

ORIENTALISM AND THE 'CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS'

Consider the extracts below from an article about the attack on the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001. Think about the language used (especially the discourse of time), and the extent to which Orientalist themes are drawn upon to characterise a distinct geography of 'us' and 'them'.

In This War of Civilisations, the West Will Prevail

(Sir John Keegan, Defence Editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, UK, 08/10/2001, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2001/10/08/do01.xml>, retrieved 13/11/06)

Striking quickly, as well as hard, may be a quality of this war deliberately chosen, and with good reason. A harsh, instantaneous attack may be the response most likely to impress the Islamic mind. Surprise has traditionally been a favoured Islamic military method. The use of overwhelming force is, however, alien to the Islamic military tradition. The combination of the two is certainly designed to unsettle America's current enemy and probably will.

Samuel Huntington, the Harvard political scientist, outlined in a famous article written in the aftermath of the Cold War his vision of the next stage hostilities would take. Rejecting the vision of a New World Order, proposed by President Bush senior, he insisted that mankind had not rid itself of the incubus of violence, but argued that it would take the form of conflict between cultures, in particular between the liberal, secular culture of the West and the religious culture of Islam. Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' was widely discussed, though it was not taken seriously by some. Since September 11 it has been taken very seriously indeed.

[...]

The Oriental tradition, however, had not been eliminated. It reappeared in a variety of guises, particularly in the tactics of evasion and retreat practised by the Vietcong against the United States in the Vietnam war. On September 11, 2001 it returned in an absolutely traditional form. Arabs, appearing suddenly out of empty space like their desert raider ancestors, assaulted the heartlands of Western power, in a terrifying surprise raid and did appalling damage.

President Bush in his speech to his nation and to the Western world yesterday, promised a traditional Western response. He warned that there would be 'a relentless accumulation of success'. Relentlessness, as opposed to surprise and sensation, is the Western way of warfare. It is deeply injurious to the Oriental style and rhetoric of war-making. Oriental war-makers, today terrorists, expect ambushes and raids to destabilise their opponents, allowing them to win further victories by horrifying outrages at a later stage. Westerners have learned, by harsh experience, that the proper response is not to take fright but to marshal their forces, to launch massive retaliation and to persist relentlessly until the raiders have either been eliminated or so cowed by the violence inflicted that they relapse into inactivity.

News of the first strikes against Afghanistan indicates that a tested Western response to Islamic aggression is now well under way. It is not a crusade. The crusades were an episode localised in time and place, in the religious contest between Christianity and Islam. This war belongs within the much larger spectrum of a far older conflict between settled, creative productive Westerners and predatory, destructive Orientals.

CRITIQUE OF ORIENTALISM

Because of its influence, *Orientalism* has generated a great deal of critical discussion. There are a large number of papers and edited collections discussing Said's work, but there are four particularly important issues.

- 1 **Occidentalism.** Just as he critiqued Orientalists of reducing a vast and differentiated area to the Orient, so Said reduces all of Europe (and later also North America) to the Occident. Clearly there are differences within the west. For instance, what differences might there be in the geographical imagination of those countries that did not have colonies? What of internal colonies and groups of others *within* Europe (such as Northern Ireland within the UK, groups of East European Romany travelling people, and those from European empires now living within the west)? Furthermore, there are traditions of 'Occidentalism', representations of Europe and its culture from the non-Western world. These are significant issues, but it is important to remember that although the structures of representation are similar, there is one big difference between Orientalism and Occidentalism which is power, i.e. that the west had, and continues to have, the most powerful voice in representing the west and the rest throughout the world. Historically the influence of Orientalist representations of the world has been much greater than that of Occidental accounts, a point we will return to at various places in the book.
- 2 **Historical difference.** Said focuses on continuities to the detriment of historical change. While we can trace the continued existence of themes from Orientalism into contemporary culture (and this is in fact something we will do throughout this book), clearly some things are different today – we can see this in the way we view the images of the rest of the world which used to be taken for granted – and if Said's theories are correct, there is no way for accounting for these changes.
- 3 **Gender.** Said has been critiqued for an implicit gendering of the Orient as female. Many of the images he used are highly gendered (think of the image in Figure 1.5). Because this is not reflected upon, Said effectively reinforces the patriarchal idea that it is men who are active and capable, and women are passive and unable to represent themselves. As we shall see in Chapter 2, feminists have argued that western women travellers to the Orient produced very different accounts because of the power relations they experienced at home. Their positionality challenged the neat binaries that Said's work depends upon.
- 4 **Retextualisation.** Said talks of a textualised Orient, but in his work he does not detextualise it but retextualises it. Following from the Foucaultian literature he draws on, no-one can provide a true representation of reality, all is constructed through discourse. Now the Orientalists' texts are replaced by Said's text. While the Orientalist texts aimed to show that the Orient was backward, this has been replaced by Said's aim of demonstrating the political nature of the Orientalists. The values (whether the Orient or the Occident contains the problem) have changed but the structure of representation (there is a geographical space of Orient and of Occident) remains the same. We still do not know what 'they' think of themselves, as the voices of Oriental people are not included in the

book. Moreover, if all versions of the Orient are textual creations, how are we to argue that today's version, or Said's version, is any better or worse than those presented in the nineteenth century by European colonisers and earlier travellers? This is a particularly important critique for us as geographers as one of the tasks that we have traditionally had is to write about different parts of the world. As we shall see, geography as a discipline was very much part of the European colonial enterprise and was caught up in Orientalism. Are we still Orientalists if we seek to write geographies of the Middle East or Asia?

