

# *Empire Building and Modernity*

Organização

ADELAIDE MEIRA SERRAS



University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies  
Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa





# Empire Building and Modernity

*Organização*

Adelaide Meira Serras



University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies  
Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa

Lisboa 2011

EMPIRE BUILDING AND MODERNITY

**ORGANIZAÇÃO**

Adelaide Meira Serras

**CAPA, PAGINAÇÃO E ARTE FINAL**

Inês Mateus

**Imagem na capa**

*The British Empire*, 1886, M. P. Formerly

**EDIÇÃO**

Centro de Estudos Anglísticos  
da Universidade de Lisboa

**IMPRESSÃO E ACABAMENTO**

TEXTYPE

**TIRAGEM** 200 exemplares

**ISBN** 978-972-8886-17-2

**DEPÓSITO LEGAL** 335129/11

**PUBLICAÇÃO APOIADA PELA**

**FUNDAÇÃO PARA A CIÊNCIA E A TECNOLOGIA**

# ÍNDICE

<b>Foreword</b>	
Luísa Leal de Faria .....	7
<b>Empire and cultural appropriation. African artifacts and the birth of museums</b>	
Cristina Baptista .....	9
<b>Here nor there: writing outside the mother tongue</b>	
Elleke Boehmer .....	21
<b>In Black and White. “Civilizing Africa” in Portuguese narratives of the 1870’s and 1880’s</b>	
Luísa Leal de Faria .....	31
<b>Inverted Priorities: L. T. Hobhouse’s Critical Voice in the Context of Imperial Expansion</b>	
Carla Larouco Gomes .....	45
<b>Ways of Reading Victoria’s Empire</b>	
Teresa de Ataíde Malafaia .....	57
<b>“Buy the World a Coke:” <i>Rang de Basanti</i> and Coca-colonisation</b>	
Ana Cristina Mendes .....	67
<b>New Imperialism, Colonial Masculinity and the Science of Race</b>	
Iolanda Ramos .....	77
<b>Challenges and Deadlocks in the Making of the Third Portuguese Empire (1875-1930)</b>	
José Miguel Sardica .....	105
<b><i>The History of the Sevarambians: The Colonial Utopian Novel, a Challenge to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century English Culture</i></b>	
Adelaide Meira Serras .....	129
<b>Isaiah Berlin and the Anglo-American Predicament</b>	
Elisabete Mendes Silva .....	143
<b>Nabobs and the Foundation of the British Empire in India</b>	
Isabel Simões-Ferreira .....	155



## Foreword

Following the organization, in 2009, of the first conference on *The British Empire: Ideology, Perspectives, Perception*, the Research Group dedicated to Culture Studies at the University of the Lisbon Centre for English Studies organized, in 2010, a second conference under the general title *Empire Building and Modernity*. This conference constitutes the second part of a three year project undertaken by the group, which will be followed, in 2011, by a third initiative, called *Reviewing Imperial Conflicts*.

The proceedings of the second conference are now presented in this book. *Empire Building and Modernity* gives a larger scope to the original project, which was developed more strictly around the British Empire, and provides the opportunity to deal with questions related to the formation of modern European empires, namely the Portuguese Colonial Empire. The different chapters in this book reveal a variety of approaches that are very often at the cutting edge of the methodologies adopted in cultural studies, particularly in the field of post-colonial studies.

The building of new perceptions on imperial issues interpreted through literature, the visual arts, history and political science, the role of museums, questions of gender and race and the construction of identity through language constitute the guidelines of the contributions presented in this volume. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed discussing the issues that contributed to its making.

*Luísa Leal de Faria*



**Empire and cultural appropriation.  
African artifacts and the birth of museums**

*Cristina Baptista*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)



# Empire and cultural appropriation. African artifacts and the birth of museums

## I – Introduction

Colonial relationship allowed the British Empire to take possession of a vast spoil of artefacts in the colonies with the purpose of exhibiting it in museums at home. My purpose in this paper will be analysing the conditions and arguments that made possible and also legitimate the removal of artefacts from Egypt, during the imperial occupation, to «feed» the holdings of central museums in Britain, instrumental to Victorian culture and, therefore, crucial to Victorian identity. Theoretical production about this issue — cultural property — is paramount. I will try a Cultural Studies approach to it.

Why a paper about museums, one might ask, in a conference under the title *Empire Building and Modernity*? And, furthermore, why Victorian museums? Concerning this issue, I will quote Barbara Black, in *On Exhibit. Victorians and their museums*, to enlighten the question,

The museum served to legitimate Britain's power at home and across the globe. It grew implicit with British imperialism, housing the spoils of colonization and guarding the growing perimeter of the British Empire. (Black 2000: 11)

Therefore, the link between museums and modernity is inextricable — as Barbara Black stresses — in the sense that they are a response to the new world order, and an attempt of producing meaning, about what Victorians felt their role their time was; on the other hand, the fact of being open to visitors, a controversial issue in the Victorian Era, meets the concept of modernity. This meant breaking from the past, when objects of art, part of private collections, were kept from the reach of the population and enclosed in palaces and mansions.

The museum provides a critical approach to the history of the past, through the exhibition of large collections of objects, formerly private, as the British Museum was the case, which at a given moment became public

spaces with open access to the population. The shift of the placing of objects provides them with a whole different function, from objects of delight of just a few to powerful symbolic role in a narrative of the nation, intended for the whole population. As Maria Emília Fonseca stresses in *The Tree of Life*, what is at stake in the exhibitionary practice in a museum is that the work of art becomes a potential producer of internal articulation and of meaning(s). (Fonseca 2007: 10)

## II – Museums, empire and modernity. Victorians and their museums

Museums represented thus an important role in British imperial identity, which included the colonies and occupied countries as part of a larger space that had to be represented in these exhibitionary spaces, turned into a reference of the global power, symbolic or effective, of that small country.

When questioning the legitimacy of the appropriation of artefacts in the colonies, particularly in Egypt, one has to look at the colonial relation as an environment that presupposes and validates appropriation. The latter presumes European cultural superiority — defended by ideologists of imperialism, like Thomas Babington Macaulay, an example among many. As Tawadros states, it is in museums, namely, that this cultural superiority is most striking:

The notion of western culture as inherently progressive, sophisticated and, above all, superior... remains firmly imbedded in the cultural institutions of western Europe, not least in its museums. (Tawadros 1990: 30-1)

This notion of cultural superiority and concepts like the guard, cataloging, identification and restoring, for further exhibition and, ultimately, the salvation of monuments and artefacts, namely African, legitimated the removal of these artefacts out of their original context, on behalf of a transposition to a new one, inside museums, were — Victorians believed — they should be, for it is there they are appreciated. Victorian museums provided thus a broad and diversified insight of the empire, materialized in the exhibition of artefacts of different origins and of an apparently unquestioned sense of belonging.

Besides, Victorians loved collecting. Therefore, the museum, not only the space, as its holdings, fulfils the viewer's imagination, moved by the beauty and the exotic of the exhibited artefacts. This is why, at the time, a museum was considered a «cabinet of curiosities», were the treasures of the nation were displayed, and were represented the attitudes and perspectives of the

dominant cultures, consisting of a material proof of the cultural endeavours.

This love of collections had given way to large private holdings, later sheltered in public museums, once the practice of collecting is profoundly rooted in European tradition, as Susan Pearce states. The motivation behind this attitude includes a range from the celebration of the triumph of war, to the practice of collecting art for the art. (Pearce 1995)

Let's now hear the arguments of the removal. In 1835, Saint-Maur, a member of the *Comission Supérieure de Bâtiments à Vapeur*, an entity belonging to the shipbuilding industry, is quoted by Reid, in resuming the main argument of the removal of artefacts from Egypt:

France, snatching an obelisk from the ever heightening mud of the Nile, or the savage ignorance of the Turks, earns a right to the thanks of the learned of Europe, to whom belong all the monuments of antiquity, because they alone know how to appreciate them. Antiquity is a garden that belongs by natural right to those who cultivate and harvest its fruits. (Saint-Maur 1835 *apud* Reid 2002: 1)

Being the process of appropriation crucial in the birth of museums — for without it they would not have part of their most important holdings —, it is therefore determined by the colonial relationship. Concepts like the ones used before appear within a conceptual framework of keywords as colonialism and imperialism we are all familiar with in the field of Postcolonial Studies, within the wider frame of Cultural Studies; anyway, I would quote David Spurr, in Ashcroft *et al.*, in the definition of appropriation, described as a process:

This process [the appropriation] is sometimes used to describe the strategy by which the dominant imperial power incorporates as its own the territory or culture that it surveys or invades. (Spurr 1993: 28 *apud* Ashcroft 2000/2004: 19)

Appropriation, thus, is rooted in the general notion that the artefacts are left to neglect and lack of appreciation in the places of origin. To look into this argument, let's search in *Mr. Budge's* memoirs, for a specific example of how monuments and artefacts were removed from Egypt, and the attitude towards local heritage that this British subject encountered in his several missions in the East. Budge, himself an orientalist, Egyptologist and philologist, was responsible during years, for the acquisitions, namely in Egypt, of the British Museum. Ernest A. Wallis Budge was assistant of Peter Le Page Renouf, trustee of the department of Oriental Antiquities of the British Museum between

1886 and 1891. He also travelled, during his purchasing missions, to Irak and Turkey.

Budge's aims included establishing closer ties with local art dealers, in order to be able to purchase artefacts without the costs involved in the excavations. He wrote down in great detail these experiences in his memoirs, *By Nile and Tigris*, published in 1920. His accounts can also be found in his reports to the British Museum, one of which describes a journey to Sudan and Egypt, between December 1898 and January 1899, were the reader can be enlightened about the purpose of the journey and the purchases accomplished. During this visit alone Budge bought namely six prehistoric mummies, several coffins, twenty Arabic manuscripts and 400 scarabs. (Budge 1899)

The same representative of the British Museum made on the whole several excursions to Egypt, during which he obtained vast collections of objects, increasing enormously the holding of the museum, a procedure highly appreciated and praised by the trustees, and of which he was extremely proud. The pride derived from these accomplishments can be explained by the then fierce competition between European museums around collections from the near East, for which the representatives of European institutions fostered relations which local art dealers and institutions.

A reading of Budge's memoirs, and the details he includes are important, because he denies the general notion that the British, or for what it is worth, representatives of other powerful European museums, literally stole artefacts from countries in the middle or far East, to enrich their possessions. As far as Ernest Budge is concerned, this is not true. What happened was quite the opposite. The reader concludes that every item was, in fact, purchased. This representative of the British Museum refers that he always tried to bargain for moderate prices, utterance that goes against his representation in popular culture as a plunderer of Egypt. In fact, apart from being remembered as a dishonest dealer, his current reputation describes him as a second rate archaeologist, despite a vast number of books published, one of which on the subject of *The Book of The Dead. The papyrus of Ani*, the theme of an exhibition recently shown in the British Museum.

Underlining this notion of fairness in dealing with local subjects, conveyed in his writings and reports, in *By Nile and Tigris* Budge recalls how the artefacts reached him and the values involved in the purchases. An episode describes a typical situation

The result was that natives came to me in boats, by night in my hut on the river bank, and offered to sell me statues and stelae, etc.; and many of their things I was anxious to acquire. I told them I had no money, and then they pressed me to take their things to England and send them the money. (Budge 1920: 96)

And again, he also refers to neglect. One of the objects he writes about is a central slab of a nine feet tall monument, with an inscription in Greek concerning Ptolemy X. In short, a precious item. Nevertheless, the owner apparently had no idea of its importance. As Budge states

This important stone had been used as a doorstep by his owner. (Budge 1920: 96)

Under the circumstances, he eventually purchased the slab «at a moderate price».

More serious than the case quoted above, taken place with private owners, and certainly due to ignorance and eagerness for easy income, is the same notion of neglect now concerning local Egyptian authorities towards heritage. Another example is mentioned about the Bulak Museum, housed in an ancient post office. This museum, as well as the store<sup>1</sup> were located, according to Budge, in the very centre of Cairo, at reach of the Nile tides and near shops and industries, where a fire could easily break. However, says Budge, he never saw any prevention against fire.

Budge also stresses issues of lack of interest and appreciation towards the Egyptian heritage by local institutions and their representatives. He recalls another episode of a finding of a temple, which he offered to purchase, again at «a moderate price». Facing the refusal of the person in charge, whom he warned about the danger of letting an item of such value unprotected, he could not persuade him, despite his efforts. (Budge 103)

According to Budge's descriptions, artefacts were held either by private art dealers, willing to sell, or by the Egyptian authorities, however deprived of due protection. His mission was even more appreciated and praised by the trustees of the British Museum as he faced growing reluctance from the Egyptian authorities as far as the removal of objects was concerned and the transport to England, difficulties that he writes about in his memoirs.

Notwithstanding local opposition, in a letter to Renouf, he acknowledges to have been able to remove artefacts, the main purpose of his mission,

---

<sup>1</sup> Budge calls it magazine, similar to what the French would name it, *magasin*.

«purchasing» them (meaning trading them for money, a phrase that prevents the reader to evaluate him as a possible plunderer) by the minimum price possible. These letters from Budge to Renouf were edited, some years ago, in four volumes, reviewed by Patrícia Usick in the *The British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan Journal*. In these letters, Budge's eagerness to make his missions worth the while is obvious. Budge is quoted by Usick as having written that he was «determined 'to "acquire" as much as I can for nothing». (Usick 2006: 15)

His effort deserves to be taken into account, as Budge acknowledges to have faced a contradictory situation, in his missions in Egypt. There was a practice, even if «unofficial», of antiques selling to representatives of western museums, from either art dealers or private sellers. Nevertheless, the representative of the British Museum had to deal with an interplay of interests, with the defenders of the removal of objects — European or locals — on behalf of their preservation, and the ones that claimed no object whatsoever should be taken out of the country. This latter faction created growing obstacles to the removal of items from Egypt, namely to ships anchored in the shore, the only transport available to move them from Egypt to Great Britain, to the point when only food was allowed to be taken in. In spite of the control over removals to ships, Egyptian authorities were not free from rumours (mainly from the natives) of corruption and traffic of artefacts, in their own benefit, to the very representatives of European and American institutions. Therefore, claimed the natives, delivering the artefacts they owned to the Bulak Museum, as was mandatory, would never make sure that the same would remain in the country.

However controversial, Budge's procedure, as other archeologists and European museum specialists in Egypt, contributed to the development of egyptology, promoting the guard of objects that, otherwise, would have been lost. Once in custody of a museum, the findings allowed the development of knowledge, namely of ancient languages. One of the examples occurred with the Rosetta Stone, belonging to the British Museum since 1802, referred to by the museum as its most visited item — a material basis for the advancement of knowledge and the establishment of Egyptology as a science and that was instrumental in the contemporary knowledge of Egyptian hieroglyphs. (Reid 2002: 14)

The contribute to the advancement of knowledge did not occur only in Europe for, within the framework of imperialism, Europeans were also responsible for the foundation of the Egyptian Antiquities Service and four historical museums in Egypt, between 1858 e 1908, proving their interest in fostering Egyptology and that these disparate interests could develop together. As Reid states,

During those same fifty years, western imperialism — fuelled back home by the industrial revolution, the demand for imported cotton and other raw materials, the quest for overseas markets and investment opportunities, the exigencies of emerging mass politics, and intra-European rivalries — firmly fasted its grip on Egypt. Archeology and imperialism seemed to walk hand in hand. (Reid 2002: 2)

Later, by the time Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankamon, in 1922, the situation was not similar. The findings of his explorations were not intended to the United Kingdom, as he worked as a British expert on behalf of local authorities and the research was considered of national interest in Egypt. This search serves as an example of the evolution of scientific Archeology and also of European expertise, and of western contribution to the salvation of monuments, an issue that worried Budge decades before. By that time, Egyptian authorities had made an effort to stop a general plunder of the country's heritage, only too late, when an uncountable amount of monuments and objects, whatever the size, had been taken out of the country.

## **II. I – Appropriation and legitimation. The concept of ‘salvation’**

The devastation in Egypt had started long before the British occupation, with the decay of the Egyptian civilization, between the Middle Ages and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the population underwent a general devastation of monuments, using materials, like stone, for new buildings. From the Renaissance on, growing western interest took place, along with the increasing conscience of salvation of monuments and art objects, at least those in sight, and above ground. As a consequence, circulation of artefacts increased, from Egypt to the major central cities in Europe.

As travelling and transport between Europe and Africa became easier, with the launching of Industrial Revolution, tourism to distant locations, Egypt included, made its appearance and, not only of travellers, as of treasure hunters, making that anything available would be transported to Europe, either obeliscs or statues and mummies, including artefacts of minor size.

An extreme example of salvation is the complex operation undertaken by the UNESCO concerning threatened monuments, and that led, ultimately, to the reconstruction of twenty monuments that would have been lost otherwise. That is how the salvation of the monuments of Nubia from the waters of the Assuan dam took place in the sixties of the XXth century, with great involvement of European expertise. This attitude revealed a growing conscience in the care and conservation of monuments, from archeological sites to heritage in general, along with the struggle against the traffic of art objects, an effort rivalled by the increasing resources of perpetrators.

