formulating their descriptions. Therefore, the images created by women travellers of West African customs were often very

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<sup>99</sup> Alice Stopford Green (1901), "Mary Kingsley", *African Society Journal*, 1, p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> See chapter 4.

different from those in other imperial discourses, but there were also significant differences amongst the women and the popular geographies that they created of West African peoples.

## CHAPTER 7

### COLONISED COUNTERPARTS

"King Ja-ja's subjects came to draw water for their households: fat elderly negresses, swathed in two or three particoloured square dusters; slim agile young matrons, looking anything but matronly in half a yard of the same material... all carrying huge water jars on their shoulders... and all laughing and talking and splashing to the utmost of their powers."<sup>1</sup>

"Women servants are seldom kept unless there are children in the family, and the good ones are few and far between. They are even more lazy than the men, and are careless, dirty, and cold hearted."<sup>2</sup>

"I requested, and obtained permission to pay a visit to the ladies of the harem..., I passed through the heavy door and found as great a contrast to the dim quiet scene I had just left as could well be imagined! A crowd of women, some mere girls, others middle-aged, nearly all carrying babies..., all laughing, clapping their hands, calling greetings and salutations incessantly."<sup>3</sup>

#### Introduction

The contact between white women and their West African counterparts created the possibility of totally unequal and dependent relationships in which British women helped to define and describe the conditions under which West African women lived, as well as the nature of those women themselves. As Alison Blunt argues, nineteenth-century travel writing "played an important part in claiming authority in the vivid representation of recurrent motifs constructing the sexuality of the other".<sup>4</sup> This was particularly important in terms of the representation of non-European women, and British women travellers had an important part to play in

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<sup>1</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893), Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Constance Larymore (1908), A Resident's Wife in Nigeria, London: Routledge, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Alison Blunt (1994), Travel, Gender, and Imperialism, New York: Guilford Press, pp. 29-30.

this. As Vron Ware argues, the grotesque imagery of the suffering Indian female, and the portrait of non-European women whose situation provoked shame and sorrow, are examples of the ways in which British women were instrumental in reinforcing the image of "Oriental" women as passive, quiescent victims of male power, "whose subordination was sometimes connected with, but always relative to, that of Western women".<sup>5</sup> Some women, like Slessor, felt morally obliged to help West African women improve their lives and throw off the shackles of male domination, which was perceived to be linked to heathen customs and a lack of Christian morality. The paradox lay in the fact that at the same time in Britain, women were beginning to oppose their own laws and institutions which were themselves oppressive to women. What is important for the purposes of this chapter, however, are the various ways in which women either reinforced or challenged the images of West African women found in other imperialist discourses. An understanding of their relationships with West African women is fundamental to this.

### **External observers or internal allies?**

Gender, as well as race, was a significant factor in allowing British women travellers access into West African societies; they presented little threat to the authority of African men, their status as women facilitated easy and frequent access to African women, and they were thus able to consider their lives from within the context of African culture and customs. As Kingsley wrote, "I openly own that if I have a soft spot in my feelings it is towards African women; and the close contact I have lived in with them has given rise to this, and, I venture to think, made me understand them".<sup>6</sup> Consequently, West African women feature extensively in the texts of Victorian women writers. However, only Slessor represented West African women differently from her portrayals of West African

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<sup>5</sup> Vron Ware (1992), Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History, London: Verso, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Kingsley (1899a), West African Studies, London: Macmillan, p. 320.



men. She often represented West African women as her allies in her fight against what she perceived as the abuses and injustices of polygamy.<sup>7</sup> She considered Ma Eme, the sister of a prominent ruler in Okoyong, to be her closest ally in helping her to prevent the ill-treatment of women.<sup>8</sup> The fact of her gender enhanced and facilitated Slessor's relationships with West African women. Gender also facilitated access to West African women for other women travellers, especially those like Kingsley and Larymore who took an interest in their West African counterparts. However, they remained observers from without, and their accounts of West African women were often no different from their accounts of West African men. Geographical and textual "closeness" to West African women was predicated on the imperial authority they derived from their status as *white* women. This gave them privileged access to West African women that was often denied to British men.

As discussed in chapter 6, Kingsley believed that the only way to understand West Africa and its peoples was to observe from the inside, to see "things as they are, with all the go and glory and beauty in them as well as the mechanism and the microbes".<sup>9</sup> Therefore, although she spent much time at mission stations and colonial offices, she also spent time alone in West African villages. In this way she fostered relationships with West African women during her travels in the French Congo. In her publications, lectures and articles, these relationships with West African women are evident. Kingsley witnessed the customs of women in different West African societies, and described in detail their roles within village life and local economies. Like other women travellers she paid particular attention to the different practices of dressing, ornamentation and hairdressing.<sup>10</sup> In such descriptions, Kingsley's position seemed to be one of a

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<sup>7</sup> M.D.W. Jeffreys (1950), "Mary Slessor - Magistrate, part 1", West African Review, June, p. 629.

<sup>8</sup> W.P. Livingstone (1916), Mary Slessor of Calabar, London: Hodder and Stoughton, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Kingsley to George Macmillan, n.d., Macmillan Papers, British Library.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Mary Kingsley (1982), Travels in West Africa, London: Virago, pp. 21, 46-8, 72, 222-4, 341, 531.

detached, objective observer. This has led some commentators to doubt Kingsley's proximity to the Africans whom she described, and a paradox existed between her self-proclaimed "closeness" to West African women, and the distance she maintained as a scientific observer. Birkett suggests that much of her knowledge was in fact second-hand, based on the work of other anthropologists (R.E. Dennett, Edward Tylor), missionaries (particularly Robert Nassau), and explorers (De Brazza, Du Chaillu, and Richard Burton).<sup>11</sup> Although it is true that she drew heavily on the works of such experts, Kingsley's own comments suggested that she developed real relationships with West African women. She wrote, "I own I like African women; we have always got on together. True, they have made some spiteful remarks on my complexion, but I must ignore these in the face of the thousand kindnesses for which I am their debtor".<sup>12</sup> On another occasion she wrote:

I cannot understand the view against the African woman, held... so commonly. They in their womanhood seem to me to quite hold their own morally with white women. Yet when one says this, as I often do, you see the white lady gaze at you aghast... I dare say it may be some defect in my character, but I always think just the same of Ayentyuwa [Nassau's African nurse] as I do of Lady Pembroke or Mrs. Green, or any other white woman.<sup>13</sup>

Here, Kingsley's identification and formation of close friendships with African women is clear. Dennett supported Kingsley's contention when he wrote, "no one can be more sensible to kind treatment or even looks than a Fjort woman and the names of certain whitewomen [sic] live for years in their thoughts and songs. Miss Kingsley's name is one of these".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Deborah Birkett (1992), Mary Kingsley. Imperial Adventuress, London: Macmillan, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> Kingsley (1899a), pp. 387-8.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in a letter from Nassau to his sister, in Caroline Alexander (1989), One Dry Season. In the Footsteps of Mary Kingsley, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 136-7.

<sup>14</sup> R.E. Dennett, "Miss M.H. Kingsley's visit to Cabinda, 1893", original handwritten manuscript, Highgate Literary and Scientific Institute.

Constance Larymore also shared an unusual proximity with West African women; she was unique in that she was allowed to enter the harems of the emir of Bida, becoming the first white woman to do so. This was perhaps a reflection of Larymore's powerful status in West Africa. As the wife of a major in a region that had been conquered by the British military forces she had considerable influence, but her white skin gave her authority independent of that of her husband. Therefore, she gained a privileged insight into a facet of Nigerian life that remained murky and mysterious in the Victorian imagination. Larymore's role as the wife of an active agent of British imperialism tended to keep her separate from local populations, as it did with Melville, Foote and Colvile. In their travelogues their position as observers from without was apparent, and there seemed to be little interaction between themselves and the women they observed. Their status and social class forced them to maintain a "respectable" distance between themselves and African people. As in the case of Kingsley, there is thus a paradox between their (geographical) "closeness" to West African women, and the distance that existed between themselves as observers and the women they observed.

Mary Slessor perhaps took the greatest interest in the women of West Africa.<sup>15</sup> In 1878, Salisbury drew up a treaty with the rulers of Duke Town, the administrative centre of Calabar, banning twin-murder, human sacrifices, trial-by-ordeal, and the enforced mourning of widows. However, this treaty was practically impossible to implement outside Duke Town. Slessor took it upon herself to enforce the treaty. In her opinion, the lives of West African women could only be improved by raising the women's own low view of their status within society. As discussed in preceding chapters, she was quickly integrated into West African societies, and this integration allowed Slessor to intervene actively on behalf of women. The wives of missionaries had sometimes attempted pioneering work with West African women, but family life, although intended to set a Christian example,

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<sup>15</sup> Slessor was particularly concerned with the quality of life for West African women. She herself had been accustomed to hardship. Her father was a violent man who eventually drank himself to death. The streets of Dundee were often places of crime and violence, fuelled by massive unemployment, and on a number of occasions she was threatened with violence on her way to church. Such an upbringing may have provided the impetus to improve the lives of West African women.

was inclined to keep the missionaries aloof and apart from local populations.<sup>16</sup> However, the presence of a single woman operating independently and living in close proximity with the people had a much more immediate impact. As her familiarity with the women of Calabar grew, Slessor devoted increasing energy to fighting their cause. Thus her relationships with West African women were often much more intense than those of other women travellers.

Anna Hinderer may have had more contact with West African women than other missionary wives because of the peculiarity of her situation, particularly when her husband was cut off from Ibadan by the Abeokuta wars, and Anna was left dependent on the local population for survival. When she first arrived in Ibadan, the local women were eager to visit the first white woman to enter their town. Hinderer wrote:

I have had many visitors this week, particularly women. Their tenderness over me is touching; if they see me hot, they will fan me; if I look tired, they want me to lie down. I have had much talk with them, through my little maid Susanna... They are kind and respectful and [have] really polite ways of speaking, and... their tender and affectionate feeling towards me... must be seen to be fully known.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Slessor, Hinderer's intimacy with Ibadani women was restricted by her inability to speak the local language. However, when she began to take Ibadani children into her house as boarders she had greater contact with their mothers, who would often visit their children. In reference to these visits, Hinderer drew a striking parallel between British and African parental relations with their children. She wrote that the visiting mothers would often bring their children "something they like to eat; they think here as we do at home, "mother's cake is very sweet"".<sup>18</sup> This comment undermines images of the brutality of life in West Africa

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<sup>16</sup> Sunday Mail Story of Scotland, 3, 39, 1988, pp. 1091-2, in Slessor Papers, Dundee Museum.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Hinderer (1872), Seventeen Years in the Yoruba Country, London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

found in other imperialist discourses, and normalises the relations between West African mothers and their children.

### Physical descriptions

The different relationships that white women formed with their West African counterparts led to considerable differences in the ways in which they represented the lives of these women, but also in how they represented the women themselves. Those women that had the least contact with West African women tended to restrict themselves to physical descriptions, in keeping with the "manners and customs" approach apparent in many nineteenth-century travel narratives by white women. These descriptions were based on the women's position as external observers. For example, Colvile and Foote were restricted to describing the patterns of dress of the women they observed, and to making a few comments on the physical attractiveness of these women.<sup>19</sup> Foote wrote:

The only African women that I admired were some from Tripoli, who had accompanied their lords and masters right across the interior. They had beautifully soft dark eyes, with a timid pleading expression, sad to see; they were dressed a *l'Arabe*, and the lower part of their faces was quite concealed by the usual band of white linen.<sup>20</sup>

Several conventions are apparent in this description. Firstly, Foote's comments revealed her own attitude towards the role of women in that she admired only those African women with whom she could identify. Her own travels were defined by her husband's role, wherever he went she was honour-bound to follow, and she admired the women from Tripoli for undertaking their journeys with grace. Secondly, she intimated by reference to their "pleading expression" that these women were oppressed and unhappy at their plight, thus evoking the stereotype of downtrodden African women. Thirdly, her observance of the women from a

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<sup>19</sup> Zélie Colvile (1893) Round the Black Man's Garden, Edinburgh: Blackwood, pp. 292 and 303; Mrs. Henry Grant Foote (1869), Recollections of Central America and the West Coast of Africa, London: Newby, pp. 177, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Foote (1869), p. 210.

distance, and her focus on their physical features and detailed descriptions of clothing, which were also a feature of other women travellers, was a form of appropriation typical in many imperialist discourses. The women were being looked at and could offer no resistance to the imperial gaze. Finally, the reference to veiling evoked a further image of exoticism, mysticism and eroticism. These conventions are typical of imperialist discourse, and suggest that constraints may have influenced the production of the text, compelling Foote to write in a conventional manner.