Further reading

On early European views of the rest of the world

- Baudet, H. (1988) *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man* (trans. E. Wentholt). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Press.
- Friedman, J. (1981) *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. Harvard: Harvard University Press. (See especially the Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2.)

The classic text on the way the rest of the world has been represented by the west

- Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.

For further discussion of Said's work

- Ahmad, A. (1992) 'Orientalism and after', in A. Ahmad, *In Theory*. London: Verso. (Reprinted in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds) (1994) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*. New York: Columbia. pp. 162-71.)
- Lewis, R. (1996) *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation*. London: Routledge.
- Porter, D. (1994) 'Orientalism and its problems', in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*. New York: Columbia. pp. 150-61.
- Said, E. (1985) 'Orientalism reconsidered', *Race & Class*, 27(2).
- Young, R.J.C. (1990) *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West*. London: Routledge. (See especially Chapter 7.)

Shohat and Stam develop Said's arguments to a world where the dominant representation comes through US media

- Shohat, E. and Stam, R. (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. London: Routledge.

On contemporary expressions of Orientalism in international relations (especially concerning the 'war on terror')

- Gregory, D. (2004) *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell.

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KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

But what is it impossible to think, and what kind of impossibility are we faced with here? Each of these strange categories can be assigned a precise meaning and a demonstrable content; some of them do certainly involve fantastic entities – fabulous animals or sirens – but, precisely because it puts them into categories of their own, the Chinese encyclopaedia localizes their powers of contagion; it distinguishes carefully between the very real animals (those that are frenzied or have just broken the water pitcher) and those that reside solely in the realm of imagination. The possibility of dangerous mixtures has been exorcized, heraldry and fable have been relegated to their own exalted peaks: no conceivable amphibious maidens, no clawed wings, no disgusting, squamous epidermis, none of those polymorphous and demoniacal faces, no creatures breathing fire. The quality of monstrosity here does not affect any real body, nor does it produce modifications of any kind in the bestiary of the imagination; it does not lurk in the depths of any strange power. It would not even be present at all in this classification had it not insinuated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks *separating* all these entities from one another. It is not the 'fabulous' animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing

them to) the stray dogs, or the animals that from a long way off look like flies. What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others.

Michel Foucault, 'Preface', *The Order of Things*, pp. xv-xvi

The opening quotation, the preface from *The Order of Things* (1970), where the author Michel Foucault explains his motivations for writing the book, seems like a bizarre turn of fantasy. As he says, who could possibly believe such things? Foucault's intention in quoting this strange Chinese encyclopaedia was to point out that the role of knowledge is to create orders so that we can make sense of the multitude of information about the world around us. Things are grouped into categories and associations that allow us to navigate our way through the world. These groupings make order out of the chaos of stuff around us. Foucault argues that through history different 'epistemes', or ways of knowing or organising the world, have come to dominate.

Foucault argues that the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the modern episteme. People began to classify difference and discontinuity into taxonomies of knowledge which were categorised into modern differentiations such as culture *or* nature, modern *or* traditional, science *or* mythology. With the rise of exploration, there was a real fear of the unknown and a desire to chart and explain new worlds. Formal colonialism generated an added incentive to learn about what had been conquered, whether in order to manage the natives and learn about their ways so as to control them (and levy taxes), or to find out about the resources available that would boost the wealth of a colonising power. Geographers had an important role in this. Indeed, the formation of the modern discipline was dependent upon geographers' roles in the charting of new places and acted as an aid to statecraft in expansion overseas.

In this chapter we will look at the rise of scientific understandings of the world, the institutions through which colonial knowledge was generated and developed, and the role that it played in governance. We will then go on to explore the ways in which this knowledge was communicated to the general population; how the majority of people in Europe found out about the rest of the world.

KNOWING THE WORLD

As we saw in the previous chapter, discourses of difference from the Medieval period to the seventeenth century were based upon religion,

appearance and social patterns. Science and technology were not often used as China, India and the Middle East were more advanced than Europe in many technologies and forms of knowledge. In the eighteenth century, the **European Enlightenment** saw a rise in the importance of science and technology as the basis of comparison. Capitalism drove the economies of Europe and scientific knowledge was used to develop new methods of production. Europeans saw their economy and society developing quickly, and viewed themselves as dynamic and vibrant in comparison to what seemed to them as timeless cultures, or even decaying civilisations elsewhere.

Time and space were central. European modernity – especially the rise of industrial production – meant that time and organisation were very important (think of the centrality of the organisation of time to the modern world, particularly the significance of timetables and workshifts). Other societies were seen to fail to 'value' time, adhering to natural rhythms or seemingly unable to use time efficiently. Space was similarly valued through the knowledges produced by charts and maps and the centrality of space in the layout of the industrial production line. This mathematisation of space allowed for better management and control, whether in terms of better navigation, or the more efficient and accurate measurement of space for the collection of taxation. Railways opened up continents and helped to link countries together. They also facilitated a more efficient exploitation of resources and the movement of troops around countries. This again seemed to provide evidence of European superiority through technology (and therefore, by extension, European civilisation): with relatively small numbers of troops they could control a country. Europeans triumphed over space, whereas others were trapped in place.

