

# SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION AND THE QUESTION OF COLOURED IDENTITY, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO CAPE TOWN, 1875-1910

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## **Introduction**

In recent years there has been a growing, and impressive, body of scholarship on slavery at the Cape. We are also beginning to get a much clearer, and pretty grim, picture of what happened in material terms to the slaves in the countryside after emancipation. What has received far less attention is the question of their social identity/identities in this period. In both respects there is little overt work on the history of ex-slaves and their descendants in Cape Town, the one major urban centre of slavery at the Cape.

The first part of this paper critically reviews existing theories about the role of slavery in moulding the identities of ex-slaves and their descendants in the Cape Colony, in general, in the nineteenth century. A short middle section deals with terminology. The final part attempts to give our answer, in note form, to the question of Coloured identity, and focuses in particular on Cape Town in the late nineteenth century.

One problem is the lack of precision as to who was, or was not, an ex-slave or descendant of slaves after this status had been abolished. There is no detailed reconstitution of Cape Town families that could help in this respect. Yet it is clear that the majority of those previously in bondage were officially recategorized as part of the city's "Coloured" population in 1838, and later described also as "Malay" or "Mixed and Other".

Another problem is the lack of detailed work on the social history of Cape Town between emancipation and 1878. In contrast, there is considerable work on the 1830s and there have been two recent doctoral theses covering the years from 1875 to 1910. It is therefore easier to give this latter period "particular attention" than the intervening decades. Our period closely correlates with significant economic and political change: the discovery of diamonds (1867) and gold (1887) in southern Africa, and Responsible Government at the Cape (1872-1910). This is also the period in which a political organization emerged in Cape Town, which claimed to represent all Coloured people and which was, by 1905, led by the grandson of slaves.

## **Existing Theories**

There would appear to be two poles of opinion as to how the slave past may have affected the social identities of ex-slaves and their descendants, in the post-emancipation period. These are not yet based on much primary research by their proponents, as the latter would admit. One, suggested by Robert Ross almost ten years ago, is that the nature of Cape slavery inhibited the development of any sense of "community" amongst both slaves and their descendants. Their social identities were essentially confined to a sense of belonging to one or other group of subordinated workers. No mutually embracing identity could, or ever did, come into anything other than a "sporadic" existence (Ross, 1982). In contrast, Mohammed Adhikari, albeit in a working paper, argued that Cape slavery helped to bring together the descendants of slaves, Khoisan and Bastards into a mutual "coloured identity" with a "coloured group consciousness" by the end of the nineteenth century. He suggested that this group consciousness was possible because of the similar culture, colour, status, behavioural patterns and values of its adherents (Adhikari, 1989).

In the conclusion of *Cape of Torments*, an otherwise excellent book whose focus is slavery rather than emancipation, Robert Ross ruled out the possibility that the period of slavery contributed to the emergence of "communal consciousness" among the descendants of ex-slaves and Khoisan bonded workers except on "sporadic" occasions:

there is no sense in which the Cape slaves and their descendants ever came to form a true community. All that united them was their legal status and their subordination to their masters, as farm workers, as unskilled labourers, as craftsmen and workmen and as domestic servants.

(Ross, 1989: p 120)

This was a result of the nature of Cape slavery that saw relatively (compared to, say, the American South) small conglomerations of slaves and, Ross argued, very limited possibilities for the emergence of a slave culture. Ross concluded that no form of consciousness could have arisen to create some form of "Coloured nationalism". The "Coloured" politics that came into existence by the early twentieth century was "almost exclusively urban and 'modernist'", and involved an educated elite that wished to deny its slave past. Only once, in an isolated ANC campaign amongst farm workers in Worcester, in 1930, was there an example of use being made of the tradition of slavery for political purposes (and, implicitly, the possibility of a more populist Coloured political identity). "*Mayibuye*", an African nationalist song, gained an Afrikaans version during the campaign. It started: "*Ons bruin mense, seuns van slawe*" ("We brown people, sons of slaves"). But Ross concluded that "No 'Coloured' group was anything but a legal category, imposed by the oppressors from above" (Ross, 1982: pp 119-21). Thus, being Coloured was having a social status thrust upon you and was presumably a meaningless appendage in terms of one's real social identity.

Ross left us wondering about who or what might constitute a "true community". The problem is that, in denying that there ever was a slave community, or possibility of communal consciousness amongst slaves or their descendants, Ross used the concept of community in a vague way. He stated that neither slaves nor their descendants ever formed a true community, but he himself referred to the "slave community" in Cape Town (Ross, 1982: p 20). A slip of the pen, perhaps, but he allowed for the possibility that in the final years of slavery a degree of "communal consciousness" might have arisen amongst slaves in the town.

It is necessary to establish clearly what one understands by a community or communal consciousness before denying their existence. A community could, of course, simply be defined as a group of people who have a sense of identity with one another, in which case there may have been many slave communities, even if they consisted of very small numbers outside of Cape Town. But this definition of community is much the same as our definition of social identity. If we wish to mean more by the term we need to say so, and thereby establish how it might differ from other terms describing group identification such as ethnicity.

Ross was writing before the publication of two books, by Gavin Lewis (1987) and Ian Goldin (1987), that explored the phenomenon of Coloured political organization and identity from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth. Their arguments about the nature of Coloured identity seem close to those of Ross. Both agreed with him that Coloured identity was, at least initially, imposed by whites. But they allowed for the fact that, once imposed, this was an identity that some people so described (by the early twentieth century only a petit-bourgeois/artisanal elite) adopted or used. This was for reasons of political or economic expediency (sometimes in pursuit of an ultimate goal of non-racialism) and/or to differentiate themselves from an African identity and all that that might mean in terms of lower status and greater adverse discrimination. Both Lewis and Goldin saw the crucial period for the emergence of a Coloured identity as coinciding with the mineral revolution. Neither appeared to see slavery as important in explaining the emergence of this identity. Lewis, for

instance, stated that before the 1880s "the heterogeneous nature of those people loosely described as Coloureds ... meant that they lacked any strong unifying sense of Coloured identity" (1987:8).

Neither go much beyond Ross in what they believe a Coloured identity consisted of, once it had emerged. Lewis appeared to suggest that Coloured identity was only political (a bit like being a Democrat or Republican?), and his book concentrated on the nature of the formal politics of the Coloured elite. Goldin has vague statements such as "a distinct Coloured ethnic identity existed only in an incipient form prior to the South African War" (1987: p 21), and showed that at times Coloured workers saw themselves as Coloured compared to White or African workers. But he never explored this "incipient" or any other ethnicity in any detail, and ultimately argued, like Lewis, that Coloured identity was constructed (or manipulated) by White regimes and remained only a political or work-place identity. This, he concluded hopefully, would disappear with non-racial political alliances or trade unionism (1987: pp 243-44).

Ross, Lewis and Goldin were writing in the early 1980s, when even researching into a distinctly Coloured past could (understandably) be seen as conferring legitimacy on the lynchpin of Apartheid ideology: the enforced division of people into official categories, into imposed identities, whether those so labelled wished to be or not. Particularly sensitive at the time was the Botha government's new constitution, with its Tricameral Parliament of White, Coloured and Indian houses. Undoubtedly many people categorized as Coloured did reject both this identity and Botha's "reforms". But by now, 1992, as Apartheid ideology and structures are crumbling, and the Population Registration Act repealed, it is more broadly accepted, and acceptable, to write that a considerable number of South Africans do, at times, think of themselves as Coloured as opposed to African or White. Allan Boesak can be appointed as Western Cape Regional leader of an overtly non-racial political organization, the ANC, at least in part to attract the Coloured vote. This suggests that the roots and nature of Coloured identity might be somewhat more complex and deeper than Ross, Lewis and Goldin implied.