These constraints were also apparent in Kingsley's narratives. As Mills points out, the external constraints concerning the reception of the text led Kingsley to adopt a multiplicity of conflicting voices, both masculine and feminine, objective and subjective, in her struggle to create an image of a scientifically accurate explorer while maintaining her "femininity".<sup>21</sup> Throughout Travels Kingsley assumed multiple identities; she was at once an ichthyologist and an ethnologist, identities which she maintained in other publications.<sup>22</sup> She deliberately adopted a scientific, objective, detached, masculine voice to lend credence to her text; she did not wish to be seen as another "globetrotteress". The masculine voice is particularly evident in Kingsley's descriptions of West African women. Both Travels and West African Studies abound with descriptions of the dress of West African women, and emphasis is placed particularly on their physical beauty. She was struck by how "picturesque" and "very pretty" the women of Freetown were; this was her first glimpse of African women. On another occasion she wrote:

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<sup>21</sup> Sara Mills (1991), Discourses of Difference, London: Routledge, pp. 153-174.

<sup>22</sup> Kingsley referred to herself as an ethnologist in the following publications: introductory chapter to R.E. Dennett (1898a), Notes on the Folklore of the Fjort, London: Folklore Society; "A Lecture on West Africa", Cheltenham Ladies Magazine, 38, 1898c, pp. 264-280; "The forms of apparitions in West Africa", West Africa, 14, 35, 1897c, pp. 331-342; "The fetish view of the human soul", Address to the Folk Lore Society, 1897a, pp. 138-151; "West Africa from an ethnologist's point of view", Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society, 1897b, pp. 58-73; "West Africa from an ethnological point of view", Imperial Institute Journal, 6, April, 1900d, pp. 82-97. She referred to herself as an ichthyologist in "Travels on the western coast of Equatorial Africa", Scottish Geographical Magazine, 12, 1896b, 113-124; "The ascent of the Cameroons peak and travels in the French Congo", Transactions of the Liverpool Geographical Society, 1896c, 36-52.

The "Fanny Po" ladies are celebrated for their beauty all along the West Coast, and very justly. They are not however, ...the most beautiful women in this part of the world... I prefer an Elmina, or an Igalwa, or a M'Pongwe, or - but I had better stop and own that my affections have got very scattered among the black ladies of the West Coast, and I no longer remember one lovely creature whose soft eyes, perfect form, and winning pretty ways have captivated me than I think of another.<sup>23</sup>

Alison Blunt points out that this naming and listing served to "depersonalize and objectify the women being described and reflected imperialist strategies of control through categorization".<sup>24</sup> Not only are West African women objectified, however, they are also appropriated by Kingsley's adoption of a masculine voice to describe them. For example, of the M'Pongwe and Igalwa women she wrote:

They are quite the comeliest ladies I have ever seen on the Coast. Very black they are, blacker than many of their neighbours, always blacker than the Fans, and although their skin lacks the velvety pile of the true negro, it is not too shiny, but it is fine and usually unblemished, and their figures are charmingly rounded, their hands and feet small... and their eyes large, lustrous, soft and brown, and their teeth as white as the sea surf..<sup>25</sup>

It is clear from these descriptions that Kingsley's responses were of a personal and sensual nature, but textual constraints and notions of femininity made it difficult for her to express this reality. Consequently, her sensual response to West African women could only be expressed through the adoption of a masculine, objective voice, suggestive of a sexual attraction and addressed to a masculine audience.<sup>26</sup> She was also constrained by the inescapable fact of her gender to deny the scientific nature of her travels, arguing that she was merely "skylarking" or "puddling about",<sup>27</sup> and that she in fact had very little knowledge of scientific methodology.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, Kingsley made positive claims for the role of women

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<sup>23</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Blunt (1994), p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 223.

<sup>26</sup> Mills (1991), pp. 157-8.

<sup>27</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 141.

in anthropological fieldwork, arguing that her gender was an important factor in allowing her access to West African women. Personal relationships and subjective inquiry gave her a privileged insight into the lives of African women that was denied to male travellers. However, as a single woman travelling in West Africa, she repeatedly felt the need to emphasise her own femininity, particularly with regard to her appearance and clothing.<sup>29</sup> In this way she countered the masculine voices she was forced to adopt to describe her adventures, but the tensions between objective/masculine and subjective/feminine voices are apparent throughout her narratives.

### **Portrayals of the lives of West African women**

Many indigenous customs within West African societies were used by Westerners to portray African women as oppressed and downtrodden, particularly polygamy, human sacrifice, and the violence perpetrated by secret societies. However, the access that British women had to West African women meant that they sometimes challenged the ethnocentric assumptions concerning the latter's lives.

#### *Polygamy*

The Victorian reverence for the virtuous wife meant that polygamy was perceived as an immoral means of maintaining the subservience of African women. According to the prevailing view, African women in polygamous marriages were treated as chattels. Kingsley's understanding of polygamy was considerably different, though it was also revealing of her own prejudices. When asked in an interview, "I suppose, Miss Kingsley, that the African woman is a very degraded specimen of humanity?" Kingsley replied:

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<sup>29</sup> For example see *ibid.*, p. 502.



Not altogether; her position has been greatly exaggerated by travellers and as most of them were men they had small opportunity for judging. As a woman I could mix freely with them and study their domestic life, and I used to have long talks... and gleaned a lot of information. I believe, on the whole, that the African married woman is happier than the majority of English wives.<sup>30</sup>

Although presenting polygamy in a favourable light, and undermining unfavourable comparisons between the lives of African women and those of British women, Kingsley's response to the question of African women being in a state of degradation was suggestive of her underlying racist beliefs. She challenged the notion that polygamy was a repressive institution for women, arguing that from her experience in West Africa, she was:

compelled to think polygamy *for the African* is not an unmixed evil; and that at *the present culture-level of the African* it is not to be eradicated... It is perfectly impossible for one African woman to do the work of the house, prepare the food, fetch water, cultivate the plantations, and look after the children attributive to one man.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, although polygamy was unacceptable for "civilised" Europeans, it was quite acceptable, and perhaps inevitable for "uncivilised" Africans. Such an attitude was deeply patrician and revealing of Kingsley's belief in polygenesis and European superiority. It is also interesting that she did not draw on the parallel between the domestic duties of both colonized women and British women. Thus her ideas about racial difference were not transcended by any sensitivity to a shared female experience.<sup>32</sup> Class difference was fundamental to this. Kingsley was in a position as a middle-class woman to employ an Irish woman to undertake her own domestic work,<sup>33</sup> and this prevented her from identifying with West African women on a profound level with regard to their domestic duties. In her view, polygamy was of benefit to African women when placed in the context of the state

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<sup>30</sup> In Katherine Frank (1986a), *A Voyager Out*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 662. My emphasis.

<sup>32</sup> See Blunt (1994), p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 211.

of African society, which she saw as inferior to that of Europe. It reduced the burden of labour, allowing women time to become involved in domestic economies and trade. Furthermore, Kingsley argued that although African societies granted sexual freedom to men while denying it to women, the burden of coping with the sexual demands of one man was shared in a polygamous household, as was the burden of childbearing. While a West African woman was breast-feeding a child, the husband was not allowed any sexual contact with her.<sup>34</sup> According to Kingsley, therefore, African women had considerable rights and freedom within marriage. For her, the image of the downtrodden African wife was an erroneous one when placed in the overall context of African society.

Kingsley understood that polygamy was a fundamental aspect of the structure of West African societies, and that the attempts by the missionaries to eradicate the custom were causing distress and disruption within these societies. On many occasions Kingsley vented her wrath against this interference by missionaries. She cited a case of a chief with three wives who had converted to Christianity and "profoundly and vividly believed that exclusion from the Holy Communion meant eternal damnation". The missionaries would not allow him into the congregation unless he abandoned two of his wives and married the other in a Christian service. However, he did not want to lose any of his wives, and the three women were united in their opposition to their separation. The situation caused immense distress; as Kingsley argued, "The poor old man smelt hell fire, and cried "yo yo yo", and beat his hands upon the ground. It was a moral mess of the first water all round".<sup>35</sup> For Kingsley, "the missionary-made man is a curse to the Coast", and the missionary attacks on the custom of polygamy did more harm than good.

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<sup>34</sup> See Ronald Hyam (1990), *Empire and Sexuality*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 183-4.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Kingsley (1896a), "The development of Dodos", *National Review*, 3, pp. 72-3.

Mary Slessor's position on polygamy was unclear, since she rarely mentioned it in her reports. This may be an indication of the constraints on the production of travel narratives which existed at the time of her writing. She had spent many hours in the women's compounds, and yet did not describe her experiences there in her reports. Her male predecessors had written lengthy reports about polygamy and the "debasing" effect it had on society,<sup>36</sup> but it may have been unacceptable for a woman to allude to such descriptions. However, she wrote of polygamy in her private correspondence and was sympathetic to Kingsley's defence of the custom.<sup>37</sup> Despite this, she also wrote, "God help these poor downtrodden women! The constant cause of palaver and bloodshed here is marriage. It is a dreadful state of society".<sup>38</sup> Slessor perceived marriage and, therefore, polygamy, to be oppressive, but she realised that it was such a fundamental part of West African culture that there was very little that she could do to eradicate it. It seems that Slessor's primary concerns lay in eradicating what she saw as the more barbaric aspects of West African customs, such as the killing of twins and human sacrifice. However, she adhered to the demands of her Church in allowing only men with one wife to become members of her congregation in West Africa, the standard policy of the missions in attempting to undermine the custom. She also supported wives who fled from their polygamous marriages to become Christians. In this way, Slessor took a small but significant stand against polygamy.

Slessor adhered to ethnocentric attitudes towards polygamy, but attempted to provide practical alternatives. She was appalled at the treatment of women in Calabar, and wrote of one of her court sessions, "What a crowd of people I have

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see Hope Waddell, report in Missionary Record, 1848, p. 169, and a report on the state of the missions, Missionary Record, 1851, p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> Slessor to Irvine, 12/12/03, St. Andrew's Hall Missionary College Library, Selly Oak, Birmingham.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Slessor, 7/10/05, Women's Missionary Magazine, January 1906, p. 20.

had here today, and how debased. They are just like brutes in regard to women".<sup>39</sup> There was no place for women outside the women's compounds, but Slessor was convinced that they could govern their own lives given the opportunity. They did most of the work on the farms and most of the selling in the markets. She believed that if they had their own land they could be self-supporting. They had no rights as citizens and were the property of their husbands. If they were rejected as wives they often starved. The scenes that most aroused Slessor's indignation were those that she witnessed in the compounds of the coastal towns and villages. In her first year in Calabar she wrote:

The women are the great drawback to our success. To visit these yards, and to see so many women going, or rather *lolling*, about almost naked [sic], - to know their habits and their deceit, - one only wonders that the men are as they are.<sup>40</sup>

Gradually, Slessor's attitude changed and she attached the blame for the state of women's lives not on the women themselves, but on the patriarchal structure of Calabar society. It was this which she believed to be responsible for the confining of women to these hovels, where they were poverty stricken and often close to starvation.<sup>41</sup>

As a consequence, Slessor fostered an intense dislike of the institution of marriage, particularly the pressure placed on women to marry in order to survive. This resentment was not only directed towards the institution of marriage in West Africa, but also towards the teachings of her own religion. In one of her Bibles, against the passage where St. Paul lays down the rules for the subjection of wives to husbands, she scribbled in the margin: "Na! Na! Paul, laddie! This will no do!"<sup>42</sup> As discussed subsequently, much of Slessor's energy was directed towards

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<sup>39</sup> M.D.W. Jeffreys (1950), p. 629.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Slessor on her first impressions of Calabar, Missionary Record, February 1877, p. 371, British Library.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Slessor, Missionary Record, November, 1879.

<sup>42</sup> James Buchan (1980), The Expendable Mary Slessor, Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, p. 195.

removing the necessity of marriage for West African women, and providing opportunities for them to live independently of men.

Mary Kingsley's rebuttal of the myth of the oppressed African wife was upheld by Constance Larymore; she wrote of the trading women in the market at Kabba:

The tender-hearted philanthropist would have to seek far and long in this merry crowd for the "downtrodden women of Africa" and the "black sister of slavery", of whom one seems to have heard. There is not much that indicates subjection or fear about these ladies, sitting at graceful ease among their loads, or strolling about in the hot sunshine.<sup>43</sup>

Like Kingsley, Larymore believed that African women were the driving force behind indigenous trade and economies, exercised great power within the villages, and contributed to the maintenance of public order.<sup>44</sup> She wrote, "I have a strong conviction that (in spite of the laments indulged in by good people at home, over the sad position of the downtrodden woman of Africa) the ladies rule the villages and set the public tone".<sup>45</sup> However, she did have some preconceptions about the state of the women in the harems. This is reflected in her complete surprise at what she found, after having obtained permission to enter the harems of the emir of Bida. Her portrayals of the harems of Northern Nigeria are very different from Slessor's depictions of the compounds in Calabar. Larymore found the harem to be a community of women and children of all ages, and was amazed to find them "all laughing, clapping their hands, calling greetings and salutations incessantly". This was not the scene of lasciviousness that she had expected. The women did not mob her in their excitement at seeing their first white woman. Instead, "their perfect courtesy, that fine characteristic of the African people, prevailed to restrain

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<sup>43</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> There is a long tradition in Africanist travel literature of describing, and often misrepresenting, the roles that women played within local economies and societies. For example, the French explorer Duveyrier (1864) expounded the matriarchal nature of the Touareg society, see Michael Heffernan (1989), "The limits of utopia: Henri Duveyrier and the exploration of the Sahara in the nineteenth century", *The Geographical Journal*, 155, 3, pp. 342-352.