Religion was still important to many as a category, but was nonetheless in decline. This trend was reinforced in the nineteenth century where science and technology, modernity and progress became paramount in the understanding of differences between cultures. For the first time in the nineteenth century came the rise of a racial 'science' which sought to explain the differences between peoples.

COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE: MACHINES AS THE MEASURES OF MEN

In many places, European travellers found no indigenous written sources and so they presumed an absence of science and philosophical learning. Science was seen as a very important tool which demonstrated human achievement over nature. In theoretical terms, the development of science allowed for the development of the laws of the physics and chemistry, and the

ability to conceptualise abstract problems. In practical terms, it facilitated precision, engineering and measurement. In his book *Machines as the Measures of Men* (1989), Michael Adas demonstrated the central importance of scientific knowledge in definitions of European superiority over others so that 'a society's level of development could be gauged by its technological achievements' (Adas, 1989: 100).

There was great debate about whether non-Europeans could be taught about science, or whether there was a fundamental difference in abilities. It was often concluded that they could be taught to operate technology, but not to comprehend abstract science. What was important about these discourses of science was the fact that they appeared value-neutral and thus beyond reproach. This was not about subjective judgement or insults; European science seemed entirely rational and unbiased, as Adas explains:

Because nineteenth century Europeans believed that machines, skull size, or ideas about the configuration of the solar system were culturally neutral facts, evaluative criteria based on science and technology appeared to be the least tainted by subjective bias. (1989: 145-6)

With the Enlightenment came ideas about the separation of 'man' from nature. It was believed that resources were put on the Earth for man, and thus he was responsible for their use (and it was 'man' and not 'humans'). There is a clear link here between Europeans' mastery of nature and the domination of other peoples around the globe who still seemed to be part of nature and not separate from it, namely 'savages' had done little to reshape their environment. Perhaps today this judgement seems a little odd to us. We may hold that the idea of living in a sustainable way with the environment, and making little impact, is a good thing. However, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nature was still something that was seen to be powerful and threatening to humans, and so there was a very strong view that nature had to be tamed. This fear of nature and the native people who lived with it provided an important spur to action. There was a clear sense that if colonisers knew what lay within the country they sought to rule, and if they could truly know and understand it, it would be easier to govern and control.

Despite its ascendancy as the predominant form of differentiation between societies, science was not always used in isolation. There were various interdependencies between scientific and religious forms of description, despite their apparent contradictions. For instance, the engineering triumph of the railways was also seen as being good for religious conversion. The explorer David Livingstone, 'who saw himself as a "cog in God's machinery"', regarded railroads and telegraphs as important instruments for breaking down barriers

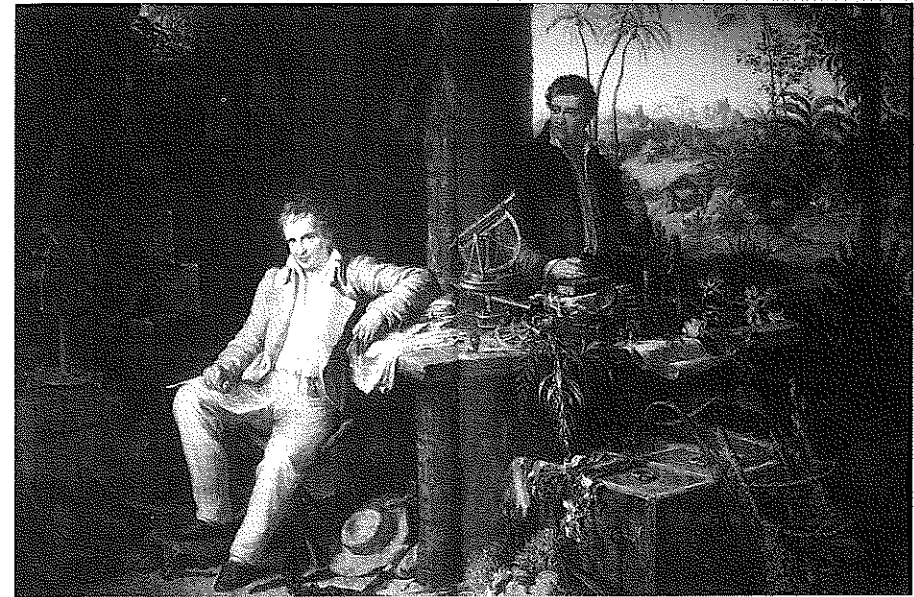


Figure 2.1 This picture is of the geographer and explorer Alexander von Humboldt with his travelling companion Aimé Bonpland. Look at the way in which they have been represented as men of science, surrounded by specimens and equipment to take measurements and readings (and compare this with the simplicity of the hut behind them)

to Christian conversion' (Ibid., p. 206). One nineteenth century European commentator suggested that 'Thirty miles an hour is fatal to the slow deities of paganism' and called it 'pilgrimage done by steam' (Edwin Arnold, 1882, quoted in Adas, 1989: 226).

ACADEMIA AND COLONIALISM

The eighteenth century saw a significant rise in academic societies willing to assist in the colonial endeavour. In 1859 the Anthropological Society of Paris was established and this in turn became a model for others.

