

**CONTESTED FREEDOMS:  
BRITISH IMAGES OF SIERRA LEONE, 1780-1850**

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## Abstract

The colony of Sierra Leone, between 1780 and 1850, was a unique practical expression of British antislavery culture and ideology. This thesis reflects on how leading abolitionists imagined this part of West Africa and what they intended to achieve there. The approach is multi-disciplinary and draws on recent theoretical developments to investigate the creation and maintenance of hegemonic images of Sierra Leone and its inhabitants during the colony's early years. The thesis points to Manichean differences of interpretation which underlay images of Sierra Leone's native inhabitants, its black settler and liberated African populations and the abolitionists who supported them. It also reflects widely on images of Africa's physical environment. Throughout, the emphasis is on the struggles for representational dominance which took place not only between antislavery supporters and their opponents but *within* antislavery culture itself.

Much of that struggle centred around early utopian images of the colony. Sierra Leone was a child of modernity at arguably its most optimistic and eloquent phase. It was seen as a place where enlightenment ideologies regarding rights and progress could be practically enacted. The utopian discourse persisted in spite of the colony's apparent commercial failure. However, images of the colony's black inhabitants became increasingly negative. This thesis suggests that humanitarians (in seeking to explain the difficulties they encountered in Sierra Leone) frequently appropriated the hostile images of blacks which had been promoted by their proslavery opponents.

Part Three of this study comprises an examination of travel writing about Sierra Leone. This section builds on recent theoretical advances in our understanding of the importance of travel writing as a cultural signifier. It insists that travel writing (as a promoter of images) is more than just a record of individual journeys and lightweight observations. In particular the thesis examines the role of travellers in perpetuating racist myths about 'other' cultures despite the use of narrative techniques which assert the travellers' vulnerability and innocence. The thesis also reveals how travellers studied and reported land and people within an imperial discursive frame that ultimately sought to appropriate and exploit them.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The past five years have been my most privileged. That they have also been so enjoyable has been due to the support and active involvement of my family; Margaret, Bill and Andrew Downing, and my partner, Paul Williamson, who has borne greater burdens than could reasonably have been expected. This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Ceinwen Elliot who knew an interesting read when she saw one and would probably not have read beyond this page.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**HLZM - Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Zachary Macaulay Collection**

**MCRBP - Minutes of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor**

**HCM - Hardwick Court Muniments (Gloucester Record Office, Granville Sharp Papers)**

**UIC - University of Illinois at Chicago (Sierra Leone Studies collection)**

**BJL - University of Hull, Brynmor Jones Library, Papers of Thomas Perronet Thompson**

**PRO - Public Record Office, (Kew). This prefix is followed throughout by the relevant Class and box references. The Class references are abbreviated as follows:**

**Adm. -- Admiralty**

**AO -- Audit Office**

**CO -- Colonial Office**

**FO -- Foreign Office**

**HO -- Home Office**

**WO -- War Office.**

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## **PART ONE**

### **Introduction, Historiography and Contexts**



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1. Scope and Purpose of the Thesis**

This study is concerned with the establishment and development of Sierra Leone, a British colony which (during an age of intense debate on slavery and abolition) comprised an early site of experimentation in the resettlement of blacks in Africa. Founded by prominent abolitionists in 1787 as a philanthropic colony for a group of Britain's 'black poor', Sierra Leone was to be settled by other discrete groups of black settlers before the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. After this date, it also became home to thousands of liberated Africans whose lives had been so dramatically disrupted by the continuing slave trade, and who were brought ashore at Sierra Leone by the British Navy. Thus, Sierra Leone had a unique practical and ideological relationship with British antislavery and that relationship provides a key focus of this thesis. This study also identifies and reflects on salient British images of the colony through its first seventy years from 1780 to 1850. It does so with reference to significant new developments in our understanding of imperial history.

##### **1a) Theoretical Insights**

This thesis explores complex issues in new ways. It draws on a growing repertoire of theoretical insights (mostly from academic fields other than history) which seek to understand the cultural and political implications of the processes by which colonisers 'know' and represent 'other' lands and peoples. For reasons which I discuss in Chapter Two, I make no

claims to postmodern credentials for this thesis. Nevertheless, its content and methodology have undoubtedly been influenced by insights gleaned from those contentious fields of academic endeavour which can be broadly described as 'postmodern', 'postcolonial' or 'poststructural'. In particular I am concerned with how abolitionists constructed notions of 'self' and 'other' with regard to themselves and to Sierra Leone and its black populations. In recent years we have come to know much about how abolitionists thought about themselves (a subject which I discuss in Chapter Three) but their wider cultural relationship to 'other' peoples has not received much attention. Recent theoretical developments make such an investigation timely, and the works which have influenced my approach underly much of the discussion in Chapter Two. Indeed, the whole of Part One is devoted to providing a general background to what follows, with an emphasis on historiography, theory and cultural contexts.

#### 1b) Utopian Representations and Ideological Disputes

In Part Two, I revisit well-trodden historical territory. The creation of a philanthropically inspired colony, settled in turn by 'free' blacks from England, America and (after the abolition of the slave trade) from all over Africa, has been the subject of numerous academic studies. In this thesis I place the colony's early years firmly in the context of utopian ideologies of 'the' Enlightenment. The initial idea for resettlement of blacks in Africa came from an evangelical, white, male abolitionist elite. Many of the major protagonists never visited Africa, and they appraised the continent from afar, responding both to their own idealised images of what the place was like and the representations of men with a pragmatic interest in the region's commercial exploitation. A powerful discourse about Africa as a fertile Arcadia will be traced. So too, will an utopian discourse about the potential of 'free' black labour, a discourse which I indicate was based on fantasies in which grateful ex-slaves toiled in

their new home for the moral benefit of themselves and the commercial gain of their philanthropic sponsors. Such fantasies were inextricably linked with notions of 'noble savages' and the 'civilizing mission'. The durability of these utopian images provides a particular focus of Chapters Four and Five but is also a constant theme throughout the thesis.

Of course these idealised representations were contested and renegotiated over time, most obviously via the sometimes vicious opposition provided by proslavery opponents of Sierra Leone's humanitarian benefactors. The Manichean disputes between these two groups provides another constant theme of this thesis. In Chapter Seven I examine the abolitionists' response to direct challenges made upon them by proslavery activists. Before that, however, (in Chapter Six) I examine challenges to utopian representations of the colony from *within* British abolitionism. I trace the lively debates which arose around abolitionist policies in Sierra Leone, particularly with relation to 'free' labour, the best means of 'civilising' Africa and the most appropriate modes of economic exploitation of the colony's perceived riches.

Overall then Part Two is concerned with struggles within and outside British antislavery to define the coordinates by which Sierra Leone and its black inhabitants were represented in wider British cultural and political discourse. Those struggles provide another key focus of the whole thesis. I often refer to the debates over representations of land and people in terms of a contest for ideological hegemony. By so doing I emphasise that the production of images is not an innocent enterprise but is intricately bound up with issues of real cultural and economic power. This lack of innocence also provides a focal point for the whole of this study. Throughout, I argue that competition for representational dominance frequently both nourished and fed upon negative, sometimes racist images of blacks. I identify

that abolitionists often appropriated proslavery negative stereotypes of blacks in order to promote their vision of the black contribution to their ideals of a 'civilising mission'. This was in spite of (and often in response to) black resistance to their own cultural and economic commodification.

### 1c) Travel Writing

In Part Three I concentrate on a specific group of sources in the form of published and unpublished travel accounts written about Sierra Leone over this period. Travel accounts often serve historians as sources of narrative information. By and large, they have not been analysed for what they reveal of the varied, sometimes hidden assumptions made by their authors about 'other' peoples and environments. Nevertheless, travel accounts provide a uniquely fascinating source base for the cultural historian. Travel writers were more likely to speculate and sensationalise than authors in other fields and their works often throw into sharp relief the ill-considered Manichean prejudices which lie buried in more 'official' texts. The very process of travel writing necessitates inscriptions of 'self' and 'other', inscriptions which are often also revealing of wider issues and debates. In Sierra Leone these debates often centred around proslavery and antislavery sentiment and ideology. Also (and this is a subject which crops up throughout the whole of Part Three) travel writing provides a rare field in which it is possible to trace the voices of imperial women and to access how women thought about the 'others' they encountered. Travel writing also reveals much about the discursive constraints under which women writers operated.

All this is interesting enough in its own right but the large archive of travel writing on Sierra Leone gains especial significance when examined in the light of new theoretical

developments. Recent studies have emphasised how travel accounts can be deconstructed to reveal the wider cultural assumptions and prejudices contained within them. My own analysis focuses on the work of Mary Louise Pratt who has done much to highlight the predominantly male, colonizing 'gaze' which travel writers used to scan alien territory, cultures and bodies in order better to 'know' and ultimately appropriate them. Crucially, imperial travel writers (over many generations and through changing conventions of style and rhetoric), have almost always portrayed themselves and the territorial ambitions which they ultimately represent as 'innocent' and 'reciprocal' in both intent and action.

These new theoretical insights, especially with relation to 'innocence' and 'reciprocity' are so important to my analysis that I have devoted the whole of Chapter Eight to them. In the remainder of the thesis I apply these new ideas in a Sierra Leonean context. In so doing, I examine notions of 'self' and 'other' with relation to land (Chapters Ten through Twelve) and people (Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen). I examine how travellers portrayed themselves variously as the suffering vanguard of the 'civilising mission', heroic adventurers and 'innocent' scientists and traders. I discuss how they repeated and built upon stereotypical observations of blacks (both in Freetown and its environs) and how they responded to real-life encounters with the 'other'. These meetings carried implications which spanned a spectrum from the erotic to the directly political (see particularly Chapter Thirteen). I also pay attention to the ability of travel writing to indicate the degree to which humanitarian sentiment or differences in class and gender could affect how far received stereotypes were promulgated within the genre.

Whilst the analysis in Part Three is tied in to a distinct theoretical literature which relates purely to travel writing there is much in it which is pertinent to what has gone before. For example the durability of utopian fantasises about the African environment as well as those which related to the efficacy of a pliant 'free' black workforce resonate in much of my analysis. Manichean binarisms of representation between proslavery and antislavery groups also provide an enduring theme across the range of travel texts and continues a major focus of the thesis as a whole. So too does the debate between antislavery sympathisers about the 'realities of place' inherent in practical abolitionist intervention in Africa. Later in this chapter I hint at major historiographical concerns and briefly expand on other key issues. For now though, I turn to a brief summary of the narrative history of Sierra Leone during the period covered by this study.

## **2. Historical Background**

The narrative bones of Sierra Leone's history have been comprehensively and accurately documented by historians, and it is from these secondary sources that this historical background is drawn. The Sierra Leone peninsula, an area about twenty-five miles long from North West to South East and ten miles across from South West to North East, protrudes abruptly from the West African coast. Much of the land is mountainous although swamps prevail near the sea. At the beginning of the period covered by this study, the peninsula and its surrounding area was far from empty, but was occupied by local tribes, principally Bulom, Temne, Mende and Susu. Muslim traders had spread throughout the country, prosletysing with some success. Indeed by the eighteenth century Futa Jalon to the North East of the peninsula had become a Muslim state following a long and successful jihad.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the early history of the region see Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 1-12.

On the peninsula, at a place called Frenchman's Bay, there was a rare safe anchorage which had been used by European ships for centuries as a source of fresh water. It was here that a group of settlers, gathered together by philanthropists in London, landed on May 10 1787 to found a British colony. On June 11, a local king named Tom and two of his sub-chiefs put their mark to a treaty which promised 'for ever to quit claim to a certain district of land for the settling of the free community to be theirs, their heirs and successors for ever.'<sup>2</sup> The land ceded covered a distance of nine or ten miles of the shoreline around the watering place and extended inland for approximately twenty miles.

They were not the first English settlers in the area. Traders had begun to visit Sierra Leone in the sixteenth century and developed an extensive and lucrative trade in tropical produce and slaves.<sup>3</sup> This trade was in full swing in the 1780s. At home, however, resistance to the slave trade was growing, and it is no coincidence that the year in which the first 'free' settlers anchored at Frenchman's Bay was the same year that saw the launch of a major public campaign against this most lucrative of enterprises.<sup>4</sup> Several prominent British antislavery activists including William Wilberforce, Granville Sharp and Henry Thornton can be credited as the 'founding fathers' of the Sierra Leone colony.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Fyfe, *History*, pp. 19-20. The secession of land ultimately turned out not to be permanent and had to be renegotiated in 1788. Fyfe, *History*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Portuguese traders were active in the region from the mid-fifteenth century. Fyfe, *History*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in 1787.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'founding fathers' is borrowed from Stephen J. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists, London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement, 1786-1791* (Liverpool, 1994), Chapter 1. The founders of Sierra Leone included many members of the famous 'Clapham Sect', a group of philanthropists dedicated to antislavery. Because of their evangelical Anglicanism, these individuals were often collectively referred to as 'The Saints'.

The earliest settlers came predominantly from a social grouping which lent itself readily to the ideals of the antislavery campaigners. It has been estimated that towards the latter period of the eighteenth century between ten and twenty thousand black people lived in Britain.<sup>6</sup> Most were loyalist refugees from the American War of Independence, but some were fugitive slaves. The majority lived in London, where extensive black socio-cultural networks existed.<sup>7</sup> Despite being technically free since the notorious Somerset case of 1772, the legal position of London's black population was tenuous.<sup>8</sup> Many were not entitled to poor relief and levels of destitution among them were high. It was from this group that the majority of settlers in the new colony were drawn.

The original settlers numbered just over four hundred. Most were black, although there were some white officials and craftsmen and some sixty white women among the group.<sup>9</sup> Poorly provisioned and with inadequate shelter on their arrival at the start of the rainy season, the mortality rate in this fledgling utopia was dramatic. Some colonists went to work on ships or with local slave traders. By March 1788 it was reported in London that only 130 settlers survived.<sup>10</sup> In spite of the despatch of a relief expedition, the 'Province of Freedom' as

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power, The History of Black People in Britain* (London, 1984), p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapters three to eight.

<sup>8</sup> The case of James Somerset was fought by Granville Sharp and led to a landmark decision in the form of Lord Mansfield's judgement. Mansfield limited the powers a slave owner had to remove his or her slave from England without the slave's consent. The ruling did not create a situation where slaves were instantly free once they had arrived in England, although it was this perception which was popularly believed and celebrated. See Braidwood, *Black Poor*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



it was known, was characterised by sickness, desertion and conflicts with native chiefs. By November 1789 it was left to a local slave trader to evacuate about fifty-seven survivors, and a local King, Jemmy, had the first settlement, named Granville Town, razed to the ground.<sup>11</sup> In 1790 another relief expedition was sent to regroup the survivors and refound the colony, this time by the newly formed St. George's Bay Company, later re-named the Sierra Leone Company. The Sierra Leone Company, under the chairmanship of Henry Thornton, was a far more commercially minded enterprise than Sharp's Province of Freedom but was just as bound up in antislavery ideology regarding legitimate trade and free labour.

Around this time, a group of black loyalists from Nova Scotia petitioned the British Government over numerous difficulties encountered in obtaining their land rights as ex-soldiers. In 1791 their representative Thomas Peters received an offer from the Sierra Leone Company for disaffected Nova Scotian colonists to settle in Sierra Leone.<sup>12</sup> In 1792, 1,196 Nova Scotian blacks left Halifax and headed 'back to Africa' with their affectionate and paternal governor John Clarkson. Together with over one hundred new European Company employees and their families, as well as a handful of white colonists, they refounded the colony and gave the capital the name of Freetown. These new colonists were also affected by heavy mortality. In addition, the black Nova Scotians came to feel that they had other reasons to regret their decision to settle in Sierra Leone. Relations between colonists and Company were never good, and became tolerable only in times of mutual adversity. The Nova Scotians brought with them to their new home a tight, independent community spirit centred on fiercely

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> James W. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1820*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1992).

independent dissenting churches. Clarkson alone among Governors held their respect, and he was removed from office when he returned to England to get married in 1793.<sup>13</sup>

Dissent initially focussed on Nova Scotian desires for a greater role in the government of the colony. In 1793, delegates from the Nova Scotian community visited England to petition the Directors with their grievances. The Directors refused to see them and they returned to announce the failure of their mission in 1794.<sup>14</sup> In this year, Governor Zachary Macaulay, one of the Claphamite 'Saints', narrowly averted outright rebellion, and for a time, a combined response to the ransacking of the colony by the crew of a French warship brought the community together. In 1796, however, an outcry ensued when the government attempted to enact a marriage law which would force Nova Scotians to marry in an Anglican ceremony.<sup>15</sup> Land, however, proved to be the issue which caused most resentment between the Nova Scotian community and the government, in particular the attempt by the Company to impose a quit-rent on settler land grants.<sup>16</sup> Resentment simmered until 1800 when a full-scale armed rebellion occurred as the Nova Scotians attempted to gain full political independence from their British governors.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Clarkson's mission to America and the early progress of the Nova Scotian community in Sierra Leone form a prominent focus of Walker's *Black Loyalists*, see especially chapters Five to Eight.

<sup>14</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>16</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

The rebellion was thwarted not by the colony's white elite but by the fortuitous arrival of one of the other black groups which was to play a significant role in the colony's history. These were the Maroons, newly arrived from Halifax, Nova Scotia, although their original home was Jamaica. The Maroons had been deported to Nova Scotia when a long-standing agreement between themselves and the Jamaican government had broken down. This agreement had centred on Maroon cooperation with the authorities in helping to track down runaway slaves or to resist an insurrection. In return for cooperation, they were allowed to keep their laws and customs and to live independently in the Jamaican mountains.<sup>18</sup> This history of cooperation with the government against fellow blacks was repeated when they arrived in Sierra Leone and defeated the rebellious Nova Scotians. The Maroons settled peacefully on the site of the original settlement, but not surprisingly relations with the Nova Scotians were often strained.<sup>19</sup>

The Sierra Leone Company failed to achieve the ambitious commercial success which its Directors had hoped for. Efforts in both legitimate trade and tropical cultivation proved to be disappointing. It was, therefore, a financially stretched and relieved Board of Directors which surrendered the colony on New Year's Day 1808 to the control of the Crown government (which was effectively funding it anyway). Sierra Leone continued to be used as a place of reception for disparate black groups. For example, in 1819 eighty-five 'convicts and other dangerous persons' were deported to Sierra Leone following an insurrection in

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Contemporary commentators and, later on, historians of the colony came to refer to both Nova Scotians and Maroons as 'settlers' in order to distinguish them from the liberated Africans who arrived in the colony after the abolition of the slave trade.

Barbados. In the same year more than one thousand soldiers from the disbanded 4th West India Regiment were settled in the colony.<sup>20</sup>

It was the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 which permanently changed the ethnic make up of Freetown and its environs. The processes of adjudicating, settling, educating and converting Africans liberated from condemned slave ships began immediately and continued for decades. Sierra Leone was the base for ships of the squadron which patrolled the West African coast in search of illegal slavers. After an initial period of reliance on apprenticing the recaptives within Freetown, a more sophisticated system by which they were settled in numerous villages around the capital was developed. This reached its peak in the early 1820s under governor Sir Charles MacCarthy, who organised the villages along English parish lines.<sup>21</sup> When MacCarthy died at the hands of the Ashantees in a war on the Gold Coast in 1824, a 'golden age' was effectively over. The Government clamped down on expenditure, and the colony came under increasingly hostile scrutiny from press and Parliament.

Toward the end of our study period, the liberated Africans were increasingly viewed by government less as a philanthropic obligation or catalyst for wider African 'civilization' and more as a potential labour supply for Guiana and the West Indies (the latter having been deprived since the abolition of slavery in 1833 of their slave labour pool).<sup>22</sup> An ambitious scheme to encourage the emigration of labour from Sierra Leone to the West Indies did not, however, prove a success. Meanwhile, in Freetown, many liberated Africans as well as

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<sup>20</sup> Fyfe, *History*, pp. 135-36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Europeans were at last prospering on the fruits of legitimate trade. In some senses, by 1850, Freetown did actually exhibit some of the characteristics its founders had envisaged in that a community of black Christians were successfully settled in a British colony.<sup>23</sup> Sierra Leone retained an iconic significance as tangible proof of Britain's high moral ambitions with regard to slavery and the slave trade. Nevertheless, the prevailing image in Britain of the colony and its inhabitants was negative, even hostile.<sup>24</sup>

### **3. Key Issues in the Study of Images of Sierra Leone**

From this brief historical summary it is clear that Sierra Leone's early history involved complex developments between several different interest groups. In order to pursue a study of the images held by and of those interest groups and of the colony itself I have felt it necessary to expand upon some of the key issues with which I have been concerned in the course of my research. Taken together these issues provide some of the main coordinates for what follows in subsequent chapters.

#### **3a) Images of Sierra Leone in British Antislavery**

Throughout this study I emphasise that images of Sierra Leone and its inhabitants betrayed a variety of conflicting agendas which reflected wide political and commercial issues. Of most significance to Sierra Leone, however, were the varying representations of the colony which were promoted by proslavery and antislavery enthusiasts. Disputes between the two

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<sup>23</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, p. 274.

<sup>24</sup> Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (London, 1965), p. 387.

groups can perhaps be understood as a contest for representational hegemony.<sup>25</sup> Issues such as the Sierra Leonean environment, the colony's commercial prospects, the intentions and reputations of the philanthropists who founded it, and the racial and moral status of its black inhabitants were all heavily debated. I shall argue that such conflicts did not simply reflect binary differences between proslavery and antislavery supporters. Indeed, I emphasise disagreements and ambivalence over Sierra Leone within British antislavery.

### 3b) Importance of the Study of Image

The word 'image' in this thesis embraces two major discursive areas. Firstly, it is concerned with 'direct' representations, images of Sierra Leone based on real experience but often produced in accordance with varying personal and political agendas. Secondly, it refers to representations which are fundamentally imaginative although often prompted by reported 'facts.' It was through their responses to images that most Britons experienced 'their' Empire. Historians increasingly appreciate the importance of identifying and analysing the discourses of representation which both reflected and constituted key elements of imperial culture. The term 'images' as used here, then, does not refer simply to something passed directly into metropolitan culture by those with actual experience of Sierra Leone, but also refers to the products of the dialectical processes of debate around different attempts to 'produce' Sierra Leone for 'consumption' in Britain. I shall argue that very often the production and invention

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<sup>25</sup> Hegemony is a notion advocated by Antonio Gramsci and relates to a dominance of one class over another by consent rather than force. Ideology is part of the legitimating apparatus of that consent, and allows the dominant group to interpret the social world in a way which makes hegemonic control appear reasonable or inevitable. For a critique of the relevance of Gramsci's notions of hegemony to antislavery studies see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (London, 1975), pp. 349-50.

of images of both place *and* people are interconnected, and I maintain throughout that they cannot be seen to constitute purely factual representations but are deeply enmeshed within wider colonial discourse. Historians have not always questioned (as much as they might) the discourses which officials wrote for themselves and others. Much of what follows is an attempt to pursue a more critical approach to images of Sierra Leone.

### 3c) Notions of Freedom

In the Sierra Leonean context the word 'freedom' was loaded for several reasons. Firstly, the colony was begun against a wider cultural background which centred on 'the Enlightenment and its powerful ideologies based on ideas of 'reason' and the 'rights of man.' Tensions developed between different notions of these perceived rights, most obviously between proslavery and antislavery supporters. Antislavery images of Sierra Leone emphasised its use of 'free' labour and its role as a haven for liberated Africans. Proslavery campaigners countered with a representational strategy which relied on negative images of blacks as 'unsuitable' material for freedom. This summarises the rhetorical dispute at its simplest. However, as I indicated earlier, this thesis will explore discourses of freedom relating to Sierra Leone in greater depth. I shall emphasise the considerable debates between antislavery sympathisers over the meaning of freedom, and shall highlight the relationship between a rhetorical emphasis on liberty and the realities of the need for social control.

### 3d) Race

Given the emphasis on 'image' and 'freedom', it is no surprise that another key subject which pervades this thesis is connected with notions of race. I examine how negative characteristics such as, for example, indolence and licentiousness, were applied to blacks in

Sierra Leone, even by white interest groups who in other arenas sought to defend blacks against charges of racial inferiority. Varying images of blacks over time will be emphasised. I shall also attempt to analyse the cultural basis to racial 'knowledge' about Sierra Leone's black population, often drawing theoretically on postcolonial studies which examine cultural imperialism and racialised discourse. The wider history of Sierra Leone provides a special opportunity to investigate abolitionist attitudes to race, an opportunity often missed, or not thought appropriate, by previous historians with an interest in Sierra Leone. Chapter Three provides a more detailed background to this key theme.

### 3e) People and Place

This thesis is concerned with British images of the Sierra Leonean environment and landscape as well as its human communities. Once again some simple binarisms can be seen to have underlain images of the colony's physical geography. On the one hand, a clearly utopian, idyllic image of Sierra Leone as a fertile Arcadia ripe for colonial exploitation was important to some degree throughout the study period. In sharp contrast was the image of the 'White Man's Grave', which portrayed the West African coast as a deathtrap completely unsuitable for colonisation. Again though, simply dividing these images into proslavery and antislavery camps will be seen to be misleading, as would a failure to appreciate the ambivalent nature of many representations of the colony's physical environment.

I am also concerned with images of land in a broader context. The sorts of questions which I shall be asking include the following. How did Britons relate themselves to an alien environment? Did those who ventured there feel at home? What normalising strategies did they employ in order to make sense of the tropical world? Can we identify a clearly defined



imperial 'gaze' that summarises British representations of the colony, or were there differences in the way in which the land was viewed and experienced (for example, with relation to gender)? How do British images of the land and environment relate to wider issues such as cultural imperialism and discourses of possession and dispossession? How were notions of 'self' and 'other' reproduced in representations of the landscape? These 'imaginative geographies' form the final key theme of this thesis.

### 3f) Image and Rhetoric

Given all of the above, it is clear that in many respects this is a study of colonial rhetoric. In mapping the rhetorical discourses which grew up with relation to Sierra Leone I have become involved in identifying representational tropes and with charting their variation and repetition in a number of sources and contexts. These tropes are not unique to Sierra Leone but are traceable in wider colonial discourse. David Spurr has identified key rhetorical modes in western writing about non-western peoples. These include the rhetorics of surveillance, appropriation and classification with regard to colonial places and peoples. There are also rhetorical modes which are aesthetically formed. On the one hand these include representations of the noble savage, or alternatively there was a powerful trend of representation which saw the colonised 'other' as 'debased' or 'disgusting.' Additional conventions in imperial discourse include those which are idealistic and can be seen in the naturalisation of exotic wilderness, the idealisation of foreign 'paradises', and the eroticisation of colonial lands and peoples. There is also that overarching discourse which developed around the rhetorical affirmation of the 'white man's burden.'<sup>26</sup> The rhetorical modes which

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<sup>26</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (London, 1993). I have been very brief with references to

Spurr has identified inform much of what follows. I shall refrain, however, from pointing out each linkage as it occurs.

### 3g) Contested Freedoms

None of the themes outlined above are to be viewed in isolation, and they will often crop up together in the analysis of a particular source group. I shall emphasise the interaction of these in subjects in providing the bases for struggles for representational clarity and superiority. The construction of colonial power is a far more complex process than is sometimes suggested, and it will be seen that these struggles did not always have predictable results. Rather, this study of images and representations of Sierra Leone will highlight the non-linear tensions that were implicit in the historical development of a colony that came to play its own role in the wider British imperial project and its numerous attempts to impose Britain's 'will' on 'other' peoples.

## 4. Sources

The potential range of sources for so broad a subject as the image held by one country and people of another is massive. To begin with there are the obvious parliamentary and official government papers which chart the progress and development of Sierra Leone and the changing attitudes of the 'official mind' towards it. To accompany these sources are the official records of interested groups, such as antislavery societies, religious and missionary bodies and other philanthropic groupings. In addition there are numerous published tracts and books which reflect the changing patterns of philanthropy and colonial ambition. The

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these rhetorical modes here. In fact Spurr devotes a chapter to each of them and develops his ideas with relation to journalism, travel writing and more 'official' imperial texts since 1870.

information contained in these official and published records is often supplemented by unpublished, private correspondence and journals. Furthermore, there is a much broader range of material that can be considered relevant to a study of image. Novels, plays, poems, songs and sayings are often particularly revealing of more 'popular' images of a place and its inhabitants. Likewise maps, sketches and works of art can all be useful sources. Also, of critical importance to any study like this are contemporary accounts from the local, national, daily and periodical press.

In the course of the research for this thesis I have visited all of these types of sources but long ago gave up hope of doing full justice to them. Not only is it impossible to incorporate a full analysis of the numerous source groups available, but it is also worth noting that even these wide-ranging sources have their limits. In general, they are white and elite. This is not to say that evidence of how the black groups imagined themselves and their colonial home does not exist. In fact, great potential for further research exists in this area. However, given that this thesis is mainly concerned with *white* images, it should be said that it is very difficult to gauge, for example, white-working class attitudes to Sierra Leone. Also, given the elite nature of written sources and their limited accessibility to a far-from-fully literate society, it is often difficult to assess the distribution and socio-cultural importance of any images and trends of thought that can be identified from them. So, I have been faced with the task of drawing conclusions about British images of Sierra Leone from a voluminous but skewed source base, which is of course a familiar problem.

## **5. Some Historiographical Issues**

In addition, the study of a subject as broad as images and representations is historiographically and theoretically complex. I deal with the historiographical influences on this thesis in more detail in Chapter Two, but for now it is apposite to note that there are two major literatures which are of relevance to this study. Firstly, there is the extensive historical literature which relates specifically to Sierra Leone. In addition, there is the literature relating to British antislavery, and especially its cultural aspects. Sometimes these two literatures overlap each other, but specific works which link the two fields are lacking and this thesis is only a partial response to this deficiency. Moreover, few projects in either area of expertise acknowledge the significant contribution to an understanding of British colonialism which has been made from disciplines outside of history.

In many ways an attempt to make amends for this situation is urgent, not least because some studies from other disciplines have drawn on sources relevant to Sierra Leonean history or British Antislavery studies in order to make a broader, theorised point. Historical sensitivity is not always a priority in these projects. Another reason for considering wider contributions from other disciplines is that it may be possible to draw on them to make an advance upon certain stalemates of opinion which have developed over significant aspects of Sierra Leone's history. For example, a debate has developed regarding the colony's very early history which centres on interpretations of the racial significance of the original Sierra Leone project.

The debate on the racial significance of the original Sierra Leone scheme will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter Two, but it centres on the motives of the philanthropists

who promoted the idea of a colony in Sierra Leone. Some historians have viewed the foundation of Serra Leone less as an act of genuine philanthropy and more as an attempt to rid Britain (under a philanthropic guise), of part of its black population.<sup>27</sup> Others, especially Stephen Braidwood, have emphasised the humanitarian intentions of the colony's founders, and have pointed to the proactive role which London's blacks themselves took in choosing to go to Sierra Leone. It is difficult to mediate between widely opposing interpretations of the same events and historical records. Nevertheless, such Manichean allegories are, in many ways, unsatisfactory and it is part of the scope of this thesis to indicate how a wider (often interdisciplinary) theoretical approach can inform our understanding of these kinds of impasse. I turn to a more detailed examination of the historiographical and theoretical issues which impact on this thesis in the following chapter but I end the current one with a statement of the thesis which underpins everything that follows.

## 6. Thesis

In a sector of historical enquiry characterised by narrative histories and sometimes by untheorised value judgements, I argue that new theoretical developments can enhance our understanding of British images of Sierra Leone. I contend that these images, even when presented as 'innocent', were cultural constructions reflective and constitutive of imperial discourse, and concerned with real issues of cultural and economic power. I intend to show how notions of 'self' and 'other' offer valuable insights into the construction of colonial authority in Sierra Leone and in the promulgation of cultural imperialism within British antislavery. I also question whether the binary oppositions which are detectable in contested

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<sup>27</sup> Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain, 1555-1833* (London, 1977), p. 117; Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 197.

images of the colony (and which involved the moral inscription of 'good' and 'bad' individuals, interest groups, and policies) serve to mask more complex, ambiguous and contradictory discourses of race, culture, gender and power.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Historiographical Trends and Theoretical Issues**

Later in this chapter, I discuss the importance to this thesis of changing theoretical developments. My focus is on the often radical work of 'postcolonial' scholars who seek new approaches to understanding the wider cultural significance of contact between the West and its 'others'. I look at how historians have reacted to developments within other disciplines and outline some of the important concepts which have influenced this current study. However, I begin by examining how studies of Sierra Leone's history and British antislavery have changed through time. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive historiographical summary, but rather to highlight significant trends and to suggest their relevance to the present study.

#### **1. Developments in the Historiography of Sierra Leone**

Four important bibliographical guides have been produced in the twentieth century which point the student towards the numerous primary and secondary sources which are available.<sup>1</sup> The earliest summaries of the history of Sierra Leone were found in contemporary works of antislavery history and propaganda such as Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Rise*

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<sup>1</sup> Harry C. Luke, *A Bibliography of Sierra Leone* (London, 1925), reprinted 1970; Geoffrey J. Williams, *A Bibliography of Sierra Leone 1925-1967* (New York, 1971); Paul E. Hair, 'A Bibliographical Guide to Sierra Leone 1650-1800', *Sierra Leone Studies* (New Series), 10 (1958), 62-72, and 13 (1960), 41-49; Margaret and Tony Binns, *Sierra Leone*, World Bibliographical Series (Oxford, 1992).

*and Abolition of the Slave Trade*.<sup>2</sup> An early attempt at a more specific history was made by W. Sibthorpe, whose *The History of Sierra Leone* contained a wealth of biographical detail of colonial officials.<sup>3</sup> The earliest twentieth-century historians of Sierra Leone produced their work when the Empire was in full swing and tended to reflect, at best, a benevolent paternalism and at worst an assumption of cultural superiority that is offensive to contemporary readers. F.A.J. Utting's *The Story of Sierra Leone* and F.W. Butt-Thompson's *Sierra Leone in History and Tradition* belong to the former group and C. Braithwaite Wallis's *The Advance of Our West African Empire* (primarily an account of the 1898 Hut Tax War) undoubtedly belongs to the latter.<sup>4</sup>

As in African studies as a whole, the 1960s saw a revolution in Sierra Leonean historiography. This was reflected in a profound shift away from paternalistic interpretations and a clear desire to respect and acknowledge the importance of African culture and history. Peter Kup's *History of Sierra Leone*, published in 1961 missed this historiographical boat totally and was resolutely Eurocentric in its approach.<sup>5</sup> Christopher Fyfe's *A History of Sierra Leone*, published the next year, reflected a completely different scholarly attitude. Fyfe has recently written about how he consciously re-wrote early drafts of his study to reflect a more

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London, 1808).

<sup>3</sup> A.B.C. Sibthorpe, *The History of Sierra Leone*, 4th ed. (London, 1970). First published 1868.

<sup>4</sup> F.A.J. Utting, *The Story of Sierra Leone* (London, 1931), reissued 1971; F.W. Butt-Thompson, *Sierra Leone in History and Tradition* (London, 1926); C. Braithwaite Wallis, *The Advance of our West African Empire* (London, 1903).

<sup>5</sup> Alexander P. Kup, *A History of Sierra Leone 1400-1787* (Cambridge, 1961). For a powerful criticism of this work, see Christopher Fyfe's review of it in *Journal of African History*, 11, 1961, pp. 327-28.



Africa-centred approach.<sup>6</sup> Later historians have long had cause to be grateful to him for this and *A History of Sierra Leone* remains the seminal work for scholars seeking an unbiased and accurate work of reference. Several historians have since responded to Fyfe's lead and the result is that the narrative bones of Sierra Leone's history are well known and accurately chronicled. John Peterson's 1969 book *The Province of Freedom* directly complemented Fyfe's study.<sup>7</sup> It concentrated on the growth of the liberated African and creole communities and showed convincingly how recaptive and creole cultural and political institutions filled voids left by ineffective colonial planning and administration. Similar high standards of scholarship have been preserved in Paul Hair's numerous journal contributions which have focused on a wide variety of themes.

All aspects of Sierra Leone's history have received attention. However, an area of distinct focus has emerged which centres on the Nova Scotian exodus and their experiences in what they hoped would be their land of freedom.<sup>8</sup> Another important trend in the literature can be found in the relatively large number of historical biographies of important Sierra Leoneans. Christopher Fyfe has contributed a biography of the creole doctor Africanus Horton; John Hargreaves wrote the life of Samuel Lewis (the first African to receive a knighthood), and the Sierra Leone Society in Freetown published a collection of essays on prominent Sierra

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<sup>6</sup> C. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, Gregg Revivals Edition (Aldershot, 1993), preface.

<sup>7</sup> John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, C. Fyfe, "Our Children Free and Happy": *Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s* (Edinburgh, 1991); Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (Toronto, 1976); Wilson, *John Clarkson and the African Adventure* (London, 1980).

Leoneans.<sup>9</sup> These three are just some examples of this particular trend. Another limited but important development has been the interest in oral history and tradition in Sierra Leonean history, a trend that developed in the early 1980s. Cecil Magbaily Fyle and Adam Jones have been particularly active in this area.<sup>10</sup>

Cecil Magbaily Fyle has also sought to use historical awareness to inform understanding of contemporary Sierra Leone. In his 1988 book *History and Socio-economic development in Sierra Leone*, he insists that an historical perspective is necessary to understand contemporary economic and cultural difficulties in Sierra Leone, and emphasises that development projects based on Western cultural and economic ideas fail to take into account the unique African cultural and economic heritage of the country.<sup>11</sup> Arthur Abraham has taken a radical Africa-centred approach to Sierra Leonean history which although relating to subjects outside the scope of this thesis nevertheless indicates the continuing (if sometimes controversial) historiographical trend away from paternalism.<sup>12</sup> I have tried here to summarise the types and trends in historical writing on Sierra Leone, and to show how rich and diverse

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<sup>9</sup> C. Fyfe, *Africanus Horton, 1835-1883: West African Scientist and Patriot* (New York, 1972); John Hargreaves, *A Life of Sir Samuel Lewis* (London, 1958); Sierra Leone Society: *Eminent Sierra Leoneans in the Nineteenth Century*, (Department of Information, Freetown, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> Cecil Magbaily Fyle, 'Oral Tradition and Sierra Leone History', *History in Africa*, 12, (1985) pp. 65-72; Fyle, *Oral Traditions of Sierra Leone* (Niamey, 1979); Fyle, *Almamy Suluku of Sierra Leone c. 1820-1906: The Dynamics of political Leadership in Pre-Colonial Sierra Leone* (London, 1979); Adam Jones, 'Some Reflections on the Oral Traditions of the Galinhas Country, Sierra Leone', *History in Africa*, 12, (1985) pp. 151-56.

<sup>11</sup> C. Magbaily Fyle, *History and Socio-Economic Development in Sierra Leone: a Reader* (Freetown, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Abraham, *Topics in Sierra Leone History: a Counter-colonial Interpretation* (Freetown, 1976).

the field has been. However, literature which impacts on the period covered by this study is dominated by (usually excellent) narrative histories. Studies informed by other disciplines or obviously theoretically underpinned are absent. Likewise, there has been little controversy or dispute.

Nevertheless, some areas of conflict do exist, and the most important has been tackled in a recent account of the foundation of the colony. An avowedly anti-paternalistic account of the early days of the Sierra Leone 'experiment', Stephen Braidwood's *Black Poor and White Philanthropists* is based on a thesis completed in 1981, but was published twelve years later in 1994.<sup>13</sup> Braidwood's detailed and accurate scholarship convincingly argues that London's Black Poor were far from passive victims of a racist-based deportation from Britain. Rather they were proactive, vociferous and organised champions of their own cause, who, once they were committed to emigrating to Sierra Leone, ensured that this was indeed where they were sent. Historiographically, Braidwood's work is an important counterpoint to that of scholars who insist that the humanitarians who prompted the foundation of Sierra Leone were acting in accordance with the needs and wishes of an inherently racist society.

James Walvin, for example, has argued that black/white relations in Britain were always determined by racial bias and hostility, and he views the Sierra Leone project against this background.<sup>14</sup> Walvin has been joined by Folarin Shylon and Peter Fryer who have

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<sup>13</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor* and also S.J. Braidwood, 'The establishment of the Sierra Leone settlement, 1786-1791', M. Phil thesis, University of Liverpool, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> James Walvin, *Black and White, The Negro and English Society 1555-1945* (London, 1973), Chapter 9.

viewed the foundation of Sierra Leone less as an act of genuine philanthropy and more as an attempt, (under a philanthropic guise) to rid Britain of part of its black population, a sort of late eighteenth-century ethnic cleansing under an 'enlightened' banner.<sup>15</sup> A large part of Braidwood's work focuses on black/white cooperation and emphasises the benevolent ambitions of the colony's founders. His book then is an important contribution to the history of blacks in Britain and their relationship with whites, as well as the foundation of Sierra Leone.

Braidwood claims to have rescued the Black Poor from the condescension of radical historians who seek 'evidence of mass aspirations, not in total mass behaviour, but in the spasmodic activities of a minority and in the prescriptive anti-Establishment literature of the day, written by a counter-elite to the VIPs.'<sup>16</sup> Clearly, Braidwood is in the business of 'busting' racist myths about the Black Poor.<sup>17</sup> Another clear aim of his study is to reinstate the reputation of the antislavery sympathisers who founded and supported Sierra Leone in its early days. He concludes that 'The Committee [for the Relief of the Black Poor] and the key individuals within the Government appear to have been motivated primarily by humanitarianism springing from Christian convictions, by gratitude felt towards the blacks as loyalists, and by abolitionist sympathies.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, p. 117; Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> S.J. Braidwood, 'Initiatives and Organisation of the Black Poor 1786-1787' in *Slavery and Abolition*, 3, (1982), p. 211.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 3, p. 225.

<sup>18</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, p. 269.

Braidwood's emphasis on the good intentions of the philanthropists supports what he calls the 'older' interpretation of Sierra Leone as a 'story of freedom.'<sup>19</sup> To emphasise this point he chronicles the Sierra Leone Company's struggles with proslavery activists over the refounding of the colony with the Nova Scotian settlers.<sup>20</sup> Braidwood's study ends on a 'note of hope' given the success of the Sierra Leone Company in showing 'that idealism could be flexible, [and] could be modified to take account of the reality.'<sup>21</sup> He points to the eventual 'success' of the colony in producing a westernised, educated and 'civilised' black population as evidence that the humanitarian struggle was eventually worthwhile. He also emphasises Sierra Leone's longstanding iconic significance as reflecting Britain's humanitarian concerns over the slave trade.<sup>22</sup>

My own feeling is that it is difficult to subscribe to such optimistic interpretations without returning to a commitment to Whiggish history. To start with, James Walker's study of the Nova Scotian settlers both in Canada and Sierra Leone shows that the period of Company rule was contentious and difficult.<sup>23</sup> In a study of similar depth in research and as anti-paternalistic in intent as Braidwood's own, Walker has detailed another black struggle for self-determination, but one which was repressed, patronised and contested by the humanitarians of the Sierra Leone Company.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, *The Black Loyalists*.

Additionally, while 'radical' historians in the '70s may have overstated the significance of the Sierra Leone scheme to the history of negative white/black race relations in Britain, there was a good deal of contemporary criticism of the prominent humanitarians who encouraged the development of Sierra Leone. These tensions and contradictions may have been the result of the 'spasmodic activities of a minority', but early criticism came from prestigious representatives of abolitionism which included William Allen, Thomas Clarkson and later Thomas Fowell Buxton, all of whom were sometimes unhappy with the political and cultural implications of policy in Sierra Leone.<sup>24</sup> The genuine tensions within British antislavery over Sierra Leone are only slowly becoming apparent.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, if the Manichean binarisms of the philanthropist/racist debates are resisted, it is possible to evaluate abolitionist intervention in Sierra Leone in a way which is sensitive to shifts and tensions in antislavery culture and ideology and which might, for example, take into account possible links between abolition and cultural imperialism.

Braidwood has suggested that a move back to an emphasis on white benevolence in Sierra Leonean studies is partly reflective of changes within antislavery historiography. The latter, he claims, has passed from Whiggish triumphalism through economic determinism, and back to an emphasis on the successful influence of evangelical culture.<sup>26</sup> Braidwood's reference

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<sup>24</sup> I discuss some of Allen's disagreements with the Sierra Leone Company in Chapter Six. Thomas Clarkson resigned from the Sierra Leone Company in 1793 because he objected to the colony being brought into national politics in relation to the war with France. Buxton was highly critical of the African Institution toward the end of its existence. T.F. Buxton to Hannah Buxton, Jan. 30 1821 (Rhodes House Library, Papers of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton).

<sup>25</sup> See for example a rare consideration of tensions within antislavery over Sierra Leone in Michael J Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the 'African Question', *English Historical Review*, 112, (1997), pp. 319-357.

<sup>26</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, pp. 1-2.

to the relationship between Sierra Leonean historiography and antislavery historiography is fleeting and undeveloped but is of some importance to this current study, and I would contest that it is misleading.

I will expand on antislavery historiography in more detail shortly but for now I would emphasise that although it is true that abolitionist studies have moved away from economic determinism to more culturally informed analyses, they have nearly always evinced a more sophisticated understanding of abolitionist culture than would be suspected by its representation in much narrative history of Sierra Leone. At the time that Braidwood was writing his thesis, abolitionist studies were beginning to reflect on notions of antislavery as a form of cultural imperialism, notions which contain within them the idea that good intentions do not in themselves lead to culturally innocent action.<sup>27</sup> Between the completion of Braidwood's thesis and the publication of his book, antislavery historiography has become even more sophisticated and reflexive, and increasingly resists monolithic interpretations of philanthropic culture.

To summarise the current state of play of the literature in Sierra Leonean history, I would emphasise that it is dominated by fair-minded and accurate scholarship of a standard rare in many other areas of imperial history. Fyfe's seminal work and more recent studies have shown how the devil is in the detail in a subject area which is so extensively sourced and complexly constructed. I have identified a sub-trend of Manichean oppositions of interpretation, particularly in relation to the emigration/deportation debate, and I have

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, Howard Temperley, 'Anti-slavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism' in C. Bolt and S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-slavery, Religion and Reform* (Folkestone, 1990).

suggested that these binarisms have proved to be unsatisfactory. I have also hinted that wider interpretations of culture and power could provide an interesting new approach to some of the difficulties which are beginning to emerge. For now though I want to consider the more complex historiography of studies of British antislavery.

## **2. British Antislavery Historiography: Trends and Contexts**

This survey of historiographical trends in studies of British antislavery also makes no claim to be comprehensive. Details of the voluminous literature on slavery and abolition are easily accessible, for example through the annual bibliographical supplement to the journal *Slavery and Abolition*. This vast literature reflects the fact that British antislavery has commanded the endeavours of numerous historians from the earliest days of the abolition movement until the present. The debates that have subsequently emerged are unlikely ever to result in consensus but four salient interpretations of the origins, nature and implications of the abolitionist project are clearly discernible.

### **2a) Moral Victory and Great Men in History**

One of the most enduring historiographical traditions relating to British antislavery is that which sees abolition as a morally righteous movement, dependent for its success on the personal sacrifices and courage of men such as William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson and other 'Saints'. Indeed it was Thomas Clarkson who did much to propagate this 'moral victory' theme and who initially represented antislavery as an apparently coherent expression of Whiggish, enlightened historical progress. Clarkson's 'trickle down' theory of abolitionism portrayed it as a movement of intellectual diffusion whereby the reasonable ideas of 'great men' were seized upon by a campaigning public to produce a victory for the forces of good over



evil.<sup>28</sup> Clarkson and many of his contemporaries had no difficulty with notions of a benevolent providence seen to be at work in the world through the activities of antislavery campaigners. This view has resonated in many subsequent antislavery studies reaching back for more than a century. As both theoretical foundation and moral sentiment, this strand of interpretation has pervaded the work of historians such as Coupland, Klingberg, Lecky and Mellor.<sup>29</sup> This conception of British antislavery is now widely understood as paternalist and elitist and later twentieth century historians have sought explanations for the potency of such ideas. Follarin Shyllon, for example, has argued that the 'moral victory' interpretation has been so enduring because it serves as 'a palliative for the national conscience' for Britain's guilt over slavery and the slave trade.<sup>30</sup>

Later scholars have not been immune to the processes of essentialisation that prompt calls of elitism and paternalism. Michael Craton's work, for example, has aimed similar criticisms at more contemporary historians, whom he accuses of having insufficient understanding of the slave role in securing abolition, as well as of the complexity and flexibility

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<sup>28</sup> Clarkson represented antislavery as an irresistible river flowing to a sea of "Universal Freedom", swollen by 'rivulets' of providentially inspired sentiment, as expressed in the ideas and activities of prominent abolitionists. Clarkson, *History*, 1, pp. 30-33 and pp. 259-64. Cited in Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery 1833-1870* (London, 1972), p. xvii and Temperley, 'Antislavery as a Form of Cultural Imperialism', p. 335.

<sup>29</sup> Reginald Coupland, *The British Anti-Slavery Movement* (London, 1933); Frank Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England, A Study in English Humanitarianism* (London, 1926); William E.H. Lecky, *A History of European Morals: From Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols. (New York, 1876); George R. Mellor, *British Imperial Trusteeship 1783-1850* (London, 1951).

<sup>30</sup> Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain*, p. 239.

of slave culture.<sup>31</sup> Even so, the moral victory theme (however well tempered by the passing decades of more liberal scholarship) still persists in some modern studies, as is evidenced by Stephen Braidwood's attachment to the 'older' interpretation of Sierra Leone as a story of freedom prompted by evangelical benevolence.

## 2b) Economic Determinism

A significant counterpoint to the 'moral victory' school was provided with the publication in 1944 of Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*.<sup>32</sup> Williams' thesis was simple but powerful in that he claimed that the British only abolished the slave trade and slavery when it was economically expedient to do so. Williams asserted that the moral crusade of the abolitionists was actually a complex packaging around the hard realities of the disintegration of plantation economics. Subsequent research has shown that Williams exaggerated the importance of the slave system in the British economy and its contribution to the industrial revolution.

Seymour Drescher and Roger Anstey have jointly accounted for a cogent response to Williams which both reinstates the importance of cultural and religious stimuli to abolitionist endeavour and also refutes notions that the slave trade became unprofitable. Drescher's *Econocide* emphasised that the slave system was efficient, profitable and expanding up to the

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains, Slave Rebellions in the British West Indies 1629-1832* (Ithaca, 1992); M. Craton, 'Slave Culture, Resistance and the Achievement of Emancipation in the British West Indies, 1783-1838', in J. Walvin (ed.) *Slavery and British Society 1776-1846* (London, 1982), pp. 100-22.

<sup>32</sup> Eric E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944).

end of the eighteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Roger Anstey in *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition* showed that the industrialist class had less to gain from abolition than Williams had suggested. Anstey also returned to a modified version of earlier emphases on the importance of the religious imperative in antislavery action.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Williams' thesis changed antislavery studies permanently, and the charting of the relationship between shifting economic values and abolitionism has ever since been recognised as a legitimate and necessary enterprise.<sup>35</sup> The spectre of Williams lurks over the sub-discipline of antislavery studies still, not least, as Stanley Engerman points out, because 'The fact remains that Britain did not end the slave trade until industrial expansion had begun, and it seems to many that such a temporal congruence could not have been accidental'.<sup>36</sup>

## 2c) Ideological Hegemony

I have already noted that antislavery historians have been more sensitive to wider theoretical developments than those of Sierra Leone. This is clear both in Williams' thesis and its subsequent re-examinations. Antonio Gramsci's refinements of Marxist theory were reflected in antislavery studies in the 1970s through the brilliant work of David Brion Davis. Davis explored, (in an abolitionist context), Gramsci's notions of ideological hegemony.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977).

<sup>34</sup> Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London, 1975).

<sup>35</sup> A point made by James Walvin in J. Walvin, (ed.) *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*, editor's introduction, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Stanley L. Engerman, 'Introduction' to David Eltis and James Walvin, (eds.), *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Age of Revolution*, p. 349.

Hegemony, explained as 'the predominance, obtained by consent rather than force, of one class or group over other classes', is a notion which reacts against interpretations of history as a series of jolts between revolution and oppression.<sup>38</sup> Following Gramsci, Davis reflected on the social foundations of ideology especially in its ability to legitimate processes of social control. Ideology "both justifies what is done by the group whose vested interest is served and interprets social reality in a way that the justification is made plausible."<sup>39</sup> Applying these notions to antislavery thought and action, Davis surmised that the abolition movement 'reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order.'<sup>40</sup> For Davis, antislavery was a political and cultural enterprise of the emerging industrialised bourgeoisie. These middle-class activists 'succeeded in making a sincere humanitarianism an integral part of class ideology, and thus of British culture.'<sup>41</sup> In so doing, they drew attention away from the emerging horrors of the factory system and promoted the notion of Britain as a just, benevolent society. Some commentators have drawn an inference from Davis' work that this distraction was deliberate and consciously manipulative.<sup>42</sup>

## 2d) Towards Synthesis

Davis produced a sophisticated view of British abolitionism which was informed by important theoretical developments. He was responsible for placing ideology (as a complex

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<sup>38</sup> John M. Cammett quoted in Davis, *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Peter Berger quoted in Davis, *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See for example, S. Engerman and D. Eltis, 'Economic Aspects of the Abolition Debate' in Christine Bolt and S. Drescher (eds.), *Anti-slavery, Religion and Reform*, p. 282.

rather than simple construct) in the forefront of antislavery studies. However, whilst important in their emphases, Davis' ideas have, like Williams', proved to be over-simplistic when subjected to rigorous scholarship in the field of antislavery studies.

A large body of research has focussed in detail on the relationship between abolitionism and industrial capital. Seymour Drescher has argued that the identification of abolitionism as an hegemonic ideology is 'at best equivocal and based on a narrow range of elite evidence.'<sup>43</sup> Much of Drescher's work emphasises that abolitionism was a broader-based phenomenon which owed a good deal of its success to 'ordinary people' who goaded the Parliamentary elite into reacting to, rather than initiating, change. Drescher emphasises that abolitionist sentiment was strongest in areas of greatest class-consciousness and proposes that far from shifting attention away from domestic problems of reform, abolitionism was constantly linked with domestic concerns as part of a reformist power struggle. As well as Drescher's work, Davis' theories now also have to stand up to research such as that of Claire Midgley who has emphasised the important role played by women in abolition campaigns.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to these studies which implicitly revise Davis' theories, a narrower, more vibrant, debate has also developed over Davis' use of the ideas of ideological hegemony. Originating in the *American Historical Review*, the debate between Davis, Thomas Haskell and John Ashworth has chronicled both a reconsideration of the usefulness of theories of

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<sup>43</sup> S. Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery, British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London, 1986), p. 164.

<sup>44</sup> Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery, The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992).

hegemony and a search for other conceptual tools which explain the relationship between capitalism and abolitionism.<sup>45</sup> Haskell advocates a move away from an emphasis on class relations in capitalism to an examination of the 'cultural or cognitive style associated with the capitalist market'.<sup>46</sup> Ashworth has developed a theory of capitalist morality which indicates that the values of capitalism tended ultimately to make slavery impossible.<sup>47</sup>

What has become clear is that far from being a middle-class project, the abolition campaign ranged across boundaries of class and gender. These conclusions have been reached out of the tensions created between economic and ideological interpretations of abolition. Perhaps as a result of these tensions, it is now increasingly understood that drawing boundaries between economic and cultural influences is a somewhat specious activity. Certainly, the abolitionists themselves did not draw them, and an important characteristic of antislavery culture was the conflation of the economic and cultural spheres, a conflation that stretched across the political and moral spectrum, for example in debates over the cultural and economic implications of a free-labour system.<sup>48</sup> It is increasingly clear that British antislavery sometimes defies rational economic analysis and the direct application of sociological theory. Inevitably then, there has been a shift towards synthesis in antislavery historiography and an acknowledgement of the complexities of abolitionist discourse.

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Bender, (ed.), *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, editor's introduction, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Engerman and Eltis, 'Economic Aspects of the Abolition Debate', p. 283. David Turley *The Culture of English Antislavery* (London 1991), p. 2.

This shift has been clearly demonstrated in David Turley's recent publication *The Culture of English Antislavery*. Turley's approach constitutes a thoughtful reaction to the historiographical changes that have gone before. He is interested in ideology but sceptical of claims that antislavery constituted a deliberately constructed attempt at bourgeois ideological hegemony.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, Turley examines antislavery against a very wide background of class and culture, seeking to understand it as a response to change within English society as well as reflexive of Britain's relations with the outside world. He stresses that antislavery was non-linear in its development, and that in its constant renegotiation of method and aims it had much in common with other major reform movements.<sup>50</sup> Turley helpfully characterises English antislavery as a 'series of alliances' which reflected divergent attitudes and emphases as well as exhibiting strong integrating features. He also questions if there was any clearly definable 'antislavery movement' and whether it was more a constituent rather than shaping force of English reforming political and cultural life.<sup>51</sup>

Specifically postmodern studies of British antislavery are absent. Likewise there has been a general lack of interest in the relationship between antislavery and empire, although Howard Temperley's study of the Niger Expedition is a recent exception.<sup>52</sup> Sierra Leone though has fared worse in demanding the attention of abolitionist historians. No study of

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<sup>49</sup> Turley, *Ibid.*, p. 227. See also, Howard Temperley, 'The Ideology of Antislavery', in David Eltis and James Walvin, (eds.), *The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 1981), pp. 21-35.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227-28.

<sup>52</sup> Howard Temperley, *White Dreams, Black Africa: The Antislavery Expedition to the River Niger, 1841-1842* (London, 1991).

British abolitionism has made more than a fleeting reference to Sierra Leone. Generally it has been dismissed as of little importance to abolitionism after the failure of the first settlement and certainly by the end of the eighteenth century when its 'failure' to provide evidence of the civilising and profitable effects of free labour were supposedly obvious.<sup>53</sup>

I would argue that Sierra Leone provides a valuable opportunity to examine early abolitionism *in action* as an agent of imperial cultural change. The debates over its foundation and progress provide unique sources for the understanding and interpretation of antislavery ideology. In addition, queries and concerns over free labour in Sierra Leone provide an example of how abolitionists dealt with ideology and economy together. Moreover, positive representations of Sierra Leone as well as the strident debates and dissension which it promoted recurred at later intervals in antislavery history, for example in the Niger Expedition and in debates over apprenticeship. Finally, at a time of exciting changes in interpretations of imperial history, Sierra Leone provides a practical point of focus to re-examine antislavery ideology in the light of new interpretations of social power and imperial domination. It also potentially sheds light on abolitionist views of race and its images of 'other' cultures.

Seymour Drescher is one antislavery historian who has hinted at the importance of this kind of endeavour. He has written:

The recent historiography of slavery has also evolved within a more general discourse, which tends to devalue not only the abolition of slavery but also the broader 'age of improvement' in which it was historically embedded. There has been a vigorous and stimulating reinterpretation of modern history focusing on the role of economic power and professional elites in constraining the masses. This perspective conceives of modern social change primarily as the invention of new institutions and agents of

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<sup>53</sup> Drescher, *Capitalism and Anti-Slavery*, p. 6; Temperley, *British Antislavery*, p. 46.



social control which maintain a perfect domination. Historiographical interpretations veer away from the traditional view of abolition as a movement of liberation and link it with nineteenth-century examples of mass confinement in prisons, workhouses, poorhouses, madhouses and schoolhouses.<sup>54</sup>

This passage raises (albeit ambiguously) the spectre of postcolonial theory and its relation to antislavery studies. Drescher appears to appreciate that antislavery studies will probably develop in relation to interdisciplinary trends as much in the future as it has in the past. With this in mind I shall move on to a discussion of the often shaky relationship between historians and the kinds of historiographical interpretations to which Drescher refers in the above quotation.

### **3. Here be Dragons: Historians and Postcolonial Theory**

What follows is an interrogatory record of encounters I have made with a variety of literature in the process of thinking through the difficulties of writing about contested representations and images of Sierra Leone. It is far from a theoretical 'mission statement', but does go some way to explaining why I have approached the sources as I have. This section also acts as a preamble to the various theoretical discussions which crop up as the thesis progresses.

The historical geographer, Leonard Guelke has written that 'The perceived world -- or rather the world view of individuals -- is reflected in actions. The essential task of historical analysis is to show how external change is related to the development of thought.'<sup>55</sup> This view resonates with much work in the arts and social sciences in recent decades. Indeed, the focus

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<sup>54</sup> Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery*, pp. 164-65.

<sup>55</sup> Leonard Guelke, *Historical Understanding in Geography* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 17.

of imperial history has apparently shifted away from a material to a cultural emphasis. This change has largely been the result of the efforts of postcolonial scholars to reassess the cultural make-up and impact of European imperialism on the non-Western world, often with the intention of 'decolonising' knowledge about the imperial past of so called 'developed' nations. David Spurr, for example, partly understands the term 'postcolonial' to relate to 'a search for alternatives to discourses of the colonial era.'<sup>56</sup>

Some opponents of postmodernism have dismissed it as a distasteful fashion that would soon go away.<sup>57</sup> The latter at least no longer appears to be the case, and even if the (loosely defined) 'movement' were wrecked on the rocks of structuralism there would be debris in the intellectual waters for many years to come. Nevertheless, hostility amongst many historians to postmodern/postcolonial analysis is palpable and unsurprising. The dispute between postmodernists and their (structuralist) opponents has deep intellectual roots. Philosophically, postmodernism rejects any prospect of an 'objective' reality. It is the companion of relativism and nihilism and accordingly has no difficulty with assertions such as that which argues that no knowledge is possible beyond culture. To align firmly one's research with postmodernism then involves identifying where one stands in relation to philosophical relativism, a decision for which a lifetime lived as a hermit may not be sufficient preparation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> See for example, Ernest Gellner, *Post-Modernism, Reason and Religion* (London, 1992), p. 71.

<sup>58</sup> For (readable) philosophical expositions of both sides of this issue see Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, and Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge, 1991).

One alternative is to ignore the philosophical (and political) implications of an anti-structuralist stance and to incorporate and respond to insights and observations which may have a postmodern foundation as and when they appear relevant to one's area of research. I make the point baldly because in the course of my research these have sometimes appeared to be the alternatives that I face. On the one hand, historians of Sierra Leone and British antislavery tend to shy away from postmodern/postcolonial analysis. On the other hand, the study of image involves an interdisciplinary approach where one often encounters work which is either firmly based on or judiciously littered with postmodern insights. Whilst an interdisciplinary approach to the history of ideas as a whole clearly has much to offer, ranging across academic boundaries often involves the researcher in a journey across theoretical divides which make for difficulties of access, continuity and understanding

I have not resolved the fundamental philosophical issues adequately enough to align this study as postmodern or postcolonial. It is perhaps more honest to describe it as rhetorically postcolonial. Certainly it is influenced by studies which can be seen as postcolonial in genre. Notwithstanding the excitement generated by new and different insights, however, this thesis was in fact prompted by a reading of a study which was published before its author would have thought of claiming postcolonial credentials. Philip Curtin's analysis of British images of Africa provides an enduring example of an historian's successful attempt to grapple with the slippery subject of images and their interpretation.

#### **4. Philip Curtin and the 'world of unstated assumptions'**

In his groundbreaking book entitled *The Image of Africa*, Philip Curtin argued that the period between 1780 and 1850 was crucial to a hardening within British culture of a negative,

hostile image of Africa and its inhabitants.<sup>59</sup> Curtin's book traced the development of this negative image via an examination of what he called the 'world of unstated assumptions' about place and people which are revealed in both official documents and less formal sources.<sup>60</sup> It was, he insisted, very much a 'history of ideas' which drew on a wide source base. Of particular importance in Curtin's study are his attempts to appreciate the conflicts and contradictions which afflicted Western protagonists as European governments went about their colonial endeavours.

In many ways, Curtin's book, with its emphasis on probing the assumptions and intentions which underlay colonial encounters in Western Africa, was preemptive of much postcolonial scholarship, although it was largely unburdened by theory and jargon. Since Curtin's pioneering study, the relevance of studying the world of 'unstated assumptions' has been more widely accepted and has been theoretically enhanced, and the interpretation of images held in the West of non-European lands and peoples has undoubtedly become more popular and more sophisticated.

## 5. Self and Other

James Duncan has summarised the importance of new approaches to the study of cultural representations by arguing that they are not ontologically self-contained, but reflect and influence the realities of economic and social power. Culture, he argues, is increasingly viewed as:

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<sup>59</sup> Curtin, *Image*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

a constructed meaning system composed of representations (images) that, although they often appear 'natural' to people within that cultural system, are far from innocent. Rather meaning systems are enmeshed within, and are constitutive of, economic and political systems within a social formation. Researchers increasingly attempt to deconstruct the constructed nature of cultural representations by exploring the political and economic elements encoded within them.<sup>61</sup>

Many historians and other students have been introduced to kinds of deconstructive techniques to which Duncan refers through the work of Edward Said.

Said had insisted that ideas, cultures and histories be studied and understood as configurations of power, mediated in an imperial context through a discourse which perpetuates western cultural hegemony. The discursive formulations which he (given a specific emphasis on 'the East') calls 'Orientalism' are fundamentally contrived via the processes of 'othering.' Through these processes, Said argues, Western cultural and economic interests defined land and peoples that were 'different' from within their own culturally encrypted discourse. 'Other' lands and peoples so defined were usually portrayed as in some way inferior.<sup>62</sup> Said argues that hegemonic representations can be deconstructed to reveal the ideologies that underlie them, and he insists that the effects of such deconstruction will be to reveal and confront forms of social power and control which fall outside narrow structuralist confines. Specifically, he acknowledges the influence of Michel Foucault's understandings of power, control and physical repression and of Antonio Gramsci's work on hegemony.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> James Duncan, 'Landscapes of the Self/Landscapes of the Other(s): Cultural Geography 1991-92', in *Progress in Human Geography*, 17 (1993), p. 368.

<sup>62</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), pp. 1-28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 3-7.

Said has been careful to locate Orientalism as a cultural and political fact, rather than as purely an idea. Orientalism, he writes 'is, rather than expresses, a certain *will or intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different world.' He goes on to say that

It is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political ... power intellectual ... power cultural ... [and] power moral.<sup>64</sup>

This notion of an uneven discursive dialogue between culture and power seems to me to go some way to fleshing out what Curtin was trying to get at in his work. It may well be possible, within such a framework, to engage with Sierra Leonean history in a way which analyses the competing discourse between interest groups of varying power and influence and to investigate the struggle for hegemony which extended to the political, intellectual, cultural and moral as well as the economic.

However relevant Said's ideas seem to this study, there are two lingering questions which loom over the prospect of pursuing them with relation to Sierra Leone. Firstly, historians have shown a reluctance to acknowledge, let alone engage directly with, Said's propositions, and it is apposite to consider why this should have been the case. Secondly, *Orientalism* and its successor *Culture and Imperialism* spawned a whole industry in postcolonial studies within varying disciplines which has elaborated on and expanded Said's ideas, often to the extent of embedding them in an increasingly obfuscatory discourse. The only reaction of most historians to this expanding intellectual climate has been to emit loud groans of dismay.

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<sup>64</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 12.