### **III – Conclusion: the restitution debate**

The restitution debate is the last and most recent step in the controversy around the legitimacy of appropriation, with former colonized or occupied countries at a global level trying to recover artefacts originally taken from them. Cultural property is at stake, a debate that can be approached under the legal angle, but also from a cultural studies perspective, underlining arguments around the antinomy neglect-preservation.

These two arguments, however, are not the only ones in the equation. One might ask if, facing these objects today, they are the same that were taken, decades or centuries before, from a given colonized space, to the centre of the Empire, out of its original context. For, work has been done to catalogue, restore, research and exhibit those artefacts. If one agrees they are not the same objects, is it legitimate to claim them back?

The notion of salvation of objects and monuments by the European expertise also gains strength when Egyptian authorities are not known for caring for their heritage, even nowadays. And when someone like the novel writer Christian Jacq, who devoted his life to writing about Egypt, says that only 20 to 30% of what is under the sand of Egypt has been uncovered (Jacq 2000), there is consequently a huge amount of work to undertake.

Claims of restitution go back as far as about a century after Saint-Maur made the statement quoted earlier, in 1932, when arguments were heard in favour of the devolution of artefacts and monuments to the countries of origin, underlining the notion of 'belonging'. Quoting a local newspaper, in Reid, again:

It is indeed a matter of deep regret that the monuments should be ours, and the history should be ours, but that those who write books on the history of ancient Egypt should not be Egyptians... (...). (The Arabic newspaper *Al-Balagh* 26 February, 1932. Reid 2002: 1).

How should the claims for the restitution of artistic African objects to the countries of origin be faced? The Rosetta Stone, claimed since 2003, under allegations of it being an icon of Egyptian identity, is surely an emblematic example, and a counter-argument of initial appropriation. The debate remains open, knowing that the demands of restitution would seriously challenge European museums curators' priorities and mission of preservation their holdings today. Giving these objects away would mean to betray their purposes.

## References

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2001). *The key concepts in post-colonial studies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Black, Barbara J. (2000). *On exhibit. Victorians and their museums*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.
- Budge, Ernest A. Wallis. *By Nile and Tigris*. London: Murray, 1920. URL: <http://www.archive.org/stream/byniletigrisnarr01budguoft#page/n3/mode/2up>. (Accessed in 6.6.2011).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Report to the Trustees of the British Museum*. 8.2.1899. URL: <http://www.british>



**In Black and White**  
**“Civilizing Africa” in Portuguese narratives**  
**of the 1870’s and 1880’s**

*Luísa Leal de Faria*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Universidade Católica Portuguesa



## **In Black and White. “Civilizing Africa” in Portuguese narratives of the 1870’s and 1880’s**

The ten years between 1876 and 1886 were, in my view, an important turning point in Portuguese and European History. During this decade a number of national and international events were taking place, following the growth of European nationalisms in the forties and giving way to a great flowering of, among other things, European invented tradition. As Terence Ranger points out in his essay “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa”, these invented traditions had as a central concept the idea of Empire. The building of African empires, late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “demonstrates the effects rather than the causes of European invented tradition”.<sup>1</sup> The process that reinforced the idea of patriotism as a sort of secular religion that held the modern state together<sup>2</sup>, was extended beyond the physical boundaries of the European countries and transposed to a “civilizing mission”, in the name of “progress”, undertaken by the European colonial states. This civilizing mission was rooted in religion, in science and in political occupation.

In Portugal, the 1870’s were a period of great creativity and unrest in the field of Literature, and a whole generation of the best Portuguese writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to be known as the “Generation of the Seventies”. They fought “literary wars” where they violently attacked or defended what was then called “Ultra-Romanticism” and “Realism”. They wrote novels, poetry and historical essays, and their creativity was directly linked to what they felt

---

<sup>1</sup> Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa”, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Canto Edition 1992, p.211.

<sup>2</sup> This point is developed by Eric Hobsbawm in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 – Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

as a state of decline of the Portuguese mind. The writers whose works I am going to examine in more detail did not quite belong to this group, but they could not be unaware of the general structure of feeling. Through their actions they contributed to the building of a new perspective on the Portuguese Empire in Africa and through their writings on the scientific expeditions they undertook in Central and Southern Africa during those ten years, they brought to the Portuguese reading public a new taste for adventure and discovery.

Until the eighteen seventies most European governments did not show great interest in Africa. The Far East had attracted much more sustained attention from the European states, including Portugal, who was also involved in exploring and keeping Brazil. Until the middle of the century the African continent was still mostly unknown. The few information on Central and Southern Africa that was already available came from Portuguese reports, made by people without scientific information, who did not follow any pattern of discovery, and could not provide accurate geographical information. Yet, during the fifties, a number of European and American explorers started to charter the African continent: Livingstone explored the middle part of the Zambeze river in 1851, and tried to cross Africa, from East to West, in 1856. The sources of the Nile were searched, and explorers like Burton, Speke, Grant, Baker and others wrote about their extraordinary adventures in African territory, raising enormous enthusiasm.

It is perhaps worth noting that one the most prominent Portuguese settlers in Africa, Silva Porto, met with Livingstone in the fifties. According to Silva Porto, he shared with Livingstone his practical knowledge of Africa, but not his scientific one, because he had none. Livingstone took advantage of his more obscure competitor, and was quick to publish, with scientific support, his findings. Silva Porto was particularly hurt when he found out, ten years after the fact, what the good Missionary had published about him and the Portuguese in general — that they were half caste and slave traders. According to various sources, Livingstone's claims were unfounded and untrue, designed to give himself credit for discovering what had in fact already been discovered by several Portuguese settlers.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Maria Emília Madeira dos Santos, *Viagens de exploração terrestre dos portugueses a África*. 2º edição. Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga. Lisboa, 1988, 255.

Between 1870 and 1876 there was a new surge of European colonial expansion in Africa. The development of markets was made possible by the growth of population, the development of industry, the progress in the means of transportation. Emigration increased, and there was a whole new surge of activity towards changing simple economic exploration into political occupation. The ideology of Empire was developed in most European nations, and scientific and military expeditions were sent into African territory to secure economic, cultural and political power. In 1876, King Leopold of the Belgians summoned a geographical Conference in Brussels, attended by Great Britain, France, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia. The purposes of the Conference were allegedly scientific and humanitarian, but the main result was a new concept of political and economic intervention in Africa, with the creation of the International African Association.

Portugal was not invited to the Conference, and the government began to realize that the so called "historical rights" to the colonies were being threatened. In Portugal, according to Veríssimo Serrão, the governments during the fifties and sixties were rather naïve as they extended their support to foreign explorers in traditionally Portuguese African territories. After Livingstone, Grant, Baker, Stanley and Brazza had already crossed substantial parts of Africa "the national consciousness as to the dangers surrounding our possessions in Angola and Mozambique had to be aroused", he writes.<sup>4</sup> And in fact the seventies showed an increase of interest in Africa, expressed perhaps first and foremost through the need to charter the territories that were traditionally under Portuguese influence. The Geographical Society of Lisbon was created in 1876, and its main purpose was "to keep up with the movement of progress already started by other European countries", "to participate in the civilizing of Africa, where all Europe is concerned and where the Portuguese had such a great part and heavy responsibility."<sup>5</sup>

The Geographical Society played an extremely important role in the new endeavours of the Portuguese to keep up with the scientific discoveries on

---

<sup>4</sup> Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, *História de Portugal*, vol. IX, *O Terceiro Liberalismo* (1851-1890), Lisboa, Editorial Verbo, 1989, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Emília Madeira dos Santos, *op. cit.*, 271

Africa that were being released into European knowledge on Africa. With the specific mission of chartering the territories under Portuguese domination, the expeditions sent forth by the Portuguese government became much more than a scientific enterprise. In the crucial decade when the “scramble for Africa” began, the reports of the expeditions brought into Europe new images of Africa that were sanctioned by science and contributed to the formation of the empire as an imagined community.

In a period of roughly ten years (1876-1886) the European occupation of Central and Southern Africa was completed, in a formal and political way. The Portuguese, the British, the French, the Belgians, the Italians and also the Dutch and the Germans began to extend to the overseas territories under their jurisdiction the apparatus of the formal empire: a system of administration, an official language, a system of education, systems of trade, industry, transportation, communications and the symbols of nationality: the flag, the nation anthem. Meanwhile, the Berlin Conference in 1885 established a new colonial public law: the European nations would be entitled to the territories of Central Africa through military occupation, and they were under the obligation to communicate the fact to the other European states. It was the end of the concept of “historical rights”, and the real beginning of “the scramble for Africa”.

The works that I shall briefly examine are placed in the ambiguous context where politics and science mingle, and a new imagined community is formed. They became, perhaps in spite of themselves, a fundamental piece in events that would shape the colonial position of Portugal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

They consist in three detailed travel narratives by the Portuguese explorers Alexandre Serpa Pinto, Hermenegildo Capelo and Roberto Ivens, who had the main purpose of drawing the maps of central and southern Africa. The first two refer to a travel expedition the three started together in 1877. After a few months they went their separate ways, and Serpa Pinto reports his experiences in a book in two volumes under the general title *How I Crossed Africa*; the first volume is called *The King's Rifle* and the second *The Coillard Family*. Capelo and Ivens called their two volume work *From Benguela to the Lands of Iaca*. The third work under consideration is again by Capelo and Ivens, and refers to a second expedition, started in 1884 from the coast of Angola to the coast of Mozambique, called *From Angola to the Counter Coast*. We shall see how the map becomes a book that grounds persistent images of colonial Africa, and how the map becomes “logo”, that is, like a “detachable piece in a jigsaw

puzzle", dyed in different colours, penetrating the popular imagination.<sup>6</sup>

The authors were not explorers in the conventional sense of the word at the time, since they were not traders, seeking their personal interest. They were military men, following orders from the government: Serpa Pinto was a Major in the Portuguese Army; Capelo and Ivens were Navy men. They all had served commissions in far off parts of the world. Serpa Pinto had been in a military operation in the Low Zambezi in 1869, against the natives of Massangano. Capelo had been in the China Seas and Ivens in the United States of America before the expedition of 1877. They were cultivated men and quite clearly practical scientists.

Their words, therefore, would carry the authority of the informed witness, who writes about what he has seen, who reports with the utmost precision the results of scientific observations. All volumes are complete with a large number of geographical tables, climatical and territorial charts, detailed sketches of every human "type", every new or different form of habitation and layout of villages and cemeteries, artefacts, exotic animals and plants. The descriptions of the expeditions follow the pattern of the diary in an almost day by day basis, from the start to the end of the expeditions. Observations on the climate, the land and the natives are interwoven with personal comment on the hardships of life in an insalubrious climate, in a hostile land, among suspicious natives. In the age of mechanical reproduction the dozens of drawings and photographs illustrating these books would contribute, in a powerful way, to the grammar of the imagined community.

The authors knew the literature produced by the explorers who had preceded them: Speke, Grant, Burton, Baker, Livingstone, Stanley, Brazza, Cameron.<sup>7</sup> They met Stanley in person in Cabinda, at the start of the first expedition, and had long conversations with him. They, nevertheless, believed that they had important new things to say about Africa, and their writings have certainly contributed to the formation of the first impressions about contemporary Africa in both the more cultivated levels of the reading public

---

<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *op.cit.*, 175.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Serpa Pinto, *Como eu atravessei a África*. I: *A carabina d'El-Rei*, Lisboa, Publicação Europa-América, Lisboa, 1998, xvii. Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol. I, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, (1996), 20.

and among the general public who, in Portugal, lacked the novel of adventures in Africa that was by then a widespread *genre* in England.<sup>8</sup>

The drawing of the maps was not an end in itself. The explorers had, besides, a twofold mission: on the one hand they had to impart their findings to “cultivated Europe”. On the other, they had a “civilizing mission” towards the natives of Africa. We shall briefly examine, first, the characteristics of these explorers and their works, as “Portuguese and Europeans”, who impart their findings to a European community.

It is important to stress, right from the start, that the Portuguese explorations were official undertakings, by order of the Portuguese government, financed through Parliament. The political interest in the definition of the overseas territories occupied by Portugal was supported by the creation of two scientific institutions in 1876: the Permanent Central Committee of Geography and the Lisbon Geographical Society. The Minister for the Colonies, João Andrade Corvo, took the matter of the first expedition in his own hands, and told Serpa Pinto that “an expedition organized as never before in Europe would leave from Lisbon to Austral Africa”. The promise would come true one year later, under another government which, nevertheless, still recognized the interest of the undertaking. The Parliament voted the sum of 30,000 *reis* to finance the expedition. The King himself gave a rifle as a personal gift to each one of the three members of the first expedition: Serpa Pinto, Capelo and Ivens.

The purpose of the expeditions was scientific. The orders received by the members of the first expedition were clear: “The expedition will have, as its main purpose, the study of the river Cuango in its relations to the Zaire and with the Portuguese territories in the West Coast, as well as the entire region that includes the sources of the rivers Zambezi and Cunene in the South and South East and stretches to the North until it enters the hydrographical basins of the Cuanza and the Cuango.”<sup>9</sup> Serpa Pinto and Capelo prepared the expedition in the record time of one month, when they went to Paris and London to order all the scientific instruments they needed, as well as most of

---

<sup>8</sup> Eça de Queiroz translated Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* into Portuguese. But none of the major Portuguese novelists of the period indulged in the novel of adventure.

<sup>9</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol.1, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, (1996), 22.

the equipment for a long stay in the deserts and jungles of Africa, and to contact other geographers. Besides the geographical notes, the explorers made extensive and detailed notes, charts and sketches on every other aspect of the climate, the land, the fauna, the flora and the soil. Every new tribe they met was described in detail, from the physiological aspect, to their social organization, social practices, religion and means of support. The problem of the variety of African languages is also seen as extremely relevant and as an appendix to his work, Serpa Pinto includes a "vocabulary" of the "four most important languages spoken between the Austral parallels 12 and 18, from coast to coast, with English equivalents". These four languages are the Portuguese, the Hambundo, the Ganguela and the Cafreal from Tete. Capelo and Ivens list the N'Bunda vocabulary in equivalence to the Portuguese, besides comparing a number of African dialects among themselves.

The Portuguese explorers were convinced that their observations were new: no one had treaded those territories before, and the three explorers saw themselves as the highest authorities as far as their direct observations were concerned. Serpa Pinto states that "the facts related in this book are the expression of the truth ... I tried to render in it the results of a steady work of many months, and I guarantee what I say about the geography of Africa because only I am an authority, entitled to talk about it in the part that concerns my travels, as long as no one else has followed in my footsteps and convinces me of the contrary."<sup>10</sup> Capelo and Ivens, when they relate the first expedition, make various claims as to the interest for science, in the areas of Geography and Natural History, of their findings. They stress the need for a "scientific and precise" notion of the "lakes, hills, peoples" of Africa, and place their book side by side with those published by the other explorers, all in the forefront of cultivated Europe. They further stress that they "act in the interest of the country", "under the need to conclude the maps of *our* provinces, to study their boundaries, to know what is ours".<sup>11</sup> A few years later, when they publish *From Angola to the Counter Coast*, they say that in the meantime they did not have the satisfaction to see in print either new books or maps that could advance the knowledge of Africa by the geographical community of

---

<sup>10</sup> Serpa Pinto, *A carabina d'El-Rei*, xviii.

<sup>11</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol. 1, 19-20, 23.

Europe. The part of their new publication, concerning the Zambezi to the east, would probably fill this gap.<sup>12</sup>

They saw their enterprises as rooted in history, acquiring therefore greater legitimacy. The explorers saw themselves as the successors of the Portuguese discoverers of the past, in a continuous and uninterrupted line, started four hundred years earlier. The historical sequence gives their narratives and their findings an added value, and imbeds them in the history of Portugal. If this history stretches from a long past, it will also stretch into the future. Capelo and Ivens make their position in the genealogy of discovery very clear, when they present the readers with a “historical sketch” of the Portuguese discoveries in Africa from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century to 1884, when the expedition from coast to coast is about to start. An expedition that is, again, decided by His Majesty’s government, and supported by the Lisbon Geographical Society.

They were patriots, who had the interests of Portugal at heart. If, as I said above, their standpoint as far as civilisation was concerned was European, they were still very proud to be Portuguese. Serpa Pinto relates how moved he was when, at the end of his travels, in South Africa, he was offered a dinner at the British Officers Mess, in Pretoria. At the end of an excellent meal, where the British officers wore their magnificent uniforms, Major Tyler, who presided, raised his champagne glass, and said, “in his powerful and strong voice: Gentlemen, to His Majesty, the King of Portugal”. Before the standing party could raise their glasses, the regiment band begun to play the anthem of the King D. Luis, heard by all in the deepest silence. Serpa Pinto was at a loss to express in words the emotion he felt while “listening to that patriotic anthem, played in a foreign land, that homage given to my country in the person of its sovereign”.<sup>13</sup> Capelo and Ivens open their work *From Benguela to the Lands of Iaca* with an “homage” to the “noble and respectable lady who, moved by an extremely delicate and patriotic sentiment of a true Portuguese, embroidered and offered a flag, a beautiful symbol made in the colours of heaven and the memory of Jesus”.<sup>14</sup> Also, Capelo and Ivens carried their Navy uniforms in

---

<sup>12</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Angola à Contracosta*, vol.1, 23.