In the mid-nineteenth century the first geographical societies emerged in Europe. In Britain, the Royal Geographical Society was established in 1830. Although this concentrated upon the collection of academic information through the sponsorship of exploration, it too had a close relationship with empire. Table 2.1 shows this clearly. Stoddart (1986) listed the occupation of 304 of the original 460 members and this showed that the influence of the

Table 2.1 Founding membership of RGS by profession (from Stoddart, 1986: 60)

Dukes	3
Earls	9
Other peers	24
Baronets, knights	38
Naval officers	32
Army officers	55
Fellows of the Royal Society	124
Fellows of the Geological Society	19
Total	460

aristocratic and military classes to be disproportionate to their numbers in society as a whole.

For effective rule to be maintained, the tenet was 'know your natives'. Knowledge was the charter for domination. Military pacification was followed by academics and royal commissions to understand sources of resistance and counter resistance. Knowledge was used to produce a skilled and pliant labour force; to reduce resistance; to establish forms of governance and taxation; to maximise resource usage.

In her work on the French colonisation of Egypt, Anne Godlewska (1994) shows the importance of the discipline of Geography and the support it received from Napoleon. Geographers could chart what had been conquered, could identify natural resources, could highlight potential places of native resistance and thus how best to deploy troops in a new land. Geographical knowledge was key to the taking and subsequent ruling of Egypt and other colonial possessions. At the same time as offering this very practical support of empire, geographical knowledge also apparently demonstrated the superiority of the French over the Egyptians due to the ease with which the country was taken and then brought under French control. The maps of France's newly acquired territories (again produced by geographers) were a potent reminder to the French population of the value of being part of such a great country, and so Godlewska argued that at the same time as facilitating conquest abroad, geographical knowledge also helped governance at home. No wonder Napoleon was so supportive of this new discipline!

Geographical theories of the time also assisted colonialism in less direct ways. The end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth witnessed the rise of 'environmental determinism', an approach that regarded human beings or human society as being the product of the environment within which they lived. Many geographers put this argument forward, but

best known among them was Ellsworth Huntington, and especially his book from 1907, *The Pulse of Asia*, which recorded his travels within the continent and ended with his argument about the correlation between climate types and civilisation, an argument developed more fully in *Civilization and Climate* in 1915. Huntington produced maps of the world which showed the potential places where civilisation could emerge. These were centred around the cool, invigorating climes of northwestern Europe. Further north, he argued, and it was considered too cold for effective civilisation to emerge; further south, and people were rendered too languid due to the heat to go about building civilisation.

KNOWING THE NATIVE BODY

It was not only geographical societies that emerged and flourished at this time. The discipline of anthropology was established at the same time as geography and for many of the same imperialistic reasons. Much of the work of this discipline was concerned with 'physical anthropology', which measured body parts as a 'scientific' way to classify races. By the end of the nineteenth century, the use of photography further assisted this science of racism. Thousands of images of natives were used to create racial archetypes. Natives' bodies were photographed against measuring sticks in front of a grid so as to allow for detailed calculations of all the dimensions of a body. This form of science led to various attempts to explain the differences between 'races' through rational, scientific explanation. It is now clear how problematic this 'science' was and much of it was simply thinly disguised racism. And yet such explanations held great sway and were generally considered entirely respectable at the time.

Racism relates human behaviour and character to the race (phenotype) to which an individual or group belongs. One very important focus for racist scientific measures of difference was the body. Racist ideology usually involved an aesthetic appraisal of physical features and an elaborate classification of traits of mind and personality linked to physical features. This relied upon an implicit mind-body unity within which the shape of the body bore witness to the soul. In the late eighteenth century racial hierarchies were constructed with whites (especially north-west Europeans) at the top and Jews and blacks in lower places, and some went further to link this to the new science of evolution by including apes at the bottom. These hierarchies were established through the measurement of skull capacity, brain size, face shape, and various other aspects of the body. It was argued that black physical traits – dark skin, coarse hair, thick lips – were outward signs of 'inner cognitive defect'. This 'science' was cross-cut by aesthetics. Cuvier (1827–1835), in the 16-volume *The Animal Kingdom*, compared black people to monkeys and

stated that they would forever remain in barbarism. In contrast, he argued that Europeans are distinguished by:

The Caucasian, to which we belong, is distinguished by the beauty of the oval formed by his head, varying in complexion and the colour of the hair. To this variety, the most highly civilized nations, and those which have generally held all others in subjection, are indebted for their origin.

(Curvier, 1832: 50)

The initiators of racism were European intellectuals: clergymen, physicians, professors, and philosophers. In the nineteenth century, science was pressed into the service of racism to prove the inferiority of blacks, all colonised people outside of Europe and Jews in Europe. Such views seemed to gain scientific legitimacy from Darwin's influential *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, published in 1859. Darwin introduced the notion of a 'struggle for life', in which some species would always be more successful than others in adapting to local natural-environmental conditions. Although Darwin's ideas revolved around changes that would occur over many generations, and from random fluctuations in genetic adaptation, the idea of the 'survival of the fittest' inherent in the struggle-for-life argument was focused on by environmental determinists. These 'social Darwinists' viewed the world as being split into winners and losers, with the winners being those organisms (or people) most able to adapt to prevailing environmental circumstances and the losers being those who were unable to adapt and fit only for death.