Nevertheless, some historians are beginning to grapple with this subject. In a perceptive and forthright article Dane Kennedy has noted how British imperial historiography has been characterised by methodological and political conservatism, often serving as an ideological adjunct to empire itself. In a massively decolonized modern world, imperial historians, Kennedy argues, have remained 'wedded to the same official documentation, persist in addressing the same political, economic and military manifestations of power, and continue to employ the same narrative conventions.'<sup>65</sup> Whilst historians have been continuing quietly along their way, however, an interest in imperialism and colonialism has developed in other disciplines and this interest has been overwhelmingly inspired by postcolonial scholars. So intense has this activity been that Kennedy claims at one point that imperial history has been effectively 'colonised' by other disciplines.<sup>66</sup>

## 6. Trick or Treat?

Why has this outside interest been such a problem? The answer would appear to lie mainly in the claims made for postcolonial analysis, especially in its liberative abilities. Postcolonial scholars frequently claim that their deconstructive approach reacts against the repressive imperial hegemonies which are perpetuated in Western academic discourse as a result of the West's success in commodifying its 'others' in order better to control and repress them.<sup>67</sup> This is particularly true of literary scholars. Dane Kennedy's criticism of many literary students inspired by postcolonial theory is damning. Assuming, he asks, that the non-

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<sup>65</sup> Dane Kennedy, 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 24 (1996), p. 345.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>67</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1990), p. 47.

Western world *is* dominated by Western cultural discourse:

How do the post-colonial theorists propose to liberate these hostages? By writing in a manner that is utterly inaccessible to most of them? By writing as the acolytes of Western theorists? By writing to mainly Western audiences from mainly Western academies about mainly Western literature? By writing?<sup>68</sup>

Leaving aside the tempting observation that questions like this may legitimately be asked of much academic writing, Kennedy does have a point.

For the historian there are more specific difficulties with some postcolonial studies of imperialism. Whilst Said himself acknowledges the importance of an historicised understanding in discourse analysis, many postcolonial theorists view history as nothing more than a text whose significance is limited to its place in the discursive realm that the scholar should seek to dismantle.<sup>69</sup> Kennedy and others argue that this often means that all sources and texts are treated as having the same value and are taken out of any context other than their status as symbols of repression.<sup>70</sup>

It is difficult to imagine objectives and methods more antithetical to the 'average' historian. Not surprisingly, where any comment has been made at all on these notions, it has often been to reiterate the quiet ideals of historical scholarship and integrity. In the case of John MacKenzie this reiteration has come about not as a knee jerk reaction to a theoretical world 'gone mad' but after a period of initial seduction by ideas that seemed to offer a way of moving on (in a liberal humanitarian way) from the methodological conservatism of imperial

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<sup>68</sup> Kennedy, 'Imperial History', p. 350.

<sup>69</sup> E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), p. cciii; Kennedy, 'Imperial History,' pp. 350-51.

<sup>70</sup> Kennedy, 'Imperial History', p. 351; Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 54-55.



historiography.<sup>71</sup> MacKenzie cites several key objections to *Orientalism* and its theoretical 'children'. These objections include the following:

- 1) Said can be criticised for inventing a 'master narrative' of western power, a kind of Whiggism in reverse which condemns progressive decline rather than celebrates positive progress. This is in spite of his profound mistrust of all other 'metanarratives'.
- 2) Said has a binary approach to the relationship between 'the West' and 'the Other' which essentialises them both.
- 3) He lacks theoretical consistency. In particular this criticism is related to Said's attempts to reconcile the theoretical approaches of Foucault and Gramsci.
- 4) His identification of a monolithic, predominantly male discourse subjects the West to 'Occidentalism.'<sup>72</sup>

Accordingly, John MacKenzie has taken up a stance of outright hostility to Said and his 'disciples', arguing along the way that polemical propositions deserve a polemical response.<sup>73</sup>

My own feeling is that this is unfortunate because it emphasises the assumption that theoretical clarity is gained by confrontationally-motivated jolts from one opinion to another, shifts which depend for their effectiveness on a near total discrediting of the 'opposition.'

Dane Kennedy, on the other hand, argues that postcolonial analysis still has something to offer the historian in spite of its excesses. In particular he asserts that such work has fundamentally affected our understanding of the nature and impact of colonialism, mainly through its insistence that 'the categories of identity that gave meaning to colonizers and

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<sup>71</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester, 1995).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 6.

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

colonized alike cannot be taken for granted: they must be problematized and presented in the context of power.<sup>74</sup> In spite of his distrust of the ahistorical nature of much postcolonial scholarship Kennedy acknowledges that it *has* made a significant contribution to the study of colonial practice. It has done this

By presenting a case for understanding the construction of cultural difference as a binary process -- we define ourselves in the context of how we define others -- post-colonial theory has insisted that the metropole has no meaning apart from the periphery, the West apart from the Orient, the colonizer apart from the colonized. The dominant party in these pairings has its own character shaped as a consequence of the shape it gives the character of the other.<sup>75</sup>

It is with this in mind that Kennedy ultimately disavows his earlier claim that postcolonial theorists have 'colonised' history and calls for a more flexible approach than one which sees the boundaries between disciplines as operating in the same way as those between countries.

Another good reason for not turning away from postcolonial theory and its practitioners is that some very worthwhile work has been produced by them. Even John MacKenzie acknowledges this, citing several works, often by women academics and often in the study of travel writing, which constitute historically sensitive, rigorous and fascinating studies of imperial culture. MacKenzie insists that these works present a 'series of unconnected challenges to Said.'<sup>76</sup> Dane Kennedy on the other hand approvingly cites many of the same texts as examples of the fruitful directions in which postcolonially-inspired scholarship can lead the historically sensitive researcher.<sup>77</sup> The difference between the two

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<sup>74</sup> Kennedy, 'Imperial History', p. 358.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> Kennedy, 'Imperial History', pp. 358-59.

viewpoints is small but the relationship between postcolonial analysis and historical enquiry depends entirely on which side of this thin line historians choose to stand.

What does all this mean for the present study? I do not aim to disrupt the balanced and careful tradition of historical scholarship which Sierra Leone has received. However, I would argue that there are grounds for using insights from other disciplines to expand on the cultural and philosophical contexts within which early Sierra Leone was conceived and raised. The issues involved in planning, promoting, defending, governing and experiencing Sierra Leone are so complex that no-one can expect to find in its historical source base a clear, Whiggish form of development over time. However, the contradictions, conflicts and renegotiations which occurred within the broad expanse of cultural discourse that permeated and surrounded the colony are fascinating and important. With this last point in mind, and before progressing to a detailed analysis of abolitionist images of Sierra Leone itself, I turn now to consider some important themes which relate to the broader cultural attributes of British antislavery.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Sierra Leone and British Humanitarianism: Themes and Contexts**

As the rest of this thesis is largely dedicated to how abolitionists thought about Sierra Leone, it is worth examining how they thought about themselves. This chapter draws largely on secondary sources to place the abolitionists who so influenced the development of the colony in a wider cultural context. I begin by asking who were the abolitionists involved in Sierra Leone and what were their cultural characteristics? What were the images they promoted of themselves? The answer to these questions are critical if the wider impact of abolitionist ideology on images of Sierra Leone is to be understood. I continue by looking in very broad terms, at abolitionist notions of 'others'. I focus particularly on their attitudes to race and point out contradictions and tensions within antislavery discourse on this subject. This contextual chapter provides an important background to the more specific discussions of abolitionist involvement in Sierra Leone which follow.

#### **1. Sierra Leone and British antislavery**

As I mentioned in Chapter Two David Turley has concluded that it can be misleading to talk about antislavery as a unified homogenous and consistent 'movement' of like-minded people and suggests that it is perhaps best studied as a series of alliances between groups and individuals who found much common ground in spite of differences on sometimes critical

points.<sup>1</sup> However, at the time of the most direct relationship between prominent abolitionists and Sierra Leone (broadly speaking up to the 1830s), antislavery was less fragmented than, for example, it was after the ending of apprenticeship in 1838. Until this time both antislavery in general and Sierra Leone in particular were dominated by the evangelical 'Saints' of the Clapham Sect. The Claphamites were internally cohesive and characterised by what Turley<sup>1</sup> calls a 'dense personal texture', that is to say, strong linkages of kin and marriage between them. They retained a practical influence on appointments and policy in Sierra Leone even after the transfer of the colony to the Crown in 1808.<sup>2</sup>

However, neither British antislavery nor Sierra Leone were totally dominated by evangelical Anglicanism. Turley has identified that the evangelical emphasis on the vital *experience* of religious truth opened up possibilities of co-operation across denominational lines in pursuit of wider abolitionist objectives, although evangelicals did resist the acquisition of influence by members of other denominations.<sup>3 4</sup> Sierra Leone, as a subject of interest in Britain attracted support from Quakers and other dissenters. In Sierra Leone itself, however, these differences were more contentious as religious divides were often also racial divides. The Nova Scotian and Maroon settlers were dissenters who belonged to Baptist, Methodist and Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion churches, and who were reluctant to participate in the

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<sup>1</sup> Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 227-28. Many of those abolitionists who were actively involved in Sierra Leone, including William Wilberforce and Henry Thornton, maintained their interest in the colony through an active involvement in the African Institution. Zachary Macaulay was the Institution's Secretary.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Anglican religious worship of those whom they thought of as their oppressors. This reluctance was often perceived by the evangelicals as having a racial motivation.<sup>5</sup> At home, too, dissenters were prominent in both supporting and questioning evangelical policy in Sierra Leone. In particular, the Quaker William Allen, editor of *The Philanthropist* kept a watchful and often critical eye on the colony<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Evangelical Culture

Given that the evangelicals were so influential in Sierra Leone, it is important to have a sense of their particular cultural attributes and enthusiasms. An understanding of the emotional commitment of abolitionists is an important component in the analysis of antislavery culture.<sup>7</sup> Evangelical Anglicans were characterised by a deep personal and emotional attachment to their experience of Christianity. This experiential dimension to their faith carried a burden for action, and evangelical antislavery campaigners placed great emphasis on the notion of duty, service and the carrying of a personal cross. In the case of Sierra Leone this was particularly true. Henry Thornton and Zachary Macaulay both left private journals and papers which indicate the depth of this dutiful sense. For example, Henry Thornton confided to his journal in 1795:

Went to Sierra Leone House and attended an hour and half on Company business.... I think my attendance was useful. It was certainly a self denial -- and yet how pleasant would some people think even my acts of self denial to be.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, pp. 200-02.

<sup>6</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 276.

<sup>7</sup> Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Thornton, Journal, Feb 15, 1795 (Wigan Public Library Archives).

If Company business in London presented one challenge to the devout abolitionist, the prospect of 'service' in Africa itself provided a particular frisson of danger and sacrifice. Sierra Leone was the place where heroic antislavery discourse and the realities of practical abolitionist government met. The tensions caused by such a meeting are most accessible to historians in the papers of governor and later African Institution secretary, Zachary Macaulay. On the prospect of returning to Sierra Leone for a second term of governorship in 1796, he wrote to his future wife, Selina Mills:

I am almost afraid to proceed. I feel on my mind a secret and involuntary dread that God will require me in Africa, and should therefore the path of duty be plainly marked I hope I shall be enabled to take up my cross and to follow Christ.<sup>9</sup>

The burden was lightened however by the other experiential side of the evangelical coin, that is to say, joy at being selected to do God's work. Macaulay's friend, mentor and religious counsellor, Thomas Babington wrote to him early in his Sierra Leone career:

I consider you as selected by the Lord in a manner rather remarkable, as his instrument in a great work. The history of your life, seems to me to vindicate a conclusion of this sort from the charge of enthusiasm.<sup>10</sup>

The life history to which Babington refers was probably Macaulay's earlier career as an overseer on a Jamaican plantation.<sup>11</sup>

An understanding of how abolitionists saw themselves as both providentially chosen and contented servants of the divine will is of more than tangential interest in Sierra Leone. In their many disputes, Macaulay frequently reminded the Nova Scotians of their ingratitude for

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<sup>9</sup> Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, Feb. 12. 1796. Viscountess Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay* (London, 1961).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Babington to Zachary Macaulay, April 9, 1793, HLZM.

<sup>11</sup> Fyfe, *History*, pp. 48-49.

what had been done for them. He was often at pains to explain how great sacrifices had been made by Company Directors in their interests and sometimes appeared to be genuinely hurt and bewildered at the hostile responses of the Nova Scotians.<sup>12</sup> This emotional sense of their paternal sacrifices often paved the way for negative collective and individual representations of blacks from evangelicals in the colony. These negative images were then frequently passed on in wider abolitionist discourse about the colonists.

If evangelicals saw themselves as participants in a divinely ordered schema, they also gave great thought to the role of others in this plan, and were committed to the idea of a moral order ordained by the almighty. This in turn had political and economic implications. The evangelicals felt and argued that the slave traders fostered a moral and economic disorder, symptomatic of a cultural and commercial life which gained its impetus from forces outside of God's plans and instructions.<sup>13</sup> Whilst compatible with 'enlightened' emphases on reasoned, moral order, evangelicals emphasised the beneficence of the Almighty in bestowing his blessings on man, and on Britain in particular.<sup>14</sup> It is important to remember this insistence on slavery as anti-providential and ultimately doomed in order to understand the claims made by its founders and supporters for what would be achieved in Sierra Leone.

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Zachary Macaulay's address to newly appointed Hundredors, March 7, 1795, PRO/CO/270/3.

<sup>13</sup> This theme of abolitionist commitment to 'order' is developed in detail in Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, pp. 17-46.

<sup>14</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Age of Revolution*, pp. 446-48.



### 3. Culture, Labour and Control in Practical Abolitionism

Particularly in the late-eighteenth century, abolitionists were locked in a dialectical conflict with pro-slave traders about the commercial as well as moral implications of Britain's involvement in the slave trade. Supporters of the West India interest were consistently pointing out the economic value to the nation of the trade in slaves and their produce. As David Turley explains, in their insistence on the economic efficacy of free labour, abolitionists were operating both practically and discursively within the mercantilist premises of their proslavery opponents.<sup>15</sup> Sierra Leone provided them with a unique opportunity to respond to the pro-slave traders' arguments in their own terms as well as to pursue a great humanitarian moral vision.

Even when these hopes appeared to be dashed, many abolitionists maintained a devotion to the ideals of a providentially just society as providing the ultimate resistance to the evils of the slave trade and slavery. Abolitionist propaganda continued to promote images of the successful employment of free labour in the colony even when its weaknesses were most exposed.<sup>16</sup> Their enduring public and personal enthusiasm for Sierra Leone centred on their belief that if it was properly run and populated with favourable human material, it would tend to cut off slavery at the root. Even towards the end of his life Wilberforce wrote to Buxton urging the need to 'vindicate' Sierra Leone from its enemies.<sup>17</sup> This enthusiasm persisted within broader antislavery discourse through to the Niger expedition and beyond.

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<sup>15</sup> Turley, *Culture of English Antislavery*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> See for example John Joseph Gurney, *Substance of a Speech Delivered at a public meeting on the Subject of British Colonial Slavery* (1824), p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Wilberforce to Buxton, March 23 1826 (Rhodes House MSS).

The success of abolitionist economic and cultural ambition for blacks depended of course on their assenting to their allotted role in the great providential plan. As David Brion Davis puts it, evangelical culture developed a 'fantasy' where the willing conversion of blacks to voluntary servitude in a white dominated economic system would be the inevitable result of contact with the inexorable march of white evangelical civilisation.<sup>18</sup> Although Davis was thinking specifically of the West Indies, the same 'fantasy' seems to have dominated early thought about Sierra Leone. When the fantasy failed to be fulfilled, its ideological basis remained largely unquestioned. Rather, another key component of evangelical antislavery culture became more apparent, that is to say, its commitment to the maintenance of providential order via the implementation of strict social control.

Antislavery (particularly in its evangelical form) was far from automatically linked with a taste for a freer society.<sup>19</sup> As will become clear, distinctions between free and slave labour often 'leaked' in wider abolitionist discourse. Evangelical abolitionists, with their acute sense of evil, were particularly attached to social control as a cultural imperative. David Brion Davis suggest that in pursuit of their highly ethical purpose abolitionists unwittingly drew distinctions and boundaries which opened the way for unprecedented forms of colonial oppression.<sup>20</sup> One such boundary can be traced in relation to race. Both in Sierra Leone and in wider antislavery discourse there was a tendency among evangelicals to mark blacks' unwillingness to succumb to the role allotted for them by white colonists as an inability to do so. Such white misconceptions legitimised more repressive means of colonial social control.

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<sup>18</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Age of Revolution*, p. 373.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, p. 377.

<sup>20</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Age of Revolution*, p. 253.

#### 4. Abolitionists and Racial Theory

In Sierra Leone's early years, developing racial theories provided not just a general backlash against abolitionists but a specific questioning of their cultural and scientific assumptions regarding black origins and ultimate cultural destination. The greatest source of dispute was over origins, as reflected in theories of polygenesis and monogenesis. Monogenist theory insisted that mankind was a single species of common origin and provided a crux of abolitionist discourse. Polygenists argued that races had different origins as well as different characteristics. This was, of course, especially useful when justifying non-white subservience to whites.<sup>21</sup> Blacks were presented by polygenists as inferior in both origin and nature and biologically incapable of being absorbed into white culture. The idea of racially differentiated origins was supported by evidence from some members of an increasingly hegemonic 'scientific' community. Edward Long in his *History of Jamaica* used biological theory to argue that blacks were like animals and formed a distinct species from the Europeans.<sup>22</sup>

By the turn of the century, polygenesis was in decline in the face of stiff humanitarian and theological opposition.<sup>23</sup> The Sierra Leone Company's physician Thomas Winterbottom produced an influential body of evidence based on his observations of settler and native blacks in the colony. Winterbottom's research was used extensively by the influential monogenist physician, J Blumenbach.<sup>24</sup> A religious revival and the growth of evangelicalism, as well as

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<sup>21</sup> Among the many summaries and analyses of eighteenth and nineteenth century views on race and the Africans' 'place' in the racialised discourse see in particular Curtin, *Image*, pp. 2-57 and also pp. 227-43.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, II, 353-56.

<sup>23</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p.229.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

disappointment in the 'rational' French Revolution, seems to have turned opinion back to a reliance on the monogenist approach contained in scripture.

However, a belief in monogenesis did not automatically imply a belief in human equality without reference to race. Abolitionists, as monogenists, were faced with the problem of accounting for the development of different races from the same origin. One solution was the degeneracy theory which postulated that non-Europeans had degenerated from the white race.<sup>25</sup> Other monogenists classified mankind into racial hierarchies. John Hunter argued that climate and diet produced racial differences. In 1809 Lamarck identified six races, and placed the Caucasian at the top and the Negro at the bottom. In 1817 Cuvier rejected the biblical division into descendants of Ham, Shem and Japhet and divided humanity into Caucasian, Mongolian and Negro, with the latter again at the bottom of the pile.<sup>26</sup>

Humanitarian attitudes to blacks reflected the xenophobia of their age.<sup>27</sup> For example a belief in blacks as libidinous and hypersexual was not restricted to the polygenists but was a common feature of humanitarian discourse. Nor for that matter were such unfounded generalisations restricted to blacks. Scotsmen, the Irish and even mythical creatures all received the attention of racial commentators in similar manner.<sup>28</sup> The key difference between monogenists and polygenists was whether the blacks' low position in an ethnocentrically-

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230-33.

<sup>27</sup> Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians, English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, 1978), p. 133.

<sup>28</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 133.

focussed hierarchy was perceived to be changeable or not. Monogenists argued that blacks had an *ultimate* capacity to achieve the same standards of 'civilization' as whites. Such assertions of course fuelled the notion of the civilizing mission and of cultural imperialism and legitimated the humanitarian obsession with social control.

By the mid-nineteenth century biological rather than humanitarian thought on race had become increasingly important, partly due to the increasing prestige of science. Scientific theories of race could not be ignored or rebuffed simply by quoting scripture as the humanitarians had done in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The way had been paved for a longer-lasting and more fruitful flowering of polygenist theories. Science, race and culture became more and more entangled as simple biblical monogenesis seemed to lose credibility. In the period covered by this study this was most obvious with the debates that began in the 1840s over the extermination of aboriginal peoples in the process of white colonisation. It was becoming clear that white contact led to high mortality and sometimes extermination of native peoples. Racial explanations were popular, inevitably perhaps given that the exterminated people were all non-white. As Curtin notes, it appeared that the extinction of non-Europeans was part of the natural evolution of the world. To some extent this evolutionary theory filtered into African policy, although it was clear to most observers that mortality in West Africa was more of a problem for Europeans than Africans.<sup>29</sup>

The problem was whether the evolutionary law was cultural or racial. If cultural, then the 'savages' falling away before the 'civilizing' influences theory could and did, for example,

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<sup>29</sup> Curtin, *Image*, pp. 372-75.

lead to theories that black Sierra Leoneans would become the inevitable conquerors of Africans.<sup>30</sup> If racial, then all Africans were destined for extinction. In such ideas lay much practical emphasis on Africans' so called 'racial weakness'.<sup>31</sup> As the century progressed there was an increasing tendency to use racial explanations to blame natives and other blacks for European failures. In wider discourse this tendency was supported by polygenist theories. But the narrower field of abolitionist culture, still resolutely monogenist, also employed increasingly negative images of black ability which resonated with those of their racist opponents.

## 5. Race and Practical Abolitionism

Most abolitionists had little or no direct contact with blacks, and when they did their reactions were often ambivalent. Several commentators point out the reactions of leading abolitionists to the family of Henri Christophe, the black radical from Santo Domingo. When his wife and children fled to the security of England, Thomas Clarkson tried to recruit practical assistance from other abolitionists. Their responses were far from enthusiastic, some thought the whole situation amusing and others were troubled on account of social propriety.<sup>32</sup> Zachary Macaulay felt it necessary to write to his wife on the subject, saying 'you need be under no apprehensions respecting Madame Christophe. She is not likely to come near us. But if she had; you might have rested perfectly easy on the score of morals.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 375. Curtin notes that this argument was pursued in the contemporary press.

<sup>32</sup> Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971) p. 225 and Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>33</sup> Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, Sept. 30, 1821, in Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay*, p. 368.

In general however the philanthropists tended to produce and rely on stereotypical images of blacks (both privately and in public propaganda), designed to further their religious motivations. English commentators in general found the 'Negro Question' a fine invitation to indulge in poetical licence and the philanthropists were particularly prolific in this area. They successfully appealed for public support by presenting an image of an oppressed black appealing for protection and sympathy, most famously perhaps in Wedgwood's emblematic representation of a kneeling slave pleading 'am I not a man and a brother'. Antislavery promoted the association of blackness with nakedness, backwardness and slavery, strengthening the impression of Africans as part of unregenerate mankind. Particularly culpable in the presentation of negative, derogatory racial stereotypes of blacks were the mission publications and children's literature.<sup>34</sup>

Abolitionists shared many of the ethnocentric assumptions from within wider cultural circles than their own field. Most abolitionists had little enthusiasm for or understanding of African culture, and Philip Curtin argues that a crucial cause of the lack of effectiveness of the anti-racist case in the early nineteenth century was the failure to distinguish between race and culture.<sup>35</sup> Anthony J. Barker argues that the wish to combat racialism was not a major objective of abolitionists who, as part of their tactical campaigns, tended to promote images of African degeneracy as caused by the slave trade. He concludes that there was broad consensus on racial matters among proslavery and antislavery writers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 328.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony J. Barker, *The African Link, British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (London, 1978) pp. 164-68, 179 and 194.

Antislavery activists are particularly associated with the convention which saw Africans as 'noble savages'. The idea of noble savagery was a literary convention which was more positive than earlier xenophobic ideas about blacks, but it was nevertheless heavily ethnocentric.<sup>37</sup> The noble savage tradition was embryonic in the earliest days of European voyages of discovery and related to longstanding European traditions which had equated simplicity with a child-like moral goodness.<sup>38</sup> Such images survived in relation to Africa in spite of an obvious barrier that the slave trade was to the intellectual acceptance of this notion. In some ways, as Curtin has argued, the noble-savage image provided the central thesis of pro-black argument for most of the first half of the nineteenth century. Lorimer notes the irony that in presenting the African as a child of nature, naturally humble, patient, long suffering and with strong kinship affections, a 'natural' Christian, the abolitionists made the first systematic attempt to produce rationalized proof of black inferiority.<sup>39</sup>

The noble savage convention was useful for propaganda purposes but did not necessarily provide a consistent hegemonic discourse about Africans in abolitionist circles. The humanitarian failure to counter negative propaganda about African 'savagery' was partly due to the abolitionists' ambivalence on the issue itself. Initially humanitarians argued that Africans were not 'savages' at all, but this seems to have changed after the 1790s to an acceptance that coastal Africans had been made so by the slave trade. Wilberforce's own

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<sup>37</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p.23; Curtin *Image*, p.241. For a wide-ranging discussion of the Noble Savage Concept see Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage. A Study in Romantic Naturalism* (Columbia, 1961).

<sup>38</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 24.



explanation of African 'barbarism' centred on this degeneracy theory and a belief in the diffusive power of a 'superior' culture.<sup>40</sup> He and other diffusionists (strongly represented among the Clapham Sect) argued that legitimate trade would bring civilization and defeat savagery. In wider discourse, however, static analyses of the causes of African barbarism were dominant and ideas of climatic determinism were particularly influential. Not all commentators on the humanitarian side were as optimistic as Wilberforce and other diffusionists, and warnings were sometimes sounded that false hope may be raised by blaming all of Africa's 'barbarism' on the slave trade.<sup>41</sup>

Douglas Lorimer has paid considerable attention to the linkages between racial attitudes and class hierarchies in Victorian England. He notes that Victorian commentators on race were largely from a middle-class background. To these people, entrenched in a strictly hierarchical social order, the question as to whether a black man was equal to a white man, meant little. Notions of social equality were outrageous to all but a few radicals. The bulk of British abolitionists based their racial assumptions on their self-conception as civilized men in an uncivilized world and as an educated elite in a largely barbarian England. The majority of Victorians did not see themselves as biologically superior to blacks. They did however assume a significant degree of cultural superiority. Thus, while it is far from difficult to prove discrimination against blacks, it is not simple to prove that race was the basis for it.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 255.

<sup>42</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 22.

Lorimer has emphasised that images of and attitudes to blacks from within the same interest groups were often at variance with each other and contained considerable internal contradictions and tensions.<sup>43</sup> Racial attitudes and representations cannot be divided simply into Negrophile positive emphasis and Negrophobe negative emphasis. Rather, evangelicals thought that blacks were both unredeemable savages and natural Christians. Proslavery groups thought blacks were idle but also advocated that they were particularly suitable to hard labour in the tropics. Blacks could be at the same time obedient but lazy, the humble servant or the cruel savage.<sup>44</sup> Public propaganda statements supported both positive and negative racial images, sometimes with obvious ambivalence along these lines. How far this ambivalence persisted in the private thoughts of individuals is not clear as such information is not easily accessible from behind the screens of propaganda. Nevertheless, intellectual and emotional ambivalence in responses to blackness and race was very much a feature of humanitarian and proslavery discourse throughout the study period.

## 6. Conclusion

The key point to emerge from the discussion in this chapter is that of complexity. Whilst there may have been a dominant Manichean split between abolitionists and their opponents, there was considerable cultural ambivalence particularly within antislavery circles. Moreover the fortunes of the humanitarian 'project' fluctuated according to broad political responses to wider national and international events. Racialised ideologies did not provide a simple counterpoint to humanitarian doctrine and propaganda, but provided part of the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

discourse within which antislavery protagonists identified themselves and the practical expressions of their ideology. Race and class issues were frequently conflated and are particularly difficult for the historian to separate. What is clear is that specific incidents and features of Sierra Leonean history during this period need to be related back to their broader cultural context. In Part Two I pursue a more specific examination of how abolitionist images of Sierra Leone were intertwined with notions of 'self' and 'other'. I focus on utopian elements of abolitionist culture as revealed in their attempts to plan for and govern a colony which was conceived from within the complex discourses I have discussed above.

**PART TWO**

**Utopian Ambitions and Dissonant Voices**

## CHAPTER 4

### **Imagining Freedom: Early Utopian Plans for Sierra Leone**

In this chapter I examine early plans for the humanitarian colonisation of Sierra Leone insofar as they constitute and reflect an utopian discourse, and I suggest that they betray much about how abolitionists thought about Africa and its inhabitants. As it is not usual to analyse the Sierra Leone 'experiment' against a background of the wider history of ideas, I take this opportunity to draw on some theoretical literature about utopias in order to emphasise the genuinely utopian nature of early ambitions for the colony. I emphasise how humanitarians idealised the African land and people and the black groups who were to pioneer ethical expansion in Africa. I also point to the Sierra Leone scheme as indicating the weight, even grandeur, of abolitionist expectations of what would happen when their moral ideologies were transformed into practical action.

Of course, the nature of utopian discourse is such that wherever idealised plans and schemes exist instances of counter-utopian tensions are bound to feature alongside them. Given that one overall theme of this thesis is of 'contested freedoms', it is important to analyse not only the processes by which Sierra Leone became the site of experimentation in social engineering but also how these proposed experiments were analysed and reassessed by contemporary critics. This is largely the subject of the next three chapters. For now though I want to expand on what those images were and how far they can be seen as utopian.

## 1. The Idea of Utopia

For Karl Marx the defining characteristic of an Utopian was 'his ineffectuality', caused by the 'a priori impossibility of his functioning in society, because of his remoteness from material causes and historical events.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless it is widely recognised that Utopianism has sometimes played a key role as a stimulant to social change and therefore that utopian discourses can be of direct social significance. The geographer David Harvey has argued that Utopian planning has been made possible through the development of capitalism, which 'has so liberated us from spatial constraints that we can imagine communities independently of existing places and set about the construction of new places in ways that were impossible before.'<sup>2</sup> This is an important point. Utopian idealism enables history's victors to indulge in social engineering. As such it is not an innocent enterprise. Utopian plans then contain encoded within them representations of their authors' imaginative geographies and the socio-cultural discourse within which their authors operated. Utopias are, in a very real sense, invented places, where certain socio-cultural factors which the author wishes to emphasise are fetishised and others, which may or may not correspond to known 'realities of place' are ignored.

The 'perfectibilism' of utopian thought extends to include human agency. Utopian planners assume that a perfect form of government can be found for a perfectible human

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Barbara Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia* (Hassocks, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> David Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity' in J. Bird *et al.* (ed.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London, 1993), p. 17.

population.<sup>3</sup> This perfectibility relies on social control via the exercise of social and economic power. As James Davis puts it:

The utopian idealises not man nor nature, but organisation. Threats to organisational perfection come from fortuna, the play of contingency, from moral inefficiency, the wavering of intention in the face of uncertainty of moral results, and from corruption, the perversion of institutional and organisational process.<sup>4</sup>

Davis argues that failures within utopias could be interpreted by those who conceived them as failures of control rather than intent.<sup>5</sup> Gregory Claeys also identifies tensions within the utopian genre in relation to the desire for reform. Resolution of those tensions tended to mean that many utopian plans contained profoundly illiberal elements.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless Claeys points out that even moderate utopian plans in the eighteenth century were significantly different from practices within Europe, and it is against this background that the situating of many ideal polities in distant lands needs to be understood.<sup>7</sup> In this context Claeys refers to early plans for Sierra Leone as examples of attempts to pursue utopian expectations in a real place

## 2. Historical Background to Utopian planning in Sierra Leone

It is important to note that the origins of the Sierra Leone experiment have their roots in the wider history of European experience and imagination in West Africa. The idea of agricultural development within West Africa was not new. Indigo plantations had been cultivated in the 1680s by the Royal Africa Company at Bance Island in the Sierra Leone

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<sup>3</sup> Goodwin, *Social Science and Utopia*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> James Davis, 'The History of Utopia: The Chronology of Nowhere' in Peter Alexander and Roger Gill (eds.), *Utopias* (London, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Claeys (ed.), *Utopias of the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1994), p. xvi.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

River.<sup>8</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, Malachy Postlethwayt vigorously argued for the relocation of British tropical enterprise to West Africa.<sup>9</sup> West Africa offered an attractive *tabula rasa* to colonial planners and a number of schemes for expansion in the region appeared in the late eighteenth century. The majority of these had humanitarian ambitions.<sup>10</sup> Around a dozen plans emerged in the decade of peace between the wars with France, but Sierra Leone was the only one to receive parliamentary backing and the only one to endure.<sup>11</sup> However, it was the eminent Quaker, Dr. John Fothergill who initially conflated humanitarian ambitions with notions of West African settlement.<sup>12</sup> No detailed plan of Fothergill's ideas survive, but his name is linked to the Sierra Leone experiment through his relationship with the botanist Henry Smeathman who produced the earliest plan for a colony on this part of the West African coast.

### 3. Henry Smeathman's Sanctuary for the Oppressed

Henry Smeathman was an amateur botanist who had spent four years living in Sierra

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<sup>8</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88. West Africa was widely understood to be less populated than it really was. *The Times*, for example noted on May 20 1796 that 'Such desolation has the slave trade occasioned on the western coasts of Africa within these two last centuries, that the most fertile tracts of that continent are almost depopulated, even for two hundred miles from the sea.'

<sup>11</sup> A broad description and discussion of these schemes is to be found in Chapter Four of Curtin's study. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-119.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Problem of Slavery in Age of Revolution*, pp. 230-31; Braidwood, *Black Poor*, p. 5; John Coakley Lettsom, *Memoirs of John Fothergill M.D.* 4th ed., (London, 1786), pp. 69-70; R. Hingston Fox, *Dr. John Fothergill and His Friends* (London, 1919) pp. 222-23.



Leone supported by sponsors who included John Fothergill and Joseph Banks.<sup>13</sup> Some years later he approached prominent Quaker abolitionists with ideas for a settlement in Sierra Leone.<sup>14</sup> Smeathman argued that West Africa was capable of producing immense quantities of rice, cotton, tobacco, sugar and indigo as well as other produce. It also had excellent fish, turtle and whale stocks.<sup>15</sup> And yet, he said, it had only really been exploited for slaves. His dream of developing this potential was eventually taken up by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor and the details of the scheme were published in Smeathman's *Plan for A Settlement*.

In his *Plan*, Smeathman noted that land was both plentiful and cheap in Sierra Leone. He promised that within days of arrival, land would be purchased cheaply and communal labour would easily secure shelter. Smeathman maintained that

This may easily be effected in that country, the climate not requiring either compact or durable houses: a slight hut is sufficient shelter for the severest season of the year; and the materials for building are so near at hand, that a company of ten or twelve men may erect very comfortable habitations for themselves and their families in a few days.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, p. 6. Minutes of A Committee of House of Commons Respecting a Plan for Transporting Felons to the Island of Lee Main in the River Gambia. Henry Smeathman's testimony, May 2 1785, PRO/HO/7/1.

<sup>14</sup> Smeathman's early ideas on the subject are traceable in letters he wrote to the Quaker, Dr. Knowles, which were subsequently published in *New Jerusalem Magazine*. Smeathman to Knowles, 1783, (no precise date) in *New Jerusalem Magazine*, 1790, pp. 279-81 and July 21 1783, pp. 281-294. These were later reproduced (with some modifications) in Carl Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 2 vols. (London, 1794). Subsequent references in this thesis are to these later reproductions.

<sup>15</sup> Smeathman to Knowles, 1783 (no precise date), reproduced in Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 2, p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Smeathman, *Plan of a Settlement to be made near Sierra Leone on the Grain Coast of Africa* (London, 1786), p. 6.

The limitless supplies of land would be easy to cultivate:

Such are the mildness and fertility of the climate and country, that a man possessed of a change of cloathing, a wood axe, a hoe and a pocket knife may soon place himself in an easy and comfortable situation. All the cloathing wanted is what decency requires, and it is not necessary to turn up the earth more than from a depth of two or three inches, with a slight hoe, in order to cultivate any kind of grain.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, Smeathman argued, the warm African climate induced livestock to propagate themselves more rapidly than they did in Britain's colder environs.<sup>18</sup> Smeathman's representations of the African physical environment then were of an easily perfectible land, a truly utopian space where the barest of efforts would produce a subsistence, but where a 'properly run' colony could be exceedingly productive.

Smeathman was less impressed with the human resources in Sierra Leone and he was dismissive of native agriculture. Like many of his contemporaries, Smeathman was contemptuous of the multi-skilled nature of native production and the seeming chaos of agricultural techniques which practised intercropping on small plots. He argued that African strength and skill were rarely harnessed together and that native customs encouraged indolence and drunkenness.<sup>19</sup> However, it was this perceived lack of native political sophistication which encouraged Smeathman in his utopian ambitions and representations. He observed that 'a white trader who can get 2 or 300 people about him, becomes virtually a chief in Africa.'<sup>20</sup> As such, Sierra Leone offered a ready site for utopian experimentation. His

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Smeathman to Knowles, July 21 1783, reproduced in Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 2, pp. 205-206.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

dismissal of African political organisation and insistence on native cultural backwardness paved the way for the introduction of British 'civil and religious liberty'.

Although Smeathman argued that the settlement would be founded 'upon the true principles of commerce: the produce of nature or industry, and mutual benefit', he did not expand on what he meant by this.<sup>21</sup> It appears that, commercially, Smeathman advocated a two-pronged attack to turn this fertile African Arcadia into a rich source of profit. Firstly, he envisaged a number of 'adventurers' who would choose to cultivate their own farms. Secondly, he proposed an emphasis on plantation agriculture, to be run by the Agent (himself) or other settlers who wished to promote cultivation using hired labour.<sup>22</sup> Smeathman was not averse to purchasing slaves to work on his utopian plantations, and proposed to Knowles that some slaves should be purchased in Senegal to work in the new settlement.<sup>23</sup> Although it seems clear that Smeathman was intending to operate a policy of redemption through labour for the slaves, his wording was at best clumsy.<sup>24</sup>

In what sense can Smeathman's plan be considered as utopian? Although he presented an Arcadian vision of the natural environment, his plan did not exhibit the high degree of rational planning which characterises genuinely utopian schemes. He undertook no elaborate calculations about profits, nor did he spend any time devising regulations and

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<sup>21</sup> Memorial of Henry Smeathman, "Proposals for Taking the Black Poor to the Grain Coast of Africa", Referred to Commissioners for the Navy, May 24 1786, PRO/T1/631.

<sup>22</sup> Smeathman, *Plan*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>23</sup> Smeathman to Knowles, July 21 1783, reproduced in Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 2, p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, p. 10.

rules by which he hoped to further the happiness of the colonists in any utopian ways. In many ways his plan betrayed pragmatism rather than utopianism, and can be seen in some senses as simply representing an attempt to exploit a cheap labour supply for commercial gain. Certainly, he was financially stretched and could not afford to indulge in leisurely utopian planning. Nevertheless, Smeathman's vision was very grand indeed, as is clear in part of a letter to Knowles in which he wrote:

It is then very obvious that by a regular *Code of Laws*, a well concerted plan of agriculture, manufactures and commerce, and with little more money than would buy a cargo of slaves, a free commonwealth might be founded, which would be a sanctuary for the oppressed people of colour, and gradually abolish the trade in the human species. In short, if a community of 1 or 2000 persons were to be associated on such principles as constitute the prosperity of civilized nations, such are the fertility of its soil, the value of its products, and the advantages of such an establishment, that it must, with the blessings of the Almighty, increase with a rapidity beyond all example, and in all probability extend its saving influence in 20 or 40 years, wider than even *American Independence*.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Con or Commonwealth? Henry Smeathman and The Black Poor

Few commentators on Henry Smeathman's plan for the Black Poor fail to notice a major contradiction in the historical evidence. Barely one year before his plan was accepted by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, Smeathman was called to testify about the West African environment to a Parliamentary Committee who were examining the possibility of locating a convict settlement on Lemaine (now MacCarthy) island in the River Gambia. In his testimony Smeathman referred to the islands where he had spent much of his four years in Sierra Leone and said:

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<sup>25</sup> Smeathman to Knowles, July 21 1783, reproduced in Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 2, p. 200.

I conceive if two hundred convicts were landed at Bananas reckoned the most healthy part of the Country - one hundred would die in less than a month and that there would not be two people alive in less than six months.<sup>26</sup>

In other areas of his testimony, Smeathman argued that convicts at Lemaine island would die with such rapidity that not one in a hundred would be alive in six months.<sup>27</sup> What was going on? The answer is important because if Smeathman was deliberately misleading the black poor Committee about Sierra Leone, or if they knew about this evidence and did nothing then Peter Fryer's contention that sending two shiploads of black poor to colonise Sierra Leone was a 'palpable trick' is supported by environmental as well as political arguments.<sup>28</sup>

The situation, however, was not as clear cut as this. Smeathman asserted that a key contributing factor to his prediction of high mortality rates was the fact that the convicts would be confined for a long time prior to transportation and would experience a difficult journey to the Gambia. He told the Select Committee what he subsequently emphasised in his *Plan*, viz. 'I saved myself entirely by medical assistance and regimen': that is to say, he thought that with the correct behaviour and knowledge West Africa could be healthy.<sup>29</sup> He also noted that the convicts would be vulnerable to native attack if they misbehaved.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Minutes of A Committee of House of Commons Respecting a Plan for Transporting Felons to the Island of Lee Maine in the River Gambia, May 2 1785, PRO/HO/7/1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 197.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of A Committee of House of Commons Respecting a Plan for Transporting Felons to the Island of Lee Maine in the River Gambia, May 2 1785, PRO/HO/7/1.

My point is that Smeathman's evidence was concerned at least as much with the specific problems of the influence of human behaviour on survival as with that of the environment. His evidence was indicative of classically utopian thought in that it reified place by treating The Gambia and Sierra Leone as almost identical locations, and also in that it emphasised the need for order and discipline within any settlement's intended human population. Rather than producing evidence of a con trick, Smeathman's testimony emphasises the utopian dimension of ideas for African development.

Indeed, it appears that the Committee was won over by Smeathman's enthusiasm for both the environment and his capabilities as a leader. Having decided on Sierra Leone as the location for their settlement, instead of Nova Scotia, it fell upon the Committee's chairman, Jonas Hanway, to urge a Black Poor nervous of settling in slave-trading territory that they would find 'That the fertility of the Coast of Africa ... [was] ... so superior to that of Nova Scotia, as to be incomparably preferable for them.'<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless when Smeathman succumbed in London to fever on July 1 1786 it was only a matter of days before the Committee was exploring the possibility of sending the Black Poor elsewhere. Sites in America, the Bahamas and Gambia were all mooted as a possible location for the new colony.<sup>32</sup> By August 4, Jonas Hanway was once again urging the black poor to move to a safe and salubrious new location, only this time it was in New Brunswick.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> MCRBP, June 7 1786, PRO/T1/632.

<sup>32</sup> MCRBP, July 28 1786, PRO/T1/636.

<sup>33</sup> MCRBP, Aug. 4 1786, PRO/T1/634.

Clearly, the evidence regarding the Committee's true images of Sierra Leone is contradictory. However, the records appear to indicate that having once accepted Smeathman's representations and the plan that went with them, they later became suspicious both of the place and the planner. The Committee retrospectively criticised Smeathman's willingness to purchase slaves, and noted that they did not believe he would keep to his intention not to sell them on. They noted that he had died of fever and therefore questioned his claims to the healthiness of the settlement. His real intentions, the Minutes recorded, 'will be a subject for strong suspicion in the breast of every man concerned as long as they live.'<sup>34</sup> Historians have generally accepted the Committee's own explanation for why Sierra Leone was abandoned at this stage.

Nevertheless some queries need to be raised even if they cannot be properly answered. Firstly, doubts over Smeathman's ambitions and competence need not have led automatically to the search for a new location. The Committee could have appointed a more reliable agent and continued with their plans to settle the blacks in Sierra Leone. To claim as they did that they were suspicious of the environment because it had killed Smeathman was disingenuous because Smeathman had been back in Europe for years. Moreover, as will become clear, there was scarcely an abolitionist involved in Sierra Leone who didn't advocate some form of slave redemption in the colony, so Smeathman's own ideas were far from beyond the pale in this respect.

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<sup>34</sup> MCRBP, Aug. 4 1786, PRO/ TI/634.

Whatever was the case, it is clear that the black poor themselves were inspired by Smeathman's Arcadian representations. Once they had settled on Sierra Leone the blacks were very reluctant to consider any other location and petitioned the Committee accordingly.<sup>35</sup> Stephen Braidwood (in a fuller study of this episode than I have been able to produce here), has demonstrated convincingly that the Committee only eventually agreed to favour Sierra Leone again because the blacks insisted on going there.<sup>36</sup> Once the black poor had ensured that they *would* go to Sierra Leone after all, there was no shortage of utopian images of the African environment in abolitionist circles. One abolitionist had no qualms about making plans for the black poor's enduring happiness in Sierra Leone. That was Granville Sharp, and his antislavery credentials were impeccable.

### 5. Granville Sharp and the Province of Freedom

Granville Sharp was not a member of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor but he was very much a key player in getting the whole project off the ground. He had long been a private financial and legal supporter of individual blacks in London.<sup>37</sup> Sharp's practical commitment to human rights was commensurate with his strong (Anglican) religious belief. He emphasised what he called Natural Law, a concept that relates to the human conscience, and insisted that all men, black and white, had the capacity to understand the natural religion inside them. Alongside Natural Law was revealed religion, specifically the Bible and the Anglican liturgy. Sharp argued that Natural Law and revealed religion provided the source

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<sup>35</sup> MCRBP, July 26 1786. PRO/T1/634.

<sup>36</sup> Braidwood, *Black Poor*, pp. 97-102.

<sup>37</sup> Sharp's legal defence of slaves in Britain climaxed with the case of James Somerset in 1772, as I discussed in Chapter One.



material from which rules or maxims for the construction and management of a just society may be formed.<sup>38</sup> Almost all of Sharp's private and public writing dealt in some way with these issues. For example, his theological and philosophical attachment to principles of equality of origin and opportunity made him an eloquent opponent of the 'wicked Brahminical doctrines' of the racist Jamaican planter Edward Long.<sup>39</sup>

However, we should not assume Sharp to be anything other than a conservative establishment man. He was avowedly anti-Catholic and morally puritanical, and was appalled by any surge of popular power that appeared to him not to be based on the teachings of natural and revealed religion. Sharp had great faith in the libertarian principles he perceived to be enshrined in the English law and the English constitution. His attachment was much more than superficial. In particular, he was obsessed throughout his adult life with the old Anglo-Saxon system of communitarian government known as Frankpledge which I shall discuss in more detail later.

Indeed, it is possible to generalise that Sharp saw Frankpledge as the solution to political, social and cultural problems regardless of time or location. Frankpledge was Sharp's great philosophical constant in all his utopian imaginings, and yet it was to him always an eminently practical subject. Sharp's involvement in Sierra Leone betrayed a longstanding interest in the planning of ideal communities. His personal papers are littered with numerous

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<sup>38</sup> Granville Sharp, *A Short Sketch of Temporary Regulations (until better shall be proposed) for the Intended Settlement on the Grain Coast of Africa, near Sierra Leona*, 3rd. ed., (London, 1788), pp. iv-vii. See also Sharp, 'To the Maroons in the New English Settlement at Sierra Leone, The Address of Granville Sharp', HCM, n.d.

<sup>39</sup> Sharp, *Short Sketch*, p. vii.

detailed variations of plans for new townships in which the geographical layout and distribution of land were meticulously calculated and designed specifically for administration under a system of Frankpledge.<sup>40</sup> Sierra Leone provided him with a practical opportunity to develop these ideas.

#### 5a) Granville Sharp and the African Environment

Sharp was a well-read man. It is likely that his images of the Sierra Leonean environment were informed by the early writings of Malachy Postlethwayt and others, as well as by those of Henry Smeathman. These favourable impressions were reinforced by testimony from some of the Black Poor themselves. In a letter to his brother, dated January 1788, Sharp recalled how he had discussed the suitability of Sierra Leone with some of the potential black settlers. He reported that

Many of them came to consult me about the proposal [Smeathman's] .... I found that several of them had been on the spot; and they assured me that there was much fine wood-land unoccupied in that part of the coast. This account was confirmed to me by several other channels, and more particularly by a young Negro man, a native of Sierra Leone.<sup>41</sup>

Having accepted the suitability of the environment, Sharp proceeded to concentrate on social engineering.

#### 5b) Governing Freedom

Sierra Leone offered Granville Sharp the opportunity to establish a settlement whose

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<sup>40</sup> The numerous plans are stored in the Hardwick Court Muniments at Gloucester Record Office.

<sup>41</sup> Sharp to J. Sharp, Jan. 1788, in Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp* (London, 1820), pp. 260-61.

government was based on the system of Frankpledge. As he wrote to his brother in January 1786:

as the majority of the settlers will probably be African negroes returned from slavery to their native soil, there will be no necessity to form the plan of government by the *constitutional model of England*,.... we may then be at liberty to draw a precedent for government from more ardent and more perfect documents than our Saxon records -- viz, from the Israelitish commonwealth under the Theocracy, purified and improved by the precepts of the Gospel: and the examples of congregational government among the primitive Christians, who decided their own temporal controversies as well as ecclesiastical questions.<sup>42</sup>

So much has been written about Sharp's views of Frankpledge that is not in his own words that it is worth continuing to quote this passage which forms a succinct summary of the key to his proposals for government in the colony.

The Israelitish government elected judges and officers: heads of tens and fifties, hundreds and thousands ... the smaller divisions being included and controlled in the larger, and the individuals of all the divisions being bound to each other, in equal numerical proportions, by the reciprocal ties or alliance of frank-pledge, which our Saxon ancestors, and many savage nations, in some degree maintained, probably from the patriarchal times. For all men are capable of this form of Government; and if it be once properly established, there is no mode of restraining and keeping in order a promiscuous body of men so cheap, so easy, or so effectual.<sup>43</sup>

Sharp may have been appealing for a return to the primitive democratic theocracy of a bygone age, but in many ways this passage can be read as indicative of a classical eighteenth century utopian vision. It clearly signifies Sharp's belief that society had fallen away in corruption from an ideal state. Frankpledge was advocated primarily as a means of keeping order, both within the society and as a defence against threats to it. It clearly idealises, in James Davis' words, 'not man nor nature, but organisation.'<sup>44</sup> Sharp held all men of equal

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 266-67.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>44</sup> see n. 6, above.

intelligence and ability to govern themselves under Frankpledge, and the chance to do this was to him the most perfect of freedoms. Frankpledge was seen as a quintessential system of freedom through security and tight social controls, particularly suited to 'primitive' circumstances.

One of the key responsibilities of settlers to the 'Province of Freedom' under Frankpledge was that of contributing to the defence of the colony via the system of Watch and Ward, (by which male members of the community, grouped in military units under the Frankpledge system, took it in turns to patrol the perimeter of the settlement). Sharp personally funded the expedition which went to the aid of the first settlers. He wrote to the new settlers on board their ship that they should get into the habit of Watch and Ward whilst still on board. He even supplied cloaks and hats for the Watch and Ward officers.<sup>45</sup> The precise environment and location of his settlement was not important, the 'system' was the key to success. Only once in his instructions to the settlers did a specific acknowledgement of the African location slip into his advice. He sent with them instruction for cultivating lemon or lime trees 'using stakes from the trees to form an impenetrable fence as protection against panthers and other wild beasts.'<sup>46</sup> Not even an ancient Israelitish system could protect against an alien African fauna!

### 5c. Land Distribution and Labour in the Province of Freedom

In his proposals for land distribution, Sharp intended to provide the settlers with the

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<sup>45</sup> Sharp, letter To the Worthy Passengers on Board the Myro Brig, May 20, 1788, in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. xxvii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxix.

necessary infrastructure to develop a successful, 'civilized' community. Land was to be provided free of charge. Each householder would receive a lot in town plus a farm, this latter of between 20 and 200 acres according to how far away it was from the settlement. Proportional lots of public land were to be laid out and cultivated by public labour. The produce from these public lots was to be sent to the public exchequer which would provide schools, religious instruction, hospitals, poor relief and salaries for public labourers. An asylum, hospital and penitentiary, all divided into male and female accommodation, were also to be provided.<sup>47</sup> The foundation and upkeep of this community depended on Sharp's system for employing what he regarded as the settlers' biggest asset and greatest duty to the community, the use of their labour.

Labour, Sharp argued, was 'the common lot of man since God's sentence on Adam.'<sup>48</sup> Through it, rights of citizenship in his new community could be maintained, and those wealthy enough not to need to labour were to acknowledge this factor via a novel system of taxation, which Sharp called a 'tax on Pride and Indolence'.<sup>49</sup> Sharp's labour plans, however, were not free from ambiguities. It is no surprise that this quintessential antislavery campaigner banned slavery in the new settlement. He did, however, allow for a system whereby an ex-slave had to work off the price of his freedom by labouring for the public exchequer.<sup>50</sup> In many ways this version of redemption through labour was similar to that of Henry Smeathman's which caused such offence to the humanitarians. Admittedly Sharp advocated labour for the public

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<sup>47</sup> Sharp, *Short Sketch*, pp. 37-53.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

good, whereas under Smeathman's scheme this labour could well be for the profit of an individual, but it is a moot point whether such distinctions would be lost on the redeemed slaves themselves.

Where public labour was not provided by settlers or redeemed slaves it would be provided by Sharp's most utopian idea, that of a public labour tax. Each male over 18 was to provide 62 days labour per annum for public labour. In addition, all contributions to the state and public fines (except felonies) were to be paid in labour.<sup>51</sup> This public labour was to be carefully regulated. Sharp produced a blueprint for a labour indenture complete with the community's motto and peppered with biblical quotations.<sup>52</sup> A day's labour would consist of eight hours' work and would be heralded by the ringing of a bell 'as in our dock yards and great manufactories.' This would prevent abuse of the system by either the employer or the employed.<sup>53</sup>

For a man careful to state that his ideas were only suggestions, and keen to acknowledge the humanity and abilities of the settlers, Sharp nevertheless felt the need to plan every minute of the day for them. Thus:

By the limitation of labour to eight hours per day, the rateable or legal days work (instead of continuing from six in the morning to six in the evening with us) will end at four in the afternoon, including two whole hours for necessary refreshment and rest; unless it should be thought more convenient in general to begin at five in the morning and to work three hours till eight, and then, after resting half an hour at breakfast, to work three hours and a half more till noon, when a moderate and temperate meal, suitable to the heat of the climate, may be rendered more refreshing and healthful to

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the labourer by a general sestoo, or sleeping time, during the meridians heat till half past one.<sup>54</sup>

The day would end at 3 o'clock 'when the evening of the ancients commenced, and the appointed hour of evening sacrifice in the patriarchal times.'<sup>55</sup> Public labour was to be followed by prayer, and Sharp enclosed a selection of prayers suitable for all occasions with his Regulations, most from the Anglican liturgy.<sup>56</sup> Above all, Sharp argued that his system of labour would effectively bind people to serve the interests of the community, saying that 'no individual in *Frankpledge* can resist the united power of a free people.'<sup>57</sup>

In addition to his other ambitions, Sharp expected the colony to be very wealthy. By his own calculations and using his system of a labour tax, he estimated that the settlement would be immensely profitable. Sharp added a fiscal value to his labour system and anticipated increased productivity in the bountiful African environment. He concluded that his system would lead to 'a very great publick revenue.'<sup>58</sup> This assumption that the settlers, having been provided with the perfect form of self-government, would produce 'an incredible accumulation of wealth', was based on Sharp's expectations that his political system was preeminent and that the African environment was every bit as fertile as Smeathman had represented it, a mixture of utopian planning and (false) environmental 'knowledge'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-77.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Sharp's plans are fascinating because they betray an absolute obsession with control and order, but with no apparent plans to impose this order from outside. His political ideas were based on his emotional and theoretical attachment to what he regarded as a divinely inspired system. Frankpledge was both a political system and a transformative reality. Like the holy spirit whose power was so important to evangelical abolitionists, if the demands of Frankpledge were adhered to, righteousness and happiness would follow. In this truly utopian plan Sharp had fetishised his notions of freedom through discipline and reified the other components of any colonisation project, that is to say, the land and the people. Moreover, in one of those confluences of economic and cultural progress that antislavery ideology tended to promote, Sharp also asserted that the most righteous political system would also be the most profitable.

## **6. Utopian Plans?**

Granville Sharp clearly had idealised images of the Sierra Leonean environment, but these cannot be called utopian at this stage because they were based on first-hand accounts of the region. He may be seen to have idealised the ease with which the settlers would fit in with his utopian ideas, but then he had every reason (within his own cultural viewpoint) to imagine that (simply because of the inherent goodness of his ideas), the black poor would both adhere faithfully and gratefully to his rules and also that they would absorb a kind of productive righteousness into their lives. Sharp's plan was clearly obsessed with discipline and social control, but the will to which the settlers were expected to submit was divine in origin and not imposed by Western states or armies. Throughout, Sharp emphasised that the settlers should be free to reject his ideas. His ideas on communal defence and government were fundamentally libertarian and way beyond anything that operated in Europe at the time. Rather



they betray the common evangelical obsession with order and internal cohesiveness, and both responded to and promoted powerful utopian representations of Sierra Leone's physical environment and its colonising population. These representations were to persist within wider abolitionist discourse.

Henry Smeathman's plan was less well structured but also in many respects classically utopian. He too fetishised both the African environment and the importance of behavioural control, although he relied on more prosaic forms of utopian intervention than the transforming power of a divinely ordained system. He was thus vulnerable to similarly prosaic judgements of his practical ideas. Nevertheless, as Philip Curtin points out, Smeathman was the only one of all the utopian planners to envisage a multi-racial 'commonwealth' where black and white people laboured together.

If Smeathman had identified the ideal place for a colony and Sharp had presented its ideal mode of Government, it was the black poor who, having gained access to the utopian vision, insisted that Africa would provide the Arcadian location for their settlement. It was they, however, who were directly to experience life as colonial pioneers, and encounter the practical limits of the utopian imagination. What the black poor did not share was access to the kinds of ideological, cultural and economic hegemony which underlay both Sharp and Smeathman's plans. Both plans were far from the unsullied products of clever imaginations but were cultural productions in themselves. The utopian planners and their supporters were powerful men who had varying degrees of direct authority in Sierra Leonean affairs, and their schemes were meant to be practically implemented.

## 7. Conclusion

Together, these early utopian plans betray a number of abolitionist assumptions about Africa and blacks. Firstly, land was plentiful and easily obtained, Arcadian, undeveloped and simply awaiting the improving hands of benevolence. There was an underlying assumption that the native Africans would either be unable to threaten a new settlement or unwilling to do so once they understood how the new colony's existence would be to their moral and commercial advantage. The colonising group can be seen in terms of what David Brion Davis called the 'fantasy' of grateful ex-slaves who would cheerfully be employed in any 'righteous' scheme that was selected for them. Neither of these schemes could have taken place in Britain. It was the distance, newness and potential for 'purity' which gave these plans their utopian potency. Yet Sharp's plan could have been executed anywhere. It was not tied to specific images of the African environment. The Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor appears to have been singularly uncommitted to an African location for the blacks except when the pragmatic advantages of having a persuasive agent who knew the area were part of the plan. That agent's attachment to Africa seemed to be at least partially tied to the ease with which he felt he could exploit it. The abolitionists were not devoted to Africa as an utopian location, but rather to their philanthropic and commercial ambitions. In the next chapter I examine how they fared when conscience and continent met.

## CHAPTER 5

### Continuing Utopian Visions

#### 1. Disaster and Reappraisal

In April 1787 the transports carrying the first settlers sailed for Sierra Leone. On July 20 a settler named Abraham Elliott wrote a miserable letter to Granville Sharp:

I am sorry, and very sorry indeed to inform you, dear Sir, that this country does not agree with us at all; ... It was really a very great pity we ever came to country [sic] ... for we are settled upon the very worse part. There is not a thing, which is put into the ground, will grow mor [sic] than a foot out of it. We are situated on a very high hill, where nothing will come forth at all. Mr Irwin [the Agent] is dead ... and, what is more surprising the *Natives* die very fast. It is quite a plague seems to reign here among us. I have been dangerously ill myself ... and the first opportunity I have, I shall embark for the West Indies.<sup>1</sup>

On October 31 Sharp passed on the bad news in a letter to his brother. 'I have', he wrote 'had hitherto but melancholy account of my poor little ill thriven swarthy daughter the unfortunate colony of Sierra Leona.'<sup>2</sup>

Sharp looked to three main explanations for the settlement's failure. Firstly was the fact that the expedition landed during the rainy season in an uncleared country.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the intemperance of the colonists, an issue he had specifically warned them about, and, thirdly, the

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Abraham Elliott to Sharp, July 20 1787, in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> G.Sharp to J. Sharp, Oct. 31 1787, HCM.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

failure of the settlers to adhere more widely to his *Regulations*.<sup>4</sup> Sharp amplified these concerns whenever he had the opportunity. In 1788 he wrote to a New York correspondent that the settlers 'had become so besotted [with rum] during the voyage that they were totally unfit for work when they landed, and could hardly be prevailed on to assist in erecting their own huts.'<sup>5</sup> After the destruction of the original settlement, Sharp admonished the remaining settlers that they could well have succeeded if they had maintained order and discipline and constructed proper earthworks around their town.<sup>6</sup>

Although disappointed in the colonists, Sharp remained enchanted by his vision of a fertile, picturesque environment. He consoled himself that the settlers

have purchased 20 miles square of the finest and most beautiful country ... that was ever seen: The hills are not steeper than Shooters Hill, and fine streams of fresh water run down the hill on each side of the new township and in the front is a noble bay, where the river is about 3 leagues wide. The woods and groves are beautiful beyond description and the soil is very fine. So that a little good management, and a prohibition of Rum and Spirits, may (with God's blessing) still produce a thriving settlement.<sup>7</sup>

On the whole then, Sharp remained optimistic.

Indeed, Sharp proved to be remarkably true to his ideas however inauspicious the actual events that were taking place appeared. He was determined that the settlers would

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<sup>4</sup> Sharp to Mrs --- (New York), Jan. 12 1788, in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. 313. Sharp, 'To the worthy British Settlers, late inhabitants of the Territory purchased by the King of Great Britain in Sierra Leona, called the Province of Freedom' in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> Sharp to Mrs ---, *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Sharp, 'To the worthy British Settlers', *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> G. Sharp to J. Sharp, Oct. 31 1787, in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. 313. See also Sharp to his Niece, Jemima, Aug. 8, 1788, HCM.

become cattle farmers and keepers of other livestock. This accorded with his vision of a community operating according to ancient rules of husbandry. Thus, he sent money for the purchase of livestock with his relief expedition, and was bitterly disappointed when the captain declined to buy the stock and gave the settlers promissory notes instead, even though, as Christopher Fyfe points out, this was the most beneficial action.<sup>8</sup> As late as 1800 when the Maroons were starting out in the colony, Sharp was urging them to pay attention to breeding cattle and fowl because 'Men must be Shepherds and Herdsmen, as the first step towards good and profitable husbandry.'<sup>9</sup> Similarly, while he had direct influence on the colony, Sharp always insisted that any prospective settlers agreed to abide by the system of Frankpledge, and he continued to press its benefits on officials from the Sierra Leone Company who took over his ailing Province of Freedom.<sup>10</sup> But that direct influence did not last for long.

## 2. The Sierra Leone Company and Realities of Place

The Sierra Leone Company represented the humanitarians' pragmatic response to the failure of Sharp's utopian vision. When he appealed for investors to help resurrect his colonisation plans, Sharp appears to have envisaged simply a commercial appendix to his self-governing community. This was too visionary for the businessmen who had bailed him out and who had their shareholders to consider.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, although far from a utopian blueprint, the 1791 constitution of the Company was liberal by contemporary English standards. Capital

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<sup>8</sup> Sharp to Pitt, April 26 1790, HCM; Fyfe, *History*, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Sharp, address 'To the Maroons in the New English Settlement at Sierra Leone'. HCM (no date).

<sup>10</sup> Sharp to Z. Macaulay, Feb. 14 1797, New York Historical Society, Granville Sharp Collection.

<sup>11</sup> Walker. *Black Loyalists*, p. 102.

punishment was abolished, and imprisonment for debt restricted. Trial by jury was ensured and at least half of a jury was to be of the same race as the accused.

Constitutionally, however, power was vested entirely in the Company, through a Governor and Council. The constitution also referred to commercial regulations and the responsibilities of the settlers to the government. Whilst the elected offices of Tythingmen and Hundredor survived, they were severely limited in their actual powers.<sup>12</sup> Sharp soon realised also that his *Regulations* were never going to become Company policy. In a letter to a friend he confided that the settlers were no longer proprietors of the land, could not grant it by free vote, nor elect their own governor. He remarked sadly:

I am very sure that such restraints cannot accord with your ideas of perfect liberty and justice. But I could not prevent this humiliating change: the settlement must have remained desolate, if I had not thus far submitted to the opinions of the associated subscribers.<sup>13</sup>

The Company directors initially revelled in the prospect of a large, willing, loyal and Christian black workforce populating their new colony. John Clarkson (the Company's Agent in Canada and later Governor) wrote to Henry Thornton that 'I can positively say that if the settlement should not succeed, it will not be for want of proper people to colonize it.'<sup>14</sup> In addition to these optimistic reports, the first major travel account published from the region praised Sierra Leone's fertility and its commercial and agricultural potential.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Curtin, *Image*, pp. 108-09.

<sup>13</sup> Sharp to anonymous friend, Oct. 5 1791, in Hoare, *Memoirs*, p. 362.

<sup>14</sup> J. Clarkson to H. Thornton, Dec. 1 1791, in Charles B. Ferguson (ed.), *Clarkson's Mission to America 1791-1792*, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, (Halifax, 1971), p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> John Matthews, *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone* (London, 1788).

Without a clear utopian blueprint it was inevitable that the Company would vacillate between several different commercial options. In practice, the ideals of legitimate trade, plantation and smaller-scale commercial agriculture were pursued simultaneously. The initial ambitions of the colony were centred on trade within the colony and with its neighbours. Additionally the directors anticipated a large, secure settlement which would promote profits for its shareholders via quit-rents on land and tax upon produce grown from it. More profit would come from the cultivation or letting of Company land.<sup>16</sup> When slave trade abolition failed to pass through Parliament in 1792 and the Company failed to receive a trading monopoly it was resolved instead to concentrate on plantation agriculture using African labour.<sup>17</sup> However, the only half-way successful plantation was that run on Tasso Island as an adjunct to a neighbouring slave factory and cultivated by slave labour.<sup>18</sup>

With the advent of the Nova Scotians a new emphasis was placed on peasant cultivation. This never took off (in spite of the incentives of agricultural premiums) because of the quit-rent issue. Indeed, the Nova Scotians had their own utopian images of Sierra Leone. Deeply religious, to them it was the promised land, a place where ransomed sinners returned home.<sup>19</sup> It appeared to them that the Company Directors were deliberately spoiling their entitlement to settle and cultivate their own paradise. A feature of Sierra Leone Company rule was the importance placed on behavioural rather than environmental or organisational reasons for the settlement's commercial failure. At times, concern for the colonists' moral welfare

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<sup>16</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report* (Oct. 1791), pp. 52-53.

<sup>17</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> This is a theme which is ably drawn out throughout Walker's *Black Loyalists*.

became almost obsessional. With the arrival of the Nova Scotians it was quickly decided that no more black colonists should be sent from England for fear that their influence would be corruptive.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, white emigration other than of the Company's own personnel was no longer encouraged.<sup>21</sup> A black servant of Granville Sharp's brother was one of those whose petition to join the colony was looked on less favourably as a result of this policy.<sup>22</sup> This time it was the Nova Scotians who were identified as an innocent, oppressed, trainable group of pioneers who were likely to live out their lives in hard work and in gratitude for the Company's intercession on their behalf. Spatially removed from London's black poor, it appears they were thereby more easily idealised. The Company's approach to them betrayed an utopian attachment to notions of purity and the need to preserve it through social control.

In this light then, John Clarkson attempted to protect the settlers from undue influences from Europe, whether in the form of white settlers, black colonists or the dissolute sailors that came ashore in the colony.<sup>23</sup> The arrival in the colony in 1792 of refugees from the Bulama Island experiment gave John Clarkson a good deal of concern. Amongst those seeking rest and refuge in Freetown were 'half pay officers, decayed gentlemen, and dissolute adventurers.' Clarkson forbade the Bulama colonists to stay ashore or settle in Sierra Leone.<sup>24</sup> Later, when the Nova Scotians were proving troublesome, great pains were taken to ensure

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<sup>20</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Sharp to J. Sharp, Nov. 7 1791 and also Jan. 14 1792, HCM.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* See also Diary of Lieutenant Clarkson RN, *Sierra Leone Studies*, 8, (1927), pp. 3,5,6 and 7.