In reviewing Lewis and Goldin, Mohammed Adhikari urged that greater attention be paid to the relationship between Coloured identity and Coloured political organization (1988). More recently, he has argued that Goldin and Lewis confused the concept of "social identity" with "social status", and that the origins of Coloured "social identity" go back well beyond the mineral revolution, to the era of slavery, and that hitherto historians have "committed the awesome condescension of denying coloureds the primary role in the making of their own identity" (Adhikari, 1990).

In his working paper (1989), Adhikari argued that slavery was "central to the creation of the coloured identity". This was because slavery at the Cape brought people of diverse origins together into similar positions of servitude. Assimilation to master-class culture overcame their ethnic and linguistic differences, and subjected them to a common status in a society where status and power "coincided" with colour, and where the status of slaves came to be close to that of Khoisan and Bastards during the course of the eighteenth century. As a racial order of white domination and black subordination solidified by the time of emancipation, "so a general black identity ... started to assert itself and to erode the smaller proto-coloured identities of the various black groups within Cape society" (1989: p 15). Emancipation hastened the process by abolishing the status distinctions between these groups, increasing inter-settlement and marriage, and intensifying white racism. By the late nineteenth century "coloured identity" had reached its "mature" or "fully fledged" form (1989: p 1).

Adhikari argued that the nature of racial slavery and its relationship with other forms of racially bonded labour provided "the cultural foundation for a future common identity", even if this "cultural foundation", in his argument, was assimilated (1989: p 9). In this respect he is agreeing with Ross that no distinct slave culture came into existence. But Adhikari suggested that "negative behavioural patterns" and "values" can be associated with those

who assumed this identity, and implied (if not very clearly) that these, together with colour and status, differentiated Coloureds in their own eyes from White colonists with whom they shared the same "cultural foundation".

Adhikari's arguments are significant correctives to those that have tended to suggest that no commonalities (other than status) previously existed amongst people who came to be described as Coloured. We would agree that there is more to Coloured identity than political or economic expediency. But Adhikari's use of terminology, as with others who have tackled this topic, is a weakness in the working paper (if doubtless one that will be attended to in subsequent work). Most obviously he never defined what he understood by "identity", or whether he saw it as a different concept from, say, ethnicity, or community. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that it is not at all clear in Adhikari's paper quite what identity is formed at what time. In other words, how does a "general black" or "proto-coloured" identity differ from the "mature" coloured identity apparently in existence by the beginning of the twentieth century? The very use of these terms cries out for greater clarity of definition. And Adhikari still needs to prove his contention that "commonalities helped to build a perception of social equivalence amongst slaves with reference to the dominant European component of the population" and that "this notion slowly and fitfully extended to other components of the black population" (1989: p 5). Unless he does so, he cannot claim that there was a "group consciousness" before the late nineteenth century.

Adhikari lays down the challenge that Coloureds be accorded a "primary role in the making of their own identity" (1990: pp 109-10). But, apart from the lack of clarity over precisely what he means by this term, his paper of the previous year still portrayed Coloureds ("proto-coloureds", "blacks") as primarily passive victims - in his account they received colonial culture, lower status, negative behavioural patterns and values. They seem to be active only when inter-marrying amongst themselves.

### **Terminology: Identity, Ethnicity, Community and Culture**

Identity is an ambivalent term, which dictionaries can define as meaning both a sense of individuality and a sense of sameness. Any person's identity presumably exists in both senses of the word. Someone could have several identities, including a sense of individuality as well as a sense of belonging to a particular occupational or ethnic group, or to a community - what I would understand by the term "social identity". Social identities do not have to evolve in a linear and predictable way. Once people are seen by themselves or others as, say, Coloureds, Zulu, English, fishermen, or District Six residents, they do not necessarily take on such identities permanently. Some (or many) may reject identities they once accepted or identities imposed upon them. Others may take on new identities or identities they once rejected. From the examples we have cited, if not from common sense, it is clear that the terms we use to describe social identities (such as ethnic, worker, communal, race or class) can and should, if they are to have individual analytical value, suggest differences of content or type, even if, at times, they might be mutually reinforcing.

Ethnicity I use (perhaps incorrectly, but it seems less ugly than "ethnie") as a noun for ethnic. An ethnic group is present when, firstly, a segment of a larger society is seen by others to differ according to culture, physical appearance or ancestry, or a combination of these; secondly, when some of the people so categorized see themselves in this way; and, thirdly, when they take part in "shared activities" built around these perceptions. By definition, the existence of an ethnic group implies the existence of at least one other (see Yinger, 1986).

The way that the concept of community has been used in South Africa has been explored in a most impressive way by Belinda Bozzoli (1987). Community has been used as a term to describe township membership, people undergoing forced removal, or as a synonym for (non-African) ethnic groups. What would appear usefully to distinguish the term community from other concepts referring to social identity (such as ethnicity), is to give community a

spatial dimension. But if the spatial dimension is necessarily present for a community to exist, a community can, of course, coincide with, or be reinforced by, ethnicity, class or commonality of occupation. Obviously communities are not necessarily closed, and spatial dimensions could change. As Bozzoli has stressed, a sense of community has often been strengthened in the South African context by an external hostile environment.

Culture, as I understand the term, means the values, symbols, and customs that a group of people have in common. Also, the social practices, institutional and informal activities, as well as the artefacts and spoken words, with which the same people express their values. Modes of cultural expression, such as language or religious beliefs, will be subject to contest or reinterpretation by different classes, communities or ethnic groups (social identities which are themselves in a state of flux). An example of contested cultural expression is provided by E P Thompson's analysis of methodism in his *Making of the English Working Class*, and I use the term class in the well known way that he defined it in that work.

The superficially similar cultural expressions that appear to unite the kinds of social groups we have defined were, I would argue, produced through mutual interaction of what might previously have appeared to be cultures specific to one or other of them. The resulting fusion will demonstrate the temporary dominance, or hegemony, of one group over others. But reinterpretations and contestations continue and, if they are sufficiently radical, can lead to the emergence of what could, and probably now would, be called a new culture or cultures peculiar to a social group.

The appearance of a "new" culture would signify the emergence of, and underpin, a new social group's identity. In this respect, cultural difference (or "newness") is at least in part about "appearance" or perception. This would not, of course, mean that cultural interaction, or struggle, with other groups would cease. Thus Peter Burke can write about the emergence of distinctly "elite" and "popular" cultures in the early modern period in Europe, but with both cultures continuing to influence one another and with the ability to "reunite" (Burke, 1981). No culture is unchanging or closed to "outside" influences. Like social group formation, culture is a process.

### Conclusions, Speculations and Hypotheses

- 1) It is important to remember that social identities are changeable, and that different identities can co-exist. Equally, ethnicity, for example, can help underpin community, and vice-versa. Identities, and social formations, result from unpredictable processes, a point downplayed by Elphick and Giliomee (1989), as well as Adhikari (1989).
- 2) Any search for a Coloured ethnicity that sees this emerging in a linear or inevitable way out of slavery is based on faulty premises. We also do not know nearly enough about the period between slavery and emancipation to be confident about making generalizations about ethnic identities in this period.
- 3) There is, as yet, no evidence which demonstrates the existence of a specifically Coloured, or Kleurling, ethnic group (in my understanding of the term), as opposed to "Malay", "Hottentot", or "Griqua" ethnicities, that would appear to meet my definition before the late nineteenth century. This does not mean that perceived physical difference associated with different social status was not part of individual and group consciousness before this period.
- 4) What we can say with some degree of certainty is that communities, consisting predominantly of ex-slaves and Khoisan, were formed within the period of slavery and continued to be formed thereafter (e.g. Bank, 1991; Ludlow, 1992). The nature, location and poverty of most of these communities was in part influenced by the economic and social legacy of slavery. But it was also influenced by the fact that political power remained in the

hands of landowners and merchants from 1853 onwards, and that between emancipation and that date the imperial power, Britain, had not intervened significantly to alter the correlation between socio-economic dominance and "Whiteness".