Social Darwinism can also be seen as an apology for the excesses of capitalists and imperialists who were associated with imperial expansion at the time, making political struggle, class warfare, economic competition and rapid change and upheaval seem like a natural state for human life:

Capitalism in its red in tooth and claw competitive stage provided the social model for a new mode of natural understanding. In turn, natural science provided legitimation for conducting social life in this dog-eat-dog way. (Peet, 1985: 313)

Social Darwinism, understood within the context of environmental determinism, made conflict, violence and domination seem natural, and an inevitable feature of human life. This gave a free rein to capitalists and imperialists to do as they wished, as it would appear that winners and losers were therefore also natural. Social Darwinists argued that in the struggle for existence, some peoples would inevitably be eliminated by superior 'races'. While such extreme views were discredited later in the century for their questionable scientific basis and racist assumptions (as we shall see later), there are elements of such views that still persist within contemporary imagined geographies.

Table 2.2 Binaries at the heart of western reasoning

Mind	Body
Reason	Passion
Culture	Nature
Active	Passive
White	Black
Male	Female
Middle class	Working class
Adult	Child

Cross-cutting all this was the belief that we have come across already that other races were more closely related to nature than whites, that they were more tied to their bodies than their minds. This returns us to the centrality of **binary logic** at the heart of the European Enlightenment thought that we have mentioned already. Enlightenment binary concepts separated the mind and rationality from nature and the body, and this central belief was reinforced by the existence of other structuring binaries running through western thought (see Table 2.2). Other races were considered to be more natural in their instincts, and sometimes even viewed as having animal passions – more given over to the body and helpless in the face of desires that were both physical and sexual. This idea was linked to a perceived lack of control over the senses that was achieved through the development of the mind. Women, the lower classes, and children were also held to be more embodied than educated white men. What links those concepts (to the right of Table 2.2 above) is embodiment, or more correctly, a lack of control over the body by the mind: women were regarded as being closely aligned to natural patterns due to their role as mothers, through the cycle of menstruation and 'womanly' problems such as hysteria and fainting; the working classes were believed to be lacking in intellect and driven by bodily passions rather than higher goals; children were viewed as not yet sufficiently developed to achieve control and reason. All had to be controlled by patriarchal powers – elites, fathers, and imperialists. Once again we see that European men positioned themselves as normal, against which all others were compared and from which all were seen to deviate.

So far, this chapter has discussed formal science and academia. While disciplines such as geography and anthropology were becoming more influential within universities and their knowledge was having greater influence within government and colonial policy, the majority of the population of Europe were not aware of the developments in knowledge that had been made. Said, however, argued that the power of Orientalism lay in its ubiquity, that the division between east and west was (and still is) fundamental to western knowledge in both high culture and popular culture. We will now turn to look at the ways in which the majority of the European population came to know about the rest of the world.

TRAVELLERS' TALES

Not the least interesting part in the study of geographical discovery lies in the insight it gives on into the characters of that special kind of men who devoted the best part of their lives to the exploration of land and sea. In the world of mentality and imagination which I was entering it was they and not the characters of famous fiction who were my first friends. Of some of them I had soon formed for myself an image indissolubly connected with certain parts of the world. For instance, western Sudan, of which I could draw the rivers and principal features from memory even now, means for me an episode in Mungo Park's life.

It means for me the vision of a young, emaciated, fair-haired man, clad simply in a tattered shirt and worn-out breeches, gasping painfully for breath and lying on the ground in the shade of an enormous African tree (species unknown), while from a neighbouring village of grass huts a charitable black-skinned woman is approaching him with a calabash [a gourd] full of pure cold water, a simple draught which, according to himself, seems to have effected a miraculous cure. [...]

...the monuments left by all sorts of empire builders [will not] suppress for me the memory of David Livingstone. The words 'Central Africa' bring before my eyes an old man with a rugged, kind face and a clipped, gray moustache, pacing wearily at the head of a few black followers along the reed-fringed lakes towards the dark native hut on the Congo headwaters in which he died, clinging in his very last hour to his heart's unappeased desire for the sources of the Nile.

Joseph Conrad (1926), 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Heart of Darkness*

Terra incognita: these words stir the imagination. Through the ages men have been drawn to unknown regions by Siren voices, echoes of which ring in our ears today when on modern maps we see spaces labeled 'unexplored', rivers shown by broken lines, islands marked 'existence doubtful'.

Wright (1947), *President of the Association of American Geographers*.

Travellers' tales have always been popular due to their mix of excitement, romance, and exoticism. Dreams of far-off places often seem to involve child-like and innocent enthusiasm. However, as we have seen, travel and exploration were caught up in the processes of imperialism and colonial expansion that characterised nineteenth century imagined geographies. Explorers were at the forefront in the establishment of colonies; recording, measuring and collecting information about new lands and new peoples. Travellers' and explorers' accounts played an important role in communicating information about new lands and peoples to Europe's populations, in addition to normalising particular representations of colonial rule. In Britain in the nineteenth century the popularity of such accounts was so great that travel books were

outsold only by religious books, and travellers' illustrated talks around the country packed in the crowds. These tales constructed the world through narratives of heroism and bold deeds. They drew upon the kinds of discourse already introduced, but made the representations much more accessible to the population at large.