<sup>13</sup> Serpa Pinto, *A família Coillard*, 248.

<sup>14</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, 9.

their travels, and wore them in ceremonial occasions, when they wanted to impress the African kings.

As I said above, the travels were part of a "civilizing mission", a responsibility contracted by Europe towards Africa. We shall now try to give a brief outline of this point of view, which may contribute to define the foundations of subsequent attitudes and events.

Capelo and Ivens state, at the beginning of their first book, that the "great scientific-humanitarian thought of the civilized world" is "to rend completely the veil of African mysteries and, by treading the black continent in all directions, to recover thousands of wretched creatures from the iron grip of slavery, and give systematic fight to such an odious crime."<sup>15</sup> In their second work they go further and sketch the relationship between Europe and Africa. "Today no one sees in Africa anything other than one of the vast quarters of the world, as adequate to life as any of the known others, as deserving of attention as any of the richest, a vast field of trading activity. The first safe ground of civilisation in Africa pertains to, or rather is a duty of, the European to explore, not only in the interest of its inhabitants, but also for the profit of common movement. In short, from a forgotten and unknown place, Africa will shortly become opulent, desirable and frequently visited, as it becomes a large centre of expenditure for all the excess of our production."<sup>16</sup>

Whites and blacks, or Europeans and Africans were perceived as radically different. The three explorers repeatedly refer to all sorts of differences, as they progress into the country. The Africans would still have a long way to go before they became equal with the white. Serpa Pinto comments clearly on the subject, when he distinguishes between the "good" and the "bad" missionaries in Africa. The "good" missionary tells the black that he is different from the white, but he will teach the black how to overcome the difference: "mend your ways, leave your habits of indolence, and work; leave crime and follow the virtue that I shall teach you; learn, and leave ignorance behind; then, and only then, will you reach a place near the white man and become his equal." The "bad" missionary insinuates himself in the native's spirit by preaching revolt and establishing disorder. Serpa Pinto considers this attitude the greatest obstacle to progress in southern Africa. He goes on, saying: "to tell the ignorant savage

---

<sup>15</sup> Id., 19

<sup>16</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Angola à Contracosta*, vol. I, 24.

that he is the equal of the civilised man is to lie, to commit a crime, to fail in all the duties committed to [the missionary] by those who sent him to Africa, it is to betray his sacred mission".<sup>17</sup> Near the end of the *From Benguela to the Lands of Iaca*, Capelo and Ivens express their agreement with Serpa Pinto<sup>18</sup>.

The specific characteristics of the tribes are minutely described, both in the interests of ethnography and to stress the cultural differences between the Africans and the Europeans. The principles of classification that apply to the mapping of the colonies, apply to the ethnicities. Among the endless variety of detail, a number of common characteristics impress the explorers, the most important being, perhaps, that the native tribes "have no religion". For the three Europeans the belief in magic (*feitico*), and all the tribal rites are the "reverse" of religion. In consequence, they claim that the Negro is incapable of higher feelings, such as love or honour. The women they find in general rather repulsive and incapable of maternal feelings. They are, indeed, appalled by the situation of women in general, in Africa, who live in a condition of complete slavery towards the men. They see the Negroes in general as indolent, cheating, lying, unable to understand the nature of a contract, prone to heavy drinking and disorderly behaviour. They stress, nevertheless, that they talk about tribes of the interior, so far unknown to Europeans, and give advice, therefore, as to the more adequate behaviour in future contacts.

The explorers try to understand the history of the African kingdoms, and through history they try to understand the formation of the different ethnicities. The various stories they tell, about the formation of the African kingdoms and empires, point to longstanding traditions of domination and subordination that make the drawing of historical maps possible. They are faced with complex forms of relationship, power, dependence and antagonism. Nevertheless, they treat those stories and the rituals of the tribes with condescension, and often write about them ironically. They are mystified by the complex and rather baffling system of protocol surrounding the *sobas*, the rituals of reception of the Europeans, the exchange of gifts, the negotiations involved in the engagement of bearers or the providing of food for the expedition.

They relate the varieties of the climate, the soil, the modes of production and subsistence to the variety of tribes. Serpa Pinto says, at one point, that he

---

<sup>17</sup> Serpa Pinto, *A família Coillard*, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol.II, 204.

is a Darwinian. He would, therefore, believe in evolution. Implicitly, they all accept the view that the African peoples suffer from a sort of delayed evolution as compared to the Europeans, and it will be incumbent on these to bring the necessary enlightenment to Africa, and speed up the evolutionary process. From another angle, they also see the primitive conditions of life in Africa, and the violence of the tribes against the Europeans and against one another, as a result of centuries of exploitation and slavery perpetrated on the inhabitants of central and southern Africa by the Arabs and the Europeans. The end of slavery is the first step to the recovery of the Negro towards "perfectibility".<sup>19</sup> The introduction of "progress" in Africa would do the rest.

In short, they see a bright future for Africa, provided the Africans prove capable of absorbing European civilisation, and provided the Europeans understand the conditions of life in Africa and develop the adequate technologies for white settlements. (The Europeans should settle in the plateaus and never on the coast, and they should at once develop the railroad, the telegraph, and the ports). In this, the perspective of the Portuguese is as ethnically conscious as any other in the European scientific community.

In 1884, when they started their second expedition, Capelo and Ivens stated that their main purpose was "to find a trading route between the Portuguese provinces of Angola and Mozambique; to investigate in the central regions the relations between the basins of the Zaire and the Zambezi; and to cross, by the middle, the *whitened* areas of the map" (*whitened* meaning, of course, unchartered and unexplored areas)... "our plan was, above all, to study and give the final word on all the central area of *our Angolan-Mozambiquan* province, and to estimate how far its fertile lands could find, in the Zambezi, an outlet for their products."<sup>20</sup>

They did, therefore, re-draw the map of southern Africa. The area between Angola and Mozambique, from coast to coast, was turned from white into *pink* and claimed as one continuous Portuguese colony. The political events following this claim, in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference of 1885, brought a crisis into Portuguese politics and convulsion in the national feelings. The government of Great-Britain, better known by then as the "perfidious Albion", refused to acknowledge those rights, and claimed the areas between the frontiers

---

<sup>19</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol. II, 202-4.

<sup>20</sup> Capelo e Ivens, *De Angola à Contracosta*, vol. I, 66.

of Angola and Mozambique for itself, forcing the Portuguese government, under the threat of a breach of diplomatic relations and a hostile positioning of the British fleet in the Mediterranean, to give in. The episode, known in Portuguese history as the “English Ultimatum” of 1890, doesn’t deserve even a foot-note in general Histories of Britain. For Portugal it was a national crisis, close to a catastrophe in the public mind. A wave of outrage swept the country, expressed both in the press and in street demonstrations, and took the shape of national mourning. The cultural and scientific institutions claimed louder than the rest, and many writers gave vent to their disgust towards Great Britain. The painter and musician Alfredo Keil composed the march called *The Portuguese*, which was to become the national anthem of the Republic. The poem *Finis Patriae*, by Guerra Junqueiro had enormous success. The King, D. Carlos, returned his English decorations and the royal family took part in the general distress. The statue of Camões was covered in mourning and, in O’Porto, Antero de Quental founded a short lived Northern Patriotic Association (*Junta Patriótica do Norte*).<sup>21</sup>

In the ten years between 1876 and 1886, a change had occurred: the European feelings that saw the first expeditions depart, became national, patriotic, slowly evolving towards the isolationism that was to mark the Portuguese foreign policies in the decades to come. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm that received Serpa Pinto, Capelo and Ivens after their return from Africa, and the success of their works made a difference to the national consciousness about colonial intervention. Their books are still in print, after more than a century has elapsed, and they are still read — perhaps not with the same sense of exhilaration as when they were first published, but still as a source of direct information on the early stages of the scientific and humanitarian exploration of the African colonies. As we read them now we can see, in black and white, the typical nineteenth century European attitudes towards Africa and the Africans at work, the confident sense of European cultural supremacy and political legitimacy, totally unaware of the events to come and of how short lived the European Empires in Africa would be.

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Veríssimo Serrão, *História de Portugal*, vol. IX, *O Terceiro Liberalismo (1851-1890)*, Lisboa, Editorial Verbo, 1989, 89.

## References

- Capelo, Hermenegildo e Roberto Ivens. *De Angola à Contracosta*, vol.I, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, 1998.
- Capelo, Hermenegildo e Roberto Ivens. *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol.II, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, 1998.
- Capelo, Hermenegildo e Roberto Ivens. *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol. I, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, 1996.
- Capelo, Hermenegildo e Roberto Ivens. *De Benguela às Terras de Iaca*, vol.II, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, 1996.
- Hobsbawm , Eric. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780 – Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Ranger, Terence. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa", in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Canto Edition 1992.
- Santos , Maria Emília Madeira dos. *Viagens de exploração terrestre dos portugueses a África*. 2º edição. Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga. Lisboa, 1988.
- Serrão, Joaquim Veríssimo. *História de Portugal*, vol. IX, *O Terceiro Liberalismo (1851-1890)*, Lisboa, Editorial Verbo, 1989.
- Serpa Pinto, Alexandre. *Como eu atravessei a África*. I: *A carabina d'El-Rei*, Lisboa, Publicação Europa-América, Lisboa, 1998.
- Serpa Pinto, Alexandre. *A família Coillard*, Lisboa, Publicações Europa-América, s. d.



# **Inverted Priorities: L. T. Hobhouse's Critical Voice in the Context of Imperial Expansion**

*Carla Larouco Gomes*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)



## Inverted Priorities: L. T. Hobhouse's Critical Voice in the Context of Imperial Expansion

L. T. Hobhouse, a distinguished journalist and academic, is generally remembered as one of the most important representatives of the new liberal thought in England and as a staunch defender of the welfare state. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, he was also a critic of imperial policies and a vigorous opponent to Empire expansion.<sup>1</sup>

According to Hobhouse (1904: 56), imperialism stood for lust, “for the dream of conquest, for the vanity of racial domination, and for the greed of commercial gain”. Recent imperial policy had pushed the country into devastating wars and consequently caused the annexation of territory, bloodshed and mourning, which were justified with the arguments of necessity and inevitability, embroidered with a fatalist and dismissive speech. (Hobhouse 1904: 29) The author set forth his ideas on Empire and imperial expansion, even though not exclusively, in his work *Democracy and Reaction*, which was published in 1904, two years after the end of the second Boer War. (1899-1902)

In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, Britain was facing important challenges and it had to struggle if it was to keep its supremacy. This period was characterized by the competition for territory in several parts of the world between European powers, and despite the fact that Britain was still at the pinnacle of its manufacturing and trading power, its competitors were well on the way of taking over the lead and the economical gap between those competitors and Britain was progressively narrowing. (Porter 2004:

---

<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention here to engage in a conceptual study of “Empire” and “Imperialism”, but rather to use the expressions in their broad meaning, as it shall suffice to meet the objectives of this study.

123-124) The solution seemed to rest on the establishment of economic ties with the developing world, namely South Africa, which was an important source of raw materials for the British Industry. (Porter 2004: 147; Goodlad 2000: 32) Therefore, the apologists of imperial expansion justified the “Scramble for Africa” with the argument of necessity and also with the statement of a sense of duty and responsibility with the natives. Even so, some believed that imperial expansion was morally wrong and had to be reversed, which made imperialists change their attitude and consequently undertake new approaches to imperialism and colonial government. Nevertheless, despite the apparent philanthropic concerns of new imperialism, influential imperialists such as Joseph Chamberlain believed that the survival of the Empire implied national efficiency, as the objective was that of transforming Britain into a proper imperial nation, and the British an uncontested governing race. (Porter 2004: 133-139; 2008: 2-3) However, the complexity of the imperial debate does not allow us to over simplify the matter and base our approach on the assumption that the whole discussion was developed in the context of an imperial/ anti-imperial division, as many critics of imperial policies were not necessarily anti-imperialists and just wanted to reform the Empire. (Porter, 2008: xxiv, xxix) There were critics, indeed, but they did not form a consistent opposition.

The Liberal Party led by Campbell — Bannerman was the main opposition group to the imperialist Unionist government of the late 1890s. Yet, liberals tended either to ignore or to deal with important problems in an abstract way, there was no agreement within the party and despite attacking imperial policies they did so without firmness and coherency.

If it is true that Britain emerged from the “Scramble for Africa” with the most substantial gains, as Goodlad (2000: 29-30) suggested, it is also evident that its victory in the second Boer war owed little to military expertise and was made possible due to contested practices. Those included farm and crop burning and the creation of concentration camps for Boer women and children. As a consequence, the enthusiastic jingoism that had previously characterized popular attitude to imperialism soon waned and anti-imperialism grew (Porter, 2004: 177-178). About that victory, Hobhouse (1904: 41) wrote:

Imperialism was to give us a cheap and easy victory. It gave us nearly three years' war. It was to sweep away the abuses of a corrupt, incompetent and over-expensive administration. The present administration of the Transvaal is more costly than the former, and more completely in the hands of capitalists.

According to Hobhouse (1904: 41), the South African case was one of the most striking examples of the difference between the promise and the performance of imperialism, which was behind the whole reasoning against imperial expansion that the author found so despicable and that he fully expressed in *Democracy and Reaction*. Hobhouse defended that liberals had been led to believe that imperialism was a good thing, which made them support, in some circumstances, the imperial project. However, it turned out that either the promises were false from the beginning or that the people behind those promises were not capable of reaching the objectives they had anticipated. The imperial project had deceived the liberals.

Before we analyze how the author described the differences between the imperial promise and the imperial deeds, let us briefly address the difficulties that arise when trying to understand whether or not liberals supported the Empire. According to Uday Singh Mehta (1999: 4), in his representative book *Liberalism and Empire* (1999), the association of liberal thinkers with the British Empire had always been “extended and deep”, as almost every influential liberal political thinker had written on the Empire. The author also focused on the liberal justification of Empire in the mid- nineteenth century, which he considers to represent the two main contradictions of the liberal argument. One the one hand, liberals defended political consent and were committed to the primacy of the individual. On the other hand, the legitimate consent was based on the belief that political institutions such as representative democracy were dependent on society having reached a certain stage of civilization. In backward societies, such as India, that stage of development had not yet been achieved and therefore individuals in those communities were not in condition to claim for such rights. (Mehta 1999: 81-82; 111)

The following statement stands out as a clear summary on Mehta’s (1999: 46) views about the relationship between liberals and Empire:

Liberalism from the seventeenth century to the present has prided itself on its universality and politically inclusionary character, but the period of liberal history is unmistakably marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and “types of people”.

Independently of the legitimacy of this statement and whether or not we agree with it, what the author fails to make clear enough when talking about the relationship between the liberals and the Empire, is that the former were not

always apologists of what Mehta refers to as exclusion. In her recent book, *A Turn to Empire* (2005), Jennifer Pitts (2005: 1-4) traced the history of the relationship between imperialism and liberalism back from the 1780s until the 1830s, to conclude that the apologetic and enthusiastic speech about the Empire in the 1830s represented a drastic change in the liberals' attitudes, as in 1780s their position was that of criticism, repulsion, and shock to imperial claims and measures. Pitts (2005: 4) explained that the disagreement and difficulty in defining the position of the liberals on Empire rests on the fact that, depending on the circumstances and historical contexts, they sometimes were enthusiastic defenders of the imperial project, and other times its severest critics.

What was, then, Hobhouse's position at the turn of the century? Was his speech, in certain occasions "an example of Imperialist cant", as Peter Clarke suggested (2007: 69), or was he rather a "staunch anti-imperialist" as Richard Bellamy (1992: 55) defended? As mentioned above, Hobhouse distinguished between imperialism of promise and imperialism of performance. On the one hand, it seems probable that the author established such distinction to justify, in a way, the fascination of some liberals with Empire, as, according to the author, their enthusiasm was a legitimate one if we bear in mind the pledges of the imperial project. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Hobhouse (1904: 147, 169) also had the intention of strongly opposing the policies of liberal imperialism, or democratic imperialism, which was a contradiction in terms, in his own words. The author recognized that the new conception of Empire had its political origins in older liberalism and imperial enthusiasts would resort to this fact to appeal for liberals' imperialist sentiment, as these believed older liberalism had made the Empire what it was: a marvelous work of the British, a mastering of the arts of conquest and government, a move towards the spread of individual freedom, to the establishment of local self-government and to the achievement of universal peace. As an example of the imperial promise, Hobhouse (1904: 15-16) specifically mentioned Joseph Chamberlain's speech at the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in 1896, in which the politician accepted that the Empire used to be a synonym of force, aggression and conquest, but nevertheless firmly asserted that such characteristics had meanwhile been replaced by those of freedom, tolerance and pacifism. In the eighteenth century, indeed, Edmund Burke, in the context of the American War of Independence (1775-1783), had realized that imperialism was not

reconcilable with liberty, but by the end of the nineteenth century the difficulties in conciliating Empire with liberty seemed to have disappeared. Imperialism was now justified with the argument that union rested on the free consent of the colonies, as they enjoyed full internal self-government, or at least, good government, which was the case of India, according to Hobhouse. Nevertheless, the author believed that it would have been better if India had never been conquered, but given that it was, British responsibility with that people could not be ignored. (Hobhouse 1904: 18-25)

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, peace looked assured and the redefinition of Empire, together with its association with earlier liberal thought, represented an almost irresistible appeal to modern liberals. Hobhouse (1904: 28) stated:

As it now stood the Empire was a guarantee of peace, freedom and equality between races and religions, and a force making for righteousness and civilization throughout the world, while Imperialism meant nothing but loyalty and devotion to an Empire so constituted.