<sup>24</sup> Diary of Lieutenant Clarkson, *Sierra Leone Studies*, p. 3.



that the Maroons would not be overly exposed to their perceived negative influence when they arrived in the colony. Until their timely arrival and assistance to the Government in suppressing the Nova Scotian rebellion, plans were being made to settle the Maroons in an entirely separate district. Again, the aim seemed to be to preserve the purity, or perhaps the pliability, of an incoming population group.<sup>25</sup>

After a few years of Company rule it became clear that the Directors had miscalculated the fertility of the Sierra Leonean environment. In the Company Report of 1794 some of the blame was placed on the slave trader John Mathews for presenting a misleading image of the environment in his influential travel account *A Voyage to Sierra Leone*.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless the Company's representations of the environment were often ambiguous. As late as 1807, when trying to convince Government to take over the colony, Henry Thornton insisted that Sierra Leone contained fine agricultural land.<sup>27</sup>

Like Granville Sharp with the first settlement, however, the blame for failure was placed largely at the door of the colonists and native Africans.<sup>28</sup> Seeking a scapegoat for its

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<sup>25</sup> Council Minutes. Report of Richard Bright on possible locations for the Maroons. Dec. 16, 1799, PRO/CO/270/4. This concern to keep the Maroons separate should be set against Wilberforce's claim that sending them to Sierra Leone would expose them to civilising influences capable of transforming their 'barbarous' natures. See report of debate on the Maroons in *The Times*, Oct. 22, 1796.

<sup>26</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report*, Oct. 1791 p. 12 and pp. 21-26 This was somewhat disingenuous as they had themselves 'confirmed' Mathews' claims of environmental salubrity through their agent Alexander Falconbridge. See *Report*, March 1794, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 132.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37. The local Temne people, fearful of the increasing power of the Company had allied with Nova Scotian rebels in a series of attacks on the colony between 1801 and 1807. Company reports increasingly blamed 'deficiencies' in the Temne and Nova Scotian

economic failure in both trade and agriculture, the Company created an almost entirely negative discourse about settler and native African populations. This, according to Phillip Curtin achieved the double purpose of blaming these two groups for the Company's problems but also of referring back to that 'ultimate scapegoat', the slave trade.<sup>29</sup> Zachary Macaulay wrote home with assessments of the Nova Scotian character which portrayed them as barbarians who were in danger of sliding back into savagery and who wanted to get rid of Company rule in order to monopolise the slave trade themselves.<sup>30</sup> In wider philanthropic circles there was much private bemoaning of the ingratitude of the Nova Scotians to their benefactors.<sup>31</sup>

All in all, the period of Company rule saw expectations of what could be achieved in Sierra Leone shift away from utopian ideals and towards an 'enlightened' cultural imperialism. Henry Thornton included in his final *Report* a valedictory statement that the Company had proved that blacks had the potential to exist on equal terms with whites and would willingly labour in the cultivation of free produce.<sup>32</sup> But the sub-text to his statements suggested that this happy state would be a long time coming.

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characters, their 'greed' and 'misguided' political ambitions (in the Nova Scotian case) for its failure to achieve its commercial and agricultural goals. These complaints formed a key component of Company *Reports* between 1800 and 1807, but began even earlier (although with a more positive slant), for example in Sierra Leone Company, *Account of the Colony of Sierra Leone from its First Establishment in 1793* (London, 1795), pp. 80-82, 86-87, 201-03.

<sup>29</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 137.

<sup>30</sup> Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills (later his wife), Dec. 1 1797, HLZM.

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Thornton to Patty More, Feb. 10 1802, in Henry Thornton, *Diary and Correspondence* (Wigan Public Libraries, Archives).

<sup>32</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report* (1808), p. 15.

Readers of *Company Reports* were familiar with descriptions of settlers as, for example, 'remarkably rash and hasty in their judgements, and vehement in all the dispositions of their mind.'<sup>33</sup> Positive representations of the settlers and natives were more akin to antislavery propaganda which referred to black *potential* rather than current ability. Thus, Thornton wrote in 1795, 'The untoward disposition which too many of them have shewn, though it may be thought to make them less worthy of assistance, proves ... the importance of bestowing on them an intelligent and protecting government.'<sup>34</sup> By the time of the handover to the Crown, these paternalistic statements had hardened into straightforward blame and recrimination. The subtle shift in images of blacks away from the capable and deserving, if pliant protagonists in a radical democracy to the 'vicious', misguided subjects of benevolent paternalism was subtle but important. It was not, however, without criticism.

### 3. Whose Freedom? Carl Wadstrom's Radical Visions

Understandably, the Sierra Leone experiment attracted a great deal of attention, not least from other utopian planners. Amongst these, the supporters of the plantation system in Africa sought to explain the Company's agricultural failure. Philip Beaver, for example, (who was a prominent official in the utopian Bulama island settlement) always maintained that the plantation system was the way forward for both commercial and humanitarian interests but that Sierra Leone was an inappropriate location. He wrote scathingly that 'whenever they make a hogshead of sugar there I will endeavour to do the same at Charing Cross.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report* (March 1794), p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report* (1795), p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Beaver, *African Memoranda* (London, 1805), p. 305.

Carl Wadstrom, author of *An Essay on Colonization* and other works on West African colonies, employed a more sophisticated, radical critique of the Sierra Leone Company.<sup>36</sup>

Wadstrom was a Swedenborgian. As such, he believed in the existence of a free and perfect church and people in the interior of Africa.<sup>37</sup> He was avowedly antislavery in sentiment and had some direct experience of Africa having made a brief voyage to Senegal in 1787 with other Swedenborgians in search of a location for a future colony.<sup>38</sup> Politically and theologically radical, Wadstrom was devoted to the ideal of forming libertarian colonies in West Africa, and before discussing his criticisms of the Sierra Leone scheme it is important to gain some feel for his own utopian ideas.

### 3a) Carl Wadstrom's Utopian Images of Africa.

Carl Wadstrom argued that coined money and capital had created the tyranny of

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<sup>36</sup> Carl Wadstrom, *An Essay on Colonization*, 2 vols. (London, 1794-1795).

See also, Wadstrom, *Observations on the Slave Trade, and a Description of Some Part of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1789) and *Plan for a Free Community upon the Coast of Africa* (London 1789).

<sup>37</sup> Swedenborgian images of Africa are a fascinating (if expansive) area of interest in their own right. Briefly, Emanuel Swedenborg, founder of the church, and ostensibly acting on divine revelation, informed his followers of the existence of a series of 'true churches' founded in parts of the world where men had the most perfect knowledge of God. As each of these churches declined and headed toward last judgement, God prepared a new pure church among the heathen. Late eighteenth-century Swedenborgians looked toward the African interior for the latest true church which was apparently developing in response to the decline of the European Christian church. Swedenborg praised Africans of the interior for leading a more spiritual life and being less corrupt. See Curtin, *Image*, pp. 26. See also, "That the Lord now establishes a Church in Africa," *The New Jerusalem Magazine* (London, 1890), pp. 181-82, and Sten Lindroth, 'Adam Afzelius: A Swedish Botanist in Sierra Leone, 1792-1796', *Sierra Leone Studies*, 1 (new series), (June 1955), p. 196. The latter reference relates to the Sierra Leone Company's botanist, a Swedenborgian whom I shall discuss in greater detail in the section on travel writing in Part 3 of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 16. His travels prompted the publication of *Observations on the Slave Trade*.

economic slavery in Europe. In true enlightened utopian style, he looked to Africa as the ideal place to develop a new society.<sup>39</sup> Wadstrom reasoned that refuge from economic slavery in Europe could be provided by starting a community in the heart of the area where chattel slavery predominated. Like Granville Sharp, Wadstrom idealised both the African environment and the cultural importance of a primitive rural lifestyle. But his agricultural ambitions had a more radical base. He felt that the peasant life, exemplified by multi-skilling in tasks of production, was more rewarding and more conducive to 'intelligent thought' than the emphasis on single tasks that was encouraged by capitalism.<sup>40</sup> This was in direct conflict with, for example, Henry Smeathman's criticism of native agricultural systems, a view which had reflected by far the more prevalent notion of African agriculture. Above all Wadstrom had a deep hatred of traders of all kinds.

### 3b) Wadstrom's Criticisms of the Sierra Leone Company

It was in his *Essay on Colonization* that Wadstrom dealt in most detail with his analysis of Sierra Leone. He was complimentary of Granville Sharp's *Regulations*, and argued that a West African colony should adopt both Frankpledge and the 'Tax on Pride and Indolence'.<sup>41</sup> Wadstrom was less complimentary about the Sierra Leone Company. Politically, he felt that the colonists should be able to vote for the Company's Directors themselves. With only the ability to petition or remonstrate, Wadstrom argued what had long proved to be true, that the colonists were unprotected from a hostile directorate.<sup>42</sup> We have seen that the Sierra

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<sup>39</sup> Wadstrom, *Plan for a Free Community*, p. xi.

<sup>40</sup> Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 1, pp. 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Leone Company had deliberately abandoned any ideas of such radical democracy. Wadstrom's comments served to resurrect the ideal.

Wadstrom was critical of the Company's efforts to establish plantation agriculture. In one of his *Reports* Henry Thornton had claimed that the native labourers who worked on Company plantations had proven that free labour could be successful and that it had a 'civilising' influence on the labourers and surrounding natives.<sup>43</sup> Wadstrom was not convinced that the plantation system had any benefits with regard to 'civilisation'. Indeed, he argued that the plantation system in Sierra Leone smacked of that in the West Indies. He wrote:

I was grieved at observing so much similarity between the system of cultivation adopted, or tried, at Sierra Leona and that practised in the Sugar Islands: and I was surprised that anything like an imitation of that *mercantile system of cultivation* should be tolerated after its oppressive consequences to the unhappy slaves on the sugar estates.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, Wadstrom was unhappy that the Company should employ a 'factory' system of plantation cultivation, involving the repetitive working practices which he so despised and which were uncomfortably reminiscent of slavery. Other elements of the system also reminded him of slavery. For example, Wadstrom argued that the grumettas [free labourers] on the Company plantations were given meals which had been prepared in the manager's house in the same way as slaves' meals were. This, he thought, did not encourage Africans to improve their household economy.<sup>45</sup> Wadstrom also criticised the method of calling labourers to the fields by the blowing of a horn, similar to the shell used in the West Indies.<sup>46</sup> On the Sierra

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<sup>43</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report* (1794).

<sup>44</sup> Wadstrom, *Essay on Colonization*, 1, p. 248.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Leone Company plantations, he noted, labourers worked under the eye of a planter who directed operations. Only the whip, he commented, was missing from the scene.<sup>47</sup>

Wadstrom was particularly critical of the hours of labour demanded on Company plantations. Smeathman had proposed 8 hours labour for weekdays, six on Saturday. The Company, however, required 10 hours per day. Wadstrom argued that under a hot tropical sun this was unfair and did not give enough time to attend to anything other than commercial production.<sup>48</sup> Such longer hours, he thought, were an unnecessary response to an utopian environment. The Creator, he said, had furnished the tropics with 'a profusion of almost spontaneous vegetable food.' Wadstrom therefore assumed that commercial greed must be the motivation behind the Company's plantations rather than 'civilisation'. This greed he saw as detrimental to the greater, humanitarian purpose of the colony.<sup>49</sup>

The final component of Wadstrom's criticism of the Company hinged on its relations with the settlers. He urged the Directors to give serious consideration to the Nova Scotian claims regarding their land rights. Wadstrom went so far as to call for a commission into this issue, and suggested that half of the Committee should be chosen by the Nova Scotians themselves.<sup>50</sup> He also criticised the Company for exporting the settlers from Canada before

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

houses were ready for them.<sup>51</sup> Wadstrom's parting shot recalled the unique role of Sierra Leone as an icon of antislavery ideology. He wrote:

The world will always expect to find this Sierra Leona business unadulterated with any commercial pursuits, which have not a direct tendency to promote the interests and the prosperity of the colony, and consequently the grand end of its establishment.<sup>52</sup>

Wadstrom's was a lone radical voice from within the antislavery movement during the era of the Sierra Leone Company. Not surprisingly, proslavery activists and the right-wing press detested him. At least one British journal identified him with revolutionary Jacobins and denounced him as 'Citizen' Wadstrom.<sup>53</sup> Indeed his views on colonisation were always better received in France than in Britain.<sup>54</sup> Wadstrom's comments comprised a criticism from within Granville Sharp's utopian tradition, and, like Sharp, he too responded to notions of tropical fecundity and fetishised the availability of land and the pliability of native and colonising blacks. His arguments provide an example from within utopian discourse of the continuing negotiation of what was meant by freedom and what were to be the ambitions of 'free' communities in Africa. They indicate how Sierra Leone acted as a site for those negotiations, particularly amongst antislavery sympathisers. This was a debate that continued in private and in public for many years.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266. Wadstrom's complaints about the Directors' failure to provide adequate shelter and provisions directly echoes those in a travel account published in the same year as the *Essay on Colonization*. See, A.M. Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone During the Years 1791--2--3* (London, 1794), 2nd ed. 1802, reprinted 1967. References in this thesis are to the reprint of the second edition, p. 150.

<sup>52</sup> Wadstrom, *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>53</sup> *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 24 (1798), p. 186.

<sup>54</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 114.



#### **4. The Durability of the Utopian Ideal**

So far I have identified some key utopian themes and images which developed within antislavery discourse about Sierra Leone. It is clear that a major utopian theme had developed concerning Sierra Leone's physical environment. Linked to this was the consistent tendency to think of agriculture as potentially hugely profitable and certainly able to support large-scale peasant farming. Other key utopian themes centred on people and government. Clearly, Sierra Leone provided an opportunity to create a more liberal society than that at home. It also presented particular difficulties regarding the management of a large black population and the need to make a commercial profit. Suggestions regarding how these two ambitions could be achieved were numerous. What is more important for our purposes, however, is the clearly emerging tendency to blame human agency for the failure of economic or political policy, and the increasingly racial nature assigned to that blame. The focus of blame for failure on the inadequacy of the human stock was accompanied by a tendency to look to different, supposedly less corrupted, locations as the source of the colony's population, and an allied concern to preserve the 'purity' of the colony from undesirable influences. In what follows I hint at the persistence of these utopian images over time and their attraction to both utopian planners and pragmatic politicians who sought inspiration for how to deal with the colony's changing circumstances.

##### **4a) Freedom by Design: Liberated Africans and Colonial Rule**

The Crown colony's first governor Thomas Perronet Thompson, entertained, as I show in the next chapter, a profound hatred of both the Sierra Leone Company, and the Nova Scotian settlers. He especially loathed the former's policy of apprenticing liberated Africans to

the latter. As a result, his imagination was captured by the possibility of turning the recaptives into a 'free and hardy peasantry.' Agriculture was portrayed by Thompson as the only possible means of ensuring the successful settlement of the recaptives.<sup>55</sup> He proposed that the recaptives should be housed in new settlements surrounding Freetown and the capital kept solely as a port and military base.<sup>56</sup> He suggested that the Nova Scotians should be resettled on an island in the river to remove their corrupting influence on the recaptives, a suggestion which echoed earlier concerns with the purity of the favoured group.<sup>57</sup> Thus 'progress' once again appeared to depend on relocation, in this case only a matter of a few miles rather than across continents, but away from the pernicious influences of Freetown. Thompson's ideas were not new but the notion of an agriculturally productive black population, grateful to be preserved from a less humanitarian fate, living contentedly in an ordered manner went back to the earliest utopian plans.

#### 4b) Parishes in Paradise: Government, Missionaries and Liberated Africans

It was Governor Maxwell who furthered Thompson's policy of settling liberated Africans in villages, and who, along with the Church Missionary society, began another utopian reimagining of Sierra Leone. The Society had caught the imagination of their memberships by setting up a school fund for Sierra Leone whereby an individual subscribed £5 for the maintenance of one child for a year. In return, the subscriber gained the privilege of giving 'their' Liberated African child a name of their choice. Twenty-eight names were

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<sup>55</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Nov. 2 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Nov. 2 1808 and Dec. 31 1808, PRO/CO/267/24. Also, Feb. 8 and March 21 1809, PRO/CO/270/11.

<sup>57</sup> Draft letter from Thompson to Under Secretary Edward Cooke, Nov. 1 1808, BJL.

submitted in 1814 and this figure grew in subsequent years.<sup>58</sup> Maxwell was keen to extend liberated African village settlements and he used the Church Missionary Society's successes as a tool in his bargaining with Westminster. In 1814 the Society was given a land grant on Leicester mountain, outside Freetown, to develop educational and agricultural projects.<sup>59</sup> A colony had been conceived where church and state worked in partnership to support a Christian, civilised peasantry. The image was promoted of a village where heathen Africans became transformed, through the power of acquiring a new name (Wilberforce and Clarkson were popular) and the chance to learn under the paternal care of the missionaries.

Maxwell's successor, Charles MacCarthy embraced the whole idea enthusiastically and refined it into a system of great administrative power and simplicity. MacCarthy's vision was of self-supporting Anglican communities living at little long-term cost to Government. He went further than his predecessor, however, in proposing that the Sierra Leone peninsula should be divided into administrative units along the lines of the English system of parishes. Each parish would have a salaried clergyman and ideally a wife, the latter teaching needlework and other skills. The government's role would be to apprentice liberated African boys as craftsmen to build the necessary infrastructure of roads, schools and churches.<sup>60</sup>

MacCarthy had little trouble getting money out of government for what became increasingly expensive building projects.<sup>61</sup> He established numerous villages, some of which,

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<sup>58</sup> Peterson, *Province of Freedom*, p. 70.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

and the missionaries associated with them, became famous back in England. In particular the Rev. Johnson at the village of Regent was presented in missionary propaganda as the perfect superintendent of recaptives, combining the role of priest, teacher, magistrate and village chief. Thus, in the hills around Freetown, it was claimed that a utopia had been created where an adoring and grateful African congregation clustered around their missionary saviour.<sup>62</sup> The villages and to some extent the images outlived MacCarthy, but the missionary society experienced difficulties in finding recruits to live in the baneful climate, and government soon pulled back from what turned out to be horrifying expenses.

In many ways, Maxwell and MacCarthy's visions were the product of the utopian experiments that had preceded them. They retained an insistence on agriculture as an essential mode of 'civilization' and continued to believe that the African environment was capable of supporting a large settled population. Likewise, MacCarthy's plan reflected a deep attachment to social control through cultural imperialism. It also reflected the increasingly dominant belief that Africans needed an extensive period of tutelage under European supervision in order to make progress in 'civilization'. Moreover, it required a marginalising of the other black groups in the Colony, the Nova Scotians and Maroons, groups which had been obliged to contend with the negative assumptions that had surrounded them since their first encounters with Sierra Leone and its British visionaries.

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<sup>62</sup> This was an image that was strongly promoted in a book about Johnson. M.L. Charlesworth, *Africa's Mountain Valley* (London, 1874).

## 5. The Continuing Search for Rural Idyll

In spite of the intense criticism of Sierra Leone which followed MacCarthy's death (and which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven) the agricultural/pastoral ideal endured. One long-term supporter of this vision was the prominent Quaker William Allen. Allen had been a firm supporter of the black American Paul Cuffee's attempts to develop a cooperative-style trading settlement of American blacks at Sierra Leone.<sup>63</sup> One of the Society of Friends' most eloquent campaigners (and editor of the humanitarian periodical, *The Philanthropist*) Allen was far from a blind follower and proponent of positive propaganda regarding the colony. He spoke out, for example, against government attempts to force the Nova Scotians to comply with a Militia Act in 1814.<sup>64</sup> Allen had his own ideas as to how agricultural communities in Sierra Leone should be organised.

In 1825 Sierra Leone's governor was made aware that William Allen had developed a plan for the 'civilization' of the colony<sup>65</sup> Under Allen's plan, the recaptives were to be given plots of land as inalienable property, plots on which they would grow produce for subsistence alongside crops such as cotton for export.<sup>66</sup> His plan was based on the Mennonite communities of Southern Russia, where families lived on homesteads with their own animals and crops and settled in villages built alongside arterial roads rather than built in a nuclear pattern.<sup>67</sup> In a move reflective of wider Quaker attitudes to the recaptives, Allen insisted that

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<sup>63</sup> Allen to Bathurst, May 27 1815, PRO/CO/267/41.

<sup>64</sup> *Philanthropist*, 14 (1814), pp. 88-91.

<sup>65</sup> Hay to Turner, Sept.30 1825, PRO/CO/268/20.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 167.

they should be instructed in their own languages and Governor Turner was asked to select four native boys in England for the purpose of carrying out this plan.<sup>68</sup> Allen also arranged for agricultural teachers familiar with tropical cultivation to work in his proposed village.<sup>69</sup>

By 1827 a new village had been constructed named Allen Town. Governor Campbell wrote to Allen in March that he had visited the village and seen '30 fine young men of the Ackoo nation each with a lot of ground laid out conformably to your plan.'<sup>70</sup> However, the same letter carried news which Allen may not have welcomed so much. Clearly, he had intended some form of representative democracy in his village. Campbell remarked that he had received 'a number of your papers and plans for the formation of a Committee of males and females in Freetown.'<sup>71</sup> Campbell's letter stressed that such a strategy would be 'impractical' in an infant colony and insisted that all recaptive Africans must remain under the Liberated African superintendent's authority. Other proposals of Allen's relating to the availability of green food and the mode of construction of the houses were also deemed impractical.<sup>72</sup>

Allen's attempts to refine the way in which liberated Africans were settled and to improve their cultural and economic welfare indicated that utopian images of Sierra Leone were still strongly held in philanthropic circles. He also clearly subscribed to Arcadian

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<sup>68</sup> Hay to Turner, Sept. 30 1825. PRO/CO/268/20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Campbell to Allen, March 18 1827, PRO/CO/268/29.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

representations of the environment. But the days for adventurous political experimentation had long gone. There was no room under colonial rule for political visionaries. Nevertheless, government was obviously still receptive to ideas which sought to tie the liberated Africans to the land, and a form of Allen's plan was sent to commissioners Rowan and Wellington for consideration in 1825,<sup>73</sup> Rowan and Wellington were charged with investigating the colony at a time when its image was severely tarnished and government patience regarding its considerable expenses was running out.

It is clear that as Sierra Leone developed after the abolition of the slave trade it continued to reflect persistent utopian images. The schemes suggested for it depended on a productive environment, social cohesiveness among a grateful black workforce, the preservation of an apparently vulnerable human grouping from undue outside influence, and the careful planning and control of their cultural and economic behaviour. However, these persistent utopian elements operated within an increasingly less utopian political framework. When it became clear that the colony was not going to be anything like as profitable as the early planners suggested, the social control element in plans for its development became less linked to idealised ambitions and more geared to the need to create some return for government investment.

This shift may be seen in the fact that Rowan and Wellington also received from the Colonial Office a *Memorandum* which suggested that cultivation in Sierra Leone may be

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<sup>73</sup> Bathurst To Wellington, Nov. 14 1825, PRO/CO/268/23.

promoted along the same lines as in Haiti.<sup>74</sup> The scheme (based on a plan contained in a letter from President Boyer of Haiti to the American Colonization Society) proposed that settlers would be bound by law to work in agriculture in return for free farmland. The author of the *Memorandum* suggested that a similar plan might be feasible in Sierra Leone. He added:

For it must ever be the most important object to promote the creation of wealth, and extension of civilization in Africa, by means of forming habits of agricultural industry among the natives, instead of those habits of occasional exertion, with longer or shorter intervals of comparative idleness or indolence, by which only a small period of time during the year is employed in useful and productive labour.<sup>75</sup>

In this *Memorandum* it is possible to trace the continuation of Henry Smeathman's concern over the apparent unproductivity of native agriculture. The increasingly negative assumptions about blacks and agriculture which had begun with Henry Thornton's reports are also apparent. For example, the Commissioners were asked to consider whether, instead of simply locating recaptives in villages where they only needed to acquire a subsistence, apprenticeship would be more effective in stimulating production of cash crops. The Commissioners were instructed to:

consider generally what means may be devised for securing to the Colony that advantage from their regular industry, which will in some measure repay the mother Country for that outlay of Capital which she employs in ... redeeming them from a state of hopeless slavery -- and you will report whether you conceive that such a plan can be carried into partial effect, without the establishment of some principle of regulated coercion, which will prevent those habits of idleness from an indulgence in which their own good dispositions alone preserve them under the existing laws.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Memorandum Respecting the Mode in Which Articles Having Exchangeable Value in England May Perhaps be Cultivated in Sierra Leone, as is done in Haiti. Enclosed in Bathurst to Rowan and Wellington, Nov. 25 1825, PRO/CO/ 268/23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Additional Instructions to Rowan and Wellington re. Liberated Africans, Jan. 18 1826, PRO/CO/268/23.



In the late 1820s and early 1830s, Government pressure to encourage liberated Africans into productive agriculture became intense. Plantations were started and abandoned and agricultural societies formed and abolished, but to no apparent avail.<sup>77</sup> Many liberated Africans developed successful trading careers. Others trained and served in various professional capacities, but very few lived out white dreams for them. Agricultural ambitions for West Africa were transferred to other areas, in particular the Niger.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the period covered by this thesis, Sierra Leone was no longer thought of as having significant agricultural potential and its liberated African population was seen by Government more as a potential labour force for the West Indies than pioneers of wider colonial ambitions.<sup>79</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Reflecting on the wide range of British utopian projects aimed at West Africa at the end of the eighteenth century, Philip Curtin remarked that 'their outstanding characteristic is the apparent lack of contact with reality, at least with African reality.'<sup>80</sup> I have tried, in focusing on Sierra Leone and extending my analysis into the nineteenth century, to indicate the power of utopian discourse within British individual and institutional responses to the 'realities of place' in the colony. I have also tried to highlight the tension that developed within this discourse, especially amongst those who were to all intents and purposes on the same (humanitarian) 'side'. Utopian imagery persisted in spite, or perhaps because of, increasingly

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<sup>77</sup> See for example Ricketts to Hay, Nov. 20 1828. Governor Ricketts wrote to William Hay with the prospectus of a new agricultural society inviting interested residents in England to take up the remaining shares for a new plantation, PRO/CO/268/10.

<sup>78</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 303.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

negative images of the black groups in the Colony. However, enlightenment ideologies of egalitarianism regarding the colony's black population did not survive in their early radical forms.

The idealism of the early planners was renegotiated partly in response to the resistance to it from black groups. The Black Poor, the Nova Scotians, Maroons and recaptives had their own notions of freedom. They were not a passive, pliable, uniform *tabula rasa* for social experimentation. Indeed, just as the Black Poor had been proactive in their relocation to Africa, it is worth emphasising that the Nova Scotians went willingly and enthusiastically to Africa: it was not simply good fortune that their paths crossed those of the Sierra Leone Company Directors.<sup>81</sup> It is also possible that in establishing liberated African villages, Thomas Perronet Thompson was simply responding to an exodus that was already underway.<sup>82</sup> The stimuli to new modes of planning after the demise of the 'Province of Freedom' were not plucked independently from the thoughts of great philanthropists.

Ultimately, however, and despite the considerable efforts of the blacks themselves and their 'enlightened' 'reasonable' sponsors, the persistent assumption that emerged from the early years of Sierra Leone's history was stereotypically negative. The salient image of the colony in philanthropic circles was of a fertile country inadequately exploited, either for want of appropriate planning or of suitable human 'material'. In wider political discourse, notions of coerced labour, negative representations of black ability, and a world view which valued black

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<sup>81</sup> Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*, p. 178.

<sup>82</sup> Peterson, *Province Of Freedom*, p. 53.

labour for its potential assistance in cultivating tropical produce in British colonies abroad had prevailed over the ambitions of the visionaries, radical planners, and political pragmatists who had responded to the utopian potential which they felt the colony possessed. But things had changed. Blacks could not be carried wholesale from Sierra Leone to the West Indies against their will. They chose not to participate to any significant degree in the emigration scheme and it failed miserably. To some extent at least they were free. It was the precise nature of that freedom that caused debates within antislavery circles, and it is with that debate that I am concerned with in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Utopia Betrayed: Dissonant Voices from within Antislavery

Early plans for Sierra Leone had exemplified the clarity of thought which typified the utopian idealism of the Enlightenment. As time progressed the debate about the potential and importance of Sierra Leone became richer, and the meanings and significance of early ideals and images were muddied and contested. In this and the following chapter I turn to an examination of how these utopian images were renegotiated and trace the development of a hostile, sometimes savage discourse about Sierra Leone and its philanthropic supporters. Of course proslavery campaigners lost no opportunity to present Sierra Leone in a negative light, as I discuss in more detail in the following chapter. However, a significant amount of opposition to the colony, its inhabitants, and its philanthropic supporters came from *within* the field of antislavery opinion and action.

This chapter focuses on Thomas Perronet Thompson and Robert Thorpe, both of whom were employed by government in the colony, the first as Governor, and the second as Chief Justice.<sup>1</sup> As such they were clearly identified with Sierra Leone's antislavery ambitions, and it was these which became the subject of dispute between Thompson, Thorpe and the 'Saints'. Some of the issues engendered by the subsequent debates resonated for decades

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<sup>1</sup>Thompson was governor from 1808 to 1810. Thorpe was appointed Chief Justice in 1808 but only took up his post in 1811 after the colony's Charter had been produced. He was dismissed in 1815.

within antislavery - - for example, debates over apprenticeship, over the best means for developing free labour to suit the needs of Western economies, and over the most appropriate method of 'civilising' a freed slave population.

### **1. 'I Cannot Be a Partner in Their Shame' Thomas Perronet Thompson and the Sierra Leone Company.**

Thomas Perronet Thompson was born into a wealthy Methodist banking family in Hull in 1783. His father was a business colleague and personal and political friend of William Wilberforce. Wilberforce had been impressed by the young Thompson's passion for the antislavery cause and proposed him as the first crown appointed governor of Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup> Wilberforce had unwittingly secured the appointment of one of the nineteenth-century's most dedicated and vitriolic social crusaders to one of the most sensitive positions in the abolitionist's sphere of action. In his long life Thompson progressed from his campaigns against the Sierra Leone company to a military career in the Peninsular War, followed by election to Parliament (where he was a vigorous sympathiser with the Chartists and an Anti-Corn Law Campaigner), and editorship of the *Westminster Review*.<sup>3</sup> If Sierra Leone became a can of worms to the abolitionist cause, it was Wilberforce who gave Thomas Perronet Thompson the tin opener.

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<sup>2</sup> Lionel G. Johnson, *General T. Perronet Thompson* (London, 1957), p. 26; Letter from Wilberforce to Castlereagh, Jan. 19 1808, PRO/CO267/25.

<sup>3</sup> Thompson's *Catechism of the Corn Laws*, became a pivotal text in the Anti-Corn Law campaign. T.P. Thompson, *A Catechism on the Corn Laws* (London, 1827). On his death in 1864, numerous obituaries looked back over his radical political career and traced the beginning of his radicalism to his time in Sierra Leone. For one example see, *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress*, 2, (1847), p. 67.

The 1807 Abolition Act had provided either for the apprenticeship or enlistment of Africans liberated from slave ships. Other than that, specific instructions were lacking. No one really knew how many slaves would be released in the colony, and there were no grand utopian plans for their disposal. Thompson arrived in Sierra Leone in July 1808, having spent his voyage studying Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which he called 'as fitting a subject ... for Sierra Leone as can be devised.'<sup>4</sup> Certainly, it is possible to link Thompson's consistent dedication to free market principles with his most serious dispute with the ex-Sierra Leone Company officials who dominated the African Institution. That dispute centred on the meaning, validity and purpose of the apprenticing of liberated Africans who arrived in Sierra Leone after the slave trade was abolished.

## **2. Redemption or Repression? Conflicts of Interpretation on the Issue of Apprenticeship**

Writing to his future wife Nancy, whilst he was on passage to the colony, Thompson revealed that he had disagreed with ex-Governor Zachary Macaulay about the idea that liberated Africans were to be apprenticed within the Colony. As money was to change hands with each apprenticeship deal, Thompson maintained that Macaulay's 'redemptions' were actually slave sales. Right from the beginning, Thompson was to use the word slavery in place of apprenticeship, sometimes expanding on his reasons and at other times leaving the word to hang like a stained banner over his subject's reputation. His ready conflation of the words 'slavery' and 'apprenticeship' present some difficulties of understanding to the historian. For example, he recorded in his journal a conversation in which ex-governor Dawes told him 'I

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Thompson*, p. 33.

always thought slavery necessary in the colony. I think so still.'<sup>5</sup> It is not easy to verify whether Dawes really used the word slavery or whether this was Thompson twisting the meanings in favour of his argument. If all his observations are taken literally, it would seem that the Company officials were at best careless in their frequent support of slavery. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the surviving evidence does reveal a very real debate about the meaning and usage of the word.

To Thompson, it followed that the individuals who promoted apprenticeship were 'slave dealers', anxious to establish their own 'slave trade'. These images were particularly startling when counterposed against abolitionist propaganda which portrayed an involvement in antislavery as a moral and religious crusade undertaken by virtuous men. As Thompson noted, Wilberforce had advised him that his behaviour must be impeccable because he was assuming the governorship of a colony which by its very existence reflected the noble intentions of the Saints and attracted virtuous servants to its cause.<sup>6</sup> Having decided that the apprenticeship system constituted a kind of slave trade, Thompson was reluctant to share Wilberforce's judgement. Instead, the horrified Claphamites found the new governor campaigning to expose the 'hypocrisy' of some of the Sierra Leone Company officials whom, he alleged, were no more than common slave dealers.

To a large degree Thompson's accusation that the Sierra Leone Company had been involved in slavery and the slave trade is dependent on one of several possible interpretations

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Perronet Thompson, Journal, entry for July 21 1808, BJL.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, Draft letter to Secretary of African Institution, Nov 2. 1808, BJL.

of two events which took place immediately after the passing of the Abolition Act and prior to his arrival in the Colony. In November 1807, the last Sierra Leone company governor, Thomas Ludlam, had freed some Temne youths kidnapped by an American ship at Robana (a town up river from Freetown). The Captain stood trial in the Colony and had his cargo appropriated, including ten slaves. These ten were apprenticed to three Sierra Leone Company employees for a price of \$100 each. This payment went partly towards the fine and partly to the chiefs to prevent them from retaliating against future American ships. In March 1808, Commander Parker of the *Derwent* brought in two prize ships, presumed to be American, with 167 slaves on board. The Abolition Act provided for the ships to be condemned in a Vice Admiralty Court, forfeited to the Crown and for the slaves to be either enlisted or apprenticed, with a bounty being paid for each slave to the captor. Ludlam followed the precedent of the November case and apprenticed most of them to colonists for \$20 per head. Parker received the proceeds.<sup>7</sup> To Thompson such transactions constituted the sale of labourers and therefore were proof that Sierra Leone Company officials had engaged in slave trading.

In addition to these two cases, Thompson began to build up a weight of what he regarded as evidence to back up his claims. Foremost among this evidence were two letters which Thompson found in the Council room when he took over the Governorship. Both were from Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Ludlam and, as we shall see, were to haunt Macaulay for years. I shall quote extensively from them here as they are relevant to much that is to follow. In the first, dated May 1 1807, Macaulay wrote:

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<sup>7</sup> Fyfe, *History*, pp. 105-06.



You somewhat misconceive our ideas in this country on the subject of African slavery. While the Slave Trade lasted I certainly felt very averse to the giving [sic] any direct encouragement to the purchase of slaves with a view to the benefit of their labour for a certain given period. But I always looked forward to the event of the abolition as removing many objections to that system. Indeed I have always been of the opinion that the slave trade being abolished, the most likely means of promoting civilization in that country would be by indenting the natives for a time not exceeding 7 years, or till they attained the age of 21, under regulations which should be well defined and rigidly enforced.<sup>8</sup>

In this example Macaulay himself apparently conflated the meanings of the words 'slavery' and 'apprenticeship'. Of course this may be more startling to a twentieth-century observer than to Macaulay's contemporaries. Moreover, Macaulay's attraction to the idea of long periods of apprenticeship was consistent with many abolitionist attitudes. Nevertheless, this letter provided the colony's enemies with much ammunition.

The second damaging letter, also to Ludlam, was dated November 4 1807 and requested 'a word in private regarding the African Institution.'<sup>9</sup> In it Macaulay passed on his judgement that Castlereagh's secretary was hostile to the African Institution and warned Ludlam to be circumspect in all his correspondence to avoid playing into the hands of 'lukewarm friends' and 'secret enemies'. Towards the end of the letter Macaulay wrote:

I have no doubt that Government will be disposed to adopt almost any plan which we may propose to them with respect to Africa provided we will but save them the trouble of thinking.<sup>10</sup>

This letter provided contemporary critics with evidence of Clapham Sect influence behind the scenes with regard to West African issues, and it implied that Macaulay had attempted a cunning manipulation of government policy. Thompson's own annotations to his private copies

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<sup>8</sup> Annotated copy Letter from Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Ludlam, May 1 1807, BJL.

<sup>9</sup> Annotated copy letter from Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Ludlam, Nov. 4 1807, BJL.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

of these letters interpreted them both as indicating that Sierra Leone Company officials were attempting to gain a monopoly of a new post- abolition slave trade in the Colony. It was an opinion that he did not keep to himself. When he was informed of his recall, Thompson copied the letters to Castlereagh.<sup>11</sup>

Thompson was equally outraged with some of the colonists' attitudes towards their apprentices. His journal recalls some of the incidents which exacerbated his fears about the harm done by apprenticeship. In July 1808 he noted 'The yard full of inhabitants ready to pull me in pieces for grumettas.'<sup>12</sup> Thompson addressed some soon to be apprenticed labourers and informed them they were to be regarded as completely free. A settler who had previously staked a claim to a particular man's labour under Ludlam's old system argued with Thompson, 'He mine, I bought him, gave twenty dollars.'<sup>13</sup> Ludlam countered that the exchange of money for apprentices did not entitle the purchaser to ownership in the same manner as slavery.

Thompson felt that this distinction was lost on the settlers and wrote to Ludlam as follows:

You know well that the people of this country never speak of the natives brought by the Derwent but as their "slaves" "my slave boy", "my slave girl", "the people I bought from the Governor" were the sounds which were to be heard in every corner of the free and happy colony.<sup>14</sup>

On another occasion, while investigating a case of ill treatment of a girl by her master and mistress, Thompson recalled the following exchange:

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Aug. 15 1809, PRO/CO267/25.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, Journal, July 1808. This story found its way into *The Times* via the *Sierra Leone Gazette* on Oct. 6 1808.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Thompson to Ludlam, Aug. 29 1808, PRO/CO/267/25

The husband pleaded hard that he had a right to do what he pleased with what was his own, and that he had paid money for the girl. Asked him if he did not know that no purchase could give him any claim to her in this colony. The man replied with an affectation of astonishment 'O [sic] Sir I did not buy her, I redeemed her.'<sup>15</sup>

Thompson concluded 'God forgive the blockhead who invented these redemptions.'<sup>16</sup>

As a free trade disciple, Thompson believed that apprenticeship was culturally and economically inappropriate in Sierra Leone and was appalled at the degree of financial support its inhabitants received. In his journal, he recorded that the Maroons had complained at the lack of public works available, and added that, 'Everything in this colony is artificial, the people expect to be supported, and wonder the Governor does not build pyramids to keep them in pay.'<sup>17</sup> Thompson loathed the fact that so many settlers were engaged in trade and argued that employing settlers and liberated Africans in anything other than agriculture would be ruinous. He insisted that the Sierra Leone Company had deliberately repressed cultivation by controlling land and labour and by promoting apprenticeship, even though there would be more than enough demand for free labour if the colony operated under free market principles. He warned Castlereagh that

If the agents of the Sierra Leone Company have represented to your Lordship that there is any necessity for indentures ... within this colony, they are either culpably ignorant or wilfully false. There is a perfect famine of labourers for the cultivation of ground in this colony.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Thompson, *Journal*, entry for Aug. 2 1808.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Draft letter from Thompson to Castlereagh, Aug. 1808, B.J.L.

Thompson contrasted his vision of an agricultural community employing free labour against the expenses of maintaining liberated Africans (he called them slaves) at Government expense. Furthermore, apprenticeship did not, in Thompson's opinion, add anything to the pool of skills available in the colony. 'Apprenticeship, my Lord, implies instruction but the native labourers are as expert as their masters in everything relating to cultivation.'<sup>19</sup> By attracting free labour 'from all quarters' and vigorously resisting all semblance of slavery and apprenticeship, Sierra Leone would become 'the Rome of Africa.'<sup>20</sup> The English Law was acknowledged in Sierra Leone and with the addition of freedom of labour 'nothing can stop us.'<sup>21</sup> He argued that the only obstacle to success was the self interest of the Sierra Leone Company, who had given the misleading impression that they were investing in agriculture.

Thompson's representations of Company officials as slave traders extended further than reporting his interpretation of the events and their implications. It had long been a feature of antislavery propaganda to portray slave traders as immoral, greedy, unscrupulous, licentious and corrupting. The well-bred young Methodist found plenty of evidence of the behaviour of Company servants in the Colony which fitted his interpretation of them as slave traders by nature as well as by name. In particular he resurrected the case of Anne Morgan, a Nova Scotian Woman who, as Anne Edmonds, before her marriage to a Maroon man, gave birth to a mixed race child in August 1807. Thompson argued that this was the third illegitimate 'mulatto' child born within her family. The baby, it had been alleged, was immediately taken away and killed, although in the subsequent murder trial, the case against

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<sup>19</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Nov 2 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>20</sup> Draft letter from Thompson to Castlereagh, Nov. 2 1808, B.J.L.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

the mother was dismissed for lack of evidence. Ludlam and Dawes encouraged her subsequent marriage and attended her wedding.<sup>22</sup>

Thompson announced the reopening of the case in church, whereupon Morgan left, comforted by Dawes and Ludlam. In the new trial she was convicted and sentenced to death, although Thompson commuted the sentence to banishment after she had been brought to the gallows.<sup>23</sup> After Thompson's recall she received a full pardon from Governor Columbine and Ludlam and Dawes were cleared of all suspicion.<sup>24</sup> The trial did, however, serve to highlight the ease of affiliation between European officials and settler women and gave Thompson many opportunities to condemn the morality of Company officials, a condemnation that fitted well with their new found status as slave-traders.

### **3. 'This Treasonable Spirit': Thomas Perronet Thompson's Representations of Blacks in Sierra Leone**

So far I have concentrated on Thompson's accusations of self interest and malpractice in relation to Sierra Leone Company officials. It was not just the white community that

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<sup>22</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, pp. 272-74.

<sup>23</sup> PRO/CO/270/10 April 3 1809.

<sup>24</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, p. 274. Columbine's personal diary (kept at the University of Illinois at Chicago) recorded a quite different version of events than that promoted by Thompson. Edmonds was apparently pregnant by the colonial surgeon, a Mr. Robson, who insisted on inducing a miscarriage. When Edmonds refused, Robson apparently aborted the foetus himself after she had suffered a 'fainting fit' at his house. Robson was dismissed from the service but Ludlam was unable to prosecute because of a lack of hard evidence. A murdered baby was found near her home but it was too well grown to be that of Edmonds. Columbine thought that one of the reasons for Thompson's hostility toward Edmonds was that he was excluded from those members of white colonial society (including Ludlam and Dawes) who were invited to her wedding. Columbine, Journal, March 8 1810, UIC.

provoked hostility in the new Governor however. Thompson clearly objected to the relationships (both professional and personal) which had developed between Europeans and Nova Scotians. He felt that the Nova Scotians symbolised all that was bad in American republicanism, describing them as 'in the highest degree disaffected to His Majesty's Government and the interests of Great Britain, being composed of the runaway slaves of American masters, and full of every species of ignorant enthusiasm and republican frenzy'.<sup>25</sup> He was critical of the materialism they displayed in building ostentatious homes and indignant at their appropriation of European dress, arguing that it was 'utterly unnecessary for the well-being of labouring persons in this country'.<sup>26</sup>

Thompson changed the name of Freetown to George Town on the basis that the former smacked too much of republicanism and abolished the 'republican' currency of dollars and cents.<sup>27</sup> He reduced the scale of the public works on which many Nova Scotians were dependent and paid them less.<sup>28</sup> As I have shown in Chapter Five, his hopes lay with the liberated Africans. Indeed he pursued his policy of relocating them in rural villages even, or perhaps especially, after he had received private intimation from Wilberforce that he was to be recalled. In May 1809 he wrote home:

The ancient regime are astonished to see me proceeding as if I had the Government as an annuity for life. Since the news of going home I have manufactured the foundations of three new towns, to their exceeding great annoy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Dec. 31 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> 'Bill' Nov. 11 1808, PRO/CO/270/10.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson to Nancy (his fiancée) May 17 1809, BJL.

As a military man, Thompson admired the Maroons and fostered their loyalty by appointing them over Nova Scotians to many official posts and favouring them as masters and mistresses for liberated African apprentices.<sup>30</sup> He contrasted his opinions of the two groups, describing the Maroons as:

fearless, headstrong, violent and sometimes furious but always disposed to answer fairly and reasonably to a reasonable question, honest, undisguised, vigorous though hasty in his conceptions, a savage half reclaimed, the Spartan of Africa.<sup>31</sup>

The Nova Scotian on the other hand was:

vain, loquacious, full of the idea of his own importance, insidious, fawning and suspicious, with all the vices of civilization and none of the greatness of the savage, an Athenian in everything except his knowledge and his virtues.<sup>32</sup>

Hostility between governor and Nova Scotians came to a head over a new Militia Act under which a new, conscripted, African Brigade was formed which replaced the previous salaried and Nova-Scotian dominated Volunteer Corps. The Nova Scotians objected strongly to the Act, but Thompson ranged the whites, Maroons and liberated Africans against them and forced them to comply with its terms. Whilst Thompsons' objections to the Nova Scotians were not obviously on the grounds of their blackness (but their 'republicanism' and their unwillingness to labour in agriculture), the Militia Act nevertheless reopened racial divisions that had been absent from the colony for years.<sup>33</sup>

Native blacks also suffered Thompson's wrath because of their linkages with the Sierra

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<sup>30</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, p. 277.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Nov. 2 1808. PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Walker, *Black Loyalists*, pp. 261-63.

Leone Company. A native king, Tirama, had long been in the habit of collecting dues from the Sierra Leone Company which allowed British vessels to claim watering rights.<sup>34</sup> Thompson described Tirama's visit to him to continue the arrangement in one of his despatches to Castlereagh:

A few days since I was honoured by a visit from one of those miserable puppets who for their imbecility and incapability of resistance are in general selected by the cunning of the leading men among the natives to hold the nominal office of a chieftain and whom the interested views of slave dealers or others deck in all the cast off finery of the footmen of their grandfathers.<sup>35</sup>

Thompson proposed to cancel the payment of the dues and to charge it to the Sierra Leone Company if they had not made government aware of the expense previously.<sup>36</sup> Henry Thornton responded with copies of the original agreement between King Tirama and the Company.<sup>37</sup>

Having established that the Sierra Leone Company officials were his enemies, it became Thompson's absolute priority to expose their 'treachery' at any opportunity. Accordingly when the captain of a slave vessel that was anchored in Freetown requested his assistance with some mutineers, Thompson wrote to him with numerous complaints about the Sierra Leone Company, including the accusation that they had never intended to encourage cultivation or to repress slavery. Thompson urged the captain to inform his friends in the West Indies of his accusations against the Company, which no doubt he was delighted to do.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Henry Thornton to Castlereagh, Aug. 18 1808, PRO/ CO/267/24.

<sup>35</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Aug. 8 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Henry Thornton to Castlereagh, Aug. 18 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

<sup>38</sup> Thompson, draft letter to unnamed captain of slaving vessel, n.d., B JL.



#### 4. The Saints Respond: Abolitionist reactions to Thomas Perronet Thompson.

The Claphamites were generally restrained in their individual correspondence with the wayward Governor. In his official capacity, Thornton chided Thompson that he had behaved precipitously for a Governor in such a sensitive position, but agreed that Ludlam was technically wrong to take money for apprentices, though he maintained that powerful mitigating circumstances existed.<sup>39</sup> Wilberforce wrote more often, genuinely hurt at the hostility of his protégé to his allies in the antislavery cause. He was clearly anxious to find out what really *had* been going on in Sierra Leone and asked for more details on Thompson's charges against Ludlam. At the same time, Wilberforce implored Thompson to 'retreat to his closet' and meditate that those who had opposed him might in fact have been correct.<sup>40</sup>

Having secured Thompson's recall, the Saints regained control of the situation, installing a new Governor, Columbine, to undo everything Thompson had attempted. At home, they prevaricated about meeting the ex-Governor and proved totally disinclined to discuss Sierra Leone with him.<sup>41</sup> In an effort to keep the issue alive, Thompson wrote to Lord Liverpool in December 1810 with an account of his time in the colony, emphasising that he had spent his own money on his attempts to improve it.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that Thompson would have liked to publish his accusations. Among his papers is an incomplete and unpublished account of his time in Sierra Leone which was nevertheless laid out as if intended for

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Thornton (from Sierra Leone Office) to Thompson, Oct. 20 1808, BJJ.

<sup>40</sup> Wilberforce to Thompson, Nov. 7 1800, BJJ.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *Thompson*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson to Liverpool, Dec. 13 1810, BJJ.

publication.<sup>43</sup> In a letter written at the end of 1810 to a friend about to embark for the Coast of Africa, Thompson bemoaned the fact that his hands had been tied. He could not publish against the Company while waiting for a discussion on the situation, but this was constantly avoided.<sup>44</sup> The Saints' strategy had effectively kept him quiet. As Thompson wrote to his anonymous friend, 'if I do not stir, it is because I have not the power to stir.'<sup>45</sup>

Certainly, his accusations did not damage the immediate future of Sierra Leone or the influence of its important benefactors. By 1812, Wilberforce was satisfied that the colony would not be the subject of a hostile parliamentary investigation and made an overture to renew his friendship with Thompson. Thompson responded positively, although he maintained that his opinions had not changed.<sup>46</sup> In his letter to his friend leaving for the Coast, Thompson had expressed doubts as to whether the British public would be interested in the Colony's scandals.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly enough, the probable recipient of this letter was Robert Thorpe, the new Chief Justice for Sierra Leone who was about to sail for the Colony.<sup>48</sup> It was Robert Thorpe who established with some certainty that the public would indeed be interested in the scandals of Britain's most important experiment with antislavery principles.

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<sup>43</sup> Thompson, *Narrative of Facts Connected with the Colony of Sierra Leone*, BJL.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, letter to a friend about to embark for the Coast of Africa, Dec. 30 1810, BJL.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Wilberforce to Charles Thompson, Aug. 1 1812. Charles Thompson to Wilberforce, Aug. 7 1812, BJL.

<sup>47</sup> Thompson, letter 'to a friend about to embark for the Coast of Africa', Dec. 30 1810.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *Thompson*, pp. 66-67.

## 5. Calamitous Accounts: Robert Thorpe and the Theme of Failure

Robert Thorpe became Chief Justice of Sierra Leone in 1808, having been removed from a similar post in Upper Canada (where he had become embroiled in party disputes and where he had behaved generally 'with violence and indiscretion').<sup>49</sup> Due to debates and delays regarding the production of a Charter for the new colony, Thorpe did not take up his post in Freetown until July 1811. Sierra Leone was then living through exciting times. 1811 also saw the passing of the Slave Felony Act which provided that British slave traders and foreign slavers trading on British territory were punishable with transportation. Governor Maxwell (with whom Thorpe was initially friendly) used the act as an opportunity to raid the Isles de Loss and captured two slave traders, one of whom was convicted but later released because of doubts about whether the Isles de Loss were British territory.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless other raids followed, including one in the Rio Pongas resulting in more convictions that were later overturned.<sup>51</sup>

Thorpe and Maxwell's friendship was short lived, and open hostility soon surfaced. Thorpe complained of abuses in the colony and eventually Maxwell sought and gained Thorpe's dismissal from his post.<sup>52</sup> Thorpe responded with an outspoken attack on the colony contained in a *Letter to William Wilberforce* which reached four editions in the year of its publication, 1815.<sup>53</sup> With this he began a pamphlet war which embraced himself, the African

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<sup>49</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 115.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Robert Thorpe, *A Letter to William Wilberforce* (London, 1815).

Institution, and Zachary Macaulay. It is with the contents of these literary missiles that I am concerned here. I shall also examine the wider impact of the debate between Thorpe and his enemies on public images of the colony and on the reputation of some of the key members of the antislavery campaign.

Robert Thorpe's *Letter to William Wilberforce* contained a two-pronged attack on both the Sierra Leone Company and the African Institution. The attack on the Sierra Leone Company began with a reference to the Company's Report of 1794 in which they stated their aims as being to encourage trade, promote cultivation, advance 'civilization', diffuse morality in a wider context, and of course, to forbid its servants to have anything to do with the slave trade.<sup>54</sup> In all these, Thorpe argued, the Company had failed. Specifically, Thorpe included among his allegations the failure of the Company to allocate to the Nova Scotians their full land grants.<sup>55</sup> He also argued that the Company had failed to cultivate cash crops to which the environment was suited, and had made only half-hearted attempts at exploration and education.<sup>56</sup> Thorpe reiterated Thompson's allegations of Company encouragement of slavery and internal slave trading, and repeated his claims that enlistment and apprenticeship were both forms of permanent slavery. Thorpe reproduced Macaulay's careless letter which began 'You somewhat misconceive our ideas in this country on the subject of African slavery ...' as proof that this internal slave trade was deliberate and premeditated.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 31.

Thorpe also accused the Company of dumping the failed colony onto government in order to relieve themselves of the cost of its administration. Nevertheless, he argued, Sierra Leone Company officials had sought to maintain their influence over the colony via the African Institution. Ludlam and Dawes had been secured new posts as Commissioners of Enquiry into the state of the West African settlements.<sup>58</sup> Zachary Macaulay came in for particular criticism. Thorpe claimed that he had effective control of Sierra Leone's commercial life via his merchant house, Macaulay and Babington. Macaulay had, he argued, instituted a system of premiums for agriculture without giving proper encouragement to settler involvement in farming, and then claimed the premium for rice for himself.<sup>59</sup> Quoting Macaulay's cautionary letter to Ludlam in which he proposed to 'save them [the government] the trouble of thinking', Thorpe portrayed Macaulay as a devious manipulator of philanthropic sentiment for private gain.<sup>60</sup>

The African Institution was accused of similar failures to those of the Sierra Leone Company in agriculture, education and exploration. For example, Thorpe suggested that Paul Cuffee, the American Quaker whose attempts to develop trade between Britain, America and Sierra Leone had been lauded by the Institution, was himself unhappy with the depraved state of the colony.<sup>61</sup> Thorpe's particular wrath however, was reserved for Governor Maxwell, and the destruction of slave factories in the Rio Pongas and Rio Nunez. He portrayed the raids as

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the illegal action of a bounty-hungry Governor.<sup>62</sup> This latter allegation was redolent of a much earlier complaint that the *Edinburgh Review* had levelled against himself.<sup>63</sup>

Thorpe was highly critical of the treatment of liberated Africans in Sierra Leone and contrasted his criticisms against African Institution claims of progress on this subject. He was particularly opposed to the system of signing up liberated Africans into the African Corps and into the West India Regiments, without, he said, their understanding the implications of enlisting. The recaptive women were, he argued, prone to exploitation by both black and white men. He also exposed the lack of adequate returns about the destination of liberated Africans. Like Thompson, Thorpe insisted that the most expedient means of dealing with the influx of captives was to establish them in agricultural village communities.<sup>64</sup>

## 6. Responses and Counter-Responses

The response to Thorpe's accusations was swift and came from two sources. The Directors of the African Institution produced a *Special Report* in response to Thorpe's *Letter*, and Zachary Macaulay hurried to his own defence with his *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester* in which he attempted to deal with Thorpe's attacks on himself.<sup>65</sup> The African Institution's

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Trials of the Slave-Traders', in *Edinburgh Review*, 21 (1813), pp. 73-93.

<sup>64</sup> Thorpe, *Letter to Wilberforce*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>65</sup> *Special Report of the African Institution* (London, 1815). Z. Macaulay, *A Letter to His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester* (London, 1815). The African Institution *Special Report* may also have been written by Zachary Macaulay. On April 20 1815 he wrote to Hannah More, 'I have answered Thorpe, tis true, as far as respects his personal charges ... I have also prepared a vindication of dear Henry Thornton and the Sierra Leone Company and the African Institution from the first moment of their existence.' HLZM.

defence of themselves focussed on the reputations of its members and their high status with government. The *Report* attempted to place Sierra Leone's failure in the context of the continuing slave trade, hostile attacks, the initial unhealthiness of the settlement and a lack of funds.<sup>66</sup>

Most of the blame for the failures of the Company which Thorpe had identified were laid firmly at the door of the Nova Scotians, who, it was claimed, were prone 'to indulge in trivial and unreasonable complaints.'<sup>67</sup> According to the *Special Report* 'The grand impediment which, from first to last, obstructed the views of the Company and of their agents, in respect to the cultivation of the soil, was the indolence of the Settlers, and their indisposition to this species of employment.'<sup>68</sup> Settler insubordination had also retarded attempts at 'civilization'.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the *Report* argued, in an attempt to shift some of the blame on their enemies, that the Colony had an appearance of prosperity when Thompson arrived.<sup>70</sup>

The greater part of the *Special Report* was concerned with accusations against the Sierra Leone Company that focussed on the issue of slave trading. The *Report* went into some detail of the events leading up to the first capture of a slaving vessel (before the *Derwent*

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<sup>66</sup> *Special Report*, pp. 8, 59.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

case) and Ludlam's decision to apprentice the slaves onboard.<sup>71</sup> Apprenticeship was defended on the basis that

They exchanged slavery through life, for a servitude which scarcely extended beyond their non-age; the cruel bondage of America or the West Indies, for an apprenticeship of the same nature with that to which free children are liable in England.<sup>72</sup>

The payments to local chiefs were defended as 'in the strictest sense of the word, a redemption of natives of Africa out of slavery to be made free.'<sup>73</sup> With regard to the *Derwent* case the *Report* emphasised that in charging twenty dollars per head for his apprentices Ludlam's main objective was 'not to reward the captors ... but to select the masters.'<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless the *Report* did concede what several members of the African Institution had admitted privately that 'unquestionably, there are solid objections on the score of irregularity and inexpediency; although it is a gross and palpable misrepresentation to call it a sale of slaves.'<sup>75</sup>

Thorpe had accused Wilberforce of not being hostile to slavery itself but only to the slave trade. The *Report* countered:

Mr. Wilberforce, in common with all the most distinguished advocates of the Abolition, is anxious to shew, that a mere cessation of the importation of Slaves cannot occasion those dangers which might justly be apprehended from the sudden emancipation of men, most of whom must be destitute of those habits which are necessary for enabling them to act with propriety as freemen.<sup>76</sup>

The *Report* then added that abolitionists remained convinced that the end of the slave trade

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-45.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.



would tend eventually to emancipation in the colonies.<sup>77</sup> Thus the *Special Report* was, in part, an attempt to reestablish the integrity of Sierra Leone as an honorable enterprise which would ultimately tend to fulfil the beneficent aims of ridding Africa of slavery. It also reflected the wider trend within antislavery to distinguish between slave-trade abolition and slave emancipation and in so doing to resist accusations that their policies fomented disorder and unrest.

### 7. Unfriendly Views and Low Purposes? Zachary Macaulay's Response

In his *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester* Zachary Macaulay emphasised his long and consistent involvement as a respected advisor to Government on Sierra Leonean issues.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, he denied that he had a monopoly of trade and maintained that he had every right to conduct his profession as a merchant.<sup>79</sup> The bulk of Macaulay's *Letter* comprised an attempt to clear himself from the implications that he was insincere in his antislavery sentiments, particularly in the light of the publication by Thorpe of his letter to Ludlam (a letter which had opened with the words 'You somewhat misunderstand our opinions on the subject of Africa slavery). He noted that Thorpe had omitted to reproduce the final paragraph of this letter which made clear that he (Macaulay) envisaged a five-year limit to the term of apprenticeship.<sup>80</sup> He also noted wryly that whereas a system of apprenticeship in the West Indies would most likely be hailed by abolitionists as a triumph for rationality and freedom, his proposals were stigmatized as cruel and hypocritical 'when applied to the Slaves of African

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>78</sup> Z. Macaulay, *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

chieftains.<sup>81</sup>

Macaulay also reminded his readers that Granville Sharp had advocated a policy of slave redemption in his *Short Sketch of Temporary Regulations*. He insisted that he had himself always resisted Sharp's redemption plan until the slave trade was abolished.<sup>82</sup> 'I am only desirous', he wrote, 'of shewing that I am not fairly chargeable with unfriendly views towards Africa, or with any low and sordid purpose, in having mooted this great question.'<sup>83</sup> In order to support this stance he appended to the *Letter* his own plan for apprenticeship in the colony in the form of a *Memoir* to the Court of Directors of the African Institution. Macaulay insisted that the *Memoir* showed he had no sinister motives in advocating apprenticeship.<sup>84</sup>

The *Memoir* provided an interesting reflection of how the antislavery movement approached and debated within itself the issues of free labour and the development of African resources, as well as how it explored more general images of Sierra Leone. In it, Macaulay explained how he felt that the lack of a large enough population had retarded the progress of 'civilization' in the colony.<sup>85</sup> To rectify this problem, he had urged the Directors to consider a large influx of native colonists into the settlement. Free native labourers (such as the Kroomen) tended not to want to settle permanently in the colony, the main obstacle being their

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, pp. 1-2.

'superstitions' and attachment to their native areas.<sup>86</sup> He seems to have underestimated the influx of liberated Africans into the colony, saying that 'It may prove considerable, but at the same time it may, and it is to be hoped will, prove very insignificant.'<sup>87</sup> In this case the ransoming of Africans by colonists was the most favourable way of increasing the population of the settlement, although with numerous restrictions on the terms of the apprenticeship.<sup>88</sup> Macaulay clearly had every hope that Britain's abolition of the slave trade would be so devastating to the traders that it would stop almost instantly. He envisaged Sierra Leone being worked by native labourers who had been ransomed in local deals, and not by those from other parts of Africa who had been recaptured on the high seas.

Macaulay was aware that an outcry would be caused 'if the same persons who have been instrumental in effecting the abolition of the Slave Trade should sanction a plan which might be confounded with that trade.'<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, he maintained that apprenticeship was vastly different from slavery. He had also anticipated the objection that his plan would be perceived only as one for the purchase of workers, but argued that constraint of labour under apprenticeship was necessary even in Britain.<sup>90</sup> Macaulay added that it would be outside of the province of the Institution to hold indentured servants or to authorise others to hold them, but he urged the Directors to consider his wider plan which would encourage the use of

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 204.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 14.

'ransomed' labour in the colony.<sup>91</sup>

The *Memoir* showed that Macaulay was acutely aware that public responses to the images that abolitionists presented on key issues were important to the success of any policy which they attempted. The fact that the Directors did not implement his plan suggests that they too were concerned about how their actions may be perceived. Macaulay was, after all, only extending the application of ideas which were older than the colony itself. In the context of defending his reputation, what this *Memoir* showed was that Macaulay gave a lot of thought to African issues. It did not of itself vindicate him from Thorpe's specific allegations and if anything, given the subtleties of the arguments he used, may have served to muddy his reputation and the slavery/apprenticeship waters even further.

In order to defend himself from the charges of scheming and attempted manipulation of government opinion, Macaulay published a letter which the former Governor Ludlam had written to him soon after the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>92</sup> Macaulay argued that in publishing the letter he could prove that he had been correct to caution Ludlam to be careful how and to whom he conveyed his opinions.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Ludlam's letter was openly hostile to current policy in Sierra Leone. It was perhaps extraordinary that a former Governor of Sierra Leone, in order to answer charges brought against him by a Chief Justice of the colony, published a letter deeply damaging to the reputation of another former Governor (and one which revealed

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix, p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> T. Ludlam, 'Letter to Zachary Macaulay, April 14, 1807' in Z. Macaulay, *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester*, Appendix, pp. 48-57.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

considerable doubts and tensions within antislavery about the efficacious effects of the abolition of the slave trade).

Abolition, Ludlam argued in his letter, would not of itself civilize Africa. Africans were savage and abolishing the slave trade would not change this.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, he argued, the writings of the abolitionists tended to contradict this 'truth' through their assertion that Europe had kept Africa in 'darkness' and that Africa would have been 'civilized' without the slave trade. Ludlam wrote: 'They say not this in direct terms; to do so would sufficiently expose the absurdity; but it is an obvious, and sometimes an unavoidable, conclusion from what they say.'<sup>95</sup> Ludlam was less optimistic than Macaulay about the effects of abolition on the slave trade. It was possible, he argued, that the trade would be re-established with the consent of abolitionists if its abandonment did not have the desired effect on African 'civilization'.<sup>96</sup> Ludlam maintained that post-abolition administration of African government and justice, no longer possible in the context of the slave trade, would have to be maintained by blood and violence. Africans' taste for European commodities would diminish and they would return to fighting with bows and arrows and to making cloth.<sup>97</sup> This kind of degeneracy theory was, of course, a common humanitarian monogenist explanation for African 'barbarism'. In the wider political arena, Ludlam predicted that French influence would return to the coast, and the smuggling of slaves would thereby increase.<sup>98</sup> Sierra Leone was

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Ludlam to Macaulay in Z. Macaulay, *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester*, p. 48.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

certain to be the victim of new native attacks which would serve to retard the colony's progress in cultivation. Ludlam concluded:

If this place be alternately pampered and neglected, according to the fluctuating politics of different administrations;- if unprincipled men be sent out to make a fortune, partly by oppressing the people, partly by fleecing the public;- if we be allowed to remain so weak, and the influence of the Government so low, as occasionally to revive the hopes of our foreign and domestic enemies; it is evident that the money and livés that have been, and may hereafter be, spent upon the Colony, will be wasted in vain.<sup>99</sup>

This was a letter that raised more questions than it answered about the effectiveness of the colony and the integrity of its officials. Macaulay had more reason to suppress it than publish it. In wider terms it indicated the lack of homogeneity in abolitionist circles about the likely effects of the abolition and betrayed a deeply negative understanding of African ability and culture. From the point of view of the broader purpose of this thesis in examining the impact of Sierra Leone on thinking about abolition within the antislavery movement, Ludlam's letter is a fascinating addition to an already complex discourse.

Robert Thorpe did not make as much capital as he might have from Macaulay's *Memoir* and Ludlam's 'letter'. Nevertheless he did reply to both Macaulay and the African Institution, in the form of a rapid-fire series of pamphlets and new editions of his original letter. As evidence that Thorpe's agitations were having a wider effect, in 1816 and 1817 the MP and Agent for Grenada, Joseph Marryat published *Thoughts*, *More Thoughts*, and *More Thoughts Still* which repeated Thorpe's accusations and tailored them to the Pro-West Indian cause.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>100</sup> Joseph Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London, 1816); Marryat, *More Thoughts* (London, 1816); Marryat, *More Thoughts Still* (London, 1818).