The style of these explorers' accounts was significant in two ways. First, the way that explorers looked at the world, according to Mary-Louise Pratt's influential (1992) critique, could be characterised by their adoption of the 'monarch of all I survey' rhetoric. Pratt has argued that explorers tended to look down upon new scenes to be described – on the one hand, to provide a vantage point from which to get a good view, but, on the other, she argued, this then had more profound impacts on the way in which the explorer described his (and the gendering is deliberate) relationship with the land. Not only does standing at a high point raise an explorer above the landscape and people being described, already implying a relationship of power, this privileged point of view also places the explorer outside of what is being described, and establishes his viewpoint as authoritative. French theorist Michel de Certeau described this perspective as follows:

His elevation transforms him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god. The exaltation of a scopic and Gnostic drive; the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more. (de Certeau, quoted in Ryan, 1996: 6)

The explorer's account from this vantage point, then, is presented as the most accurate and complete (for an example of this, see the box on Henry Morton Stanley on p. 41).

The second important aspect about the nature of explorers' accounts was the structure of the narrative of their travels. The first-person account articulated through an explorer's journal ensured that he was at the centre of the story, creating him as the hero of that story:

The mythology of exploration insists that the explorer be pitted against the vicissitudes of nature, hounded by inconsiderate indigenes and worn out by hunger in the service of his country. Above all, the explorer is an heroic *individual*: in exploration hagiographies there is rarely mention of the other members of the party ... (Ryan, 1996: 21)

Richard Philips (1997) and others have argued that this exploration was marked by the convergence of nationalism, masculinity and the romance of far-off places. It was a kind of muscular, individualistic, independent masculinity. This was not a bookish intellectual, but instead a figure with great knowledge of survival skills, nature and what has been called the 'sternly

practical pursuit' of geography. The narrative excludes women, unless they represent ties to home (wives and mothers who urge them not to go, who try to domesticate them, loved ones and the safety longed for when far away), or prizes or things to protect. This was promoted in literature for adults but could also be seen in children's stories, particularly in the exciting 'Boys' Own' stories, which some have argued were significant in grooming the next generation of colonisers.

It is important to put this into the context of conceptions of sexuality in Europe at the time, especially in Victorian Britain. The rise of bourgeois society and middle class morality, especially in the nineteenth century, brought in prudish ideas of sexuality, particularly those involving repression and control. Within Britain the middle classes worried about working-class practices of sexuality and morality. The middle classes felt that the working classes could not control themselves and they agonised over the negative effects of urban life, especially for women. This in turn paralleled their understanding regarding the sexuality of equally embodied other peoples.

Thus it became necessary to demonstrate the 'proper' practices of morality: in the duty of patriotism; in the moral and physical beauty of athleticism; in the salutary effects of Spartan habits and discipline; in the cultivation of all that was masculine and the expulsion of all that was effeminate, unEnglish and excessively intellectual – what geographer David Stoddart (1986) has celebrated as 'solid hunks of British manhood'.

The narrative of the heroic explorer was that such figures opened up blank spaces on the map for colonialism and imperialism by defeating barbarism and overcoming the challenges of the natural world. They battled with the elements before the oncoming domesticating forces of colonialism:

Since continued expansion represented a means to achieve or maintain moral, racial, spiritual, and physical supremacy, exploration thus becomes an instrument not only to justify imperial or nationalist political doctrine, but also to embody the supposed collective cultural superiority of the nation. (Riffenburgh, 1993: 2)

Such a narrative reduced stories to the image of the individual spirit versus the wilds, making for an innocent, natural and heroic tale. In actual fact, this was not always the case. When Stanley left Zanzibar to cross Africa in 1874 he took three white assistants, 356 native bearers and labourers, eight tonnes of stores and a 40-foot boat that had to be taken apart to be carried through the jungle.

Explorers popularised their tales and deeds in books and presentations on lecture circuits of the amateur geographical societies which had arisen during the nineteenth century. The Royal Geographic Society (RGS) was one of most fashionable London societies. Their 'Africa nights' to discuss the latest feats of exploration met with 'an immense audience [which] thunders at the gate'

(quoted in Driver, 1991: 144). The popularity of these travel accounts was especially significant in the nineteenth century with the rise of the popular press. It was, after all, the most important way in which people learnt about the world.

STANLEY AND HEROISM

Think about the style adopted in the excerpts below from *Through the Dark Continent*, by H.M. Stanley (1878). Consider the claims of authority, heroism and masculinity presented here. In the last excerpt, think about the claims he makes for the objectivity of his viewing of the landscape.

Unless the traveller in Africa exerts himself to keep his force intact, he cannot hope to perform satisfactory service. If he relaxes his watchfulness, it is instantly taken advantage of by the weak-minded and the indolent.

[...]

What a forbidding aspect had the Dark Unknown which confronted us! I could not comprehend in the least what lay before us. Even the few names which I had heard from the Arabs conveyed no definite impression to my understanding. What were Tata, Meginna, Uregga, Usongora Meno, and such uncouth names to me? They conveyed no idea, and signified no object; they were barren names of either countries, villages, or peoples, involved in darkness, savagery, ignorance, and fable. [...]

The object of the desperate journey is to flash a torch of light across the western half of the Dark Continent. For from Nyangwé east, along the fourth parallel of south latitude, are some 830 geographical miles, discovered, explored, and surveyed, but westward to the Atlantic Ocean along the same latitude are 956 miles – over 900 geographical miles of which are absolutely unknown. [...]