5) Some of these communities were in the countryside - on mission stations, in rural townships, and in the form of rare rural settlements such as that at Kat River (Kirk, 1980; Peires, 1987). Others were in towns, although spatial boundaries were less clear (a feature of inner-city communities?). More research is needed into the kinship and occupational ties, and cultural forms, that undoubtedly helped force community identities in these places, but it seems that all these factors were essential ingredients in the process (Bank, 1991; Ludlow, 1992; Bickford-Smith, 1993). We need to investigate the connections between communities. These may well have occurred through the same factors that helped forge individual communities, and allowed for a high degree of community openness where spatial and economic considerations allowed. Other cross-community connections would have been provided by migration and labour mobility. It would seem certain that the mineral revolution increased the importance of these last two factors in stretching connections across greater distances.

6) Language is one cultural form we now know something about in the pre-industrial Cape. Creole-Dutch or proto-Afrikaans facilitated communication between communities. This language was not just the result of slave/Khoisan "acculturation" to "colonial" culture (or the culture of their "masters"). It was forged through social interaction and mutual linguistic influence (Ross, 1982; Den Besten, 1989; Davids, 1990). What we know little about in any detail, although we know that they existed, are variations in dialects and lexicons. We do, of course, know that one feature of the "Coloured élite", who became involved in formal colonial politics in the second half of the nineteenth century was that they could speak English. We must conclude on this point that language itself is a process that was constantly changing before and after attempts at standardization began. Language did not inevitably unite or divide the ex-banded. Almost by definition, however, linguistic similitude would characterize a community.

7) For the period from 1875 onwards, we have a greater body of primary research than for the previous four decades to draw on in understanding how overtly Coloured political organization occurred. I have argued in detail elsewhere (drawing, of course, on the ideas of Lewis and Goldin), as to how this happened, but have also tried to show that there was more to "Coloured identity" than political, or even economic, expediency (Bickford-Smith, 1989 and 1993, forthcoming). A crucial aspect of the development of Coloured political organizations was the fusion of Muslim and Christian political initiatives under the joint label of Coloured, where I have agreed with Lewis that the actual term "Coloured" had been imposed by people who thought of themselves as Whites. These initiatives were initially urban and centred on Cape Town. But after 1902 the overtly Coloured political organization, the APO, had branches in town and countryside. This political mobilization was part of a process that led to the emergence of Coloured ethnicity in the twentieth century. Other factors which were certainly important, and observable from Cape Town research, were:

- a) Increased segregation of "Other than Whites" from "White" from the 1870s onwards, which by the 1890s reached down into institutions frequented by unskilled workers and the "lumpen proletariat", as well as by some members of the "élite", e.g. schools, hospitals, prisons, pubs and sports fields.
- b) Legislation that differentiated between "Natives" and other people deemed to be "non-White", such as liquor laws and residential segregation.
- c) New divisions of labour that sandwiched Coloured between Whites and "Natives" amongst both artesans and unskilled workers.

d) Within inner Cape Town at least, cultural forms, such as songs and festivities, furthered the possibility of Coloured ethnicity replacing Malay, as they could appeal to both Muslim and Christian alike. Examples would be the New Year "Coon" Carnival and "Ghoemaliedjies", also known as "straatlied" or street songs. The anniversary of emancipation continued to be remembered and have meaning for many members of this inner-city community, and the origins of the Carnival can at least in part be traced back to the era of slavery. Emancipation was celebrated or commemorated in many different ways. This was presumably why some Coloured political mobilizers attempted to make it a kind of Coloured political holiday in the early twentieth century (Bickford-Smith, 1993, forthcoming). But specific celebration of emancipation seems to have disappeared in the course of the early twentieth century, and with it the association between slavery and Coloured ethnicity in overt social activity.

e) The formation of what George Frederickson would call parallel, and which became specifically Coloured, institutions - most obviously temperance organizations, some friendly societies and sporting organizations which could cut across divisions of class, status or occupation.

Although these parallel institutions and political mobilization may have been initiated by "élites", almost all people officially categorized as Coloured in 1904 would have had occasion to think and describe themselves as Coloured. In this respect the Anglo-Boer war could have been added as point f), but I was already well into the alphabet. Certainly Bill Nasson's recent book (Nasson, 1991) strongly suggests that the war experience was of crucial importance in spreading a sense of Coloured ethnicity across community boundaries. But I would once again stress that Coloured ethnicity, like any ethnicity, was only one of several co-existent identities available to its possessor, where one identity will have moments of greater salience than others. Social identities are processes subject to change. Coloured ethnicity has a history, and much of this still has to be written.

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dedicated housekeeping and care for her father, was released from her duties, aged thirty, by his death. Almost immediately she announced that she was "just off to skylark and enjoy myself in Africa".[7] Similarly Isabella Bird was occupied as the family spinster until the age of forty, looking after her elderly parents. By the time they died she was suffering from a debilitating illness, depression and acute insomnia. Travel was prescribed, and she became addicted. It is possible to argue that travel was often an "individual gesture of the housebound, man-dominated Victorian woman. Trained from birth to an almost impossible ideal of womanly submission and self-discipline, of obligation to class and devotion to religion, she had need of an emotional as well as an intellectual outlet. This she found, often late in life, in travel ... she was able to enjoy a freedom of action unthinkable at home." [8] But, despite her new-found sense of freedom - her "free-legged air" - Isabella Bird, like most women travellers, was continually torn between the two conflicting landscapes of self-fulfilment and duty.

It is clear that, for a wider social history of imperialism, recognition of the role and impact of women in the realm of empire is urgently needed, not least because of the discrepancy between the dominant culture's images of colonial women and women's presentation of their own reality. The desire to explore history "from below" - from the perspectives of ordinary people instead of the dominant classes - has in recent years drastically altered the study of history. This partly coincides with the frequent concern of feminist historians and literary critics to recover submerged "women's voices" in history and literature. Arguments about how history has silenced, missed or failed to credit the female voice are familiar. Listening to women's voices, interpreting their lives, studying women's writings, and learning from their experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Relatively little has been written about women travellers, pioneers and explorers, and until recently the stereotypes have remained largely unchallenged.[9] The popular perception of women travellers is of a series of extraordinary (often highly exotic and eccentric) individuals who set out to explore unknown and dangerous frontiers out of a "sense of adventure". However, women travellers and travel writers are far more varied and complex than this view suggests. The label "traveller" implies someone for whom travelling is an end in itself, but women journeyed to Africa for very different reasons and with different aims: some were indeed adventurous explorers; others travelled to relatively safe and settled outposts of empire; some were scientists or anthropologists or missionaries who travelled with the intention of broadening the frontiers of human knowledge or carrying "civilization into darkest Africa" - an intellectual or spiritual journey as well as a physical one. For some women - particularly during the last decades of the nineteenth century - new opportunities were opening up in the fields of nursing, mission work, teaching, botany, and so forth, which provided the opportunity for travel. Often empire provided career opportunities for women not available at home, for example for doctors or teachers. But a great many women who wrote travel accounts were "accidental tourists" or "ornaments of empire", who accompanied families or husbands to colonial postings. Many of these women recorded their experiences, leaving behind a rich legacy of travelogues, diaries, letters, autobiography, journalism and fiction.