Thorpe's publications had aroused the interest not just of the Colony's enemies but of its friends. Prominent among these was William Allen, editor of the *Philanthropist* and writer of an article in July 1815 which lamented the small amount of land in cultivation in Sierra Leone. Thorpe quoted Allen directly as follows:

We cannot conceal our disgust at the attempts which have been made to attribute the consequences of mismanagement to the depravity and bad disposition of the settlers; they have laboured under many discouragements, and it must be remembered that the promises made to the Nova Scotians before they quitted Halifax, have not to the present day been performed.<sup>101</sup>

Thorpe was keen to exploit divisions among the abolitionists such as were indicated in this quotation. He referred approvingly to the setting up of a new agricultural society, headed by Thomas Clarkson, a man to whom Thorpe gave the accolade 'The legitimate father of the Abolition.'<sup>102</sup>

In the *Preface to the Fourth Edition of his Letter to Wilberforce*, Thorpe extended his allegations with regard to the treatment of liberated Africans in the colony. This followed the publication of the *Ninth Report of the African Institution* which had dealt specifically with the subject. Thorpe accused Maxwell of being complicit in the ill-treatment of apprentices, and said that many nearly starved during Columbine's administration.<sup>103</sup> He charged that women were employed in agriculture against the regulations of apprenticeships. Further, he wrote, apprentices were not issued with appropriate clothing and necessities and many were in a state of nudity, a situation which the man in charge of them, Kenneth Macaulay, did nothing to

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Thorpe, *A Reply "Point by Point" to the Special Report of the Directors of the African Institution* (London, 1815), pp. 12-13.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> Thorpe, *Postscript to the Reply*, pp. 3, 5.

prevent.<sup>104</sup> He accused Kenneth Macaulay of apprenticing females into prostitution, and living profligately with many young liberated African girls.<sup>105</sup> He appealed to Quaker supporters of abolition to give up their 'listless credulity' and campaign for improvements to the colony's moral and economic state.<sup>106</sup> As evidence of Saintly 'hypocrisy', Thorpe also pointed out the irony of encouraging Nova Scotians as masters and mistresses of apprentices when the Siertra Leone Company had such a low opinion of their abilities and temperaments.<sup>107</sup>

Thorpe's consistent campaigning against established policies in Sierra Leone proved to be his personal undoing. He was removed from his position in 1815 without pension and it appears that he drifted into insolvency and was released from the bench some time around 1818.<sup>108</sup> In this year he published his views on the continuing slave trade, and proposed his own plans for the civilization of Africa, plans which involved dotting the coast with trading posts and training centres for practical skills. The schools were to be staffed by artisans condemned to death in England!<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, he went into print to remind the public of the continuing slave trade and to criticise the choice of Sierra Leone for Courts of Mixed

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Extract of letter from Sir G.T. Thompson to J.W. Croker, April 16 1820, PRO/CO/267/88.

<sup>109</sup> R. Thorpe, *A View of the Present Increase of the Slave Trade* (London, 1818), p. 96.; Curtin, *Image*, p. 265.



Commission in 1819.<sup>110</sup> He also petitioned Parliament with his case in 1821 and 1827.<sup>111</sup>

Colonial Office papers reveal copious notes on his case designed to help officials through the maze his campaign had created.<sup>112</sup> Joseph Hume was a supporter of Thorpe and wrote to Goderich on his behalf.<sup>113</sup> When Goderich rejected Thorpe's appeal for a pension in 1827, a printed pamphlet was prepared entitled *Appendix to the Case of Robert Thorpe, Esq.*<sup>114</sup> This reproduced correspondence between Thorpe and Hume and restated his appeals against his dismissal. All were to no avail.

Nevertheless, as Christopher Fyfe points out, the sponsors of the African Institution lost much of their influence over government largely as a result of Thorpe's activities.<sup>115</sup> In this sense Thorpe's appeal to Wilberforce and his colleagues to give up meddling in Sierra Leone was to some extent achieved by default. The African Institution did indeed quietly give up its self-defined duties to the colony and held its last public meeting in 1827 (although it continued as a shadow of its former self for a while longer).<sup>116</sup> Thorpe and Thompson's allegations contributed to controversy over the Slave Registry Bill introduced by Wilberforce

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<sup>110</sup> R. Thorpe, *A Commentary on the Treaties... for the Purpose of Preventing ... any illicit Traffic in Slaves* (London, 1819).

<sup>111</sup> Both petitions are in CO/267/88.

<sup>112</sup> Observations on a Pamphlet by Robert Thorpe Esquire L.L.D. intitled A Reply 'Point by Point' to the Special Report of the Directors of the African Institution, PRO/CO/267/88.

<sup>113</sup> Hume to Goderich, May 31 1827, PRO/CO/267/88.

<sup>114</sup> Appendix to the Case of Robert Thorpe,, Esq., L.L.D. Elicited by a Letter from Viscount Goderich to Joseph Hume, M.P., London, 1828, PRO/CO/267/88.

<sup>115</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 123.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

in 1815.<sup>117</sup> They had succeeded in promoting, in print and in the public domain, a negative discourse about Sierra Leone which was lent considerable weight by the status of their roles in the colony. The African Institution and those members of the Sierra Leone Company involved, failed to respond with sufficient vigour to Thorpe's allegations and this failure at the very least meant that the anti-abolitionists had a greater voice than they had held previously. That voice continued to be raised against Sierra Leone.

## **8. Conclusion**

In many respects the negative images of Sierra Leone created by Thomas Perronet Thompson and Robert Thorpe may not appear to be particularly interesting to historians. They were involved in the kind of petty squabbles that always grow up in small colonies and the level of debate was often childish and insignificant. However, my analysis in this chapter is revealing of several interesting issues. Firstly, it is clear that it was possible to be intensely hostile to what had been achieved in Sierra Leone and retain one's antislavery credentials. The process of contesting utopian images of the colony from a stance that was sympathetic with its original aims was very much a question of debating the meaning and implications of words that in themselves were culturally loaded in an antislavery context.

It involved a process of 'othering' people and policies that had previously been positioned within one broad abolitionist framework. Thomas Perronet Thompson understood that the battle was one largely for sincerity of meaning, and it was this lack of sincerity which was perhaps his and Thorpe's most potent accusation against the Saints. It was certainly the

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<sup>117</sup> Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition', p. 330.

one that seemed to promote the most response. For example, the Sierra Leone Company was 'other' to Thomas Perronet Thompson, and by implication the antislavery campaigners were authorising by default a colony which was 'other' than they had conceived. Thompson put it as follows:

The Government and people of England can no longer be imposed upon by one of the clumsiest deceptions ever practised on the world. The character of the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company place them far above all suspicion of fraud, but their agents have carried on the grossest system of prevarication and perversion..... Their soldiers, paid at an extravagant price and useless to the last they style volunteers. Their infamous tributes are payments. Their licences for slavery are Acts for Prevention. Their slaves are apprentices. Their sales indentures, their purchases redemptions. And this novel nomenclature has appeared to them a sufficient instrument for deceiving their employers, and by their means for deceiving the world.<sup>118</sup>

Thorpe wrote several passages in a similar vein. Clearly this was a battle over meaning as well as fact. It was a contest for representational hegemony to which the abolitionists did not respond effectively, perhaps because it came from an 'enemy within' and not the usual West Indian opponent.

Moreover, it is clear that in several instances the first line of defence was to blame various black groups for the colony's failures, often due to arbitrary preferences and prejudices. Ultimately, these negative images of the black groups played into the hands of the colony's enemies. The 'enemies within' had succeeded in bringing into the public domain both specific inadequacies in Sierra Leone and more general tensions within antislavery as a whole. The colony's more natural enemies were bound to seize their opportunity, and the manner in which they did so will form the subject matter of the next chapter.

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<sup>118</sup> Thompson to Castlereagh, Aug. 8 1808, PRO/CO/267/24.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Trouble in Paradise: Discourses of Opposition from Outside of Antislavery**

Whereas Thomas Perronet Thompson and Robert Thorpe had worked to undermine the abolitionists' positive representations of Sierra Leone by referring to their own experiences within the colony, there was no shortage of criticism from more general commentators. The 1820s, particularly after the death of Sir Charles MacCarthy in the Ashanti war, saw the press become increasingly sceptical about the claims made for Sierra Leone in philanthropic circles. For several decades, sections of the press which were not directly favourable to the West India Interest had tended to accept and reproduce the kinds of positive representations of Sierra Leone that were to be found in Sierra Leone Company and African Institution *Reports*.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, however, writers began to stress negative images of the colony. This was especially true of representations of the 'fatal' climate, the continuing slave trade and the level of 'civilization' achieved by the colony's black inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> As the debate over the abolition of slavery itself intensified the colony's enemies became particularly vociferous.

This chapter discusses negative images of Sierra Leone which were promoted by

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, *Monthly Magazine*, 17 (1804), pp. 21-26, 21 (1806), pp. 315-18, pp. 394-97, 30 (1810), pp. 54-59; *European Magazine*, 30 (1796), pp. 365-66; 41 (1802), p. 231, 62 (1812), pp. 273-76, 81 (1822), p. 438.

<sup>2</sup> See for example *Monthly Magazine*, 55 (1823), p. 577, in which a reviewer of a travel account by Captain John Adams stated that 'no voyagers for pleasure or curiosity visit this pestilential coast.'

writers outside of the antislavery movement. I focus on three significant examples. Firstly, there was a short but significant war of words in *The Times* in 1820 between two correspondents self-styled as *Africanus* and *Investigator*. Essentially a debate about the competing claims of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone as a site for the location of the Courts of Mixed Commission for the adjudication of captured slavers, the correspondence serves to indicate some stereotypical forms of criticism and defence of Sierra Leone. Secondly I shall discuss a sustained campaign against Sierra Leone by James MacQueen in *Blackwood's Magazine*. MacQueen was a champion of the claims of the Niger region to funding for colonial development.<sup>3</sup> Ostensibly a supporter of gradualism in abolition, he was an often outspoken supporter of the West India interest and maintained a consistent hostility to Sierra Leone on economic, geographical, political and personal terms. He later gained a degree of influence in antislavery circles and was consulted by Thomas Fowell Buxton regarding the Niger Expedition.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, I shall examine a vitriolic campaign in the Tory newspaper *John Bull* against Sierra Leone in general, and against Zachary Macaulay in particular. An examination of *John Bull's* attacks reveals the extent to which Sierra Leone's specific problems, by then well publicised by Thorpe and MacQueen, were utilised by pro-West Indian campaigners to disparage both the Africans and their philanthropic supporters.

### **1. A Subject for Urgent Consideration: The 'Africanus'/'Investigator' Correspondence in *The Times***

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Sierra Leone competed for public and political approval

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<sup>3</sup> James MacQueen, *Geographical and Commercial View of Northern Central Africa*, (Edinburgh, 1821).

<sup>4</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 408.

against the rival claims of other West African colonies, relying to some considerable degree on its special philanthropic status in debates with its critics. The debate engendered in the letters page of *The Times* between 'Africanus' and 'Investigator' for much of the months of January and February 1820 was broadly concerned with the rival claims for continued government finance of the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. 'Investigator', who began the correspondence, was a supporter of the Gold Coast, and argued that Sierra Leone was too far to windward to be an effective base for the adjudication of captured slavers. He also pursued a broader argument against Sierra Leone which claimed that the African Institution had misled the public with positive representations of the colony. He portrayed the colony as unkempt, unhealthy and 'unfit for the purposes of Government'.<sup>5</sup> With regard to its black inhabitants, 'Investigator' referred to the trial for cannibalism of a liberated African named Quai Pei. This trial, which centred on the prosecution of a liberated African found in possession of human remains, had received extensive coverage in *The Times*.<sup>6</sup> 'Investigator' invited readers to compare the positive propaganda of the African Institution with the 'realities' of savage behaviour in Sierra Leone.

The next day *The Times* published a leader urging consideration of the subjects raised by 'Investigator', saying that the slave trade must be suppressed, but that it should be done with a due eye to European life, health and money.<sup>7</sup> The leader writer suggested that abolitionists had responded to the criticisms and suggestions of others with fear and jealousy. It also raised the issue of philanthropists benefitting personally from post-abolition trade in

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<sup>5</sup> 'Investigator' to Editor of *The Times*, Jan. 4 1820.

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, Oct. 27 1819.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, leader article, Jan. 5 1830.

Sierra Leone, a direct reference to Zachary Macaulay. A small voice of support for Sierra Leone appeared in a letter from one 'T.P', the letter questioning 'Investigator's' high mortality figures for the settlement, but *The Times* proceeded to publish a story which stated that the Spanish Commissioners were so ill from the climate that they were not able to adjudicate on the captured vessels of their nation.<sup>8</sup>

By now it was clear the whole subject was raising considerable interest, and 'Africanus' attempted a robust defence of the colony. He suggested the formation of another base *in addition* to Sierra Leone for the adjudications of slave prizes, and defended the colony's climate as no worse than anywhere in Africa or the West Indies. Interestingly, 'Africanus' argued that a lack of agricultural cultivation was a fallacious indication of a colony's prosperity and of the comfort of its people. The blacks in Sierra Leone lived, he said, in as great a comfort as any peasantry in the world.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture, of course had long been the backbone of philanthropic plans for the colony's development, but it seems that in order to defend its wider reputation, its importance had to be played down.

'Investigator's' numerous retaliations promoted and expanded on the idea that 'Africanus' was a Director of the African Institution and benefited from his involvement in Sierra Leone, an almost certain reference to Zachary Macaulay. He insisted that cannibalism was widespread and also claimed that the liberated Africans were badly treated. 'Africanus's' responses tended to focus on the strategic issues.<sup>10</sup> Other correspondents reacted to the

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<sup>8</sup> 'T.P. to Editor of *The Times*, Jan. 10 1820. *The Times*, leader article, Jan. 11 1820.

<sup>9</sup> 'Africanus' to editor of *The Times*, Jan. 11 1820.

<sup>10</sup> 'Investigator' to editor of *The Times*, Jan. 18 and 22 1820.

debate and in particular a small skirmish developed on 12 and 14 February between 'An Eye-Witness' and 'Africanus'. These participants debated whether a 'certain individual' (probably Zachary's cousin Kenneth Macaulay) had simultaneously held mutually inappropriate posts in the administration.<sup>11</sup> The whole flavour of the attack on Sierra Leone was of scandal, lies and self-interest on the part of the African Institution and unredeemable savagery on the part of the liberated Africans.<sup>12</sup>

The 'Africanus'/'Investigator' correspondence indicates a number of key focal points for proslavery attacks on Sierra Leone. A triumvirate of hostility was becoming increasingly familiar. This related firstly to the colony's perceived economic and political failure, which was ascribed to various geographical and political causes not least of which was the climate. Secondly there was the potent hostile discourse relating to black savagery and degeneracy. Thirdly, critics of the colony had increasingly turned their attentions to the moral reputations of interested white philanthropists and of some colonial servants. Even supporters of the colony (as *The Times* had generally been) were anxious to think through negative accusations against Sierra Leone and its protagonists.

## **2. James MacQueen and the Continuing Campaign**

The West India interest had seized upon Thompson and Thorpe's allegations with glee. The most persistent and prolific of pro-West Indian campaigners against Sierra Leone and the

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<sup>11</sup> 'Eye Witness' to editor of *The Times*, Feb. 12 1820; 'Africanus' to editor of *The Times*, Feb. 14 1820.

<sup>12</sup> The correspondence continued with letters from Investigator on Feb. 16, a letter in support of 'investigator' from 'XL' on Feb. 17, and a final letter from Africanus on Feb. 29.



'Saints' was James MacQueen. His attacks began with the publication of two pamphlets in 1825, *Colonial Controversy* and *The West India Colonies Vindicated*.<sup>13</sup>

The broad thrust of these pamphlets centred on the notion that West Indian slaves were 'unfit' for freedom. MacQueen used the familiar proslavery argument that emancipation would lead to insurrection and to the ultimate loss of the colonies, seeking evidence from Sierra Leone to back up this argument. In both pamphlets he savagely attacked Sierra Leone for failing to provide the nation with any kind of return for its investment in Africa and for failing to meet its own economic and cultural objectives.<sup>14</sup> The *Quarterly Review* included MacQueen's *The West India Colonies* in a review article on a number of publications concerned with slavery. This article was less than favourable to Sierra Leone. The reviewer argued that so long as liberated Africans lived a subsistence lifestyle with tools and land provided for them, there was no evidence from Sierra Leone that free labour would work in the arduous conditions required to grow sugar in the West Indies.<sup>15</sup>

MacQueen's attacks on Sierra Leone were continued in a series of articles written for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1826 to 1833. *Blackwood's* was conceived as a Tory rival to the Whig *Edinburgh Review*. It was intended to be more entertaining and varied than that other prominent Tory Journal, the *Quarterly Review*.<sup>16</sup> *Blackwood's* had a reputation for

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<sup>13</sup> J. MacQueen, *The Colonial Controversy* (Glasgow, 1825); MacQueen, *The West India Colonies Vindicated* (Glasgow, 1825).

<sup>14</sup> MacQueen, *West India Colonies*, pp. xi, 161. *Colonial Controversy*, pp. 85-90.

<sup>15</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 30 (1824), pp. 560-567, especially p. 567.

<sup>16</sup> Alvin Sullivan (ed.), *British Literary Magazines The Romantic Age, 1789-1836* (Connecticut 1983).

heavy-handed humour and biting satire, which sometimes proved offensive to some of the reading public. MacQueen's savage rhetorical style, then, was in the tradition of the journal for which he was writing.

Whilst all of the articles in *Blackwood's* referred to Sierra Leone, it was the first three, published between December 1826 and May 1827, which sought specifically to undermine the credibility of the colony. These articles took the form of three letters to Secretary of State R.W. Hay.<sup>17</sup> In the first of these letters MacQueen identified the prime aims of the founders of the colony, emphasising the ambition of suppressing the slave trade through the provision of a site of legitimate influence and Christian example. In addition, MacQueen identified five other aims of the colony's founders, including legitimate commerce, civilization, agricultural improvement, education, and the spreading of Christianity in Africa.<sup>18</sup> The Sierra Leone Company, MacQueen argued, had failed to achieve all of these targets, but its leaders had nevertheless been allowed to continue to have control of the colony after the transfer to the crown. He aimed, he said to tear assunder a veil of deception which had been drawn over the colony.<sup>19</sup>

MacQueen's long articles drew upon information from numerous sources, including travel writers. For example, he quoted the explorer Alexander Gordon Laing's complaint that

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<sup>17</sup> James MacQueen, 'Civilization of Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberated Africans. To R.W. Hay, Esq Under Secretary of State &c. &c', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 20 (1826), pp. 872-92; MacQueen, Letter II to Hay, same title, *Blackwood's*, 21 (1827), pp. 314-29; Letter III, *Blackwood's*, 21 (May 1827), pp. 596-624.

<sup>18</sup> MacQueen, Letter to Hay I, p. 593

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 832.

the country outside Sierra Leone was devoid of missionaries, while those missionaries in Freetown generally lived a life of debauched excess.<sup>20</sup> He asserted that the much vaunted educational successes claimed for the African colonists were instances simply of rote learning, and not of understanding, an old racist argument.<sup>21</sup> He argued that the recaptives were ignorant of the real meaning and duties of religion. He did however allow that the Nova Scotians had retained some of the religion learnt from their residence in 'civilized' areas.<sup>22</sup>

If MacQueen had a low opinion of black society, his representations of white society were no better. He accused white men in Sierra Leone of purchasing black women as concubines and of keeping 'seraglios of black females' on the Bullom shore or upriver, where they preferred to spend Sunday.<sup>23</sup> MacQueen claimed that economic figures produced for agricultural production and trade in Sierra Leone were spurious. Exported produce such as timber was, he argued, the product of slave labour in neighbouring areas rather than of free labour in the colony.<sup>24</sup> He even alleged that in order to be effective, liberated African labour had to be compulsory. He insisted that the whip was used unsparingly and that little attention was paid to the comfort or health of the liberated African workforce.<sup>25</sup> This was an especially potent accusation against a philanthropically inspired colony, and brought into the public domain the claims that the abolitionists had behaved in a manner more usually levelled at slave

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 897-98.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 884.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> MacQueen, letter to Hay, II, pp. 325, 327.

<sup>24</sup> MacQueen, letter to Hay, I, p. 885.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 887.

traders. An important component of MacQueen's accusations was that Sierra Leone was a barbarous place, unlikely ever to become representative of 'civilised' values. The failure of the colony with respect to civilization had, he alleged, come from listening to 'weak theorists' viz: 'We take Slavery and the Slave Trade as the cause of African ignorance, barbarity, and degradation; whereas the former evils are the effects of the latter.'<sup>26</sup>

Having identified the ways in which Sierra Leone had failed, MacQueen used his second letter to Hay to argue that it had done so because it was not based on rational thought or action. This irrationality, he alleged was revealed in the account of the chaotic administration of the Sierra Leone Company which was given by Anna Maria Falconbridge in her travel account. Falconbridge had also alleged that around sixty of the white women in the original settlement were prostitutes inveigled on board the transports.<sup>27</sup> This was a sensational accusation against the Directors which had not been picked up on when Falconbridge's book was published. MacQueen resurrected the story as a means of sullyng the Saints' moral reputation still further. He also accused abolitionists of blaming 'intemperate' soldiers for causing their own deaths rather than admitting that they were killed by the climate.<sup>28</sup> His discursive insistence that Sierra Leone was, in a variety of ways, 'irrational' struck at the earlier claims made for it as a logical product of enlightened, rational thought.

In this second *Letter*, MacQueen brought into the open several of Thompson and

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 891.

<sup>27</sup> MacQueen 'Letter to Hay, II', pp. 315-16. Anna Maria Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone, during the Years 1791-2-3* (London 1794), second edition 1802, reprinted 1967, pp. 64-65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

Thorpe's key accusations. As 'proof' of the deliberate deception of the public by the Saints, MacQueen quoted extensively from Ludlam's letter to Macaulay, which questioned the anticipated success of slave-trade abolition and resurrected Macaulay's unfortunate 'save them the trouble of thinking' letter.<sup>29</sup> MacQueen also chose this occasion to expand on his allegations concerning the improper use of the apprenticeship system, especially with regard to the 'ransoming' of black women.<sup>30</sup> MacQueen claimed that local slaves were freshly captured to satiate the lust of white colonists because liberated African women were considered too ugly to seduce.<sup>31</sup> Such a sensational claim took an accusation more likely to be used by abolitionists against white slave traders and turned it upon themselves. At the same time it reinforced negative stereotypes about black women.

Furthermore, MacQueen insisted that white men 'gain the slovenliness and vulgarity and indolence of their black housekeepers'.<sup>32</sup> This comment presented a novel twist on degeneracy theory. It appeared that white Sierra Leonean colonists were also prone to 'deterioration' upon contact with blacks. Such degeneracy, MacQueen argued, sapped the basis of human society and social order.<sup>33</sup> The liberated Africans in general were essentialised as cannibals and fetishists. In particular, he referred to the increasingly notorious case of Quia Pei mentioned earlier. As a logical follow on to such representations, MacQueen argued that it was essential to retain personal slavery in Africa and to set captives to work under a forced

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

labour system cultivating tropical produce for Europeans, preferably in Fernando Po.<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Kenneth Macaulay's Response to James MacQueen

In between publication of MacQueen's second and third letters in *Blackwood's* a response to his allegations was produced by Kenneth Macaulay (who was a cousin of Zachary, and who, amid some criticism, was, for a short period in 1826, acting Governor of the colony).<sup>35</sup> In many ways the fact that Kenneth Macaulay published at all is bizarre, as his notoriously loose living life (as I have shown in Chapter Six) had been a focus for Thorpe's attacks on white morality. He was also clearly implicated in MacQueen's accusations of white immorality in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless he set about his task resolutely. Macaulay's defence was by now familiar. He claimed the mortality rates had been exaggerated and that Sierra Leone was no more unhealthy than other tropical colonies. He devoted considerable space to defending Sierra Leone's trading reputation.<sup>36</sup> Of course he expressed horror at the attacks MacQueen had made on the character and integrity of Sierra Leone's philanthropic supporters.

Kenneth Macaulay gave no indication that he believed himself to be on shaky ground in defending the colony's white residents against charges of immorality. He argued that there were immoral men everywhere, even in Glasgow (MacQueen's home town). White immorality, he argued, did not prove that attempts at civilization and instruction of the liberated Africans had failed. He agreed that chastity was not sufficiently prized, but added that cohabitation

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327-329.

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Macaulay, *The Colony of Sierra Leone vindicated from the Misrepresentations of Mr. MacQueen of Glasgow* (London, 1827).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-86.

outside marriage in Sierra Leone did not imply the 'sink into depravity' that it did in England, nor did it cause a total renunciation of moral feeling, or prevent obligations of fidelity within a relationship.<sup>37</sup> These of course were arguments which were likely to become overwhelmed in a flurry of anti-Sierra Leonean righteous indignation. MacQueen countered Macaulay's defence of the colony with some salacious details of the latter's personal life.

#### 4. MacQueen's Campaign Continues

In his third letter to Hay, MacQueen compared Sierra Leone to New South Wales, a colony started in the same year with the 'lowest outcasts of British Society', but now rich and industrious with a population of nearly 50,000.<sup>38</sup> The failure of Sierra Leone, he argued, reflected nothing but bad on the black character. He pursued his attack on 'barbaric' Africans with reference to the Kroo.<sup>39</sup> This tribe of free labourers had sometimes received favourable reports in relation to their hatred of slavery, and MacQueen himself noted a positive account of them which had been written in the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>40</sup> MacQueen criticised them for their attachment to polygamy, their lack of interest in clothing and their 'disdain' of Europeans.<sup>41</sup> He built on this evidence of African barbarity to emphasise the need for a system of coercive personal servitude. This, he claimed was in line even with some of his opponent's views. In this he was probably referring to Zachary Macaulay's ideas on apprenticeship.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> MacQueen, 'Letter to Hay', III, p. 597.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 601-02.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 601.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 616-18.

This was not the end of MacQueen's publishing activities. A further volley of articles appeared between 1828 and 1833 as the campaign against slavery reached its height.<sup>43</sup> These tended to be more general letters, aimed at supporting the West India Colonies and defending personal slavery in the face of black 'savagery'. But in them MacQueen never lost the opportunity to make the point that Sierra Leone had not stopped the slave trade, that the colony was against the principles of good order and was unfairly favoured by government over the superior claims of the West India colonies. MacQueen's abuse of Sierra Leone and its African population continued up to the eve of slave emancipation.

Colonial Office employees prepared abstracts of MacQueen's arguments as briefings for parliamentary debates. The writer of one such summary felt that MacQueen had failed to emphasise the most important evidence regarding the colony's failure. This was the fact that the African Institution's *Special Report* blamed the lack of agricultural progress on the indolence of the settlers. The government official wrote in his briefing notes as follows:

No evidence respecting the difficulty of getting free Negroes to labour in agriculture, has ever been stronger than this testimony from the Directors of the African Institution, ... If Mr Hume examines these Reports with more care than Mr McQueen

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<sup>43</sup> James MacQueen, 'British Africa: Sierra Leone, Report of the Parliamentary Commissioners, to R.W. Hay, *Blackwood's Magazine*, 23 (1828), pp.63-87; 'The British Colonies: Letter to His Grace the Duke of Wellington', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 23 (1828), pp. 891-913; 'The Colonial Empire of Great Britain', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 30 (1831), pp. 744-64; 'The British Colonies: A Second Letter to Wellington', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 25 (1829), pp. 633-63; 'The British Colonies, Letter Third, To Wellington', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 27 (1830), pp. 223-253; 'British Colonies - Anti-Colonists, Letter Fourth, To Wellington', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 30 (1831), pp.187-213; 'British Colonies - James Stephen, Letter to the Right Honourable Earl Grey', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 29 (1831), pp. 455-466; 'Letters to the Right Hon. E.G. Stanley, British Tropical Colonies, Letter I', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 34 (1833), pp. 231-57; Letters to Stanley, British Tropical Colonies, Letter II', *Blackwood's Magazine*, 34 (1833) pp. 611-40.



has done, he would have plenty of proof, without other documents to prove a failure.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, this writer felt that the philanthropists had tacitly, if inadvertently, acknowledged Sierra Leone's failure. He had identified that the most damaging allegations against the colony had been made by the abolitionists themselves.

James MacQueen's consistent assaults on Sierra Leone kept it in the public eye for all the wrong reasons so far as leading abolitionists were concerned. His tirades contributed to a general loss of idealism about Sierra Leone and to an abandoning of the hopes for liberated African labour. He had attacked the colony at its roots by insisting that it had failed because it was founded on 'unreasonable' assumptions. His was a particularly savage critique in which Sierra Leone was portrayed as government-sponsored madness, more like a Hogarth engraving come to life than an enlightened utopia. Here was a world where abolitionists whipped slaves, and prospered from the financial and sexual abuse of the objects of the nation's philanthropy. Moreover, abolitionists appeared themselves to be degenerating via their contact with the 'stinking savages' who made up the liberated African population. The savagery of MacQueen's attacks was replicated and enhanced in the proslavery press.

##### **5. *John Bull* and 'Zachmakery'**

Robert Thorpe, 'Investigator' and James MacQueen had succeeded in raising within the public domain serious question marks over Sierra Leone and the reputations of its philanthropic supporters. All had made attacks on Zachary Macaulay. The campaign against Macaulay was most venomous as it appeared in a leading Tory newspaper, *John Bull*.

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<sup>44</sup> Abstract of arguments from Mr. McQueen's books, PRO/CO/325/37.

*John Bull's* campaign brought together numerous accusations which had by now become established themes. The whole issue began with a letter from a West Indian planter claiming, with a direct reference to Robert Thorpe, that positive images of Sierra Leone were a sham. He used evidence of black 'improvement' to prove his point and complained that

To walk to church, and gabble a grace after meat does not constitute a Christian. In spite of the expenditure of British treasure which is lavished on that country, I very much fear was I to meet one of the Christians alone in the woods he would desire to eat me.<sup>45</sup>

Here were the twin accusations of African 'barbarism' and philanthropic cover up yet again.

*John Bull* launched an editorial campaign in the wake of this letter and turned its guns on Zachary Macaulay. The initial attack centred on Macaulay's 'monopoly' of trading operations in Sierra Leone, his receipt of government agricultural premiums intended to encourage black peasant cultivation and the 'inflated' price of goods from the Sierra Leone Company store when Macaulay was governor.<sup>46</sup> Referring to Macaulay's ideas on apprenticeship which surfaced in his *Letter to the Duke of Gloucester*, the editor claimed that Macaulay had intended to purchase numerous slaves for the colony and had only been prevented from doing so by the likes of Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson.<sup>47</sup> This separation of abolitionists into 'good' and 'bad' camps was becoming a familiar aspect of debates about Sierra Leone. Moreover, on the issue of free labour, *John Bull* expanded on the theme regarding 'unfree' labour in the colony by claiming that whilst the parliamentary

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<sup>45</sup> 'A West Indian', letter to editor of *John Bull*, Dec. 14 1823.

<sup>46</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Oct. 26 1823.

<sup>47</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Nov. 30 1823.

committee who were considering the question of sugar duties had been told that Sierra Leone indicated the success of free labour, in fact, the colony's trade figures 'have no more to do with the question of free labour than the work of the convicts on the hulks, at Woolwich, has to do with the exports and imports of the poor of London.'<sup>48</sup>

It will be remembered that James MacQueen used information from Anna Maria Falconbridge's travel account to bolster his arguments against Sierra Leone. *John Bull* resurrected some of Falconbridge's negative representations of both place and people, including her dramatic claim that the climate was so bad that sometimes there were not enough coffins to receive the dead.<sup>49</sup> Another editorial referred to Falconbridge's story of how Zachary Macaulay, as Governor, prosecuted some white sailors for stealing a duck from a Nova Scotian householder. Eventually, after a trial involving black jurors, the sailors were sentenced to a punishment of whipping which was carried out by black settlers. Falconbridge's account of the incident was written with mock horror and hilarity.<sup>50</sup>

But when *John Bull* resurrected the story they did so in the context of a key issue of debate between West Indian Slavers and the abolitionists. This debate centred on the death of the London Missionary Society's missionary, John Smith in a Demerara jail following a slave insurrection, a death which was then dominating debate in Britain between proslavery and antislavery campaigners. By ridiculing Macaulay's attitudes to justice, *John Bull* actively sought to discredit abolitionist comment on this issue. Accordingly, a letter from 'An

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<sup>48</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, May 16 1824.

<sup>49</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Aug. 15 1824.

<sup>50</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 222-23.

'Hereditary Planter' was published which wryly asked whether, with regard to the affair of Rev. Smith, 'Does the Society for Missions and Gradual Abolition of the Slave Trade intend to save the Government the trouble of thinking?'<sup>51</sup>

*John Bull* unleashed more of its wrath on Africans and their supporters in the wake of the Ashantee War in 1824. During the war, *John Bull* frequently conflated the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, and also their white and black populations. Even though the Gold Coast was administered from Sierra Leone, it was perhaps disingenuous to index the death of Sir Charles MacCarthy in the war under the heading 'Disasters at Sierra Leone.'<sup>52</sup> Many negative images of the Ashantee were produced in articles headed Sierra Leone, including the sensational claim that MacCarthy was roasted alive by his captors.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike the responses to Robert Thorpe and James MacQueen, no lengthy publications were produced by individuals or institutions in response to *John Bull*. The *Sierra Leone Gazette*, published in Freetown, made lengthy and general rebuttals of the allegations although they made little specific effort to defend Zachary Macaulay's reputation.<sup>54</sup> The *Morning Chronicle* published some of the *Gazette's* refutations and was roundly ridiculed by *John Bull* for doing so.<sup>55</sup> Zachary Macaulay did attempt to sue over the accusations but met with

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<sup>51</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Feb. 22 1824.

<sup>52</sup> *John Bull*, index to volume 4.

<sup>53</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Aug. 15 1824.

<sup>54</sup> *Sierra Leone Gazette*, editorials, Sep. 12 1823, Nov. 22 1823; Dec. 13 1823; July 31 1824, Aug. 7 1824, Jan. 1 1825. In addition to the attacks from *John Bull*, the *Morning Herald* also made much of the colony's troubles, see for example, *Morning Herald*, Aug. 28 1823.

<sup>55</sup> *John Bull*, leader article, Nov. 7 1824.

numerous difficulties.<sup>56</sup> Although a fighting fund was set up in antislavery circles to support him, Macaulay's friends petitioned him not to risk financial ruin.<sup>57</sup> Wilberforce wrote from his sick bed urging Macaulay not to pursue the issue, especially as any enquiry may perhaps focus on a part of his life 'when he might not be governed by so strict a rule of conduct as in his after-life.'<sup>58</sup> Indeed, *John Bull* had requested permission to gather evidence in the West Indies where Macaulay had once worked as an overseer of slaves.

The negative discourse persisted in the general media for years to come and outlasted the demise of the African Institution. In 1826 *The Times* carried a short leader which expressed some hope that improvements in Liberated African 'civilisation' may have been such that the nation's expenditure was justified. But support was muted. The *Quarterly Review*, a Tory periodical, kept up a vociferous campaign against the 'pestiferous charnel house' of the philanthropists.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, the demise of public enthusiasm for abolitionist 'sentimentality' was well underway. In 1827, *The Times* carried an anonymous letter which railed against the interference of Christian evangelicals who were trying to change the day of the races at Newmarket so that jockeys could keep the Sabbath holy. The writer pointed to Sierra Leone as an example of the dreadful results which arose when those with an 'hypocritical' and self-indulgent Christian fervour interfered in things they knew nothing about. Sierra Leone had

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<sup>56</sup> *John Bull* claimed, for example that they would rely on Thorpe's testimony which had been in the public domain for years without Macaulay having sued him. *John Bull*, leader article, Nov. 30 1823.

<sup>57</sup> Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay*, p. 425.

<sup>58</sup> Wilberforce to Macaulay, July 2 1824, in *Ibid.*, p. 426

<sup>59</sup> *Quarterly Review*, 39 (1826), p. 181.

become the 'whipping boy' in the context of wider moral campaigns.<sup>60</sup> To cap it all, Thomas Perronet Thompson reappeared in the guise of editor of the *Westminster Review* and by 1831 was lamenting that Granville Sharp's wise ideas had been crushed in Sierra Leone, and was urging that blacks be given a greater share in the government of the colony (though presumably not the Nova Scotians)!<sup>61</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined three specific campaigns against Sierra Leone, campaigns which were conducted in the press by opponents of the philanthropists and supporters of the West India interest. Clearly, the discursive content of these hostilities shared much with that produced by Thomas Perronet Thompson and Robert Thorpe, especially in relation to accusations made with regard to the moral behaviour of white philanthropists concerned with or working in Sierra Leone. However, some of the negative images referred to in this chapter were connected more directly with proslavery arguments. These included claims that abolitionism, as practically expressed in Sierra Leone, was irrational and unprofitable. Against the background of this 'evidence', it was possible to argue that Britain's continued prosperity was dependent on the persistence of a slave based system of cultivation in the West Indies. It was also possible to make claims regarding the moral justifications for slavery by reference to the 'proven' unsuitability of blacks in Sierra Leone for 'civilisation'. These claims, which directly linked anti-Sierra Leonean and proslavery sentiment, were unique to the criticisms of Sierra Leone that came from sources outside the antislavery movement.

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<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, Nov. 24 1827. Lorimer notes the shift towards antagonism against philanthropic 'sentimentality' by mid-century in *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p.123.

<sup>61</sup> *Westminster Review*, 15 (1821), p. 512.

However, increasingly negative characterisations of blacks in the colony, whether in general or specific terms, were a feature of discourses of opposition to the colony from within both camps.

So far in this thesis I have shown how images of Sierra Leone were most often split into the form of binary oppositions, either utopian or deeply hostile, but I have shown that the divisions engendered by these differences did not divide down simply antislavery and proslavery lines. I have examined how abolitionists and their opponents constructed notions of self and 'other' and how they used issues of race and reason to frame their own contest for representational hegemony. By the 1830s, Sierra Leone's detractors were in the ascendant. Although prominent abolitionists generally maintained their personal reputations, they did not emphasise their role in Sierra Leone.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Sierra Leone remained a site of enduring fascination for the reading public who had an interest in West Africa. This is clear from the large number of travel accounts written about the colony throughout our study period. It is on these accounts that I shall focus for the remainder of this thesis.

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<sup>62</sup> Zachary Macaulay, William Wilberforce and Granville Sharp are buried in Westminster Abbey with eulogic memorials in place. None of these memorials mention Sierra Leone.

**PART THREE**

**Travellers' Tales From The Land of Freedom**



## CHAPTER 8

### Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Travel Accounts

#### 1. Why focus on Travel Writing?

Travel writing on Sierra Leone was extensive and provides a comprehensive and discrete body of texts for analysis. Unlike other groups of sources (such as the various missionary publications) which produced and reflected images of the colony, travel writings about Sierra Leone comprise an authorial base which consists of numerous different voices. They varied, for example, in terms of their author's position on issues such as antislavery. They are also one of the few sources from which women's images of Sierra Leone can be accessed. The main attraction of travel accounts as source material has normally been found in their ability to contribute narrative information which is unavailable elsewhere. Indeed the Sierra Leonean accounts have been invaluable in this context.<sup>1</sup> The wider cultural context and significance of travel writing in general and Sierra Leone in particular has received scant attention. An unsurprising exception to this general rule is provided by Philip Curtin who clearly regarded travel writing as an important influence on the production of 'the world of unstated assumptions' about West Africa.<sup>2</sup> In general however, the scholarly literature on Sierra Leone has failed to analyse the wider cultural significance of travel writing.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Fyfe, *History*, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Curtin, *Image*, pp. 34, 56.

Aside from this general gap in the literature there are other reasons why this study of Sierra Leonean travel writing is timely. The history of exploration and travel, rather like the history of imperialism, has until recently been dominated by focussing on 'great' personalities and on the production of Whiggish histories which celebrate the West's human and technical ability to come to grips with the earth's physical and human mysteries.<sup>3</sup> However, increasingly travel writings, like other colonial texts, are no longer analysed as straightforward transcriptions of the life and experiences of the writer. Instead they are seen as both reflecting and constituting 'systems of meaning' from within the dominant imperial culture. Put simply, travel writing and its analysis is no longer seen as quite such an innocent enterprise as it once was.

Since Curtin's influential book was published, academic studies of travel writing, or as one set of commentators puts it 'tropological writing about-writing-about travel', has burgeoned, although historians have played little part in this.<sup>4</sup> Edward Said's work has had a major influence on studies of travel writing, and analyses which employ notions of travellers' texts as 'Orientalist' are increasingly common. I noted in Chapter 2 that some historians, notably John Mackenzie, complain that Saidian scholars tend to identify monolithic orientalist structures in texts at the expense of adequate attention to historical facts and contexts. However, Mackenzie also accepts that studies of travel writing are not so easily open to such

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<sup>3</sup> For a counteraction of this tendency in relation to a later period of African history see, Felix Driver, 'Henry Morton Stanley and His Critics: Geography, Exploration and Empire', *Past and Present*, 133 (Nov. 1991), pp. 135-165.

<sup>4</sup> S. Arshi, C. Kirstein, R. Naqvi and F. Pankow, 'Why Travel? Tropics, En-tropics and Apo-tropaics' in G. Robertson et. al (ed.) *Travellers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London, 1994), p. 225.

criticisms. Although he maintains a deep suspicion of discourse analysis and postcolonial approaches to the study of history, MacKenzie does acknowledge that many works on travel by historians are 'disturbingly over-empirical', and he insists that an appreciation of the cultural context of travel writing is an urgent pre-requisite to their meaningful analysis.<sup>5</sup> My study of travel accounts from Sierra Leone is mindful of both MacKenzie's caution and enthusiasm.<sup>6</sup>

Many of the secondary studies which I have drawn on here belong to a developing field of academic enterprise which is both theoretically informed *and* intensely historicised. Indeed, colonial travel writing has been the subject of several important and innovative studies which stress discontinuities in Orientalist discourse and which emphasise tensions and contradictions in how authors represented their images of the countries and peoples which they visited. These studies seek to avoid the crude essentialisations of the kinds of monolithic discourse analysis which invoke the suspicions of many historians. In the light of such work, there is little scope remaining for historical studies which continue to refer to travel texts simply as narrative documents.

A theorised focus on travel writing in this thesis is no arbitrary exercise. As we shall see, some of the texts from the large source base of Sierra Leonean travel writing have attracted commentators from across academic disciplines. The use of texts about Sierra Leone to inform wider arguments has not always been done in an historically sensitive way. For example, in her study of British women writers and slavery, Moira Ferguson has referred to Anna Maria Falconbridge as a radical writer who presented an intensely critical account of

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<sup>5</sup> MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, p. 5.

prominent evangelicals and abolitionists.<sup>6</sup> Ferguson also maintains that Falconbridge had retained 'a commitment to abolition and a sense of pride in the association of her name with abolition.'<sup>7</sup> In fact, Falconbridge actually ended her account with an assertion that the slave trade must continue until Africans were culturally equipped with the virtues of a 'civilised' society and able to understand the value of freedom.<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on gradual abolition was a far from radical stance. It also belies Ferguson's insistence that Falconbridge was somehow more sympathetic to black claims for equality, an interpretation which apparently comes from the Falconbridge's sympathies with Nova Scotian criticisms of the Sierra Leone Company.<sup>9</sup> But Falconbridge's attachment to the Nova Scotian cause was undoubtedly influenced by her wider quarrel with the Sierra Leone Company as much as it depended on her (questionable) commitment to black freedom. Ferguson's claim that Falconbridge was a radical abolitionist is misleading and unappreciative of wider historical trends within abolitionism and of her individual circumstances. In fact, a more historicised approach to Falconbridge's account may well reveal complexities in her writing which are even more interesting than crude attempts to fit her into a wider theory about women's antislavery writing.

Another feature of recent studies of travel writing has been a marked tendency to focus on accounts written by women. It is in this area that accounts from Sierra Leone have found their way into theorised studies from other disciplines, and I shall be acknowledging

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<sup>6</sup> Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others, British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (London, 1992), pp. 195-208.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>8</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 238.

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, p.205.

these studies at various points in what follows. However, this state of play gives a skewed impression of travel writing about Sierra Leone. There are no studies of travel writing which have a regional focus on Sierra Leone, and none which consider the broader range of relevant texts, especially those written by men. I can make only partial reparations for that neglect in the following chapters.

In this chapter, however, I want to examine developments in 'writing about writing-about-travel', and want to suggest some implications of these academic developments in the context of Sierra Leone. I do not intend to adopt or produce a definitive theoretical framework on which to hang the themed analysis of Sierra Leonean travel writing which follows in later chapters. Rather, my aim in this chapter is to highlight modes of interpretation which enhance understanding of the cultural significance of travel writing and which thereby go some way to correcting the current over-empirical imbalance in the Sierra Leonean literature.

## **2. Orientalism and Travel Writing**

Whilst the larger part of Edward Said's Orientalist theory is based on an interpretation of more straightforwardly 'literary' texts, he has suggested that travel writing can be analysed via discourse theory in order to excavate what he identifies as the uneven discursive relationship between culture and power.<sup>10</sup> Such an analysis supports his premise that an overwhelming hegemonic 'Orientalism' is often discernible in imperial travel writing. Said's influence is clear in other works. Moira Ferguson, for example, identifies an 'Anglo-

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<sup>10</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p.121.

Africanism' in some women's writing on African slavery and abolition (including travel writing). This 'Anglo-Africanism' comprised a discourse which was 'accepted by a majority of the white population as authentic', and which emphasised African heathenism and non-Christian barbarity in contrast to English 'civilization'.<sup>11</sup> In similar terms, Patrick Brantlinger includes exploration and travel writing among the literature which he draws on to support his broader argument that a constant imperialist 'sense' is traceable in early-Victorian and mid-Victorian literature. Brantlinger has argued that portrayals of Africans by antislavery writers became more negative as the nineteenth century wore on and has suggested that this contributed to an imperialist, racist discourse of social and economic power which was reflected in literary productions.<sup>12</sup>

Another writer with a strong interest in imperialist discourse in colonial literature is Abdul R. JanMohamed. Although JanMohamed does not write on travel literature, he has contributed a critique of colonial literature that seems to me to have a bearing on studies of colonial travel writing. JanMohamed is keen to relate discourse to material practice. He also stresses a profoundly Manichean tendency in colonial writing, even among more sophisticated commentators.<sup>13</sup> He argues that colonialist discourse sometimes masked the basic imperial aim of material intervention and exploitation. For example, the discursive convention of the civilizing mission can be seen to act as a foil for economic motives. JanMohamed argues that

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<sup>11</sup> Ferguson *Subject to Others*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness, British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London, 1988); Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent', in Gates (ed.) "'Race", *Writing and Difference*, pp. 185-222.

<sup>13</sup> Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', in Gates (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference*, pp. 78-106.

colonial discursive practices fulfill the same function as material practices; the writer commodifies natives in order to make their physical exploitation easier, and the colonial administration returns the favour.<sup>14</sup>

Other writers emphasise the complexities and contradictions in Orientalist texts. For example, Dennis Porter has used studies of travel writing to argue that an insistence on monolithic Orientalism in many texts is an oversimplification. He argues that, whilst Said discovers hegemonic unity amongst heterogeneous accounts, 'no consideration is given to the possibility that literary works as such have a capacity for internal ideological distancing that is usually absent from political tracts or statesmen's memoirs.'<sup>15</sup> Porter traces such 'ideological distancing' in travel writing such as Marco Polo's *Travels* and TE Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, works which on first appearance seem perhaps to be overwhelmingly Orientalist. He accuses discourse theory of tending to essentialise the West and of not being subjected to historical grounding.<sup>16</sup> Porter prefers to talk of varied class and national discourses that give rise to many types of overdetermined cultural products. Travel writing for Porter presents an unstable and shifting field of meaning which cannot be reduced to simple binarisms or to the tracing of discursive hegemony. As MacKenzie points out, Porter's analysis also presents a significant challenge to the over-empiricism of some historical accounts of travel writing.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> JanMohamed, 'Economy of Manichean Allegory', p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Dennis Porter 'Orientalism and Its Problems,' in F. Barker *et. al.* (eds.) *The Politics of Theory, Proceedings of the Essex conference on the Sociology of Literature*, (Colchester, 1983), pp. 179-211.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 192.

<sup>17</sup> Mackenzie, *Orientalism*, p. 5.

### 3. Theorising Women and Travel Writing

John MacKenzie notes that several challenges to Said have come from women scholars, many of whom work in the field of travel writing.<sup>18</sup> Much of this recent work has tended theoretically toward poststructuralism and has aimed to resist accounts of women's travel writing which incorporate totalising metanarratives and which essentialise women within imperial discourse. In this section I undertake a brief historiographical survey of literature relating to women's travel writing, but I would add that in producing a theoretical framework for their discussion of women's travel texts, commentators have often made points which are obviously more widely applicable.

The most detailed exposition of post-structural analysis of women's travel writing has been produced by Sara Mills in her 1991 book, *Discourses of Difference*.<sup>19</sup> Mills is one those writers who note that Said fails to include women's writing in his studies of colonialist texts. Although she agrees that 'Orientalist texts, in the main *do* attempt to construct the Orient as different and inferior,' [my italics] she also argues that because of the discursive constraints upon it women's travel writing 'is not straightforwardly Orientalist in the way that Said has described it.'<sup>20</sup> Mills suggests that women's travel writing has tended to be marginalised and is often 'portrayed as the records of eccentric and rather strange spinsters.'<sup>21</sup> She goes on to suggest that it has sometimes been ignored by contemporary commentators because often it

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 61-62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.



does not appear to have the clear-cut qualities that are evident in men's writing. Given the complexities of women's travel writing, Mills suggests a Foucauldian mode of analysis which resists the tendency to assume that women's travel texts are straightforward transcriptions of their lives.<sup>22</sup>

Mills suggests that women were pulled in different textual directions as they struggled to reconcile discourses of imperialism with those of femininity.<sup>23</sup> Consequently they were more diffident in their adoption of an imperialist voice. She points out that women's travel texts tended to undermine themselves in relation to their broad Orientalist functions.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, she suggests, this was because conventional colonialist discourses were less readily available to women. The most widely studied discursive constraints of colonialism, she suggests, are ethnography, racial superiority and savagery (including the noble variety)<sup>25</sup>. Such discursive leitmotifs were not so easily appropriated by women writers who had to negotiate access to them via the discursive constraints of femininity. Therefore women were more likely to describe their interactions with people rather than simply focussing on larger political issues.<sup>26</sup>

Mills' analysis leads her to conclude that not only the subject but also the form of women's travel writing was discursively restrained. In response to such constraints, women

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

often chose to produce sentimental narratives which concentrated on the private sphere.

Another method by which women could assume a powerful narrative role without contravening 'feminine' conventions was to root their accounts in philanthropic and religious concerns.<sup>27</sup> Many women presented their accounts in the form of letters or diaries that constituted a literary form sufficiently loose to contain unstructured narratives about numerous subjects. Within these narratives there were some subjects, sex, for example, and some narrative standpoints, such as the English hero with the 'stiff upperlip', which women could not easily adopt, at least not without modification via literary techniques such as humour.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the prevalence of women in the field of travel writing was in itself indicative of the constraints of taboo and confidence which often prevented women from entering the 'centre stage' of mainstream literature. Travel writing offered women an opportunity to write, but within a relatively low-status genre. Within this genre, she argues, blandness of writing was largely seen to be appropriate for women, and this blandness was then sometimes used by literary critics to discredit them.<sup>29</sup>

Following on from her observation that women travellers emphasise discussions of people in their accounts, one of the most significant of Mills' conclusions is her assertion that the texts produced by women within these constraints ultimately contained 'both a challenge to male Orientalism and a different form of knowledge about other countries.'<sup>30</sup> One critical manner in which this challenge is seen to be produced is in women's interest in native peoples.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-72.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 82.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Mills argues that some women travellers positioned their accounts not only within imperial discourse but also to varying degrees in alignment with native interests. Thus:

These women writers are undoubtedly part of the colonial project, and yet colonialism is more notable by its absence in many of the accounts; the addressing of large-scale issues, such as the role of the journey in relation to colonial expansion or description of potential colonial sites, is notably absent. Instead, their accounts demand a recognition of the importance of interaction with members of other nations, not as representatives of the race, as in male-authored accounts, but as individuals.<sup>31</sup>

To conclude this brief summary of Mills' work it is important to note that she does not deny that women have contributed to Orientalist discourse via their travel writing, although she suggests this contribution has tended to be ignored by (largely male) academics.

Nevertheless, in many instances she maintains that women's travel writing is significantly different from men's. Sometimes women's writing is able to

act as a critique of the colonialist enterprise since there is a stress on personal involvement and investment on the part of the narrator. This 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>32</sup>

Another writer who notes Edward Said's failure to acknowledge the contribution of women writers to imperial discourse is Alison Blunt in her book, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism*. Blunt acknowledges that the assertion of 'knowledge' of the colonized population legitimates authoritarian colonial power and that travellers behaved in many ways like empires in their contribution to the gaining of knowledge for the purpose of conquest. But she also argues that such a totalizing view of travel writing inevitably obscures the roles

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

that women play in imperial discourse, whether as coloniser or colonised. In short, Blunt suggests that binary oppositions in analysis tend in themselves to reproduce imperialist strategies.<sup>33</sup> Following Lisa Low, Blunt argues that there is a need to deconstruct these oppositions in order to reveal the heterogenous nature of that imperial discourse.<sup>34</sup> By accepting complexity and ambivalence within individual travellers' texts it is possible, for example, to recognise that a traveller can be an accomplice in imperialism whilst criticising it at the same time.

Like Mills, Blunt argues that the position of women within imperial discourse is not so easy to locate as that of men. This is true, for example, in the terminology employed to describe travel writing. As Blunt sees it, 'the imperial discovery rhetoric of "African exploration",' was 'the most graphic characterization of imperial travel writing.'<sup>35</sup> However, women tended to be labelled as travellers rather than as explorers, 'suggesting constructions of the overt masculinity of exploration and the more passive femininity of travel.'<sup>36</sup> In an analysis that is acutely spatially aware, Blunt also makes distinctions between how women travellers were perceived (and indeed how they presented themselves) according to whether they were active within or without the geographical boundaries of colonial society. She proposes that within colonial territory and society women were most constrained by patriarchal discourse. However, when they travelled outside the physical and cultural bounds of the colonised

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<sup>33</sup> Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism, Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (London, 1994).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

locality, women became more likely to share in the authority of male colonizers and adopt an overtly imperialist, masculine stance.<sup>37</sup>

Cheryl McEwan has approached women's travel writing on nineteenth century West Africa from a point of view which emphasises the spatial context of women traveller's narratives.<sup>38</sup> In an article informed by both Blunt and Mills, McEwan also follows Billie Melman in emphasising that gender should always be considered alongside other relationships of power such as race and class.<sup>39</sup> McEwan suggests that a regional (that is to say more localised) approach which analyses narratives about a specific place or region both 'facilitates the exploration of differences within travelogues written by women, and avoids notions concerning an essential feminine experience and description of empire.'<sup>40</sup> This smaller-scale regional approach has also been emphasised by Billie Melman who has analysed women's writing about travelling and living in the Middle East. As John MacKenzie notes approvingly, Melman's analysis 'has produced a fractured, multivocal and polyglot discourse', an analysis which constitutes a direct challenge to Said's essentialisms.<sup>41</sup>

The above is a far from exhaustive historiography of studies of women travellers.

Rather, I have highlighted important theoretical components of studies which owe various

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Cheryl McEwan, 'Paradise or pandemonium? West African landscapes in the travel accounts of Victorian women', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22 (1996), pp. 68-83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69. See also Billie Melman, *Women's Orient: English Women and the Middle East 1718-1918* (London, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> McEwan, *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Mackenzie, *Orientalism*, p. 13.

degrees of allegiance to discourse analysis. The writers above variously accept and challenge Saidian notions of discursive hegemony. They all acknowledge that women played an important role in producing and reproducing imperialist discourse and ideology. However, they also argue that special conditions should be appreciated as operating on women's travel writing, especially given women's more ambivalent access to authoritative discursive structures. None of these writers suggest that women's writing should be treated in isolation (although in practice that has tended to be what has happened).

Moira Ferguson and Cheryl McEwan both use travel accounts of Sierra Leone written by women in their analyses. I have already commented on some difficulties in Ferguson's use of Anna Maria Falconbridge's account. In contrast, Cheryl McEwan's analysis of Elizabeth Melville's *A Residence at Sierra Leone* is part of a successful, regional focus on British women's images of West African landscapes.<sup>42</sup> The present study is in broad sympathy with the emphasis on the regional/localized as a means of avoiding the pitfalls of essentialising gender issues and as a way of allowing for other relationships of power such as race and class to be acknowledged. I have not treated women's accounts separately in this thesis for the same reasons, and gender issues will be examined in what follows alongside other relevant themes.

### 3. Mary Louise Pratt and *Imperial Eyes*

Published in 1992 Mary Louise Pratt's carefully wrought book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* has had a significant theoretical impact within the field of study

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth H. Melville, *A Residence at Sierra Leone* (London, 1849), reprinted 1968. References in this thesis are to the 1968 reprint.

of travel writing and in the wider field of imperial history.<sup>43</sup> Pratt's book stands in direct contrast to the Whiggish, valedictory nature of many previous historicised accounts of travel writing. In addition, her book is more expansive than some studies which are specifically tied into themes such as gender. Many of her ideas and concepts can be applied in a Sierra Leonean context. Pratt makes no totalizing claims for her project and for what she describes as its resultant 'rhetoric of travel writing'.<sup>44</sup> Her prime stated purpose is 'not to circumscribe travel writing as a genre' but to emphasise complexity, to disunify as well as to unify, and to avoid any conclusions which generically codify or define travel writing.<sup>45</sup> My own work shares those aims, and seeks to promote an appreciation of the heterogeneity of travel writing about Sierra Leone as much as to highlight its sometimes startling, chronologically circumscribed, rhetorical cohesiveness.

*Imperial Eyes* comprises both a critique of travel writing in its reciprocal relationships with imperial ideologies as well as a study of travel writing as a genre. Pratt uses a wide range of case studies to seek to understand how 'travel and exploration writings have *produced* "the rest of the world" for European readerships' and how such 'signifying practices' encode, legitimate and sometimes betray 'the aspirations of economic expansion and empire'.<sup>46</sup> She insists that in using these key themes to inform an analysis of case studies the researcher is

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<sup>43</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 2nd ed. (London, 1993). See also Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', in Gates (ed.), *"Race," Writing and Difference*", pp.138-162.

<sup>44</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

involved in a 'dialectic and historicized approach to travel writing.'<sup>47</sup> In her attempt to pursue such an approach Pratt has been led to manufacture several terms and concepts which inform her interpretations of travellers texts. These concepts are 'Contact Zone', 'Anti-Conquest', 'Mystique of Reciprocity' and 'Transculturation'. For John Mackenzie, Pratt's identification and use of these concepts serves to destabilise the rigidities of a study which echoes Said's work but goes beyond the ordinary endeavours of colonial discourse analysis.<sup>48</sup> I shall expand on these concepts in some detail here so that their later use in relation to Sierra Leonean texts will be clearer.

### 3a) Contact Zones and Transculturation

In coining this term Pratt seeks to destabilise the notion of the imperial frontier as a rigid cultural and physical boundary. The 'contact zone', she argues, consists of 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination -- like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths.'<sup>49</sup> The 'contact zone' is often synonymous with the colonial frontier, but the frontier is in itself a Eurocentric boundary, significant only to Europeans.<sup>50</sup> The term allows relations between travellers and 'travellees', colonisers and colonised, as spatially and temporally copresent and intersecting.<sup>51</sup> The notion of a 'contact zone' effectively presents European and Native interaction in a more realistic and fluid dimension than many other studies. One characteristic

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*



of the 'contact zone' that Pratt identifies is 'transculturation', that is to say the selection and invention by marginalised groups of cultural phenomena from the material presented to them by the dominant (usually the imperial) culture. 'Transculturation' is a term which reacts against the 'dynamics of possession and innocence' so frequently identified in travel texts, and sometimes reproduced in their analysis.<sup>52</sup> Its use insists that analysts appreciate the interactive nature of the colonial experience throughout and on both sides of the contact zone.

### 3b) Anti-Conquest

Broadly, anti-conquest refers to those 'strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony.'<sup>53</sup> In coining this phrase, Pratt had a particular imperial representative in mind, viz:

The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call "the seeing man," an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse - he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.<sup>54</sup>

Whilst the main feature of anti-conquest can be described as the assertion of an innocent gaze, usually from a male protagonist, Pratt expands on the concept considerably, often referring to examples of African travel writing to do so. I shall summarize some of her more expansive arguments here as they are of importance to the texts that I shall be analysing later. In broad terms I shall focus on how Pratt interprets anti-conquest as informing two broad rhetorical formulations, that of the 'scientific' travel account and that of the 'sentimental' travel account.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

### 3c) Anti-Conquest, Science and Travelling Naturalists

One of Pratt's prime areas of focus is concerned with changes in the relationship between science and travel writing. She points out that by the second half of the eighteenth century, the international scientific expedition had become 'one of Europe's proudest and most conspicuous instruments of [imperial] expansion.'<sup>55</sup> Scientific attention had moved away from maritime exploration towards interior discovery. No longer content with defining the outer limits of potential territory, the growth of the Linnean system of taxonomical classification prompted a focus on identifying and naming flora and fauna throughout the world. Pratt likens the Linnean naturalists who accompanied scientific expeditions to 'disciples' spread across the globe, using natural history to 'construct global-scale meaning.'<sup>56</sup> Inevitably, from the second half of the eighteenth century, natural history played a major role in travel writing.

Thus:

Alongside the frontier figures of the seafarers, the conqueror, the captive, the diplomat, there began to appear everywhere the benign, decidedly literate figure of the "herborizer," armed with nothing more than a few peaceful hours alone with the bugs and flowers. Travel narratives of all kinds began to develop leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly "naturalizing."<sup>57</sup>

Whilst natural description was not new to travel writing, it was only after the growth of the Linnean classification project that 'the observing and cataloguing of nature itself became narratable.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Narrative travel accounts provided a form of mediation between science and the larger public. Pratt argues that many of the naturalists' tales in travel accounts were narratives of anti-conquest in that they presented the scientist as innocent and in some senses disconnected from the realities of the imposition of imperial power. She notes that frequently naturalists' narratives appear to depict 'urbanizing, industrializing Europeans fanning out in search of non-exploitive relations to nature.'<sup>59</sup> Thus, the natural historian as presented in travel writing reflected an utopian image of 'a European bourgeois subject simultaneously innocent and imperial, asserting a harmless hegemonic vision that installs no apparatus of domination'.<sup>60</sup> Compared to the navigator and conquistador 'the naturalist-collector is a benign, often homely figure, whose transformative powers do their work in the domestic contexts of the garden or the collection rooms.'<sup>61</sup> In many ways the naturalist was presented in travel writings as an edenic vision of Adam in the primordial garden. The naturalist was also practically and discursively located in an overwhelmingly androcentric world.<sup>62</sup>

As I have mentioned, Mary Louise Pratt's notion of anti-conquest hinges on the idea of a deceitful 'innocence' in the authorial stance of travel writers in relation to their subjects. This is particularly true in the case of the Linnean naturalist. Pratt points out that the whole purpose of Linnean classification was to name every species on the face of the planet. This constituted a totalising vision which was commensurate with an expanding search for resources to be exploited, lands to colonize and markets to dominate. Natural history was,

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

however, more than simply a project to depict and describe the planet as it was. Rather, it tended to view the world as a chaos from which the scientist-as-hero produced an order. The world's contents were to be abstracted from their particular (chaotic) surroundings and located in their appropriate place in the system, with a new, secular, European name.<sup>63</sup>

The links between the 'innocent' naturalist and the realities of imperial exploitation were strong in practical as well as discursive terms. Pratt notes that scientific expeditions frequently travelled with secret commercial instructions. Naturalists produced commercially useful knowledge often in exchange for free journeys and other perks with trading companies.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Linnaean naturalists, however apparently non-transformative were intimately tied up with the pursuit of profit and with the rationalisation of resources. It is no surprise, Pratt asserts 'that the systematization of nature coincided with the height of the slave trade and the plantation system, and colonial genocide and slave rebellion in North and South America and the Caribbean.'<sup>65</sup> If the Linnean gaze is reversed and Europe viewed from the imperial frontier, the processes of standardization, bureaucracy and normalization can be seen to have different genealogies, 'For what were the slave trade and the plantation system if not massive experiments in social engineering and discipline, serial production, the systematization of human life, the standardizing of persons?'<sup>66</sup>

All this had quite an effect on travel writing. Travel narratives began to be aimed more

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

at administrative control, territorial surveillance and appropriation of resources rather than at the discovery of trade routes. With the emphasis on describing geography and identifying flora and fauna, the human presence in the narrative, whether European or native became marginalised.<sup>67</sup> Natives were especially peripheral to many narratives, seen most often 'out of the corner of the landscanning eye', occasionally cropping up to act as porters or steal the brandy.<sup>68</sup> In Adam's garden, people usually disappear from view, 'which, of course, is why he can walk around as he pleases and name things after himself and his friends back home.'<sup>69</sup> Indigenous voices, Pratt argues, were rarely quoted or reproduced, and often the inhabitants were 'placed' within separate 'textual homelands' within the narrative, in the form of chapters on 'manners and customs' and the like.<sup>70</sup> In many ways, Pratt insists, the 'scientific' texts were complicit in the wider colonial context which sought ruthlessly to create a 'deracinated, dispossessed, disposable workforce.'<sup>71</sup> This 'textual apartheid' which separated landscape and people ensured that European aspirations were seen to be uncontested. But, all this was presented from the narrative viewpoint of the naturalist's 'innocent' gaze. Pratt sums up the tensions between the innocence of science and the guilt of conquest and the effect of this tension on the discourse of travel narratives thus:

In the literature of the imperial frontier, the conspicuous innocence of the naturalist ... acquires meaning in relation to an assumed guilt of conquest, a guilt the naturalist figure eternally tries to escape, and eternally invokes .... Even though the travellers were witnessing the daily realities of the contact zone, even though the institutions of expansionism made their travels possible, the *discourse* of travel that natural history

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

produced, and is produced by, turns on a great longing: of a way of taking possession without subjugation and violence.<sup>72</sup>

### 3d) Anti-Conquest and Sentimental Heroes

The anti-conquest that from a naturalist's perspective accompanied scientific travel accounts was to be joined by, and in some measure replaced by another kind of innocent (self) representation on the part of travel writers. This particular form of anti-conquest was reflected in representations of the author as a sentimental subject, an innocent hero-adventurer. Pratt locates this further shift toward anti-conquest discourse as occurring at the end of the eighteenth century. She argues that around this time Euroimperialism faced a legitimation crisis. The unpleasant realities of imperial intervention did not mesh with 'enlightened' rationalist and humanitarian ideologies. Eventually, new ideological justifications for empire were found in the form of scientific racism, technology based paradigms of development, and, of course, the civilizing mission.<sup>73</sup> As these developments progressed they were accompanied by a 'reimagining of the African interior' which in turn was a response to the developing momentum of the antislavery movement after 1770 and the reconception of Africans as a market to be developed rather than as a commodity to be traded.<sup>74</sup> In order to elaborate on her ideas regarding 'sentimental' travel accounts, Pratt focuses on Mungo Park's 1799 account of his successful journey to the Niger.