However, besides the professed ideals, a political theory had also to be judged by its fruits. And much to the dismay of those liberals who had supported it, the evaluation of the fruits of imperialism and imperial policies, defended on the ground of necessity, bore little resemblance to its promises. The policy of imperial expansion was still carried out, despite the recent disappointments with the “South African Adventures”. The spirit of domination inherent to territorial expansion was opposite to the idea of racial equality and did not allow freedom and fairness to be fostered. On the contrary, there seemed to be a wide spread belief that the British were a superior race, which was in great part stimulated by the development of new theories of progress, mainly by social Darwinism, that emphasized the gap between barbarity, or backwardness, and civilization. The Orange Free State had been subjected to an absolute despotism, which contrasted with its previous prosperous and well administered community; the measure of freedom granted to India in the previous generation had been suffering setbacks and the tendency to resort to servile labour had increased again. As mentioned before in this article, according to Hobhouse, (1904: 41) the South African case was that which best stood as an example of the contrast between the promise and performance of imperialism which leads us back to the author’s quotation at the beginning

of this paper: “Imperialism was to give us a cheap and easy victory. It gave us nearly three years’ war.” (Hobhouse 1904: 41) Hobhouse (1904: 45) summarized the contrast between both imperialisms as follows:

Little by little it became clearer that the New Imperialism stood, not for a widened and ennobled sense of responsibility, but for a hard assertion of racial supremacy and material force.

Imperialism of promise was “based on the constitution of the Empire as built up by Liberal statesmen”, while Imperialism of performance was “based on the policy of Empire as shaped by a generation of Imperialist statesmen”. (1904: 44)

Bearing in mind the distinction Hobhouse established between imperialism of promise and imperialism of performance, I believe, to a certain extent, that it is not wrong to agree with Peter Clarke when he says that the author’s speech may be interpreted as showing signs of imperialist cant and, at the same time, assert that Hobhouse was an anti-imperialist, as Bellamy understood. But we need to explain. Hobhouse did not oppose the British Empire. It was imperialism that Hobhouse vigorously attacked, not the one of promise though, since this, as we have seen, had its roots in liberal thought and was inherently good, but the one of performance, which sharply contrasted with the former. If we think of imperialism as a heritage of the earlier generation of liberals, such as the ones who represented the “Manchester School”<sup>2</sup> and developed along those lines, respecting freedom of the individual and the community, the notion of consent and which aimed at attaining universal peace, tolerance and equality, while allowing self-government, then we might look at Hobhouse as one of its enthusiasts. But this was not the imperialism that was fostered, but instead one which involved claims for racial and national superiority, aggression, militarism and war. And with this imperialism Hobhouse could not comply with. Therefore, we may accurately affirm, I believe, that Hobhouse was neither a critic of Empire nor of imperialism of promise. But he was, for sure, anti-imperial expansion and consequently a stern critic of recent imperial policies, that is, of imperialism of performance.

---

<sup>2</sup> Influential school of thought in the mid-nineteenth century led by the liberals Richard Cobden and John Bright. It defended free trade, free competition and freedom of contract, as its members were apologists of *laissez-faire* policies.

This is why I feel inclined to approach the study of the relationship between Hobhouse and Empire by seeing him as a critical voice in the context of imperial expansion rather than an anti-imperialist.

Having thus explained the second part of the title of my paper, I will now focus on its first part: Inverted Priorities. What does this refer to? We have seen that Hobhouse established a distinction between imperialism of promise and imperialism of performance and criticized the fact that the second did not coincide with the first. One might nevertheless wonder whether, for Hobhouse, this disparity was intentional or, on the contrary, merely fortuitous. That is, whether the defenders of imperialism were conscious that they were making a false promise, but they did it anyway to gather sympathies, or they were actually committed to meet the professed objectives but were constrained by external factors, which made them act differently from their initial intentions. A comprehensive approach to this issue would certainly make us embark on an analysis that, though interesting and engaging, exceeds the scope of the present study. However, if we limit our approach to Hobhouse's views on this matter, we can safely assert that the imperialists' misleading arguments reflected their deliberate purpose of deceiving people and meeting their hidden objectives, those of expanding territory, imposing their racial superiority and subduing the natives, that no excuses or rhetoric could disguise. Hobhouse (1904: 29) stated:

The naked fact is that we are maintaining a distinctive policy of aggressive warfare on a large scale and with great persistence, and the only result of attempting constantly to blink the fact is to have introduced an atmosphere of self-sophistication, or, in a syllable, of cant into our politics which is perhaps more corrupting than the unblushing denial of right.

Imperialists had, then, two possible ways of developing the imperial project. They had chosen the wrong one. The one that had always been at the back of their minds, waiting for the right moment to come out. This stands as one of two examples of their inverted priorities.

The second example is related to what the author defined as "imperialism reaction on domestic affairs" (Hobhouse 1904: 49), whose consequences he bluntly summarized in the following statement: "The absorption of public attention in foreign affairs paralyzed democratic effort at home." Determination to rule others and to expand the Empire had deviated popular and government

attention from what should be their main priority and consequently weakened national constitution. The “democratic effort at home” should have striven for a more substantial political democracy, for a fairer industrial legislation, for provision for sickness, for sanitation, cleanliness and public recreation, for the reduction of pauperism and crime and for a free, secular and compulsory education for all classes, for the maintenance and for the further development of working class organization and trade unions. (Hobhouse 1904: 50-55) One might argue that what Hobhouse was really interested in defending when opposing imperial policies was a comprehensive and effective social reform in Britain, besides attacking decadent popular attitudes and behavior that had been stimulated by an exacerbated jingoist sentiment. That is true and it might indeed have been his priority. But there was more to it. Hobhouse insisted that Empire expansion was proved to be contrary to peace, freedom and democracy and a synonym of conflict, aggression, war and imposition. This was imperialism at its worst. However, the author might have accepted a tolerant and truly philanthropic imperialism since, despite opposing imperial expansion, Hobhouse was not anti-Empire and insisted that Britain had responsibilities with the colonies it had conquered. Moreover, we cannot doubt that Hobhouse was also devoted to fighting for justice and against the abuses of imperialism as in 1898 he had been involved in the protection of native races and asserted that justice had to be done in South Africa. In addition, he denounced the barbarism of the farm-burning and concentration camps building policy of the British in South Africa, of which he could provide an accurate account, since his sister, Emily Hobhouse, was the secretary of the women’s branch of the South African Conciliation Committee and, while in Africa, had gathered reports of British barbaric practices. (Clarke 2007: 69-70) In fact, according to Peter Clarke (2007: 70-71), Emily Hobhouse later influenced Campbell -Bannerman to state his position against methods of barbarism.

Expansion of territory had been preferred to reform at home, motivated by the blind and unintelligent ambition for power, whose consequences Hobhouse (1904: 55) summarized in the following way: “Aggrandisement, war, compulsory enlistment, lavish expenditure, protection, arbitrary government, class legislation, follow naturally one upon the other.” Hobhouse stated that even if one believed in the alleged objective of working towards the emancipation of the natives from a stage of underdevelopment, often stated

by defenders of imperialism, the right time for such initiative to take place, had not yet arrived. Later, in *Liberalism* (1994: 21) the author would write:

Until the white man has fully learnt to rule his own life, the best of all things that he can do with the dark man is to do nothing with him. In this relation, the day of a more constructive Liberalism is yet to come.

Moreover, the author stated that democracy was based on the principle that people as a whole must be able to employ total control over the administration and, in order to do so, they need to be fully informed of political affairs. Unfortunately, this did not seem to be a priority for the vast majority of people in Britain, overwhelmed by jingoism<sup>3</sup>, who revealed apathy, futility, did not bother to think and showed little interest for politics (Hobhouse 1904: 67-73). Nevertheless, even if that interest existed, the amount, complexity and distance from the imperial affairs, would make the role of controlling them difficult and hardly ever achieved. Hobhouse (1904: 147) stated:

(...) the affairs of any community should be in the hands of its members as a whole as against a single family or class. For democracy is government of the people by itself. Imperialism is government of one people by another.

Therefore, democratic imperialism is but a contradiction impossible to reconcile due to the very nature of the terms. But does this not collide with our previous conclusion that the author, as a liberal, could have supported one kind of imperialism, the one of promise? It does not seem the case. Hobhouse explained that if there was an aggregation of territories enjoying internal independence while united by a common bond, democracy might be reconcilable with Empire. This ceased to be true if Empire implied the imposition of one community will on others, which was the case at the time. (Hobhouse 1904: 157)

## References

- Bellamy, Richard (1992). *Liberalism and Modern Society*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Clarke, Peter (1978). *Liberals and Social Democrats*. Cambridge: CUP. 2007.

---

<sup>3</sup> Exacerbated form of patriotism, usually characterized by an aggressive attitude towards foreign countries.

- Goodlad, Graham. D. (2000). *British Foreign and Imperial Policy, 1865-1919*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hobhouse, L. T. (1904) *Democracy and Reaction*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1911). *Liberalism and other Writings*. Ed. James Meadowcroft. Cambridge: CUP. 1994.
- Mehta, Uday Singh (1999). *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pitts, Jennifer (2005). *A Turn to Empire. The Rise and Fall of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Porter, Bernard (1975). *The Lion's Share: a short History of British Imperialism, 1850-2004*. Harlow: Longman, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1968) *Critics of Empire. British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*. London: I.B.Tauris & Co, 2008.

# Ways of Reading Victoria's Empire

*Teresa de Ataíde Malafaia*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa



## Ways of Reading Victoria's Empire

The two [England and India] have no common past. Their roots are stuck in different soils; they look at everything from different angles; and the best intentions are constantly misunderstood. Wrong motives are supplied; distorted vision deludes.

Annie Besant (1926). "India, Bond or Free?"

Lecturing on the British Empire has always been a difficult matter though these days a great variety of approaches and media is readily at hand to all of us. Indeed, we always had the Victorian authors, women or men, who viewed the colonies in a critical way, but now we also must deal with the nineteenth-century's re-imagining which emphasises diverse perspectives, such as the ways museums exhibit imperial visual/material cultures and the way artists see them. Ever since the remarkable exhibition held in the British Library in 2009 *Victoria's Empire to Points of View. Capturing the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Photographs* we have certainly been dealing with new readings on the nineteenth-century from twenty-first century perspectives.

Empire building and modernity were, in fact, founded on notions of east and west as two opposed entities. This cultural construct, whereby the west is understood as superior to the east, served the purpose of keeping the Orient controlled and, at the same time, stimulated an unbalanced power which is still visible today, namely in our multicultural societies.

For several years I have been doing research on the Victorians and the Empire which led me quite frequently to wonder about the different ways on how to motivate undergraduate and postgraduate students on these issues, considering engaging readings, either textual or visual. Especially interesting are women's addresses on colonialism and its aftermath, such as Mary Seacole's

and Mary Kingsley's<sup>1</sup> readings on the British empire, or even Julia Margaret Cameron with her successful photographs not only of famous British people but also of peasants working on plantations in Ceylon, today's Sri Lanka. Considered by Cox and Ford as "a product of British colonialism", Cameron lived in this country "from the coastal village of Kalutara to the hill station of Nuwara Eliya" (Cox, *Ford* 203: 483). Though not expecting to have a market for her work as was the case previously and trying to negotiate the hot climate, she nevertheless kept doing portraits of maidservants and plantation workers, as we can be seen in *Young Woman, Ceylon*.<sup>2</sup>

Actually, these women's readings, either textual or visual, on the British colonies made an important contribution to many different imperial observations (gazing) about their contemporaneous colonial reality easily recognisable, in the following excerpts, from Seacole's, firstly on her readiness to be a nurse in the Crimean war and then on her entrance in Sebastopol:

Now, I am not for a single instant going to blame the authorities who would not listen to the offer of a motherly yellow woman to go to the Crimea and nurse her "sons" there. [...] In my country, where people know our use, it would have been different. (Seacole 1857/1988: 78)

The news of the evacuation of Sebastopol soon carried away all traces of yesterday's fatigue. For weeks past I had been offering bets to every one that I would not only be the first woman to enter Sebastopol from the English lines, but that I would be the first to carry refreshments into the fallen city. (Seacole 1857/1988: 172-173)

Just for this paper's sake, the challenge is not to provide a core of critical and theoretical readings but to focus on Annie Besant (1847-1933). In fact, these considerations on various ways of reading the Empire, which post-colonial theory made possible, inspired me to return to this Victorian woman who looked at the orient with no preconceptions. Annie Besant was an essayist who campaigned for many causes not only in England but also in India as is stated by Gayatri Spivak who considered her "a brilliant woman of extraordinary enthusiasm and unremitting activism, for Christianity, atheist secularism,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Kingsley (1897/1992). *Travels in West Africa*. London: J. M. Dent.

<sup>2</sup> Julia Margaret Cameron. *Young Woman, Ceylon* (1875-79). 24.5x18,3 cm. Provenance: Nigel Henderson, 1983.

Socialism, and Theosophy/India, respectively.” (Spivak 1991: 264). Indeed, she contributed to many social and political movements and her considerations on India point out to Britain’s relationship with other cultures, inasmuch as she fought for India’s Home Rule (*swaraj*), the ultimate moral and political ideal. In many cases, women’s relations with the Empire did not aim at the transformation of the established rules, as is objectively illustrated by Mary Kingsley, but aimed rather at a humanised Empire as is expressed in *Travels in West Africa*:

Nothing strikes one so much, in studying the degeneration of these native tribes, as the direct effect that civilisation and reformation has in hastening it. The worst enemy to the existence of the African tribe, is the one who comes to it and says: — Now you must civilise, and come to school, and leave off all those awful goings-on of yours, and settle down quietly. (Kingsley 1857/1998:158)

Indeed, when one lives out here and sees the surrounding conditions of this state of culture, the conviction grows on you that, morally speaking, the African is far from being the brutal fiend he is often painted, a creature that loves cruelty and blood for their own sake. (Kingsley 1988: 203-204)

In the case of the above mentioned women, Seacole, Kingsley and Cameron, and in spite of their ways of representing the Empire, an explicit will to highlight the colonised subjects is not recognisable. Yet, in Besant’s assumptions we clearly see the deconstruction of “the rationale that had consciously justified British colonialism in India.” (Walpole 2005: 3). In spite of the contemporary asymmetrical relations of power, Besant and Cameron represent India and Ceylon in ways which acknowledge the antinomic outcome of British culture in these colonised countries. Besant’s essays led to struggles for liberation and the independence from British rule (1947) while Cameron only drew our attention to the controversies about people from Ceylon giving them some visibility in her time. Yet, as I had the opportunity to say in a previous article<sup>3</sup>, in which I study ways of displaying as related to Julia Cameron and Ami Vitale when analysing some of her photographs on Kashmir, it is my belief that Cameron’s experience of the British Empire was a determinant factor to her educational background, not only because she was

---

<sup>3</sup> See “Ways of Displaying. Women, Photography and Empowerment” (Malafaia 2009: 781)

born in Calcutta, but also because of her life as a *mensabib*, married to a British official in India, and a mother of six. Therefore, I consider that her Ceylonese works deserve a real critical study, for they are, still today, largely ignored. In fact, as Victoria Olsen points out in *Julia Margaret Cameron's Women*, the exhibition organised by the Art Institute of Chicago and held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, from 1998 to 1999, did not include Cameron's photographs taken in Ceylon (Olsen 2003: 251). Again according to Olsen, in spite of a great demand for "ethnographic portraits of colonial peoples at that particular time" (2003: 252), Cameron did not try to show them. We may conclude from Cameron's notes and subsequent critical studies that she did not then design an exhibition project capable of truly motivating her. Yet, her Ceylonese photographs are at present exhibited on-line and both the J. Paul Getty Museum and the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, England, have made efforts to display them. As a matter of fact "photography (...) implicitly reinforced a vision of western superiority and progress." (Falconer 2010:71)

However, in Besant's case she always urged Indians to be proud of their own culture and, in some of her essays, she seems to be unconsciously a party to the several struggles against colonial rule. The idea that the colonisers had the duty to "civilise" the natives and that the colonial ideology had to be carried out for the good of the "inferior ones", is thus completely deconstructed in her essays, namely when analysing English education in *Shall India live or die?* (1925) where she states:

Why is it not felt by Indians to be intolerable? It is because it has become a habit, bred in us from childhood, to regard the Sahab-log [English] as our natural superiors. (Besant 1925: 31)

It is also important to bear in mind that Besant has a very clear position on education. In fact, she points out that "English Education was to awaken India to a sense of her own humiliation. It was the destined destroyer of her subjection". (Besant 126 1926: 123). She considered that Oriental spirituality was really threatened by the material features of the western countries, namely by Great Britain. Actually, she stressed that India's past and present cultures were very rich, a concept which justifies her defence of an Indian education and the refusal of the English language which

(...) not only tended to de-nationalise them [the Indian students], but closed to them the history of their country; for its history, as taught in the Government Schools, was written by an Englishman, leaving them to grow up ignorant of the fact that they were heirs of a Past unparalleled in history. (Besant 1926: 121)

These cultural and political assumptions led Besant to found the Central College of Benares in 1898. Her attitude towards helping India in relation to her roots is always present in her numerous and hardly available works on India. They can surely be viewed within a broader cultural and political movement which opposed the Anglicists who believed English education in India would contribute to her cultural and social improvement, to the Orientalists fighting “to give back to India her ancient Freedom.” (Besant 1926: 26)

It is very challenging to analyse how Besant tried to deconstruct *la mission civilisatrice* of British imperialism. Actually, her essays and speeches emphasised the need for a cultural unity which is the recognition of the cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of India. While other authors represent colonised subjects as homogeneous groups, very much like Mary Kingsley or Julia Cameron do, in Besant we encounter a permanent concern with identity and unity, mainly in relation to young people when she defends, as a builder of the New India<sup>4</sup>, “the youth of the Nation, rising above all decisions, forgetting all ancient animosities, with its watchword, *United India*”. (Besant 1942: 464) It is well known that the imposition of the English language and literature in schools was quite controversial and again led to tensions between the Orientalists and the Anglicists as Annie Besant’s and Thomas Macaulay’s considerations make clear:

(...) the dialects common spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so rude that, until they are enriched with some quarter, it will not be possible to translate any valuable work into them. (...) I am quite ready to take Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who would deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. (Macaulay 1835/1871: 91)

---

<sup>4</sup> See Annie Besant (1942). *Annie Besant — Builder of New India*. Besant Spirit Series, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House.