Despite their variety, British women travellers had in common the signifying system of their home culture and social class: a common understanding of language, values, symbolic structures, sacred and secular rituals, hidden meanings and reference points. Once in Africa, particularly if they remained in a colonial town or enclave, they were expected to learn the new social prescriptions that upheld the power relations of imperial culture. All these women travellers and writers journey away from a familiar environment towards imperial frontiers, sometimes also crossing the boundaries of convention and traditional feminine restraint. There is no doubt that many middle-class women found life in Britain oppressive and limiting. Women travellers tend to write about the domestic sphere as cloistered, cramping ambition and limiting the imagination, and about the world beyond "home" as liberating. A number of women travel writers use the metaphor of leaving a protected garden and entering the wild landscape beyond to portray the experience of travel. For Gertrude Bell, "the gates of the enclosed garden are thrown open, the chain at the entrance of the sanctuary is lowered

... and behold! the immeasurable world ...".[10] And Alexandra David-Neel describes how she "craved to go beyond the garden gate, follow the road that passed it by, and set out for the unknown". [11] Another common trend is that travellers have an "outsider's view" of Africa, a perception and understanding of the "Dark Continent" which is heavily mediated by their race, class and gender in the colonial context. In their travel writings, landscapes and people often seem to be extensions of the European imagination, filtered through a colonial consciousness. Raised in a Britain of empire, expansion and conquest, women travellers often shared a common perception of Africa and Africans, and their writings reveal how they construct the "difference" between themselves and "others" in racial and cultural terms.[12] Portrayal of the "other" in colonial texts is usually not a reciprocal discourse. Travellers write about them, for them or against them - but the "other" remains, like Friday in J M Coetzee's novel *Foe*, voiceless. Finally, as women in what was structured and encoded as a "man's world", female travellers' experiences were "gendered": one of the most fascinating aspects of exploring the lives and writings of women travellers is that it provides the opportunity to examine how the power relations of gender are perpetuated, exploited or transformed in the colonial context, and to what extent women accept, collude with or resist their subordinate gender status.

Although it is possible to see common trends in the experiences of women travellers of the nineteenth century as a whole, it is crucial to maintain a historical perspective in order to understand how lives and contexts change over time. South Africa has a long history of exploration and travel in the interior: François le Vaillant, with his romantic visions of "noble savages", John Barrow, William Burchell the renowned illustrator, Francis Galton and David Livingstone were some of the men who described and codified the landscape and people for European audiences. For women travellers, South Africa offered distinct opportunities and appeal. The Cape had a long history of contact with Europe, and South Africa was increasingly seen, as British economic interest and political influence in the region developed over the course of the nineteenth century, as an extension of the motherland. With the first massive wave of British settlers to the Cape, in 1820, the colony became a centre of immigration. For many travellers it presented a unique combination of the familiar and secure, with the exotic and potentially dangerous. Settlers, soldiers and colonial administrators attempted to consolidate the ever-expanding frontiers, while explorers, traders, hunters and missionaries ventured further into the interior. As the sub-continent was gradually "opened up", fortune hunters and miners, invalids sent by British doctors to convalesce in the warm climate, workers eager to escape the harsh conditions of city slums (encouraged by a government equally eager to get rid of them), and many more streamed to what, by the closing decades of the century, had become a region of political significance, the "coming country".

Partly because it had a substantial settler population, and was thus considered relatively "civilized" and safe, many British women travelled to the Cape and often further afield. Through examining why and how women end up travelling in South Africa, an interesting pattern emerges. During the early decades of the nineteenth century it was virtually impossible for middle-class women to travel independently. Most women coming to the Cape accompanied family or husbands: Lady Anne Barnard(1750-1825) wrote letters and kept journals recording her experiences as the wife of the first British Colonial Secretary of the Cape; Mary Smith came to the Cape in 1819 to marry the missionary Robert Moffat, and travelled far beyond the colony's frontiers; Harriet Ward, an army wife, accompanied her husband to South Africa in the 1840s, and soon found herself caught up in a frontier war. One of the few women travellers who did manage to travel independently was "James Barry" (pseudonym for Miranda Stuart), but she had to dress and live as a man, qualifying as a regimental surgeon and travelling to the Cape in 1816. Barry's true identity was allegedly discovered after her death.[13]

Towards the closing decades of the century, however, it became increasingly possible for middle-class women to travel independently. During the second half of the century the social position and expectations of both working-class and middle-class women began, for

economic reasons, to change substantially as structural transformations and technology altered and increased the scope for women's employment. There was also a striking increase in secondary education for girls. These changes became obvious in the last decades of the century, though the more visible aspects of women's emancipation were still largely confined to the middle classes: "The transformations within the bourgeoisie after the 1870s inevitably provided more scope for its women, and especially its daughters ... it created a substantial leisure class of females of independent means, irrespective of marriage ..." [14] It is from this group that many women travellers emerged. As conditions changed and opportunities for women increased, women with a sense of adventure, or scientific and career interests, were able to travel to South Africa by themselves. Marianne North, an amateur botanist and artist, came to the Cape in 1872 to collect and paint botanical specimens for her gallery in Kew Gardens. But, although she could travel where she wished, and without the protection of husband or family, there were many other restrictions placed on her and her fellow women travellers. North was, for example, never recognized as a scientist or botanist: as a woman, she was merely "an amateur collector". Financial independence, leisure time, a sense of adventure and a greater freedom of movement for middle-class women allowed Florence Dixie, wealthy, pampered daughter of the Marquis of Queensberry, to come to South Africa in the 1880s to hunt, while Alice Balfour took a pleasure trip from the Cape to Mashonaland between the Zulu and Boer wars. The manuscript of Balfour's book, *Twelve Hundred Miles in a Waggon* (1895), was full of political references, but these were removed by the publishers and it remains a light-hearted narrative of a Victorian tour "off the beaten track". Sarah Heckford, on the other hand, came to South Africa partly to improve her health, but also because she hoped to make her fortune and find an independent life in Africa. Finally, the South African war at the end of the century brought a flood of nurses, philanthropists, wives of colonial officials, and so on, to South Africa, many of whom wrote about their experiences.

By briefly examining the lives of three women - Mary Moffat, Harriet Ward and Sarah Heckford - who travelled to South Africa at different historical moments, it is possible to trace the way in which opportunities for travel changed over the course of the century, and how women increasingly took advantage of their new environments in order to negotiate their gender status and extend the boundaries of what was acceptable "feminine conduct". These women are of interest because they were also involved - directly or indirectly - in three key areas of the "opening up" of the South African hinterland, namely missionary endeavour, military conquest, and trade. Because of the limitations of space, discussion is necessarily episodic and impressionistic.

Throughout the nineteenth century a common motive for travel was missionary work. The London Missionary Society was the first to develop a network of stations in the interior, dedicated to the Christianization and "civilization" of Africans. Missionary activity should be seen within the context of the colonial enterprise, which required seizing the hearts and minds of Africans: inevitably missionaries were also agents of cultural change as they strove to transform communities they perceived as essentially barbaric and primitive, but the extent to which they can be regarded as "footsoldiers of capitalism" is a controversial issue. [15] Although missions were from the beginning entangled in colonial processes, this was not envisaged by the early missionaries, who were products of the evangelical revivals that swept England in the late eighteenth century. In 1819 Mary Smith of Manchester set sail for Cape Town to marry the missionary Robert Moffat, who had arrived a few years earlier with the London Missionary Society. Her parents had for three years strongly opposed the marriage and it is a measure of Mary's determination and strength of character that they eventually allowed her to leave for a hard, potentially dangerous life as a missionary's wife in an alien and far-off land. The term "missionary wife" is, in fact, misleading. Deeply religious since her youth, Mary Moffat shared her husband's beliefs and sense of evangelical mission, and in her new environment became a missionary in her own right, although she has generally been overlooked for the more visible achievements of her husband. The Moffats worked as pioneer missionaries north of the Orange river, near Kuruman, under conditions of extreme hardship and "spiritual barrenness", far removed from the picture of rewarding missionary

work accepted in England. She was wholly engrossed in her husband's work. In the midst of drought, famine, warfare, and strife caused by the increasing pressures of white settlers on the northern frontiers of the Cape colony, Mary Moffat built a home, taught the Gospel, bore her children and ran the mission station while her husband was away. This was a far cry from her comfortable and relatively uneventful upbringing. Robert Moffat recorded their activities in letters, journals and in *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (1842): by the late nineteenth century, such epic accounts of missionary "labours and scenes" had "become an established European genre, taking its place beside popular travel and exploration writings, with which it shared features of intent and style".[16] Mary Moffat's letters to parents and friends provide an interesting counterpoint to the accounts of her husband and other missionaries.