Typically, Pratt argues, sentimental texts like Park's were written in the manner of a

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

'plain unvarnished tale.'<sup>75</sup> They focussed more on human activity and personal experience than on landscape description. There is much use of the pronoun "I" in sentimental writing, the personal nature of which is so studiously avoided in scientific texts.<sup>76</sup> Whereas the scientific narrators as information producers reflect 'the panoptic apparatuses of the bureaucratic state', the sentimental subject inhabits and reflects the private sphere of the individual, of spirituality, of sex and desire.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, the sentimental subject shares much with his scientific counterpart, his class, his sex, his European origin, but also, crucially, the innocence and passivity of his own anti-conquest.<sup>78</sup> The sentimental hero writes from the centre of a discursive field rather than its edge; he writes with a whole body rather than as simply a seeing eye (I).<sup>79</sup> But, he is still constructed as a European presence which is non-interventionist. As such, Pratt argues:

Things happen to him and he endures and survives. As a textual construct, his innocence lies less in self-effacement than in submissiveness and vulnerability, or the *display* of self-effacement. Mungo Park writes himself as a receptor, not an initiator, as devoid of desire as his scientific counterpart.<sup>80</sup>

### 3e) The Mystique of Reciprocity

A concept which complements this sentimental anti-conquest has been promoted by Pratt as a 'mystique of reciprocity.' By this she refers to the ideals of reciprocity between European travellers and natives which are represented as key components of sentimental

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

accounts. The portrayal of 'reciprocity' provides a reinforcement of the traveller's innocence in an imperial context. In Mungo Park's case, 'Reciprocity ... is the dynamic that above all organizes Park's human centred, interactive narrative.'<sup>81</sup> For example:

The encounters with local rulers, which are basic building blocks of the narrative, are above all negotiations in which Park tries to secure survival and safe passage in return for gifts of European goods. They are a struggle to find an equilibrium between the finiteness of Park's goods and the degree of greed exercised by his hosts. Even when pillaging and thievery have reduced Park to indigence and beggary, we always find him striving to reciprocate.<sup>82</sup>

Park's mystique of reciprocity, which destabilises clear Manichean binarisms of representation with regard to European and native interaction is, as Pratt sees it, a key component of sentimental (re)presentations of the contact zone. This innocent reciprocity is of course a culturally-loaded smoking gun, and Pratt makes this point conclusively:

The obstacles to the utopia are, of course, not European but African. African greed, African banditry, African slave trading threaten the mystique of reciprocity at every turn -- and they are the only points on which Park does not reciprocate. He would rather die than steal. Can the Africans become that good too? Through his anti-conquest, Park acts out the values of the greatest non-reciprocal non-exchange of all time: the Civilizing Mission.<sup>83</sup>

Pratt has recently been criticised for inconsistencies in her theorising and for oversimplification of the issues. In particular, one group of critics have argued that the use of the term 'contact zone' is paradoxical in that it implies an attempt to circumscribe a structure, whereas the emphasis on transculturation emphasises the two-way flow of interaction.<sup>84</sup> The

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>84</sup> Arshi *et al.*, 'Why Travel', p. 229.



same critics accuse her of having a simplistic economic model of reciprocity and exchange.<sup>85</sup>

Most importantly perhaps, Pratt has been criticised for failing to emphasise the travellers' 'desire to be there', that is to say she focuses on what happens when a traveller reaches their destination rather than discussing the processes which promoted the visit and the arrival itself.

This failure to narrate 'arrivals' of travellers tends to reinforce their seemingly innocent reciprocal stance, which in turn supports Pratt's overall argument.<sup>86</sup> Pratt's analysis is also limited as a critique of women's travel writing. Nevertheless, as in the studies of women's writing we touched on earlier, Pratt sees this form of travel writing as even less clear-cut than men's. Using examples from wide timespans and geographical areas, including Anna Falconbridge's Sierra Leonean account, Pratt argues that 'women protagonists tend to produce ironic reversals when they turn up in the contact zone.'<sup>87</sup> Pratt is not concerned specifically with theorising women's travel writing but she does acknowledge 'difference' in how women writers 'produce' the areas they visit for their readership.

#### **4. Implications of Theoretical Developments for Studying Sierra Leonean Travel Accounts**

What is clear from this brief survey of recent theoretical developments around travel writing is the variety and complexity of debate that has grown up on this subject. In many ways, to split the debate between monolithic 'Saidian' discourse analysis and more complex, destabilising analyses is unhelpful. Most scholars who subscribe to binary, Manichean interpretations of travel writing acknowledge that more complex discourses exist and vice

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 102.

versa. In the Sierra Leonean context it would be pointless to subscribe to one particular theory over another, especially as the Sierra Leonean literature covers a wide historical timespan and a large variety of texts and contexts. Rather, these varied texts allow an opportunity to assess the relevance of many of theories above in a specific regional context.

Questions which inform such an analysis would include for example: How far is straightforward Orientalist discourse traceable in Sierra Leonean travel writing? Are cultural complexities in travel writing often reduced to Manichean, binary oppositions? How far do women's travel accounts of Sierra Leone reflect the constraints on women writers identified above, and how far do women's accounts destabilise more masculine norms and act as a colonial critique? How far do notions of 'anti-conquest', 'mystique of reciprocity', 'contact zone' and 'transculturation' assist in highlighting the peculiar resonances of Sierra Leonean travel writing? Whilst these questions are legitimate subjects in themselves, I have chosen to refer to them in order to inform a wider 'themed discussion' on subjects which were of particular concern to writers about the colony. These themes include images of land and environment, reflections on antislavery, and images of white and black society in the colony. It is hoped that in studying these themes, the lack of innocence of travel texts will become clearer, but also that this will be possible within an historicised discussion. Firstly, however, it is necessary to introduce the texts and authors themselves, and to place them in a broad historical context, which is the aim of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 9

### Sierra Leone Travellers: Texts and Contexts

#### 1. The Wider Historical Significance of Travel Accounts

Travel accounts have long been of importance to European 'knowledge' of 'other' regions and peoples. Eighteenth-century Europeans both knew and cared more about Africa than at any period up to the 1950s. Much of their knowledge came from traveller's accounts. Many reports of the Western Sudan were found in accounts written by Arab travellers between the tenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The most popular and influential work until the 1780s was Leo Africanus' *Description of Africa*. Written in 1526 it was nearly three hundred years old when this study period begins.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century several hundred travellers left accounts of their journeys to Guinea and a total of around twenty works formed an accepted canon of knowledge about West Africa.<sup>3</sup>

These accounts were readily accessible to educated English people, as many were published in multi-volume compilations, some of which had world-wide scope. Thomas Astley's *New General Collection of Voyages and Travels* published between 1745 and 1747 was one such account, with a comprehensive volume dedicated purely to Africa. Astley's

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<sup>1</sup> Curtin, *Image*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

*Voyages* collected French and English works together and became a definitive mine of information for anyone interested in Africa.<sup>4</sup> Alongside such compilations, general syntheses such as the *Universal History (1736-65)* presented the reading public with competent accounts of the non-Western world.<sup>5</sup> The information in these reports was refined and revised by communications from travellers who visited the region on business, from slave traders, staff from the European forts, and from educated Africans both on the coast and in England.<sup>6</sup>

However, the late eighteenth-century saw the additional influence of reporters who travelled specifically for the sake of gathering information. In particular, naturalists such as Linnaeus and Banks sent out 'enlightened' travellers to gather information to enhance their various scientific projects. Some expeditions bridged gaps between ethnography, natural history and a wider interest in African affairs. Henry Smeathman's early expedition to Sierra Leone was in this vein, as was the 1787 Swedish expedition to Senegal of Carl Wadstrom and his colleagues (mentioned in Chapter Five).<sup>7</sup> In 1788 Joseph Banks founded the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, commonly called the African Association which sent travellers into the African interior to report on geography, ethnography and natural history. Although people had always travelled out of mere curiosity, it is worth noting that the beginning of my study period coincides with a surge in interest among travellers in African affairs and culture. The professional traveller had taken centre stage.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Astley (Publisher), *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*, 4. vols. (London, 1745-1747). Cited in Curtin, *Image*, p.13.

<sup>5</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.12-14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

By way of contrast, the end of this study period coincides with an almost complete lack of interest in eye-witness reports of West Africa. Press and public had lost their enthusiasm following the failure of the Niger Expedition. Interest in West Africa also lapsed in the 1830s, during what Curtin calls 'the disinterested decade', when reports from West Africa and enthusiasm for them had waned.<sup>8</sup> However, Curtin's observations for travel writing on West Africa in general are only partially true for Sierra Leone. Whilst a strong decline in interest *is* clearly discernible in the 1850s, travel accounts relating to the colony were more or less constantly produced during the period of this study. Curtin's 'disinterested' 1830s were particularly busy and scarcely a year of this decade passed without some report from the colony. The 1840s were only slightly quieter. If anything it was the 1820s which saw a decline in the production of travel accounts of Sierra Leone, although as I have shown in chapters Six and Seven this was a period when the colony's affairs came under considerable scrutiny in the press. Clearly, travel accounts from Sierra Leone provide a wide and varied archive of sources which are significant both to the historian of Sierra Leone and to anyone with a wider interest in early colonial travel writing on West Africa. It is to a more detailed consideration of these sources that I shall now turn.

## 2. Sources

In defining a travel account for the purpose of this study I have included those texts which refer to a specific journey or journeys undertaken in Africa and which contain reports of or comments on Sierra Leone. I shall occasionally refer to texts which are not obviously travel accounts, such as medical treatises, which often contained personalised references to their

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

authors' journeys to and in the colony. The market for published tracts and books on travel was well supplied with material from Sierra Leone. Also, several accounts were serialised in the periodical press. Others are to be found in the reports and journals of bodies such as the Sierra Leone Company, the African Institution and the Royal Geographical Society.

Not all reports of journeys were intended for publication, however, and of those that were, at least one account remained unpublished for one reason or another.<sup>9</sup> Official and unofficial archives contain both complete and fragmentary reports of journeys, private journals and official accounts of travels. These journeys were made as part of government duty, either in response to instructions from London, or simply from the desire to add to the volume of information 'known' about the colony. I have included some of those accounts in this study. It is possible that more survive and the whole field of unpublished travel writing would warrant future attention. Those that I include here shed light on how far the discursive conventions of travel writing pervaded even those reports which were not intended for publication. They also illustrate how unpublished accounts sometimes exhibited an honesty of reporting which was not always found in those which found their way to the publishers.

### 3. Introduction to the Texts

By way of introduction I have grouped the source texts into several categories. Such groupings give some impression of who was writing about Sierra Leone during my study period, and about why they wrote. Of course, these categories are not fixed. Indeed, most

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<sup>9</sup> The Swedish botanist Adam Afzelius had intended to publish a work which included a broad description of Sierra Leone and comments on native life as well as a more scientific account of its flora and fauna. See Sten Lindroth, 'Adam Afzelius, a Swedish botanist in Sierra Leone, 1792-96', *Sierra Leone Studies*, (new series), 4 (1955), p. 207.

authors could be placed in more than one category. For example, it is perfectly possible for a writer to be an abolitionist, a colonial official, and a self-styled explorer at one and the same time.

### 3a) Proslavery and Antislavery Travel Accounts

It is noteworthy and perhaps surprising that of ten published accounts based on or referring to travels in the Sierra Leone region up to the abolition of the slave trade only four were hostile to the slave trade, and of these only one was openly favourable to Sierra Leone. The earliest accounts of our period did not pay any attention to the philanthropic colony as such. John Matthews' *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone*, published in 1788, was an account of his journey to re-establish a slave trading factory at Whitman's Bay.<sup>10</sup> Matthews included some ethnographic information on native tribes which several subsequent travellers drew on. His account was very much an apologia for the slave trade and was popular enough to be re-issued in 1791. In the same year, Alexander Falconbridge published *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa*.<sup>11</sup> This account was based on his travels on the coast as an agent of Thomas Clarkson, who had engaged him to obtain information on the slave trade. His eyewitness account was not so much a travel narrative as a series of observations detailing the workings of the slave trade. Carl Wadstrom published his *Observations on the Slave Trade*, in 1789, which, like his later *Essay on Colonization* contained references to his visit to Senegal. As we have seen, Wadstrom was hostile to the slave-trade but also unimpressed by the Sierra

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<sup>10</sup> Matthews, *Voyage to the River Sierra Leone*.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Falconbridge, *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London, 1788).

Leone Company.<sup>12</sup>

Positive representations of the utopian schemes in Sierra Leone were simply missing from most accounts written by those with real experience of West Africa at this time. Things were to get worse for those who would have wished Sierra Leone to be shown in a good light. In 1790 Alexander Falconbridge was engaged by the Sierra Leone Company to relieve and resettle Granville Town. Accompanying him on that voyage, and on his return to the colony in 1792 (as the Company's Commercial Agent) was his young wife Anna Maria. In 1794, after Alexander's drink-induced death and following bitter conflict with Henry Thornton over money, Anna Maria published a profoundly dissonant and hostile account of the colony entitled *Two Voyages to Sierra Leone*.<sup>13</sup> Not only was she critical of the Company but she ended her account as a firm supporter of the pro-slave traders and their business. Such traders included Joseph Hawkins, who published a titillating account of the debauched life of slave traders on the river Nunez in his *History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa*, which was published in 1796 and reached a second edition in 1797.<sup>14</sup>

In the midst of all this hostility came a far-reaching and insightful account of the natives in and around the colony by the Company's surgeon, Thomas Winterbottom. His two volume *An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighbourhood of Sierra Leone* was

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<sup>12</sup> Wadstrom, *Observations on the Slave Trade*; Wadstrom, *An Essay on Colonization*. See Chapter 5 of this thesis for Wadstrom's criticisms of the Sierra Leone Company.

<sup>13</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*.

<sup>14</sup> John Hawkins, *A History of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa*, 2nd ed. (Troy, 1796) reprinted 1970. References in this thesis are to the 1970 reprint.



published in 1803.<sup>15</sup> One volume dealt with medical matters, the others contained more general ethnographic survey and comment. Much of Winterbottom's account aimed to refute the more salacious and racialised representations of native manners and customs dominating contemporary debate about Western Africa. Winterbottom's was the only published traveller's voice of this period which was in favour of Sierra Leone. The hero of the Bulama Island scheme, Phillip Beaver published his account of that expedition and his impressions of that colony in 1805. Although in favour of 'legitimate commerce', Beaver thought the Sierra Leone project doomed in commercial and therefore in all other terms.<sup>16</sup> Another survivor of the Bulama expedition who visited Sierra Leone was Joshua Montefiore who included a brief portrait of the colony in his subsequent travel account<sup>17</sup>.

A French writer, J.P.L. Durand, continued the theme in his influential *A Voyage to Senegal*, which contained the argument that as slave labour was essential to the success of new colonies Sierra Leone was inevitably doomed to failure.<sup>18</sup> Another writer in favour of slavery in new colonies was Joseph Corry, whose *Observations on the Windward Coast of Africa* was published in the year the company passed over control of Sierra Leone to the Crown. Corry emphasised the positive economic benefits of slavery and was critical of the

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<sup>15</sup> Winterbottom, *Account of the Native Africans*.

<sup>16</sup> Beaver, *African Memorandum* (London, 1805).

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Montefiore, *An Authentic Account of the late Expedition to Bulam, on the Coast of Africa with a Description of the Present Settlement of Sierra Leone and the Adjacent Country* (London, 1794).

<sup>18</sup> J.P.L. Durand, *A Voyage to Senegal* (London, 1789).

Sierra Leone 'experiment'.<sup>19</sup> Captain John Adams was hostile to the Sierra Leone colony, both for its aims and its location. He published two travel accounts in the 1820s and used them as a vehicle for his argument that slavery had acted as a culture bearer to 'savage' African nations. He also argued that the town of Malemba just north of the mouth of the Congo was, in terms of its physical environment, a more suitable place for colonisation than Sierra Leone.<sup>20</sup>

### 3b) Naval Accounts

Aside from slave traders and colonial officials, another group of regular travellers to the coast was naval officers, usually visiting the region in support of the naval blockade once the slave trade had been abandoned. Naval officers published their own impressions and opinions of Sierra Leone for the benefit of readers back home. The first of these was far from favourable. In 1807, Frances Spilsbury, Surgeon aboard HMS *Favourite*, published his *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa*, which described Sierra Leone as a sickly destination and its white and black populations as immoral (a theme which was to become all too familiar to British readers).<sup>21</sup> In 1811 *La Belle Assemblée* serialised an account by another ship's surgeon, J. Strang.<sup>22</sup> Both Strang and Spilsbury's accounts were typical of the other naval officers' accounts which followed in that they were gossipy and light-hearted, and made

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Corry, *Observations on the Windward Coast of Africa* (London, 1807), reprinted 1968. References in this thesis are to the 1968 reprint.

<sup>20</sup> John Adams, *Remarks on the Country Extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo* (London, 1823, reprinted 1966). References in this thesis are to the 1966 reprint. *Sketches Taken during Ten Voyages to Africa, Between the Years 1785 and 1800* (London, 1822).

<sup>21</sup> Frances Spilsbury, *Account of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa* (London, 1807).

<sup>22</sup> J. Strang, 'Original Journal of a Voyage to the Coast of Africa in 1805 in His Majesty's Ship, Success', *La Belle Assemblée* (1811), pp. 233-36 and 291-95.

little pretence to 'learned' observation. In the 1830s and 1840s, the naval blockade came to provide what Curtin calls 'a special reservoir of leisured would-be literary talent' and naval reminiscences burgeoned.<sup>23</sup> In 1832, Captain F. Chamier published a highly critical account of the colony as part of his lively, broad ranging, *Life of a Sailor*.<sup>24</sup> In 1833, Peter Leonard, another naval surgeon, published his own journalistic *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa*.<sup>25</sup>

An exception to the lightweight accounts which tended to typify reports from naval officers was found in an anonymous 'Private Journal of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa'. This was printed in the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* and was mainly concerned with detailing how the writer had maintained the health of the crew onboard a naval patrol ship.<sup>26</sup> Similarly factual was the 1833 account of Capt. William Owen who, as part of a larger voyage, made the first accurate survey of the Sierra Leonean coastline.<sup>27</sup> More journalistic studies returned in 1837 with Captain James Alexander's *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation among the Colonies of Western Africa*. Alexander recorded his images of Sierra Leone which he visited on route to military service in Southern Africa.<sup>28</sup> In 1849, a Lieutenant

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<sup>23</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 322.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick Chamier, *The Life of a Sailor, by a Captain in the Navy* (London, 1832).

<sup>25</sup> Peter Leonard, *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa in H.M.S. Dryad*, (Edinburgh, 1833).

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, 'Private Journal of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa' *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal*, (October 1830), pp. 217-230.

<sup>27</sup> William F. Owen, *Narrative of a Voyage to explore the Shores of Africa, Arabia, and Madagascar* (London, 1833).

<sup>28</sup> John E. Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage of Observation among the Colonies of Western Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1835).

Frederick Forbes published *Six Months Service in the African Blockade* which contained numerous observations on the colony's black inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> As late as 1850 the naval tales continued, with the publication of Henry Huntley's *Seven Years Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa*.<sup>30</sup>

### 3c) Explorer's Tales

Despite the immense popularity of sentimental exploration narratives such as those of Mungo Park in The Gambia and the reports of Niger explorers, narratives of genuine exploration which focussed on Sierra Leone and its environs were rare.<sup>31</sup> Lured by the potential for the development of trade, several forays were made from Sierra Leone to the prosperous muslim state of Futa Jallon. Thomas Winterbottom's brother, Mathew and another company servant James Watt visited its capital Timbo, about three hundred miles from Freetown in 1794. Watt was one of the Colony's original members of Council, and was an agricultural entrepreneur who had once been a planter in Dominica.<sup>32</sup> A manuscript copy

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<sup>29</sup> Frederick E. Forbes, *Six Months Service in the African Blockade* (London, 1849).

<sup>30</sup> Henry Huntley, *Seven Years Service on the Slave Coast of Western Africa*, 2 vols. (London, 1850).

<sup>31</sup> Mungo Park's successful first expedition up the River Gambia in search of the Niger provided a rare public triumph for the African Association. For his account of this journey see Mungo Park, *Travel in the Interior Districts of Africa* (London, 1799). Dixon Denham and Hugh Clapperton explored the area comprising the North of modern day Nigeria in the early 1820s. See D. Denham and H. Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823, and 1824*, 2 vols. (London, 1826). Denham became Governor of Sierra Leone in 1828 but died before he could make a great impact on the colony other than to add to its unhealthy reputation. Clapperton died at Sokoto, on an expedition with his servant Richard Lander. See H. Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London, 1829) and Richard L. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa ... with Subsequent Adventures of the Author*, 2 vols. (London, 1830).

<sup>32</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 46.

of Watt's journal survives and provides an important unpublished source.<sup>33</sup> In the 1820s the Sierra Leone Government focussed once more on the promotion of trade with the interior.

Expeditions went up to Timbo again in 1821 and 1822. The first of these was led by Brian O'Beirne, an Army surgeon sent to carry a peaceful message to the Alimami of Futa Jallon.<sup>34</sup> The latter was led by Alexander Gordon Laing. Laing later became famous as the explorer who first reached Timbuktu (and was killed on the return journey). He published a detailed, illustrated account of his expedition to Timbo and its environs entitled *Travels in The Timannee, Kooranko, and Soolima Countries*.<sup>35</sup> A further attempt to secure a trade with Futa Jallon was made in 1841 when the missionary William Cooper Thompson was sent to Timbo in 1841 to reopen Watt and Winterbottom's trading route. He died there after a residence of two years, but his journal was brought back to Freetown by his twelve-year-old son and was published in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* in 1846.<sup>36</sup>

Other travellers who produced accounts based on journeys in the country around the colony, and who were presented or presented themselves in exploratory mode, included another surgeon, Peter McLachlan, who published his *Travels in the Baga and Soosoo Countries* on Freetown's own press.<sup>37</sup> In a different vein was the missionary Sigmund Koelle,

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<sup>33</sup> James Watt, Journal, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

<sup>34</sup> The success of O'Beirne's journey merited inclusion in *The Times* of Aug. 6, 1921.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander G. Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*.

<sup>36</sup> 'Narrative of Mr. William Cooper Thomson's Journey from Sierra Leone to Timbo, Capital of Futah Jallo, in West Africa. Communicated by Lord Stanley *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*', 17 (1846), pp. 106-138.

<sup>37</sup> Peter McLachlan, *Travels into the Baga and Soosoo Countries* (Freetown, 1821).

who visited the interior in order to investigate reports of an African language with a written script, and who published an account of his adventures in 1849.<sup>38</sup>

Two other published accounts can be loosely placed in the 'explorers' cannon although they are based on second-hand information. The first, Rev. William Bingley's *Travels in Africa from Modern Writers* was a compilation of African travel writing which drew heavily on Winterbottom for its section on Sierra Leone.<sup>39</sup> The tenor of this 1819 publication emphasised western exploration of Africa and was intended 'to allure young people to the study of Geography and Knowledge of foreign countries'.<sup>40</sup> The second, Catherine Hutton's *The Tour of Africa* was published in the same year as Bingley's and offered another compilation of other travellers' writing.<sup>41</sup> Hutton, however, wrote deliberately without specific reference to the travellers from which she had drawn her information. Instead she invented an imaginary explorer/traveller and created a narrative which included some of the detailed journeys from real travellers. Mary Louise Pratt has noted that Hutton's technique made the discursive terrain of exploration available to her as a woman when the real task of exploration was not an option.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sigmund Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Vy Country of West Africa* (London, 1849).

<sup>39</sup> William Bingley, *Travels in Africa, from Modern Writers* (London, 1828).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, preface.

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Hutton, *The Tour of Africa*, 3 vols. (London, 1819-1821).

<sup>42</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 106.

### 3d) Accounts from Colonial Officials

Some of the most detailed travel accounts relating to the colony were written by colonial officials or their relatives. I have mentioned Anna Maria Falconbridge's book earlier in this chapter. Hers was the only account from a writer linked to the colonial government which was openly hostile to official policy in the colony. Nevertheless, other accounts in this genre varied widely in content and argument. The bulk of unpublished journals which survive were written by men operating in an official capacity. They include the extensive journals left by the Sierra Leone Company's botanist Adam Afzelius, a resident in the colony between 1792 and 1796.<sup>43</sup> Afzelius was a 'disciple' of Carl Linnaeus, one of Mary Louise Pratt's 'innocent' herborizers, 'Adam' in his garden! In 1802 a young member of Council, Richard Bright, was sent by governor Dawes upriver to 'Mandingo Country' in order to secure the capture of a Nova Scotian rebel, Nathaniel Wansey, and the Temne King Tom who had been responsible for a recent attack on the colony. He was instructed to make detailed notes of his journey and these survive in Colonial Office records.<sup>44</sup>

Several other journals and memoirs of varying length and importance also survive. These tended to relate to specific missions of negotiation with native chiefs. Alexander Smith visited the Mandingo country to complete Bright's mission in 1802 and returned on diplomatic missions on two other occasions.<sup>45</sup> Governor Columbine kept a Journal between 1809 and

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<sup>43</sup> A.P. Kup, (ed.), *Adam Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal 1795-1796* (Uppsala, 1967).

<sup>44</sup> Bright's instructions and journal are preserved in PRO/CO 270/8.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Smith, *Journal of a Voyage to the River Kisi-Kisi* (December 1802); *Journal of a Voyage to the River Kisi Kisi in the schooner Experiment* (February-April 1805); *Journal of a Voyage from Sierra Leone to Fouricaria the Chief town in the Mandingo Country in the King Kanta after the expulsion of Dallamooda* (November 1806), UIC.

1810, and also wrote a Memoranda of his first voyage to Africa.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Ludlam kept a journal of his visit to Sherbro to negotiate between two warring chiefs whose dispute was unsettlingly close to the colony.<sup>47</sup> Other unpublished journals of interest include a brief memorandum of an exploratory foray into the mountains around Freetown conducted by Abraham Vanneck, an official of the Sierra Leone Company and the unpublished reflections of a naval officer, George Courtenay, on duty on the coast in the early 1820s.<sup>48</sup>

It was not until the 1830s that a positive account of the colony was published which had been written by a colonial official. This was Major Henry Ricketts' *Narrative of the Ashantee War*, published in 1831, and containing a short vignette of Sierra Leone which lauded the achievements of the liberated Africans.<sup>49</sup> Ricketts was a survivor of the Ashantee war and who became governor of the colony in 1828. Four years after Rickett's account, a short piece of missionary propaganda entitled *Sierra Leone, or the Liberated Africans* was published under the name 'Mary Church'. Christopher Fyfe has identified the writer as most probably being Catherine, daughter of Governor Octavius Temple.<sup>50</sup> In 1831, the Colonial Surgeon to Sierra Leone, James Boyle, wrote a medical treatise on the diseases of Sierra

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<sup>46</sup> Edward H. Columbine, 'Memoranda made on my voyage to Africa in H.M. Ship Crocodile in the years 1809-1810' and 'Journal', 1809-10, U.I.C.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Ludlam, 'Journal of Proceedings during a Voyage to Sherbro', (1805), U.I.C. See also, *Observations (by Mr. Ludlam) -- Respecting the Relations of the Colony with the Neighbouring Countries*, n.d., U.I.C.

<sup>48</sup> Abraham Vanneck, 'Journal of an excursion with a detachment of Sierra Leone volunteers into the mountains of Sierra Lone &c.', Feb. 7. 1807; Lt. G. Courtenay, Commander of HMS B.W. 'West African Journal', Sept. 1823-June 1825, U.I.C.

<sup>49</sup> Henry J. Ricketts, *Narrative of the Ashantee War*, (London, 1831).

<sup>50</sup> 'Mary Church', *Sierra Leone, or the Liberated Africans*, (London, 1835). Fyfe, *History*, p.264.



Leone which established him as an authority on tropical fevers. Alongside the scientific detail, Boyle included personalised impressions of the colony.<sup>51</sup> An unusually full and important account appeared in 1836, written by Frances Harrison Rankin and entitled *The White Man's Grave*.<sup>52</sup> Rankin's was one of the few accounts specifically on Sierra Leone to attract the interest of reviewers. He was a relative of the colony's Chief Justice and worked as Marshal of the mixed Court, then as a clerk and manager in the Liberated African Department. Rankin did not, however, emphasise these connections in his book. He commented on all aspects of Freetown society, delved into the history of the colony, and was not afraid to proffer opinions about its future. In addition, he presented himself as an heroic adventurer, and his text is, in Mary Louise Pratt's terms, a quintessential sentimental travel account.

The 1840s saw the publication of some quite lengthy accounts from colonial servants and their relatives. In 1843 the Assistant Colonial Surgeon Robert Clarke published his *Sierra Leone* which was a precursor to his 1863 volume, *Sketches of the Colony of Sierra Leone and its Inhabitants*.<sup>53</sup> Between 1841 and 1842, William Hamilton, a retired naval officer and some-time magistrate and manager of a liberated African village, published a series of articles on the liberated Africans in the *Colonial Magazine*.<sup>54</sup> In 1847 William Whitaker Shreeve, a

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<sup>51</sup> James Boyle, *A Practical Medico-historical Account of the Western Coast of Africa* (London, 1831). For a discussion of the significance of Boyle's work see Curtin, *Image*, pp.347-48.

<sup>52</sup> Frances H. Rankin, *The White Man's Grave, a Visit to Sierra Leona in 1834*, 2 vols. (London, 1836).

<sup>53</sup> Robert Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, (London, 1843); *Sketches of the Colony of Sierra Leone and its Inhabitants* (London, 1863).

<sup>54</sup> William Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, (1841-42).

disgruntled official, published a hostile, gossipy account called *Sierra Leone*, in which he attacked the colony's first black governor, William Ferguson.<sup>55</sup> In 1849, Elizabeth Melville, wife of the King's Advocate for the colony, published *A Residence at Sierra Leone* which describes the life and concerns of a colonial 'lady' in Freetown.<sup>56</sup> Finally, in 1850, the Rev. T.E. Poole, who had eventually taken up the post as chaplain that he had once turned down on the grounds of its unhealthiness, produced a journalistic, partisan account of the colony entitled *Life in Sierra Leone and the Gambia*.<sup>57</sup>

### 3e) Missionary Travellers and a Lone Tourist

Not all religiously affiliated travellers went off into the bush on exploration/mission work. In 1817 Edward Bickersteth visited Freetown to gather information on mission work there and reported his impressions to the African Institution.<sup>58</sup> The Quaker teacher and linguist Hannah Kilham visited the colony twice in 1824 and 1827 during which time she set up a school in the village of Charlotte. Kilham's narratives of her travels lack the gung- ho exploratory, masculine sense that pervaded many male missionary accounts. Her experiences are chronicled in a variety of published sources including letters, tracts and articles in Quaker journals.<sup>59</sup> In 1839 R.M. McBriar published his *Sketches of a Missionary's Travels*, part of

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<sup>55</sup> William W. Shreeve, *Sierra Leone*, (London, 1847)

<sup>56</sup> Melville, *A Residence at Sierra Leone*.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas E. Poole, *Life, Scenery, and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia* (London, 1850).

<sup>58</sup> For Bickersteth's report see African Institution, *Reports of the Committee, Eleventh Report* (1817), pp. 126-52.

<sup>59</sup> Hannah Kilham, *Report on a recent Visit to the Colony of Sierra Leone* (London, 1828); Kilham, *Present State of the Colony of Sierra Leone*, (Lindfield, 1832).; See also, *Extracts From the Letters of Hannah Kilham now at Sierra Leone. Reprinted from the Friends Magazine*

which contained his suggestions for a theocratic mission to the liberated Africans.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear from the above that travel accounts about Sierra Leone came from a wide and varied source group. People travelled to the colony for numerous purposes and lengths of time. Some were 'just passing through' and others had a specific role to fill. Only one traveller appears to have gone to Sierra Leone just for the sake of it and he was the blind traveller John Holman who published his *Travels* in 1840, having visited the colony as part of a longer trip which included Madeira, the Canaries, and other West African ports.<sup>61</sup> Holman's was the only account which approached tourism, in the sense perhaps of the grand tour in Europe or picturesque tours to the English Lake District, although sections of other accounts, such as Rankin's, were written in a similar vein. Given such a wide variety of viewpoints and motivations for writing, it might reasonably be expected that these numerous accounts would have little in common outside of their broadest classification. In fact, all travel writers operated within certain narrative constraints and conventions which restricted what they reported and how they wrote. These conventions also forced the writers to present themselves as worthy of the reader's attention. It is to a discussion of those conventions and the self (re)presentation of the travel writers themselves that I shall now turn.

#### 4. Narrative Constraints and Intertextuality, and Self-Presentation in Travel Writing

Intertextuality is a term first coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966: she argued that a text is

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(London, 1831); Sarah Biller, *Memoir of the Late Hannah Kilham* (London, 1837).

<sup>60</sup> R.M. MacBriar, *Sketches of a Missionary's Travels in Egypt, Syria, Western Africa, &c., &c.* (London, 1839), pp. 328ff.

<sup>61</sup> James Holman, *Travels in Madeira, Sierra Leone, Teneriffe, St. Jago, Cape Coast, Fernando Po, Princes Island* (London, 1840).

not an isolated phenomenon but has a necessary interdependence with a mass of other texts that preceded it.<sup>62</sup> Christopher Fyfe did not employ this concept specifically when he commented on the similarities between many travel accounts written about Sierra Leone but he nevertheless concisely summarised intertextuality in these writings when he wrote:

There is almost a formula for the journey out -- a disapproving word on the Popish superstitions at Madeira, a glimpse of the high peak of Teneriffe, the vista of low-lying African coast, then the surprised gasp at the beauty of Freetown harbour, followed by gloomy reflections on the evil climate it masked, a description of the town, the grassy street the washerwomen and market-women in their bright turbans, perhaps a bit about the Krumen with their funny names (King George or Bottle of Beer), a garbled account of the foundation of the Colony, and off the traveller goes in quest of slave ships or the Niger waters!<sup>63</sup>

In many ways, intertextual leitmotifs in travel writing, such as Fyfe describes, constitute hegemonies of representation which form the dominant images in these accounts. Any analysis of travel writing then is inevitably involved in the task of tracing intertextuality within and between a variety of texts. Of equal interest, however, is the presence of 'dissonance' or 'resistance' to such hegemonic intertextuality, which is also a feature of travel writing in general and Sierra Leone in particular.

Intertextuality in travel writing is far from coincidental but can be seen to reflect more general constraints on the authors. Above all, travellers writing for publication needed to be readable and to produce a work which appealed to readers 'back home'. As Curtin points out, this often led to sensationalism in the reporting of African life.<sup>64</sup> Writers often stressed elements of African society most repellent to Western readers, such as cannibalism or

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (Oxford, 1980).

<sup>63</sup> Fyfe, *History*, p. 265.

<sup>64</sup> Curtin, *Image*, p. 321.

'primitive' religious ceremonies. In this sense, for example, the intertextual enthusiasm for describing the Kru (traceable in a wide number and variety of travel accounts on Sierra Leone) is understandable, given their idiosyncratic choice of anglicised names and refusal to wear European dress.

Writers were not just restrained by the need to appeal to the public, they also had to take into account reviewers and their opinions of an appropriate literary style. The eighteenth century saw the development of a preferred 'literary' style for travel writing. The key to a text being defined as 'literary' was that it should employ a degree of narrative organisation, unlike the travel guides and compendiums that had previously dominated the field of published travel writing.<sup>65</sup> In stylistic terms, eighteenth-century reviewers favoured a 'golden mean between formal discourse and colloquial speech', those considered too weighty or too conversational being censured alike.<sup>66</sup> With the developing interest in sentimental accounts and the growth of chapters on 'manners and customs' of the natives and the beauties of nature, a more sophisticated, literary style was demanded of travel writers.<sup>67</sup> Such demands persisted as the nineteenth century progressed. Stylistic considerations were a constant theme of review articles. For example, in the *Edinburgh Review*, the reviewer of volume two of Thomas Winterbottom's *Account of the Native Africans* noted with approval that 'The language is pure, unaffected, and classical.'<sup>68</sup> By contrast the reviewer of Elizabeth Melville's *A Residence*

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Batten Jr. *Pleasurable Instruction - Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature* (California, 1978), p. 36.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>68</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, 5 (1805), p. 398.

in *Sierra Leone* in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* was keen to point out her 'limitations' and noted that: 'Our lady is a good painter of minute objects, but she wants breadth: her pencil is feminine, and addicted to stippling, and reminds you, by the neatness and colouring, of the effect of a kaleidoscope.'<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, a comparative review (in the *British Quarterly Review*) of Rankin and Melville's books criticised Melville for failing to deal with antislavery issues and for producing natural descriptions which 'rush up rather exuberant and tangled'.<sup>70</sup> Such reviews tend to reinforce what Sara Mills has claimed and which I discussed in Chapter 8, that the form of women's travel writing was restricted by convention but at the same time often treated by commentators as if those conventions did not apply. Thus, as I have already discussed in greater detail, another strong constraint on travel writing centred around gender concerns.

Reviewers were especially critical of travellers who attempted to describe foreign countries after only a fleeting visit. The same reviewer who criticised the lightweight nature of Melville's text also criticised Rankin for drawing weighty conclusions after only a short stay in the colony.<sup>71</sup> Anxious to avoid such criticism, many writers justified their journey, their length of stay and the particular emphasis of their account in an introduction or preface to the main text. These prefaces helped writers to stake their claim to legitimacy within the genre and are an important component in any analysis of the cultural significance of what is written. As I have noted in chapter 8, Mary Louise Pratt has been criticised for not discussing how

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<sup>69</sup> *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 11 (1849), p. 343.

<sup>70</sup> *British Quarterly Review*, 11, (1850), pp. 48 and 52.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

travel writers have narrated their journeys from home to their foreign destination, nor their explanations of their desire to make the journey in the first place. Obviously, the reasons authors gave for pursuing their travels and writing about them have been of little interest to historians who have 'visited' their accounts for the sole purpose of gaining narrative information. Nevertheless, an understanding of how travellers represented themselves to their reading public is an integral component of my study which adheres to the premise that, for historians as well as for literary critics, a travel account begins in the preface, and not as the boat pulls into Freetown harbour.

John Mathews' proslavery apologia was written in the form of letters home to a friend. In the last of these letters, written from Liverpool and effectively comprising an appendix, Mathews outlined his defence of the trade and its operatives, making clear that this was his major reason for publication.<sup>72</sup> Whilst Anna Falconbridge also ended as a supporter of the trade and adopted a similar form to Mathews (in that her texts consist of letters home), she was more direct about her purposes in publishing. Falconbridge cited the novelty of her travels as a woman as the main reason for sending the letters.<sup>73</sup> She also readily admitted that the letters were written with an eye to publication.<sup>74</sup> In her preface, Falconbridge claimed to report important events, and manners and customs of the natives.<sup>75</sup> In general, the narration of such issues was a more masculine province. A major part of the purpose of her preface seems to have been to indicate that she should not be trifled with. She noted that she had

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<sup>72</sup> Mathews, *Voyage*, pp. 157-59.

<sup>73</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. v.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

married against the wishes of her family and friends and was determined to accompany her husband 'even to the wilds of *Africa*'.<sup>76</sup> Presenting herself as a determined and articulate opponent, Falconbridge stated that her main aim in publishing was to bring to the public's attention her 'unpromising account' of the colony under the Sierra Leone Company's government. She also directly challenged the Company to contradict her account if they wished.<sup>77</sup> Falconbridge seems to have been generally unconstrained by her potentially lower status with the reader as a woman. She claimed a gender-based novelty value for her account, but did not adhere to conventions of female travel writing, such as those which restrict a woman from commenting on political and commercial matters. Hers was an uncompromising text with an overt political message, and she made this clear from the start, presenting herself as a strong and defiant enemy of the 'hypocritical' Directors of the Company.

Far removed from Anna Maria Falconbridge's account, both chronologically and discursively, was Elizabeth Melville's *A Residence in Sierra Leone*. Melville introduced herself in a self-deprecating and apologetic way, much more typical of women's travel writing of the period. In her preface she apologised that the work contained 'trivial matter', presenting her observations, both social and physical, as being those of an interested amateur open to censure. She also made it clear that she had eschewed two of the most popular themes of travel writers on the colony. Firstly, she said she had avoided commenting on European society 'because it would incur imputation of personality.' Secondly, she had avoided writing much about the slave trade.<sup>78</sup> Although Melville gave no distinct reason for this omission, it is

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

<sup>78</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. v.



clear that she was operating within the discursive convention which assumed political issues to be unfit for female comment. However, Melville wrote that 'whilst disclaiming all intention of discussing the merits of a great political question [the slave trade]' she hoped that she would not be thought 'presumptuous' if she added her 'feeble' voice to calls for the squadron to remain in service off the West African coast.<sup>79</sup> On safer ground, she also praised the work of missionaries in the 'education and enlightenment' of the black population.<sup>80</sup>

Self-deprecation and apologies for the lack of weighty reflection also figured in texts written by men. Their voices, however, tended to be more assured, more convinced that theirs was a tale that would interest the reader. Several of the accounts written by naval officers contain prefaces and introductions written in this vein. Peter Leonard wrote: 'The author has no pretensions to the character of a learned traveller, and therefore has contented himself with a simple record of the observations which he made during his visits to different parts of the coast of Africa and its islands.'<sup>81</sup> Captain Alexander acknowledged that he was open to censure for not having spent much time in most of the places he visited. This, he explained, was because his main purpose was to undertake a journey of exploration in Southern Africa. Nevertheless, he claimed that his aim was to present the reader with new details, 'to give variety and to convey to others some part of the amusement and instruction which the voyage afforded to himself.'<sup>82</sup> He noted the lack of profound reflection in his account, and excused this on the grounds that it was written amid the general bonhomie on board his ship. In claiming

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>81</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. ix.

no more legitimacy for his account than that of a good yarn, he was able to ridicule other travellers in order to claim his own place within the genre. Thus, he wrote:

every traveller is allowed to boast of some particular achievement or another. One of "the order" says that his pride is that he has eaten of as many different animals as are found in a well-stocked museum .... Another gloried in having stood, at one time, on one leg under the falls of Niagara, and held out the other to be cured of rheumatism by the cataract; and the same time next year, to have stood on one leg on the head of the angel on the top of the castle of St. Angelo at Rome. The boast of the present writer is, that he has been permitted to do a good deal in a short time: whether well or not, is for the public to judge.<sup>83</sup>

The contrast between this passage and Melville's gentle apology is striking. Other naval writers were less apologetic and often launched into their narrative in a self-validating manner.<sup>84</sup>

Another writer who claimed that his account was lightweight and frivolous was Frances Harrison Rankin. In his preface to *The White Man's Grave*, Rankin made it clear that he aimed to produce a gossipy account of the colony which should entertain the reader. As he put it:

It will be seen, that in the texture of the subsequent leaves, details concerning permanent phenomena, the origin and customs of surrounding tribes, and natural productions have been avoided: the floating froth has been skimmed, and little of the solid substance put forward in dry form.<sup>85</sup>

Rankin referred his readers to Thomas Winterbottom's much earlier works for more sophisticated observations of the natives, arguing that things had not changed since Winterbottom wrote, and that the gap of information which needed addressing concerned the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>84</sup> This was true, for example, of Henry Huntley in *Seven Years Service*.

<sup>85</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. viii.

colony itself.<sup>86</sup> In some respects, as will become clear in much of what follows, Rankin's claim to a concern only with the 'floating froth' of colonial life was disingenuous. Throughout his account Rankin played down the short amount of time he had actually spent in the colony and wrote with an aura of gravitas and authority. Such gravitas was hinted at in the preface where he suggested that he would vindicate the colony from its detractors, particularly with regard to its climate. He aimed, he said, to bring real knowledge to an area of much speculation. This implied a somewhat more serious approach than his early comments suggested. This dialectic between gossip and gravitas was a feature of Rankin's account and the preface contains hints in that direction.

In contrast to texts which claimed to be light-hearted, others were aimed at that most serious of enterprises, the production of useful imperial knowledge. As one of the important aims of a journey, the desire to gather knowledge of land and peoples, was one of the most potent justifications a traveller could produce for his or her work. Even James Watt, at the end of his unpublished journal, expressed the thought that his travails would have been worthwhile if his observations were 'useful'.<sup>87</sup> The text most evidently devoted to the production of 'useful' knowledge, however, was that of Thomas Winterbottom. His preface was modest and self-deprecatory. It also stands out in that it contains a stated aim of the author that his work sought to remove some common prejudices about native Africans amongst British readers.<sup>88</sup> This overt defence of African capabilities in a serious intellectual context was most unusual as a prime reason for writing. 'Mary Church' also claimed that she

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> James Watt, *Journal*, final paragraph.

<sup>88</sup> Winterbottom, *Account*, vol. 1. preface.

wished to defend African capabilities, although her work belonged to the light-hearted domesticated cannon of colonial texts.<sup>89</sup>

Other writers sought to fill a gap in public and professional knowledge of the colony. For example James Boyle noted that whilst numerous attempts had been made to penetrate and describe the African interior, the issue of health had been neglected. His book sought to address that issue.<sup>90</sup> The introduction to William Hamilton's accounts of the Liberated Africans in the *Colonial Magazine* noted that England spent a good deal of money on philanthropic purposes and made little effort to assess the results.<sup>91</sup> Whatever the merits of that argument, it allowed Hamilton to be introduced as a knowledgeable expert who had gained the trust and confidence of the blacks and thereby acquired a good deal of information.

Frederick Forbes insisted that his chapter on Sierra Leone was primarily written to indicate the possibilities for legitimate trade with Africa.<sup>92</sup> Robert Clarke claimed that his account included much information about the colony, its topography, productions and liberated African traditions which were still unknown to the British public. He also aimed to stimulate further exploration in the area.<sup>93</sup> The posthumous introduction by Lord Stanley to the extracts of William Cooper Thomson's diary in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical*

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<sup>89</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. A5.

<sup>90</sup> Boyle, *A Practical Account*, pp. v-vi.

<sup>91</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 6 (1841), p. 327.

<sup>92</sup> Forbes, *Six Month's Service*, p. vii.

<sup>93</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, p. iv.

*Society* emphasised the trading objective of Thompson's mission and lamented his loss to the world of colonial commerce.<sup>94</sup>

Many of the above texts aimed at knowledge production also sought to introduce the author as an explorer-hero. This is a theme which will be studied in more detail later. The only enduringly well-known explorer among these sources though was Alexander Gordon Laing. A long preface to his book was written by a friend, ostensibly to apologise for any defects in his compilation of the book from Laing's journals. However, the real achievement of the preface seems to have been to eulogise the traveller. The preface detailed how Laing was unable to prepare the book for publication himself because he had been fighting in the Ashantee war and explained how later plans to edit his journals were thwarted by a call to join in the Niger expedition. These explanations authenticated Laing's status as an explorer and hero.<sup>95</sup>

Two writers were more concerned than any others about justifying their account to the reader, the blind traveller John Holman and Catherine Hutton, the compiler of numerous accounts under one authorial voice. Holman framed his journey as a quest for truth, a response to an instinctive passion for travelling that he had discovered in his nature. In this sense he seemed to indicate that his was a personal, introspective journey as well as a voyage to Africa. Holman was more a tourist than a traveller. He acknowledged that travel gave a purpose and outlet to his 'moral energies' and reduced his sense of deprivation at being

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<sup>94</sup> Stanley/Thomson, 'Journey', p. 106.

<sup>95</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, pp. v-vi.

sightless. However, he insisted that his own need to travel was matched by what his unique status allowed him to provide for the reader. Holman argued that because the picturesque in nature eluded him, he was forced to be more searching in his examinations than a sighted traveller content with a superficial view and first impressions. He was, he said, compelled to be patiently analytical, and thus freed from the burden of being misled by appearances he was more likely to come to accurate and well thought-out conclusions.<sup>96</sup>

Catherine Hutton made it clear that the textual existence of her imaginary hero-traveller was the most significant aspect of the project to her as an author, and she stated that she had consciously resisted the efforts of friends and reviewers to acknowledge the original authors more fully. She claimed that her narrative technique:

has enabled me to avoid all discussions, arguments, and contradictions: it gives to the intimation it conveys an air of consistency, perspicuity, and originality; it spares the reader the fatigue of referring to authorities.<sup>97</sup>

Such ideas did not endear her to reviewers and the *Monthly Review* was particularly critical, arguing that she should at least have acknowledged her sources in the margin.<sup>98</sup> Her prefaces to volume one and volume two are contradictory. In volume one, she pointed out that readers could check her text back to original sources to validate the accuracy of her account. 'I am aware', she said, 'that truth and fiction should not be mingled, and I have not mingled them'.<sup>99</sup> In volume two she argued, in response to criticism from the *Monthly Review*, that it was too arduous continually to identify the real authors because:

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<sup>96</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, pp. 4-6.

<sup>97</sup> Hutton, *Tour*, I, preface.

<sup>98</sup> Hutton, *Tour*, 2, p. vi.

<sup>99</sup> Hutton, *Tour*, I, p. vi.

in those countries where there have been different travellers, one paragraph is often extracted from several, and sometimes one sentence from two; and that the authors are so mingled, in order to form a regular whole, that, like the tub of feathers prepared by the fairy, it would be almost impossible for any bird to find its own.<sup>100</sup>

Hutton was not a new writer; she already had two works of fiction behind her.<sup>101</sup> She seems to have been determined to maintain her narrative stance even though she offended reviewers and contradicted herself at times. Mary Louise Pratt has also noticed the oddities of Hutton's enterprise, and has suggested that the imaginary traveller was important to Hutton because he provided her with an opportunity to be an heroic adventurer, even if only in an imaginary sense.<sup>102</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Although I have 'themed' this brief survey of self-representations of travel writers on Sierra Leone, many writers were clearly situated in more than one category. It was possible, for example, for a writer to present himself or herself as an explorer, a supplier of colonial information, and as an opponent of the slave trade. Alexander Gordon Laing was one writer who presented himself in this way. What stands out most, however, is the need felt by many writers to justify their writing in the particular style they had chosen, and their claims or disclaimers regarding the amount of 'learned knowledge' in their texts. Many of these texts contain intertextual similarities despite attempts by some of their authors to stake an individual niche of 'difference' in an effort to market themselves. We have an imaginary traveller, a blind traveller, travellers who had an express 'political' purpose, and those who pretended to have

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<sup>100</sup> Hutton, *Tour*, II, p. vi.

<sup>101</sup> C. Hutton, *The Welsh Mountaineer* (London, 1817); Hutton, *Oakwood Hall* (London, 1819).

<sup>102</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 106.

none. Nevertheless, the 'difference' that authors claimed for themselves was in itself a narrative convention. This convention allowed them to claim a legitimate 'desire to be there' as well as to assert their authority over their subject. The discursive terrain from which the 'knowledge' contained in Sierra Leonean travel writing was gathered was undoubtedly complex, but also underlain with structures and conventions which determined what was 'seen', 'known', and produced.



## CHAPTER 10

### **Innocents Abroad: Travellers in an Alien Environment**

In this and the following chapter, I focus on how travel writers reported and represented their encounters with the colony's physical environment. It is clear from elsewhere in this study that the first-hand accounts of travellers had a direct bearing on some aspects of policy formulation as well as playing an important role in wider debates. For example, the whole Sierra Leone project would not have got off the ground without Henry Smeathman's account of the region's environmental riches. The genre of travel writing allowed authors wider discursive scope around the subject than other forums of debate and most travellers were aware of the political significance of disputes about Sierra Leone's physical environment. Travel writing allowed amateur and professional 'scientific' observations of the environment to enter a wider readership than other texts which dealt with the same subject. In addition, they were less constrained by official and scientific discourse and more able to speculate, sensationalise and romanticise representations of the colony.

For some writers the African physical environment was a key theme of their text. However, nearly all writers of travel accounts relating to Sierra Leone had some comment or observation to make on it and the importance of the physical environment as a theme in the wider body of Sierra Leonean travel writing can hardly be over-emphasised. Given this breadth of interest, the tracing of intertextual themes is one obvious task of my study. However, in analysing travellers' images of the physical environment I am also concerned with

wider discursive issues, especially those which centre on Mary Louise Pratt's notions of anti-conquest, innocence, reciprocity, and the presence of a landscanning gaze within travel writing. This landscanning gaze forms the primary subject of the following chapter. In this chapter I focus on three other key themes relating to traveller's representations of the physical environment and which have much to do with assertions of authorial innocence in the contact zone. Firstly, I am concerned with how writers related their first impressions of the landscape and climate on arrival in the colony, and the reassessment of these impressions over time. Secondly, I discuss the use of 'other' environmental discourses in an African context, that is to say, the use of Orientalist description of the Sierra Leonean environment and the employment of a normalising discourse in description of an alien place. Thirdly, I assess travel narratives of home and displacement (and in particular the assertion of innocence on the part of the traveller through a longing for home).

## **1. Tropes of Arrival**

### **1a) A Surprising Beauty**

Perhaps the most striking example of intertextuality in Sierra Leonean travel writing concerns the manner in which writers narrated their arrival in the colony. The journey to the African coast was variously described as boring or uncomfortable due to seasickness or the incompatibility of travelling companions. Those travellers that described their journey to the colony tended to do so with a sense of mounting excitement at reaching the prospect of arrival at their destination. Many writers also emphasised their apprehension when drawing near to a place with such an unhealthy reputation. This apprehension in itself was a form of anti-conquest. Sometimes, writers portrayed themselves as if they were a sacrificial lamb, drawing inexorably closer to a place which may well kill them, thus asserting their innocence and

vulnerability to the climatic evils hidden in the African air.<sup>1</sup>

The vast majority of writers were impressed with the beauty of the Sierra Leone peninsula as their ship drew nearer to Freetown, and the narration of their surprise and delight appears across the range of texts, including those written by proslavery and antislavery sympathisers and writers of both 'scientific' and 'sentimental' accounts. Here, for example, is the slave trader, and early travel writer, John Matthews' description of the entrance to the Sierra Leone river:

In coming in from the sea in the dry season few prospects can exceed the entrance into the Sierra-Leone river. Before you is the high land of Sierra Leone rising from the Cape with the most apparent gentle ascent. Perpetual verdure reigns over the whole extent, and the variegated foliage of the different trees, with the shade caused by the projecting hills and unequal summits, add greatly to the beauty of the scene.<sup>2</sup>

This description with its 'picturesque' overtones is not typical of Matthews' account. Generally lacking in sentimental or picturesque description, his narrative consisted mostly of an encyclopaedic collection of commercially exploitable 'facts' regarding the natural environment. Joseph Corry, who was also broadly sympathetic to slavery, likewise emphasised the beautiful scene on arrival, before he too moved on to catalogue the area's natural resources for commercial purposes.

Anna Maria Falconbridge, another broadly proslavery writer, also produced an account which obeyed this trope of picturesque arrival. She wrote:

You will readily believe my heart was gladdened at the sight of the mountains of Sierra

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Matthews, *Voyage*, p. 22.

Leone, which was the land we first made. Those mountains appear to rise gradually from the sea to a stupendous height, richly wooded and beautifully ornamented by the hand of nature, with a variety of delightful prospects.<sup>3</sup>

These three examples from proslavery texts which were not generally concerned with picturesque description indicate how strong this trope of arrival was.

By the time Elizabeth Melville's *A Residence at Sierra Leone* was published in 1849, the picturesque arrival was a virtually mandatory component of any travel account about the colony. Missionaries, sailors, governors, slavers and colonial officials and their relatives all exclaimed their surprise and joy at the beautiful vista which greeted them. Even John Boyle, in what was predominantly a dry, 'scientific' treatise on tropical fevers, devoted a large part of his introduction to the description of the peninsula's lofty, verdant scenery.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Melville's account of her arrival heralded a narrative obsessed with picturesque observation and personal reflection. On arrival in the Sierra Leone River, she could only make out Freetown as a 'white spot at the very foot of the hills', and it was the mountains which held her gaze, with their summits which 'stood out in bold relief against a cloudless sky'.<sup>5</sup> The final part of her journey was undertaken in darkness and she wrote of a sense of mounting excitement. What she saw when she awoke was the now familiar utopian scene of tropical beauty. As she put it:

As soon as daylight streamed in at the little window of our cabin, I looked eagerly out and saw fantastically painted buildings glittering in the glorious light of a tropical sun; and beyond, the lofty mountains of Sierra Leone. Through the faint shadowy haze their verdure appeared more soft and beautiful than that of the foliage near us, which flashed on the eye with a supernatural tint ... the whole landscape conveying the idea of

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<sup>3</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> Boyle, *A Practical Account*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>5</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 5.

a perpetual summer.<sup>6</sup>

This passage typifies Melville's attention to detail as well as picturesque painting of the broader picture. Her own adherence to the trope of arrival was conveyed in a more expansive, softer, picturesque style, to some extent 'feminised', in contrast to the shorter, more 'matter of fact' passages from the proslavery accounts.

### 1b) A Different Focus

This trope of arrival was so common to traveller's accounts that the three texts which did not adhere to it are most striking. Henry Huntley completely subverted this trope by refusing to gaze on the landscape in his narrative. Rather, he indulged in a rhetorical speculation which placed his frigate as the centre of attention for unidentified people on the shore. Thus, he narrated the ship's sailing by some African villages in the following manner:

as the frigate passed she arrested for a time the busy hand of occupation, (if indeed the negroe' hand is ever busy) to indulge in gazing at the graceful object as she hurried on her way to the anchorage.<sup>7</sup>

This image of arrival was profoundly dissonant from that observed in most other texts and served the purpose of allowing Huntley to emphasise his derogatory opinions of the colony and its associated philanthropists. He refused to 'see' the colony, not least because he already 'knew' that he was approaching a 'savage' land. His was not the arrival of a hopeful coloniser. Rather, it was the record of a reluctant presence in a land which he felt could never deliver what its founders had promised.

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Huntley, *Seven Years' Service*, 1, pp. 13-14.

Rather than narrate his arrival, Huntley preferred to concentrate on a damning description of Freetown. Huntley's Freetown was decrepit and useless. In the images he presented, tropical fecundity produced not riotous beauty but sordid decay. He wrote:

There is a character of languor and an unhealthy *prestige*, pervading the entire colony: enervated men listlessly lounge over their counters, or drag themselves from place to place when some business forces them into action; large dilapidated buildings denote the failure of those prospects which were once ardently entertained with reference to this possession, huge fissures in the streets denote the heavy rains which have prevailed -- weeds, grass and even indigo spring up in the unused parts -- half famished dogs spread out their attenuated limbs beneath the shade of some projecting corner -- in short everything possessing life appears in Sierra Leone, to suffer, rather than enjoy it.<sup>8</sup>

Huntley had little room for the picturesque or romantic and the tropical environment he encountered was predominantly portrayed only for its ability to destroy and disrupt man-made urban order.

Aside from Huntley's unusual account, several other writers failed to narrate their arrival in the conventional way. Huntley's disruption of the normal arrival narrative was echoed (although much less eloquently) in the private journal of Lt. George Courtenay. Courtenay had no time to comment on the beautiful landscape but rather focussed on complaints about the ineffectiveness of his black crew. His notes on the violence of the rains preceded a generally despondent and unenthusiastic account of the colony.<sup>9</sup> Because of his blindness, John Holman was literally unable to survey the beautiful vista. Instead he emphasised his first experience of the colony's black population, giving an account which contrasted sharply with the more usual view from aboard ship. He described his ship's arrival

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<sup>8</sup> Huntley, *Seven Years Service*, 1, pp. 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Courtenay, Journal 1823 -1825, no date to specific entries.

in the Sierra Leone River as follows:

About 8 o'clock, the ship was crowded with black women ...some brought a little fruit, and all brought a very long tongue... and they clustered round our breakfast table without any ceremony, which was not very pleasant, in consequence of the variety of odours which they carried with them, from the delightful one of fruits and flowers, to the broadly contrasted smells which I suppose were peculiar to their colour.<sup>10</sup>

This passage conveys an oppressive sense and adhered to a popular stereotype of physical blackness, indeed, one of the few stereotypes available to a non-sighted person. The physical productions of the tropics, such as the fruit and flowers, were utilised only to emphasise his encounter with the black traders. Holman appeared as an innocent victim of an unpleasant scene, and in this sense he was not alone. There was a sub-class of arrival tropes which conveyed similar impressions. Chaplain Poole had little time for observing the landscape and began his narrative of arrival on the Freetown landing stage where he said he was surrounded by grimacing blacks, talking in 'laughable' English, in a 'strange scene.'<sup>11</sup> Again, the image presented was of an innocent abroad, surrounded by the scrutinizing gaze of 'others' from whose presence he was thankful to be extricated.

The failure to identify with the trope of arrival that exclaimed the beauty of the land was clearly not restricted by chronology or purpose of the writer. It was also not gender specific. Mary Church wrote her own arrival earlier, but in very similar terms to Holman. She too complained that she was denied any peace as her ship arrived at the coast. As she wrote it:

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<sup>10</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery, and Customs*, p. 13.

I was prevented from observing the appearance of the coast whilst we were beating in, by a crowd of black people absolutely besieging the ship, and not choosing to take any hints that their company was disagreeable.<sup>12</sup>

Mary Church showed little taste for landscape description or observation in her narrative. Her gaze was more private, people-centred and less overtly territorial than many others.

Nevertheless her failure to get a view of the land accentuated her innocence. Holman and Church shared a kind of narrative passivity, he from his blindness, her from her gender. They both employed a narrative technique which made them innocent subjects of the gaze of an undisciplined black horde, who contrasted directly with the travellers' more refined status. In many ways, Holman and Church's narration of their arrival can be interpreted as a kind of anti-conquest.

### 1c) Beauty and Deceit

The trope of arrival and its subversion indicates the unique ability of travel writing to excavate tensions surrounding images of the colony. This potential was also evident in the appearance of another trope within many travel accounts, one which presented the colony's beauty and apparent salubrity as deceitful and dangerous. This trope of beauty and deceit contrasted the seen with the unseen, emphasising the colony's reputation as 'the land of death', poisoned by noxious vapours and riddled with unseen health risks. In these times before the correct diagnosis of the origins of insect-borne diseases, fever and death were perceived to be literally 'in the air', and the 'bad air' was thought to emanate from the land in the form of vapours from swamps and woodland. This added an especial piquancy to the travellers' experience of the colony and how they represented it. The counterposition of beautiful

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<sup>12</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 6.



landscape and fatal climate, and the ability of the apparent Arcadia to seduce Europeans into a false sense of security provided a representational dialectic of great potency.

This trope of beauty and deceit was particularly evident in travel writing of the 1830s and 1840s, and was strong among travellers who were writing most overtly outside of the scholarly tradition. The contrast of beauty and death provided ample scope for reflection and sentimentality. Frances Rankin, for example, described his rapture at the 'gorgeous mountain-on-mountain scenery of the colony' when he awoke on his first morning there, adding that the beauty had caused him to forget the colony's gloomy associations.<sup>13</sup> A few pages later he described the funeral procession of a young white woman who had died the previous evening.<sup>14</sup> In these few pages and by adhering to the beauty/deceit trope, Rankin wrote himself as a sentimental subject, vulnerable and innocent. This strong message that the colony was a dangerous place comes through in spite of his more direct assertions it was healthy and his book sought to promote a good climatic reputation for Sierra Leone. 'Mary Church' also noticed that while the colony seemed healthy she had seen a lot of sickly Europeans.<sup>15</sup>

Captain Alexander was more direct in his observations. Arriving outside the rainy season, 'the season of disease and death', he wrote: 'It was a beautiful picture, but its beauty was deceitful, ... Sierra Leone is not safe at any time.'<sup>16</sup> This trope of deceitful beauty was open to wider interpretations. In his hostile narrative, Captain Chamier contrasted the beautiful

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<sup>13</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. 87.

natural setting with the ramshackle appearance of Freetown itself. As he put it:

We arrived in Sierra Leone, and came to an anchor off that sink of human wretchedness, misnamed a town. The beautiful fragrance of the limes, on entering the river, with the delightful verdure of the shore, cruelly deceived us as to the painful reality we had ample time to experience .... It was a picture of misery, poverty, and meanness...there was no cheering sight, no bustle, no activity; all seemed wretched, naked, and disgusting.<sup>17</sup>

It was with the publication of Elizabeth Melville's account that the beauty/deceit trope reached its zenith. Indeed, a major theme of Melville's account centred on how the climate and her own sickness slowly wore down her initial delight with the Colony's natural wonders. The earlier parts of her text contained many Arcadian descriptions of the landscape and portrayed a fascinating rather than threatening climate, whereas in later descriptions she writes herself as tired of exotica, weakened by illness and threatened by the 'excesses' of the climate. This was a point seized upon by contemporary commentators, some of whom reviewed her book alongside or with direct reference to Rankin's book which claimed to defend the colony's reputation.<sup>18</sup>

The *British Quarterly*, for example, criticised Rankin for basing his opinions on a short period of residence, and reproduced large, negative passages from Melville's texts containing terrifying descriptions of tornados, heat, insects and reptiles.<sup>19</sup> In *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, the reviewer emphasised that Melville had only slowly become critical of the climate, after herself experiencing illness. With reference to Rankin's defence of the colony in spite of

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<sup>17</sup> Chamier, *Life of a Sailor*, p. 263.

<sup>18</sup> See *British Quarterly Review*, 11 (1850), pp. 38-61 and also *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 11 (1849), pp. 343-345.

<sup>19</sup> *British Quarterly*, 11 (1850), p. 38.

'the trifling obstacles of statistics' the reviewer noted that Melville became disillusioned with the climate and commented that 'The truth is, this African paradise *is* delightful -- for a little while'.<sup>20</sup> The reviewer also emphasised that Melville ultimately criticised Rankin for denying the insalubrity of the place, and agreed with Chamier 'that the climate is *the worst under the sun*'.<sup>21</sup>

By the time of Melville's account, the beauty/deceit trope had gained widespread acceptance and those who braved the climate were truly acknowledged as heroic, those who defended it were seen as fools. This trope of beauty and deceit can be seen to have comprised a potent form of anti-conquest. The risks that Europeans took in travelling to Africa were emphasised, and the beneficence of their motives were asserted simultaneously. Whether scientists or not, writers who subscribed to this trope can be seen in part as 'sentimental' writers, asserting their innocence and to varying degrees allying themselves with the 'mystique of reciprocity.'

## 2. Normalising Discourse in Sierra Leonean Travel Writing

By 'normalising discourse' I mean those strategies of representation which sought to represent exotic Africa in more conventional terms via the substitution of familiar imagery for what by implication is deemed impossible to convey in its own terms. An example of this process is provided in Elizabeth Melville's text. Melville narrated her own thought processes as she ruminated on the strangeness of the vegetation on the hillsides viewed from her ship on

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<sup>20</sup> *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 11 (1849), p. 343.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

arrival. Eventually, she articulated to herself the notion that she could think of this strange vegetation in its resemblance to the heathers and furzes of her native Scotland, thereby presenting her reader with a clear and potent image of this alien flora without needing to try and express it in any other way.<sup>22</sup> The reader follows the development of her thought and in turn participates in this normalising process.

Sometimes, although more rarely, writers turned to other stocks of imagery than that of their native land in order to present a visual picture of what they encountered. Some writers wrote that the landscape reminded them of a West Indian Island, or perhaps referred to a popular novel, or another tropical area in order to press more familiar images into the service of their need and desire to describe the African landscape to a reader 'back home'. Capt. Alexander, for example, wrote that from the sea Sierra Leone reminded him of a West Indian island and that the vegetation and landscape reminded him of scenes from a novel entitled *Paul and Virginia*.<sup>23</sup> Peter Leonard wrote that aside from the church and European buildings, Kiskey almost completely resembled an Indian village.<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes, writers referred to Sierra Leone in straightforward oriental imagery. Frances Rankin for example claimed his visit to the Muslim quarter presented an Eastern scene which 'leads an Englishman to forget his geography'.<sup>25</sup> In a more domestic setting, Elizabeth Melville turned to orientalist imagery to describe the house where she spent her first night

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<sup>22</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, pp. 86, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, p. 344.

ashore. The house fittings and the presence of a black servant in white livery, she wrote, 'gave the whole a colouring as if a splendid Eastern scenery and costume had suddenly started into life.'<sup>26</sup> Such allusions brought a shade of familiar oriental exoticism to readers of the accounts who were already accustomed to tales from the 'East'. This passage is more striking in that it follows closely on her conflation of African and Scottish vegetation. Melville, like other writers seems to have had great difficulty or disinclination in finding a descriptive milieu for the African environment which portrayed it as itself. Oriental and European imagery could be mixed up in the struggle for appropriate descriptive metaphors.