Education can always be evaluated as a means of appropriation of the power structures for it helps to create elite groups. In this colonial agenda, the elites were expected to reproduce the colonial model or the spirit of freedom. However, in Besant's essays and speeches, the Anglicist's discourse is also present, and according to Indira Ghose, "the figure of the educated native confronts the colonial rulers with the ambivalence at the heart of the colonial discourse. The disturbance caused to the British by the educated native stems, in part, from a sense of prescience, and it is precisely these mimic Englishmen who are later to overturn British rule. (Ghose 2002: 35)

Yet, at the time, many people in England did not agree with such a model of subordination and considered this kind of subjugation temporary. In spite of her reading India as a Victorian sage, Annie Besant considered the British as "birds of passage attracted by the high salaries and power attached to the members of the 'ruling race'" (Besant 1926: 25). Yet, in India, the subaltern groups did not form a unity, though Besant fought to give the subject nation a voice, inasmuch as she was one of the greatest supporters of Home Rule. As she states:

My own life in India, since I came to it in 1893 to make it my home, has been devoted to one purpose, to give back to India her ancient Freedom. I had joined the Theosophical Society in 1889, and knew that one of the purposes for which it was intended by the ever living Rishis (...) was the rescue of India from the materialism which was strangling her true life by the revival of ancient philosophical and scientific religions, and, by the placing of India as an equal partner in a great Indo-British Commonwealth would avert a war of colour and bind East and West together in a Brotherhood which would usher in an Era of Co-operation and Peace. (Besant 1926: 26-27)

"A mere change of mindset, however great, will not bring about revolutions" — this assumption from Spivak's in "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model" (Spivak 1980: 88) brings my approach to its logical conclusion. Actually, despite their being women and thus marginal subjects within the Victorian frame of mind, Mary Seacole, Mary Kingsley, Julia Cameron and Annie Besant belonged to the dominant culture in Jamaica, vast areas of Western Africa, Ceylon or India. Even Seacole who was "only a little brown", "a Creole", belonged to this dominant culture owing to her "good Scotch blood". (Seacole 1857/1988: 4, 1) In actual fact, gender was not the only factor shaping these women's identities. All of them were British citizens. Three of

them were white British citizens. And in spite of their different readings of colonial rules, the Empire granted them the possibility of being in the public domain and, thus, intervene.

These considerations can be easily applied to Mary Seacole, Mary Kingsley, Julia Cameron and Annie Besant for they were able to give visibility to the colonial subject though always on the grounds of class and gender issues. Thus, in spite of all the contradictions we come across in their ways of reading Victoria's Empire, which are still kept alive nowadays, these women contributed in their own ways to deconstruct the ideologies and the values which legitimised British imperialism.

## References

- Besant, Annie (1926). *India: Bond or Free? A World Problem*. London, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Besant, Annie (1942). *Annie Besant – Builder of New India*. Besant Spirit Series, Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House.
- Cox, Julian, Colin Ford, eds. (2003). *Julia Margaret Cameron. The Complete Photographs*. London: Thames & Hudson in association with The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles and The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford.
- Falconer, John, Louise Hide (2009). *Points of View. Capturing the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Photographs*. London: The British Library.
- Ghose, Indira (2000). *Women Travellers in Colonial India. The Power of the Female Gaze*. Oxford, New Dehli: Oxford India Paperbacks.
- Kingsley, Mary (1897/1992). *Travels in West Africa*. London: J. M. Dent.
- Macaulay, Thomas B. (1835/1871). "Minute on Education". In Lees W.Nassau (1871) *Indian Musulmáns*. London, Edinburgh: William and Nortgate.
- Malafaia, M<sup>a</sup> Teresa de Ataíde (2003). "A autoridade da Experiência: as Viagens Africanas de Mary Kingsley." *Anglo-Saxónica. Revista do Centro de Estudos Anglísticos da Universidade de Lisboa*. Série II. 18. Lisboa: Edições Colibri. 199-209.
- Malafaia, M<sup>a</sup> Teresa de Ataíde (2003). "Mary Seacole – An Alternative Voice in Colonial Discourse?" *Estudos Anglo-Portugueses. Livro de Homenagem a Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Centro de Estudos Anglo-Portugueses. 451-456.
- Malafaia, Maria Teresa de Ataíde (2009). "Ways of Displaying. Women, Photography and Empowerment" *Homenagem a Maria Helena Paiva Correia*. Lisboa: Colibri. 775-785.

- Olsen, Victoria (2003). *From Life. Julia Margaret Cameron & Victorian Photography*. London: Aurum Press.
- Seacole, Mary (1857, 1998). *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. (1980). "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model", in Landry *et al.* (1996). *The Spivak Reader*. New York, London: Routledge. 75-106.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. (1991). "How to Teach a 'Culturally Different' Book", in Landry *et al.* (1996). *The Spivak Reader*. New York, London: Routledge. 238-266.
- Walpole, Rosa (2005). "Annie Besant's own Indian Ideals: Encouraging Citizenship?" Unpublished MA dissertation. Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon.

National Portrait Gallery <<http://www.npg.org.uk/>>

# **“Buy the World a Coke:” *Rang de Basanti* and Coca-colonisation**

*Ana Cristina Mendes*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)



## “Buy the World a Coke:” *Rang de Basanti* and Coca-colonisation

The purpose of this paper is to identify and examine, with reference to the Indian film *Rang de Basanti*, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra and released in 2006, processes of coca-colonisation, a Marxist-inspired term which broadly refers to the cultural (re)colonisation of the globe through the action of western multinational corporations. As I see it, coca-colonisation occurs at two levels in the film: at one immediate level, through the actual product placement of Coca Cola and, at a second level, through the use in Mehra’s film of a western documenting and directorial eye, an outside directorial eye which is presented as authoritative.

Before addressing the subject of this paper, I would like to note that this is the first attempt to articulate ideas that have been emerging around a research project on post-liberalisation narratives of national identity in India, particularly on what I would like to tentatively call “Bollywood heritage film” and its marketing of the Indian revolutionary figure. When using the term “Bollywood” I am of course aware that, as the critic Amit Chaudhuri puts it, “‘Bollywood’ is a droll but misleading shorthand for what is really an exceptional heterogeneity of periods and styles”. (Chaudhuri 2008: 177) Rakeysh Mehra himself has stated: “I know Hollywood. It has a hill in it. Where is Bollywood? It doesn’t exist. It is a notion.’ [...] Bollywood is not an actual place — you can’t visit it. It’s an idea, even a form, perhaps a sensibility”. (qtd. in Chaudhuri 2008: 175) When referring to the term “Bollywood heritage film,” I am also alluding to heritage film, or to be more accurate to British heritage film, which the film Andrew Higson has influentially defined as “a relatively small group of ‘British’ costume dramas of the 1980s and early 1990s that detailed aspects of the English past and that shared various circumstantial, formal, and thematic characteristics,” in particular, an

“emphasis on the upper and middle classes in the early decades of the twentieth century”. (Higson 2003: 11) Later Higson would broaden this definition to include, more generally, any films that “engage in one way or another with English heritage,” that is, films which “offer some version of the English past, or some representation of the history of Englishness or the English cultural heritage”. (Higson 2003: 25)

Though some researchers have noted that heritage film is a transnational genre, that is, a phenomenon not exclusively linked to the British film industry, little attention has been devoted to Bollywood heritage film. This is clearly an emerging area of studies — it will suffice here to consider the increasing visibility of Indian films, which are more and more enjoying a global reach, attracting as they are crossover viewers beyond a South Asian diasporic audience. Bollywood’s growing corporatization, the result of India’s integration into a globalised free-market economy in the 1990s, has of course had a decisive impact on this development. Furthermore, aware of the export potential of India’s entertainment industry, the Government of India passed a law in 1999 exempting film export earnings from tax. (Thussu 2008: 105) As a result of economic reforms imposed by the World Bank and IMF, over the last two decades, India has seen the rise of a young, urban population that has had significant exposure to western media and entertainment. In response to this “multiplex culture,” a burgeoning number of Indian filmmakers began experimenting with urban-focused themes. *Rang de Basanti* is one of those “multiplex films,” a film aimed at urban youngsters, specifically upper middle-class college students. (Dark 2008: 134) It was touted as one of the biggest releases of the year 2006 in India and was also aggressively marketed months before its premier. “Accomplished and universally appealing, this is the way Bollywood films should be made...” reads part of a BBC online review reprinted on the cover of this UTV (United Television) film. Indeed, the film had high DVD sales among Indian diaspora audiences in the US, Canada, and the UK, and was nominated for a BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) award.

I will now briefly turn to the first level of coca-colonisation in the film, related to branding strategies which include product placement, celebrity endorsements before and after the release of *Rang de Basanti*, and the launch of products, such as collectibles, based on the theme of the film. UTV, the company which produced the film, allocated 40% of its total budget to

marketing expenses. In order to recover its heavy production costs, UTV needed to create a unique brand image for *Rang de Basanti* much before its release so that it could gain from advertising revenues coming from numerous tie-ups with various brands. The brand image and, consequently, the entire marketing campaign of *Rang de Basanti* was centered on its tagline which read "a generation awakens." As P. K. Varma observes, "Indian identity is a composite duality of western and domestic product consumption. Urban India brushes its teeth with Colgate or Pepsodent; drinks Coca-Cola, Pepsi or Thums Up" (Varma 2004: 160-161) and this is the lifestyle that is showcased in films such as *Rang de Basanti*.

To signal the theatrical release of the film, Coca Cola launched special edition bottles featuring the slogan "Piyo Sar Utha Ke" ("Drink with your head held high"). This slogan was present in an integrated marketing campaign which included, besides print advertisements and radio spots, co-branded movie trailers. Other promotional activities by Coca Cola comprised giving away free passes to the film, co-branding the soundtrack of *Rang de Basanti*, launching film collectibles such as T-shirts, and conducting a contest to meet the leading actor/ brand ambassador of Coca Cola in India, Aamir Khan. Upon the film's release, Khan posed with India's Coca Cola's vice-president of marketing and a large-scale model of the special edition Coca Cola bottle. While a detailed examination of the negative brand image of Coca Cola from its very arrival in India and an inquiry into the marketing strategies used by the company to fight its bad publicity would merit another essay, what is relevant to note here is that, on the one hand, the nationalist theme of *Rang de Basanti* offered Coca Cola the perfect opportunity to be perceived as an "Indian" brand, and, on the other hand, the film mirrors the ever increasing presence of advertisers in the Indian popular film industry and the seamless integration of brands into Bollywood storylines.

At this point I will turn to the second level of coca-colonialisation in *Rang de Basanti*, related to the overarching western directorial eye. The film begins with a struggling British filmmaker, Sue, who is determined to shoot a docudrama based on the diary of her grandfather, James McKinley, who served as a jailer in the British Army during the 1930s Indian independence movement. Sue arrives in India, a speaker of Hindi and knowledgeable in revolutionary history, a history that only she, an outsider, seems to covet. With the help of an Indian friend, Sonia, she holds screen-tests for the docudrama. Sonia helps

her cast four young men for the script: Daljit (“DJ”), Karan, Aslam, and Sukhi. The young men gradually begin to realise that their own lives are quite similar to the characters of the Punjabi revolutionaries they portray in Sue’s film — DJ plays Chandrasekhar Azad (1906-1931), Karan plays Bhagat Singh (1907-1931), Aslam plays Ashfaqullah Khan (1900-1927), and Sukhi plays Hari Sivaram Rajguru (1908-1931). In the process of filming, the idealism of India’s freedom fighters displaces the protagonists’ alienation and urban disaffection and seeps into them. One of the four friends discovers that his father is an arms broker, supplying defective spare parts of fighter jets to the Defence Ministry. These substandard parts result in the crashes of several fighter planes. Among the casualties is their friend, Lieutenant Ajay Rathod, Sonia’s fiancée. Indeed, Rang de Basanti is dedicated to lives of Indian airmen who have died due to frequent MiG aircraft crashes. Enraged and frustrated, the protagonists hatch a plot to kill the Defence Minister. They succeed and take shelter in the All India Radio building, which they have taken over. Before they are gunned down, they broadcast their message to the country explaining why they took the law into their own hands. The intersection between the two plot lines occurs when the students begin to take on the role of revolutionaries. Through a film-within-a-film format, Mehra begins by interspersing scenes of the freedom fighters’ confrontations with the British with scenes depicting the protagonists’ scepticism and lack of idealism. Such non-linear narrative structure, aided by the diary format and voice over narration, sets the tone of the film from the outset. For instance, the opening credits of Rang de Basanti are accompanied by archival video footage, including old film reels of officers beating Indian subjects, and a collage of photos from the Indian struggle for autonomy, to the sound of a rock Hindi song.