On arriving at the Cape Mary was shocked to find that missionaries were widely despised and resented in the colony, and that the LMS was in disarray: dissension in the ranks, liaisons between missionaries and Khoi women, and missionary interference in political matters such as the slavery issue (the Cape economy in 1820 was still slave-based), were some of the reasons for their unpopularity. LMS missionaries, strong-willed, independent, burning with eagerness to spread the Gospel, saw an immediate task among the KhoiKhoi - poor, dispossessed, without rights. Working from isolated mission stations they established small settlements, evangelized, taught literacy and other rudimentary skills: symbols of "civilization". To a large extent non-conformist missionaries found themselves positioned ambiguously between the interests of colonial farmers and local Africans. Partly because of the scandal surrounding missionaries who had taken Khoi wives or concubines, the LMS favoured married men. Wives were regarded as a source of aid, comfort and sexual fulfilment, which helped missionaries avoid the temptation of local women: "Though it was natural to think of women as the weaker sex and young women of good family were hedged about by protective prohibitions which must for many have resulted in fatal nervous frustrations, the LMS in its early years expected its missionaries to have wives and families, and took it for granted that the women would endure whatever hardships were to be met alongside their men." [17]

In 1820 the Moffats trekked into the desert region north of the frontier to revive the mission station at Lattakoo (Dithakong), and to make it the cornerstone of Tswana evangelism. Beyond Beaufort West every semblance of familiarity disappeared: the tenuous links with friends and with home almost vanished. Moreover, "the Missionary road ... was a passage across a highly conflicted social map, one not always receptive to the contours of the evangelist's dream". [18] The Moffats were trekking into an arena of "struggle between colonial factions over native resources", where, almost from the start, missionaries' "significance in local power relations was mapped out for them by both whites and blacks". [19] Letters from the Moffats (which took months to reach England) tell us of their anxiety and exhaustion. From Mary Moffat's letters to her parents and friends in England we learn a great deal about the resilience, fortitude and unwavering faith of the author as well as about daily life at the mission and her perception of the local Africans. Not surprisingly, many of her letters are taken up with the spiritual wellbeing (or lack thereof) of potential converts. Writing to her parents at the end of 1822: "Alas, everything is much the same, no attention to the word of God ... We hope God is working secretly, though slowly, and though their carnal hearts are still enmity towards him, some of their superstitions are giving way." [20] After very briefly mentioning that she is "solitary and alone", and meets few "European Christian friends", she returns to her main concern: "There is much need of strong faith and perseverance to keep up the spirits. If they could be brought to argue or reason, there would be some comfort; but as it is, the missionary has nothing amongst them to exercise his own mind, but retires from them in melancholy gloom ..." [21] For Mary Moffat, as for the majority of missionaries with a spiritual and civilizing mission, the Africans around her were primarily heathens who needed to be rescued. This is the recurring theme of her letters up to 1828, when the first convert was eventually won. It is no surprise that the first missions made few converts: there was a massive gulf between their religious beliefs and experiences and those of the peoples of southern Africa. Missions succeeded best

in communities where socio-political structures had broken down. In Mary Moffat's letters, Africans are often portrayed as childlike and in need of protection, primitive, and occasionally barbaric. In one letter Mary Moffat repeats an account she has heard about cannibalism: "I know you will shudder when I tell you that they did it without the least emotion ... We have reason to believe this has long been the custom with them ..." [22] The Griquas are described as "only now emerging from their barbarous state", and the women's "filthiness incorrigible". Nevertheless, they are regarded with a more favourable eye than the Boer farmers. In Mary Moffat's letters as well as her husband's *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (1842), the local people are part of the desert landscape: they are devoid of history, and give the reader "glimpses of radical otherness".

During the 1820s the mission was repeatedly part of the battleground in a war between various groups of Africans uprooted or dislocated by the expansion of the colony, which had a far-reaching impact. Occasionally the mission was also attacked by refugees or marauding bands, and there was widespread starvation, poverty and hardship in the area, exacerbated by drought. By 1824 she was writing regularly to her parents about the dangers surrounding the mission: "I cannot vouch for the truth of this report, but a man was here yesterday, who said he heard the firing of guns. Thus, you see, we are surrounded on every hand. It requires some little fortitude to live at rest in such a tumultuous land amidst barbarians, but we trust that 'He who hath delivered will yet deliver' ..." [23] Although the mission inevitably played a political role, Mary Moffat's main concern was still the winning of souls for God.

In the years between 1820 and 1828 Mary Moffat bore four children, established a "little paradise in this wilderness country", and saw her marriage ripen into "a partnership of mutual dependence and trust developed through years of shared hardship and danger". [24] At the end of 1828 Mary Moffat could write to her father: "We have at present a candidate for baptism, who, though not a Mochuana, may prove the beginning of a Christian church among them." [25] Mary Moffat travelled to South Africa as a missionary wife; but once she was plunged into the alien environment of the Kalahari desert, her travels to South Africa provided her with the opportunity to express herself spiritually through her evangelical mission. Her journey is thus a spiritual as well as a geographical one, and gave her a sense of personal achievement and self-fulfilment perhaps not available in England. Nevertheless, her position as loyal "helpmeet" was one of relative powerlessness, and a great deal of further research is needed to explore the ambiguities of her life and work, in particular the constraints placed by social structure on human agency.

The arrival of the 1820 settlers at the Cape heralded a more permanent English-speaking population in South Africa and the cultural colonization of the Cape, including the "acceptance, often unstated and unconsciously held, of the 'natural' superiority of the English gentleman". [26] Such attitudes were powerful determinants of how women travellers perceived the African interior as well as settler society. Harriet Ward, born in Norfolk in 1808, daughter of a military family, set sail for the Cape in 1842 to accompany her husband, Captain John Ward, to the "kaffir wars" on the Eastern Cape frontier. She was by this stage a seasoned traveller, having accompanied him on all his foreign service. The military, like the colonial service, was a male institution in all respects: with its masculine ideology, rituals of power and hierarchy, and rigid gender divisions, the small minority of women who accompanied their husbands on foreign service were marginalized, subordinate and dependent on their husband's social position and rank. Although she appears to conform in almost every way to the stereotype of the colonial memsahib in terms of values, conventions and outlook, Ward was unusual in that she carved out a career for herself as a novelist and political commentator - something that may not have been possible for her in Britain. It is hoped that further research will tell us more about Ward and that an analysis of gender relations within the imperial culture will show in more detail the restrictions placed on women as wives dependent on their husband's position in society.

Like Mary Moffat, Ward experienced adventures that would have horrified her staid and decorous stay-at-home friends in England. Before she had even set foot in the Cape, the

family (including a very young child) suffered both scarlet fever and shipwreck on the miserable troopship, the *Abercrombie Robinson*. After a long, uncomfortable and often dangerous wagon trek, she eventually arrived at the Grahamstown barracks, and found herself in the middle of a war on the Eastern Cape frontier, where land-hungry settlers were locked in conflict with African societies to the north. Life on the frontier was hard; besides the fighting, living conditions were difficult and risks to health high. During the lengthy campaign Ward and her family suffered the usual camp hardships of sickness, anxiety and ennui. To fill the long and anxious hours she kept a journal and composed a history of "Kaffir country", giving an account of the fighting from a British point of view, which was published hot on the heels of the signing of the peace treaty in 1847.