One of the functions of a normalising discourse was to dispel notions that the African environment was chaotic and confused. The recognition of an inherent order in the natural 'otherness' of the African environment has been identified by Cheryl McEwan as a feature of women's travel writing on Africa. McEwan particularly cites Elizabeth Melville's comparison of aspects of the landscape of Sierra Leone with paintings by Claude and Poussin as indicative of this need to find order in an alien environment.<sup>27</sup> However, the large body of literature available on Sierra Leone indicates that the use of normalising discourse to combat images of chaos and wilderness was also a feature of many texts by male authors.

Brian O'Beirne reached one town where the tidy huts reminded him of the 'cottages of home.' However, it was in this village that he found himself at most risk because of attempts by his guides to trick him.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, O'Beirne's use of normalising discourse in this instance

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<sup>26</sup> Melville, *Residence*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> McEwan, 'Paradise or Pandemonium', p. 76.

<sup>28</sup> O'Beirne, *Journal*, Feb. 21, 1821.

served a similar purpose to the beauty/deceit trope. The clear message was that the traveller must always be wary and not be lulled into a false sense of security by the beautiful or the familiar. William Cooper Thomson, like Melville, was a Scot whose journal often made reference to his native land. For example, he wrote that as a native of a mountainous country he tested his powers of endurance against 'the steep roads of Africa' but, in true heroic-adventurer style, he found that Africa did not induce great fatigue.<sup>29</sup> The most un-Africanised landscape description in his work however comes second-hand via Lord Stanley's narration of Thomson's stay outside of Tembo, the capital of Futih Jallon. Stanley wrote:

The coolness of the evening, the green of the woods, in which not a single tree of tropical form was to be seen, and the singing of the birds, carried Mr. Thomson back in imagination to the woody huts and green glens of his native land, and almost made him forget that he was in Africa.<sup>30</sup>

This example indicates several effects and functions of the use of a normalising discourse. The writer is able to import home into the contact zone, fracturing time and space realities, and effectively transforming one place into another. This passage contains a denial of the realities of African place and a personal imaginative colonisation of the contact zone. In fact it is no longer a contact zone at all, there is nothing indigenous to make contact with or attempt to describe. An expedition into an alien landscape has become an imaginary journey home.

This importation of home into African space, I would argue, is another component of anti-conquest, an idea that Pratt has not developed, perhaps because of her focus on travellers dealings with 'others'. It will be remembered that Pratt asserted that part of the representational indication of a traveller's innocence rested on a 'great longing' to transform

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<sup>29</sup> Stanley/Thomson, 'Journey', p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

Africa without violence. I would further argue that this innocence is also asserted by the equally great longing to import home into the contact zone, or indeed, as I note later in this chapter, actually to return home.

An extension of the use of normalising discourse is contained in another heavily intertextual narrative technique which referred to a pastoral myth and the imagining of Sierra Leone along the lines of a 'garden', either potential or actual. This was in fact a feature of much African travel writing in general. The use of the garden as a rich metaphorical link between English order and tropical chaos must be seen against a suburban-urban dialectic in Victorian Britain. 'Back home' where suburban settlements were developing rapidly, gardens came to be seen as refuges from ugly urbanism. In West Africa this imagery was extended, but with a twist, the garden coming to be seen as a retreat from the wilderness that surrounded it and representative of civilization on the untamed imperial frontier.<sup>31</sup> Peter Leonard who was particularly fond of normalising imagery wrote one passage which serves to illustrate many of the points I have made so far. After a description of an 'attractive' Freetown, he went on to note:

The huts scattered about in the suburbs surrounded with banana, orange, pawpaw, and other fruit trees, put one in mind of the garden summer-houses of the honest Cockney citizens in the neighbourhood of London. But within all that is so pleasing to the eye, it is but a painted sepulchre.<sup>32</sup>

This passage shows the use of normalising imagery to familiarise the exotic, and the socio-political power of this imagery in drawing parallels with Africans under British rule and 'honest Cockney citizens'. The description of gardens invoked images of order and integrity, but this

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of this see McEwan, 'Paradise or Pandemonium', 76-77.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 39.

was quickly followed by that particularly potent Sierra Leonean environmental binarism, the trope of beauty and deceit.

The potency of the garden imagery, however, did not depend solely on the representation of land altered by the hand of man. Alexander Gordon Laing saw an inherently ordered garden landscape in the heart of the countryside. Describing the view of an interior valley from a hillside vantage point, Laing described a vista of trees with a small river running through them and noted that they 'exhibited the appearance of a well-cultivated and tastily-arranged garden rather than a tract amid the wilds of Africa.'<sup>33</sup> This was a softer, more commercially exploitable Africa, ordered and welcoming and full of promise to a hopeful coloniser. In another context the garden in Africa provided a potent frontier against the alien 'other' physical environment. Elizabeth Melville wrote home that her garden plot on which she cultivated European vegetables was guarded with the same enthusiasm as exotic fuchsias and geraniums at home. She wrote about her vegetable garden in a way which contributes to her theme of gradual disillusionment with the colony's exotic flora and produce.<sup>34</sup> The garden then was one of the most potent symbols of present or potential colonial intervention, and a symbol which would resonate with British readers.

### 3. Narratives of Home and Displacement

I made the assertion earlier that the use of normalising discourses relating to sentimentalised images of home can be seen as part of the narrative strategy of anti-conquest.

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<sup>33</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 161.

<sup>34</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 200.



In this section I want to expand on how travellers narrated their notion of home and their sense of displacement and dislocation from it, narratives which indicate strategies of anti-conquest, innocence and reciprocity. As we have seen in the case of Elizabeth Melville, images from home were often employed immediately upon arrival in the colony. In fact the issue was at the forefront of many writers' texts. John Boyle, in an extension of the trope of arrival, exclaimed that the view was so beautiful that it made him forget home entirely.<sup>35</sup> In this image, he innocently surrendered himself to the captivating charms of the 'other'.

In contrast to both Melville and Boyle however, 'Church' lamented that the view, although pleasant, did not make her forget home. Rather (and this was entirely contradictory of Melville's conflation of exotic and Scottish vegetation) 'Church' wrote that the 'entire dissimilarity to anything European, or rather English, painfully reminded me of the immense distance which separated me from those I love.'<sup>36</sup> Although 'Church's arrival narrative contrasted with Melville's in the way which she invokes sentimental longings for home, it was to be Melville who took up the theme of homesickness with most enthusiasm and intertwined it with minute and careful observation of the physical environment.

Towards the end of her book homesickness had become Melville's primary theme. She wrote of 'rebellious thoughts' which turned away from the tropics to home.<sup>37</sup> The following passage is typical of several which employ simple binarisms to highlight the inadequacy of Africa to fulfill her need for familiar territory:

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<sup>35</sup> Boyle, *A Practical Account*, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 206.

Oh! how doubly beautiful the cultivated fields, the wide meadows, the stately wood, the green lanes, the purple and golden hills, and the pure healthsome rivers of our happy country appear, as they pass in clear review before the mind's eye, while before the bodily eye all the time lie stretched out the lonely sierras, the swampy plains, the mangrove-bordered creeks and the rank vegetation of the noxious western coast of Africa.<sup>38</sup>

This passage is in marked contrast to her earlier enthusiastic picturesque description. The message of this passage seems to be that despite all her (heroic?) efforts to describe, interpret, understand and relate to the African environment, it could never bring her personal contentment. She was an alien, an innocent abroad, who had been let down by a deceitful environment. The way that she wrote herself as disembodied from the environment, living in her 'minds eye' rather than her 'bodily eye', accentuated the alien experience. Her later affirmation that she would never think of Sierra Leone without thinking of many exotic and beautiful natural treasures was perhaps an assertion of her heroic Britishness, her ability to endure and survive and retain exotic memories.

Melville's narration of her 'great longing' for home was not restricted to panoptic musings such as those typified by the above passage. In fact her most minute observations of the natural world often picked up this theme. In one passage written quite soon after her arrival, she described one of many evening walks with her husband during which they came upon some ferns and a plant which resembled a nettle, although it had no sting. She felt, 'as if I had met two old friends'. Her mind wandered to 'glad home-woods and dingles with their ferny brakes, and old grey ruins, whose roofless chambers were choked up by tall thick nettles'. Her reverie was broken when she looked up and saw the alien vegetation of Africa and she wrote that ultimately she was amused 'that even a *momentary* charm could be thrown

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

round so ill-favoured a weed as a nettle.<sup>39</sup> In this passage, unlike her arrival narratives, Melville made no attempt to relate her wider view of the environment to a normalising discourse. This had now become unalterably alien. But she still found it possible to be completely distracted from her alien surroundings by musing on its smaller details.

One reviewer wrote that Melville had succeeded in 'compelling [the landscape] to sit for its wild portrait.'<sup>40</sup> This particular portrait of Africa was also a portrait of home and a technique of narrating her homesickness. The conflation of time and space and the transformation of one species into another more familiar one were part of the techniques of that narration. The African landscape, ostensibly the focus of her attention, was actually used as the backdrop to a more internalised natural vision. What this produced, according to the same reviewer was 'a sort of miscellaneous discoursing of mountains, vapours, storms, and bright views.'<sup>41</sup> What could be more innocent than that? But in the process of asserting her innocence Melville exercised a narrative and descriptive power over the environment that forced it to serve her own purposes.

Sentimental narratives of home and displacement were not limited to female writers. Joseph Corry's introduction contained a lengthy discourse on man's affection for his homeland, and the power of this affection to spur him on 'to the noblest deeds', by which he was presumably making an oblique reference to his trip to West Africa.<sup>42</sup> Peter Leonard

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<sup>39</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 46.

<sup>40</sup> *British Quarterly*, 11 (1850), p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Corry, *Observations*, pp. 26-27.

emphasised his homesickness when sailing to Sierra Leone. This emphasis was placed alongside his fear of death from the climate, again accentuating his innocence and vulnerability. However, another discourse relating to home and displacement is traceable in the literature besides the simple one of homesickness. Several travellers wrote about how they came to feel 'at home' while on their travels, and in narrating this they can be seen to be employing the mystique of reciprocity. However, this strand of discourse related primarily to reciprocal relations between white travellers and colony and native blacks, and I shall discuss it in more detail in Chapters 13 and 14.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to show how travellers responded to and reflected the strangeness of their new environment. Strategies including normalising discourse, the recognition of order in chaos, and conventional picturesque description all served to 'tame' the wild environment and help it to serve its narrative purpose as a backdrop to personal adventures and reflection. However, few attempts were made to find original descriptive techniques, and ultimately the landscape seemed to provide no more than a backdrop, and moreover a backdrop to be feared by the innocent traveller at risk of disease and death. More complex relations with the environment were lacking, however apparently detailed the travellers observations appeared at first sight. I shall argue elsewhere that attempts to describe uniquely 'African' features were confined mainly to travellers' images of African bodies, which were more easily defined and controlled within a narrative than the landscape. Before moving on to this subject however, I shall examine another feature of colonial travel writing identified by Mary Louise Pratt, that of the landscanning gaze.

## CHAPTER 11

**'What the country is capable of becoming, as well as what it is:'**

### **The Landscanning Gaze in Information-Producing Travel Writing**

In this and the following chapter I am concerned exclusively with the prevalence of what Mary Louise Pratt called the 'landscanning gaze' in Sierra Leonean travel writing. I shall analyse how this process of 'landscanning', by which a traveller assessed the land for 'prospects', whether temporal, spatial, commercial or personal, was a familiar component of travel accounts of all types and throughout the study period. In the following chapter I focus on the landscanning gaze in 'sentimental' travel writing. Here though I am concerned with the information-producing genre. In both chapters, however, my analysis is influenced by the fact that Sierra Leone was of such unique significance to British antislavery. It is a worthwhile exercise to examine how proslavery and antislavery supporters incorporated their particular ideological stance into the narration of their images of the African physical environment. How were their sentiments reflected in the nature and persistence of landscanning incidents in 'scientific' and experiential texts?

#### **1. The Landscanning Gaze in Informational Travel Writing**

Central to Pratt's ideas on the relationship between landscanning and territorial imperialism is her identification of two distinct discursive agendas within colonial travel writing which broadly relate to sentimental and scientific writing. Pratt argues that in the sentimental, 'experiential' accounts, the author was self-narrated in the tradition of an heroic

adventurer and white/native encounters assumed a central role in the narrative. Scientific, or 'information-producing' accounts on the other hand, especially those concerned with exploration and/or aiming at scientific status, tended to exhibit a passive but possessive, 'landscanning gaze'. One of the key features of information-producing accounts was the removal of observations of the natives to the 'textual homelands' of 'manners and customs' chapters. The separation of people from place in 'information-producing' travel writing was, Pratt argues, 'a kind of discursive division of labor' particularly resonant in late eighteenth-century texts.<sup>1</sup>

One result of this division was that the land was often narrated as empty, opening up its prospects before the passive narrator/traveller's gaze. Within this discursive tradition then, definitive landscanning incidents and observations tended to crop up at regular points in the narratives. For example wide, panoptic views from hilltop viewpoints were regularly described. The natural features of the land, whether observed from a distance or actually travelled through, such as rivers, plains or woods were often defined in terms such as 'fine', 'fertile', or 'rich'. These definitions implied a temporal as well as a spatial prospect.<sup>2</sup> Pratt further asserts that landscanning narratives which contain these kinds of views and assessments were normally produced from the viewpoint of a (usually male) seeing eye (I) which represented both the observer and the state. This eye (I) was normally passive and unobtrusive, a status which automatically distanced the observer from the unpleasant realities

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', in Gates (ed.) *"Race": Writing and Difference*, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 61. This is a general point that Pratt makes. However she illustrates it with specific reference to John Barrow's travels in Southern Africa.

of present or future colonial enterprise.<sup>3</sup> Chronologically, the final decades of the dominance of information-producing travel writing coincided with the height of the abolition movement, and it is with this in mind that I turn to an examination of the landscanning gaze in accounts of Sierra Leone written by proslavery and antislavery sympathisers.

## **2. Proslavery and Antislavery Travel Writers and the Landscanning Gaze prior to the abolition of the Slave Trade**

The period prior to the abolition of the slave trade saw several travel accounts produced by writers on both sides of the political and ideological divide of British antislavery. Mary Louise Pratt has made a brief but clear assertion that slavery, the slave trade, and the immense intellectual resonance of the Linnean classification project were ideologically as well as historically linked in late eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>4</sup> The classification of resources for purposes of commercial exploitation by Europeans extended to the human as well as the physical environment, but the naturalistic Linnean discourse assisted proslavery writers in presenting slavery as part of a naturally-ordered world. Thus, it would be reasonably expected that proslavery travellers who wrote on Sierra Leone would reflect this discourse and perhaps reinforce the 'naturalness' of the slave trade in their own representations of the physical environment. For the most part this is true, and never more so than in John Matthews' 1788 account entitled *A Voyage to the River Sierra Leone*.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.





### 3. John Matthews -- A Slaver's Eye

With the notable exception of his description of the picturesque vista greeting the traveller on arrival at the Sierra Leone river, Matthews' narrative almost entirely lacked experiential, sentimental description, but consisted instead of an encyclopaedic collection of commercially exploitable facts. This is evident from the contents pages of his book and the titles of his letters. The first letter covered his voyage to Africa and a description of his negotiations with natives to reestablish the slave factory at Whiteman's bay. The second letter consisted of a 'Geographical description of the coast, rivers, settlements, and occupations of the natives of Africa from the Rionoonas to Cape St. Ann.' The third was entitled simply 'The seasons', the fourth 'Natural History', the fifth turned to 'Religion, government, laws, and wars' and the sixth focussed on 'Persons of the natives, customs, and ceremonies.' The final two letters were concerned with a description and defence of the slave trade.<sup>5</sup> These contents lists and chapter titles serve to indicate how far Matthews' account conforms to Pratt's information-producing genre.

In Matthews' classic information-producing account then, people were separated from place in 'manners and customs' chapters, and other chapters were dedicated to the production of 'knowledge' about the physical environment. The influence of Linnean classification on travel writing is shown in his letter on the seasons. This consisted simply of climatic observations and measurements, and reflects the role of travellers in producing 'scientific' information.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of such information, unstated of course, was, like all science in a

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<sup>5</sup> Matthews, *Voyage*, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-35.

**colonial context**, discursively underlain with the (passive) aim of aiding future exploitation.

In the 'Natural History' section Matthews restricted his descriptions of the flora and **fauna** of the country to clearly exploitable natural phenomena.<sup>7</sup> For example, he noted **potential** timber resources and mentioned the use of the palm tree for the production of oil and **wine**.<sup>8</sup> His images of the land held out the promise of wealth under European influence. He **argued** that the region had the potential to produce indigo, cotton, sugar and rice, in **commercial** quantities, if 'lazy' native systems of cultivation were supplanted.<sup>9</sup> Matthews also **described** tropical produce such as peppers, fruits, coconuts and other nuts, including cola.<sup>10</sup> His **landscanning** gaze extended to geology as well. Looking out to the mountains of the area, **he assessed** their relief and form and concluded that mineable loadstone may have existed in **them**.<sup>11</sup> In this, and other contexts, the land, did indeed appear to open up before the author's **landscanning** eyes. In Pratt's words, the observing eye (I), 'scanning prospects in the spatial *sense knows itself* to be looking at prospects in the temporal sense' [My italics].<sup>12</sup>

Matthews' book included a map which contained all the essential information for a **slave-trading** merchant in the area; in effect, his study was produced by a slaver's **landscanning eye** (see plate opposite p. 248). The map encompassed the coast from the River Nunez to the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-53.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 61.

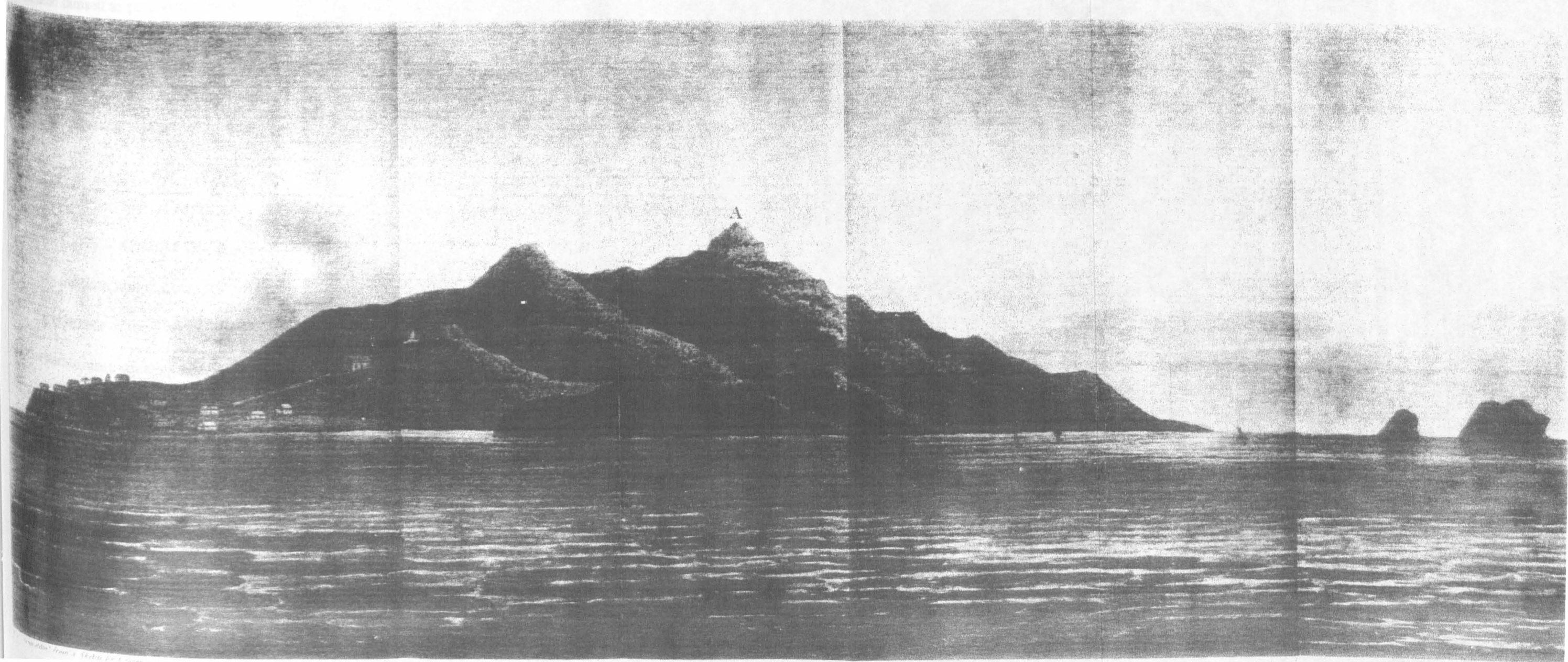
River Sherbro and emphasised the rivers and their tributaries, the islands in the region and soundings from the coast and river approaches. The rivers and islands indicated where slaves could be collected, traded and imprisoned. The navigation details provided the information necessary to the completion of these tasks by European merchants. In the same map, the human presence was marked only by broad locational references to the different tribes which inhabited the area. Native towns were not marked, but rather the tribe names, placed over the blank spaces not taken up by coast or river, could as easily be names of exotic crops than human groupings.

What effect, if any did Matthew's occupation as a slave trader make to his landscanning gaze? In some senses, perhaps, an answer lies with Pratt's notion of anti-conquest. His reasons for being in Africa concerned trade, exploitation of resources and an enhancement of Britain's commercial role in the area, so he clearly had no need to assert his innocence by temporal or spatial removal from the realities of direct intervention. Nevertheless, there was an assertion of self-effacement and innocence simply in the employment of the landscanning gaze. With the natives removed to 'manners and customs' chapters, and to parts of the narrative where Matthews used *his* ingenuity to tempt them back to the slave trade, the land was presented as naturally ordered and exploitable rather than the product/producer of European knowledge. This appearance of natural order was a common strategy of 'innocent' representations of the landscanning observer.<sup>13</sup>

As a producer of 'useful' information, of scientific observation and classification

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<sup>13</sup> Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', in Gates (ed.), *"Race"*, p. 144.



THE COLONY OF SIERRA LEONE, A bearing S. E. by W distant 3 Miles, and the by CANASS bearing N. E. distant 2 leagues.

Matthews enhanced his personal contribution to Britain's fund of exploitable knowledge. He represented himself as personally 'innocent' of large-scale commercial ambitions. He presented his own role as a skilful entrepreneur who just wanted to carry on his profession, benefit Britain's commercial prospects in the region, and provide helpful information where he could. His profession was presented as reasonable and natural, and because of this, profitable.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Joseph Corry – Selective Observations

By the time Joseph Corry wrote his *Observations on the Windward Coast of Africa* in 1807 the existence of the Sierra Leone experiment ensured that slave trade sympathisers had to incorporate more complex arguments into their representations of Sierra Leone as a commercially exploitable area.<sup>15</sup> Although ostensibly committed to gradual freedom for the slaves, as reflected in an elaborate plan to ensure their 'civilisation' prior to attaining freedom, in many ways his account amounted to an expression of deep attachment to the institution of slavery and its commercial benefits, and it is legitimate to treat him as a pro-slavery writer. Corry made much of the failure of the Sierra Leone Company to achieve their objectives.<sup>16</sup> The bulk of his argument turned on his theories that slaves were barbaric, uncivilised and unfit for freedom.<sup>17</sup> Correspondingly, the majority of his travel account focussed on 'manners and

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<sup>14</sup> This is very much the tenor behind Matthews' final letter on the subject of the slave trade and abolition. Matthews, *Voyage*, pp. 160-83.

<sup>15</sup> Corry, *Observations*, pp. 80-84.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

customs' descriptions which presented the Africans in this light.<sup>18</sup> Natural observations and overt landscanning occupied by far the minority of Corry's account.

Nevertheless, this account was, in many respects, typical of 'information-producing' travel writing. The authorial stance was self-effacing, and far removed from the sentimental tradition of writing. The text also contained classic landscanning moments. For example, in narrating his first journey to the River Sierra Leone, Corry began by giving grid references to 'place' it accurately. He also included a description of soil fertility at Tasso island and at the slave trading island of Bance.<sup>19</sup> His second journey entailed a stay of more than seven months at Bance and it was then that he was 'enabled to decide upon the situation of this country, and to form a conclusive opinion of the condition and character of its inhabitants, and its commercial resources.'<sup>20</sup> Only one part of one chapter was devoted to 'Observations upon the natural Productions of the River Sierra Leone', but this section contained explicit information on the suitability of some fruit and vegetables for commercial and subsistence purposes, and listed sugar cane, coffee, vegetables dyes, and silk cotton as potentially cultivable for European markets.<sup>21</sup> Animal and insect life was also described in commercial terms, especially in its tendency to destroy produce. Corry informed his readers that termites destroyed houses, ants ruined food, cockroaches and crickets destroyed leather, linen and clothes.<sup>22</sup> He had little

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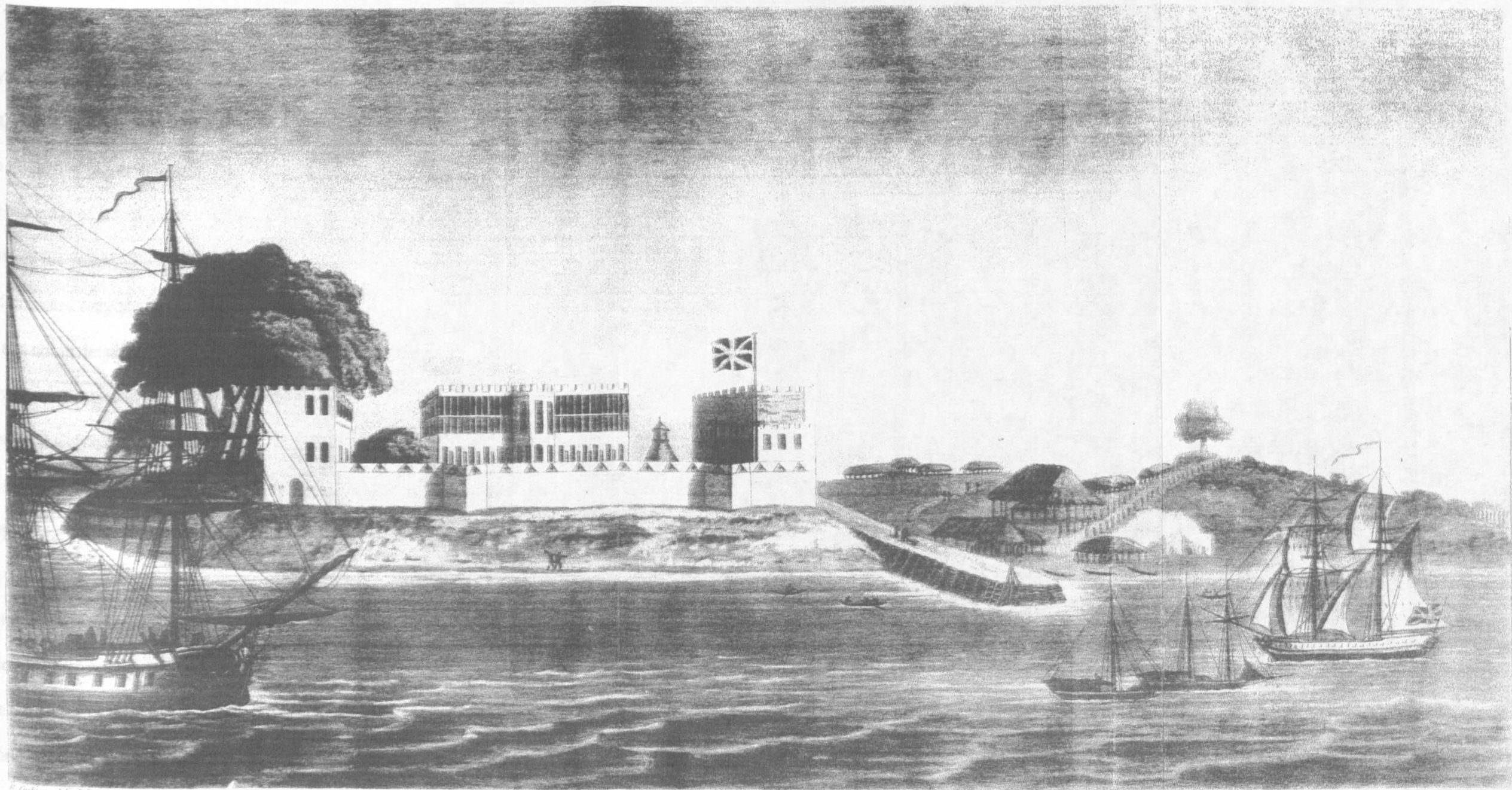
<sup>18</sup> See for example his description of the use of 'red water' in criminal trials. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-41.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36. The *Christian Observer* in a hostile review of Corry's account accused him of exaggerating the hostility of the region's fauna by claiming falsely that it was populated by lions



*Looking down from a Skotch by J. Garry*

*J. C. Neill sculp.*

BANCER ISLAND, in the RIVER SENECA, ALBANY,  
The Property of John B. Stewart's "Anderson Coy." London.

inclination for reporting the flora and fauna of the region in terms other than those which had direct commercial implications.

Corry's account also contained a more direct expression of his information -producing 'landscanning' gaze, that is to say, it contained plates giving pictorial representations of the region. Two of the five plates in Corry's books were of Sierra Leone. One is of the colony itself and the second is of Bance Island. Neither were described in much detail in the text. In the plate showing the colony (see plate opposite p. 251) Freetown was not the focus of attention and occupied only about one quarter of the total area of the picture. It was seen in the distance and not in detail. In this plate, Freetown was shown on the very edge of a picturesque wilderness. It does not make and perhaps it was not intended to make, much of an impression on the observer. The emphasis instead was on landmarks from which navigational bearings may be taken, with the waters of the Sierra Leone river stretching invitingly beyond the colony.

In another plate (see opposite) that of Bance Island, the commercial activities to which Corry was so sympathetic were seen from a much closer distance. There was a good deal of action in the picture, with slave ships anchored off, and with people walking to and from the fort, the shore, and the tidy grumetta village. The landscape was obviously controlled and ordered and the fort was emphasised as an impressive symbol of British commerce, the Union Jack standing out proudly. The drawing was captioned as 'Bance Island in the River Sierra Leone *The Property of John & Alexander Anderson Esqrs. London*' [my emphasis]. This was

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and tigers. *Christian Observer*, 6, (1807), p. 819.



a piece of Africa claimed for English (slaving) commerce; tamed, tidy, busy and owned. These two plates illustrate how the landscanning gaze was a political activity in prints as well in texts. As Corry presented it, the evidence of order and 'civilization' was much clearer in the close up view of Bance than in the distant one of Freetown (which was depicted as if precariously perched on the edge of the peninsula, so that it could well topple into the river).

### 5. Anna Maria Falconbridge -- A Disruptive Gaze?

So far I have shown how two proslavery writers produced informational accounts which emphasised science, order and reason (as part of the discursive underpinning of their political stance). Another writer far from hostile to the slave trade and slavery who published during the period of intense debate leading up to the abolition of the slave trade was Anna Maria Falconbridge. Falconbridge produced what Mary Louise Pratt has called 'one of the most unusual [travel accounts written by a woman] in any period.'<sup>23</sup> In many ways, her text was experiential and sentimental as its main arguments and narrative significance hinged on the tensions inherent in her relationship with her husband and with the Directors of the Sierra Leone Company. Even so, Falconbridge (unusually for a woman) did focus separately on native 'manners and customs' in one of her letters to her correspondent, thus reflecting the still influential information-producing form of travel writing.<sup>24</sup> Apart from brief landscanning instances (for example when she noted good supplies of wood, water, fruit and vegetables on Tasso Island), Falconbridge made very little direct comment on Sierra Leone's physical environment.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 74-90.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-49.

Speculation as to why Falconbridge largely neglected the natural environment may perhaps focus on Pratt's assertion that the information-producing, landscanning eye is usually male. Thus, she could have been restricted from landscanning by convention. However, convention does not appear to have been a great restrainer in Falconbridge's account as she produced a highly politicised piece devoted to her wider campaign against Henry Thornton and his colleagues. Indeed, her observations on the physical environment lent discursive weight to that campaign. Her desperate words about the devastating effects of the climate on the fledgling colony -- 'It is quite customary of a morning to ask "how many died last night?"' -- reverberated through literature on the colony for decades.<sup>26</sup> But whilst the climate may have ultimately been remembered as the villain of the piece, Falconbridge was less concerned with its intrinsic danger than with the Sierra Leone Company's failure to anticipate its effects. She accused the Directors, rather than the physical environment, of causing the sufferings of the early colonists by failing to provide adequate shelter and by starting the settlement during the rains.<sup>27</sup>

Falconbridge mocked the Director's hunger for 'knowledge' about African people and produce when she returned to England with her husband after their first spell in the colony. They were accompanied on this voyage by Prince Naimbana, the son of a local chieftain who gained a degree of celebrity in Britain.<sup>28</sup> Falconbridge published a letter from Granville Sharp

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148. This quotation was used in the frontispiece to Frances Harrison Rankins 1836 book *The White Man's Grave*. In Chapter Seven I suggested the influence of Falconbridge and other travellers on hostile accounts of Sierra Leone in the press.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

to her husband in which Sharp asked him to call round with Naimbana and natural specimens from Sierra Leone.<sup>29</sup> In the context of Falconbridge's wider arguments, she presented her husband and herself as the innocent pawns of the Director's greed for information. In her account, therefore, Falconbridge used sentimentality to marshal opposition to the humanitarians. Her use of an experiential narrative in a *pro*-slavery context is in stark contrast to the convention of allying abolitionist sentiment to experiential travel writing (that was to become the norm). As Pratt puts it, Falconbridge's account is evidence of how 'women protagonists tend to produce ironic reversals when they turn up in the contact zone.'<sup>30</sup> Proslavery sentiment, in Falconbridge's case, was clearly no guarantee that a quintessentially information-producing account full of landscanning moments would be produced.

## 6. Scanning the Land for Company and State

It is also interesting to note that the majority of accounts of Sierra Leone that were written by antislavery sympathisers prior to abolition also belonged to the information-producing genre. They were written by men closely connected with the Sierra Leone Company and devoted to the humanitarian, antislavery cause. These writers included Adam Afzelius and Thomas Winterbottom. Afzelius of course, never produced a complete travel account and never published his work: the details of his travels and daily life are accessible only through the journals he left behind. The Sierra Leone Company however did report some of his observations in one of their own published reports.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>30</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> *An Account of the Colony of Sierra Leone by Order of the Directors*, (London, 1795), pp. 225-42.

Afzelius is a fascinating subject in the context of Pratt's observations on 'innocent' naturalists and their role in the production of information for exploitative purposes. Not only was he a 'disciple' of Linneaus, funded by Joseph Banks, he was also a Swedenborgian. As I mentioned in Chapter Five, West Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was an important place to utopian Swedenborgians who looked for the discovery of a perfect church in the interior. Not surprisingly, Swedenborgians tended to have high hopes for the potential riches contained in the African land as well as for the perfectibility of its people. Afzelius' Swedenborgian colleague (and Company mineralogist) August Nordenskold wrote in his own journal that he was sure that the interior was rich in diamonds and gold. He impatiently set off on an expedition soon after arrival, but with quickly fatal consequences.<sup>32</sup> There were other reasons why Swedenborgians were fascinated with the physical environment of Africa. Their enthusiasm as naturalists partly related to the fact that, to them, nature was a book of symbols. There was a spiritual significance to natural reality which could be contemplated properly only by an enlightened Swedenborgian mind.<sup>33</sup> Their colonising, landscanning gaze had an additional spiritual resonance.

Afzelius' commercial relationship with the company was explicit. By employing scientists such as himself, Winterbottom, and Nordenskold, the Sierra Leone Company emphasised its commercial credibility. Although paid and equipped by Joseph Banks, the Company provided Afzelius with his passage, house, provisions and servants.<sup>34</sup> The Company

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<sup>32</sup> Lindroth, 'Adam Afzelius', 199.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> Kup (ed.), *Adam Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal*, pp. 1-2.

at one stage disputed ownership of Afzelius' specimens with Banks.<sup>35</sup> Afzelius' importance to the Company was further highlighted by their promise of a 'large donation' if he discovered anything of commercial importance.<sup>36</sup>

An example of the excitement generated by this commercial potential is glimpsed in that part of his journals in which Afzelius described a journey to the site of a recently discovered native coffee tree. However, Afzelius' description of the trip into the mountains to verify the discovery and collect seeds is almost biblical in its idyllic narration, and the following example reveals a narrative innocence entirely consistent with Pratt's observations on discursive anti-conquest in Linnean-inspired travellers. He wrote:

About half the way between the first ascent and the Coffee tree we crossed a brook with fine cool and chrystalline water, which attempted [sic] us to sit down on the side of its sweet murmur and take our first breakfast consisting of bread and water at last mixed with some wine.<sup>37</sup>

Here was Adam, the disciple, wandering in the promised land, and rewarded with the knowledge that a bountiful land contained a valuable prize. What is clear from his journals, however, is his sense that this prize should only be exploited by 'good' men such as himself, rather than 'evil' slavers. His detestation of slavery was clear throughout his journal, and his sentimental commitment to the antislavery cause perhaps disrupted his Linnean gaze at times.<sup>38</sup> The commercial benefits he looked for from the land related to his sense of his own role in the noble antislavery enterprise. His antislavery sympathies and his profession, as well as his

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<sup>35</sup> Lindroth, 'Adam Afzelius', 199.

<sup>36</sup> Kup (ed.), *Adam Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66, entry for Feb. 6 1796.

<sup>38</sup> For an example of the kind of antislavery inspired observation which occurred regularly in Afzelius' text see *Ibid.*, p. 8, entry for April 17 1795.

Swedenborgianism, were all components of his innocence and anti-conquest.

The prominence of 'anti-conquest' discourse was not the only aspect of Afzelius' journals which revealed a quintessential information-producing, landscanning gaze. They contained very few personalised, experiential references and although he travelled on one occasion to the Isles de Loss with only native company, his day-to-day dealings with Africans were not recorded in any detail beyond the mentioning of a name, or the statement that they had been delayed by the guides and so on.<sup>39</sup> Afzelius nurtured a scientific garden to which Africans, settlers and white company officials brought all manner of specimens for observation, cultivation and classification. The garden was destroyed in the French raid of 1794 and his collection ruined. The Sierra Leone company emphasised his innocent plight in an ensuing report.<sup>40</sup>

Thomas Winterbottom, Afzelius' friend and companion on some of his limited travels around the colony, was not a Swedenborgian but a doctor from South Shields employed as the Sierra Leone Company's surgeon. Winterbottom did publish his account, in two volumes, one devoted to medical information, the other containing more general reports on the geography of the area and including 'manners and customs' sections. In the familiar manner of information-producing writing, Winterbottom's account contained virtually no narration of 'self' and little comment on day-to-day interaction with settler and native blacks. A romantic, and somewhat incongruent streak (disliked by some reviewers) was provided by a number of

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65, entry for Feb. 6 1796.

<sup>40</sup> Sierra Leone Company, *Report*, Feb. 1795.

pretentious classical allusions which peppered the text, along with numerous poetic quotations.<sup>41</sup>

We know from Afzelius' journals, and from oblique references in his own account, that Winterbottom went on several journeys in the area.<sup>42</sup> However, he certainly did not narrate his 'adventures' as a traveller in any sentimental sense. His observations stand alone as 'knowledge'. Nevertheless, Winterbottom was involved in a general climate of exploration which accompanied the era of the Sierra Leone Company. Specifically, he had links with the Company's most successful exploratory journey through his brother Mathew (who accompanied James Watt on the first mission to Timbo in Futa Jalon). Winterbottom used some of their physical and human observations in his account, and noted their journey on a map which provided one of the plates in his book. In this sense his account is more similar to earlier encyclopaedic works on Africa than to travel writing as such. His information-producing, landscanning gaze relied partly on eyes other than his own.

Elsewhere, Winterbottom's gaze was more traditionally information-producing. The eye (I) in Winterbottom's text was male, passive, disinterested, and discursively perhaps more representative of the state rather than revealing of the individual.<sup>43</sup> The first two chapters of

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<sup>41</sup> Monthly Magazine, 17 (1804), p. 657.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Winterbottom was with Afzelius on his trip in spring 1796 to the Rio Pongas and later to Wongapong. Kup (ed.), *Adam Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal*, p. 122, entry for 26 March 1796. In his own account Winterbottom made it clear where his observations were based on first hand experience. For example see Winterbottom, *Account of the Native Africans*, 2, pp. 168-70, where he used information gained on the trip with Afzelius to enlarge upon his ideas on albinism.

<sup>43</sup> Pratt, as in n.4. above.

his initial volume contained classical informative material. He was concerned in both text and plates to define territories and boundaries. Rivers, coastlines and hills were recorded in terms of grid reference, bearing, distance and length. He referred in classic landscanning terms to 'the face of the countries' he described, expanding his discussion to include information on the relative soil fertility in different areas of that 'face'. In this discussion, people were absent and the land was ripe for the transference of European fantasies of occupation and transformation.

Clearly, Winterbottom's book was almost entirely dedicated to the production of 'knowledge'. What was unusual about his account, however (as I noted in Chapter Nine) was that its primary stated purpose was to vindicate Africans from accusations made by some white writers against their abilities and their customs. Perhaps as a result of this humanitarian emphasis in Winterbottom's research, his account did not tend to separate people and place so much as proslavery writers. Although he used Linnean naming he was equally likely to use African names for natural phenomena. He was also particularly interested in and respectful of the Africans' interaction with their environment in the production of remedies and medicines.<sup>44</sup> The Africans' relationship with their land was openly acknowledged and emphasised. In this sense it was clear that the land was not empty but was in fact a reservoir of historically acquired expertise. So, once again, the territorial ambitions implicit in the landscanning gaze which Winterbottom undoubtedly employed were tempered to some degree by his humanitarian sympathies and by his open-minded approach to research. Though clearly not an experiential account, then, Winterbottom's study does show that humanitarian sentiments

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Winterbottom, *Account of the Native Africans*, 2, Chap.11 pp. 193-218, which gives information on the nature and name of African treatments for various general diseases.



could disrupt the unidirectional discursive force of classic landscanning observation.

So far I have examined published and unpublished accounts, from the period prior to the abolition of the slave trade and from a standpoint which has aimed to identify the landscanning gaze *implicit* in them. However, Richard Bright and Brian O'Beirne's unpublished accounts of their journeys undertaken for political and trading reasons were carried out under instructions which contained explicit evidence of the political will and interest that lay behind the processes of scanning the land for prospects. Council's instructions to Bright began with an order to 'Avoid the public declaration of our resolution not to relinquish the land we have taken from the native'. This referred to previous skirmishes.<sup>45</sup> The instructions went on to say:

As the coast of Africa attracts more and more the public attention, and is at this time considered not merely as a field of useful scientific research, but as an object of increasing political importance, you will not fail to seize such opportunities of making geographical and statistical remarks as may occur. The course of rivers; the distance and bearings of remarkable places, the population of the country, the extent of cultivation, the nature of the soil and particularly what the country is capable of becoming as well as what it is, will be objects worthy of your attention.<sup>46</sup>

These instructions comprise the direct voice of the state to one of its servants, and reflect West Africa's wider political importance at this time. The physical and human environment must be quantified, analysed and known in order that Britain's political destiny could be realised. Ironically, Bright, apart from a few half-hearted attempts to describe some

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<sup>45</sup> Minutes of Meeting of Council, 27 Sept. 1802, PRO/CO270/8. The Nova Scotian rebels has been aided by local Temne forces, some of which were led by King Tom whose disputes with the company over its territorial boundaries had sometimes led to conflict. See Fyfe, *History*, pp. 74-75, and also pp. 89-92.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

aspects of the physical environment, actually produced an experiential, sentimental account which emphasised his dealings with people more than his observations of place.

Brian O'Beirne's instructions were issued in 1821 when the colony was well established and some contact had already been made with the Foulah interior. Governor Grant attempted to guide O'Beirne through the hierarchy of chiefs on the journey; their temperaments and varying degrees of greed and artifice, and the kinds of presents they would require. O'Beirne was urged always to attempt to impress the chiefs that slave trading was a folly and that there were enormous benefits to be had by trading with the colony.<sup>47</sup> He was instructed to focus on four main areas; manners and customs of the natives, the fertility of the soil and its exploitation under native agriculture, types and quantity of livestock, natural history, mineralogy and geology, the state of the slave trade and any information on the courses of major rivers.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, O'Beirne was instructed in the kinds of observations which 'every traveller into unknown countries ought to notice and record in his journal'. He was advised to keep two journals. One, for 'Government', should contain details of the days transactions, length of march, course, distance, temperatures and 'general remarks on the country'. The other should focus on observations of the people, especially manners and customs. O'Beirne was warned that he should 'keep this latter journal with the greatest care attention and accuracy, as upon it will probably depend your future reputation and advancement in life', and he was urged to 'collect as much knowledge as you possibly can.'<sup>49</sup> Here was a classic landscanning manifesto.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Grant to Brian O'Beirne, Jan. 29 1821. PRO/268/16.

<sup>48</sup> A. Nicholl M.D., Memo to O'Beirne. Jan. 25 1821. PRO/268/16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Accounts of natives were to be kept separate from the sort of information which Government needed, and which was aimed at surveillance, control and future exploitation. But at a time when exploration was a career and there was a deep fascination with explorer/native interaction, O'Beirne was urged to focus on his encounters with 'others' and to express himself as much as possible in writing. His reciprocal and anti-conquest status was ensured by the trading purpose of his mission, but state-based territorial ambition was also explicit in the instructions he received.

Other unpublished accounts by Company officials recall an appreciation of the instructions to Bright. John Clarkson, in the early Company days sent James Watt on various forays around the area, from which journeys he brought back accounts of fertility and potential for plantation agriculture. He clearly felt that acquiring possession of the land would present no problem and viewed all the accounts he received in this respect. When James Watt negotiated land for a sugar plantation on King Jemmy's land 'for a trifling consideration', Clarkson reported that some colonists on a walk behind Jemmy's town had 'discovered a spacious savanna which will be very useful to us.'<sup>50</sup> Alexander Smith, who finished off Bright's mission to capture the Nova Scotian rebels, took care to provide bearings and distances regarding his travels and noticed whether rivers were straight or whether the land was swampy or apparently fertile.<sup>51</sup> Thomas Ludlam, as well as recording his negotiations with native chiefs, noted the 'attractive' environment, the apparently fertile soil and the neglected natural

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<sup>50</sup> John Clarkson, *Diary* (March 1792), entries for March 20, 23 and April 13 and 17.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Journal*, Dec. 1802, entries for Dec. 1-3. Smith, *Journal of Voyage in King Kanta*, entry for Dec. 2.

produce to be found on Sherbro island. He also provided navigational details.<sup>52</sup> Abraham Vanneck's brief foray into the mountains around Freetown was a quintessentially landscanning exercise. He noted where streams were wide and straight where there were waterfalls and where the soil appeared fertile. He also climbed hills to 'spy' the courses of rivers. However, rather than presenting the land as unoccupied, it was clearly a large part of Vanneck's objective to avoid contact with natives; and his need to scan the land for prospects was pressing enough for him to risk native anger, so that he changed course at times to avoid their farms or settlement.<sup>53</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

What is clear from this chapter is that the Sierra Leonean archive does indeed lend support to Pratt's notion that late eighteenth-century travel writing can be typified by the information-producing account, where 'innocent' protagonists worked within the discursive boundaries of Linnean science and where a heavily Eurocentric approach was taken to the potential of the African environment. Clearly, this discourse was particularly suited to proslavery supporters, although Anna Falconbridge's account provided a proslavery argument from an intensely sentimental narrative. Antislavery supporters also subscribed to landscanning discursive techniques and emphases. Their innocence was doubly reinforced by their humanitarian sympathies, but the resonance of the male seeing eye (I), scanning the land for prospects on behalf of the state, remained potent.

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<sup>52</sup> Ludlam, *Journal of Proceedings*, entries for May 16 and 29.

<sup>53</sup> Vanneck, *Journal of an Excursion*, entries for Feb. 7 and 8, 1807.

Sierra Leone does not, however, provide the clearest of theoretical fits with Pratt's arguments. Pratt takes her examples of the landscanning gaze in information-producing accounts of Africa from works which referred to regions and periods where no immediate colonial exploitation was planned. In the case of Sierra Leone, commercial ambition was always explicit, especially during the time of the Sierra Leone Company. One of the *raisons d'être* of the whole project was to 'prove' that Africa could be profitably exploited without need for recourse to the slave trade. In Sierra Leone these information-producing accounts were written at a time of intense commercial interest in West Africa, so the disinterested innocence of gentlemen travellers is of little relevance in this context. What is equally clear, however, is that the notions of innocence and anti-conquest remained resonant in informational accounts of Sierra Leone. Claims to innocence and anti-conquest were explicitly made by anti-slave trade writers, especially when they contrasted their own ambitions with the 'evil' activities of slave traders. These claims were also made within more oblique discourse by the personal anti-conquest stance taken by writers from both sides of the ideological divide. After the abolition of the slave trade, when Sierra Leone assumed a new significance as the home for liberated Africans, the discursive arena widened. This, combined with the growth of sentimental travel writing, produced accounts more obviously linked with sentimental, experiential discourse. But the landscanning gaze persisted, and it is to evidence of that persistence that I shall now turn.

## CHAPTER 12

### **The Persistence of the Landscanning Gaze in Experiential Travel Writing**

Mary Louise Pratt argues that the gaze of the innocent, observant eye (I) was less obvious in 'experiential' travel writing. The importance of the day-to-day adventures of the traveller and the narrative significance of the native travellee in these accounts were, she suggests, more likely to result in texts which asserted 'multivalence, confusion, self-doubt, and self-parody'.<sup>1</sup> These texts tended to be less straightforward and pedantic in their imperial vision. The landscape was far from empty, it was the site of the traveller's heroic encounters. Nevertheless, landscanning moments appeared at strategic points in many sentimental accounts and provided one of the most persistent features of the wider discourse of imperial travel writing. As with the trend for travellers to indulge in amateur science, the employment of a landscanning gaze did not disappear with the growth of experiential travel writing.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the narration of personal adventures and traumas (which came to characterise travel writing on Sierra Leone and its environs) was frequently interrupted with pauses of landscanning and information gathering. Rather like the unspoken assertions of innocence, claims to authority and validity by the inclusion of 'useful' information seem to have been a constant discursive leitmotif of travel writing on the colony. Even the blind Holman talked about the natural beauty and fertility of the Bullom shore and

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the Country', in Gates (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference*, p. 158.

stressed its agricultural potential.<sup>2</sup> The preface to Rev. Koelle's book about his search for the originator of the script of the Vy language emphasised that missionaries had acquired valuable scientific information on their travels even though the pursuit of such knowledge was 'often a snare and hindrance to missionary work.'<sup>3</sup> Robert Clarke listed the land's resources, complete with Linnean names, as befitted his own scientific profession of surgeon.<sup>4</sup> Scarcely an account was complete without a panoramic view, some comments on the 'natural productions' of the country, and suggestions about how the land could be 'improved'. The gender, class, age or political affiliation of the author mattered little in the constant landscanning enterprise. But the most resonant of landscanning interludes came from authors who can broadly be identified as 'explorers'.

### 1. The Advance Scouts of Capitalism

Mary Louise Pratt has identified explorers as 'advance scouts of capitalism', travelling that the land may be known and reported for future use in a colonising enterprise.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Sierra Leone, exploration literature was rooted firmly in the sentimental/experiential genre. This was certainly true of the published accounts of the travels of Alexander Gordon Laing and the missionary traveller, William Cooper Thomson. But what of unpublished journals such as those of James Watt's journey to Timbo in 1794? Although unpublished, Watt's journal was clearly produced for his readership, the Sierra Leone Company Directors in London. It was peppered with references to 'the productions of the country', names and locations of

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<sup>2</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, pp. iv-v.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, pp. 106-30.

<sup>5</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 61.

native towns and lists of trading and commercial opportunities, in the manner of information-producing writing. His eye was continually noting the prospects of the land through which he travelled. For example, he described one tract of land near the River Cojong in Foulah territory toward the beginning of his journey as being 'barren' but 'delightfully formed.'<sup>6</sup> This sort of observation recorded both a picturesque sentiment and a commercial judgement. When his successor, Brian O'Beirne, followed in Watt's footsteps to Timbo, he recorded his observations in a similar manner.<sup>7</sup>

What is particularly striking with Watt's text, however, is the way in which he recorded his daily travels almost without reference to any native presence other than to those in his retinue and to those living in the villages and towns he passed through, a classically information-producing technique. A remarkable example of this is found in his entry for February 10, when Watt wrote in detail about how he and his party searched out and discovered the source of the River Cojong. In his description of this day the land appears to be empty, barren, opening up beneath the feet of Watt's party. Then, in the last sentence of this account, he wrote that 'we saw at least 600 Foulahs this day.'<sup>8</sup> This passing reference confirmed the land as known, inhabited, and exploited by natives but at the same time dismissed the relevance of these facts. Nevertheless, the daily marches were written in true explorers style and Watt wrote himself as every inch the sentimental hero, presenting a series of heroic encounters with intransigent natives as an integral component of his account. Watt's journal then provides examples of several instances of the persistence of the landscanning gaze

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<sup>6</sup> Watt, Journal, entry for Feb. 8 1794.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, O'Beirne, Journal, Feb. 28 1821.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for Feb. 10 1794.



in an experiential account which dealt in large measure with reciprocal relationships with natives. In many ways, it straddles the borders between experiential and informational travel writing. Perhaps that joint affiliation is more apparent because Watt's journal was unpublished.

In contrast, Alexander Gordon Laing's book was written very much in the heroic, sentimentalist explorer genre made so popular by Mungo Park.<sup>9</sup> Laing's journey was narrated almost entirely as a series of heroic encounters, often with uncooperative natives. Whereas in information-producing accounts the narrator's seeing eye was passive and devoid of sentiment, in Laing's experiential account his own *desire* to gain information was central to the heroic sense of the narrative. He wrote this desire in clear terms of physical and mental longing. Here, for example, is what he wrote on his return journey, when, despite the success of his trading mission, some of his exploratory ambitions had been thwarted.

I had lately looked with a longing eye towards a lofty sugar-loaf hill called Konkodoogore...I had been desirous of ascending this hill, and observing the country from its summit, but hitherto I had been deterred from making the attempt, fearing I had not recovered strength enough for the undertaking; I this day ascended its almost perpendicular sides, exposed to occasional difficulty as well as danger, from the frequent obstructions opposed by protruding blocks of granite...On arriving at the highest point of this hill...I was enabled from the clearness of the day, to take ...bearings.<sup>10</sup>

The bearings that he took from Konkodoogore were some of many which appeared throughout the text.

Laing never lost an opportunity to fix a reference, trace a river source, establish a boundary in physical or human geography or to identify physical resources whether exploited

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<sup>9</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304-5.

already or available for future exploration. He made careful geological observations of rock type and frequency, and collected samples of pebbles to add to the expedition's collection of natural phenomena.<sup>11</sup> In many ways, Laing's journey obeyed all the instructions given years earlier to Bright. His was a quintessentially landscanning expedition, but it was written up in sentimentalist vein. Laing was the protagonist, hero and narrator of his own story. He represented state ambitions but his innocence was not obtained through his absence from the narrative. Rather, it was derived more from the nuances of his reciprocal relationships with the natives with whom he had to deal.

A careful reading of Laing's text gives reason to recall Pratt's assertion that sentimental travel writing turned on the 'great longing' of taking possession without violence. This was apparent in the narration of his attempts to gain access to the source of the River Niger. One of the main themes of Laing's story was his ambition to trace the source of the Niger, and many pages were given over to his ingenious plans to reach the source (and to the native procrastination which prevented him doing so).<sup>12</sup> He wrote of his distress at the failure of these plans and made clear his longing to visit the source. He blamed his failure on the procrastination of the King of Falaba, who had said he could not guarantee Laing's safety because he was in dispute with the tribes in the source area.<sup>13</sup> Laing was forced to abandon the plan because of the fatherly concern of the king for his safety. Nevertheless, even when he had reconciled himself to the knowledge that he would not reach the source on this particular

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-301.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

journey, he anticipated the opportunity of visiting it on another <sup>14</sup>

Laing was only reconciled spiritually to the fact that he would not visit the source of the Niger when he reminded himself that he was on a trading mission and not on an overtly exploratory adventure. In the midst of his longing to trace the origins of the Niger he paused to remember the trade goods that he had been entrusted to him by merchants in the colony. His role as an explorer was to take second place to trade. This of course enhanced his personal anti-conquest.<sup>15</sup> The interventionist nature of a trading expedition was diffused in his narrative by making the trading objectives a source of his personal suffering. Moreover, by separating trade from exploration, Laing implied that exploration was a personally heroic activity not inevitably connected with ambitions of state or capital. Laing's explorer credentials were finally asserted when he traced the source of the River Rokelle, an enterprise which involved much secrecy and hacking through the undergrowth.<sup>16</sup> Laing's account then contains frequent landscanning instances in the context of a sentimental narrative. His personal innocence was emphasised through his acknowledgement of the need to reciprocate in dealings with natives and to remember the overt commercial purposes of his trip. Longing, landscanning and anti-conquest were all combined in an heroic explorer's tale.

Laing was the most significant 'explorer' to operate in the region surrounding the colony, and his narrative comprises a travel account in the tradition of Park and later Stanley and Livingstone. The explorer as hero, however, was a theme which pervaded other

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

sentimental accounts which exist in the Sierra Leone archive. William Cooper Thomson died before he could write up his journals for publication, but Lord Stanley, who published selections from his accounts in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* presented Thomson very much in the heroic adventurer mode.<sup>17</sup> Stanley focussed on the relationships between Thomson and native Africans. As I discuss in Chapter Fourteen the images of natives which came out of these encounters were extremely negative, and this, indeed was a feature of much missionary writing on Africa. However, once again this overwhelmingly sentimental narrative was peppered with instances of pure 'landscanning'. Bearings, distances, heights and lengths of paths, rivers and hills were given at every opportunity. Pastures were noted and analysed as 'fine' or 'poor'. Soil fertility was estimated and medical topographic issues considered, all with the unspoken but inevitable assumption that the land was being scanned for future European intervention and/or colonisation.<sup>18</sup> It was the prospect of that intervention that continued to make such criteria of relevance to landscape descriptions and which was so familiar in travel writing on Sierra Leone.

The landscanning gaze, coupled with a sentimental narrative, could produce a discursive environment strikingly different from the calm, scientific, Linnean observation that characterised the accounts with which I began the previous chapter. Frances Harrison Rankin's *The White Man's Grave* was an intensely journalistic study based on a limited period of residence in the colony. Mainly concerned with people-orientated discussions, a few sections of Rankin's book indicated the continuing potency of the landscanning discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley/Thomson, 'Journey', pp. 106-38 .

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Rankin's account stands out because he alone of nineteenth-century travel writers remained overtly committed to expanding white colonisation in West Africa. At several points Rankin's colonising ambitions were explicit. For example, in the Preface to volume one, he wrote:

In casting the eye over the map of Africa, it is gratifying to note, scattered along the shores of that vast and barbarous continent, the names of European settlements; centres of spreading civilization, wholesome as the well-springs in her own parched and desolate deserts.<sup>19</sup>

This conflation of Africa's physical and moral environment, the notion of an uncivilised desert watered by an European conscience, shows the influence of missionary propaganda in sentimental discourse of this period. In this case Rankin had introduced a classically imperialist representation of Sierra Leone as an enlightened outpost on a barbarous shore. The gaze was panoptic and had a temporal as well as spatial element. Time had brought changes to a barbarian land and Rankin's seeing eye scanned the map for the evidence of this past endeavour as well as for the prospects for the future.

The bulk of Rankin's volumes were concerned with observation and comment made on black and white society in Freetown, and his gaze in these instances was necessarily restricted and detailed. Away from the boundaries of the metropole, however, the colonising gaze seldom failed to return. For example, when writing on the liberated African villages he described riding out to Regent, where he encountered the following view:

Here, a ravine exhibited in its harsh outline of shattered rocks the fury of some former convulsion; there, a patch of bush ground, cleared for cultivation showed by charred stumps of trees and the ashy surface of the soil that fire had been employed to bare the surface previous to the coming rains; beneath lay the mud huts of Freetown, and the interminable Atlantic spread beyond; whilst, separated by an arm of the sea, many a league of low country inhabited by untamed savages of innumerable tribes, where

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<sup>19</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. iv.

Mungo Park had died and Laing had fallen added interest to the exciting prospect.<sup>20</sup>

The references to Mungo Park and Laing were, of course, part of Rankin's self (re)presentation as a sentimental explorer-hero. As such a hero, Rankin stood on a hill overlooking an outpost of civilisation in a land which had swallowed up the bodies of other brave Europeans, a land infested with savages, but ripe for exploration and conquest. He was scanning the land for prospects, and part of the sentimental excitement caused by this action was reflected in the juxtaposition of a landscape partially tamed by African 'slash and burn' agriculture with a more completely tamed settled Freetown and with a seemingly unknown wilderness.

Given Rankin's enthusiasm for increased colonial activity, the prospects that he had in mind were overtly territorial and imperial. This was made clear in his narration of visits that he made out of Freetown. On one of these he accompanied the Governor on a tour of the Freetown peninsula and the Banana Islands, hardly a journey of heroic exploration, but certainly presented as such. In many ways Rankin's account of this journey was classically experiential and sentimental. When the ship left Freetown, Rankin mused to himself:

On weighing anchor before Freetown, we stood out to the smooth Atlantic .... Sierra Leone, and the shore of the Bulloms, were on either side. The accumulated mountains of the one seemed to tower in conscious dignity, as the asylum of the unfortunate and the adopted land of civilisation; whilst the low, dull shore of the savage sank beneath the watery horizon, and hid itself from white man's view.<sup>21</sup>

As in the case of his view from Regent, here again the 'savage' was hidden from the coloniser's gaze, the relevant metaphor in both cases being that of height. The invisibility of the savages

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

was reminiscent of the invisibility of the noxious vapours that were thought to kill Europeans. But this sentimental passage was also a landscanning one. The binary oppositions of imperial representation were clear; savage versus civilization, safety versus danger, height over depth. The land was scanned in a sweeping panoptic gaze which overtly encompassed both environmental and moral parameters.

On the same journey with the Governor, Rankin visited the liberated African village of York, a place which particularly interested Rankin's landscanning eye. Here he was greeted by a 'rag tag militia' of liberated Africans.<sup>22</sup> Rankin contrasted the dishevelled militia with the exotic natural flora and fauna. In a fanciful description, he wrote that it seemed as if the birds and fish had joined in an exuberant welcome to the Governor as his boat drew near to the village.<sup>23</sup> In this far-fetched journalistic cliché, the environment was kindly, welcoming and enthusiastic. What troubled Rankin was not the hostility of the environment which had troubled so many other travellers but the fact that York's European superintendent, a man 'of cultivated mind', should have to live without other European company. Rankin marvelled that such a man 'could be induced to accept exile in a place almost hermetically sealed to intercourse with men of congenial habits.'<sup>24</sup> Rankin fixed upon the village of York as an ideal site for white colonisation. His mind wandered round the subject and what resulted was an utopian vision of a new colony. He wrote:

I could not help indulging in a fanciful vision of a white settlement at York. The "mind's eye" beheld the comfortable home of an industrious and thriving farmer, speedily raised by the willing exertion of black labourers, sheltered by the orange and

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 2, p. 16.

lime trees of this evergreen land: the farm-yard well stocked with the diminutive poultry and the stately Foulah cattle, and ...glossy piebald sheep. The ...granary filled with maize, millet and corn. Beyond the homestead, were pictured fields of sugar-cane and indigo, and plantations of cotton, whilst the hill-sides bristled with a stiff but generous coffee tree.<sup>25</sup>

York, already a liberated African village, was seen here as a labour pool for future white colonists, a part of the colonial frontier. Rankin sought an enlargement of the function of the village as a 'contact zone', the result of which would be a white pioneering community. Gone were the small subsistence plots of the liberated Africans and the slash and burn techniques of natives and 'liberated' alike. Instead, the exotic was familiarised through the use of European imagery and the land was defined by an imperial, landscanning gaze.

## 2. The Female Landscanning Gaze

It would be reasonably expected, giving the gender-driven constraints on women travel writers that I have discussed elsewhere, that the process of landscanning from an imperialist, interventionist perspective was unlikely to be a major feature of women's travel writing. In the Sierra Leonean case this was mostly true. I have already noted above that Anna Maria Falconbridge's text contained little that can be equated with the kinds of landscanning activity that I have been discussing up to this point. 'Mary Church' limited herself to the description of picturesque views from vantage points, and the Quaker linguist Hannah Kilham never reflected in a way which can be equated to a landscanning gaze. Only one female writer dedicated a significant amount of her text to observation and comment on the physical environment and that was Elizabeth Melville. In what remains of this chapter I want to examine Melville's landscanning gaze and its similarities to and differences from the discourses that I have been

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



concerned with up till now.

In one sense Elizabeth Melville wrote a particularly innocent version of scanning the land for prospects. A feature of her narrative was her expressions of homesickness, expressions which belonged to a more traditionally female discursive arena than many of the male-authored accounts that I have examined. The prospects she looked for most expectantly were those of news from home or her own return to family and friends. I referred in Chapter Ten to Melville's use of normalising discourse regarding Scottish flora and fauna in her attempt to familiarise the exotic upon her arrival in the colony. The 'longing' for home was narrated from her earliest time in the colony. During the few months she stayed in Freetown she spent many hours gazing from her window to Signal Hill, looking for the flag that indicated that a ship was in the offing and hoping it brought news from home.<sup>26</sup>

She was not alone in this particular scanning activity: 'Mary Church' also wrote in detail of the importance to her of the signal hill flags during her stay.<sup>27</sup> The contrast with Rankin's narrative is striking. Whilst his 'mind's eye' envisioned England transported to Africa, Melville and Church's 'mind's eyes' gazed all the way back home, compressing spatial boundaries. Nevertheless, both forms of landscanning had the effect of intruding the imaginative world into the observed world. Melville's resolutely dialogic text enabled her to bring these imaginative excursions to the forefront of her narrative. For example, she wrote from Freetown to her corespondent, 'It is almost impossible to picture you all at present

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<sup>26</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 12.

wrapped up in cloaks and furs, and mayhap surrounded by snow.<sup>28</sup>

As well as her use of a landscanning gaze in the context of her homesickness, Melville's book is also particularly noteworthy for its edenic imagery in relation to the West African environment. Her representations of the tropical world have been identified as in line with antislavery propaganda.<sup>29</sup> Much of her description concerned benign, amusing, beautiful and romantic flora and fauna. Such imagery discursively aligned Melville with antislavery sympathies even though she vowed to avoid political references in her study.<sup>30</sup> Many of her observations employed a gentle narrative style and a particularly innocent stance. She wrote of the 'dream like prospect' in the view from her window in Freetown, and her whole narrative contained a sense of reverie and benign reflection rather than the kind of explorer's or potential aggressor's observations so common in other texts.<sup>31</sup> Although she was aware of the climate's threats and difficulties, and sometimes found the environment intimidating, McEwan argues that Melville nevertheless perceived the African landscape, including the 'wilderness', as edenic and inherently ordered.<sup>32</sup> Equally benign were her descriptions of the flora and fauna. The following is typical:

One large gracefully formed bird, of a sober brown hue, with black crested head is always to be seen amongst the orange-trees. Its note begins at daybreak, and is very

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<sup>28</sup> Melville, *Residence*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> McEwan, 'Paradise or Pandemonium', p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Melville did, however, express her firm support for the British naval squadron in the preface to her account. Melville, *Residence*, p. v.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> McEwan, 'Paradise or Pandemonium', p. 76.

cheerful.<sup>33</sup>

It is hard to imagine a natural description farther removed from Linnean requirements. Reviewers noted the issue but 'excused' her on grounds of gender.<sup>34</sup> This lightweight, feminised innocence is perhaps a form of anti-conquest, the edenic images fostered by her observations being the result of a benign, feminised gaze.