<sup>45</sup> Larymore (1908), p. 286.

them. There was no... pushing, or crowding".<sup>46</sup> Larymore's descriptions of the harems were, therefore, quite different from many contemporary portrayals.<sup>47</sup> Billie Melman argues that this was a separate, feminine experience of the harems,<sup>48</sup> but Larymore's experiences as a *white* woman make her descriptions all the more relevant.

As several writers have discussed, the very notion of the "harem" was linked implicitly with images of exoticism, and particularly with the exoticising of Islam. (In this respect, it is perhaps of interest that the women's yards of Southern Nigeria were referred to as compounds, whereas the women's quarters in Northern Nigeria were referred to as harems.) Much of the fascination with the harem emanated not only from Orientalist authority, but also from the ideology and aesthetics of the concept of separate spheres for men and women. However, as Melman argues, descriptions of harems by women such as Larymore, drawing on experience rather than external textual authority, were a critique of Western patriarchy and the position of women in the West. Furthermore, travel writing by women subverted gender ideology and the ethos of domesticity:

Writing a travelogue involved a redefinition of the feminine space and sphere of action. And the new genre anatomises the tension between the emancipating effects of travel in what had been literally and metaphorically man's land and culturally dominant notions of femininity.<sup>49</sup>

Not only did Larymore transcend the boundaries of the "feminine" sphere by travelling and writing, she also challenged Orientalist depictions of the harem. Race and class defined her as an outsider, but the fact of her gender ensured her

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>47</sup> For analyses of accounts of harems by European male travellers, see Malak Alloula (1986) The Colonial Harem, Manchester: Manchester University Press; Rana Kabbani (1986), Europe's Myths of Orient. Devise and Rule, London: Macmillan; Billie Melman (1992), Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918. Sexuality, Religion and Work, London: Macmillan; and Edward Said (1978), Orientalism, London: Peregrine.

<sup>48</sup> Melman (1992), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

access to those "feminine" spaces within the harem that were denied to men. It could be argued that she had the same desire to penetrate to the interior of the harem found in Orientalist writing, but her descriptions were a challenge to those external observations which depicted the harem as the *locus* of an exotic and abnormal sexuality, and which had fascinated Europeans for decades.

### *Physical "cruelty" towards West African women*

Not only were the women of West Africa perceived to be downtrodden in the minds of many Victorians, they were also considered the victims of cruel and barbarous practices. As with polygamy, the secret societies of West Africa (discussed in chapter 6) were sometimes portrayed in a negative light in respect of the part they played in the lives of West African women. Many European travellers believed much of the perceived oppression of these women emanated from the secret societies and the fear that they brought. They were considered the sole domain of men, and inherently linked to witchcraft and cannibalism through which villages, and in particular, women were terrorised. Kingsley, whilst recognising the fear that the secret societies inspired, did not believe that they were completely disadvantageous to West African women. She argued that secret societies were not religious but judicial. Men's societies existed to keep the women in check, and arose "from the undoubted fact that women are notably deficient in any real reverence for authority, as is demonstrated by the way that they continually treat that of their husbands".<sup>50</sup> (Whether Kingsley saw this as a positive attribute is somewhat unclear.) She cited the existence of women's secret societies, and suggested they were equally as powerful and exclusive as those of the men; "a man who attempts to penetrate the female mysteries would be as surely killed as a woman who might attempt to investigate the male mysteries".<sup>51</sup> As previously discussed, for Kingsley, the secret societies were a means of maintaining social harmony, and they were, therefore, of benefit to women, rather than a means of

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<sup>50</sup> Kingsley (1982), p. 526.

<sup>51</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 527.

terrorising them.

Mary Slessor's attitude towards the secret societies and their treatment of women was often contemptuous. The most feared society in West Africa was perhaps the Egbo of Nigeria, whose members were believed to have the power to transform themselves into wild animals to attack people. The Egbo runners brought fear upon the villages, and any woman found on the streets as they passed through was attacked or molested. Slessor's way of dealing with the Egbo was to confront them, exercising the power arrogated to her by her white skin. One of her adopted children, Daniel, described how she attacked the Egbo runners.<sup>52</sup> Slessor wanted to break the spell of fear that the Egbo held over the women of Calabar, and she made every effort to dispel the superstitions concerning the powers of the Egbo runners, ignoring the charms that they left to obstruct her path and confronting them wherever possible.

For British women travellers the treatment of widows was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the lives of African women to confront. West African women were often required by indigenous laws to undergo trials-by-ordeal, ritual sacrifice, or enforced mourning at the death of their husbands. Such customs were alien to the sensibilities of British women. However, Kingsley, for the most part, was able to suspend judgement in order to explain these customs from the point of view of the West African. She argued that "cruelty" towards widows emanated from the fear of witchcraft and was, therefore, an understandable part of African law, rather than an expression of misogyny. The fear of witchcraft meant that the first people suspected of a man's death were his wives, who were tried. Kingsley explained that for the African, the confining of widows was a means of protecting the soul of the dead man, which remained around the house until the burial. She wrote that, contrary to the impression given by missionary reports, the period of mourning

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Slessor to Thomas Hart, 30/11/1948, Slessor Papers, Macmanus Galleries, Dundee Museum. Daniel wrote that the Egbo "tremble because she a woman, of what power they cannot say, can dare to even come near, let alone attack without the fear of instant death".



ended with the burial of the husband, and the widow was then free to marry again.<sup>53</sup>

The sacrifice of widows at funerals by some ethnic groups was in order that they should accompany the husband to the underworld, ensuring that he did not arrive as a pauper (a man's wealth was measured by the number of wives he had). According to Kingsley, a Calabar chief had explained to her that the British Government's rigorous suppression of this custom meant that men went into the next world as paupers, and "added an additional chance of his going there prematurely, for his wives and slaves, no longer restrained by the prospect of being killed at his death and sent off with him would, on very slight aggravation, put "bash in his chop"". <sup>54</sup> In other words he would be poisoned. Kingsley suggested that the threat of ritual sacrifice thus helped to maintain social order. For other tribes that believed in reincarnation, such as those around the Niger Delta, women were "sent down" with their husbands to determine the class of the reincarnated soul. There was a great fear that a person would be reincarnated as a slave if he were sent down without his wives. Kingsley adopted the guise of the anthropologist in attempting to rationalise such customs by referring to the point of view of the West African. However, as Lata Mani argues:

When reading Kingsley's accounts of the sacrifice of widows, there is no understanding of why the women allowed such violence to be perpetrated on them. Possible reasons are lack of property and safeguards for the future, ostracism, and ostracism of children.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, Kingsley may have placed too much emphasis on witchcraft and indigenous spiritual beliefs, and ignored other social and cultural influences on the practice of the sacrificing of widows. For this reason she was unable to explain why the women themselves allowed the practice to continue.

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<sup>53</sup> Kingsley (1982), pp. 483-4, 487-91, 516.

<sup>54</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 489.

<sup>55</sup> Lata Mani (1992), "Cultural theory, colonial texts: reading eyewitness accounts of widow-burning", in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler [eds], Cultural Studies, London: Routledge, p. 395.

The paradox between distance and "closeness" is again apparent in Kingsley's descriptions, with Kingsley becoming the detached scientific observer, but claiming that her knowledge was based on her "intimate" relationships with West Africans. The tensions of being both inside and outside imperial discourses are also apparent. Kingsley was attempting to challenge some of the ethnocentric assumptions about West African customs, but she was forced to adopt the voice of the external observer, gazing from a position of authority upon the subjects of British imperialism to give credence to her observations and opinions.

*The societal role of West African women*

Several white women travellers challenged the image of West African women as downtrodden victims. As discussed previously, Kingsley and Larymore offered direct challenges to the prevailing images of West African women, and Slessor insisted that it was only the dependency of West African women upon marriage that maintained their subservience. Kingsley, in particular, wrote a great deal about the virtues of West African women. For example, she described a liaison with a Cabendan woman on a beach. The woman was a young mother, carrying with her a baby and a basket of fish, and Kingsley was struck by how miserable the woman appeared. She tried to speak to the woman in a local language but she did not understand. Kingsley then noticed that the woman was staring at a large crab-hole, and realised that her sadness emanated from the fact that it would take two people to catch such a crab. Kingsley helped to catch the crab, to the delight of the woman, who then reluctantly offered it to her. Kingsley refused it, but the next day at market the woman seized her and introduced her to everyone present. She was not only a heroine in this village, but the Cabendan woman ensured that her reputation preceded her into the surrounding villages, guaranteeing that Kingsley was able to gather much more information about the local peoples than would otherwise have been possible. Kingsley wrote:

From these things and many like them I can say nothing against the African woman, but yet it is an undoubted fact that she imposed on the male explorer, and caused him to give the idea that the African woman is the

down-trodden fool of Creation who is treated anyhow.<sup>56</sup>

It was this image of the African woman, purported by missionaries as well as explorers, that Kingsley sought to challenge and counteract throughout her narratives. She had a detailed knowledge of the role of African women in their societies, and thus came to more objective conclusions on their position and status in these societies. She argued that African women could at times be hostile to Western "civilisation" because they felt that it would remove the constraints of their own cultures from their children. The law of *mütterrecht* made the tie between the mother and the children closer than between the father and the children; white culture would reverse this system and was, therefore, alien to African women. Furthermore, between husband and wife there was no community of goods under African law; each had a separate estate; again this was very different from Victorian law, which ceded all possessions to the husband on marriage. For these reasons, African women were often more forceful in their rejection of Europeanisation than African men. It is apparent in her narratives that Kingsley believed that African women had real power. For example, when she entered a Fang village the guards, on seeing this strange white woman, consulted their mother before acting. Kingsley was able to settle her intentions with the woman, and together the two of them established peaceful relationships between this village and its rival, from which Kingsley had recently travelled. The Fang woman obviously had a great deal influence in the local vicinity. Kingsley, therefore, told this story to contest the images of West African women as downtrodden and oppressed.

Kingsley was also aware of the fundamental role played by African women in trading. Many West African markets were run by women, and they were the mainstay of indigenous economies. This fact was often completely ignored by missionaries and travellers. Furthermore, Kingsley demonstrated that African women were adept businesswomen. In Fang villages, the men collected the rubber

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<sup>56</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 390.

and the women manipulated it for market. Kingsley described how the women adulterated the rubber with clay or yam to add to its weight:

So great is the adulteration, that most of the traders have to cut each ball open. Even the Kinsembo rubber, which is... shaped like little thimbles formed by rolling pinches of rubber between the thumb and finger, and which one would think difficult to put anything inside of, has to be cut, because the "*simple children of nature*" who collect it and bring it to that "*swindling white trader*" struck upon the ingenious notion that little pieces of wood shaped like the thimbles and coated by a dip in rubber were excellent additions to a cluster.<sup>57</sup>

The African woman that Kingsley encountered was, therefore, much more intelligent, and more involved in local trading activities, than the stereotype often envisaged by the Victorians. The women were also much more involved in the rituals of daily life and, therefore, had much more influence than the downtrodden woman in Orientalist discourse. For example, Kingsley pointed out that on the island of Corisco it was customary for the women only to catch the fish in the inland lakes; the men were prohibited. Women representatives from each village were expected to attend any fishing to observe that the catch was properly divided. The responsibility of food provision, therefore, lay with the women of Corisco. This also ensured that good relations were maintained between the villages and that quarrels were avoided. The women were, therefore, the peace-keepers of the island.