Not much is known about Ward's life in South Africa, but she left behind a novel and journals which give the reader a profound insight into her attitudes towards and experiences and understanding of this "savage land", as well as an oblique but fascinating view of political developments, imperial attitudes and life on the frontier in the 1840s. Her novel *Jasper Lyle: a Tale of Kaffirland* (1852), for example, is based on her own experiences and understanding of the situation in and around Grahamstown, and is a direct response to the frontier conflict: she expresses settler concerns about the defence of the colony against Xhosa insurgents, the threat of "internal rebellion" by the disaffected Boers or Africans inside the colony, and illegal arms trading across the frontier. The novel is striking in its expression of dominant settler interests, virulently critical of missionaries, who "interfere with the natives", and a justification and motivation for British settlement in the Eastern Cape. *Jasper Lyle* provides the author with a useful ideological framework for the insertion of her ideas about colonial conquest and consolidation, the imperial spirit, and racial superiority. The ideological landscape of the novel - as with most colonial fiction and travel writing - is divided into the colony, with its "green and undulating parks", and the threatening landscape beyond the frontier. The colony is a paradise that contrasts invitingly with "the crowded homes of England, its pallid manufacturing children, its cities with dark buildings jammed together, its thronged populace, toiling, toiling on, with heaven's sunlight bricked out ...". [27] The landscape is also fraught with racial tension, with loyal and beleaguered settlers determined to protect the colony against the savage hordes beyond the frontier.

The novel dovetails neatly with the ideas expressed in Ward's journal, *Five Years in Kaffirland* (1848), where she advocates an aggressive policy of expansion and conquest alongside mass immigration. Her writing is informed by racist and segregationist thinking. Ward's portrayal of Africans is an excellent example of how colonial writers, eager to explain and codify the indigenous population into ethnographic categories, tend to construct Africans as "the Other". As Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out, travel writing often homogenizes Africans into a collective "they", and occasionally the iconic "he" - the standard male specimen.[28] This is typical of Ward's journals and political commentary on the colony: Africans are even located in separate, ahistorical and decontextualized "manners-and-customs" chapters or textual bantustans. Writing within a context of conquest, Ward also focuses on the need to "pacify" or "civilize" the indigenous population, and assesses their amenability to domination and potential as a future proletariat. "Manners-and-customs" discourse flourishes in frontier situations, like Ward's: "nowhere are the notions of normal, familiar action and given systems of difference in greater jeopardy than on the imperial frontier. The Europeans confront not only unfamiliar Others but unfamiliar selves ... It is no accident that, in the literature of the imperial frontier, manners-and-customs description has always flourished as a normalizing force and now retains a kind of credibility and authority it has lost elsewhere. It is a mainstay of travel and exploration writing; and under the rubric of ethnography, it has been professionalized into an academic discipline which serves, in part, to mediate the shock of contact on the frontier." [29]

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the majority of British women travellers found themselves, like Ward, within the confines of colonial compounds or settler communities in a foreign land. Even in remote areas there were centres - like Grahamstown - that were

established, familiar and British in terms of buildings, language, dress, and the exaggerated traditions of exiled and colonial communities. All travellers initially disembarked at colonial extensions of "home", like Durban or Cape Town. Here the middle-class wives, daughters and sisters of missionaries, settlers, colonial officials and army officers had to reproduce the homes and reinforce the lifestyles they had left behind. Although the predominantly male population of settler or colonial societies had initially resisted the intrusion of women into the masculine domain of imperial expansion, women were over time drawn into the imperial enterprise.[30] They were gradually "incorporated into the elaborate and rigid forms of social organization and ceremony through which [racial and class] distance was expressed". [31] The degree of British women's inclusion in the dominant culture thus changed alongside the stages of the development of imperial control. Women often fortified their own sense of British middle-class identity by emphasizing their pale skin, dress, conduct, rituals, and so on. As late as the early twentieth century, Constance Larymore, first wife of a British Resident allowed to accompany her husband to Nigeria, had this advice for colonial wives: "Always wear corsets, even for tête-à-tête home dinner on the warmest evenings; there is something about their absence almost as demoralising as hair in curling pins." [32] Harriet Ward reveals in her writing a rigid acceptance not only of British racial and class hierarchies, but also of the dominant values, mores and attitudes pertaining to gender. Ward is in many ways a contradictory figure. She is clearly unusual in that she travelled to a dangerous place rather than staying safely in England, or even in a safer part of the Cape, along with most other army wives. She had to some extent broken out of the conventional mould for middle-class British women, and yet in every other way - racial attitudes, sense of British superiority, and so on - she is extremely conventional. Clearly she found frontier life exhilarating, in powerful contrast to the lethargy and restrictions of home, and perhaps she shared with other contemporary women travellers an enhanced sense of control over her life in the face of real or imagined danger. As Mary Gaunt, another traveller in Africa, explains, confronting danger can sometimes be empowering: "there is something in the thought of danger that must be overcome, that you yourself can help to overcome, that quickens the blood and gives an added zest to life". [33]

By the 1880s so many women were travelling outside Britain that Lilius Campbell Davidson wrote *Hints to Lady Travellers* (1889). Not only does this book give an enlightening picture of the possibilities opening up for women, it also gives us some ideas of the restriction from which middle-class women were emerging: for example, there is a whole section on how to buy a railway ticket, clearly not a task ordinarily performed by a lady. Mrs Sarah Heckford was definitely not the kind of woman in need of advice on how to buy railway tickets. Travelling independently to South Africa in the 1870s, she is in some way an archetypal intrepid Victorian lady traveller, eager to escape the conventions and restrictions of her life in Britain: in her own words, she longed to "leap the barriers of young-lady-dom", even if they were "armed with painfully sharp spikes". Born Sarah Goff in Dublin in 1842, child of a well-to-do Anglo-Irish family, Sarah spent most of her childhood in several different countries in Europe. Her parents died young (the father probably having committed suicide) and Sarah became gravely ill with an infection that left her lame and with a slight deformity of her right shoulder. Like so many other women travellers of the time, her ill health would one day be an excuse to go travelling.

Sarah and her sister had a strictly conventional upbringing under the protection of an uncle, but in 1860 the two young women formed their own establishment, their inheritance of £15000 each adequate for maintaining a middle-class lifestyle of servants, carriage and horses. Sarah wrote: "I found myself possessed of a good fortune and absolutely my own mistress. My uncle died shortly after and so the last link that bound me to obedience of anyone but myself was broken." [34] But there were still the social conventions of Victorian society to contend with: "The inert weight of family influence well nigh choked my life, for ... that which is called life by many is not life at all." [35] At this stage Sarah met some of the leaders of various suffrage and women's movements: although she was never directly involved, she may well have been influenced by some of their ideas.[36] Her scandalized relatives deplored her unconventional behaviour and this brought about a final break. Her

unacceptable behaviour included stopping church attendance, and visiting the East End, which in later life she regarded as the beginning of the development of her social conscience. Unease, restlessness and unformed ambition crystallized into the idea of becoming a doctor (an ambition never realized), a very unconventional idea in an era where women were regarded as "unfit" for the profession, and only one woman doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell, had managed to get herself placed on the British Medical Register.

In 1866 England's last great cholera epidemic struck London, and ironically this provided a key to Sarah's freedom: she volunteered to become a nurse. Philanthropy, acts of charity and concern for the poor were not unusual amongst middle-class women, but Sarah in this instance displayed particular courage. At the time cholera was a terrifying, often fatal disease. Deaths numbered 8000, more than half in the East End. At the Wapping District Cholera Hospital and at her nearby lodgings Sarah for the first time directly confronted the desperate situation of the urban poor. She also met Calcutta-born Dr Nathaniel Heckford, son of a British master mariner and his "eurasian" wife, whom she married in 1867. Back at home after the epidemic, Sarah now found herself a heroine amongst her friends and relations, feted and admired. But Sarah Heckford was not made for a conventional life: thanks to her inheritance, she and her husband were now able to put into practice a dream they both cherished. Giving up a comfortable life in Belgravia, Heckford moved to the East End with her husband, where they established a sorely-needed hospital for children - a history recorded in her book, *The Story of the East London Hospital* (1887). The life of constant hardship and shortage of money Sarah nevertheless calls "a life of fun and frolic".