Nevertheless, this is not the whole story. It is clear from the discussion of women's travel writing in general in Chapter Eight that women frequently employed descriptive stances which reflected their relative position of authority in relation to the colonised. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the lack of innocence behind the enterprise of scanning the land for prospects is, I feel, particularly useful here. In many ways, Melville's account is a classic sentimental explorer's narrative, although on a smaller spatial scale. She did not travel through numerous towns or cover large distances, but the discourse she employed revealed the same kind of territorial ambitions as her masculine, explorer counterparts. Her narrative was riddled with the desire to access, name, and know the physical environment, and to appropriate it for her purposes. She scanned the land for prospects of two kinds, the first being that which would bring her a rewarding 'picturesque' experience, the second that which enhanced her ability to live happily in the environment, and this latter involved envisioning a transformation of the land or her relationship to it.

Melville disliked Freetown and she was generally uninterested in black society other

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<sup>33</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, 11, (1849), p. 343.

than when it impinged on her housekeeping duties.<sup>35</sup> She never visited the market nor went inside an African hut.<sup>36</sup> In Freetown, her landscanning was limited to gazing up at Signal Hill. Eventually, after a few months, the Melville's moved up into the hills surrounding Freetown to 'a new and very solitary habitation' on Smith's Hill. Melville renamed (and thereby appropriated to herself) the hill as Mount Oriel.<sup>37</sup> Warned that she would find life there boring, she embarked on her twin preoccupations of amateur botanising and gazing out ruminatively on the landscape spread before her. The following observation is typical: 'I have really been very idle to-day, doing nothing except wandering from one window to another to gaze on the beautiful prospect of both land and sea which lies spread out before me.'<sup>38</sup>

Melville's access to edenic landscapes and the images they promoted depended on her removal from the 'realities of place' of colonial Freetown. She emphasised the extent of that removal from the outset, noting that from the windows of her new house 'Freetown looks as if marked out upon a map on a gigantic scale.'<sup>39</sup> Life on 'the hill' was a source of great pleasure to her because she could go in and out as she pleased to observe the flora and fauna 'whilst in the streets there was nothing to be seen but the same groups of market-people day after day plodding along.'<sup>40</sup> Melville's sentimental representations of the landscape seem to some degree to have depended on romantic notions of nature's unpredictability and continual fascination. It

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<sup>35</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263, 266.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

was the human environment that was tidy, ordered and regimented, and to her, boring. She rejected 'seeing' and seeking to 'know' the Freetown people and concentrated her gaze on nature. High on Mount Oriel the people of Freetown all but faded away. On her first morning, while surveying the landscape that unfolded below her, she was struck by 'a shrill wild cry repeated several times'. This cry turned out to be the Mohammedan call to prayers, barely audible, which was just how she preferred things.<sup>41</sup> Melville's landscanning gaze was that of a lady in a fairytale world, aware of, but not part of the human world. Her love of the picturesque and romantic emphasised her personal innocence and anti-conquest, but her position of power as a white upper-class wife of a prominent colonial official allowed her full scope to name, interpret and interfere with the environment as she saw fit.

The solitude and removal from human affairs which she so loved had a price and there were tensions in Melville's narrative of her relationship with the physical environment. She wrote that at first she felt lonely and 'hemmed in by hills and ravines.'<sup>42</sup> When she retreated indoors from these unpleasant feelings she found she had been invaded by an 'enemy within' in the form of insects in the store cupboard.<sup>43</sup> This tension was an important part of her sentimental narrative. In order to feel comfortable in this environment it was necessary that it should be tinkered with. One of the main ways she dealt with her unease was to embark on a project of path building, which was designed to make the immediate environment more accessible to herself on her solitary walks and on the rides and walks she took with her husband. The paths they built were to enable them to wander 'without having to thread our

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

way through tall grass and brushwood, at the risk of startling a snake at every step.<sup>44</sup> As the roads and paths were improved, she wrote that 'Although wild and solitary in the extreme, still it is a sort of tidy wilderness and cheerful solitude.'<sup>45</sup> The environment Melville wanted in her immediate vicinity seems to have taken the form of a suburban garden, a 'tidy wilderness'.

This was a discursive approach that McEwan has identified as unique to women travel writers after the 1840s and stands in direct contrast to the increasingly hostile images of Africa as the 'dark continent.'<sup>46</sup>

If Pratt is accurate in identifying male naturalist discourse as relating to that of Adam in his garden, then can Melville be interpreted discursively as Eve, captivated by the beauty of the world, under the protection of her husband, but threatened by hidden serpents? Not quite, because eventually, of course, Melville tired of the Eden and the garden that she grew most attached to was the more prosaic vegetable plot which provided her with European vegetables.<sup>47</sup> I have argued here that Melville's landscanning gaze did indeed differ from the more generally identifiable male eye (I) which scanned the land for exploitative prospects. I have also argued that the innocence and anti-conquest that can be attributed to her feminised, low-key observations on the environment were deceitful in that they masked the overt desire for knowledge, possession and naming which she indulged as part of the privilege of rank and race which she assumed. If women writers in the contact zone tended to produce ironic discursive reversals as Pratt suggests, Elizabeth Melville's narrative also shows how the

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>46</sup> McEwan, 'Paradise or Pandemonium', pp. 79-80.

<sup>47</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 200.

imperialist, landscanning gaze could resonate even within such dissonant narratives.

The landscanning gaze was one of the great defining coordinates of European travel writing on Africa, and Sierra Leone provided no general exception. Anti-conquest was narrated in both scientific and sentimental accounts through the author's expression of their relationship to the physical environment. Whether scientific or sentimental, authors suffered hardships and formulated normalising strategies to deal with their encounters with an alien world, some of which were brutally direct, others of which were more surreptitiously revealing of an 'other' environment. Through all this, travellers continued to scan the land, and their personal prospects tended to be aligned to those of the wider colonial project. I have shown, however, that important variations in that gaze existed and that gender, antislavery allegiance and notions of innocence, reciprocity and sentimental or scientific narrative did influence the resonance and significance of the landscanning gaze in such a wide variety of texts. But those differences did not divide along simple proslavery or antislavery lines. Landscanning was a much broader colonial activity to which all could subscribe.

## CHAPTER 13

### A Great Sentimental Obsession: Erotic Encounters in the Contact Zone

Having examined travellers' images and impressions of the Sierra Leonean physical environment, I now turn to an examination of how travel writers portrayed the different groups of people whom they encountered on their journeys. The remaining chapters of this study are concerned with the kinds of discursive strategies employed by travellers when they narrated their encounters with blacks as 'other'. In this chapter I seek to expand on the notions of innocence, reciprocity and anti-conquest in relation to black/white sexual or seemingly erotically-charged encounters in Sierra Leone and surrounding districts.

Separating traveller's images of people and place in this thesis has been an artificial strategy which I have employed in this study for the purpose of theoretical clarity. But the linkages between images of place and people were particularly resonant in the African colonial context, especially to developing notions of a 'Dark Continent'.<sup>1</sup> In the context of this chapter, these linkages may be revealed, for example, in the ways in which images of a dark fecund physical environment were conflated with representations of blacks as sexually licentious. The process of 'scanning for prospects' then related to African bodies as well as the African landscape. Indeed, Pratt makes brief but significant references in her arguments to 'transracial

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<sup>1</sup> Brantlinger, 'Victorians and Africans', in Gates (ed.), *"Race", Writing and Difference*, pp. 185-22.



erotics' within the context of discourses of reciprocity and anti-conquest.<sup>2</sup> She argues that interracial encounters were often narrated in a manner which asserted the innocence of the (usually male) white traveller.

The bulk of sources which inform this section of the thesis belong to the sentimental, experiential tradition of travel writing. It was in these accounts where black/white interaction was most fully described. As Pratt points out, sentimental travel writing tended to narrate a series of epic-style adventures, in which encounters with 'Other' peoples took a central role in the narrative. Often these encounters were directly or obliquely referred to as sexual. It was also in these texts that a narrative critique of white society occurred. White morality, and particularly overt white/black sexual liaison was a notable feature of many travel accounts.

The role of sex in the mediating of racial attitudes has been considered by some other writers on colonial literature. For example, Robert C. Young has asserted that much nineteenth century racial theory (building on the ideas of Edward Long and his followers) focused on the possibility or otherwise of hybridity. It was, therefore, explicitly concerned with issues of fertility and sexuality and was, Young argues, typified by a fascination with miscegenation and inter-racial 'transgression'.<sup>3</sup> Young proposes that there was a double logic to racial ideology from the 1840s onwards, a logic which sought to police the differences between whites and non-whites, whilst at the same time focussing on a fetishistic interest in

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<sup>2</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995), p. 9.

the miscegenated produce of the contacts between them.<sup>4</sup>

Young also emphasises the importance of visual representations of other races as a means of mediating racist attitudes among readers of texts. He writes that 'Whereas the difference between civilization and savagery was something most readers could assume but not themselves experience..., the visual distinction between the ideals of Western beauty and deliberately debased representations of other races could be judged from a quick glance at the page.'<sup>5</sup> Such representations could be graphic or textual. Nevertheless, Young suggests, many texts contained an ambiguity between repulsion and desire. He argues that 'The repulsion that writers commonly express when describing other races, particularly Africans, is, however, often accompanied at other points, with an equal emphasis, sometimes apparently inadvertent, on the beauty, attractiveness or desirability of the racial other.'<sup>6</sup> This ambivalence between disgust and desire provides another focus for this chapter.

How far does all this apply to travel writing on Sierra Leone? In examining this question I shall focus on three main areas of enquiry. Firstly, I shall look at black/white sexual discourse in the 'explorer' canon of literature that was produced in relation to the colony and its surroundings. Secondly, I shall examine the situation in Freetown as represented by travellers, with a particular emphasis on debates around issues of white morality. Thirdly, I look at how women's travel writing on the colony obeyed or resisted discursive structures relating to black/white erotic encounters. I do not want to give the impression that Sierra

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Leonean travel literature consists of one erotic image or encounter after another. By far the majority of texts relating to explorers' encounters with blacks were concerned with unerotic reciprocal contact. But many references were made to black/white interaction which carried a sexual connotation and which are especially interesting given my theoretical emphasis on anti-conquest and reciprocity.

### **1. Sierra Leonean Explorers and African Bodyscapes: Scanned for Prospects.**

In this section I focus on black/white erotic encounters as narrated in texts written by authors who laid claim to credentials as explorers or who narrated their adventures in a style reminiscent of classic exploration narratives. Commonplace among these 'exploration' accounts were the expressions of disgust many travellers made at the 'otherness' of the blacks (particularly women) whom they observed. Here, for example is Richard Bright, on the Susoo women whom he encountered on his journey:

The Susoo women, and indeed all the Cofferee women upon this part of the coast indulge themselves in a slovenly and disgusting practice of anointing their face, neck and arms with butter made of sour curds; or wanting this with any other grease which they can procure. The husband, however great his abhorrence may be of a custom repugnant to personal cleanliness and female delicacy, has no right to interfere in this toilette concern.... To their praise be it spoken, this trait of barbarism is seldom visible among the Mandingoes.<sup>7</sup>

'Scanned for prospects', the Susoo 'bodyscape' was unappealing, particularly in contrast to the Mandingo women whose tribe had already received the accolade of being more 'civilised' and intelligent than the Susoos. Bright followed this description with a summary of the punishments for adultery within the tribe, making a clearer, if inadvertent link that his

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Bright, Journal, entry for 8 Oct. 1802, PRO/CO270/28.

assessment of the women's physical appearance had a sexual context.<sup>8</sup> Other intimations of disgust were more oblique. Rev. Koelle, for example made it clear that he had been shocked by African sexual mores, but he did not go into detail. The Africans, he wrote, were 'sensual and carnal' with the women being particularly 'shameless.'<sup>9</sup> Such generalised negative stereotypes were quite common.

Alexander Gordon Laing also wrote in a similar manner about the women he encountered on his travels. However, his narration of these encounters was somewhat more ambivalent and it was in his text that the boundary between disgust and desire was most frequently blurred. In the first part of his travels in Soolima territory, at Malaghia, Laing wrote of a visit he and a white surgeon made to a chief named Yarradee. On this visit they were entertained with Soolima music and dancing. Here, Laing wrote:

His [Yaradees's] wives were ... exhibited; but we could not say much in favour of their beauty, although their various decorations of beads, and large gold ear-rings may be supposed to have shewn them to advantage.<sup>10</sup>

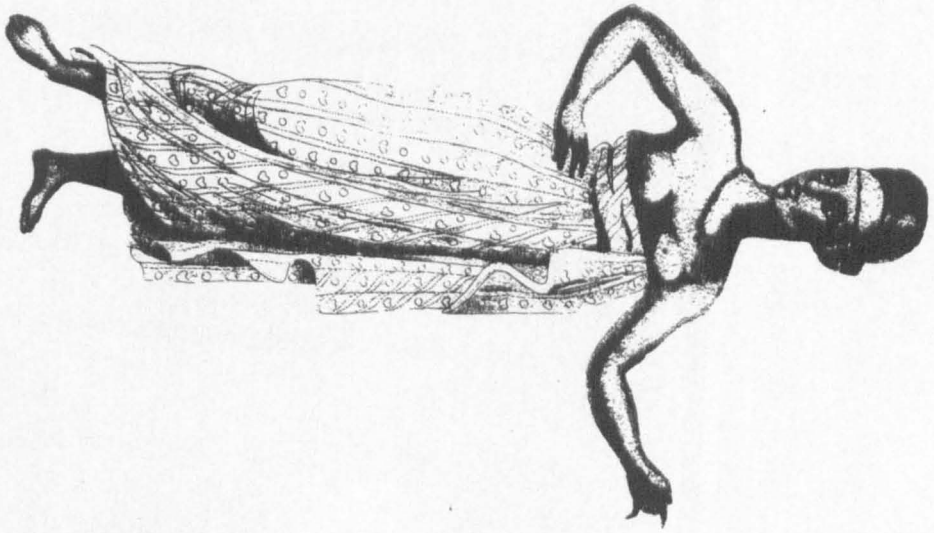
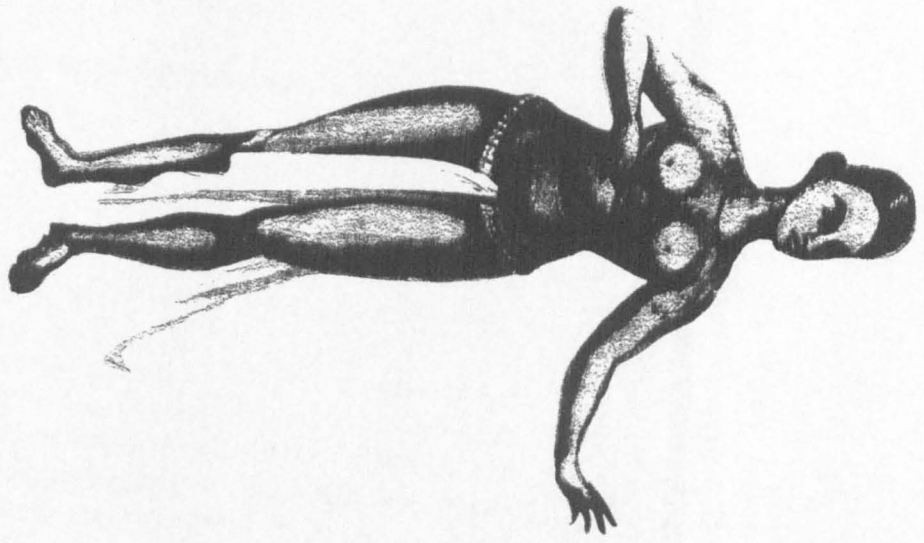
The women were 'scanned' and the verdict of their prospects was similar to the kind of discourse regarding a less than 'fine' landscape. Laing, the hero, was not deceived by finery. He scanned the bodies and not the jewellery. His gaze exhibited the 'superior' European value of reason which enabled him to employ an intelligent avoidance of native attempts to deceive him. Interestingly, while in Malaghia, Laing recorded an instance of this bodyscanning gaze being reversed: Yaradee himself eventually gave in to his curiosity and rubbed Laing's skin and

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 20.



hair, exclaiming subsequently 'They are not men, they are not men.'<sup>11</sup> The chief reportedly asked Laing's interpreter whether the white men had bones.<sup>12</sup> This reversed bodyscanning gaze was not uncommon in explorer-style narratives. It tends to bear out Pratt's assertion that the 'innocent' traveller is self-represented as passive, a person whom things happen to rather than who is proactive.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the Soolimas, Laing found Timanee women more attractive. In the course of one of his discussions of Timanee physical characteristics, Laing noted:

The women are uncommonly handsome in their persons, pleasing in their address, and evince the greatest anxiety to shew attention to strangers, who, by their allurements, are not unfrequently brought in the most serious and awkward dilemmas.<sup>14</sup>

Laing was 'tempted' sexually by the women. He himself was passive and innocent, suffering a 'dilemma' because of their effect on him. The contrast with this passage and Laing's negative representations of the Soolima women brings to mind Robert Young's insistence that the copresence of desire with disgust is an important element of the use of sex as a mediating term in racist discourse. This is also perhaps indicative of the kind of situation Pratt has in mind when she talks of transracial erotics as a 'sentimental obsession.'<sup>15</sup> This assertion of anti-conquest in a sexual context lent weight to the common racist dictum that African women were sexually licentious.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

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

<sup>13</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timanee*, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 82.

Some twenty pages later, however, the standard discourse of 'disgust' reappeared, again in relation to Timmanee women. This time it was accompanied by a plate of semi-naked Timmanee women (see plate opposite p. 290). Laing wrote:

The women, with the exception of those contiguous to the water-side, are as deficient in the article of raiment as the men, and many of them more so ... I have actually, in some few instances, seen great over-grown women, mothers of families, as naked as when born, and quite unconscious of the disgust which their appearance excited.<sup>16</sup>

Again, there is an ambiguity in Laing's text between desire and disgust. This was set against a 'knowledge' of Timmanee society as poorly refined in its sexual conduct. Laing bemoaned what he saw as the lack of a courtship ritual and noted that when a man 'takes a fancy to a girl, it is not considered at all requisite that he should learn whether or not the attachment is mutual'.<sup>17</sup> In this context then, Laing seeks to excuse the women for their 'disgusting' behaviour and appearance.

This whole subject emerged again in a section on 'Manners and Customs of the Soolimas'. Here, Laing recorded the dignity, good-manners and kindness of some Soolima women, but asserted that despite this he 'knew' that they were 'loose in morals' because in the palavers brought before the king sexual disputes were so common.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, and this is a critical point, Laing wrote that the women would 'adorn society' if they were treated with the kind of respect accorded to women in 'civilised' societies.<sup>19</sup> The women Laing encountered, then, were scanned for prospects like a landscape. Some were portrayed as sexual

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<sup>16</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

temptresses, others ugly and disgusting. All were victims of their 'barbarous' culture and capable of 'improvement' under a (male) civilising influence. This discourse bears a strong similarity to prominent representations of the physical environment as a riotous mass waiting for the 'improving' hand of the white pioneer. And still, the seeing eye was innocent, passive, merely wandering and reporting, but in a sentimental, experiential account recording its (his) reciprocal responses to that 'which it (he) was exposed.

As I have discussed in chapter 11, Frances Harrison Rankin wrote accounts of brief journeys that he made outside Freetown, to the Bananas Islands and to some more remote liberated African villages. His accounts were very much in the heroic-adventurer tradition. The account of a trip to the Bananas Islands comprised a detailed discourse on black and white bodies. He began by relating his sense of sartorial freedom when, while out shooting with two black guides, substantial clothing 'became superfluous when beyond the critical notice of European eyes.'<sup>20</sup> What followed was an account of the sensual delights of being lightly clad in the freedom of nature. He wrote:

There is a luxury in stepping forward freely in a glowing climate, released from the restraint of sartorial bondage.... It is especially exhilarating to ramble in this manner, where everything around is rioting in the wild and joyous freedom of nature; when a pardonable enthusiasm for the natural, delights in obliterating for the moment every possible memorial and badge of the artificial.<sup>21</sup>

This passage perhaps constitutes a limited 'going native' discourse, and conveys a sense of otherwise forbidden delights, possible in 'wild and joyous' Africa, but only when away from the gaze of fellow Europeans. As the story of his adventure developed, however, Rankin

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<sup>20</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 2, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



encountered the reciprocal gaze of his black companions, scanning his sartorially-released body. He noted that when he bathed in some shallow water on the island his African guides 'shrank back' in horror as more of his body became exposed. Africans, he wrote, had a terror of white men.<sup>22</sup>

What followed was a long discourse on the different perceptions white and black people had of each other's bodies, these reflections culminating in a reversal of received stereotypes. Rankin began by asking 'What is physical beauty? Has it other existence than as habit defines it? We are taught to picture the Evil one as black. The African is certain that Satan is white.'<sup>23</sup> After discussing various physiological theories regarding difference in skin colour, he notes that 'The European, in constant intercourse with the African, loses much of his distaste for the sable skin, and occasionally acquires a positive preference. The reverse is not so common.'<sup>24</sup> Here then Rankin was emphasising white ambivalence between disgust and desire, and representing the African disgust with white bodies as the more constant sentiment. The fluidity of white experience in the 'contact-zone' was apparent in Rankin's text, and served to destabilise received stereotypes.

In accordance with experiential travel writing, however, Rankin maintained his own innocence and passivity. Things happened *to* him, as in the case of the blacks shrinking from the sight of his body. On his own journey into Timanee country, exhausted after numerous difficulties in arranging his passage, Rankin enjoyed great native hospitality at Ro-Yel. Here

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<sup>22</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 2, p. 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

he found himself the object of curiosity from a number of local women who crowded round him to examine his body. He wrote that they appeared desperate to touch him but only one had the courage to do so.<sup>25</sup> Once again he was the passive, innocent object of a reciprocal gaze.

The African woman's perceived fascination with white men was a common theme of much male travel writing, and cropped up in unpublished as well as published accounts across the timespan covered by this thesis. Adam Afzelius, much of whose notes fitted the information-producing pattern, wrote in a more sentimental manner when writing of specific journeys and particularly noted his encounters with African women. When his garden was ransacked by the French, Afzelius retreated into the woods where he became ill with fever, saved only by a passing native princess who nursed him for two days.<sup>26</sup> He also noted the attentions of one lady who made a great fuss of looking after him to the extent of spending the night in his hut with her retinue. This one-legged lady was recorded as both fascinating and her attentions as welcome, but also as annoying, because she woke him up in the night to prepare food with which to look after him.<sup>27</sup> In both instances he was the passive recipient of African women's attentions.

James Watt also frequently recorded African women's 'curiosity' with himself and Winterbottom. At one town in the Foulah country, he complained how the local chief had

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, p. 277.

<sup>26</sup> Lindroth, 'Adam Afzelius', *Sierra Leone Studies*, new series., 4 (1955), p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> Kup (ed.), *Adam Afzelius: Sierra Leone Journal*, entry for March 23 1796.

deliberately prevaricated over allowing him to proceed on his travels.<sup>28</sup> The chief's women also seemed intent on delaying him, but with hospitality and entertainment.<sup>29</sup> At Timbo itself, Watt continually complained how the chief was delaying his plans or making his stay uncomfortable by, for example, giving him inadequate quarters.<sup>30</sup> In direct contrast, he noted how much he enjoyed the company of African women in the town, but lamented that they were largely kept away from him by the chiefs. The women, however, were determined to spend time with him.<sup>31</sup> In one passage he told how some women visited him whilst the men were occupied at prayer. Included among the retinue was one of the chief's wives 'who indicated clearly she would be flogged if caught.'<sup>32</sup> The message was clear. These women were prepared to risk ignominy and physical punishment just to spend time with white men. Watt himself was informed that speaking with the 'King's women' put him at risk of having his hands and feet cut off. He wrote. 'I really should think it very hard to lose a limb for only being commonly civil to a Lady. I fear it would spoil my gallantry for ever.'<sup>33</sup> Watt did not reciprocate the willingness to face punishment for spending time with the women. In this statement he asserted his passivity and innocence. If punished *he* would be the victim of *their* curiosity.

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<sup>28</sup> Watt, Journal, entry for Feb. 23 1794.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for March 6 1794.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, entry for March 7 1794.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Black Women and White Men in Colonial Freetown

So far I have examined explorer-style narratives and their representations of black sexuality in encounters with white travellers. But how were blacks in Freetown represented?

Not all writers distinguished between the different black groups in the colony. Capt.

Alexander, for example, wrote of the 'negresses' he and his companions met on their way to market. Alexander explained:

They are very fond of being spoken to by white men, so we indulged them. No people in the world, taken collectively, are so good-tempered as negroes, or so easy to please by taking a little notice of them.<sup>34</sup>

As in the explorer narratives, white men were merely responding to the women's desire for contact with them. They themselves were neutral.

One of the easiest ways for Europeans to observe and report on liberated Africans was by watching them in the liberated African yard prior to their distribution among recaptive villages, or prior to apprenticeship in Freetown. Several travellers used their visits to the yard as a 'bodyscanning' opportunity. William Hamilton's observations of women captives in the yard were similar to Laing's observations of the women 'exhibited' to him at Malaghia.

Hamilton wrote:

The women, although equally well formed about the feet, and other-wise elegantly made, it would be ridiculous to associate any ideas of beauty with them under such unfavourable circumstances: the brilliant is intrinsically beautiful, although obscured with ore and dirt, but it derives its beauty from the high polish which it receives under the hand of the operative.<sup>35</sup>

Hamilton had scanned the women and found them repulsive, but he hinted that with European

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. 93.

<sup>35</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 6 (1841), p. 335.

'polish' they may well prove desirable. He went on to lament how, in spite of a general degree of 'improvement' in 'civilization' among recaptives, 'female society' was still retarded.

'Woman', he remarked, either 'creates in man a desire for the intellectual and refined enjoyments of the highest cultivation, or, by her conduct and example, she degrades him to the level of the brute creation.'<sup>36</sup> The former presumably related to European women, the latter to liberated African women. He complained that the liberated Africans were 'utter strangers to the responsibilities of matrimony' and that the weighty words of the marriage ceremony meant nothing to them.<sup>37</sup> The 'debased' physical state of the recaptives in the yard was, Hamilton asserted, accompanied by the persistence of their 'loose morals' when assimilated into the colony.<sup>38</sup> As in several of the explorer-narratives, the implication here was that black women were inherently immoral.

The perceived sexual licence of Freetown blacks was a frequent cause for comment by travellers. James Holman (whose blindness meant that he was unable to bodyscan in the more usual way) sat through a court case in which a (Maroon) Rev. Samuel Thorpe was tried for adultery with the wife of a (Nova Scotian) carpenter.<sup>39</sup> Holman noted that adultery was common amongst the black groups.<sup>40</sup> Henry Huntley hinted as much in his account of the

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<sup>36</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 7(1842), p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, pp. 86-96.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

blacks, lethargic by day, becoming active at night with tom-toms and dancing.<sup>41</sup> Peter Leonard noted that black women dressed 'immodestly' and went on to wonder that 'perhaps blushes are incompatible with a countenance of ebony.'<sup>42</sup> Even Frances Harrison Rankin, who as I have shown was sometimes given to more thoughtful ruminations on black/white differences, was keen to point out the failure of the Maroons to advance in 'civilization', noting 'the children of either sex often arriving at a late period of youth without assuming a vestige of clothing even in the capital, and elders practising polygamy with as much simplicity and *gusto* as my friends the Timmanees.'<sup>43</sup>

The most harshly negative image of blacks in Freetown was painted by the naval Captain Chamier, who was vehemently proslavery for most of his life. His concern to represent Sierra Leone as 'that sink of human wretchedness' led to the employment of some sensationalist imagery.<sup>44</sup> His descriptions of blacks in Sierra Leone comprised of entirely negative, barbaric representations which reflected both on black and white morality. I shall quote a long passage from Chamier because it indicates that a vehemence came into travel literature similar to that expressed by *John Bull* and others in the public press.<sup>45</sup> Chamier wrote that scenes similar to those in this passage 'frequently occurred'.

A tall black, with nothing in the world on but a cocked-hat, would strut by us; and now and then a sable dandy, with a long-tailed coat but deficient in every other part of dress, would stand in naked pride for our admiration. The women exhibited in

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<sup>41</sup> Huntley, *Seven Years' Service*, 1, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 109.

<sup>44</sup> Chamier, *Life of a Sailor*, p. 263.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Seven.

natural nudity all their glowing charms, and some of the younger of these were beautifully formed; but Love never could nestle on the thick black lips of an African nigger. Some gentleman painted the southern wall of his garden black, to retain the heat and ripen his fruit early in the season; or perhaps it is the colour and the sun which places a girl of twelve years old at Sierra Leone in so ripe a point of view....In purchasing one of these animals, you did not buy a pig in a poke; you saw your bargain bare as Eve, and consequently could not be taken in.<sup>46</sup>

In this passage the criticism of the commodification of human bodies which was commonly applied to slave traders was reversed to apply to the supposedly 'civilised' community of Sierra Leone. Blacks were presented as brazenly naked, the women sexually tempting and the men simply barbaric. What Chamier did, however, was to refer to white complicity and hypocrisy in Sierra Leone in taking advantage of the black's 'natural' sexual licentiousness. It is to this subject of white male sexual morality in Sierra Leone that I shall now turn.

### **3. The Moral Gaze: Traveller's Images of White Sexual Morality**

At the end of the passage that I quoted above the French Captain Chamier wrote ' I know not where the devil walks- - but his direction, or *poste restante* is at Sierra Leone'.<sup>47</sup> Here he undoubtedly directed part of his disgust at contemporary morality towards the white society of Freetown. In chapters Six and Seven of this thesis I noted how issues of white morality in the colony had entered the public forum through the sustained campaign of several of the colony's enemies, and through its subsequent defence by its supporters. To some degree these campaigns hinged around a Manichean axis. On the one hand there were the utopian, antislavery images of the benevolent, altruistic, philanthropist and missionary gently coaxing Africans toward civilization and 'useful' labour. On the other hand, images of

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<sup>46</sup> Chamier, *Life of a Sailor*, p. 264.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

hypocritical, deceitful, self-serving and immoral whites, exploiting the British treasury, and living a life of debauched excess, became a familiar 'leitmotif' of wider images of Sierra Leone. But how did travellers describe the white community and their own moral attitudes toward them? It is with this question that I am concerned here.

Before I can examine this subject though, it is worth asking why it is appropriate to focus on images of white society at all? There is perhaps a tendency to think of the 'contact zone' solely as a focus for interaction between white and black. I argue here that an important feature of the 'contact zone' for travellers to Sierra Leone was provided by the 'difference' of white society compared to that at home. The white community, or sections of it were part of Sierra Leone's 'other' to many travellers, and the moral behaviour of various classes and sections of the white community provided a source of enduring fascination to travel writers. They, of course, had a wider discursive licence to probe such issues than more formal means of reporting the colony may have provided. A large part of that fascination centred on interracial sex and miscegenation.. The 'mulatto' offspring of white men and black women, to be seen in the streets of Freetown were visible signs of this aspect of the 'contact zone.'

White sexual morality had long proved fascinating for travellers to the region.

Although a slave trader himself, Joseph Hawkin's account of the white slave trader's lifestyle in their settlement on the River Nunez was not obviously intended to be complementary to them, and reflected an anti-English rather than antislavery agenda. Significantly, the trader's perceived moral depravity was identified partially in terms of inter-racial sex. Hawkins remarked on their laxity of manners, and on their habitual drunkenness leading to an



intellectual vacancy 'which marks the uncultivated mind.'<sup>48</sup> He also noted the 'customary plurality of [black] women in the domestic establishment.'<sup>49</sup> Describing a typically debauched evening of gluttony and drunkenness, he wrote: 'At the conclusion of these debauches, the black wives who know their duty, attend and convey each exemplary master to his own house.'<sup>50</sup>

It will be remembered that one key focus of dissonant voices about Sierra Leone that I discussed in chapters Six and Seven was provided by Kenneth Macaulay, the somewhat dissipated cousin of the 'Saintly' Zachary. James Alexander's travel account was published a few years after Kenneth Macaulay's death, but his account obliquely reminded the reading public of the latter's exploits. On arrival in Freetown, Alexander went to stay with Henry William Macaulay, one of Zachary Macaulay's sons, who was employed in the mixed commission of adjudication. He explained that the latter

has the character of being a young man of excellent ability, high principle, and unbounded hospitality and charity; giving five hundred pounds a year out of his salary ... to support a school, the coloured descendants of his relative Kenneth, and for the relief of the indigent and distressed in general.<sup>51</sup>

Captain Alexander went on to describe how on the night of his arrival one of Kenneth Macaulay's 'mulatto' sons, thrown out of the house for loading a pistol with intent to shoot some boys with whom he had quarrelled, stabbed one of Macaulay's servants, as well as a Kroo

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<sup>48</sup> Hawkins, *History of a Voyage*, p. 157.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. 88.

gate man.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Kenneth Macaulay's sexual indiscretions were represented as having left a violent, disorderly and disreputable legacy. His 'mulatto' offspring had become a burden on more honourable whites. Miscegenation, Alexander suggested, had long-term negative consequences for the moral health of colonial society.

The fascination with interracial sex was enhanced when the 'transgressors' belonged to the church. Alexander Gordon Laing was opposed to missionaries being used in a political capacity in the colony, and used moral lapses as part of his arguments against them. One of these lapses involved a missionary known to be 'living with a negress.'<sup>53</sup> Peter Leonard wrote how the missionaries were unpopular 'among the dissolute Europeans' in Freetown, but also emphasised that missionaries were 'vulnerable' to the same temptations as other Europeans citing the case of a priest who was accused of seducing a young Liberated African girl.<sup>54</sup>

The most detailed descriptions of how black/white relations were played out in Freetown was produced by Frances Rankin. He explained that Freetown was a bachelor society; even those who were married generally preferred to leave their wives at home and to 'live as bachelors' in the colony. Of the white women in the colony, few accompanied their husbands to an unmarried white colleague's home because it was possible that the host's black mistress might not show due deference to her.<sup>55</sup> Rankin informed his readers directly of the importance and prevalence of inter-racial encounters in Freetown in the following quotation:

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>53</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 393.

<sup>54</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>55</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, pp. 171-72.

The state of society may be gathered from a simple fact. In the principle burying-ground stands a handsome monument, erected by a late governor [Findlay], to the memory of a young coloured girl, an especial favourite. I was informed that the attendance of the principal government functionaries was desired to give public pomp to her funeral. The epitaph is copied verbatim and needs no comment:

To the  
Memory of  
Mary Esmond,  
who departed this life,  
aged fifteen years  
and eleven months  
And of her infant son,  
who died in the same hour,  
on the same day,  
aged twelve hours<sup>56</sup>.

Rankin was telling his readers that governors of the colony had sex with young African girls and used the apparatus of power to give sanction to these relationships. His refusal to comment lent an ambivalence to the situation; it allowed the underlying fascination with (and perhaps tacit approval of, or longing for) such relationships to impinge silently on the text, alongside the more expected moral horror likely to be expressed by both author and reader.

Some writers mentioned 'Dignity Balls' as one of the specific forums wherein black women and white men met socially. On these occasions, white gentlemen entertained settler women with dancing and hospitality.<sup>57</sup> Rankin described the events in a tone which indicated amusement rather than hostility, although seizing gleefully on the opportunity to elaborate on the novelty of 'dark maidens' bewitched by dashing white officers.<sup>58</sup> Rev. Poole, however,

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> James Walker notes that the format for Dignity Balls of all-night dancing, drinking and singing was actually introduced to the colony by the Nova Scotians. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 309.

<sup>58</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, pp. 191-92.

responded to the dignity balls with predictable horror, and wrote:

It is unnecessary and impossible to say more of these assemblies than that they supply the most fatal and poisonous means of corruption, and dress temptation in all the fascinating charms and inviting forms of Immorality and Excess.... And yet it is a well known circumstance, that a sanction is given to these Dignity Balls, substantially and personally, by individuals whose standing in society there would not be advanced by such imprudence.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. Gendered differences in travel writers' bodyscapes

As might be expected given the discursive constraints I have outlined before, much women's writing simply did not engage with issues of sexual morality and miscegenation. Certainly, Elizabeth Melville did not comment on either the issue itself or its visible evidence. 'Mary Church's responses to her correspondent's questions on 'society' and 'gaieties' were naive and vague, whether deliberately or not is unclear. Explaining that society is 'limited' she noted to her questioner that there used to be 'Dignity Balls at which all the washerwomen were present', but did not comment any further.<sup>60</sup> Hannah Kilham appeared to have no interest in society gossip, but did lament that the 'immoral' behaviour of whites in the colony set a bad example to blacks, and added that she sometimes experienced spiritual depressions because of the lack of 'cultivated Christian society'.<sup>61</sup>

Anna Maria Falconbridge, on this as on so many other issues did not subscribe so much to the discursive restraints which may perhaps have operated on other women writers. In fact, intentionally or unintentionally, her text tends to use the 'innocent' feminine discourse

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<sup>59</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, p. 297.

<sup>60</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup> Biller, *Memoir*, pp. 292, 390.

which did not deal directly with issues of sexual morality to emphasise male 'transgression' in this area. For example, she described how, soon after arrival, she visited Bance Island where she first encountered numbers of black women. She wrote:

Seeing so many of my own sex, though of different complexions from myself, attired in their native garbs, was a scene equally new to me, and my delicacy, I confess was not a little hurt at times.<sup>62</sup>

On the same visit she learned that some of these women were white men's mistresses. 'I then understood', she wrote, 'that every gentleman on the island had his *lady*.'<sup>63</sup> The moral significance of her encounters in the contact zone were only slowly apparent to Falconbridge. This lack of a direct gaze and seeming slowness to understand situations was perhaps, a kind of anti-conquest. This is a feature of Falconbridge's account that Mary Louise Pratt has also identified.<sup>64</sup> There is more than one example of this more feminised, but potent, moral gaze in Falconbridge's text. Another example is provided by the frequently noted story she told of a conversation with some filthy, poor, 'black' women, whom she soon discovered were white prostitutes supposedly inveigled on board the transports when the original colony was founded.<sup>65</sup> The plausibility of this account has fascinated historians for decades, but its discursive significance has often been overlooked.<sup>66</sup> Boundaries between black and white and the moral gaze which distinguished them were initially blurred by Falconbridge, only to be

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<sup>62</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 105.

<sup>65</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 64-66.

<sup>66</sup> For the latest, perhaps definitive refutation of Falconbridge's claims see Braidwood, 'Black Poor', pp. 280-86. Nevertheless, Braidwood's claim (p. 286) that until new evidence comes to light in support of Falconbridge's claims the prostitutes story barely warrants a mention in subsequent histories overlooks the discursive implications of the story and its repercussions then and now.

revealed to the distress of her moral sensibilities and the intended discredit of her philanthropist targets. Race, sex and philanthropy were discursively mixed in a tale told in a manner which enhanced the innocent, anti-conquest, gaze of the story teller.

In some senses, then, Falconbridge's initial miscomprehension of the role of black mistresses, and her confusion about the racial identity of the white prostitutes, introduced a destabilised notion of bodyscanning into her text. However, it is in her account that one of the most direct instances of white/black bodyscanning is found. At Bance Island house, whilst receiving the decent hospitality of white slave traders so disapproved of by her husband, Falconbridge wrote that she 'involuntarily' strolled to a window in the dining room which happened to overlook the slave yard. Here 'without the smallest suspicion of what I was to see', she gazed on 'between two and three hundred wretched victims, chained and parcelled out in circles.'<sup>67</sup> Although recording 'astonishment' at the sight, she did not turn away but rather remained with her gaze fixed on the slaves. As she wrote it:

Offended modesty rebuked me with a blush for not hurrying my eyes from such disgusting scenes; but whether fascinated by female curiosity, or whatever else, I could not withdraw myself for several minutes...be assured I avoided the prospects from that side of the house ever after.<sup>68</sup>

As Pratt herself points out, Falconbridge's use of the term 'prospects',

ironically recalls the hegemonic European subject who scans landscapes and dreams of their transformation. And as that persona is male, its desire possessive, so Falconbridge identifies her seeing and desire with her gender ... As a woman she is not to see but be seen, or at least she is not to be seen seeing.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 104.

Falconbridge's gaze was not simply that of white female to black male; the slaves in the yard were probably of all ages and both sexes. And yet the passage aligns most discursively to the disgust/desire tensions that I have written about in relation to white male encounters with black women, providing a gendered discursive reversal of considerable force. Her personal innocence was perhaps asserted most through her decision not to 'see' these 'prospects' again rather than in the fact of her looking at all.

Another destabilising feature of Falconbridge's account concerns a brief reference which she made to the 'mulatto' offspring of interracial sex. While most writers focussed on white attitudes to 'mulattoes' and the sexual mores that produced them, Falconbridge highlighted the attitude of a black man whose wife had a 'mulatto' child. Having visited an unnamed native town, she noted that the 'headman's favourite woman, had a beautiful *mulatto* child'. The headman saw Falconbridge's interest in the child and said to her:

God a[l]mity sen[d] me dat peginine[child], true, suppose he no black like me, nutting for dat, my woman drinkee red water, and suppose peginine no[t] fro[m] me, he dead.<sup>70</sup>

She went on to write, 'I could not help smiling at the old fool's credulity, and thinking how happy many of my own countrywomen would be to rid themselves of a similar stigma so early.'<sup>71</sup> As may be expected for someone who eventually came to defend slavery and the slave trade, Falconbridge focussed on 'the old fool's credulity' and superstitious beliefs, and used the incident to point out the wider degradation in African society, outside the field simply of sexuality.

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<sup>70</sup> A.M. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, *Two Voyages*, p. 83.

It is clear from this chapter that sentimental travel writing on Sierra Leone contained many instances of sexualised references to blacks in Freetown and the surrounding countryside. The discursive strategies employed most often by writers, male or female, were those of innocence, passivity and anti-conquest. The reciprocal gaze of the African, frequently noted, reflected his or her fascination with Europeans and further emphasised the white author's anti-conquest. Negative images of blacks as licentious, devious and potentially dangerous to white moral resolve were emphasised in many accounts. In general, white women did not share access to this particular means of providing negative images of blacks, although Anna Maria Falconbridge did reflect on sexual morality and felt no need to avert her real or textual gaze from a fascinated examination of black bodies and morality. Like the land, African bodies were presented as full of prospects, but only under the (literal?) hand of white tutelage.

## 5. Conclusion

Several key themes have emerged from this chapter. I have examined how white travellers asserted their own passivity and innocence in the face of reported duplicity and deceitfulness of 'artful' blacks. I have examined notions of 'self' and 'other' as they related the specific subject of 'bodyscapes' and erotically charged encounters. Manichean binarisms of representation have again become apparent in this discussion and the power of white travellers to construct and define the terms of discourse relating to their encounters with natives has been emphasised. However, I have also hinted that a limited dissatisfaction with white stereotypes of blacks is detectable in some texts. This potential capacity for self-questioning was an important component of sentimental travel writing. Finally, some gendered differences in the erotic 'gaze' of sentimental travel writers has been revealed. These themes are of more



general relevance to any consideration of blacks in sentimental travel writing and in the final chapters of this study I move on to examine broader human encounters in travel accounts and their narration in terms of innocence, anti-conquest and reciprocity.

## CHAPTER 14

### Encountering the 'Other':

#### 'Reciprocity' and Images of Native Blacks in Sierra Leonean Travel Writing

The wider study of white encounters with blacks in Sierra Leone provides a large and unwieldy subject. For clarity then I have divided my analysis into two main areas. In the following chapter I examine reciprocity and anti-conquest within accounts relating to Freetown, whilst in this chapter I examine broader reciprocal images of native Africans. The majority of travellers who ventured away from Freetown wrote sentimental travel accounts which emphasised their role as hero-adventurers and it was this form of travel writing which Mary Louise Pratt found most useful in formulating her notion of the 'mystique of reciprocity'.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, reciprocity and anti-conquest go hand in hand. Pratt argues that through an emphasis on the traveller's attempts at reciprocal relationships with native Africans, the European presence in sentimental travel texts was represented as non-interventionist. Tension occurred in these accounts when the traveller's attempts at reciprocity were presented as failing because of the ignorance, greed or even plain wickedness of the Africans. The traveller was subjected to trials which happened *to* him rather than being created *by* him, and the reader was encouraged to empathise with him as a vulnerable, submissive and suffering hero.

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 80-81.

Reciprocity was a dynamic which apparently guided attempts at honourable white/native interaction. It also distanced the author from the unpleasant realities of imperial enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Pratt asserts that the mystique of reciprocity, economically 'capitalism's ideology of itself, extends to knowledge and culture, and is evident in representations of subjects as diverse as medicine and transracial erotics.<sup>3</sup>

The mystique of reciprocity was particularly evident in encounters with local rulers which, according to Pratt formed 'the building blocks of the [sentimental] narrative.'<sup>4</sup> The traveller (in Pratt's example Mungo Park) attempted to negotiate his and his party's survival and safe passage through the disposal of a finite number of 'gifts' of European goods, and the struggle to find equilibrium between these finite goods and the 'greed' of his hosts provided epic narrative tension and asserted the traveller's reciprocal vulnerability.<sup>5</sup> Moral superiority was asserted through the insistence on a bottom line, stealing, for example, below which the European traveller was not prepared to go in order to achieve reciprocity.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Reciprocity In Information-Producing Accounts

It would be logical to suppose that the general failure of information-producing accounts to narrate specific native/white encounters might preclude the discursive development of the mystique of reciprocity within them. However, wherever information-

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-82.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89-91.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

producing accounts referred to native/white interaction 'reciprocity' was a potential subject for the travellers' narration. Alexander Smith, for example, wrote himself as the 'victim' of black indolence when he was forced to travel at the same pace as a native canoe which was guiding him or when 'his' people delayed the journey by getting up late.<sup>7</sup> He became involved in the rituals of present giving and was guided through the process on one occasion by a local Alimamy. He also wrote about how he was frustrated by deliberate delays in the palavers that he attended.<sup>8</sup> Smith noted in his journal that he would be able to get on much better with the chiefs if they were not always asking for favours and he remained suspicious about their aggressive ambitions. Here then was Smith struggling to reciprocate against native greed and artifice.<sup>9</sup>

Abraham Vanneck tried to avoid meeting natives on his landscanning foray into the mountains. When his tactics failed he was questioned by an angry chief about his 'improper' and unnegotiated approach to the colony from the mountains. Placed into a reciprocal situation he had sought to avoid, Vanneck simply lied that he had got lost, a lie he was able to underpin by a cautious show of force from the detachment of volunteers who accompanied him.<sup>10</sup> Landscanning, by its very nature did not remove the traveller from the need to participate in the mystique of reciprocity. Nevertheless, the number and variety and detail of reciprocal instances are much more apparent in sentimental, experiential texts, and in the case of travellers outside of Freetown the majority of these came from or aspired to the cannon of

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, Journal, Dec. 6 1802, UIC.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, Journal, Feb.-April, 1805, entries for March 3 and 20, UIC.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Journal of voyage in King Kanta, entries for Nov 30 and Dec. 30, UIC.

<sup>10</sup> Vanneck, Journal of an Excursion, Feb. 8, 1807, UIC.

exploration texts. It is to these more detailed 'heroic' encounters that I now turn.

## 2. Heroic Accounts and the 'Mystique of Reciprocity'

One of the authors I have included within my broader study of exploration narratives is Frances Harrison Rankin. This inclusion is open to question as Rankin was really far from an explorer, staying in Freetown for only a short time and venturing (not very far) outside it for a matter of weeks rather than months or years. Nevertheless I have included him because he *presented* himself as an explorer and appropriated exploration discourse in relation to his own travels. He also, as I discuss in more detail later, produced a significantly dissonant discourse regarding European explorers methods and motives. Travelling without official instructions or purpose, Rankin's account provides an example of the influence of explorer-hero texts to more general travel writing.

Exploration accounts were fundamentally concerned with the question of negotiating safe passage via the proper exchange of 'gifts'. James Watt's journal provided a constant record of palavers and negotiations to proceed on his trading journey. Much of his early journal was devoted to the selection and packing of presents. He was variously assisted and obstructed in this by white slave traders who knew the rules of African hospitality better than himself.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Richard Bright's journal largely comprised of a series of 'interviews' and 'palavers' with chiefs, these being intended to settle disputes between them and the colony over support for the Nova Scotian Rebels and seeking to 'explain' the colony and its intentions to

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<sup>11</sup> Watt, Journal, entries for Feb. 2 to Feb. 5 1794.

them.<sup>12</sup> Edward Bickersteth, in his journeys around the peninsula, recorded meetings with headmen involving negotiations for land for his missions and for the potential acceptance of a missionary into the community.<sup>13</sup> Alexander Gordon Laing's account was often preoccupied with the narration of negotiations to proceed and with African demands for presents.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, then, as Pratt has asserted in relation to Park's narrative, reciprocity was the guiding theme of these texts. However, 'reciprocity' as a concept involved more than debates over material 'presents'. Wider economic, cultural and religious issues pervaded this subject as well. My aim in what follows is to look at the two sides of the coin of reciprocity from a wider viewpoint. Firstly, I shall examine evidence of how the writers presented their side of the exchange, and then I move on to look at the representations of actual negotiations and at the images of Africans which emerged from those representations.

### 3. 'Reciprocity' and White 'gifts'

One of the European components of the 'exchange' was technological. Explorers travelled with a conscious pride in European technological and scientific superiority. It was also a useful component in the armoury of white/native negotiation. James Watt for example, though impressed by the literate Foulah people, felt compelled to inform the king of a forthcoming eclipse of the moon 'as proof that our knowledge was superior to theirs.'<sup>15</sup> Later

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<sup>12</sup> See for example Bright's list of local chiefs in the neighbourhood of Fouricaria and the presents they would need at a forthcoming palaver. Bright, Journal, Oct. 3 1802.

<sup>13</sup> Bickersteth, 'Report', p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Laing's account is literally littered with details of his disputes with native chiefs over presents. For his own reasoning about the best attitude to adopt on the subject see Laing, *Travels in the Timanee*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Watt, Journal, Feb. 11 1794.

he explained to the same King about techniques of ploughing and told him that one of the main reasons for his being sent was to point out how his knowledge could benefit the King's country.<sup>16</sup> Alexander Gordon Laing undertook a smallpox vaccination programme in one of the last villages he passed through, and thought that the willingness of people to submit to the vaccination showed how strong native confidence in white peoples' measures was.<sup>17</sup> Earlier in his trip, Laing told how he had let off fireworks, with a large rocket which startled the village 'Greegre Mansa' (a native magician) so much that he ran out of the yard to accompanying laughter from those who had previously been enthralled by his magic.<sup>18</sup> Here was white technology being used to combat black 'superstition'.

Another key component of white 'benefits' that the explorers brought with them was the Christian God. The explorer's God was represented as peaceful, in direct contrast to the supposed native 'fondness' for war. When asked to support the Foulah in a local war, Watt was able to reply that 'I consider ... that God almighty who made me, made also the people with whom Ali Mami is going to fight, and that we are naturally all brothers.'<sup>19</sup> In anti-slave trade accounts, particular emphasis was placed of course on the idea that God made both blacks and whites.<sup>20</sup> Questioned on the Company's motives in not dealing with slaves, Richard Bright replied that it was against the spirit of white religion.<sup>21</sup> Bright also stressed the

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, March 4 1794.

<sup>17</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, pp. 338-40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342-43.

<sup>19</sup> Watt, Journal, March 5 1794.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Watt, Journal, March 3 1794.

<sup>21</sup> Bright, Journal, October 24 1802.

Christian values of forgiveness and renunciation of revenge in a conversation with his black hostess Betsey Heard, and with a Fouricaria schoolmaster named Le Hai Boboo. 'I specified' he wrote, 'instances of the heroic spirit of our soldiers and sailors in saving their enemies from a watery grave, tho at the imminent peril of their own lives.'<sup>22</sup> He also read parts of the church service to Heard and Le Hai Booboo, during which 'they were struck with admiration at the sublime pious and charitable spirit in which it is framed so superior to their own defective and bigoted system.'<sup>23</sup>

As well as their emphasis on spiritual benevolence, abolitionist travellers made potent claims of economic reciprocity. Richard Bright when addressing a meeting of headmen at one of the many palavers he attended insisted

that the views of the Sierra Leone Company in planting coffee and introducing agricultural improvements were not merely or chiefly directed to their own advantage, but to that of their neighbours .... They did not aim to acquire wealth in the country, and then forsake it, as other white men did after making their fortunes. But if the colony were broken up, by the injustice of the black people, no person in England would think of establishing another.<sup>24</sup>

Another aspect of non-aggressive representations of the European reciprocal presence concerned the travellers' self-narrated role as peacemakers. James Watt, for example in his efforts to open up a direct route between Freetown and Timbo, was involved in negotiations between Foulah and Sooso tribes, and despite the personal 'trials' he endured in such negotiations took comfort from his pacific role.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Bright, Journal, Oct. 8 1802.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1 1794.



These then were the components of the European reciprocal armoury: the bounteous benefits of legitimate trade, technological superiority, a kind religion, and a benign, peacemaking influence on warring, 'debased' African societies. It was these benefits, in addition to the more precise and finite goods and presents, that the explorers struggled to reciprocate in their dealings with native chiefs. What these components of reciprocity have in common (as narrated by the explorers' in their texts) are a passive, non-invasive sense. The ambitions as well as the people were portrayed as innocent. How then did the explorers fare in their attempts to reciprocate? Perhaps the key word in answer is 'suffering'. The requirement that innocent explorers should portray their suffering appears to have been a key feature of these texts and it to this subject that I now turn my attention.

#### 4. The 'Innocent' Traveller and the Native Response

Explorers suffered in three ways. Firstly, through the physical trials of travelling in Africa. Alexander Gordon Laing suffered regular bouts of sickness, rats ate Rev. Koelle's hair as he slept, and Richard Bright suffered from the heat and numerous mosquito bites.<sup>26</sup>

Secondly, they suffered through their exposure to an 'alien' unfamiliar culture. Sometimes the sense of alienation was narrated as being exacerbated by the presence of stereotypically 'savage' Africans. Richard Bright, for example wrote at the end of his journey:

I begin to feel weariness ... at being surrounded with human beings who are gross in manners and uninteresting - both as objects of sight and subjects of investigation. Compassion is not long felt for those, who seem to have no hopes, no conceptions of enjoyment other than that of animal nature, who probably would prefer a grain of the dunghill on which they are treading to all the treasures of a cultivated mind.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bright, Journal, Oct. 17 1802; Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 8; Laing, *Travels in The Timanee*, pp. 7, 240, 258.

<sup>27</sup> Bright, Journal, Oct. 20 1802.

Here, Bright narrated his struggle to relate to the African 'other' but his 'cultivated mind' suffered through the 'barbaric' nature of the people with whom he had been dealing.

Apart from the discomfort caused by their sense of alienation, the explorers also suffered directly from the actions of the natives. One of the most common sources of trauma for travellers concerned the long delays and waiting around necessary to complete negotiations. These delays were seldom accepted as part of an age-old way of doing business, but were usually narrated in a way which portrayed Africans as 'thieves' of the explorers' time. It is in this sense that the commercial, exploitative intentions of the explorers' journeys intruded into their passive accounts. All the explorers (except Rankin) had a specific trading or 'civilizing' mission in mind. The delays they encountered frustrated the completion of these missions, and held up progress and civilization. James Watt lamented that, when debating how the world was shaped and supported, he 'lost a good deal of time' telling a Muslim priest that 'English ships sailed all around the world, and that we know very well its shape.'<sup>28</sup> The priest had delayed Watt by failing immediately to grasp the latter's intellectual superiority and forced him into a reciprocal discussion which disrupted his commercial aims.

Reciprocal intentions were also thwarted, and delays encountered, through political negotiations with natives over trading routes. Records of such negotiations often employed the 'mystique of reciprocity' in order to assert the passivity and innocence of the traveller. Nowhere in the Sierra Leonean texts is this clearer than in the account of William Cooper Thomson's journey to Timbo. Lord Stanley made clear that Thomson's journey was 'impeded

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<sup>28</sup> Watt, Journal, Feb. 25 1794.

by the mutual jealousies and narrow views of petty chiefs.<sup>29</sup> The chiefs at Malagiya, for example, detained him with 'endless palavers.'<sup>30</sup> Thus, not only was native 'need' the thief of European time, but also, of course, native 'greed'. The vulnerability and defencelessness of the 'explorer' was emphasised with Stanley's reporting of Thomson's thoughts when he finally left Malaghia laden with gifts from his friends in Sierra Leone. Thomson wrote, plaintively, 'it will be months ere we meet such kind looks as we have left behind us.'<sup>31</sup>

In another example of native actions thwarting European reciprocal intentions, Alexander Gordon Laing described his party's arrival at Kangiamo, 'a small wretched-looking village' where the inhabitants had very few items of clothing.<sup>32</sup> His response to this 'obvious' need for clothing was narrated as a sincere attempt at reciprocity which was spurned by Kangiamo's ungrateful, greedy citizens. Laing wrote:

I compassionated their condition so much that I tore up several fathoms of cloth into small strips, which I gave to the females [but] they would not even fetch us a drop of water, or lend us a vessel to carry it in ourselves, without a reward of beads, with which I found they would rather decorate their naked persons than cover them with decent raiment.<sup>33</sup>

This passage accentuates Laing's anti-conquest through his attempt to reciprocate. His narration of the women's thwarting his reciprocal attempts managed to convey several stereotypes in one short passage. The women were shameless (because of their insistence on nakedness), greedy for useless baubles as well as lacking in compassion, lazy and

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<sup>29</sup> Stanley/Thomson, 'Journey', p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109.

<sup>32</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

unwelcoming. All this Laing discovered because he attempted 'civilised' reciprocity.

James Watt was particularly aggrieved at the delays he experienced and often saw them as showing disrespect to Europeans. On entering Timbo, he refused to rest or sit down because he wanted to speed up his access to the King. After an hour he passed on a message that he had travelled a long way and did not want to be kept waiting. When asked to be patient and sit down and rest, he wrote, 'I pointed to the dirty skin, and asked him if that was fit for a white man to sit upon.'<sup>34</sup> When Watt finally got an audience, he was soon delayed again by the King's need to attend to prayers. Watt's entreaties that he needed to talk quickly and extensively with the king were largely ignored and his 'suffering' on this account was palpable.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the native refusal to drop everything to talk to the European traveller and to receive the 'benefits' he brought with him was a constant theme of Watt's journals. In these instances it was clear that the contact zone was not simply a point where European ideals met African ignorance in a seamless manner, but was rather a site of more complex reciprocal negotiation and transculturation.

Alexander Gordon Laing regarded difficulties of negotiation as the most significant obstacle in the way of his expedition. He argued that he had less to apprehend in terms of personal violence than in the political difficulties of persuading natives to permit a direct line of communication between Sierra Leone and the interior.<sup>36</sup> Laing identified attempts to 'close the paths' as a general African practice, designed to protect the native monopoly of

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<sup>34</sup> Watt, *Journal*, March 3 1794.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 26.

intermediate trading traffic between the colony and the interior.<sup>37</sup> Here was a clear example of native greed standing in the way of Europe's noble reciprocal ambitions. Laing's mission was to overcome that greed and convince the Africans of the benefits of trade with Sierra Leone.

Native greed was indicated still more potently in disputes over presents. There are too many examples of such disputes in these texts to acknowledge them all, but some examples suffice to show how travellers promoted hostile images of native negotiators. Alexander Gordon Laing gave a full account of a palaver, in order, he said, to show his reader 'the delays, which, at every little village, oppose the progress of the traveller.'<sup>38</sup> When another palaver was delayed because a king demanded more presents early on in his trip, Laing wrote: 'I was a good deal annoyed at losing a day in this foolish manner', but he concluded that 'it was idle to fret at disappointments, which the traveller must lay his account to meet with daily, among a people who set no value on their own time, nor on that of others.'<sup>39</sup>

One 'greedy' King apparently irritated Laing who was forced to lecture him that 'white men did not get their money for nothing. ...[and]... the king ought to think himself fortunate in having got the presents which lay before him.'<sup>40</sup> Brian O'Beirne wrote that he was misled by a native guide about the number of presents which would be needed on his journey. He was forced to juggle his finite goods and redistribute his gifts according to careful calculations on

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

which his life might well depend.<sup>41</sup>

Laing had a more phlegmatic approach to delays than James Watt, but he emphasised them time and again in his account. He also noted delays caused by problems other than palavers. For example, he was held up when one of his party offended a King by dressing in a finer shirt than him, and Laing reported that the King 'made up a law on the spot that no man should be better dressed than the King or he should forfeit his clothes'.<sup>42</sup> At Matuko, Laing wrote that they:

were again under the necessity of waiting till the inhabitants had consulted their greegrees on the propriety of allowing us to proceed; but as the greegrees had no objection, as soon as the head-man had got a fathom of cloth, we obtained permission, after an hour's delay, to go on.<sup>43</sup>

These persistent references to delays, caused by greed and superstition whilst emphasising the individual explorer's reciprocal vulnerability and anti-conquest, also reinforced in a specific context some of the generalised negative stereotypes that featured within broader discourses about natives.

Perhaps Laing's most 'heroic' suffering through native artifice concerned his failure to reach the source of the Niger. The King of Falaba had repeatedly told him that it was unsafe to travel through 'hostile' territory: Laing ultimately accepted this and was forced to consider the commercial rather than territorial ambitions of his project.<sup>44</sup> When later trade negotiations

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<sup>41</sup> O'Beirne, Journal, Feb. 13 1821.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup> For the details of the negotiations see Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, pp. 270-301.

with the King proved less successful than he had hoped, Laing postulated that he had been deliberately kept from visiting the source by the King who wanted to keep trade to himself.<sup>45</sup>

The other form of 'suffering' which the explorers endured can be seen in their portrayal of themselves as victims of the native's reciprocal gaze. I have already dealt with the sexual implications of this issue in the previous chapter, but the 'harassment' they 'endured' was more broad ranging. Watt, again was particularly agitated by the attention he received. At Labay he wrote:

We were much harrassed by curious people coming to see us, and when we go abroad, we are constantly followed by hundreds of boys. This however is tolerable but to be cooped up in a small house and there exposed to the view of the populace like wild beasts in a cage is tormenting beyond description.<sup>46</sup>

Rev. Koelle, likewise, was troubled when trying to relax, by a group of spectators who asked 'a multitude of uncalled for questions.'<sup>47</sup>

The 'heroic' nature of the journey did not rest solely on the tension between a suffering reciprocal hero and a greedy native. A significant element of this aspect of the narratives centred on the courage and/or intelligence which the white travellers used to overcome native 'cunning'. Thomson, for example, fed up with native procrastination decided to continue through a wood even though he had been warned not to go by native chiefs and 'had good reason to apprehend an attack in the woods through which he had to pass.'<sup>48</sup> In the following

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>46</sup> Watt, Journal, Feb. 25 1794.

<sup>47</sup> Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley/Thomson 'Journey', pp. 123-24.

passage relating to this incident, Lord Stanley narrated Thomson's role in a way which served to accentuate at the same time his heroism and his passive reciprocity:

he told them that, trusting in God, whose protection he had so often experienced, he would proceed as he had been ordered, and endeavour to fulfil the great object of his mission, which was to promote the welfare of themselves and all the neighbouring countries.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, Brian O'Beirne was forced to confront a chief who was attempting to keep him within his village as part of a dispute with another chief. O'Beirne insisted he would not be deflected from his journey and would use force if necessary, whatever the consequences.<sup>50</sup>

On leaving Ma-Boom in Kooranko country, Alexander Gordon Laing became aware of a conspiracy against his party and eventually persuaded his interpreter to explain that there may be a plot by the guide to rob him. Laing ordered the interpreter to bribe the treacherous guide. Failing that, Laing explained that the guide would have to be killed. In this way Laing dealt simultaneously with the threat of robbery, the implied greed of the guide, and the implied cowardice and indifference of his interpreter.<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere, Laing learned that a Timanee chief had been 'planted' with his group to ensure that they did not travel to a particular village. He solved this problem by conspiring to get the chief drunk and leave him by the roadside.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> O'Beirne, Journal, Feb. 18 1821.

<sup>51</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timanee*, p. 122.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.



Another example of the apparent need for white cunning on the part of the suffering explorer was provided in Watt's account of his travels back from Timbo to Sierra Leone. Watt lamented that he had continued to suffer the presence of a particularly unhelpful guide in his party because if he had forced the guide to return home to Timbo he would have been 'cruelly punished' by the king.<sup>53</sup> In this case, a reciprocal desire not to surrender the guide to African cruelty required that the explorer suffer even more discomfort in making his journey.

Perhaps the most spectacular instance of reciprocity in action in Laing's account concerned another local plot to attack his party. This plot was foiled, not by Laing's own actions but through those of a disbanded black soldier who lived locally. This ex-soldier joined in with the potential aggressors and delayed them by regaling them with tales of the white man's riches. Laing wrote of the soldier's desire to save the white man and also any of his old colleagues that may have been in the party.<sup>54</sup> He also emphasised the 'difference' of the blacks in his party from the avaricious locals. Laing wrote:

It was their intention to have slain me, and to have made prisoners and slaves of my party; but they would have found the attempt attended with more difficulty and hazard than they had expected; for men such as those who were with me, long habituated to freedom, which they enjoy as purely at Sierra Leone, as if they breathed a British atmosphere, would have shed the last drop of their blood, before they would have suffered themselves to have been made slaves.<sup>55</sup>

Here was proof that the 'mystique of reciprocity' worked. Contact with benevolent Europeans had transformed both the ex-soldier and Laing's black entourage into brave, thoughtful and humanitarian individuals. Here were Africans reciprocating the good deeds done to them by

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<sup>53</sup> Watt, *Journal*, March 29 1794.

<sup>54</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, pp. 176-79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

saving Laing's life and refusing to have anything to do with the barbaric actions of their brethren.

So far I have discussed how the explorers' narrated world was typically portrayed as one where they pursued their 'righteous' mission quietly and peaceably, bearing the sufferings inherent in dealing with a 'barbarous' people. The natives themselves were largely caricatures, drunken thieves with little respect for Europeans, and greedy and constantly at war. In the narration of specific incidents, as well as in broader generalisations, negative stereotypes were continually asserted, at the same time as the passivity of the explorer was made clear. To assert, however, that experiential travel writing simply produced a series of negative images of blacks would be misleading. All the narratives were punctuated with 'positive' interludes. As I showed in the previous chapter male travellers often presented positive images of their encounters with native women, even though they often 'suffered' under the black female reciprocal gaze. Also, as I mentioned earlier, another positive discourse about native Africans grew up around images of their hospitality. Often, travellers wrote about how they came to feel at home in certain places that they visited on their journeys. Richard Bright, for example, was extremely taken with his Betsey Heard's domestic hospitality.<sup>56</sup> He noted that her house was large and furnished with European items and that his stay with her at Bereira had not been as tedious as those elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> Later he wrote that he thought of her house as home, and noted that she personally made up for the want of servants by her kind attentions to himself and to Dalla Modhu.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bright, Journal, Oct. 14 1802.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Bright, Journal, Oct. 4 1802.