A thousand things may transpire to prevent the accomplishment of our purpose: hunger, disease, and savage hostility may crush us; perhaps, after all, the difficulties may daunt us, but our hopes run high, and our purpose is lofty; then in the name of God let us set on, and as He pleases, so let Him rule our destinies!

[...]

On the 19th a march of five miles through the forest west from Kampunzu brought us to the Lualaba, in south latitude 3° 35', just forty-one geographical miles north of the Arab depot Nyangwé. An afternoon observation for longitude showed the east longitude 25° 49'. The name Lualaba terminates here. I mean to speak of it henceforth as THE LIVINGSTONE.

[...]

Now look at this, the latest chart which Europeans have drawn of this region. It is a blank, perfectly white. [...]

(Cont'd)

I assure you [...] this enormous void is about to be filled up. Blank as it is, it has a singular fascination for me. Never has white paper possessed such a charm for me as this has, and I have already mentally peopled it, filled it with the most wonderful pictures of towns, villages, rivers, countries, and tribes – all in the imagination – and I am burning to see whether I am correct or not. *Believe?* I see us gliding down by tower and town, and my mind will not permit a shadow of doubt. Good night, my boy! Good night! and may happy dreams of the sea, and ships, and pleasure, and comfort, and success attend you in your sleep! Tomorrow, my lad, is the day we shall cry – 'Victory or death!'

From my loft eyrie I can see herds upon herds of cattle, and many minute specks, white and black, which can be nothing but flocks of sheep and goats. I can also see pale blue columns of ascending smoke from the fires, and upright thin figures moving about. Secure on my lofty throne, I can view their movements, and laugh at the ferocity of the savage hearts which beat in those thin dark figures ... As little do they know that human eyes survey their forms from the summit of this lake-girl isle as that the eyes of the Supreme in heaven are upon them.

Subverting dominant travel? 'Lady travellers'

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

Punch magazine's song to the Royal Geographical Society, 10 June 1893, quoted in Stoddart, 1986: 63)

The myth of the explorer was a tale very much caught up in masculinism. As we can see in the quote above, the prevailing view of the RGS, if not society more generally, was that women were better off at home, not out there in the wilds discovering places.

However, women's exclusion from travellers' tales was not only exercised through their exclusion from professional societies and formal expeditions. The very nature of heroic tales of exploration was masculinist and thus exclusive of women. In these narratives, nature was coded as female and often written using a language of seduction. Furthermore, as we have already seen, Mary-Louise Pratt (1992) has argued that for the heroic male explorer the most common representation of land was from a birds-eye position (like a map). Again, following up on the binaries of western knowledge, the masculine knower is disembodied and distant from the land he is viewing.

But for women, this position is different. In contrast with male discovery rhetoric, seeing violates the norms of conduct for women. In western culture, as we have seen, there is a series of binaries which underpin our structures of

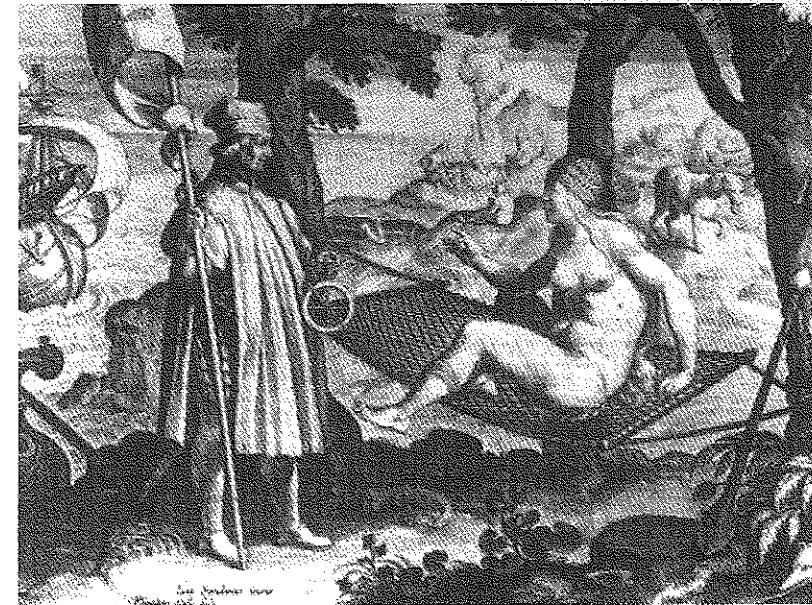


Figure 2.2 Jan van der Straet's *America* (look at this representation of Columbus arriving in America. What are the characteristics of male and female, and of coloniser and colonised, as shown in this image?)

thought. The differences between men and women are reinforced by other pairs in each binary. While men are seen as active agents, women are seen as passive – men look and women are looked at. If this seems like an exaggeration, think about the artistic tradition of painting nudes. If you go into a museum to look at such great works, the vast majority of painters will be men and their subjects will usually be women. The male artist is active (he has painted the picture) while the women are passive, sitting (or more often lying) still while they are represented. Similarly, a male viewer of the picture will be active, doing the looking. The woman in the picture will often be both naked and submissive (either looking away or up at the viewer).