Nathaniel became ill and died in December 1871, aged 29. Sarah was devastated, and never married again, but the event also launched her on a series of travels through various countries. She went to Italy, primarily for health reasons, then Egypt and India - regarded by her friends as eccentric and daring behaviour for a woman on her own. [37] In India Sarah made a pilgrimage to Calcutta, where Nathaniel had been born, to work for the Zenana Mission, a charity that brought medical care to women in purdah. Travelling through central India to Bhopal, she became for one year the resident medical adviser to Shah Jahan Begam. A bad dose of malaria forced her to return to England in 1878.

By 1878 much attention was focused on Britain's newest colony, the Transvaal. The Boer Republic had been annexed to the British crown in 1877: trade boomed, there was demand for labour and agricultural products for the Kimberley diamond fields, land speculators moved in and promoters of the new colony published glowing accounts of the prospects, potential wealth and glorious climate of the Transvaal. Sarah Heckford, hoping to make her fortune, and also eager to travel in Africa, bought a hundred shares in "Transvaal Farming, Mining and Trading Association", and set sail for South Africa. She was the only woman in a group going out to the "coming country" to study farming methods with a view to improving agricultural production and speculating in land. Heckford was 39, lame, of unsound health, and travelling alone to a country about which she knew almost nothing. She arrived at Port Natal (Durban) in December 1878, and at this point her travel autobiography, *A Lady Trader in the Transvaal* (1882) commences. The period covered in the book (1878-1881) was an eventful and important one in the history of the Transvaal and South Africa as a whole. [38]

In her book, Heckford describes not only the hardships of travelling into rough and wild terrain, heading for the Transvaal, but also regards the small, dusty villages, lack of facilities, and unfamiliar landscapes and people with a very critical, British eye. Like Moffat and Ward, hers is an "outsider's view" of Africa, and the landscape clearly fell short of the vision of an exotic, distant country imagined at home: "I must warn my readers, that although I shall have to tell them of rocks and valleys and wooded ravines, &c., they must not picture to themselves anything analogous to what they may have seen in Switzerland or Italy ... There are no delicately shaded tints, as [the sun] fades into shadow, or plays over uneven surface. The artist who would portray it need have but few colours in his paintbox." [39] In scanning landscapes, colonial writers often describe the potential or future possibilities of the countryside: they see resources to be developed, landscapes to be peopled by Europeans.

This is very obvious in Harriet Ward's writing, and in Heckford's can be seen in her praise for the healthy, fertile, beautiful "uplands" of the Woodbush area of the north-eastern Transvaal, and her dismissal of the malaria-ridden bushveld regions. These areas are today divided into rich white farmland and overcrowded homelands.

Any conventional woman would have travelled the 450 miles from Natal to the Transvaal in a wagon, but Sarah set off on a pony, with a revolver strapped to her waist and another on her saddle. Heckford's refusal to conform to the stereotype of feminine compliance and helplessness once she found herself beyond the rigid confines of Victorian society, and in a predominantly male environment, is significant. It represents on one level an escape from rigid notions of correct feminine behaviour, but also indicates the way in which some women in a colonial context extended the boundaries of their independence and freedom by identifying strongly with and emulating dominant white, male values and behaviour. Such "masculinization" can be seen as a form of protective colouring, a way in which a woman travelling without family or husband could successfully maintain her independence, gain personal power and exert authority in a "man's world". It is perhaps analogous to some nineteenth century women novelists' adoption of male pseudonyms in order to succeed as artists - Olive Schreiner, for example, used the pseudonym "Ralph Iron". Heckford, an independently-minded woman travelling in an unfamiliar land, clearly felt the need to assume some aspects of masculinity - riding astride, carrying a gun, and so on - to empower herself, and there is no doubt that it also brought her a wonderful sense of freedom. She found herself in situations that would have been unthinkable at home: walking alone ahead of the wagons along the road to Rustenburg; sharing a bottle of brandy with a group of dishevelled men; rolling herself in damp blankets to sleep under a wagon, huddled with virtual strangers for warmth.

Strategies to assume power and authority are common amongst women travellers, although they take vastly different forms. Particularly in places like South Africa, where race is a more powerful social determinant than gender, women travellers strove to identify themselves with the most powerful and dominant group, namely white males: "being British in Africa or Asia meant more than simply being an outsider - it meant being a visible representative of a colonial power. Colonialism stressed the importance of physical appearance and racial characteristics were used to form an absolute distinction between the ruler and the ruled. To a greater extent than other systems of control of one people by another, British colonialism rested upon the embodiment of power in individual colonial officials and informal representatives, displayed through dress, housing and, most simply and importantly, the colour of their skin. This was a display of authority in which white women, on the grounds of their white faces, could share." [40] In order to enforce their authority in alien societies, women sometimes internalized and acted out the role of white men, referring to themselves in their writings as "Englishman", or "horseman". This was often combined with an exaggeration of the trappings of colonial power to their own advantage: "They used them to stress their difference, based on race, from the local population - differences on which their status as white rulers rested. For here, they recognized, lay their freedom and prestige; here lay their newfound power." [41]

There was clearly in some situations the need to assume masculinity in order to assume power. But it is crucial to remember that this kind of "masculinization" was always contradictory and ambiguous, partly because of the need to appease the colonial community, but also because the majority of women believed in maintaining "natural" gender divisions and feminine identity. For example, Mary Kingsley followed in the footsteps of male explorers, but maintained in her dress the strictest Victorian propriety: she would rather have "mounted a public scaffold" than have her "earthward extremities" in trousers (sometimes referred to as "inexpressibles"). Back in colonial centres like Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria, or in Britain, women travellers would often don the mask of decorum. Sarah Heckford, for example, on first arriving in Pretoria (then a predominantly English-speaking town) in 1879, quelled the rowdy all-male occupants of the European Hotel bar with her ladylike presence: "taking heart of grace, into the bar I walked. It was as full as it could be of

the kind of men who frequent bars.” [42] There was an astonished silence at her entrance, and she was eventually escorted to a separate room.

While attempting to create spaces for themselves in colonial contexts, women like Sarah Heckford simultaneously identified with and took advantage of imperial culture and the dominant belief system regarding racial, gender and class hierarchies. In Heckford's case, her attitudes are revealed in her portrayal of Africans, Dutch-speaking whites and the “lower classes”. Heckford, like most newcomers, describes the local population, whether Boer or African, as decidedly “different” from the civilized and superior British. Here are her impressions of Rustenburg in the northern Transvaal: it is “the last place inhabited by white people, and through whose streets numbers of Kaffirs and Kaffir women troop daily, dressed in skins, and adorned with barbaric ornaments ...”. [43] Sarah was not entirely accurate in her description of the town as the last white outpost, but it is clear that she saw herself as being at the outer edge of civilization, a frontier where wild savages could be seen intruding on the “white” town. In Rustenburg, Heckford and her party discovered that the farming scheme that had lured them to the Transvaal had been a scam, and she was forced to find a job as a governess if she was to avoid returning to England. On the farm Nooitgedacht Heckford “got to know the native”. Apart from the white farming family of 1820 stock, there were “raw Kaffirs”, men “clothed in old European garments, but the women wearing skins, and the children being naked”. [44] There were also “Ullams, or civilized Kaffirs, living in mud houses on [the] property. These families dressed like Europeans, and had food like Europeans, even to the drinking of early coffee.” [45] They were mission educated, something which most local whites regarded with suspicion. Heckford writes: “I don't think the school did them much good.” They are the stereotypical idle and ignorant natives that can be found in so much colonial literature. Heckford's description totally misses or ignores the real substance, context and history of their lives: for her they are entirely alien and different, presented as comic or pathetic spectacles for the eyes of a British readership. Simultaneously the book decontextualizes the presence of African squatters and servants on white farms. They are timeless ethnographical specimens, not very different from the fauna and flora she describes: they are simply “there” as part of the landscape. The Boers are not much better, being dirty, cunning, stupid and cruel - a perception perhaps enhanced by the constant “Boer scares”, not too different from later Black Peril scares. Heckford was also strict about maintaining the correct degree of social distance between herself and working-class English settlers: “She may have escaped from Belgravia but she trailed with her the Victorian obsession with the niceties of social distinction ... Sarah had to some extent adapted to the ‘free and easy’ manners of the Transvaal, yet complained of the difficulties of ‘maintaining the proper relation of master and servant’. By this she meant the relationship between white employer and employee.” [46]