Alexander Gordon Laing wrote of a similar sense that Falaba had become his home.<sup>59</sup> He frequently wrote of his deep attachment to the King who treated him so hospitably. On leaving, he was moved to write: 'I felt as if I had parted from a father.'<sup>60</sup> This, incidentally was the same king who had prevented him from visiting the source of the Niger, a fact which provided an unspoken source of reciprocal narrative tension. Even Rev. Koelle, who had very little good to say about Africans in general, felt that Doala Bokharu (the man he identified as the originator of the Vy language) was 'a very interesting man, [who] is distinguished from his country people, not merely by a greater intelligence, but by an altogether nobler spirit.'<sup>61</sup>

So it is apparent that simple negative stereotypes were not universally promoted. How far did these protestations of friendship indicate genuine respect for these black people? Very few positive representations exist given the sheer numbers of observed and encountered blacks with whom the explorers became acquainted during their travels. Perhaps it is more relevant to see the King of Falaba, Doala Bokharu and Betsey Heard and Dalla Modhu as 'key blacks'. My use of the term 'key blacks' is prompted by Mike Tadman's recent work on 'key slaves' in plantation households. Tadman points to an ambivalence in slaveholder attitudes to their slaves, by which owners retained an attachment to a very few, favoured slaves whilst treating the rest with indifference. Given the evidence from Sierra Leone, it seems possible that the key slave/key black idea may well be applicable in a much wider context.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Laing, *Travels in the Timannee*, p. 268.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>61</sup> Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 25.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Tadman, 'The Persistent Myth of Paternalism: Historians and the Nature of Master-Slave Relations in the American South', *Sage Race Relations Abstracts*, 23, (1998), pp. 7-23; *Speculators and Slaves, Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, 2nd. ed., (London,

The reciprocal approval and attachment between white travellers and these 'key blacks' privileged them and the traveller's sentimental attachment to them. However, this privileging of 'key blacks' within some travellers' narratives discursively masked the more common generic negative stereotypical images of blacks. Those blacks who were either not mentioned or presented as an homogenous 'other' were lost in a discourse which emphasised the explorer's reciprocal relationship with *some* Africans. Perhaps there was no more potent discourse of reciprocity than that where the traveller wrote that he found a 'home' or a 'father' among the ranks of black 'others' that he encountered. It is perhaps also significant that at some stage in their reciprocal encounters all of these 'key blacks' admitted European superiority in some aspect that was important to them. Betsey Heard admitted the superiority of white religion, the king of Falaba was impressed by Laing's scientific and technological knowledge, and Doala Bokharu insisted that white men could write VY better than black men.<sup>63</sup> In the specific as well as the general cases then, 'reciprocity' seems to have worked to reinforce the kinds of general representational negativity that has been discussed throughout this thesis.

##### **5. The Slave Trader as a Barrier to Reciprocity**

In considering negative stereotypes of blacks, it should be remembered that explorers in the vicinity of Sierra Leone had more than one disruptive, delaying and antagonistic force to overcome. To those charged with opening up trading or religious opportunities with natives, a significant 'enemy' was the white slave traders in the region. Often the conflation of slave-

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1996), pp. xix-xxxvii.

<sup>63</sup> Bright, *Journal*, 24 Oct. 1802; Laing, *Travels in the Timanee*, p. 338; Koelle, *Narrative of an Expedition*, p. 19.

trading and black 'barbarism' was made in a straightforward manner which implicitly criticised the 'humanity' of the traders. Edward Bickersteth, for example, blamed 'the lowness of [the Africans'] state of mind, and great degradation of character', on the influence of the slave trade.<sup>64</sup>

A more precise experiential picture, however, was painted in the journals of James Watt. It is interesting in Watt's case that many of the negative characteristics applied to natives were also applied to the slave traders. Watt wrote that the preparations for his journey were hindered by the actions of a slave trader named Walker who engaged their carriers and helped him to acquire presents. Walker and another trader, Fortune, acted as negotiators with natives in the initial stages of their journey.<sup>65</sup> At least one palaver seems to have depended for its successful completion on the defence of Watt and Winterbottom by a slave trader.<sup>66</sup> Watt described Walker as blowing hot and cold in his helpfulness and complained that he was generally malicious and insulting. Walker also lost some of the trading goods which had been entrusted to Watt.<sup>67</sup> In order to counteract Walker's hostility, Watt had to employ the same ingenuity that he later had to show with black plots against him. He visited another trader on pretence of taking a walk and discovered that Walker was intent on sending them to a town (Labay) where they ran the risk of being murdered.<sup>68</sup> Watt wrote that it was necessary to 'bear it [the trader's hostility] with patience' in much the same way as he would have written about

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<sup>64</sup> Bickersteth 'Report', p. 131.

<sup>65</sup> Watt, Journal, Feb. 2 1794.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 3 and 5 1794.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 4 1794.

an African chief.<sup>69</sup> At the end of Watt's journey a slave trader supplied him with a gift of spirits and Watt talked himself into accepting it as 'a gift of providence' despite his moral misgivings.<sup>70</sup> Watt's use of the mystique of reciprocity, and the narrated need for deceit, negotiation and pragmatism (despite his moral misgivings) was as potent with relation to his dealings with slave traders as it was with blacks. His negative conflation of the behaviour of black Africans with the actions of slave traders operating in 'moral darkness' was perhaps also reflective of broader abolitionist discourse.

## **6. Rankin and the Interrogation of the European reciprocal role**

Clearly there is much of significance to Sierra Leonean travel writing in Pratt's notion of the 'mystique of reciprocity'. But what of that other feature she mentions in relation to experiential sentimental travel-writing, its ability to at least offer the possibility of interrogation of the European role and to question the motives and or methods of European intervention? One of the rare dissonant texts on this issue was Thomas Winterbottom's quintessentially 'information-producing' account. In his study Winterbottom asserted that many of the negative behavioural stereotypes attributed to Africans were characteristics they had learnt from copying European vices.<sup>71</sup> He defended Africans against charges of cannibalism and generally mounted a robust moral defence which attributed most negative stereotypes to slavery and slave traders rather than to racial issues.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 5 1794.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, April 22 1794.

<sup>71</sup> Winterbottom, *Account*, 1, p. 205.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-66.

In general, the sentimental travel writers made hardly any attempt to question Britain's commercial ambitions or moral claims. There was, however, one critical exception and that was Frances Harrison Rankin. In the course of his self-promotion in the hero-adventurer mould, Rankin twice explicitly questioned European behaviour toward Africans. Journalistic and disingenuous as his narrative style certainly was, the questioning itself was nevertheless important in discursive terms and stood out in stark contrast to other sentimental explorer-texts. Again it is worth stressing that Rankin's actual explorers credentials were extremely limited but the discursive weight he gave the subject was substantial enough to warrant consideration here.

In one of his encounters with natives, Rankin wrote of his dismay when a group of natives fled into the bush after he had 'jokingly' pointed a gun at one of them.<sup>73</sup> This incident caused Rankin to lament that the social principles of a British settlement were so little understood among natives and that 'The white man had been considered quite capable of an intention to commit a wanton act of barbarity upon a black man.'<sup>74</sup> Although an absurd incident, Rankin was making a more serious, even dissonant point as he emphasised that Europeans were regarded negatively by Africans, as harsh and cruel. Although this emphasis was quite common in antislavery propaganda, it only rarely appeared in travel accounts. Rankin even noted this sentiment in an African's own words, a rare example of a native black being quoted directly. He was informed by one African that 'White man love drink blood, love kill him brother. When white man fight he kill: love blood-palaver too much.'<sup>75</sup> Blacks,

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<sup>73</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 2, pp. 52-53.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Rankin argued preferred capture to slaughter. Here he reminded his readers that the European role in West Africa was not all about glamorous adventurers.

Rankin also directly contradicted the received stereotype regarding native greed for presents. He did this by reporting a conversation with a white timber trader at Tombo who held very different views from those which emphasised native greed for European goods. Rankin introduced the trader's theories on reciprocity by chiding Europeans who were 'childishly unwilling to concede much to a negro, and scarcely [allowed] a greater share of intellect to the African than to his fellow-denizen of the woods, the baboon.'<sup>76</sup> He lamented the tendency for European writers to 'seek for the vices alone', and in a rare attempt to consider the subject from an African point of view, he wrote:

A black man could not even comprehend the meaning of that endless list of vices which refinement invents and patronises; could he do so, it may be doubted whether he would feel harmed by the censure of English moralists.<sup>77</sup>

Rankin went on to quote his friend on the subject of native demand for presents:

You are about to trust yourself amongst men whom you have been accustomed to hear termed savages. These savages I have known and trusted for many years. I dwell in the midst of them; no white man lives near my island, yet my person is as safe as if protected by volumes of statutes.<sup>78</sup>

Normally, examples of white people living outside of white society, 'going native' to varying extents were reported for their novelty value, but Rankin treated the merchant's comments seriously. Rankin's new friend went on to say:

Of course, the head-men and chiefs, seeing boxes of tobacco and rum, pistols and

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.



beads, gunpowder and cotton cloth, naturally expect a portion in return for their own expense in maintaining and lodging the traveller and his retinue. The traveller returns to England, writes his book, abuses the humble hut and spare diet of those who gave him their best, and loudly complains of their exorbitant demands.<sup>79</sup>

This was a uniquely dissonant passage in the Sierra-Leonean texts and certainly questioned received wisdom regarding native greed. The subject demonstrates the capacity of sentimental writing directly to question the European role.

However the reported conversation with the timber trader was not part of a consistently dissonant discourse on the subject of black hospitality. In Rankin's narration of one of his own encounters with a native chief (where he attempted to negotiate safe passage) he simply reproduced the more familiar stereotypes. He wrote how a chief named Ba-Cabo demanded extravagant presents from him, having assumed that he had 'bribed' everyone else on route. Rankin's response was to threaten to cut off the chief's talismanic beard which would, according to the superstitions of his people cause the death of old men in the village. He also accused the chief of being drunk.<sup>80</sup> Here was black intransigence, greed, superstition and drunkenness, reinforced in one short passage. Never one to miss the opportunity of a spectacular story, even at the expense of intellectual consistency, Rankin also used the occasion to emphasise his own ingenuity at overcoming these difficulties, in the same way as famous explorers such as Laing had explained their successes. In some ways the Ba Cabo story undermined the trader's assertions and pointed to a conclusion that the old stereotypes were in some measure accurate. However, the relative space and discursive weight given to both impressions in the text suggests the seriousness of Rankin's Euro-questioning stance.

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

## 7. Female Travellers and the Depiction of Native Blacks

So far as gendered differences in attitudes to natives are concerned perhaps the most obvious point to make is that women really did not have the explorer role open to them, although as I have suggested Elizabeth Melville constructed a similar discourse in relation to her own 'explorations' up on the hill of Mount Oriel. Melville, 'Church', and Kilham had little contact with natives outside of Freetown and the liberated African villages. However, 'Mary Church' did actually visit Dalla Modhu on the Bullom shore and was impressed with his domestic arrangements. She wrote that 'The style of rude magnificence in which he lives puts one in mind of Cedric the Saxon,' but she went on to note that 'there is one point in which his highness and Cedric greatly differ' and that was in the treatment of women.<sup>81</sup> The African women, she argued were treated as inferior instead of being looked up to. This comment, however, was not the product of a uniquely female gaze, as the inferior treatment of women in African society was, as I have shown, a common feature of male-authored travel accounts as well.

Catherine Hutton came closest to producing a genuine explorer-style narrative by a woman, but of course, it was based on a fantasy figure. Indeed, as I have mentioned in Chapter 9, Hutton, who was already a successful published author, braved the criticism of reviewers to insist on her ability to incorporate the information she had gained from a number of travel writers under a single narrative eye. She insisted that her aim of gathering the most interesting work on Africa 'would be best attained by creating an imaginary traveller, who

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<sup>81</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 28.

should speak as his own person.<sup>82</sup> Her fantasy explorer was the son of an English country gentleman with a 'large fortune'. Hutton went into some detail describing the sleepless nights he spent ruminating on the difficulties and dangers he would face in Africa.<sup>83</sup> Even in the unusual context of this 'fantasy' narrative we find the persistence of the devices of suffering and the need for reciprocity.

Another exception to the general rule of a lack of observation by Western women on their encounters with the native population, was, unsurprisingly, found in Anna Maria Falconbridge's account. She clearly positioned herself in the heroic-adventurer tradition, emphasising her bravery in travelling to Africa and frequently referring to the sufferings she had to undergo. But in Falconbridge's account, the people that disrupted her journeys, and caused her loneliness, fatigue, poverty and distress, were more likely to be white philanthropists than black natives. Not long after arrival in Sierra Leone her husband insisted that they visited the upriver town of Marre Bump with black guides. The party inadvertently startled some natives whose hostile reaction appeared to threaten their lives. Falconbridge's ire was reserved for her husband who had failed to gain permission to land at the town.<sup>84</sup>

It was partly to this fright that Falconbridge attributed her lack of composure when she attended a palaver with King Jemmy to re-establish the settlement. Listening to him talk animatedly she wrote:

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<sup>82</sup> Hutton, *Tour of Africa*, preface.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 49.

My heart quivered with fear lest they might be forming some treacherous contrivance: I could not conceal the uneasiness I felt: My countenance betrayed me, a shower of tears burst from my eyes, and I swooned into hysterics.<sup>85</sup>

This is certainly a different narrative tale from that told by male heroes in their accounts of palavers. But Falconbridge's innocence was narrated in relation to her white oppressors as well as her fear of the black 'other'. The implication was that she did not trust her husband to take care of her. In these circumstances, Falconbridge was forced into the same forms of deceit and trickery that white male heroes turned to when put into that situation by deceitful blacks. She confided in her reader: 'I must be honest and tell you, I was resolved not to visit Robana again, whilst this mock judicatory lasted.'<sup>86</sup> She feigned sickness and retreated to the hospitable slave traders at Bance House, where she entertained them with her accounts of the palaver. So it is clear that Falconbridge's narration of her encounters with natives was overlain with the wider concerns of her negative portrayals of her husband and his employers.

In keeping with her proslavery sympathies, generalised negative stereotypes did crop up in Falconbridge's account. For example this is what she wrote regarding a short term attempt to introduce Clara Elliott, the wife of King Naimbana's clerk, to the sartorial benefits of Western culture.

She remained with me several days, during which I had opportunities (for I had made a point of it) to try her disposition; I found it impetuous, litigious, and implacable: I endeavoured to persuade her to dress in the European way, but to no purpose; she would tear the clothes off her back immediately after I put them on. Finding no credit could be gained by trying to new fashion this *Ethiopian* Princess, I got rid of her as soon as possible.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

However, elsewhere in her text, under the umbrella of her manners and customs section, Falconbridge asserted that Africans had the same inherent intellectual abilities as Europeans, disrupting somewhat the standard proslavery viewpoint on this issue.<sup>88</sup>

In her fainting at the palaver, and in the attempts to dress Clara Elliott respectfully, Falconbridge was narrating her interaction with blacks from a discursively feminised position. This was apparent from her narration of her earliest encounters with natives. Recording the first palaver she attended, Falconbridge noted how King Naimbana's stockings had holes in them and wrote of her desire to mend them for him. She desisted, however, for fear that she may draw blood as she had been told that anyone drawing the blood of the King would face the death penalty.<sup>89</sup> Rather, like James Watt not wanting to risk limb amputation for 'being commonly civil to a lady', Falconbridge could not reciprocate openly because of her fear of native cruelty. Clearly, Falconbridge's accounts of native encounters reproduced some common stereotypes, but her observations sometimes contained a gendered twist. As in other aspects of her profoundly dissonant account, the normal 'enemies' were not her principle narrative target, but rather her hostility was focussed on what she saw as white, male, humanitarian hypocrisy.

Falconbridge's conflation of hostile images of the humanitarians with negative observations of native characteristics was most apparent in her recollections of the so-called 'African Prince' John Frederick Naimbana. Prince Naimbana was sent by his father for an

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

education in England under the auspices of the Sierra Leone Company. On arrival he was feted in humanitarian circles as an example of black capacity for education, Christianisation and 'improvement'. A novel was written based on his life and his arrival was noted in *The Times*.<sup>90</sup> Naimbana travelled to England in the same ship as the Falconbridges, but Anna Maria's reporting of this fact was low key. Here is her account of the Prince as written to her correspondent:

It has slip'd my notice till now to describe him to you: -- His person is rather below the ordinary, inclining to grossness, his skin nearly jet black, eyes keenly intelligent, nose flat, teeth unconnected, and filed sharp after the custom of his country, his legs a little bandied, and his deportment easy, manly and confident withal. In his disposition he is surly, but has cunning enough to smother it where he thinks his interest is concerned; he is pettish and implacable, but I think grateful and attached to those he considers his friends; nature has been bountiful in giving him sound intellects, very capable of improvement, and he also possesses a great thirst for knowledge.'....He is not wanting in discernment, and has already discovered the weak side of his patrons, which he strives to turn to good account, and I dare say, by his natural subtilty, will in time advantage himself considerably by it.<sup>91</sup>

In this passage, Falconbridge produced a dissonant, unexpected account of the Prince. Her own refusal to exaggerate his importance, saying that it 'slip'd her notice' to mention him earlier profoundly disrupted the eagerness with which the philanthropists embraced the arrival of their protégé. Also, in emphasising his intelligence and abilities, she stressed his 'artfulness', which again was a dissonant image to that of humanitarian propaganda about the Prince. Furthermore, she used her reporting of Naimbana's characteristics to disparage the directors of the Sierra Leone Company, presenting him as someone prepared to counter-exploit their own intended exploitation of himself. Falconbridge also wrote that 'I could not help secretly smiling to see the servile courtesy which those gentlemen paid this young man, merely from

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<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, Oct. 27 1792.

<sup>91</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 127.

his being the son of a nominal king.<sup>92</sup> She wrote herself therefore as clear-eyed and not hypocritical, devoid of artifice, unlike both the Prince and his sponsors. In many ways this type of self-narration can be seen as a form of anti-conquest.

## 8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that Sierra Leonean travel texts were not short on traditional stereotypical images of native blacks, whether positive or negative. I have also attempted to examine Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the mystique of reciprocity in relation mainly to sentimental travel texts. I have shown that this notion is of relevance to Sierra Leonean writing and have indicated that the predominant stance taken by most travellers was that which emphasised their innocent, passive attempts to bring British 'benefits' to the region, these attempts in turn being subverted by native hostility and greed. However, the particular association of Sierra Leone with British antislavery is highlighted in some early texts which produce similarly negative images of white slave traders. Also, Rankin's later sentimental text found room for more dissonant questioning of the European traveller's reciprocal role. Women had a limited but important place in the discussion of native characteristics, and Anna Maria Falconbridge used the narration of her encounters with natives in a way which continued her challenge to the humanitarianism of her husband and of the Sierra Leone Company's Directors. The reciprocal discourse about natives in Sierra Leone was complex, broad and very revealing of wider issues.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

## CHAPTER 15

### **Encounters at the heart of the land of Freedom:**

#### **Images of Blacks in Freetown and the Liberated African Villages.**

Exploration in the regions outside Freetown provided the substance of only a small portion of travel accounts written on Sierra Leone. Many accounts of native Africans were based on short (sometimes extremely short) forays made into the 'interior' or to the islands on the Sierra Leone River by a traveller normally resident in Freetown. For most travellers, Freetown itself was their focus and the capital's black (and to a lesser extent white) communities comprised the alien 'other' which they observed and reported. After the abolition of the slave trade, visitors encountered a diverse ethnic and cultural mix, with many African tribes represented among the liberated African population. To many travellers, Freetown seemed to offer an interaction with Africa in microcosm. Here was a chance to encounter numerous African tribes without hacking down a single item of undergrowth.

The political and discursive situation for travellers in Freetown was quite different from that which existed for those who travelled outside the settlement. When writing about blacks in Freetown, travellers wrote against the background of a British colony, originated, defined and administered within British political discourse. Here, power relations between black and white were entirely different from those between explorer and native. In Freetown, encounters were not defined by the need to negotiate safe passage and to reciprocate black 'hospitality'. Indeed, the philanthropic discourse which prompted the very idea of the colony suggested that Freetown of itself was a reciprocal gesture, the most significant possible 'gift' to



the African, a free Christian territory in the heart of slave-trading country. Images of blacks in the colony need to be studied in that light.

In Freetown also, encounters between whites and blacks were less formalised than the endless palavers and discussions which characterised contacts outside. On arrival, the white traveller slotted into colonial society, encountering different groups of blacks on a daily basis and interacting with them according to the latter's own colonial role, whether that role was as recently liberated subject, labourer, servant, juror, constable, washerwoman, market stallholder, priest, prostitute, or, in the case of Dr. Ferguson, governor.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to examine the white representations of blacks which emerged from this interaction.

As I have shown in Part Two, images of Freetown blacks figured widely in official and unofficial discourse outside of that produced by travel writers. The 'knowledge' and prejudices of governors, philanthropists and newspaper columnists and correspondents produced several stereotypical images of Freetown's black population. These ranged from philanthropic propaganda about the grateful African under European tutelage to the blind fury of the *John Bull* articles. One of the issues this chapter addresses is to what extent these kinds of images are traceable in travel accounts. But there are other questions as well. How far, for example did travel writers differentiate between black groups? Alternatively, how much were blacks seen generically, simply as an alien 'other'? How did philanthropic discourse influence images of blacks in Freetown and, equally, how significant were the negative images of blacks that were inspired by proslavery writers? And what of anti-conquest, reciprocity, and

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<sup>1</sup> William Ferguson was the colony's first black governor, appointed in 1844 until his death in January 1846.

transculturation in these contexts? In the colony, was narrative innocence an issue? Did travellers struggle to reciprocate in Freetown as much as they did in Falaba? What did they make of developing creolism, and of the 'blackening' of selected aspects of white culture by settlers, maroons and liberated Africans?

### 1. Science and Sentiment in Images of Blacks in Freetown

As I have noted before, instances of overtly scientific, informational travel writing on Sierra Leone were rare, but this did not prevent the persistence of this discourse in many of the texts, especially in relation to Freetown's black communities. Thomas Winterbottom took advantage of observations of the Nova Scotian settlers to build his antislavery case in defence of African ability. He argued, for example, that racial theories advocating the assessment of ability through the measuring of facial angles were unsupported in Sierra Leone because the Nova Scotians presented too wide a variety of facial angles to give any support to these claims.<sup>2</sup> To Carl Wadstrom's insistence that blacks could not easily deal in hard currency Winterbottom replied that Nova Scotian blacks had no trouble working with Sierra Leone dollars.<sup>3</sup> He refuted stereotypical images of black 'countenances' as ugly, brutish and so on by noting that many blacks in Sierra Leone were European in all aspects of their appearance other than skin colour<sup>4</sup>. Elsewhere he attempted to discredit other racial stereotypes, such as, for example the old chestnut that black women gave birth more easily than white, basing his refutation on observations of the labours of numerous Nova Scotian women.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Winterbottom, *Account*, 1, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 200-01.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

Winterbottom was not the only writer from a scientific background who reported on Freetown's black population in terms of their role as a scientific laboratory. James Boyle, despite brief wanderings into sentimental observation of the picturesque environment was largely successful in achieving his stated aim of commenting on the different groups of Freetown only in relation to their health.<sup>6</sup> He limited his observations to the ability of blacks to survive the climate and incorporated his findings among other scientific observations such as lists of soil types and the Latin names for plants.

The Colonial Surgeon of the 1840s, Robert Clarke, also emphasised scientific research into the black population, in his case the liberated Africans at Kissy. He asserted for example that the warm climate led to premature development of intellectual faculties (in direct contrast to Winterbottom's observations).<sup>7</sup> He also made a collection of African skulls, and sent them back to England. Having made careful measurements of the cranium dimensions for different tribes, Clarke drew the conclusion that they were smaller than normal and exhibited signs of degeneracy in the intellectual faculties over time. However, relying on the testimony of an 'intelligent draper' that similar sized hats were needed for the fishermen of Nigg, Cromart and Campbeltown, Clarke argued that the supposed degeneracy came not from racial causes but from the 'neglect' of mental faculties.<sup>8</sup> On the whole then, the limited scientific discourse that existed regarding blacks in Freetown, tended to belong to the philanthropic strand of opinion and to be broadly hostile to negative racial stereotypes.

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<sup>6</sup> Boyle, *A Practical Account*, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote to p. 48.

In general though, accounts of Freetown's black population which can be thought of as informational in the ways which Pratt suggests are rare. The majority of relevant texts in this chapter belonged to the burgeoning genre of sentimental writing. However, there was within sentimental writing no shortage of informational 'interludes' in the form of unsubstantiated comment on Freetown's blacks. These interludes were often written from an unjustified authoritative standpoint where the author's 'knowledge' appeared to be self-validating. Especially by the 1830s and onwards, travellers often wrote in a totalising style about their black subjects, perhaps prompted by the lack of physical and economic vulnerability which seems to have stimulated at least the appearance of reciprocity on the part of travellers outside of Freetown. Often the effect of this type of writing was to reproduce received stereotypes which referred to a generically 'other' black population.

## **2. Stereotypical images of Blacks as 'other'**

Often, stereotypical images of blacks as 'other' were reproduced in accounts which also dealt with more specific discussions of black individuals and communities. Their presence in these texts indicates the enduring persistence of derogatory discourse about blacks, familiar from proslavery literature, but also present in philanthropic traveller's discourse. Sometimes these negative generalisations seem to have been intended to fulfill a specific role in making the travel account entertaining to the reader. In particular, negative stereotypes were sometimes used to make a 'humorous' point. Here, for example is Frances Harrison Rankin on an anonymous (in name and ethnicity) black servant of his host, Henry William Macaulay:

The lethargy of sleeping negroes is miraculous; nothing short of excessive personal violence can shake it from them;...should they receive a smart blow upon the face or even a kick upon the head from a friend desirous of awakening them, the chance is that their hand is instantly and mechanically raised to clap the injured part or rub it, under the dreaming impression that the pain has been caused by a cockroach or

mesquite: the hand falls, and they slumber on. Cannibals have quiet consciences.

Far from being simply a man deeply asleep the black servant has become a representative of a black 'they', characterised by insensitivity to pain (an old proslavery chestnut) and by cannibalism. Elsewhere Rankin repeated other stereotypes which had originated with proslavery campaigners decades earlier. These included theories which regarded blacks as being temperamentally suited to enduring the journey across the Atlantic into slavery, as well as being suited to slavery itself. Such images, in what was probably the most humanised and detailed of narratives on the colony, perhaps serve to indicate how, by the 1830s, negative stereotyping of blacks was becoming important to the creation of 'interesting' travel narratives.

However, unsupported ruminative comment on blacks also featured in earlier accounts. Catherine Hutton had her imaginary traveller reflect as follows:

It were greatly to be wished that a colony established for such noble purposes as those of abolishing the slave trade, and civilising black men, should answer the ends proposed; but perhaps it is not in the nature of things that it should do so to any extent; perhaps the manners of black men are assimilated to their climate, and are in some degree inseparable from it... In a word, it might be as easy to wash black men white, as to produce any general change in them.<sup>9</sup>

Here, Hutton repeated a common assumption that linked hot climates with black degeneracy. She was not alone in this. Robert Clarke, for example, asserted from his scientific observations as surgeon at Kissy village that the intellectual capacity of black children declined at the later period of childhood.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hutton, *Tour of Africa*, II, pp. 489-90.

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, p. 35.

Thomas Poole's job of colonial chaplain involved him in regular visits to Freetown's jail. In one passage he gave the impression that he was visiting animals rather than people, using language and images familiar from proslavery discourse popular some fifty years before he published. He wrote:

The majority of the prisoners whom I met with in the yard, presented a disgusting and bestial appearance. The sight of them was revolting to every feeling and sentiment of decency. Their bold and vacant stare, their grinning and chattering, I cannot soon forget.<sup>11</sup>

Henry Huntley, writing toward the end of this study period, was another author who produced entirely negative images of blacks in Freetown. Huntley's target was the general 'they' of liberated Africans. He began his discussion with the sweeping statement that 40,000 liberated Africans had been brought into the colony by the time of his visit, 'but to what useful end, as colonists, no one practically conversant with the system observed towards them can divine.'<sup>12</sup> Huntley wrote that the positive stereotypes commonly imagined by 'rich men' in England of a hardworking African taking a frugal meal with his family, contributing to the growing riches of the colony and consuming British exports were no more than 'reflections'.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for his denial of this positive stereotype were given in generalised terms regarding *all* blacks rather than as a continuation of detailed reporting of liberated Africans. Thus, this 'failure', Huntley argued, was due entirely to 'the negro propensities, from which nothing can drive or entice him.' Education had taught 'him' to 'despise labor', his 'religious propensities' were exhibited only by getting worked up into a 'phrensy' and black children were raised by

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<sup>11</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Huntley, *Seven Years' Service*, 1, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

parents who 'like the animal... is devoted to his helpless infant, but regardless of its welfare when grown up.'<sup>14</sup> Lazy during the day, Huntley said that 'the negro comes out of his shell at night, enjoying tom toms and dancing.'<sup>15</sup> His text contained liberal hints of black sexual immorality.

Another common negative stereotype concerned the treatment of women. For many writers this was one of the key indications of a civilized society. William Hamilton argued that 'until the female society is very materially improved and increased, it is hopeless to look for any rapid progress in moral civilization.'<sup>16</sup> Robert Clarke also argued that liberated African women 'are esteemed only to gratify men's desire and minister to his wants', and Frances Rankin argued that the time 'should come when the influence of the whites will be directed to raise the too-submissive negress.'<sup>17</sup> As we have seen, this stereotype also pervaded explorers' literature, and in both cases it can be argued that this particular narrative trope was an important component of the explorers' benevolent 'anti-conquest'. The sympathy for black women promoted the writer's gentlemanly intentions and partly endorsed white men in their 'desire' for black women. Other stereotypes which cropped up without specific identification other than blackness and residence in the colony included laziness, sexual licentiousness and a lack of intelligence characterised by an ability to learn by rote without understanding.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 7 (1842), p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, p. 48; Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 222.

This attribution of negative stereotypes to Freetown blacks as 'blacks' rather than as settler, maroon, liberated African and so on was a common feature of much travel writing throughout the study period. Whilst the ethnic identity of the observed subject or subjects may be possible to work out from the text itself or from a broader historical knowledge, authors often failed to allude clearly to the specific identity of their subject when making negative observations. These interludes of negative observation, where the subject was sometimes described in detail but not located in time or space (other than in relation to the author's gaze and assessment), were frequent. Rather like the landscanning eye this negative cultural gaze reduced 'knowledge' to the direct observations of the European writer. The failure to 'ground' the observed other than in the observer's terms produced a culturally disembodied subject, easily ridiculed.

However, generalised negative stereotyping about blacks also appeared in texts which were more explicit in drawing boundaries around their subject matter. Soon after the abolition of the slave trade, recaptives became by far the most numerous black group in Freetown. These people were often reported as one grouping rather than a melting pot of numerous tribes from all over Africa. William Hamilton's series of articles in the *Colonial Magazine* contained a steady stream of negative images of the liberated Africans. Here are some examples:

the absence of virtue is so entire amongst these degraded people, as to induce the belief that ideas of any thing so exalted never had existence amongst them, *under any character or in any degree whatever, in either sex*: the savage who immolates his wife upon the funeral pile for infidelity, shows at least a barbaric admiration of female virtue.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 7 (1842), p.



And later:

So far are they from bringing with them to Sierra Leone anything in the slightest degree desirable to human nature, that they exhibit humanity in its most complete state of degradation. They will feed upon dead animals, and offal, although almost in a state of putridity; common dirt, or earth, locusts, beetles, and flies. I remember having detected an African going into the slave-yard with a dead dog under his shirt, for the purpose of eating it; dead ducks and fowls are considered as niceties. Major Ricketts mentions an instance of a man having been detected with a human hand in his wallet.<sup>19</sup>

The cannibalism story almost certainly relates to the disputed Quai Pei case which had figured so strongly in disputes in the British press about the morality of the liberated Africans and which I discussed in Chapter Seven. Moreover, the degradation was seen as immutable. Even when educated in England, Hamilton argues, the liberated African was too conscious of white superiority to frequent the society of Europeans. He mixed instead with his own people, as domestics, apprentices or friends of his parents and soon reverted to his 'pristine condition.'<sup>20</sup> These were arguments familiar to proslavery advocates decades before Hamilton's account was published. Hamilton, writing in the first two years of the 1840s in relation to liberated Africans used references very similar to those once used to justify enslaving them. All this in a text which overtly sought to chart 'progress' in the Colony.

### 3. 'Positive' Stereotypes

There were positive stereotypes too of course. An anonymous extract of a letter from Freetown appeared in *The Times* in 1828 which, though hardly constituting a travel account,

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<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 6 (1841), pp. 463-64

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 7 (1842), p. 37.

was written from the authoritative viewpoint of a well-travelled correspondent. The writer praised the fertility of Sierra Leone's soil, the quality of its produce, the excellence of buildings in the town and the readiness of the hardworking liberated Africans to submit to authority. This letter comprised an oasis of positive propaganda amid the wasteland of invective which had been poured around the colony's reputation in the 1820s.<sup>21</sup> Sympathetic travel writers regularly embraced noble savage discourse at strategic points in their narratives. Robert Clarke's observations that Africans were light hearted and always smiling was typical.<sup>22</sup> During the time of the Sierra Leone Company, the assaults on the effectiveness of the company's philanthropic objectives received little counteraction from sympathetic travel writers. An exception was Joshua Montefiore who wrote:

The Sierra Leone Company have certainly great merit in reforming their black settlers, who before were a pest to the community and had not the least idea of religion or morality, but are now so far reclaimed from their original degeneracy of manners, as to be equal at least to the populace of most civilized nations.<sup>23</sup>

Note however, that this stereotypical image was complementary of white transforming power rather than of black ability. A similar instance of philanthropist propaganda can be found in 'Mary Church's' later text regarding liberated Africans. She summarised the reasons for her 'pride in Old England' as follows:

The Liberated African so degraded and debased on his first arrival, gradually assumes another station. His charms and incantations are superseded by an outward observance at least of the forms of Christianity. The lax intercourse of the sexes gives way to the obligations of marriage, and the consequent reciprocal duties of parents and children are created. On these follow industry and order; and in a few years, the savage is found either a useful artisan in the town, or a laborer in the villages, surrounded by his family, with ample means of support, and in the practice and comforts of civilized life. The old consoling themselves for the loss of their

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, July 29, 1828.

<sup>22</sup> Clarke, *Sierra Leone*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Montefiore, *An Authentic Account*, p. 48.

country in the freedom of their children, and the children exulting in their freedom as their first birthright.<sup>24</sup>

Positive images of blacks then were largely seen in the light of the transforming power of Christian white 'civilisation'. Occasionally, this diffusionary ability was seen to be applicable to black bodies as well as minds. Some (women) writers argued that children born to liberated Africans evinced signs of their new, free status in their 'countenances', their features softened and became more pleasing simply by virtue of their being born under British rule.<sup>25</sup> A negative counterpoint to such 'observations' was provided by writers who wrote that these 'improved' Africans were predisposed to degenerate again when removed from European influence. I have already mentioned William Hamilton's comments on this subject. James Holman went so far as to propose the education of a key group of recaptives as if they were foundlings, a strategy designed to avoid their 'relapsing' into barbarism through contact with their 'savage' parents.<sup>26</sup>

Positive images of blacks in their own right were rarer and tended to relate to the persistence of 'noble savage' discourse. Frances Rankin, in addition to reproducing the negative stereotypes we noted earlier also dwelt on the positive aspects of 'simple' black culture. Few stereotypes could be more eloquently expressed than in Rankin's description of a scene he encountered when travelling to the liberated African village of Kissy. He wrote:

The entrance to the village afforded an example of that simple kindness which shines amongst the dark barbarism of the savage like the silver sparkling of the medusae upon the black surface of the ocean in the depth of night. An old man, white-haired

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<sup>24</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 36.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20; Melville, *Residence*, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, p. 65.

and blind, bent and feeble, and resting upon a staff, was slowly walking, led by a young child. He advanced to a cottage by the road-side, and, the moment he was perceived, the children came from it, and stood by silently and respectfully; whilst the father stepped forward, took the unfortunate object by the hand, drew him to the rude bench by the door, and, having seated him in the shade, brought him refreshment, unsought and unrequited. The scene was patriarchal. Necessity for poor-laws does not enter in the political economy of the hospitable African. Idiots, the blind, and the aged are sacred to the savage.<sup>27</sup>

This patriarchal scene of noble savagery was reminiscent in its romanticism and sweeping observations of Rankin's landscanning description of a West African map in which he noted bright pools of European civilisation in a dark, savage country.<sup>28</sup> But here the bright, 'civilised' interludes were provided by African rather than European culture. As I have noted before, Rankin's stereotyping was inconsistent and seems to have obeyed laws of journalistic convenience more than textual consistency, but he was one of the few writers who produced extensive positive representations of blacks in the colony.

Other apparently favourable stereotypes occurred solely in relation to Liberated Africans. Most positive generalisations about this group relied on assertions of their 'ultimate' ability to progress, accompanied by appeals for sufficient time to be allowed for them to 'prove' their abilities. 'It is not only vain, but foolish', wrote Rankin, 'to desire a sudden conversion from degradation to perfection.'<sup>29</sup> And things were not so bad after all, he wrote: 'the mass of improving savages in Sierra Leone present tolerably honest members of society. Worse men might be found in London when the nights are dark.'<sup>30</sup> Even William

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<sup>27</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, pp. 350-51

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Eleven.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Hamilton contradicted his own negative stereotypes when he noted the occupations of Liberated Africans in the recaptive yard, making craft objects and sewing, for example. He noted how they looked after one another, were temperate, did not gamble, and could be respectful if the officer over them was characterised by 'strictness and reserve.'<sup>31</sup> Frederick Forbes cited the example of two wealthy liberated African merchants and noted the cleanliness of the villages where 'Everything ... wears an appearance of happiness and comfort.'<sup>32</sup> Alexander noted how hard they worked and that many became wealthy within a short period of landing.<sup>33</sup> Thus, several accounts which contained ultimately negative assessments of the colony nevertheless contained some positive interludes.

#### 4. Transculturation and Reciprocity in Images of Freetown Blacks

I have already noted that images of blacks in Freetown do not generally fit so well with the sorts of texts that Pratt analysed in developing her notions of anti-conquest, transculturation and reciprocity. In many ways, reciprocity is the least applicable of these three notions to many accounts of Freetown. Particularly in those accounts which produced or reproduced established stereotypical 'knowledge' of the blacks in Sierra Leone, whether general or specific, an 'innocent' authorial stance was not in evidence. White political and territorial dominance over the black population was simply too strong and too explicit for such narrative positions to be relevant in any significant degree. However, the historical details and the cultural nuances of life in Freetown belied these simplistic generalisations, and some

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<sup>31</sup> Hamilton, 'Sierra Leone and the Liberated Africans', *Colonial Magazine*, 7 (1842) p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Forbes, *Six Months' Service*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. 98.

travellers did report the complexities of their personal interaction with different groups, producing at the same time evidence of their 'struggle to reciprocate' with the colony's blacks. I have identified several key areas or themes in which the 'mystique of reciprocity' is most apparent. In two of these, 'black English' and 'black religion', travellers recorded their impressions of black transculturative actions, commenting on the development of spoken and written English or on the use of forms of Christian worship severely discordant to that of the Anglican or to traditional non-conformist churches. Another of these key themes concerns the attempt by white travellers to narrate to their readers aspects of black history in Freetown.

Three writers in particular picked up on the issue of Nova Scotian land claims. This began very early on with Anna Maria Falconbridge, who recounted Nova Scotian complaints against the Sierra Leone company.<sup>34</sup> Later Frances Rankin and Elizabeth Melville dwelt in some detail on settlers' stories of their history and grievances. The latter two especially used the settlers' own words to tell the story. Melville argued that doing this would give her correspondent some impression of how blacks spoke in the colony.<sup>35</sup> She also added that she could not believe the more 'extravagant' claims of the settlers against the white government of the time and believed they must have been exaggerated.<sup>36</sup> Rankin also did not claim completely to believe the account he reproduced, and noted that 'Whether correct or imaginative, the narrative is believed by themselves, and will fairly represent the manner in

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<sup>34</sup> An example of Falconbridge's extensive use of Nova Scotian discontent to discredit the Sierra Leone Company is found in her reproduction of a letter from John Clarkson to Henry Thornton complaining that his promises to the Nova Scotians regarding land had been disregarded by the Company. Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 258.

<sup>35</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 238.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

which they brood over their lot darkly and unprofitably.'<sup>37</sup> This ambivalence was a kind of anti-conquest. Nevertheless, when set against short, pithy, negative stereotypes of the Nova Scotians in other travel accounts, these long eloquent testimonies from blacks themselves seem particularly dissonant.

I am not suggesting that Falconbridge, Rankin and Melville intended to reciprocate against wrongs done to the Nova Scotians by foregrounding their grievances in their accounts. Indeed, the difference of the power relations between author and subject is apparent in the author's ability to 'give' them a voice at all. But these accounts do once again indicate how travel writing could engage with wide political and historical issues as a by-product of attempting to produce an 'interesting' account. They also smoothed out the more common textual binarisms between author and subject, mediated the consistent references to blacks as 'other', and gave representations of black/white contact where whites listened to black stories, and appreciated and reproduced them. This discursive smoothness was in itself, of course, a kind of anti-conquest. In spite of all this, however, textual binarisms and the constant search to narrate the presence of an 'alien other' were never far away from images of blacks in Freetown.

#### **4. Black English**

The 'otherness' of the black population was seldom more obvious than on the issue of language. Black English (to use a modern term for what is now known as Creole/Krio, but what was more usually referred to during this study period as pidgin) threw up a considerable

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<sup>37</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 83.

reciprocal difficulty to whites newly arrived in the colony. T.E. Poole was horrified by the scene at the landing stage on arrival. He noted that

The mode and language of salutation were exceedingly laughable: "Ah, daddie!" "Well, old fellow!" "Glad to see'e back again!" "Eh, massa, you do me for good, too much, you come here." ..., but I was fortunate so far, that I was soon extricated from this strange scene.<sup>38</sup>

Elizabeth Melville noted on her arrival that she would have great difficulty running her household until she had learnt to speak the dialect.<sup>39</sup> This learning was clearly seen as part of a necessary reciprocal input into participating in the great cultural experiment that Freetown actually was. 'Mary Church', on the other hand, had no intention of reciprocating on this point. She informed her correspondent that pidgin was 'gibberish' and that the English made things worse by talking it. She had been told that if she did not learn to communicate in pidgin, no African would understand her. Her response was to write that she intended to repeat her correct English words several times until she was understood.<sup>40</sup> Peter Leonard also appears to have objected to white use of black forms of speech. He wrote:

Poor Quamino, in giving utterance to our civilized dialect, falls into many diverting errors of style as well as pronunciation, and our countrymen here seem to think it is necessary he should not improve in this respect, as they all make use of the same defective and incongruous jargon in speaking to every one of dingy exterior.<sup>41</sup>

The reproduction of letters, memorandums and requests written by blacks in Sierra Leone was a common feature of many travel accounts, designed presumably, like the quotation from Rankin above, to inject humour into the reader's experience. Elizabeth

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<sup>38</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, pp. 51-52.



Melville was 'amused' to find her servant's journal open on the dining room window sill and quoted directly from it, noting that one page was given over with instructions for setting the table. Melville joked:

The diction was really most laughable; the handwriting, on the contrary, very good. Yet with all the apparent *intellect* evinced by making this memorandum, I almost invariably find the table set wrong.<sup>42</sup>

Melville here made the linkage between the structure of speech of her servant and her ability to do her job. Here, as in many of the texts where pidgin and creole were noted by travellers, the transculturative actions with regard to language of blacks in Freetown were used by white writers to reinforce negative impressions of ability and enthusiasm.

## 5. Reciprocity and Domesticity

As is clear from the above notes on black English, many negative representations of black behaviour and ability were reported in the context of the author's domestic life. In general, discursive constraints meant that these domestic details were the province of women's texts. However, the Rev. Poole proved a late exception to this rule when he described his early days in the colony living in Kroo Town. His account focussed on his female neighbours, one of whom 'was one of the bad as well as noisy sort - a perfect specimen of a black fury.'<sup>43</sup> This neighbour had a tendency to 'greet me more familiarly than I liked whenever I went to my window' and he wrote that by ignoring her he 'cruelly slighted her good manners.'<sup>44</sup> Like 'Mary Church' and her refusal to speak in pidgin, Poole refused to reciprocate his neighbour's greetings. Instead he ridiculed her, writing how he had wounded her pride, 'for pride of a

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<sup>42</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

certain kind these creatures have', and later he lampooned her appearance on her wedding day, describing her as 'the ugliest specimen of a black venus you could desire to see.'<sup>45</sup>

One of the most detailed accounts of the struggle for reciprocity in a domestic context concerns Melville's narration of one of her black servant's fondness of and concern for her son. In particular, she recounted how one of her servant's wives, named Petah, had left her own child to collect 'country medicines' for Melville's son when he was ill, presenting Melville with a collection of roots and seeds with instructions on how to prepare them. Melville was touched, 'Here had the poor creature gone' she wrote 'without saying a word of her intention to any one, and, unaided by either hoe or cutlass, wandered through the intricate bush during the whole of that hot, dusty day, searching for those herbs that she deemed infallible in the cure of all infant ailments.'<sup>46</sup> Having been advised by her doctor to have nothing to do with the cure she told the woman that the remedies would not work for white children and she should keep them for her own child with Melville's thanks. The woman was 'vexed' but continued to be kind to the child.<sup>47</sup>

The frequently narrated inability of some travellers to reciprocate with blacks in a domestic context was in many instances, undoubtedly due to issues of class as well as race equality. There were constant assertions by blacks of their equality with whites, less often through the dramatic process of political rebellion than by their simple refusal to see themselves as second-class citizens and their tendency to borrow and manipulate elements of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47.

<sup>46</sup> Melville, *Residence*, p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

European culture and dress that suited them. Thus we find Frances Rankin observing on arrival in the river when his ship took on board a black pilot, that 'It was novel to find a black treating a white man with aristocratic independence.'<sup>48</sup> He went on to note that

In due time, however, his dignity condescended to unbend itself "a few," as he would have expressed it; but never so far as to allow us to forget that he was a free black man of Freetown, capital of the free colony for the location of freed slaves. If his manner was not free, it was because he was perfectly free to treat his equals according to his own good pleasure.<sup>49</sup>

For Elizabeth Melville, this assertion of black equality involved her in a particular kind of reciprocal struggle in which she attempted to overcome the strictures of race and class in order to be 'polite' to black visitors or not to be cruel to her servants. Two of her servants asked her to make them clothes like her own. One asked for a direct copy of one of her dresses. Melville wrote:

The request proceeding from pure ignorance, I did not like to mortify the good woman; so replied, that although I could really not spare time to *make* her a dress, I would try and cut one out for her, provided she brought me the materials.<sup>50</sup>

One particular incident Melville retold with a mixture of shock and hilarity. This concerned a young (probably settler) woman who visited Melville to inform her that a cargo of English straw bonnets had arrived in the colony and that they were :

so beautiful that all the settlers of any taste had henceforth resolved to discard hats, gravely begging to be the medium of sending me up a quantity of the said bonnets to choose from seeing they have become so fashionable *among the blacks of Freetown!*<sup>51</sup>

As hierarchies of ethnicity and class became more entrenched in black Freetown

<sup>48</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Melville, *Residence*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

society, the women from those groups who were conscious of their own perceived superiority within the black hierarchy, especially the Nova Scotians, took to visiting white women as equals, for tea and chat and sometimes to moan about the liberated Africans. Melville wrote that she admitted them regularly in order to gain more information about them, but it is clear that they remained alien and 'other' to her.<sup>52</sup> The willingness to listen to and participate in the ritual of reciprocity, may indicate that women took a greater interest in black women as individuals, but the clear divide between white and black women is perhaps seen more clearly when thought of in terms of white women's refusal to reciprocate 'transcultured' behaviour.

Melville's domestic observations also represented a more general negative domestic discourse. She lamented the ability to find servants, particularly female ones. Black reciprocal interaction with her family was reported in a way that emphasised the tropes of black 'barbarity'. For example, she noted how a servant wanted to hang a crab up by its leg to amuse her infant son and how he was mortified when he received a lecture on animal cruelty.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, she wrote elsewhere that 'Blacks in general have no sense of the beauty of plants *per se*,' adding that they were more keen on clothes and jewellery.<sup>54</sup> If we recall how much of Melville's understanding of herself as innocent traveller depended on her romantic attachment to natural beauty, this negative representation was particularly strong in the context of her account. In a wider discursive context, she was denying that blacks had an aesthetic sense as far as nature was concerned, something of particular significance at a time when the romantically-inspired travelling-gentry figure was so important in British cultural life.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

'Mary Church', who refused to reciprocate on equal terms with blacks in the use of language, was horrified by the reluctance of black women to assume the place in the social hierarchy which she thought fitted them. Early on in her stay in Freetown, she was visited by a black (probably settler) woman whom she described to her correspondent as a 'grotesque figure', dressed as follows:

Now do you fancy to yourself an elderly black woman, with a muslin gown and apron on, a colored handkerchief tied round her head, and over that, a man's shaped blue beaver hat - in one hand an umbrella, and the other tossing about her pocket handkerchief.<sup>55</sup>

This 'grotesque figure' offered to wait on Church until she was able to arrange for a suitable servant to take over. 'But', she wrote:

I should think, she will not choose to do very much. She seemed not to consider herself at all inferior, for she walked across the room and took possession of the sofa with the greatest composure in the world, and insisted on shaking hands with me. Gradations of society, said I to myself, certainly do not seem very well understood here; and I suppose a person would be thought proud who endeavoured to teach them, but I believe I shall make the experiment in my own house at least, for I do not see any reason for shaking hands with an African servant more than an English one - what do you say?<sup>56</sup>

No need for anti-conquest here. And also no need to participate in the mystique of reciprocity. If 'Mary Church' was, as Fyfe suggests, Governor Temple's daughter, then we can see here how class issues and the breadth of her authority as a colonising subject precluded discourses of anti-conquest and reciprocity from her account. Similarly, the black woman's transculturation of European dress produced a response akin to disgust. For many women in a colonial context the territory they claimed for themselves was that of the domestic household. 'Church', and to a lesser but still significant degree Melville, sought to defend that territory and

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<sup>55</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

their authoritative role within it against intrusion by an 'other', especially an 'other' that did not understand its own role within the cultural and territorial hierarchy.

## 6. Religion, Reciprocity and 'Difference'

There was one other significant area of transculturative activity with which travellers were frequently concerned and that was black religion. Again, this is a theme that pervades travel literature on the colony since its inception. Anna Maria Falconbridge was among the first to note the religious devotion of the Nova Scotians, who had brought their own strong non-conformist religious tradition with them from Canada.<sup>57</sup> In many ways black religion was one of the most constant positive images of blacks in Freetown. Hardly a traveller failed to notice careful black observation of the Sabbath (in contrast to the colony's white population), and the numerous chapels built by Nova Scotian, Maroon and liberated Africans were nearly always noted as being greatly to their credit.

However, the 'enthusiastic' nature of black worship, with its accent on the direct experience of the holy spirit, its speaking in tongues, as well as its sheer physicality, impressed some travellers with one of their most potent images of black 'otherness'. This was an impression exacerbated by the lack of a defined priesthood in many black churches. Capt. Alexander for example wrote that

Every evening...the sound of psalmody was heard from a neighbouring chapel, where a coloured blacksmith officiated, whose lungs were most stentorian. Sometimes the doors were closed, and one or two of the congregation "found the Lord," as these deluded people imagined; when the most frightful yells and screams proceeded from

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<sup>57</sup> Falconbridge, *Two Voyages*, p. 201.

the premises.<sup>58</sup>

For Henry Huntley, the description of black religion as simply the attendance of chapel and 'getting worked up into a phrensy' was evidence that although given land and Christian instruction 'yet he still retains the negro propensities, from which nothing can drive or entice him'. James Holman noted the proliferation of independent chapels and black preachers, but gave a large portion of his text over to a case where a Maroon priest was tried for adultery with the wife of a carpenter. Holman did this to 'give a clear and characteristic idea of the state of society amongst these people.'<sup>59</sup> All of these writers were making it clear that the 'vaunted' Christianity of Freetown's blacks was not necessarily indicative of their adherence to 'civilised' behaviour patterns. As Frances Harrison Rankin put it, 'They are prone to religious belief, which, when unguided by truth, exfoliates into a thousand fantastic notions.'<sup>60</sup>

Not all writers emphasised or even acknowledged the 'difference' of black religion. 'Mary Church' approvingly wrote of being woken by singing in chapels at 5 am, neglecting to mention that the chapels were not Anglican. Wilfully ignoring black religious proactivity, she noted 'how different they would be, were it not for the blessed efforts of the Missionaries.'<sup>61</sup> Similarly Rev. Poole waxed lyrical on the encouraging experience of conducting a service in St. George's cathedral 'when native choristers, with their white surplices, sang with all the correctness and melody of English children.'<sup>62</sup> On the evidence of Poole's account, the

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 1, p. 90.

<sup>59</sup> Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, p. 86.

<sup>60</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 60.

<sup>61</sup> 'Church', *Sierra Leone*, p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, p. 109.

philanthropic stereotypical image of a devoted black Anglican population appeared to be a broad cultural, spatial and temporal reality.

Other writers, however, made much of the differences in styles of worship. Indeed, the chance to sit through a black service provided opportunities, and sometimes even difficulties, which were reminiscent of those faced by explorers, or so Frances Harrison Rankin would have his readers believe. In his account of a visit to a 'Settler Chapel', the familiar sentimental discourses of innocence, anti-conquest and reciprocity appeared again as they did throughout so much of his account. 'I had' he wrote:

a strong desire to sit through a service at Settler Chapel, in order to hear the style and general tone of the most educated of their preachers; but the steam and suffocating atmosphere of a densely crowded congregation of blacks baffled the attempt, and obliged me to be content with a humbler, although, perhaps, not a less instructive example.<sup>63</sup>

Like an explorer, physically suffering from his attempt to understand the 'other', Rankin was forced to abandon his reciprocal venture. Instead, he went to 'a remote part of Freetown, inhabited by the least refined of the Liberated', where he attended a service at a chapel known from their style of build as a 'grass house'.<sup>64</sup> Rankin wrote, in a manner reminiscent of explorer narratives, that he soon regretted his curiosity once the service had commenced, because 'nothing is so painful as the feeling of giving a sanction to a burlesque upon sacred things'.<sup>65</sup> He was appalled at the 'overpowering' effect of the service where 'every possible

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<sup>63</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 262.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262-63.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.



perversion of the English language' was witnessed.<sup>66</sup> The preacher was, Rankin wrote, 'a large heavy-headed negro in a blue coat with bright metal buttons.'<sup>67</sup> Moreover, 'The precise subject which the sermon was designed to enforce, it would be difficult to define.'<sup>68</sup> This story in many ways reflects classical exploration narratives. 'Innocent' Rankin found himself struggling to understand 'alien' behaviour and longing for the day when a more 'civilised' religious life would be brought to Freetown. The poor, neglected area of Freetown which contains the grass houses was the colonial frontier, a contact zone where black and white met and struggled to understand each other.

Finally, and by way of extension of this last theme, I want to note how travellers to Freetown encountered an 'alien other' in relation to the only large 'pagan' group settled in Freetown, the Kuroo. The Kuroo, included by Rankin under the title, 'Voluntary Colonists, Pagans', were the frequent subject of travellers' observations.<sup>69</sup> Their refusal to adhere to European dress codes provoked comment from some.<sup>70</sup> Many travellers noted that the Kuroo were active thieves.<sup>71</sup> Still more mocked their names, such as 'Tom Coffee' and 'Bottle of Beer.'<sup>72</sup> T.E. Poole's image of a Kurooman in jail summarises the sentiment behind many traveller's images of the Kuroo. He described his subject as follows:

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> See for example, Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, 1, p. 144.

<sup>71</sup> See for example, Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> See for example, Holman, *Travels in Madeira*, p. 66.

His round straw hat is cocked on one side; he walks with a swaggering air and daring impudence. And then the noise, the almost inhuman shout and yell, the wild gestures, the savage expression and fearful excitement of these terrible elements of social being! It was enough to test the nerves of a stronger-minded man than myself.<sup>73</sup>

Some writers admired the Kroo, especially for their detestation of slavery.<sup>74</sup> Others admired their physical fitness and strength, noting that they enjoyed sports, especially wrestling.<sup>75</sup>

Peter Leonard resorted to a normalising discourse to convey his summary of the Kroo character, arguing that they were the 'Scotsmen of Africa', being 'a remarkably strong, active, hardy, and intelligent race of men.'<sup>76</sup>

These wildly varying images of the Kroo show the discursive flexibility of traveller's images of blacks in Freetown. Indeed the whole of this chapter has shown how prejudice, the desire to tell a good story, the narrative attractions of received stereotypes, and the desire to portray a particular authorial role, all affected travellers' images of blacks in Freetown. While historians have generally filtered out the descriptive excesses of these images in their search for narrative detail, the contradictions and complexities of traveller's discourses on the subject are only apparent when a specific study such as this one is undertaken. Also in this chapter it is clear that Pratt's notions of anti-conquest and reciprocity remain relevant in the Freetown context, in spite, perhaps even because of the large degree of transculturative activity pursued by blacks in the settlement. Here, in a narrative territory far removed from that of Alexander Gordon Laing and other explorers, there was still the need to police a cultural divide, to

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<sup>73</sup> Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Rankin, *White Man's Grave*, p. 147.

<sup>75</sup> Forbes, *Six Months' Service*, p. 20.

<sup>76</sup> Leonard, *Records of a Voyage*, p. 55.

negotiate roles, to reciprocate or be seen to be attempting to reciprocate in a fluid, transculturated contact zone. The wild plains were substituted for different territories, a grass-house perhaps or even the domestic home, but there were many discursive similarities between the narration of sentimental encounters with blacks in a white-controlled urban area and those in the rural 'wilderness'. Away from the more detailed narrations of white/black encounters, travellers' texts continued to search for, invent, and reproduce 'knowledge' about blacks, both generally and specifically, as the cultural and economic superiority of the white traveller was claimed over and over again.

## CONCLUSION

Sierra Leone was a product of its times. As written in utopian plans and abolitionist propaganda it appeared to be a reasoned and logical response to the moral imperatives which were increasingly recognised by an 'enlightened' and 'civilised' nation. To many, it appeared also to be a manifestation of God's will. The colony retained an iconic significance as a symbol of Britain's philanthropic instinct, a symbolism which endures in some degree to the present day.<sup>1</sup> The planning, execution, management and history of the early decades of Sierra Leone indicate the strength of cultural cohesiveness among the Claphamite evangelicals who were its parents. Sierra Leone was one of the routes by which they competed for representational hegemony against proslavery ideology. Their hegemonic claims were based on a discourse which had three clearly definable coordinates.

Firstly, there were the personal reputations of the abolitionists themselves, their deeply-felt sense that they were doing God's work and their sincere commitment to appropriate behaviour and endeavour. Then there were the black subjects of British philanthropy. Racially defined as equal through monogenicist logic, the abolitionists' positive images of blacks were intimately bound up with degeneracy theory: increasingly abolitionists relied on a defence of blacks' ultimate potential rather than actual achievement in the field of

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<sup>1</sup> In Stephen Spielberg's 1998 film, *Amistad*, Sierra Leone's role as a base for the antislavery squadron was emphasised. Images of 'barbaric Africa' also endure, especially in the light of recent political difficulties. Shortly before this thesis was submitted, the *Sunday Times* carried an article by one of the new government's mercenary 'liberators' with stories of 'sick brutality, forcible amputations, and cannibalism.' *Sunday Times*, May 24 1998, p. 5.

'civilisation'. Racialised images of blacks were also tied up with the persistence of the noble-savage tradition and the 'fantasy' figure of the grateful, pliant ex-slave. Thirdly, there was Africa itself. Apparently fertile and underdeveloped, Africa was a place far removed from the physical, cultural and political difficulties of Britain, and a location where it appeared easy to acquire land and influence. Africa was represented as a place that would prove lucrative in both moral and financial terms once it was exposed to the power of 'civilisation'. These three formulations comprise the simplest expressions of 'self' and 'other' within abolitionist discourse about Sierra Leone.

But there were complexities even within these basic images. Some 'others' were less so than their counterparts who (or which) could be described within similar rhetorical formulations. For example, the Black Poor and the Nova Scotians, having been exposed to white culture, were (initially at least) clearly seen as less 'other' than native Africans. They appeared to offer ideal material for social and economic experimentation in Africa because they were apparently more accessible, knowable and controllable than anonymous native colonisers would have been. Abolitionists were more comfortable within a normalising rhetorical formulation. This applied to the land as well. Back in England, Granville Sharp tried to imagine his new colony and compared it to Shooter's Hill. This normalising discourse was a constant feature of abolitionist rhetoric about the colony and its inhabitants. The 'other' was continually scanned for points of fixity which indicated their proximity to abolitionist ideas of 'self'.

This abolitionist triumvirate of images relating to self, land and black colonisers (or later recaptives), when knitted together in rhetoric and propaganda, provided the discourse

which divided the humanitarians from the cruel, greedy, self-interested deceitful, unreasonable and ungodly slave dealers. This Manichean theme underlay the early utopian plans for Sierra Leone. It did not, however, point insistently to the development of a colony in Africa. This thesis has shown that the early commitment to a practical experimentation with 'free' labour and the development of alternatives to the West Indian system did not necessarily constitute a 'back to Africa' scheme. The logic which apparently bonded together blacks, abolitionists and Africa as a potent practical and rhetorical symbol of abolition was not a shaping force in the thoughts of the early planners. Rather, they reified organisation, discipline and morality as opposed to place. In this sense then, the thinking that led to the foundation of Sierra Leone was truly utopian. Africa was ultimately chosen because the Black Poor insisted on it and because the lingering utopian images presented by Smeathman and others allowed the construction of positive representations and the development of an optimistic discourse about the colony's prospects. This persisted when the 'realities of place' were encountered. The dedication to an agricultural Arcadia, cultivated by a grateful peasantry or willing plantation workers, Christianised, pacified and humanised after being born into and made the victims of African 'barbarism', remained a potent purpose behind much practical intervention in Sierra Leone.

However, beyond this enduring iconic status and significance in the most Manichean of arguments, there are more complex, multivalent discourses relating to Sierra Leone and its abolitionists supporters. Firstly, there were disputes over the meaning of the word 'freedom'. Only Thomas Perronet Thompson advocated a completely free system of labour in Sierra Leone. Everyone else envisaged some sort of redemption policy. And yet the differences *between* the various abolitionist images on this subject were enormous. Henry Smeathman

was disparaged and condemned as possibly a slave trader in disguise because he had slave-trading friends and advocated the purchase of slaves for Sierra Leone. Zachary Macaulay, who had once been a slave overseer and who advocated a far more widespread system of slave purchase and redemption, was an enduring hero in abolitionist propaganda. In general, the evangelicals stuck together and fought to retain representational superiority, but they were resisted from within abolitionism by dissenters and radicals. This dissent was sometimes vituperative, often reasoned and cogent. The degree of debate within abolitionist circles about freedom, apprenticeship and the best means of 'civilising' Sierra Leone betrayed a lively and varied abolitionist movement in which a number of complex discursive strands were brought together with varying degrees of success.

The precise expressions of dissent, the machinery of conflict and the processes by which debates were conducted and evangelical hegemony maintained are deserving of further research. What I have pointed to here is that the Saints *did* retain the power to create and preserve abolitionist discourse about the colony. That discourse was far from self-questioning. Perhaps the need to pose a direct opposition to the West Indians and their supporters did not allow for the abolitionists to examine where *they* had persisted in errors of judgement. Rather the blame for Sierra Leone's increasingly apparent inability to succeed in the terms which the abolitionists themselves had defined for the colony was shifted onto the black settlers, natives, and to a lesser extent those whites who dissented from dominant evangelical discourse. In this way, abolitionists tended to appropriate hostile images and representations of blacks which owed much to proslavery propaganda. Abolitionist opponents of the evangelicals, such as Thomas Perronet Thompson and Robert Thorpe, in their rush to the moral high ground, ensured that images of blacks in the colony were even more

derogatory and abusive. Theoretical claims to black equality mattered little within the overall potent discourse which commodified blacks as 'other' and legitimated increasing abolitionist attachment to the notion of a 'civilising mission'.

The idea of a 'civilising mission' carried overtones of cultural imperialism and contributed to the darkening of the overall image of Africa. It also paved the way for the racist theoretical and practical excesses of Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Early echoes of these excesses are found in the writings of proslavery travellers. The extent to which antislavery sympathisers shared in the production and persistence of this trend is also reflected in contemporary travel writing. But the images promoted by travellers from both proslavery and antislavery camps were discursively wrapped in the discourses of anti-conquest and reciprocity. The degree to which both groups contributed to imperial discourse can only be accessed if the mystique of reciprocity and technique of anti-conquest are fully recognised and appreciated.

The Sierra Leone Company had a Linnean naturalist and a mineralogist charged with knowing, naming (and thereby paving the way to appropriate) the natural environment and resources. Company servants went on short walks in the woods to scan the area for potential exploitation, and ventured further afield on trading missions. Like their proslavery counterparts they 'scanned the land for prospects' and anticipated its future exploitation. For both groups, the prominent image which they nurtured was one of passivity and innocence especially when contrasted with native waste of resources, technological inadequacy and 'barbaric' culture. In their role as peacemakers, abolitionists, doctors, planters and traders, travellers struggled to reciprocate against the 'barbaric' habits of centuries and the largely



ungrateful 'other' with whom they had to deal.

Such a discourse outlived the Company and survived into the genre of sentimental travel writing. Abolitionist sentiment continued to present Arcadian images of the environment, representations of noble savages and optimism about the prospects for 'improvement' and 'civilisation'. But in their narration of their heroic suffering, these travellers expressed ambivalence and hostility toward native blacks. The blacks encountered by heroic adventurers could be presented as noble, gentle, shy, generous and paternal or greedy, barbaric, vulgar and stinking. The distinctions often rested on black willingness to participate in the Euro-centred mystique of reciprocity and techniques of anti-conquest. Nor was the situation much different in Freetown where travellers often sent back reports of an homogenised 'other', either peaceful/pacified or incorrigibly uncivilised depending on their individual political and personal prejudices. Dissonance against these prevailing stereotypes did occur, of course, though it was rare and not as attributable to distinctions of class, gender or abolitionists sympathy as some modern commentators might wish.

I conclude by expressing the conviction that approaches to British abolitionism in general and Sierra Leone in particular which seek to emphasise binary splits along proslavery or antislavery lines are inadequate. Nevertheless clear Manichean binarisms were very important in the production of images of Sierra Leone. However, the nature of imperial discourse, especially when represented in something as broad as notions of image and mediated through abolitionist culture, presents a large field for analysis which cannot easily be tied down. I have suggested throughout this thesis that this slippery imperial discourse is best approached through a multi-disciplinary approach that is not afraid of employing new

theoretical insights. Such an approach has indicated that, in the case of Sierra Leone, as in the case of other imperial projects and moments, there are clearly traceable divides of both ideology and representation. However, the boundaries between these divides leaked, and they leaked morally, economically, politically and culturally. These last four categories return us back to Edward Said's breakdown of the components of imperial power. Abolitionist intervention in Sierra Leone was intimately bound up with that power, and it is that simple but overwhelming impression that has endured throughout the twists and turns of this thesis.

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