Rang de Basanti’s narrative begins in present day London when, after Sue’s company cuts off funding for her docudrama owing to the unsaleability of any Indian freedom fighters except for Gandhi, she resigns and heads to India to produce the film on her own. Sue decides to tell not the pacifist, Gandhian story, but rather the story of anti-colonial revolutionary heroes who ushered in “Inquilab Zindabad” (“Long live the Revolution”), a story of militancy, martyrdom, and armed struggle that apparently “does not sell.” The curious fact is that in recent Hindi cinema there has been an upsurge of interest in the figure of Bhagat Singh and a converse disinterest in Gandhi. As Vidhu Aggarwal puts it, “this more recent spate of films about Bhagat Singh reflects

a turn in the self-figuration of India from the conciliatory tone of the Gandhi/Nehru model to the promotion of a more violent dissident energy in pace with India's militarism". (Aggarwal 2010: 5)

In Mehra's film, James McKinley, Sue's grandfather, is one of the colonial police officers in charge of breaking Bhagat Singh and his fellow independence fighters. The opening sepia shots of *Rang de Basanti*, contrasting with the lush and colourful shots of the fun-loving friends throughout the film, take us inside a prison house in British India where McKinley informs two Indian revolutionaries, Ashfaqullah Khan and Ram Prasad Bismil, of their imminent execution and leads the resolved Bhagat Singh to his death. McKinley's diary, on which Sue's docudrama is based, vividly records the remorse over his part in the torture and, later, in the executions. In the film, key moments from India's independence struggle are re-enacted in glossy sepia tones, with low key lighting, all of which are shot from the perspective of James and Sue McKinley: the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919, the Kakori train robbery of 1925, the "Simon go Back" agitation and the assassination of British deputy superintendent J. P. Saunders in 1928 in retaliation for the brutal death, during a nonviolent protest, of nationalist leader Lala Lajpat Rai, and the subsequent imprisonment and execution of the revolutionaries. The climax of Mehra's film — when one of the friends, Ajay, dies in an air crash — sees the merging of the past and present plots. For example, in the assassination of the Defence Minister we see startling resemblances to the murder of Saunders by the revolutionaries. As such, *Rang de Basanti* restages, as Chaudhuri writes, "Hindi cinema's old preoccupations: to do with forgetting and remembering one's place in the world, and, connected to this, to do with the theme of doubles, of being joined, whether one knows it or not, to a different, often contradictory, version of one's self and life". (Chaudhuri 2008:172)

Given that the episode at Kakori touched the lives of the four revolutionaries, the centre piece of Sue's docudrama is to be the spectacular train robbery itself (Basu 2010: 102). The idea of the robbery was initially conceived by Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan, who belonged to the HRS (Hindustan Republican Association), to finance an armed revolution against the British Empire in India. In the film, the railway cars of today become the besieged carriages of the robbery of 1925 and the young people who minutes ago inhabited the present are transported in full period-costume to their assigned revolutionary roles. (Basu 2010: 104) This cinematic sequence

incorporates the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, shot in black and white except for splashes of red that stand for the spilling of human blood. Jallianwalla Bagh is seen by many to be the turning point in India's struggle for freedom because it led to the emergence of the revolutionary quit-India movement. As you well know, this massacre took place in Amritsar, when British soldiers under the orders of General Dyer fired on unarmed men, women and children. As already mentioned, the turning point in the film is the death of Ajay due to corruption in the Ministry of Defence, and the scene depicting Jallianwalla Bagh compares the ruthless General Dyer and the Indian Defence Minister by having both figures alternatively issuing the command to shoot unarmed civilians. (Kumar 2010: 10)

My concluding remarks address a central question: it is through Sue that the group of friends begin to morph, in sepia tones, into revolutionary figures. It is her vision that transforms them into freedom fighters: "I saw them then, like they had leapt out of the pages of grandpa's diary." She is thus scripted "as the catalyst for [Indian] political awakening". (Dark 2008: 142) Most relevantly, as Kshama Kumar notes, Sue "functions as the camera herself" (6): hers is the "documenting eye". (Basu 2010: 93) She is the one "who is always in control of all recording devices, be it the movie camera, or her grandfather's diary". (Basu 2010: 102) In addition, she acts symbolically as the fantasy audience, both a witness to the socio-political problems in present day consumer India and the western subject who provides recognition for the historical traumas of British India through sentimental affiliation with anti-colonial freedom fighters. (Aggarwal 2010: 5) To conclude, these are my the questions I have been trying to find answers to: Why the choice of a British character, the granddaughter of an officer of the Crown in India, as catalyst for political awakening, as documenting eye and as fantasy audience in a cinematic retelling of the story of the Punjabi freedom fighters led by Bhagat Singh? Why the choice of the diary of a British colonial officer as narrative engine? Why does Mehra's film borrow the western view already mediated by post-imperial melancholic tendencies acted out in popular media? To appeal to the western market, as a go-between? To make the film more marketable through the use of a western perspective? Or is it to make a western character expiate the guilt of the atrocities committed in the past?

## References

- Aggarwal, Vidhu (2010). "The Anti-Colonial Revolutionary in Contemporary Bollywood Cinema." Thematic issue "New Modernities and the "Third World"". Eds. V. DeSousa, J. E. Henton, and G. Ramanathan. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/5>. CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture. 1-10. 12.2. 1 November 2010.
- Basu, Manisha (2010). "Rang de Basanti: The Solvent Brown and Other Imperial Colors." *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*. Eds. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Rajeshwari Pandharipande. London: Anthem Press. 93-110.
- Chaudhuri, Amit (2008). "Hollywood aur Bollywood." *Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Peter Lang. 170-181.
- Dark, Jann (2008). "Crossing the Pale: Representations of White Western Women in Indian Film and Media." <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/TfC/article/viewArticle/677>. *Transforming Cultures eJournal*. 124-144. 3.1. 1 November 2010.
- Higson, Andrew (2003). *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kumar, Kshama (2010). "'Bhagat Singh Topless, Waving in Jeans': Melancholia Through Mimesis in Rang De Basanti." <http://widescreenjournal.org/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/60/86>. *Wide Screen*. n/p. 1.2. 1 November 2010.
- Thusu, Daya Kishan (2008). "The Globalization of 'Bollywood': The Hype and the Hope". *Global Bollywood*. Eds. Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar. New York: NYU Press. 97-113.
- Varma, P. K. (2004). *Being Indian*. New Delhi: Viking.



# **New Imperialism, Colonial Masculinity and the Science of Race**

*Iolanda Ramos*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas – Universidade Nova de Lisboa



## New Imperialism, Colonial Masculinity and the Science of Race

The British Empire was in its heyday the largest empire not only in modern history but in human history. It has lingered on in the collective mind as ‘the Empire upon which the sun never set’<sup>1</sup> to express how it stretched over the five continents of the Earth. From the fifteen century onwards, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France and Britain built empires, but in fact the British Empire by the end of the seventeenth century consisted of only the colonies in North America, the West Indies and India.

The world view in 1700 was different from today, and maps depicted the three great empires that existed at the time: the Mughal Empire of India, the Manchu Empire of China and the Ottoman Empire ruled by the Sultan of Turkey. (Roberts 1995: 4) These empires were eventually dismantled one hundred and fifty years later, while the European powers and Britain in particular — as the ‘workshop of the world’ and the owner of a mighty naval force — took the lead as colonising and imperial nations.

This essay aims to examine how the assumption that Britain represented a superior form of civilisation came together in empire building, gender construction and racial theory. It seeks to rely on a relational approach in order to underline how times have changed but the world-wide conditions of the later Victorian era — economic crisis, social tension and a questioning of established values — seem familiar to this postmodern and postcolonial age.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, a Web site like “The British Empire Where the Sun Never Sets”, built by Stephen Luscombe in 1996 and regularly updated (Luscombe 2011).

## 1. (In)formal imperialism and global political strategy

The years between 1870 and 1914 witnessed the fastest growth in the British empire. British institutions and culture exerted a strong influence throughout the world, and there was a gradual awareness that English would lead the way as an international language. At the end of the century, Britain had possessions all over the globe and authority over a quarter of the world's population. As Jeremy Paxman points out, the Victorians did not invent the British Empire, but "it was in Victorian times that the idea of a *political* Empire first became a pressing issue". (2009: 192) In fact, popular opinion echoed the tune according to which Britannia ruled the world, and, to use David Cannadine's words, the "cartographical image provided a reassuring picture of coherence and uniformity". (2002: 85) The map became an icon of British power as it showed British territories — a fifth of all the land in the world — in red, something that impressed and filled with pride millions of ordinary Britons that, for the most part, had never left the Isles.<sup>2</sup>

The designation 'New Imperialism' expresses a new impulse that was given to the imperial project as Britain and other European nations accelerated their partition of territories, which caused a scramble for colonies, mainly in Africa but also in Asia and the Pacific. India remained 'the jewel in the crown' but British interests in Africa developed at an unprecedented pace. In the 1870s, the interior of Africa, known to the Victorians as the 'dark continent', was still largely unexplored. By 1914, however, the whole continent had been divided among the major European powers.

As A. N. Wilson remarks, "the nation of shopkeepers had become the nation of imperialists". (2003: 218-19) There was no break in Britain's traditional colonial policy developed in the preceding period, from 1815 to 1870, but this expansionist movement and more obvious quickening of pace for the taking over of new lands in Africa, the Pacific and the Far East, or for developing existing overseas possessions, which began in the 1870s, "aimed to promote

---

<sup>2</sup> This evolution is very visible if one compares maps of the British Empire in 1820, 1870 and 1914 (Roberts 1995: 10-11; Lynch 1999: 234-35). See also <[http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Map-of-the-World-Showing-the-British-Empire-Coloured-in-Red-at-the-End-of-the-Nineteenth-Century-Posters\\_i1873718\\_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/Map-of-the-World-Showing-the-British-Empire-Coloured-in-Red-at-the-End-of-the-Nineteenth-Century-Posters_i1873718_.htm)>. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. Board games also depicted the world as a tour through the British colonies and foreign possessions (see illustration in MacKenzie 2001: 282).

national prestige and stimulate commerce". (Lynch 1999: 233)<sup>3</sup> In fact, by mid-century the British population had risen to 18,000,000, having doubled since 1801, but in spite of Britain's good economic performance, large parts of the Empire were undeveloped and in no position to buy British goods.

A growing convergence between politics and economics emerged from the competitive free-market economy of the late Victorian Period. The British began to fear for the country's leading position as the world's trader, especially when Britain's manufacturing superiority began to be undermined by German and American competition. In his analysis of the growing scepticism that was felt in the 1870s about "the effectiveness of the autonomous and self-correcting market economy" (1999: 54), Hobsbawm rephrases Adam Smith in order to conclude: "The hand was becoming visible in all sort of ways". (*ibid.*)

Contrary to what the well-known adage 'trade follows the flag' asserted, modern historians point out that commerce and informal imperialism often preceded annexation and imperial formal authority. (Harvie 2000: 118; Matthew 1988: 559) This represents a departure from previous criticism based on the links between capitalism and formal colonial rule, as inspired by Hobson's surplus capital theory of expansion, for instance — which opened the path to a complex body of theories of New Imperialism that discussed economics and empire. (Smith 2000: 74-79) Although the economic explanations for the New Imperialism have come under close scrutiny, it must be taken into account that "between 1870 and 1914 Britain's net overseas investment increased from £1200 million to £4000 million". (Pugh 1999: 132) Bernard Porter, for instance, keeps his line of argument and asserts: "Capitalism lay at the root of nineteenth-century British imperialism. [...] The economic development of the empire, in the interests of all its members and subjects for perpetuity, would be the crowning achievement of the 'new imperialism'". (2004: xi, 188)

From the early 1870s, imperial expansion also became a key element in the Conservative Party foreign policies, causing a splitting effect regarding the Liberal commitment to domestic affairs and the Irish question. Both as Prime Minister and as Leader of the Opposition, Disraeli pledged the nation to the

---

<sup>3</sup> See maps showing Britain's imports and exports 1860-1910 on a global scale (Lynch 1999: 16).

maintenance and development of the Empire, accusing Gladstone and his party of attempting to reduce Britain's status as an overseas and imperial power. Home Rule for Ireland, in particular, was eventually refused by Conservative parliamentarians as well as by many Liberals, for they considered it to endanger the future of the British Empire. The imperial dimension of the Unionist cause and the strategic importance of Ireland in terms of Britain's position in the world thus strengthened reluctant imperialism, a feeling already shared by British politicians that wished to avoid colonial wars and preferred to enjoy the commercial benefits of Empire without incurring any material and human costs. (Harvie 2000: 118; Pugh 1999: 129)

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85, rather than Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882, Simon Smith argues, began a new aggressive phase in the partition of Africa (2000: 77). In fact, rather than relying on claims to informal supremacy, the Conference forced countries to establish a formal, 'effective occupation'. The remarks from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, written in February 1885, can testify to the vital role played by the popular press both in transmitting and shaping public opinion:

In times past [...] we did what we pleased, where we pleased, and as we pleased. [...] All that has changed. Europe has overflowed into Africa, Asia, America, Australasia and the Pacific. At every turn we are confronted with gunboats, the sea lairs, or the colonies of jealous and eager rivals. (*apud* Porter 2004: 121-22)

In short, a general motive for colonial expansion was the search for markets, and mid-nineteenth-century global economy faced a situation in which several developed economies needed new markets at the same time. Therefore, "the 'new imperialism' was the natural by-product of an international economy based on the rivalry of several competing industrial economies". (Hobsbawm 1999: 67) This explains why great powers discussed the right of the old, small powers like Spain and Portugal to keep their colonial empires.

It should be kept in mind that the 'Scramble for Africa' — an expression coined by *The Times* in September 1884 (Wilson 2003: 488)<sup>4</sup> — was primarily economic, but strategic explanations of imperialism must also be taken into

---

<sup>4</sup> The expression remains in the public's mind, as seen from the DVD "Queen Victoria's Empire", disk 4, "The Scramble for Africa" (2000). It is also enlightening to compare European possessions in Africa in 1878 and 1914. (Lynch 1999: 240)

account. For instance, in a global context, the British expansion in Africa ensured the maritime and terrestrial routes to India, which required control over Egypt, the Middle East, the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and South Arabia. “As the only great maritime Empire, she [Britain] needed to prevent her rivals obstructing the steamer routes to the East, via Suez and the Cape. That meant digging in at both ends of Africa”, in Thomas Pakenham’s words (1992: xxiii). Therefore, India was “the ‘brightest jewel in the imperial crown’ and the core of British global strategic thinking”, (Hobsbawm 1999: 69) and her importance to the British economy cannot be overlooked — more than 40 per cent of the 60 per cent of British cotton exports which went to the Far East sent to India alone.

In fact, the partition of Africa between the European powers had begun in Egypt. In 1869, the Suez Canal opened up an important new sea route from Europe to India. In 1875, the British Prime-Minister, the conservative Benjamin Disraeli, gave a new impulse to the profitable Indian trade by buying shares in the Suez Canal company from the bankrupt ruler in Egypt. This situation was the object of many caricatures, as for instance the *Punch* cartoon “The Lion’s Share”, which portrayed Disraeli buying the shares while the British lion is holding the key to India. (Roberts 1995: 12)

The famous cartoon drawn by John Tenniel in 1876 and published in *Punch* with the caption “New Crowns for Old Ones!” fictionalises the moment when Disraeli, portrayed as Aladdin, offers the queen her crown as Empress of India.<sup>5</sup> This was a title that pleased Victoria very much — especially because she, the last monarch of the House of Hanover, proudly became *Regina et Imperatrix*. Victoria felt fascinated by India, took on Indian servants, including a secretary, and attempted to learn Indian languages. (MacKenzie 2001: 246) Her ceremonial role as a universal matriarch grew when her own family intermarried with the royal houses of Europe,<sup>6</sup> which makes Victoria the ancestor of most European royalty nowadays. As a matter of fact, Hobsbawm explains that the era from 1875 to 1914 may be called the Age of Empire not only because it developed a new kind of imperialism but also because it was the

---

<sup>5</sup> See <<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/tenniel/1.html>>. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that Victoria’s grandson Wilhelm became Kaiser of Germany and that Nikolay, Tsar of Russia, was a relative of the British royal family.

period of modern world history that witnessed the greatest number of rulers with the title of emperor. (1999: 56)

The monarchy in Britain had actually passed through a difficult period and its popularity was regained only in the late 1870s, closely connected with the monarch's imperial role. When Prince Albert died in 1861 the queen retired to Windsor and Balmoral, and for fifteen years she made few public appearances and refused to participate in national ceremonies. Despite the sympathy of the people for her grief, the nation began to feel abandoned by the queen, and Republican associations developed during her seclusion. When Victoria reappeared to be proclaimed Empress of India, the whole process marked her transformation in the public mind from "petulant widow to imperial matriarch", as declared by the author of *Propaganda and Empire*. (Mackenzie 1997: 4)

Splendour had been put aside for more than a decade, but the monarch's imperial status reinforced Britain's position in the world. Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her reign, in 1887, and consecrated Victoria as Queen-Empress. Moreover, representatives from all parts of the empire went to London to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee, on 22 June 1897 — when Victoria was 78 years old — at the height of the new imperialist mood. For the first time, by means of the electric telegraph, a monarch could tap a message in morse to be received by hundreds of millions subjects around the globe. It was a short and simple greeting: "From my heart I thank my people. May God bless them". (Roberts 1995: 6) This was something, however, that had never been done before and was very symbolic of what was intended to be seen as a closer relation between the queen and her people on a worldwide scale.

Colonial questions were regularly discussed in the periodicals. Newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and *The Times* were strongly imperialist, and weekly magazines like the *Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic* gave its readers plenty of coverage of imperial events. Indeed, the monarchy became increasingly associated with imperial imagery. Most of Victoria's subjects were familiar with her image, in particular with the Queen's head in profile as introduced in May 1840 by the Penny Black and reproduced in the famous Penny Red stamp. (Atterbury 2001: 10) Though she never visited her vast empire, the name of Victoria was given to cities, towns, rivers, lakes, falls and mountains. She was also extensively portrayed in statuary by many indigenous

people, as in the case of a beautiful African statue of the Queen, cut in wood. (MacKenzie 2001: 243)

Public enthusiasm for the royal family reached its peak during the jubilees, when commemorative souvenirs and memorabilia of all sorts were produced on a large scale for a mass market. A recognisable depiction of the Queen also travelled throughout the Empire by means of coins. British gold coinage was actually revised in order to reflect changes in Victoria's appearance during her long reign. Coins that featured the "Young Head" portrait (1838-74) and the "Jubilee Head" (1887-92) were inscribed Victoria Regina, while the "Old Head" (1893-1901) showed the effigy with the inscription Victoria Regina Ind Imp.<sup>7</sup>

With the New Imperialism and the Scramble for Africa, "the Imperial idea became the central fact of the new world-order". (Wilson 2003: 547) In spite of the emphasis put on the economic interpretation of imperialism, there are other aspects to be added to the debate about the justification for Britain's Empire in the public mind.