Something that marks Heckford as an extraordinary woman is her decision to become a travelling trader or *smous* in the bushveld, where Boers set up their winter camps and there were also African communities to trade with. The *smous* was a familiar figure in the rural Transvaal, but a female *smous* was unheard of and inconceivable for a British middle-class woman; she was also a widow of 40, small and not very strong, lame, subject to severe attacks of malaria, and had no idea about trading. Nevertheless, Heckford used the balance of her capital, £600, to buy trade goods and horses, hired a *voorloper* and wagon driver, and set out. Some of the time she was accompanied by an Englishman called Egerton, which caused a great deal of scandal. Trading in the Waterberg region, at Boer camps, African households and mission stations, she confronted not only the danger of wild animals and snakes, but diseases like malaria, typhoid, diphtheria, enteric and pneumonia, all of which claimed many lives in the 1870s. She returned to the bushveld in August, loaded with “African goods” since “Kaffir trading” was the most profitable, and was able to purchase a cottage in Pretoria and a farm, Jakkalsfontein. Sarah Heckford's sense of achievement and authority rested on dissolving the barriers of gender where it was advantageous to do so. Becoming a *smous* in the bushveld shows how she was able to act outside the traditional dictates of gender. In Isabella Bird's words: “travellers are privileged to do the most improper things with perfect propriety; that is one charm of travelling.” [47] Here Heckford could assume the role of

“white man”. She casts herself in the role of adventurer, explorer, entrepreneur, while landscape and local people dissolve into the savage and primitive. Heckford’s career as a Transvaal trader came to an abrupt end with the Boer rebellion or *vryheidsoorlog* of 1881: in Pretoria she was caught up in the siege and saw victorious Boer troops enter the town before selling her property and returning to England.

These brief episodes from the lives of Mary Moffat, Harriet Ward and Sarah Heckford suggest some of the ways in which middle-class women travellers in nineteenth-century South Africa were able to achieve a measure of independence and self-expression perhaps not available in Britain. Nevertheless, their positions remained ambiguous, while their autonomy to a large extent depended on the inherent contradictions and inequalities of colonial society.

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### Notes

- 1 The heroic status and mythical image of explorers in Africa is mirrored in the fiction that accompanied the “opening up” and colonization of the continent. The immensely popular novels of Rider Haggard, John Buchan, and others present the reader with a series of imperial heroes, imbued with the very best qualities of patriotic British manhood.
- 2 On some levels this is not surprising. The memoirs of explorers or colonial officials focus on the public domain where, according to Helen Callaway, “history was generated, where decisive action took place, in that ideational field designated as a ‘man’s country’”. See *Gender, Culture and Empire. European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (London, 1987), p 22.
- 3 Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women* (Oxford, 1990), p. 3. Florence Baker’s story is extraordinary: auctioned off to Samuel Baker at a Hungarian slave market at the age of seventeen, she accompanied him on even his most dangerous travels. Her achievements were unprecedented, but Victorian propriety and her own loyalty pushed her into the background while her husband was feted as a darling of the empire.
- 4 See Kingsley’s *Travels in West Africa* (London, 1897) and *West African Studies* (London, 1899).
- 5 Sheldon, *Sultan to Sultan Adventures among the Masai and other Tribes of East Africa* (London, 1892).
- 6 Quoted in Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London, 1965), p 13.
- 7 Quoted in Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good, Thick Skirt* (London, 1989), p 149.
- 8 Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers*, p 4.
- 9 Publications such as Dorothy Middleton’s *Victorian Lady Travellers* or Jane Robinson’s *Wayward Women* give some indication of the rich variety, scope and sheer numbers of women who for various reasons undertook long and often dangerous

journeys to distant lands, there to become explorers of places, peoples and cultures. Dea Birkett's *Spinsters Abroad* (Oxford, 1989) is one of the few books on women travellers that goes beyond the short biographical sketches that typify most studies, bringing us closer to an understanding of the personal motivations for and socio-historical context of travel.

- 10 Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London, 1907), p 1.
- 11 David Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa* (London, 1927), p xviii.
- 12 This idea is explored in great depth in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1991), and elsewhere.
- 13 Barry's identity and gender, always controversial, is still in dispute.
- 14 E J Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (1989), p 202. Also see chapter 8, "The New Woman".
- 15 See Elizabeth Elbourne, "A Question of Identity: evangelical culture and Khoisan politics in the early nineteenth-century eastern Cape" in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Vol 18: ICS, Collected Seminar Papers No 44 (1992).
- 16 Jean and John Comaroff, "Through the Looking-Glass: colonial encounters of the first kind", *Journal of Historical Sociology* Vol 1, No 1, March 1988, p 9.
- 17 Morag Dickson, *Beloved Partner. Mary Moffat of Kuruman* (London, 1976), p 36.
- 18 Comaroffs, "Through the Looking-Glass", p 9.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p 10.
- 20 Robert and Mary Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman. Journals and Letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820-1828*, edited by I Schapera (London, 1951), p 65. Letter dated 9 December 1822.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p 68.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p 109. Letter dated 1 September 1823.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p 158. Letter dated 12 July 1824.
- 24 Dickson, *Beloved Partner*, p 83.
- 25 Moffats, *Journals and Letters*, p 292. Letter dated 30 December 1828.
- 26 Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, p 31.
- 27 Harriet Ward, *Jasper Lyle: a tale of Kaffirland* (London, 1852), p 43.
- 28 See Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen", in H L Gates (ed), *Race, Writing and Difference* (London, 1986), p 139.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 30 See Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: the British experience* (Manchester, 1990).

- 31 Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*, p 77.
- 32 Constance Larymore, *A Resident's Wife in Nigeria* (London, 1908), p 300.
- 33 Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa* (London, 1912), p 22.
- 34 Quoted in Vivien Allen, *Lady Trader. A Biography of Mrs Sarah Heckford* (London, 1979), p 6.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p 7.
- 36 Middleton argues that the outburst of female energy towards the end of the nineteenth century was undoubtedly linked with the increasingly vigorous movement for women's political and social emancipation. And yet, the majority of women travellers were often at pains to dissociate themselves from women's suffrage movements or any other radical cause: "They were not, with the notable exception of Mary Kingsley, very interested in politics; many of them ... were conventionally religious: on the whole, they accepted class and colour as they found them ..." (*Victorian Lady Travellers*, p 4)
- 37 What Victorians described as "travelling on one's own" usually meant that one was unaccompanied by someone from the same social class.
- 38 These years saw increased Boer resistance to British authority, the collapse of the myth of British military supremacy in engagements at Laing's Nek, Ingogo and Majuba, and eventual Boer control of the Transvaal in 1881.
- 39 Sarah Heckford, *A Lady Traveller in the Transvaal* (London, 1882), p 6.
- 40 Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*, p 115.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 42 Heckford, *Lady Traveller*, p 88.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 *Ibid.*, p 77.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p 78. The term "urlams" is probably derived from the Afrikaans word "oorlams", of Malay origin, which means "sly" or "cunning".
- 46 Allen, *Lady Trader*, p 121.
- 47 Quoted in Barr, *A Curious Life for a Lady*, p 54.