Both Mary Slessor and Mary Kingsley recognised the power of the local matriarch in West African societies. Slessor, in particular, forged links with the most influential women in the villages of Calabar in order that they could influence the elders and obtain support for her policies. Anna Hinderer also recognised the authority that women could exercise in Ibadan. She wrote:

The Yoruba people have some very nice arrangements about their form of government. I found out that there is an "Iyalode" or mother of the town, to whom all the women's palavers are brought before they are taken to the king. She is, in fact, a sort of queen, a person of much influence, and looked up to with much respect. I sent my messenger to her to tell her I would like to meet her, to tell her I should like to visit her. She sent word she should be delighted... [I] found a most respectable motherly looking

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

person, surrounded by her attendants and people, in great order, and some measure of state... We two Iyas made strong friendship,... and the lady settled that we were to be the two mothers of the town, she the Iyalode still, and I the "Iyalode fun fun", the white Iyalode.<sup>58</sup>

Hinderer recognised the authority that the Iyalode could exercise in Ibadan, and immediately sought to ally herself with her in the same way that Slessor sought to ally herself with Ma Eme. Friendship with the Iyalode was a means through which Hinderer could establish her own status in the town and exercise her own authority as a white "mother". She used this authority in much the same way as Slessor. She provided refuge for those women who had left their husbands to join the congregation. She also supported those women who were beaten by their husbands for attending church. She described an incident of a husband attempting to prevent his wife from attending church; "she was... cruelly beaten with sticks and cutlasses and stoned, till her body swelled all over".<sup>59</sup> Such beatings were common occurrences in Ibadan, and although Hinderer did not actively intervene in the same manner as Slessor to prevent such attacks, she did provide shelter for such women, and encouraged them to stand up to their husbands. Rather than depicting Ibadani women as downtrodden, Hinderer paid testament to their bravery, and cited many incidents of their belligerence.<sup>60</sup>

#### **Active intervention: Slessor's settlement for women at Use**

As stated previously, Slessor was most closely involved in the lives of West African women; the longer she spent in Calabar the more she moved away from attempts to Christianise the population, and the more time and effort she dedicated towards improving the lives of West African women. The ultimate aim of Slessor's work was to establish a women's settlement, where women who were confined to

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<sup>58</sup> Hinderer (1872), pp. 110-11.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

the compounds, and if unmarried could be legally raped, tortured, assaulted or injured,<sup>61</sup> could find refuge. Such a settlement, she believed, would free women from the need to marry. She wrote:

The kind of advance, which concerns the women of the Church more especially, lies in the direction of some development of our work which will make the native women something more than a mere cipher in the community; something more than a mere creature to be exploited and degraded by man... Not only must we provide some way of protecting and sheltering women, but in order to meet this end we must create some industry by which these women may earn their living, and thus become independent of the polygamous marriage and the open insult.<sup>62</sup>

Over time her ideas began to assume greater clarity. The women of the settlement would not only be independent, but would also contribute to the local economy, producing food and goods with which to trade with neighbouring villages. She also advocated training schools for women where they could achieve independence and self-confidence. As discussed beforehand, she gained the trust of the people amongst whom she lived by forging friendships with women close to the chiefs and elders, in the hope that they would use their influence and enable her to pursue her policies and ideas. Slessor apparently repaid this closeness of West African women for, when she became a magistrate, it was widely rumoured that no woman ever lost a case in her court.<sup>63</sup>

Slessor's dream of creating a women's settlement was realised in 1908 when a site near Use on the Cross River became available. She purchased the land in the name of her adopted daughters and built a refuge for widows, orphans, the mothers of twins and their children, and refugees fleeing the harems. Her financial independence from the Church of Scotland, which was based on her trading with the people of Calabar to generate an income, meant that she could build this refuge without the consent of the Church. For the first time women had a place to go

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<sup>61</sup> Basil Miller (1946), Mary Slessor. Heroine of Calabar, Michigan: Zondervan, p. 113.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Slessor (1908), "Concerning advance work in West Africa", Women's Missionary Magazine, January, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffreys (1950), p. 629.

outside the societies that had rejected them. Furthermore, a training centre was established to educate women and girls in traditional industries, crafts, and farming. Slessor disagreed with the quasi-religious education promoted by the Mission, and believed that training in traditional methods was best suited to West Africa.<sup>64</sup> Again, she pursued her own policies independent of advice from the Mission. Slessor ensured that the settlement was located near large potential markets; the goods produced were thus exchanged for materials such as medical supplies, books and writing equipment, and the community became self-sufficient.<sup>65</sup> The settlement was known as the Mary Slessor Mission Hospital until it was destroyed in the wars for independence in the late 1950s.<sup>66</sup> Slessor thus provided a refuge for orphans, twins and their mothers, and refugees from the harems, who would otherwise have been driven out of their villages to starve. The establishment of the women's settlement was typical of Slessor's efforts to improve the lives of West African women, she did not attempt to attack overtly existing customs, but provided an alternative, both to these customs and to the official solutions offered by the Church of Scotland.

## Conclusion

West African women featured prominently in the narratives of white women travellers, and in the case of Slessor, Kingsley, Larymore and Hinderer, particular emphasis was placed on their experiences of, and with, West African women. Gender, as well as race, was a significant factor in this, allowing these women closer contact with West African women, and especially access to the harems and women's compounds. By describing the lives of West African women and the day-

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<sup>64</sup> Caroline Oliver (1982), Western Women in Colonial Africa, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, pp. 118-9; Elizabeth G.K. Hewat (1960), Vision and Achievement 1796-1956. A History of the Churches United in the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh: Nelson, p. 203.

<sup>65</sup> Jubilee Booklet (1948), The Life of Mary Slessor, Pioneer Missionary, 1840-1915, Edinburgh, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Kathleen Goldie Papers (1949), Dundee Public Library, p. 13.

to-day activities in the domestic spheres of West African towns and villages, British women travellers reaffirmed their own femininity, locating their own interests firmly within the domestic sphere. This was, to a certain extent, a result of the textual constraints which partially shaped their descriptions. As discussed in chapter 1, women tended to be excluded from political and scientific discourse, and their texts were thus directed more towards descriptions of landscapes and peoples. It is, therefore, not entirely unexpected that women travel writers should have chosen to devote extensive passages to their West African counterparts, and thus have a greater concern for the subject of their enquiry. Nevertheless, the descriptions by white women travellers revealed their own interest in the lives of West African women, and the information that they imparted about the role of women within West African societies and economies, particularly in the case of Slessor and Kingsley, was invaluable to subsequent policies in colonial education and administration.<sup>67</sup> However, there were also constraints governing the content of their narratives, and the distinction between public and private writings is an important one in this respect. The textual constraints that may have controlled published narratives were not present in private correspondence, where women were often freer to express their opinions regarding even the most taboo of subjects in Victorian society. That textual constraints controlled published narratives becomes clear when one compares the opinions expressed in print to those communicated in private correspondence. For example, Kingsley excluded descriptions of the practice of female circumcision from her published narratives. This custom was a fundamental ceremonial rite in many parts of West Africa, but none of the women discussed here referred to it. Kingsley was aware of its existence, but did not allude to it in any of her anthropological studies. Neither could she bring herself to describe the practice to the anthropologist E.B. Tylor; instead she hinted at the custom in letters to his wife, in the hope that she could communicate the information back to Tylor.<sup>68</sup> Such constraints meant that several

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<sup>67</sup> Discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

<sup>68</sup> Kingsley to Mrs. Tylor, 7/12/96, E.B. Tylor Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford. Kingsley wrote: "Now if you would turn ethnologist I could tell you a lot of queer things that have very important bearings on what we will call the external skeleton of the ceremonials". She also wrote to Keltie: "I can



of the women could not comment upon such customs as the killing of twins and the persecution of widows, and the likes of Melville, Foote and Colvile were restricted to describing the dress patterns of various ethnic groups.

However, for many Western women travelling in West Africa it soon became clear that despite the perceived horrors of polygamy, infant marriage, secret societies, and cruelty towards twin-mothers and widows, in some ways West African women had many more rights, freedoms, and much more influence in everyday life than certain imperialist discourses suggested, and in the opinion of Kingsley, than they themselves had in Victorian England. As Melman argues, "Observation of women's life in another culture brought on a reevaluation by the Western women, of their own position as individuals *and* as a marginalised group in a patriarchal culture".<sup>69</sup> There was certainly a hint of envy in Kingsley's descriptions of the lives of West African women.

Therefore, in many ways, the narratives of white women travellers challenged the images of their West African counterparts found in other imperialist discourses. Kingsley's work is particularly notable for the attention she devoted to describing West African women and their roles in society. She wrote, "The subject of women is one I habitually avoid except when it comes to dress",<sup>70</sup> but an analysis of her work proves otherwise. Although she painted detailed pictures of African dress and the hairdressing customs of the women of West Africa, the real motive behind her detailed descriptions of African women lay in her determination to challenge the image of the downtrodden African woman of imperialist discourse. Both Kingsley and Larymore were convinced that African women had more influence and independence than was suggested by existing literature on West Africa, and West African women had a fundamental role to play in ensuring that

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go and tell... Mrs. T. [sic], who can tell him why they kill twins in West Africa and such like things", suggesting that she and other women travellers had access to information about Africans denied to men (see also pp. 112-3); Kingsley to Keltie, 1/12/99, Kingsley Papers, Royal Geographical Society.

<sup>69</sup> Melman (1992), pp. 307-8.

<sup>70</sup> Kingsley (1899a), p. 387.

the economy functioned properly, that discipline was maintained, and that the indigenous culture of the society was retained. They believed that African women were not anonymous entities incidental to their travels, nor victims of barbarism perpetrated by "savages", but functioning members of society with certain rights that accorded them status within this society. Slessor recognised that certain women within West African societies held positions of authority, and despite her perception that the marriage customs of Calabar were oppressive of women, she believed that every woman could be independent if given the right opportunity.

Not only did these portrayals by white women travellers disrupt Orientalist images of non-European women, but they were also founded, in some cases, on completely different relationships with these women. As Melman argues:

Travel and the encounter with systems of behaviour, manners and morals, most notably with the systems of polygamy, concubinage and the sequestration of females, resulted in analogy between the polygamous Orient and the travelling women's own monogamous society. And analogy led to self criticism rather than cultural smugness and sometimes resulted in an identification with the other that cut across barriers of religion, culture and ethnicity. Western women's writing on "other" women then substitutes a sense of solidarity of gender for sexual and racial superiority.<sup>71</sup>

This was evident in the narratives of Mary Slessor, and apparent to a lesser degree in the work of Constance Larymore and Mary Kingsley. However, the exploration of the negotiation by these women of racial, gender and, to a lesser extent, class differences within the theatre of empire raises important questions about the construction of a singular "other". In Victorian Britain, white women were othered on the grounds of their sex in the same ways that other groups were othered on the basis of their social class, race, mentality, wealth, sexuality, and so on. However, with the possible exception of Mary Slessor, although certain women travellers may have felt some affinity towards their West African counterparts, the recognition of racial difference was not transcended by the sense of a common female experience. White women travellers perceived themselves in West Africa more in terms of their skin-colour rather than their femininity and, therefore,

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<sup>71</sup> Melman (1992), pp. 7-8.

retained a sense of racial superiority in their relationships with, and representations of, West African women.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS: THE GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S TRAVEL NARRATIVES

#### **Introduction**

The fact that nineteenth-century British women travellers committed their ideas to paper and were published is of importance, since their narratives formed part of a much bigger literature on West Africa. Travel and exploration narratives were exceedingly popular with many sections of British society during this period, and travel narratives by women thus had potentially large readerships. The women of this study, therefore, produced a popular literature on West Africa, and their narratives contributed in some part to imperial culture in Britain between 1840 and 1915. That they actually travelled to West Africa, and that they recounted their experiences as *women* in this region, added novelty and interest to their accounts. The publication of their travelogues by large publishing companies (Macmillan, Routledge, Blackwood) is also indicative of their potential popularity.

As suggested in chapter 3, white women gained authority in various ways as a consequence both of travel and travel writing. Of significance is the fact that they wrote for different audiences; they exercised varying levels of influence upon different groups of people. Several of the women, such as Zélie Colville and Constance Larymore, produced popular travelogues in which they recounted their experiences and added to popular images of West Africa. Others, such as Elizabeth Melville and Mrs. Foote, wrote travelogues containing forceful arguments in support of Britain's anti-slavery efforts in West Africa. Anna Hinderer's journals were published posthumously, but contained arguments strongly in favour of the Christian mission in West Africa. Mary Slessor had access to a large public audience through her publications in the missionary magazines, and used this to express her own opinions about church policy in West Africa. Mary Kingsley had the largest audience; her travelogues and treatises on the administration of West

Africa were very popular, and she used newspaper and journal articles, as well as public lectures, to advance her own opinions on West Africa and the future of Britain's interests there.

In addition to communicating their visions and impressions of West Africa through published travel accounts, several women used other popular media to publicise their travels. Like Kingsley, Mary Slessor and Zélie Colvile used public lectures to voice their opinions, and Colvile also published a journal article. Through these media, women travellers acquired a public voice with which to express their attitudes towards British imperialism in general, and to represent specifically the landscapes and peoples of West Africa. Thus to varying degrees (which are difficult to quantify but nevertheless important), British women travellers in West Africa contributed to the imperial culture of Britain during the nineteenth century, adding to the great mass of material written about territories beyond Europe and subsequently available for public consumption.

In light of the above, it is the contention of this thesis that any study of geography, gender and imperialism must, therefore, take account of the fact that white women were empowered (in the sense that they gained an audience for their opinions, that they represented and, to some extent, appropriated West African landscapes and peoples, and in the sense of their interpersonal relationships with West Africans) in the imperial context on the basis of race and class. Thus the women of this study were empowered in their relationships with West Africans, but they also acquired authority in Britain through their publication of travel narratives. They acquired a public voice, and the popular geographies they produced helped construct nineteenth-century visions of West Africa in Britain. Thus, despite the constraints and restrictions shaping the lives of Victorian women travellers, which were related particularly to the patriarchal nature of society and to the specific form of British femininity that arose at the time of their travels, the opportunity to travel in West Africa was ultimately empowering.