## 2. Masculinities and popular militarism

This vast Empire was administrated and ruled much in relation to what was seen as different stages of development. The Colonial Office was created in 1854 and white settlers put the concept of 'responsible government' into practice. On the one hand, several regions within the white dominions were virtually independent after the 1850s — Canada was formally given self-government in 1867, the Commonwealth of Australia Act was to be passed in 1900, and New Zealand acquired full Dominion status in 1907. On the other hand, India was ruled by a viceroy and British officials, but some areas maintained native administrative responsibilities. A different situation occurred in the African colonies, which were treated with almost no regard for historic tribal traditions and did not involve Africans in its administration.

Colonial masculinity was also structured around established categories, notwithstanding its versatility and pragmatic role-playing. The Empire relied on this manpower to serve as leaders, administrators, soldiers, explorers,

---

<sup>7</sup> See "Coins of Queen Victoria" <<http://www.coins-of-the-uk.co.uk/pics/qv/>> and "British Gold Sovereign" <<http://www.thegoldcoinstore.com>>. Web. 30 June 2011.

entrepreneurs. Therefore, masculinity in the Age of Empire was embodied by the “Imperial man”, defined by John Beynon in *Masculinities and Culture* as:

[...] a patriotic servant of Queen, country and Empire, the attributes of whom were adventurousness and fearlessness, stoicism, emotional reticence and coolness under pressure, a strong sense of fair play and justice, physical fitness and the capacity to take the lead as the occasion demanded. (2002: 162)

One must be aware that while all men have the male body in common, masculinity is composed of many masculinities and is “always interpolated by cultural, historical and geographical location”. (Beynon 2002: 1) These are some of the key factors — the others being age and physique, sexual orientation, education, status and lifestyle, ethnicity, religion and beliefs, class and occupation, culture and subculture — that shape masculinities as something that is not fixed by biology. With such considerations in mind, it must be added that Beynon’s suggestion of reading masculinity-as-a-text “culturally constructed and enacted (‘authored’ and ‘performed’) in time and place” (2002: 10, 163) works as an effective means of analysing gender identities.

It can be inferred that the Imperial man is a construction that carried the manly ideal of the eighteenth century into a Victorian ideological conjunction. David Glover has stated that the manly ideal, also known as the dominant masculine stereotype or normative masculinity, “lay a renewed emphasis upon the perfectibility of the male body, which became an outward sign of a man’s moral superiority and inner strength of character” (2001: 59). Physical fitness, achieved by regular exercise and participation in team sports, was of crucial importance for the mid-nineteenth century ideal of Arnoldian masculinity, promoted by the reforming educationalist Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School. Thus, muscular Christianity — also referred to as Christian manliness (Hall 1999: 3, 7) — featured a training for manhood and masculinity, and was associated with British public schools, especially after the publication of Thomas Hughes’s novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1856).

The games field came to be seen as a preparation for war, and obviously the battlefield represented “a quintessentially male arena”. (Glover 2001: 56) Strength was not maintained without exercise, and war was defended not only as a necessity, but as a good in itself, “for the qualities of character it brought out in the participants, and for its purgative effect on nations which might otherwise grow ‘effeminate’”, as Bernard Porter points out. (2004: 131)

Accordingly, war acted as a tonic to the national health against too much ease, luxury and material prosperity. (*ibid.*)

A new militarism rose after the second half of the nineteenth century. As militarist nationalisms developed in Europe, British schools helped to fuel a patriotic and imperialist militarism. The army rose in the public's esteem and became a source of local and civil pride (MacKenzie 1997: 5). The working classes also became involved in working men's clubs, patriotic music hall performances, rifle clubs and paramilitary organizations such as the Salvation Army, founded in 1878.

The boy scout movement, founded in Britain by Robert Baden-Powell with the purpose of training boys to be healthy in body and pure in mind, and the literature that used the Empire as the site of "masculinist imaginings", aiming to make boys grow into "manly men" (Beynon 2002: 31), contributed to educating the elites to become the future leaders of the nation. Middle class values and the Protestant work ethic would also ensure the superiority of British imperialism. Indeed, the emergence of Imperial man and of suitable masculinity/masculinities to serve the Empire with physical strength, intellectual energy and moral purpose stirred popular imagination in the second half of the nineteenth century in a way that pervaded all social classes.

The imperial imaginary was stimulated by warfare and militarism, wedded into juvenile literature — the leading popular literary genre of the period, with texts such as *Treasure Island* (1883), by Robert Louis Stevenson, and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), by Henry Rider Haggard — to an overseas tradition of adventure in which "heroism was enhanced by both distance and exotic locales", in John MacKenzie's words. (1997: 6) Moreover, the "locus of hero-worship moved from Europe to the Empire", he stresses, (*ibid.*) and even the arts became fascinated by the military performing heroic deeds in faraway places. (Paxman 2009: 202) As a matter of fact, soldier-heroes "attained a Christ-like stature in terms of 'moral manhood', patriotism and bravery-unto-death" (Beynon 2002: 31), and it was expected that a 'real man' would be prepared to fight and if necessary to die for Queen, Country and Empire. (Dawson 1994: 1)

"Imperialism", Martin Pugh points out, "could not be simply an abstract question debated by a handful of politicians". (1999: 134) Perhaps the most striking feature of New Imperialism in the mid-to-late nineteenth century was indeed the enthusiasm towards the Imperial mission shown by the British

public in general and displayed by male ordinary citizens in particular. The growth of popular imperialism linked fantasies of heroic masculinity with representations of British national identity, in which notions of Englishness were often equated with Britishness.

As John MacKenzie demonstrates in *Propaganda and Empire*, “of all the systems of social discipline applied in the late nineteenth century, it was the imperial core ideology which worked best”. (1997: 258) Two of the pictures in his book (*ibid.*: 227, 252) can be used in order to illustrate how mainstream notions of colonial masculinity persisted in the twentieth century: “Brothers All: Brothers Beyond the Seas”, frontispiece from *The New Empire Annual* (1934) and “Sons of the Empire”, frontispiece from *The Wonder Book of Empire* (1927). Added to this focus on a family consisting of brothers and sons, a depiction of “Citizens of the British Empire the Greatest Empire the World Has Ever Known” reinforces the enduring power of the Victorian male gaze.<sup>8</sup>

As a sociohistorical and cultural construction of male and female identities, gender is distinguishable from the biological categories of man and woman. In fact, the culture of ‘being a man’, traditionally based on physical power, aggression and competition, (Beynon 2002: 161, 163) is usually associated with masculinism. Bernard Porter argues that the masculinism factor, clearly associated with imperialism, was possibly one reason for the lack of progress made by the women’s suffrage movement in the 1890s, and concludes: “The point of all this was to toughen and temper Britain into a proper imperial nation, or ‘race’, as it was usually put then”. (2004: 134)

British, and, in particular, English, masculinity was generally held to be superior to other ‘races’. This was significantly applied to the most cherished colony of the Empire. In fact, India had a vast population with religions and cultures which were far more ancient than Britain’s, but just as a black man was disregarded as being a child,<sup>9</sup> Indians were disregarded as being effeminate — and feeble, languorous and lustful — by contrast to the manly Englishmen.

Jeremy Paxman maintains that a certain tolerance was given to Indian

---

<sup>8</sup> See <[http://www.allposters.co.uk/-sp/Citizens-of-the-British-Empire-the-Greatest-Empire-the-World-Has-Ever-Known-Posters\\_i1873205\\_.htm](http://www.allposters.co.uk/-sp/Citizens-of-the-British-Empire-the-Greatest-Empire-the-World-Has-Ever-Known-Posters_i1873205_.htm)>. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.

<sup>9</sup> In his study of the connections of race, ethnicity and masculinity, Tim Edwards addresses the issue of black emasculation through processes of racism, colonialism and Western imperialism (2006: 65-70).

customs, together with a firm grip on government — a twin strategy of tolerance and harshness referred to by the Indians as “the knife of sugar” and described by Kipling as “knuckle-dusters under kid gloves”. (2009: 201) As Ali Rattansi remarks, Nawabs and princes were often incorporated into colonial culture by being awarded titles and medals in colourful ceremonies (2007: 48). Focusing on the context of the changes in an imperial social formation that included both Britain and India, Mrinalini Sinha shows how colonial discourse was loaded with words like ‘manly’ and ‘effeminate’, and examines the shifts in the Anglicist over the Orientalist school of colonial administration. (1995: 4, 17-19)

Clare Midgley has convincingly demonstrated that imperialism is a highly gendered phenomenon and a “masculine enterprise” (1998: 7). Policy-making and administration were most certainly male domains. Imperial Britain honoured those who governed, administered and went to settle in the Empire as members of the colonial service. Almost any competent administrators, David Cannadine notices, were awarded one of the three ranks — companion, knight commander and knight grand cross — of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George, and became CMG, KCMG or GCMG, popularly known as standing for ‘Call Me God’, ‘Kindly Call Me God’ and ‘God Calls Me God’. (2002: 86-87)

An Oxbridge education ultimately provided the manly qualifications required for the ‘gentlemanly administrator’ that embodied the model of colonial masculinity in the British civil service (Sinha 1995: 103-4). Consequently, the notion of manhood as a characteristic of advanced societies combined with a masculine self-definition of Britain’s rulers within a Protestant culture had to be passed on to the youths of England so that they would be able to make up their minds regarding imperial duty, as John Ruskin’s 1870 Inaugural Lecture at the University of Oxford showed. (Ramos 2003: 68-69)

The effemination of colonial subjects was thus also related to the reconstruction of British masculinities, especially of the upper-class male that ran the Empire. As a matter of fact, the “masculinism of imperialism” (Rattansi 2007: 47) also affected constructions of womanhood at home, reinforcing the idealisation of demure women — in total contrast both to those who had ‘fallen’ and to the feminists — so as to ensure their role as mothers of the imperial race. Not only were women depicted within the Christian imagery of the Madonna and Child, (see Atterbury 2001: 49) but also in the symbolic

role of Britannia as the bearers of the nation. (McClintock 1995: 354-56)

To that extent, the civilised purity of 'the angel in the house' was as much a construction as the primitive sexuality displayed by African women in general and 'the Hottentot Venus' in particular. The African woman Saartje (or Sarah) Baartman was in fact exhibited around Europe for five years, until her death in 1815. She was only four feet six inches tall and became the paradigm for the notion — intertwined with racial and gender prejudice<sup>10</sup> — that black women had an animal-like sexuality that manifested itself through external signs, namely a distinctive enlargement of the sexual organs. Her anatomy, dead and alive, became a case study of difference, and she actually suffered from the pathology known as steatopygia. (Hall 2003: 264-65, Rattansi 2007: 33-34)

Imperialism builds on a complex ideological cluster but, as John Mac Kenzie admits, "in its popular context it has usually been seen as synonymous with jingoism — aggressive, offensive, and xenophobic". (1997: 10) Moreover, colonial heroes were regarded as "the prime exemplars of a master people" (*ibid.*: 7). Bernard Porter, for instance, considers the association of jingoism with imperialism in the 1880s as "purely accidental". (2004: 120) He maintains that "jingoism fed on heroes and wars, and it just so happened that most of Britain's heroes murdered then were murdered in the cause of empire, and most of her wars or quarrels were over colonies" (*ibid.*). If heroes acted as role models for the public at large, it can be assumed that they contributed to the hardening of racial attitudes as well — their remarkable achievements were akin to the superiority of the nation, thus providing grounds for conflict between cultures.

The social application of Darwinism suited militarism and vice versa. Warfare was inevitable in order to preserve civilisation from decay and extinction. Therefore, not only were gender constructions clearly interwoven with imperial nationalism and racial issues, but British assumptions of superiority were 'scientifically' regarded as proof of the Darwinian notion that

---

<sup>10</sup> In her approach to the display of peoples in colonial exhibitions, Mandy Treagus points out that human displays for education or entertainment were a form of 'scientific racism' and served the imperialist cause. (2008: 124, 142, 135) The discourse of power through observation is a key theme in neo-Victorian fiction, namely in the novel *Hottentot Venus*, published by Barbara Chase-Riboud in 2003. (Heilmann 2010: 113-16, 120-31)

only those nations which struggled to adapt would survive.

### 3. National identity and theories of race

In the late nineteenth century, popular imperialism assembled a reverence for monarchism and royalty, hero-worship, militarism, a cult of personality and notions of racial superiority. Britain had benefited from the advantages of being the first nation to modernise, but outmoded organizational structures as well as anxieties about maintain the pace began to be felt as the turn of the century came closer. The Empire thus worked as a means of arresting — or at least disguising — an uncomfortable, but undeniable decline. By creating a national purpose with a high moral content, MacKenzie observes, the Empire not only was able to regenerate the ‘backward’ world, but the British themselves. (1997: 2)

By the 1890s, as the historian Martin Roberts asserts, “both politicians and the public wanted to add more countries to the Empire”. (1995: 13) Opulent celebrations marked the height of popular imperialism. Fifty thousand soldiers, including troops from the Empire, paraded through the streets of London for the Diamond Jubilee. The reaction to this display was commented on *The Daily Mail* Special Jubilee Issue, in June 1897:

The soldiers are all so smart and straight and strong, every man such a splendid specimen and testimony to the GREATNESS OF THE BRITISH RACE that there was not an Imperialist in the crowd who did not from the sight of them gain a new view of the glory of the British Empire. (*apud* Roberts 1995: 6)

*The Illustrated London News* also celebrated the long reign of Queen Victoria and the success of her Empire (*ibid.*) on the front cover of a special supplement, on 26 June 1897. In 1898, before the Second Anglo-Boer War, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Prime Minister of Canada, which was already an autonomous country within the British Empire, paid tribute to the British people:

In everything that makes a people great, in colonizing power, in trade and commerce, in all the higher arts of civilization, England not only excels all other nations of the modern world, but all nations in ancient history as well. The British are a breed apart, superior to all others on the face of the earth. (*apud* Beynon 2002: 26)

These representations help modern observers to understand the popular impact of the celebrations and, mainly, the symbolic meaning of the Empire for the common man. The eminent scholar Eric Hobsbawm makes an enlight-

ening comment: “A world economy whose pace was set by its developed or developing capitalist core was extremely likely to turn into a world in which the ‘advanced’ dominated the ‘backward’; in short into a world of empire” (1999: 56).

Cecil Rhodes, who was Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1895 and dreamed about a British Empire which stretched from the Cape to Cairo, wrote to his friend, the journalist W.T. Stead, on 19 August 1891: “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race” (*apud* Roberts 1995: 43). A genuine belief in all these arguments in favour of the British capability to rule the world was deeply rooted in the collective mind because it found evidence in reality. In a discourse reproduced by *The Times*, on 12 November 1895, the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain addressed an audience at the Imperial Institute in London:

I believe in the British Empire, and [...] I believe in the British race. I believe that the British race is the greatest of the governing races that the world has ever seen. I say that not as an empty boast, but as proved by the success which we have had in administering vast dominions which are connected with these small islands. (*ibid.*: 13)

*Pax Britannica*, an evocation of the Roman Empire, was rooted in Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation, the three Cs that explorers and missionaries like David Livingstone helped to sustain.<sup>11</sup> A moral justification for empire building was given to the civilising mission of extending the benefits of British rule to less developed peoples, “half-devil and half-child”, by means of a kind but firm guidance. This view was put into verse by Rudyard Kipling, the leading poet of the Empire, in “The White Man’s Burden” (1899) — and it must be reminded that the author of *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *The Seven Seas* (1894) was born in India.

Despite the campaign to suppress the slave trade in Africa and the actual abolition of slavery throughout the Empire in 1833, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century a range of theories contributed to highlight the inequalities among the

---

<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on the moral crusade — in accordance with Prince Albert’s vision of Camelot where good would prevail over evil — persists to this day. See the DVD “Queen Victoria’s Empire”, disk 3, “The Moral Crusade” (2000).

different races, constructing a hierarchy that graded whites at the top and blacks at the bottom. It is important to bear in mind that the term 'race' originally signified continuity over generations in aristocratic and royal families, therefore referring to lineage and breed (Rattansi 2007: 23). Only with the Enlightenment and the belief in progress — from a barbaric stage to advanced, civilised refinement — was the idea of race incorporated into classificatory systems that aimed to understand the place of humans in the world. Based on Linnaeus's system, for instance, ideas of race, variety and nation were still often used interchangeably (*ibid.*: 26), but it can be sustained that the eighteenth century set the theoretical bases of the racial science of the next century. (Wade 2000: 27)

The publication of Darwin's *On The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) had a powerful effect on both science and society. Darwin's theory of evolution was applied to human societies, and Western societies in particular concluded they had evolved faster than others and were the most advanced. Accordingly, scientific evolutionary progress relied on the idea that there was a linear progression from the childhood of primitive races to the adulthood of European imperialist nations.