Feminist theorists have suggested that this relationship is much more significant than simply being a convention in art. Thus, a viewer is characterised as being male and that which is being seen is coded as female (think of 'virgin territories' awaiting discovery by male explorers). It is not that women cannot look (at pictures, landscapes or other women), but that the gendered relationship is structured in such a way as to make this difficult, and we see this encompassed in the particular strategies adopted by early female travellers.

For instance, one English explorer of West Africa, Mary Kingsley, depicts herself discovering swamps not by looking down on them or walking around them to demarcate them, but by sloshing zestfully through them. Kingsley

was not taking possession of what she saw but instead stole past. Why does this difference exist?

Women were not the first European people to 'discover' places. Audiences were interested in their books and talks because they were the first European women to set foot in a new place, and they were of further interest because they were thus doubly out of place. In addition, they had different reasons for such travel. It was impossible for them to take part in scientific expeditions due to their complete exclusion from scientific societies until the dawn of the twentieth century (the RGS did not admit women as fellows until 1913), and rarely did they have the independent means required due to the position of women in European society at the time. When they did write of their experiences, there were general expectations that women would choose to write personalised accounts of their experiences rather than seek to contribute to science. There were also many other barriers to those women who wanted to travel. For instance, Mary Kingsley was a keen naturalist from family of scientists. However, she was the one required to stay at home and look after her parents when they fell ill. It was only after they died and left her money, when she turned 30, that she was able to see for herself what her male relatives had already seen.

MARY KINGSLEY, TRAVELS IN WEST AFRICA, 1897

Having been escorted by half of the population for a half mile or so beyond the town, and being then nervous about Fans [local people], from information received, I decided to return to Kangwe by another road, if I could find it. I had not gone far on my quest before I saw another village, and having had enough village work for one day, I made my way quietly up into the forest on the steep hillside overhanging the said village. There was no sort of path up there, and going through a clump of shenja, I slipped, slid, and finally fell plump through the roof of an unprotected hut. What the unfortunate inhabitants were doing, I don't know, but I am pretty sure they were not expecting me to drop in, and a scene of great confusion occurred. My knowledge of Fan dialect then consisted of Kor-kor, so I said that in as fascinating a tone as I could, and explained the rest with three pocket handkerchiefs, a head of tobacco, and a knife which providentially I had stowed in [...] my pockets. I also said I'd pay for the damage, and although this important communication had to be made in trade English, they seemed to understand, for when I pointed to the roof and imitated writing out a book for it, the master of the house said 'Um', and then laid hold of an old lady and pointed to her and then to the roof, meaning clearly I had equally damaged both, and that she was equally valuable.

[...]

The old male [gorilla] rose to his full height (it struck me at the time this was a matter of ten feet at least, but for scientific purposes allowances must be made for a lady's emotions) and looked straight towards us ...

[...]

About five o'clock I was off ahead and noticed a path which I had been told I should meet with, and, when met with, I must follow. The path was slightly indistinct, but by keeping my eye on it I could see it. Presently I came to a place where it went out, but appeared again on the other side of a clump of underbush fairly distinctly. I made a short cut for it and the next news was that I was in a heap, on a lot of spikes, some fifteen feet or so below ground level, at the bottom of a bag-shaped game pit.

It is at these times you realise the blessings of a good thick skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of many people in England, who ought to have known better, and did not do it themselves, and adopted masculine garments, I should have been spiked to the bone, and done for. Whereas, save for a good many bruises, here I was with the fullness of my skirt tucked under me, sitting on nine ebony spikes some twelve inches long, in comparative comfort, howling lustily to be hauled out. The Duke came along first, and looked down at me. I said, 'Get a bush-rope, and haul me out.' He grunted and sat down on a log. The Passenger came next, and he looked down. 'You kill?' says he. 'Not much,' say I; 'get a bush-rope and haul me out.' 'No fit,' says he, and sat down on the log. Presently, however, Kiva and Wiki came up, and Wiki went and selected the one and only bush-rope suitable to haul an English lady, of my exact complexion, age, and size, out of that one particular pit.

[...]

From the deck of the *Niger* I found myself again confronted with my great temptation – the magnificent Mungo Mah Lobeh – the Throne of Thunder [Mount Cameroon]. Now it is none of my business to go up mountains. There's next to no fish on them in West Africa, and precious little rank fetish [Kingsley's study was of fish and fetishes, or religious beliefs], as the population on them is sparse – the African, like myself, abhorring cool air. Nevertheless, I feel quite sure that no white man has ever looked on the great Peak of Cameroon without a desire arising in his mind to ascend it and know in detail the highest point on the western side of the continent, and indeed one of the highest points in all Africa. [...] I have given in to the temptation and am the third Englishman to ascend the Peak and the first to have ascended it from the south-east face. The first man to reach the summit was Sir Richard Burton, accompanied by the great botanist, Gustav Mann. He went up, as did the succeeding twenty-five (mostly Germans) from Babundi; a place on the seashore to the west.

QUESTIONS

Mary Kingsley considered herself a proper scientist and yet her accounts are run through with self-deprecating humour – why do you think she wrote in this way?

The gendering of Kingsley's account is apparently contradictory. On the one hand she extols 'the blessings of a good thick skirt' and discusses the importance of always being properly turned out as an English lady when there was the possibility of meeting other European explorers; on the other, she talks of being the third 'Englishman' to reach the top of a particular mountain. Why might this be the case?