## Common narrative themes

The absence of women from the traditions of geographical inquiry and exploration, particularly at the time of the establishment of geography as a scientific and academic discipline, does not preclude them in histories of geographical thought in the broader sense. This study has illustrated that white women were not only active within the British empire, and were empowered through unequal imperial power relations that would not have been possible in contemporary patriarchal British society, but they also produced popular geographies of the lands through which they travelled.

Four prominent themes recur throughout the travel narratives of British women in West Africa: landscape, race, anthropological description, and West African women. This thesis has attempted to unpack these images and explore British women's visions of Africa. The common ground for the narratives is the region. The following, therefore, is a discussion of how images of West Africa changed rapidly in light of Britain's interest in the region during the nineteenth century, and the extent to which this is reflected in descriptions by women travellers.

### *1) Landscape*

Representations of the physical environment played a powerful part in the creation of Victorian visions of West Africa. Many British travellers in West Africa at this time held firm views on Britain's role in the fulcrum of European economic and political imperialism. Indeed, Edward Said suggests that there was a powerful partnership between those who travelled in and studied the empires of Europe, and those who governed them, with complex linkages between the financiers of explorations and travellers, the latter reporting their findings back in Britain, representing imperial lands in specific ways, and providing the imperialists with the arguments to support extension of the British empire.<sup>1</sup> The depictions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said (1978), *Orientalism*, London: Peregrine, p. 156.

physical environment were important in establishing enduring images of West Africa in nineteenth-century Britain.

The portrayals of non-European landscapes proved to be powerful tools for both pro- and anti- imperialists in Britain. Positive, favourable renderings of these landscapes were often used to encourage further travel and interest in certain areas, providing an impetus for colonial settlement and subsequent development and exploitation of these environments. These colonies provided an escape from the filthy, unhealthy industrial cities of Britain, and many people resorted to travel, or emigration, as a means of improving their health. Conversely, negative, unfavourable renderings of non-European landscapes were sometimes used to further the cause of the pro-imperialists. Overseas territories were often represented as vast tracts of wilderness that required European domination to establish order and facilitate economic development. In the case of West Africa, images of the physical environment evolved with the changing nature of British imperialism in the region. The anti-slavery supporters fostered an image of an Edenic West Africa, but with the failure to convert West Africans to Christianity, and as a result of the high mortality rate among Europeans travelling to West Africa, this image soon transformed into a more negative portrayal. West Africa became exotic, unfamiliar and frightening. The harsh climate and prevalence of disease provided the anti-imperialists with an argument in favour of Britain's abandonment of West Africa, and such portrayals held sway throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. By the time of the revival of Britain's interest in West Africa in the 1880s, the image of the West African environment in travel and exploration literature, and in colonial fiction, had become one of pandemonium. Chaotic and confused, it was sadly lacking the order of "civilisation". This depiction of the physical environment coincided with the desire in some parts of British society to extend its empire in Africa at the time of the Berlin Conference, and notions of "wilderness" and untamed nature encouraged support for British expansionism and the spread of "civilisation".

The descriptions of the physical environment by women travellers thus need to be framed within this broader picture of British imperialism, and the changing popular images of West Africa throughout the nineteenth century. The differences in their descriptions are revealing of the women's differing attitudes towards British imperialism in West Africa. Elizabeth Melville's attitude was typical of the 1840s, and her landscape descriptions were heavily influenced by philanthropic perspectives on West Africa, anti-slavery concerns, and the anti-colonialism in Britain at the time. She portrayed West Africa as almost Edenic; it was a land of gardens and cultivation, of flowers, blossoms and perfumes. However, it was not Europe's Eden, but Africa's. She believed West Africa unfit for European colonisation, primarily because of climatic conditions; the presence of Britons would be unnecessary once the slave trade had been abolished. Abolishing slavery would ensure that West Africans could be left to live peaceably *in their own* paradise. Mrs. Foote shared Melville's belief that the West African environment was unsuited to European colonisation, and the conviction that it was the burden of the British to eradicate what remained of the slave trade, but she saw this in terms of being able to establish legitimate trade which would ultimately benefit Britain. However, like Melville, Foote occasionally constructed Arcadian images of the landscapes of West Africa, and there are similarities in the pastoral paradise the two women envisaged.

Mary Slessor's landscape descriptions, to a certain extent, continued the tradition of romanticising West Africa, but they were also heavily influenced by the realities of living in the region for *forty years*. *The imagery that Slessor* deployed was perhaps less influenced by the nature of British attitudes towards West Africa, and more informed by her role as a missionary living in Africa. This is not the case with Constance Larymore's descriptions of Nigerian landscapes. Larymore was unique among the women of this study in that she adopted of the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" position to describe the landscapes she encountered. She even claimed territory as her own in her writings. She was able to do so, because, unlike the other women, she travelled through a part of West Africa which had been conquered by the British and which had been formally incorporated into the



British empire. In effect, she was surveying territories that were about to be colonised. Mary Kingsley's landscape descriptions were also unique, not only in their great abundance and poeticism, but also because they challenged many of the images of West Africa which prevailed during the 1890s. Unlike Zélie Colvile, who portrayed West Africa as the "Land of Death", Kingsley drew on earlier romantic depictions in order to challenge negative visions of West Africa, and to raise interest in the possibilities for British imperialism there. She believed that if she could convince the British public that West Africa was not a land of darkness, it would encourage the Government to increase Britain's trading interests in the region.

Landscape descriptions by women travellers also need to be viewed in relation to the wider literary and philosophical traditions which persisted throughout the nineteenth century, and which influenced their relationships with, and understanding and depictions of, the environments of West Africa. These traditions include nineteenth-century ideas about "Nature", Victorian romanticism, and nineteenth-century notions of wilderness and the imperial frontier.

Victorian romanticism and ideas about "Nature" were strongly influenced by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century concepts, and in particular by the works of the Romantic poets. However, to those Victorians who adhered to rationality and the spirit of Science, the subjectivity found in such writings was to be avoided. Nature should be objectified.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, many nineteenth-century notions about the physical world remained distinctly conservative. As Knoepflmacher and Tennyson argue:

"Though partially discredited and bereft of some of its "mysteries", it [Nature] would continue to be cherished for its symbolic representations and sacramental meanings in the face of the rapid advances of science into a very different natural order."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> U.C. Knoepflmacher and G.B. Tennyson [eds] (1977), Nature and the Victorian Imagination, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. xix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

Therefore, certain philosophies about the physical environment in nineteenth-century Britain remained essentially backward-looking, and "Nature" remained above all "a repository of feeling, a sanctuary they were all eager to retain".<sup>4</sup> The cult of Nature was a prominent part of the nineteenth-century experience, and was probably an obverse manifestation of the loss of faith which characterised the period. Many thinkers in Victorian Britain, as in any age, looked back towards a Golden Age and yearned for a countryside which was being swept away by the Industrial Revolution (although there were also utopian optimists, such as John Stuart Mill, who yearned for a new world based on science, rationality and modernity). Contempt for industrialisation among some thinkers helped produce a pastoral myth of country cottages and gardens.<sup>5</sup> As discussed in chapter 4, these developments in philosophies about the physical environment influenced greatly the ways in which non-European landscapes were depicted, and they also influenced the women of this study. Melville and Foote evoked the pastoral myth in their representations of the West African countryside. Slessor and Kingsley both depicted West Africa as a sanctuary, and Slessor in particular painted romantic pictures of the Calabar past. Although most of the women shared a romanticism, this is most clearly expressed in the works of Kingsley, and her portrayals of the landscapes of West Africa owe more to the romanticism of the eighteenth century than that of the nineteenth century.

Portrayals of non-European landscapes were complex, and were influenced not only by nineteenth-century concepts of Nature, but also by imperialist literatures. Thus, on the one hand, non-industrial non-European landscapes could sometimes be depicted as wildernesses and sanctuaries, but on the other hand, these landscapes were also depicted as existing beyond the frontier of "civilisation". It was the "duty" of Britain to push back this frontier and extend "civilisation",

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

<sup>5</sup> Despite this some writers such as George Eliot elucidated the fantasy of this vision of the past, pointing out that there were rural slums among the tidy hamlets, and that the poor, who were now trapped in urban slums, had never lived in cottages with gardens, but had worked other people's land and had been burdened by the poor rates.

commerce and Christianity into these vast wildernesses. The notion of the imperial frontier was particularly powerful in literature concerning Britain's involvement in West Africa. European contact had existed since the fifteenth century, yet it remained a land of mystery. Its extreme climate, high death rate, and dense, unexplored forests ensured that it was perceived by many in Britain as the most nefarious region of the Dark Continent. The slow progress of British imperialism throughout the nineteenth century ensured that the idea of the imperial frontier endured well into the twentieth century. Thus there are images of the imperial frontier in the narratives of Foote (who wrote in the 1860s), Slessor (who wrote from the 1880s), and in those of Larymore, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century. All alluded to the gradual extension of civilisation in West Africa as the influence of the missionaries and the British Government increased.

From mid-century onwards, the Edenic Africa of anti-slavery literature was transformed. The failure of expeditions due to fevers and the difficulty of the terrain, the impact of scientific racism from the 1860s onwards, and the descriptions of West Africa in exploration literature ensured that the popular image of West Africa darkened. Burton's Africa was "hideous and grotesque", to Stanley the forests were "remorseless and implacable".<sup>6</sup> Winwood Reade feminised the continent and its "horrors".<sup>7</sup> Africa was represented in exploration literature as a wilderness, the superficial beauty of which concealed the hidden dangers of disease.<sup>8</sup> It was at once fecund, alluring, repulsive, and ultimately destructive. Such portrayals were a feature of nineteenth-century exploration literature, and also of colonial fiction, epitomised by Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, published in

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<sup>6</sup> In Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow (1977), The Myth of Africa, Library of Social Science, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> (*Ibid*, pp. 71-2).

<sup>8</sup> The image of "feminine" beauty concealing hidden danger paralleled the image of the syphilitic prostitute that was powerful throughout the nineteenth century. This was epitomised in Émile Zola's L'Assommoir, where Nana's alluring face/mask eventually succumbs to the disease, and Zola describes in gruesome detail how her face putrefies and decomposes before she dies. Images of putrefaction and decomposition were integral to representations of West Africa as the heart of the "Dark Continent" - see Sander Gilman (1985b), "Black bodies, white bodies: toward an iconography of female sexuality in late nineteenth century art, medicine and literature", Critical Inquiry, pp. 234-7.

1902. They helped legitimise Britain's increasing involvement in the affairs of West Africa during the 1870s and 1880s. Hargreaves contends that:

As impressions and prejudices derived from African experience were fed back into Europe a new "image of Africa" began to emerge, as an incorrigibly barbarous continent, more suited for civilisation by conquest than by the old agencies of Christianity and commerce.<sup>9</sup>

These attitudes are certainly apparent in Colvile's portrayal of West Africa in the 1890s, and her descriptions of surrounding landscapes are, at times, almost Conradian in style.

There were, therefore, conventional ways of representing "other" landscapes during the nineteenth century which influenced the narratives of women travellers. The contrast between the backward-looking romanticism of many Victorian thinkers and the ideas of progress inherent in contemporaneous imperial discourses was apparent in their descriptions of West African landscapes. The physical environment of West Africa was variously portrayed by these women as a sanctuary, as an Arcadia and refuge from British industrialisation, and as a threatening, barbaric, and bewildering wilderness beyond the frontier of "civilisation". Furthermore, the degree to which landscapes figured in their descriptions is itself indicative of the constraints operating upon and within their texts. There was perhaps a greater emphasis on landscape description in the accounts of women travellers than in those of their male counterparts because of textual constraints, which limited the possibilities for making scientific observations and political comments.

Similarities exist in the ways in which British women represented the landscapes of West Africa; for example, they attempted to familiarise their surroundings rather than to exoticise them. Despite this, the relationships between the women and their environments, and their subsequent descriptions of the landscapes, were often very different. Mary Kingsley had a deeply spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> J.D. Hargreaves (1974), "The European Partition of West Africa", in J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, History of West Africa, volume 2, p. 407.

relationship with the landscape of West Africa. Elizabeth Melville and Mrs. Foote were both wary of the hidden dangers in their surroundings, but both delighted at the natural flora in a similar way to Mary Slessor. Constance Larymore also took pleasure in the physical environment of Nigeria, but wished to control and "tame" it by planting British-style gardens.

## 2) Race

Much has been written on race and nineteenth-century Britain,<sup>10</sup> and increasingly studies are combining the issues of gender and racism. While women travellers have become a topic of considerable interest to feminist writers throughout the social sciences, the issue of race and racism has proved a difficult one to tackle. As was discussed in chapter 1, much of the early feminist research tended to excuse or ignore the racism of white women in the British empire, or to argue within the confines of a gender dichotomy that women were not, in fact, racist and that white men were the primary purveyors of racism within the empire.<sup>11</sup> As Vron Ware argues, feminist theorists have been reluctant to analyze the nature of the racism apparent in the travel narratives of white women:

It is still rare... to find any white feminist history of the nineteenth century that relates to the British Empire, except as a force that touched women's lives in Britain or as a possible escape route for women who failed to make a satisfying life at home. Overlooking the existence of imperialist ideologies suggests that the question of race has no relevance to the history of white women.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Christine Bolt (1971), *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Sander Gilman (1985a), *Difference and Pathology. Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Robert A. Huttenbach (1976), *Racism and Empire*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Abdul R. JanMohammed (1985), "The economy of Manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature", *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1, pp. 59-87; Douglas Lorimer (1978), *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, and (1988), "Theoretical racism in late Victorian anthropology, 1870-1900", *Victorian Studies*, 31, pp. 405-430; Albert Memmi (1990), *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, London: Earthscan; Ronald Rainger (1978), "Race, politics, and science: the Anthropological Society of London in the 1860s", *Victorian Studies*, 22, 1, pp. 51-70.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Helen Callaway (1987), *Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, London: Macmillan; Ann Laura Stoler (1991), "Carnal knowledge and imperial power, gender, race, and morality in colonial Asia", in Micaela Di Leonardo [ed], *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Post-Modern Era*, Oxford: University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> Vron Ware (1992), *Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History*, London: Verso, pp. 36-7.

Gender was particularly important in organising ideas about "race" and "civilization", and women were involved in many different ways in the expansion and maintenance of the empire. This was crucial during the late Victorian period when theories of race and eugenics were used to support the concept of the innate superiority of the white race above all others, and Englishwomen were seen as the "conduits of the essence of race". Women were considered to be the guardians of the race in their reproductive capacity, and they also provided - as long as they were of the right class and breeding - a guarantee that British morals and principles were adhered to in the colonies.<sup>13</sup> Thus by the end of the nineteenth- and into the twentieth century, the demands of empire began to influence literature on social mores.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between race and gender is, therefore, of critical importance in the context of British imperial culture. However, there has been relatively little analysis of the ways in which women who actually travelled in the empire negotiated race and racism in the course of their travels. According to Ware:

Whereas feminist historians have uncovered many examples of feminists who have braved convention at home to fight to improve the lives and opportunities of women of all classes and backgrounds, there has been little corresponding interest in British women who came face to face with the complexities of racism and male power... their role in the imperial project and the way they dealt with racism and cultural difference... The purpose of exploring the histories of... imperialism is not to bring white women to account for past misdeeds, nor to search for heroines where reputations can help absolve the rest from guilt, but to find out how white women negotiated questions of race and racism - as well as class and gender.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Davin documents the changing attitudes from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century towards the role of women in the empire. For example, she notes that the recommended reasons for marriage changed from the 1860s, when a woman was advised to seek a partner who would support, protect, guide and help her, to 1914, when the three main objects of marriage were the reproduction of the race, the maintenance of social purity, and the mutual comfort of the couple. See Davin (1978), "Imperialism and motherhood", *History Workshop*, 5, pp. 9-65.

<sup>15</sup> Ware (1992) pp. 42-3.

Following Ware, it is clear that the issue of white women and racism within travel texts is highly complex. As chapter 5 illustrates, there were, in effect, a whole series of different reactions by women travellers that were both informed by, and, in some cases, challenged the prevailing racism at the time of their travels.

The importance of elucidating and understanding the images of West Africans in the narratives of white women travellers becomes apparent when one considers Lorimer's contention that:

Much of the Victorian discussion of race took place in haphazard fashion, mixing the observations of travellers with common prejudices. This was the common-place discourse not only of everyday conversation and of the daily press, but also of scientific gatherings and publications including the organs of the British Association, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Anthropological Institute.<sup>16</sup>

The role of travel narratives in the formulation of racist theories, and the imagery associated with them, was thus of some significance. They played a crucial part in the complex process of the production of images concerning West African peoples; a process which involved the construction of images within Britain, the ever evolving racist theories in Britain, and accounts from those who had travelled in West Africa. Most nineteenth-century travellers to West Africa shared a fascination with the peoples they encountered in the course of their journeys. As Stevenson argues, during the nineteenth century British perceptions of Africans comprised a complex and shifting blend of mythology, ethnocentric prejudice, pseudoscience, and observation.<sup>17</sup> In the early nineteenth century, certain literatures, in particular, anti-slavery literature, mythologised West Africans as "noble savages" living in an Arcadia being destroyed by slavery. However, the propaganda of abolitionism relied on a *dual* portrayal of Africa in its efforts to gain support: the revelation of atrocities associated with the slave trade, as well as the evocation of the image of

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<sup>16</sup> Lorimer (1988), p. 428.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Barnes Stevenson (1982), Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa, Boston: Twayne, p. 10.

the "noble savage".<sup>18</sup> These noble Africans were the counterparts to the English aristocrat. Such images are found occasionally in Melville's account, but are most strongly represented in Kingsley's narratives. Kingsley's evocation of this outmoded stereotype enabled her to challenge the more cynical racist images of Africans which prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century. Melville's humanitarian portrayal of Africans as simple, innocent savages was unintentionally derogatory, and such images were used later in the century by those in favour of extending British imperialism in West Africa. Kingsley herself attempted to undermine such portrayals by proving the intelligence of West Africans. However, during the 1890s, the African "savage" became analogous not to the English aristocrat, but to the English working classes. Kingsley's response was uncommon; Colvile's contemptuous and condescending tone was more conventional for the time.

Negative images of Africans, such as those in Colvile's narrative, persisted throughout the nineteenth century, but gained greater weight from the 1850s onwards. Missionary literature continued to use simplified racial stereotypes which evolved into the more cynical racism of the 1860s. As Lorimer argues, "the association of Africans with blackness and nakedness, especially in contrast to the fully-clothed Victorians, strengthened the impression that Negroes represented unregenerate mankind, sinful and unwashed". Africans were no longer "noble savages" living in Eden; they were in the sinful and depraved state of those expelled from Eden, and were crying out for conversion.<sup>19</sup>

The changing attitudes towards Africans were not only constituted by imperial experience, but also by changing attitudes among some Victorians at the

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<sup>18</sup> The latter image had a long history. Shakespeare's Othello and Marlow's Tamburlaine were both barbaric noblemen. As Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow suggest, Aphra Behn brought the "noble savage" to Africa with her novelette *Oroonoko*, whose main character, as the victim of white men, became the model for the "noble savage" (1977, p. 18). As Christopher Miller argues, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Africa was "made to bear a double burden, of monstrosity and nobility, all imposed by a deeper condition of difference and instability" (Miller (1985), *Blank Darkness. Africanist Discourse in French*, London: University of Chicago Press, p. 5).

<sup>19</sup> Lorimer (1988), pp. 77 and 78.



time of the religious revival in mid-century. There was an increasing interest in Britain in anti-slavery in the United States, which coincided with the wider access to literature and new forms of popular entertainment such as stage and music hall in the 1850s. Popular anti-slavery tracts, such as Uncle Tom's Cabin and the minstrel shows, created enduring stereotypes of Africans and Afro-Americans as simple, child-like and amusing. While intended to arouse sympathy for the slaves in the United States, such portrayals also heightened the sense of difference between Britons and black people. This transition in racial attitudes was, therefore, undoubtedly connected to the changing nature of opinions concerning social status in Britain, but it was also, in part, a response to the needs of empire. JanMohammed argues that whilst the overt aim of the imperial powers, as articulated by imperialist discourse, was to "civilise" supposedly primitive peoples, there was a hidden aim to create a fixation upon the irrevocable barbarity of the African, and by doing so, provide legitimisation for Britain's continued attempts to "civilise" Africans. Thus, exploitation of Africa's resources could continue indefinitely behind the façade of Britain's position of moral superiority.<sup>20</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, at the time of the travels of Foote and Hinderer, many Britons were themselves developing a sense of their own racial uniqueness and, under the influence of the precepts of Social Darwinism and continental racial theories, "Anglo-Saxonism" began to flourish.<sup>21</sup> As Lorimer argues, the external reality of expanding European domination over the world and its peoples encouraged some Victorian thinkers to rank racial groups by their power and status. They perceived the African as the photographic negative of the Anglo-Saxon, and they seemed to get a clearer perception of their own supposed racial superiority from the inverted image of the black African.<sup>22</sup> The notion of the

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<sup>20</sup> Abdul R. JanMohammed (1985), "The economy of Manichean allegory: the function of racial difference in colonialist literature", Critical Inquiry, 12, 1, pp. 59-87.

<sup>21</sup> Huttenbach (1976), p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Lorimer (1978), p. 11.

"gentleman" served to delineate the middle-class man from the working-class labourer, thus making his position in society seemingly unassailable. White skin became an essential mark of a "gentleman", maintaining the apparent distance between the African and the Anglo-Saxon. These ideas certainly seemed to influence the portrayals of Africans by white women, especially those who were residents in West Africa. Scientific racial theory evolved from what could be termed a pseudoscience in the 1850s and 1860s, into an established science from the 1880s onwards.<sup>23</sup> Evolutionary theory gave this extreme form of racism added weight.

The refusal to acknowledge the richness of African history, philosophy and society can be traced back to the eighteenth century and the works of such "authorities" as David Hume and Thomas Carlyle,<sup>24</sup> but by the 1860s the denial of African history and individuality had become an affirmation of African inferiority and backwardness. Evolutionary anthropology, if not portraying Africans as a separate species, placed the African on the lowest rung of the ladder of civilisation, and created the myth that the African had more in common with apes than with Europeans. This complimented and legitimated the sense of superiority among some sections of British society, and as Brantlinger argues, "evolutionary thought almost seems calculated to legitimate imperialism".<sup>25</sup> Kingsley's narratives attempted to counter these portrayals of Africa, and her understanding that West Africans had a long and rich history also led her to challenge some of the popular myths about West African customs.

After 1860, the analogy between Africans and children began to be used with increasing frequency. This clearly implied a paternalistic point of view which

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<sup>23</sup> For a full account of the formation of the Anthropological Society, see Rainger (1978), pp. 51-70.

<sup>24</sup> Boniface Obichere (1977), "African critics of Victorian imperialism: an analysis", Journal of African Studies, 4, 1, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Brantlinger (1985), "Victorians and Africans: the genealogy of the myth of the Dark Continent", Critical Inquiry, 12, 1, p. 184.

denied equality between Africans and Anglo-Saxons by denying the former "the privileges reserved for adults".<sup>26</sup> Such portrayals were often used by pro-imperialists to support arguments in favour of establishing formal British imperialism in West Africa, and these images were present in the travel narratives of some women travellers. Larymore referred to West Africans as simple and child-like, and Slessor's authority in Calabar was based upon her "mother-child" relationship with the local people. Kingsley was the only writer to openly refute and challenge these depictions in her publications.

By the 1890s, at the time of Colvile and Kingsley's travels, the image of West Africa in the imaginations of many Victorians was set. The images in missionary and exploration literature were augmented by colonial fiction, which was extremely popular at the end of the nineteenth century. As Hugh Ridley argues, "the archetypical picture of the cruelty and harshness of Africa [was] repeated *ad nauseum* in all colonial fiction". Even for critics of European imperialism, such as Joseph Conrad and Paul Vigné, the landscapes of West Africa were accursed, and Europeans had "succumbed to the evil of Africa herself rather than to the inherent brutality of imperialism".<sup>27</sup> The preference for strong rule which arose after 1895 "sprang from unflattering notions about savagery, infantilism, and general incompetence of the non-white inhabitants of the British Empire".<sup>28</sup> Such attitudes are apparent in Colvile's narrative, and were used by many pro-imperialists to justify the extension of Britain's empire in West Africa, the nature of which, by now, had more to do with strategy and with competition from other European powers than it did with Britain's sense of moral duty to spread civilisation in a supposedly "savage" land.

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<sup>26</sup> H. Alan Cairns (1965), Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society 1840-1890, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 88-9, 92-6; Dorothy O. Helly (1969), "Informed opinion on tropical Africa in Great Britain 1860-1890", African Affairs, 68, p. 206. There was also an association between blackness and madness. As Sander Gilman argues, it was believed that "the "simple nature" of blacks and their "child-like essence" did not permit them to function well in the complexities of the modern world and predisposed them to insanity" (see Gilman (1985a), p. 140).

<sup>27</sup> Hugh Ridley (1983), Images of Imperial Rule, London: Croom Helm, pp. 70-1.

<sup>28</sup> Bolt (1971), p. 215.

Images of West African peoples were, therefore, inextricably linked to both racist theory and imperial policy, and images constructed within Britain had important influences on the opinions of those travelling within the empire. This study has illustrated that great differences were apparent in the ways in which white women related to, and portrayed, the peoples of West Africa. Their views were often influenced by racial theories in Britain, and as these changed and evolved over time, so the attitudes of the women varied and contrasted. Therefore, most of the women formulated their descriptions of West Africans within the conventions of imperial discourse at the time of their travels. However, this was not the case with Mary Kingsley, whose theories on racial difference went completely against contemporary doctrine. As a polygenist, her ideas had more in common with pre-Darwinian ideas about race. Kingsley, and to some extent Slessor, stood apart from the other women travellers in that they acknowledged an African history and attempted, on the whole, to relate to West Africans on an individual basis. Despite this, the fact of racial difference endowed white women travellers with a sense of their own superiority, and although the attitudes of some (for example, Melville, Foote, Larymore and Colvile) were infected with nineteenth-century notions about class superiority, the responses towards West Africans of all the women of this study were premised on racial difference. Whether the women perceived relationships with West Africans in terms of Britain's paternal role (Melville, Foote), or in terms of their own personal maternal role (Hinderer, Slessor), as trading partners (Kingsley), as colonised subjects (Larymore), or whether they treated West Africans with complete contempt (Colvile), it was the sense of their own racial superiority that framed their responses.

### *3) Anthropological observations*

Informed by racial theories of the time, many nineteenth-century Britons often depicted Africa as a land where human life was particularly cheap. Indigenous African societies appeared to be structured around a random, wanton and arbitrary violence. According to many accounts, West Africa was a land of spectacular and appalling brutality in which slavery, cannibalism, ritual murder and other violent

practices were common occurrences. Such visions of landscapes of fear in West Africa were connected to a peculiar Victorian desire to be titillated by tales of savagery and immorality in far-off, exotic places; and, as illustrated earlier, they were also motivated by a strategic need to represent Africa as a wild and uncivilised place, in need of enlightenment by British imperialism.

However, Africans were only savages in the tautological sense that many Victorians were induced by their cultural background to define them as such. As images of Africans transformed from evocations of nobility to bestiality, increasingly to nineteenth-century writers Africa became an accursed land, the Biblical "land of Cham". West Africa remained the heart of the Dark Continent; while travellers and explorers were unravelling the mysteries of the physical geography of West Africa, they were also creating "clouds which obscured an adequate vision of African life and cultures".<sup>29</sup> They were more interested in Africa as a geographical phenomenon than in Africans as social groups. As Mazrui argues:

The explorers were enchanted by mountains and rivers but were inadequately sensitised to the ways and customs of the people. Their reports of African societies therefore tended to be offered as a dramatic local background to the adventure of tracking down the sources of great waterways.<sup>30</sup>

Many commentators failed to recognise the complexity of the ethnic structures of the societies that they observed. The same can be said to be true of their representations of West African customs and cultures. The cultures of West Africa were, and remain, complex, as were the systems of beliefs and practices. However, as Idowu argues, "In the past this complexity has led would-be scholars on Africa to take refuge in meaningless or insulting terms like "amorphous", "savage", "barbarous", or "primitive" in describing what they really did not

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<sup>29</sup> Ali A, Mazrui (1969), "European exploration and Africa's self-discovery", The Journal of Modern African Studies, 7, 4, pp. 668.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 675.

understand".<sup>31</sup> The spiritual beliefs of West Africans were generally of no interest to Victorian audiences, they were merely "pagan error". However, spectacular festivals, human sacrifice, and trials-by-ordeal were "curiosities", and were, therefore, recounted at length. No traveller wished to return without a story to tell. As Curtin argues:

The love of the extraordinary was partly the reflection of a much older European interest in the exotic - an interest blending genuine intellectual curiosity with a libidinous fascination for descriptions of other people who break with impunity the taboos of one's own society.<sup>32</sup>

As the reputation of West Africans grew ever darker, so the popular fascination in certain sections of British society with tales of cannibalism also grew. From mid-century onwards, anthropophagy was a much exploited theme. As Hammond and Jablow argue, cannibalism was not an important theme in British writing before mid-century, but "in the imperial period writers were far more addicted to cannibalism than... Africans ever were", Stanley was "carried away in his zealous horror of anthropophagy and repeated every tale of cannibal tribes that he heard in addition to creating quite a number of his own"; Winwood Reade "sprinkled cannibals around West Africa rather like raisins in a cake".<sup>33</sup> Although there is little evidence to suggest that cannibalism was widespread in West Africa,<sup>34</sup> the theme provided a new variation on images of the "bestly savage". The spiritual beliefs of Africans, their nakedness and supposed cannibalism formed a syndrome; "nakedness may well imply that there is also cannibalism and that the people are "fetish-worshippers". A clothed cannibal is somehow a contradiction in terms".<sup>35</sup> These ideas influenced the depictions of African customs by white

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<sup>31</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu (1973), African Traditional Religion. A Definition, London: S.C.M. Press, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Curtin (1965), pp. 23-4.

<sup>33</sup> Hammond and Jablow (1977), p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> See W. Arens (1979), The Man-Eating Myth. Anthropology and Anthropophagy, London: Oxford University Press, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Hammond and Jablow (1977), pp. 36-7.

women travellers, and especially Colvile and Kingsley. Colvile tended to view most customs she witnessed in a negative light, and made several allusions to the supposed savage and cannibalistic tendencies of West Africans. Kingsley, on the other hand, attempted to desensationalise the issue of cannibalism by using humour and irony in her comments about it. She constantly undermined images of Africans as savages in her narratives by referring to their rationality, common-sense, and gentle nature. Here again, Kingsley attempted to undermine prevailing preconceptions about West Africans.

Colvile apart, most women travellers tended to avoid the sensational reports of West African customs that were often apparent in other imperialist discourses. Textual constraints may have been a factor in this, prohibiting the women from discussing those violent customs they encountered or had described to them. However, it may be that the nature of the journeys of these women, and the distance between themselves and those whom they observed, meant that they were unfamiliar with the lifestyles of West Africans, and they remained unexposed to what many people in Britain perceived to be the most violent of West African customs. Certainly, writers such as Melville, Foote and Colvile did not seem interested in documenting or understanding the customs of the peoples they encountered, and their experiences on their travels merely confirmed their preconceptions. However, Kingsley, and to some extent Slessor and Larymore, occasionally challenged European misconceptions about the customs of West Africa and the depiction of West Africans as barbarous and savage. Therefore, although most of the women of this study were influenced by the racial theories at the time of their travels and the prejudices implicit in these, the images they created of West Africans and their customs were often very different from those found in other imperialist discourses. The complexities of their representations, and the varied nature of their responses suggests that the context of their journeys, and the individual characteristics of each woman, were as significant as gender in shaping their visions.

#### 4) *West African women*

A feature of nineteenth-century narratives about Africa was the anonymity of the indigenous peoples themselves; African women were particularly anonymous. Very few travel or exploration accounts referred to African women, and those that did tended to reinforce the twin stereotypes of the oppressed wife in a polygamous household, or the lascivious female, associated with the prostitute in Britain. The middle-class Victorian reverence for the virtuous wife meant that African societies were condemned for condoning infant marriage, for producing child-mothers, for treating women as slaves when they were adults, and for subjecting widows to trial-by-ordeal.<sup>36</sup> The comparative nudity of West African women was considered indicative of their unrestrained sexuality; the blame for the sexual excesses of European men within the imperial setting was thus shifted onto African women.<sup>37</sup> The few descriptions of African women that did exist were, therefore, *formulated* within the framework of enduring stereotypes. Little effort was made to describe the lives of African women within the context of their own cultures and societies.

Images of women were central to the intellectual and ideological discussion of the non-European "other". The "plight" of African women was depicted, however erroneously, as inferior to the situation of women in Britain. Missionaries, travellers and reformers "moralised and dramatised rather than analyzed or understood the legal, familial or cultural frameworks of women's lives".<sup>38</sup> As with other aspects of the popular geographies of West Africa, these images were not rooted in empirical observation but in anthropological theory, fictional writing and imaginative description, as well as the visual images generated in popular journalism, art and advertising. There were, of course, many variations and contradictions in the representations of women in imperialist discourse; they were

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<sup>36</sup> Bolt (1971), p. 138.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed analysis of European depictions of the sexuality of African women, see Sander L. Gilman (1985b), pp. 202-242.

<sup>38</sup> Joanna de Groot (1991), "Conceptions and misconceptions: the historical and cultural context of discussion on women and development", in Haleh Ashfar [ed], Women, Development and Survival in the Third World, London: Tavistock, pp. 107-135.



depicted as exotic, as oppressed victims, as sex objects or as the most ignorant and backward members of primitive societies. As de Groot argues, these representations of women played a central part in the conceptualisation of African societies and European male views of their relationship to those societies.<sup>39</sup> They also obscured the complex circumstances of the lives of African women, and ignored the fact that comparison with the lives of British women could well be to the advantage of the former. Above all, the images of African women were an expression of power relations rather than expressions of ignorance or bigotry:

The material and cultural dominance underlying European views of non-Europeans, and in particular non-European women, was a matter not only of the control wielded by powerful groups of European men in a world system, but of connected patterns of gender and class power sustaining male authority over women and the control of propertied and privileged groups over the labouring and popular classes.<sup>40</sup>

The obsessive depiction of these images of "femininity" and "foreignness" as simultaneously attractive and subordinate expressed the contradictions inherent in popular geographies of empire, but also the imperatives of class-gender-race which provides the framework for analysis of white women's descriptions of their West African counterparts.

Contemporary constructions of gender were certainly of some importance in white women's portrayals of African women. Their femininity allowed British women access to West African women, and, in turn, their descriptions of the domestic sphere in West African communities facilitated the affirmation of their own impeccable femininity. The transgressive nature of their travels was, therefore, partially concealed by their location of parts of these journeys, and of their own interests, in the domestic sphere. This is particularly the case with the residents and missionaries. White women travellers could view the lives of West African women in relation to their own lives, and Larymore and Kingsley, in particular, were

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115. De Groot also offers an interesting (and at present under-researched) link between these depictions, imperial policies towards women, and policies that shape the lives of women in contemporary "Third World" societies.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

convinced that in many cases West African women enjoyed greater freedoms than their British counterparts. Therefore, by being able to identify with West African women on the basis of a shared femininity, white women travellers sometimes challenged the representations in other imperialist discourses of the time. However, the fact remains that within the imperial setting, a common female experience did not transcend racial difference in most representations of West African women. British women travellers perceived themselves in terms of racial superiority, and this is reflected in the fact that few of them developed close personal relationships with West African women, they did not question their right to enter the women's compounds or harems, nor their right to appropriate, objectify and represent these women in their narratives. Furthermore, many women travellers perceived themselves in terms of class superiority, and this was particularly apparent in the accounts of those women residents who employed West Africans as servants. The only exception to the above was, perhaps, Mary Slessor, who did seem to have a profound sense of personal affinity with West African women on the grounds of a common female experience, and spent most of her years in Calabar working with West African women to improve their rights and opportunities. Therefore, representations of West African women by British women travellers were intersected by differences of both race and class, and a knowledge of the personalities of each individual, as well as the context of their travels, is important in gaining an insight into the images that they produced.

### **Interpretations of the "Dark Continent"**

The four themes of landscape, race, anthropological observations and women, which recur in women's descriptions of West Africa, formed part of a broader metaphor of the "Dark Continent". This had a particular resonance during the nineteenth century. Unlike the Middle East, where European contact, and thus curiosity, had a very long history, West Africa was a relatively new phenomenon in the imaginations of the British. As a consequence of its novelty, the image of the Dark Continent had a powerful hold on the Victorian imagination. However,

this study has illustrated that the Dark Continent was not a monolithic concept; it was formed by a complex production of knowledge and, therefore, open to a variety of interpretations. The archive used in this study has revealed the complexities of this metaphor.

The images created by women travellers were rooted in relationships of power and formed part of the process by which British scholars, scientists, explorers, administrators, and so on, documented, detailed, mapped and appropriated imperial territories. The fundamental flaw in Edward Said's Orientalism was the homogenisation of what he referred to as "the West", which created a binary opposition of Orient/Occident and replicated the very model that he was attempting to critique.<sup>41</sup> This thesis has illustrated that there were a variety of interpretations of the Dark Continent by white women travellers during the nineteenth century. Despite the differences in the periods in which they travelled, all the women of this study referred directly to Africa as the Dark Continent, or used the metaphor in allusions to images of darkness, death, disease or primitiveness in their descriptions of landscapes, peoples and customs. However, their interpretations of this image, as revealed by their narratives, were complex. In the narratives of Melville and Foote, West Africa was at once a primitive paradise and land of disease and death. There are similar depictions in Hinderer's narrative. Thus the metaphor of the Dark Continent was not consistent in these accounts; the seasonality of the climate played an important role in how they viewed West Africa differently at various times. Colvile's West Africa was the antecedent of Conrad's Heart of Darkness, a land of savagery and cannibalism beyond redemption. For Larymore, the Dark Continent was a land waiting to be civilised and enlightened by British imperialism. Only Slessor, and, in particular, Kingsley challenged the metaphor of the Dark Continent in any great measure. However, even these women did not resist evoking this metaphor on occasions, Slessor in response to some of the brutality she witnessed and her own sufferings (which were due to climatic conditions and, therefore, seasonal), and Kingsley in

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<sup>41</sup> Said himself has since recognised this problem; see Said (1994), Culture and Imperialism, London: Vintage, pp. xi-xii.

her discussion of Scheele's maps of disease: "There is no mistaking what he means by black... and black you'll find they colour West Africa from above Sierra Leone to below the Congo".<sup>42</sup> Despite this, Kingsley proceeded to dismantle her own preconceptions on arrival in West Africa, and through her subsequent publications she challenged more often than she confirmed the metaphor of the Dark Continent. She tended to be more ambivalent than the other women; West Africa was her kind of place, but she understood that it was not a suitable, nor desirable, environment for all.

### **Differences and similarities in women traveller's responses to West Africa**

It is apparent that there are both similarities and differences in the travel narratives of British women in West Africa. The notion of distance is important when considering these. The relative distance between British women as observers and describers, and the peoples and landscapes that they described, had important influences on the nature of the imagery they created. In different ways, Kingsley and Slessor attempted to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding by locating themselves within West African landscapes and communities. This was particularly apparent in Kingsley's landscape descriptions, which were almost transcendental in nature, and which demonstrated Kingsley's desire to blend into the landscapes through which she travelled. Kingsley also travelled into the rainforests, accompanied only by African guides, and on a few occasions stayed overnight in West African villages (although for the most part she remained in the coastal towns and mission houses). Her intention was to observe landscapes, peoples and customs from the "inside" in order to gain an understanding of all things West African; proximity was a primary concern. Similarly, Slessor decided to move away from the European mission stations, to locate in African villages, and to adopt a West African lifestyle in order, firstly, to understand the customs of Calabar and, secondly, to attempt to eradicate the worst of these without destroying the fabric

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Kingsley (1982), Travels in West Africa, London: Virago, p. 3.

of indigenous social life. This proximity to both the landscapes and peoples of West Africa was in marked contrast to the other women travellers, and it may have been a factor in inspiring the sympathy and fondness that both Kingsley and Slessor held for West Africa and its peoples.

Although the nature of her role in West Africa necessitated that Anna Hinderer live with the peoples of Ibadan, she did not share Slessor's affinity with West Africans, nor did she "go native" to extent that Slessor adapted her lifestyle. Melville, Foote and Larymore perceived their residences as temporary; West Africa never became "home" for them in the same way as it did in material terms for Slessor, who lived there for most of her life and who died there, or as it did in spiritual terms for Kingsley, whose travels were a fundamentally liberating experience, and who seemed, from her writings between 1895 and 1900, never to lose her desire to return to West Africa. The only way that Larymore could make Nigeria feel a little like home was by attempting to impose English gardens upon the landscape. Zélie Colvile was the most removed from West Africa, viewing it from the decks of a steamer, and taking only brief excursions inland by way of the Oil Rivers. As a pure tourist travelling during the period of high imperialism in Africa, it is perhaps of no surprise that Colvile was the most dismissive and contemptuous among British women travellers in West Africa. Whereas Kingsley and Slessor could understand and even empathise with West African customs, and could feel at home in the unfamiliar physical environments, many of the other women remained detached and critical. The distance between observer and observed, therefore, had enormous implications for the images contained in the travel accounts of British women.

The relationships between several of the women in this study and the peoples and environments that they encountered were often deeply ambivalent.<sup>43</sup> For example, Slessor, Kingsley and Larymore did not wish to see the landscapes

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<sup>43</sup> See Alison Blunt (1994), pp. 23-6, who draws extensively on the work of Homi K. Bhabha. See also Bhabha (1985), "Signs taken for wonders: questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817", *Critical Inquiry*, 12, pp. 144-165.

of West Africa altered and spoiled by the presence of the British, but they failed to account for the impact they themselves were having on these landscapes. Larymore was aware of her own ambivalence; she was part of a British military expedition to establish an administrative network in Nigeria, and she was aware that this would alter drastically the landscapes and pace of life in Nigeria, yet at the same time she bemoaned these changes. Women travellers realised that their presence in West Africa was facilitated by the same British imperialism that posed a threat to those very features of West Africa that they took pleasure in. This ambivalence was apparent in Kingsley's expressed desire to see West African customs remain unchanged. She paid no attention to the impact that she, as a white woman who employed guides and engaged in trade, had on these indigenous customs. She did not consider the impacts that her advocacy of drawing West Africa into Britain's trading sphere would have on these customs, and believed naively that market forces and capitalism would benefit Britain and West Africa equally. Finally, Kingsley did not contemplate what the effects of closer contacts with European anthropologists and other scientists, which she also advocated, would have on West African cultures. Similarly, Slessor regretted the changes that the British had wrought in southern Nigeria, but did not consider that she herself, by establishing mission stations in the interior and a network of "native courts", had helped lay the foundations for these very changes. Therefore, these women may have been critical of certain aspects of British imperialism and the effects they were having on West Africa, but ultimately they shared in British imperial power and authority, and this facilitated their own liberation in West Africa.

One obvious reason for the differences in the popular geographies created by these women lies in the fact that they travelled in different regions of West Africa, including Sierra Leone, the region of Lagos, Calabar and the Oil Rivers further to the east, Fernando Po and the Congo Français to the southeast, the central areas of Yoruba, and the emirates in the sub-Saharan regions to the north. These geographical variations, and the different landscapes and peoples encountered would obviously create variations in description. However, this would not necessarily produce variations in *how* the women reacted to and represented

West African environments and peoples. The attitudes of the women themselves, and the external factors which informed these attitudes, are of critical importance. Thus, as discussed previously, the temporal variation of their journeys becomes significant, particularly in relation to the changing nature of British imperial culture throughout the nineteenth century.

In addition to these external differences, there were also differences in the women themselves as individuals which influenced their writings. Social class was an important factor. It was suggested in chapter 2 that the backgrounds of these women varied significantly. Zélie Colvile and Elizabeth Melville both had aristocratic backgrounds; Mrs. Foote, Anna Hinderer, Constance Larymore and Mary Kingsley were very much middle-class; and Mary Slessor had a working-class up-bringing. These differences in social class were compounded by such factors as marital status (Kingsley and Slessor were both unmarried), and whether or not the women had children with them in West Africa (Elizabeth Melville actually gave birth to her first child in Sierra Leone). Furthermore, there were different reasons behind their decisions to travel to West Africa. As detailed in chapter 2, some were missionaries, some were the wives of military men or administrators, and some were independent travellers. These varying roles in turn influenced their motives for travel. Many travelled out of a sense of duty; some, like Zélie Colvile travelled as tourists; others such as Mary Kingsley undertook scientific research during their travels; and many, if not all, were seeking some measure of personal liberation and an extension of their experiences that would not have been possible in Victorian Britain. What becomes clear is that the personal motives for travelling to West Africa were often complex and, therefore, unique to each woman. The various roles that the women performed and the personal motivations for their journeys had some bearing on the vision of West Africa that each woman constructed.

## Popular geographies

Perhaps the major geographical significance of travel narratives in any period of history lies in the images they contain, and the ways in which the authors' visions are projected onto the lands through which they travel. Leading geographers at the end of the nineteenth century recognised the importance of descriptive material in securing Britain's empire, and the ways in which it augmented the hard, empirical, geographical facts based on measurement and mapping. As Thomas Richards argues:

[Thomas] Holdich makes it clear that geography was a necessary but not sufficient tool for realizing territory. It must always be accompanied by the imperatives of state ethnography, which territorialize a domain not only by mapping it but by producing all manner of "thick" *description about it*.<sup>44</sup>

As Richards argues, the British empire was loose and fragmented, and was not controlled by any central authoritative body (the Foreign Office at this time was small and overworked). The "knowledge" that was collected about the empire, both empirical and descriptive, was critical to British imperial culture; the "control of knowledge" was clearly allied to the "control of the empire", and helped produce the "myth" of the British Empire as a controllable and manageable whole.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, although it may be difficult to make a case for the inclusion of women in historiographies of geography in the disciplinary sense during the late-nineteenth century, women certainly contributed to geographical *thought* at this time. Women may not have "discovered", mapped and explored "new" territories, but they did add to the imagery surrounding the empire. Moreover, they influenced how this imagery was mapped onto the imaginations of the majority of people in Britain who did not have first-hand experience of areas such as West Africa. The fact that they experienced places that many people in Britain could never experience, and they conveyed impressions of these places to their readers, makes

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Richards (1993), The Imperial Archive. Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire, London: Verso, p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-9.



the work of these women "geographic". They are not the "heroines" of the foundation of the discipline of geography, they did not define themselves as geographers, and they cannot be claimed in any disciplinary sense. Several feminist geographers, including Mona Domosh, have attempted to define women travel writers as geographers, but one could argue that they could equally be claimed by other disciplines such as literary criticism, anthropology or history. It is the contention here that they should not be "claimed" by any single discipline, but that their narratives can be criticised within and across a range of disciplines. However, their works are important to geographers today because of the popular geographies of imperial lands that they contain, and their contribution to British imperial culture at the time of publication. An emphasis on the creation of images of territories beyond Europe, their importance to imperial culture, and the part that women played in their construction, perhaps facilitates a more *critical analysis of histories* of geographical thought than those that have gone before.<sup>46</sup> Women travellers were not feminist heroines whose narratives can be viewed uncritically; they were deeply involved in the production of "knowledge" and, therefore, of "power" in Britain. Their narratives, and their own liberation and achievements, must be viewed within the context of British imperial culture.

A study of the imaginative geographies of empire is not only significant in an historical context; the production of imagery of territories beyond Europe also has some significance today. The power to label and to define what constitutes "the Other" still lies in the developed world, which has produced what some scholars refer to as a "crisis of representation" within geography.<sup>47</sup> This study has focused upon representations of West Africa during the nineteenth century, a period in which it tended to be depicted in various imperialist discourses as the Dark

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<sup>46</sup> See Felix Driver (1992), "Geography's empire: histories of geographical knowledge", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 10, pp. 23-40; Alison Blunt (1994) *Travel, Gender and Imperialism. Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, New York: Guilford Press, pp. 6-9.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, N. Duncan and J.P. Sharp (1993), "Confronting representation(s)", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 11, pp. 473-486; see also Sarah Radcliffe (1994), "(Representing) post-colonial women: authority, difference and feminisms", *Area*, 26, 1, pp. 25-32, for a discussion of post-colonial production of knowledge.

Continent. It has analyzed, particularly, how women travellers constructed West Africa as a place in their travel narratives. As Lucy Jarosz argues, the authority to construct Africa in various discourses is still located in the former imperial powers, and the tradition continues today. Historical images of Africa inform the contemporary representations of Africa; "the metaphor of Africa as the Dark Continent continually (re)makes and represents the continent as Other".<sup>48</sup> Images of famine and a Malthusian population crisis, and images of Africa as a land of disease and death still have a resonance today. The most recent re-emergences of the metaphor have occurred in academic and popular mass media accounts of AIDS in Africa;<sup>49</sup> they have also re-emerged in images of the appalling violence in Rwanda, which is portrayed not as a legacy of imperialism, but as a symptom of African barbarity.<sup>50</sup> Thus the validity of exploring historical constructions of West Africa as a place is apparent since this process continues to a certain extent in contemporary discourses.

This study has limited ambition, and is based on a small sample of women who travelled in a particular area during a particular period. However, this has allowed for a detailed understanding of the context for each travel narrative, it permits a more specific exploration of the popular geographies contained therein, and it avoids references to an essential "feminine" experience of empire and "feminine" *genre* of travel writing. It also facilitates the incorporation of women and their experiences in histories of geographical thought. The archive explored in

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<sup>48</sup> Lucy Jarosz (1992), "Constructing the Dark Continent: metaphor as geographic representation of Africa", *Geografiska Annaler*, 74 B, 2, pp. 105-115, quote from p. 105. See also Jarosz (1994), "Agents of power, landscapes of fear: the vampires and heart thieves of Madagascar", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 12, 4, p. 425.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111-113.

<sup>50</sup> The social inequities which exist between the Tutsi and the Hutu are not far removed from those which existed between the aristocracy and the proletariat in early nineteenth-century Britain. However, British society was allowed to evolve naturally; Rwandan ethnic and social divisions were frozen in time, first by Germany and then by Belgium; they were even encouraged in a policy of divide and rule. This must play a major part in the atrocities occurring in the country today. Disturbingly, right-wing commentators such as Andrew Roberts see such tragedies as a justification for a new imperialism; he writes, "Imperialism, were we able to throw off our politically correct notions of national self-determination for people who patently cannot exercise it properly, is an idea whose time has come" ("When the East was a career for the West", review article, *The Times*, October 1994).

this thesis is a valuable one; many of the narratives have not been reprinted and have rarely been studied. Few women wrote about West Africa during the nineteenth century; the fact that the women studied here were among the few to have travelled in West Africa, and to have recounted their experiences in published travel accounts, makes these all the more valuable. They provide scholars today with a unique insight into the complexities of women's experiences of empire and the ways in which they contributed to imperial culture during the nineteenth century. The travel accounts analyzed in this study are important for this reason alone.

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*W.G.S.G. Newsletter*, Spring 1994

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