Before the diffusion of the theory of evolution in the 1850s, creationism was supported by two narratives concerning the origins of the races, as Anne McClintock demonstrates: monogenesis, which drew on the biblical account, and polygenesis, according to which there were different centres of creation and obviously blacks and whites had been created at different times (1995: 49). By the mid-century, the debate had been fuelled by works such as *The Races of Men* (1850), published by Robert Knox, and Arthur de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1854), that claimed that all human variation was due to innate racial characteristics. (Rattansi 2007: 31; Valeri 2003: 206) It was 'scientifically' explained that distinct physical markers characterized the different races and determined their psychological attributes. Several aspects of physiognomy were taken into account, such as skin colour, facial features, and texture of hair. With the development of phrenology, the measurement of the size and shape of human skull, added to brain weight, determined the capacity of the mind and the analysis of intellectual abilities.

Distinct anatomical types constructed linear hierarchies of races, representing a linear image of evolutionary progress, from the archaic to the modern.

(McClintock 1995: 38, 39, figures 1.6 and 1.7) Moreover, images that showed a classical Greek profile were used to accentuate the similarity between the facial angles of the Negro and those of the ape (Rattansi 2007: 29). Both the concept of a global Family Tree and the notion of a single Great Map of Mankind<sup>12</sup> served the purposes of the imperial project by helping to merge ‘scientific’ racism with the idea of racial progress, such that it can be asserted that “social evolutionism and anthropology thus gave to politics and economics a concept of natural time as *familial*”. (McClintock 1995: 38) As part of a natural order, the Empire depicted social hierarchy as natural and familial, which enabled imperial intervention to be envisaged as paternal authority over immature children.

The culture of British imperialism relied on the assumption that the white man was superior to the black man, and white children from an early age were persuaded that this stereotype was true. George Alfred Henty was a popular and influential English novelist that wrote boy’s stories in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the author of over seventy titles that celebrated imperialistic adventures and brave actions — hence the recognition of “the Henty phenomenon” (Wilson 2003: 259) —, he helped to shape the way that the British thought about the other peoples in the world. One of his characters in *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti War*, declared in Chapter VIII, “To The Dark Continent”:

[Negroes] are just like children. [...] The intelligence of an average negro is about equal to that of a European child of ten years old. [...] Living among white men, their imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilization. Left alone to their own devices they retrograde into a state little above their native savagery. (Henty 1884: n.p.)

Despite the fact that “no two scientists of race could agree on a classification of races” (Rattansi 2007: 37), which was eventually combined with the collapse of phrenology and physiognomy, the boundary between ‘them’ and ‘us’ persisted and was even aggravated by indetermination in the definition of black and white. Above all, the ‘inferior races’, both abroad and at home, had to be civilised and “acculturated into the ideological dynamics of the nation”

---

<sup>12</sup> Recent genetic research has shown that all humans belong to one large family tree that began in the heart of Africa. See the DVD “The Human Family Tree” (2009).

(Young 2000: 51). This meant that, most of the times, British imperial ascendancy was assigned to Anglo-Saxon racial superiority.

The celebration of Englishness and Anglo-Saxon brotherhood was at the heart of the ideological conjunction of national and imperial identity issues. Together with the notion that there were different white races, the nineteenth-century debate on culture and civilisation in Europe resumed racial prejudice based on the gap between the Protestant North and the Catholic South. In short, it can be stated that “to be English was to be white, Anglo-Saxon, and a master-race, masters indeed of a quarter of the world’s population”. (Hall 1998: 180)

Not only were the native peoples overseas the victims of Anglocentric bias, but those of Celtic ancestry as well. Focusing on the travel books of the popular Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope — himself referred to as typically English —, Catherine Hall examines how his writing served the purpose of linking colonial knowledge to an “amiable Englishness” (1998: 184). Trollope’s accounts, therefore, were consonant with the “racialised discourse of Irishness in England” (*ibid.*: 182), according to which the Irish were white but different.

Charles Kingsley, another well-known writer, helped to disseminate racial prejudice within the white race. When he visited Ireland in July 1860, he remarked that the Irish looked like human chimpanzees with white skin (McClintock 1995: 216, 403). Traditionally, only Africans were regarded as black, but it was claimed that the Irish were ‘Africanoid’ and cartoonists often portrayed them as ape-like. (Rattansi 2007: 39-41; Dyer 2010: 53-56)<sup>13</sup>

An ‘index of negrescence’ was compiled in 1885 by the nineteenth-century English ethnologist John Beddoe, who concluded that the Irish were darkest than the English and had traces of negro ancestry. As a matter of fact, after the

---

<sup>13</sup> The Irish were not the only people to be submitted to comparisons within the ascription to whiteness. An enlightening example can be taken from the *Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle* (1726): “There may be about 2000 Whites (or should I say Portuguese, for they are none of the whitest) [...]”. (*apud* Dyer 2010: 50)

<sup>14</sup> The term was revisited in the late twentieth-century discussion of masculinities. It was applied to white youth in South London that took on aspects of black youth subculture. (Beynon 2002: 167)

1860s, pseudo-Darwinian arguments against the Irish identified them as ‘white negroes’<sup>14</sup> and ‘Celtic Calibans’, very distinct from the Anglo-Saxons. (McClintock 1995: 52, 403, 418) For the purpose of discussing empire building and modernity, one must be particularly aware that “‘primitive’ culture is not that which is merely Other to superior English national-imperialism, but that the ‘primitive’ is appropriated as a category to disrupt modernist conceptions of nation and empire” (1999: 71), to use C. J. Wee’s comment on national identity.

#### 4. The commodification of Empire and stereotyped Otherness

In a developing consumer society, the Empire itself became a product to be bought and sold like any other. The material benefits of the imperial enterprise caused a profound impact not only on the national economy but on the domestic economy of the ordinary household, with supplies of commodities such as tea, coffee, cocoa, sugar and tobacco. They also served the purpose of promoting the Empire, “taking symbols of colonial adventures into every home”. (MacKenzie 1997: 5) In fact, there were many exercises in publicity intended to support the imperial ideal and national self-aggrandisement.

‘Scientific racism’, based on anthropological and medical journals, travel writing and ethnographies, shifted to what Anne McClintock calls ‘commodity racism’ (1995: 33). As she demonstrates in her enlightening study *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, imperial advertising linked domesticity and commodity racism (1995: 207-231). According to her, “the advertising agent, like the bureaucrat, played a vital role in the imperial expansion of foreign trade”. (*ibid.*: 211)

Otherness was also used for consumption at home. Like whiteness, blackness as a cultural construction was used in advertising on the one hand in order to disseminate images of blacks as “uncivilized, inferior, but smiling, happy, and grateful in their subservience” (Rattansi 2007: 52). On the other hand, there was a recurrent publicity message of soap as having the magic power to make black people change to white, as shown in a Gossages’ advert of a half black, half white face. (Rattansi 2007: 53; MacKenzie 1997: 15) A similar but more obvious point is made in a two-framed Pears’ advertisement that depicts a white boy, clothed in a white apron, while a black boy sits in a bathtub. (McClintock 1995: 213, 214) In the second frame, the black boy’s body has become white, but his face — a symbol of identity, individuality and

self-consciousness — remains black.

Pears' campaigns always had a clearly symbolic significance. White supremacy and sexism could be combined in ordinary commercial publicity, as in the case of another soap advertisement for keeping "the hands in beautiful condition and soft as velvet", that portrayed a half-naked black female servant with a fan bending over a white woman lying asleep (see Hobsbawm 1999: fig. 45, between pages 298 and 299). The racialised Other was used in representational practises, and advertising was "one means by which the imperial project was given visual form" (Hall 2003: 240). Under the title "The Formula of British Conquest", which Hobsbawm identifies as guns and trade (1999: fig. 21, between pages 298 and 299), a group of Sudanese look at an inscription in huge white characters on a rock: "Pears' soap is the best". This advertisement of 1884 implied that British power was the best colonial power in the world.

In an advertisement in the American periodical *McClure's Magazine* in 1899, when the Anglo-Boer War broke out, a British admiral dressed in an immaculate white uniform is depicted washing his hands in his cabin on a ship sailing off to Empire. The caption reads: "The first step towards lightening The White Man's Burden is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. Pears' Soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place — it is the ideal toilet soap." (McClintock 1995: 32-33) It is important to stress that Pears' soap was the most advertised soap in Britain in the later years of the nineteenth century, and that Pears' advertisers showed "trade and the expansion of the Empire going hand in hand". (Roberts 1995: 51) Therefore, the expression 'the Pears' factor' is commonly used as synonymous with a successful commercial project embedded in the culture of imperialism.

Pseudo-scientific racism after the 1850s and commodity racism after the 1880s built the paradigm of the stereotyped Other within a framework of the Family of Man. Preconceived ideas and ideological prejudice against difference and Otherness persist in the collective mind to the present day, in spite of several theoretical shifts that have undermined specific categories and value judgements (Bolaffi 2003: xvi-xvii). Since the 1980s, Benetton's advertising campaigns, for instance, have struggled to enforce equality within diversity so as to promote harmonious multiculturalism. From "It's my Time" (February 2010) back to "Black woman breastfeeding white baby" (September

1989), there are various examples of deconstructing racial and gender prejudice. “Hearts” (March 1996) and “Tongues” (February 1991) show how, in spite of a different skin colour, the organs of all human beings have the same colour.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most recognisable Benetton’s advertisements is “Angel and Devil” (September 1991), also known as “Ebony and Ivory”, which simultaneously maintains and subverts racial preconceptions. The campaign manager Oliviero Toscani claims that “in the history of painting angels are blonde, devils are black. So it’s a stereotype [...] but it’s up to you to look deeper than that”. (*apud* Holliday 2006: 101) The nineteenth century engendered a theory and practice of human inequality based on the aphorism ‘different — and also different, unequal’, as Robert Young states in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (2000: 92). This was built against the humanist, universalising equation, and therefore Young concludes:

‘The same but different’ was the trope of humanist universalism, of humankind as a universal egalitarian category made up of individuals [...] the whole ethic of sexual and racial equality rests upon it: difference which must be acknowledged, but also sameness which must be conceded. (*ibid.*)

Visual representations of the late Victorian period put forward a racialised discourse, structured on semiotic codes based on binary oppositions: culture and nature, civilisation and savagery, white and black, refinement and primitivism, purity and pollution, as Stuart Hall asserts. (2003: 243) In fact, as Edward Said insists, recurring images of the Other express “a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles” (2003: 2) — hence the construction of Otherness as being crucial to colonial discourse, as the Western stereotypical image of the Orient exemplifies. (*ibid.*: 7-8) Stereotyping as a signifying practice, Stuart Hall argues, is central to the representation of racial difference — it exaggerates and simplifies difference, it excludes every-

---

<sup>15</sup> See also, for instance, “Human Rights” (March 1998), “Blanket” (September 1990) and “Kiss” (February 1991). <[http://press.benettongroup.com/ben\\_en/about/campaigns/list/](http://press.benettongroup.com/ben_en/about/campaigns/list/)>. Web. 1 Dec. 2010; <[http://press.benettongroup.com/ben\\_en/about/campaigns/history/](http://press.benettongroup.com/ben_en/about/campaigns/history/)> and <[http://press.benettongroup.com/ben\\_en/image\\_gallery/campaigns/?branch\\_id=2652](http://press.benettongroup.com/ben_en/image_gallery/campaigns/?branch_id=2652)>. Web. 30 June 2011.

thing which is different in order to maintain social and symbolic order, and it occurs when there are inequalities of power. (2003: 257-58) Moreover, Adrian Holliday identifies the representation of the South and East as “deficit cultures” (2006: 38) during colonial times as a strategy to justify civilising conquest.

As these arguments suggest, the dualistic view of the Other presents an oversimplification of a very complex process. The media and popular discourse of nineteenth-century advertising constitute a clear example of an essentialist, stereotyped, determinist and simplistic approach to culture — a model which is opposed to a heuristic, empiricist, relativist and complex view of culture. (Holliday 2006: 4-5, 63)<sup>16</sup> Modern approaches, however, are clearly aware that there are other ways of seeing the categories of black and white within colonial discourse theory and within the historiography of the British Empire.

It cannot be denied that an imperial ranking and imaging existed, that the Empire reinforced a racial, gendered and hierarchical view of the world, and that antagonistic and stereotypical identities played a significant part in imperial — as in gender and in economic — history. The principle of race exerted a paramount influence on imperial ideology, in which inequality and conflict were the norm, but an alternative vision of cooperation can also be taken into consideration.

In order to fully understand this issue, it is important to bear in mind that the concern with rank, together with race, was part of a form of rule which the British historian David Cannadine defined as ‘Ornamentalism’, to distinguish it from the Western prejudiced interpretation of the East, identified by the eminent scholar Edward Said as ‘Orientalism’ (2003: 2-3). Recalling Cannadine’s words, the British Empire in its heyday was “first and foremost a class act” that embodied “the vehicle for the extension of British social structures, and the setting for the projection of British social perceptions, to the ends of the world — and back again”. (2002: 10, xix) Imperial constructions, it can be argued, were thus primarily the mirror images, whether

---

<sup>16</sup> An example of a recent satire on social and race prejudice can be found in the film *Up in the Air* (2009), when the character Ryan Bingham, played by George Clooney, advises his young female colleague to never stand in a queue at the airport behind old people and people who travel with children. He prefers to get behind Asians, who pack light and travel efficiently, and he concludes: “I’m like my mother. I stereotype. It’s faster”. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7k6FwXJhNk>>. Web 1 Dec. 2010.

reflected, refracted, or distorted, of the unequal society that existed in the metropolis.

To that extent, to regard the British Empire as not solely concerned with the creation of Otherness but with the ‘construction of affinities’ — or ‘cultivation of affinities’ (Cannadine 2002: xix, 126) — can add a complementary perspective to the conventional one. According to this proposition, by exporting and projecting sociological visions from the metropolis to the periphery, on the one hand, and by importing and analogising them from the Empire back to home, on the other hand, the British constructed “one vast interconnected world”. (*ibid.*: 88, 122, 136) This construct of substance and sentiment is what Cannadine calls “*imperialism as ornamentalism*”. (*ibid.*: 122) As a matter of fact, this perspective seems closer to the articulation of identity, otherisation and representation as major themes in the current debate on the theory of intercultural communication, which assumes that cultural differences are “intersubjective and negotiated processes”. (Holliday 2006: xv)

## 5. Final remarks

In the period of New Imperialism, characterised by the scramble between the European powers for the control of Africa, most popular representations were based on the marking of racial and gender difference. Cultural discourses and ideological assumptions thus served imperial purposes at home and overseas, within a complex framework of sociohistorical constructions and strategies.

In 1886, the British Empire was proudly depicted as an Imperial Federation.<sup>17</sup> Although this dream of a world-wide British order fell through, more than a century later, the Commonwealth — and the significance of the term itself must be noted — remains a successful on-going project that seems to provide a link between empire building and modernity. Given that imperialism means different things to different people at different times, as John Mackenzie observes (1997: 1), it is to be hoped that a twenty-first-century discussion reconsiders the long-term purpose of the British Empire

---

<sup>17</sup> The Imperial Federation Map of the World was published in *The Graphic*, 24 July 1886 (see the cover of *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*, MacKenzie 2001 and *ibid.*: 242). It has inspired the poster of this Conference.

in terms of continuity and change, antagonisms and affinities, globalisation and cultural relativism.

## References

- Atterbury, Paul, and Suzanne Fagence Cooper (2001). *Victorians at Home and Abroad*. London: V&A Publications.
- Beynon, John (2002). *Masculinities and Culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bolaffi, Guido *et al.*, eds. (2003). *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cannadine, David (2002/2001). *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*. London: Penguin Books.
- Dawson, Graham (1994). *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge.
- Dyer, Richard (2010/1997). *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Edwards, Tim (2006). *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Glover, David, and Cora Kaplan (2001/2000). "Masculinities." *Genders*. London and New York: Routledge. 56-85.
- Hall, Catherine (1998). "Going a-Trolloping: Imperial Man Travels the Empire." *Gender and Imperialism*. Ed. Clare Midgley. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 180-99.
- Hall, Donald E. (1999/1994). "Muscular Christianity: Reading and Writing the Male Social Body." *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*. Ed. Donald E. Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 3-13.
- Hall, Stuart (2003/1997). "The Spectacle of the 'Other'". *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage Publications. 223-90.
- Harvie, Christopher, and H. C. G. Matthew (2000). *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heilmann, Ann, and Mark Llewellyn (2010). *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Henty, George Alfred (1884). *By Sheer Pluck: A Tale of the Ashanti War*. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8576/8576-h/8576-h.htm#2HCH0008>>. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.
- Hobsbawm, Eric (1999/1987). *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*. London: Abacus.
- Holliday, Adrian *et al.* (2006/2004). *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource*

- Book*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Luscombe, Stephen (2011). "The British Empire Where the Sun Never Sets." <<http://www.britishempire.co.uk/index.php>>. Web. 30 June 2011.
- Lynch, Michael (1999). *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century British History 1800-1914*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- MacKenzie, John M. (1997/1986). *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. (2001). *The Victorian Vision: Inventing New Britain*. London: V&A Publications.
- Matthew, H. C. G. (1988). "The Liberal Age (1851-1914)." *The Oxford History of Britain*. Ed. Kenneth O. Morgan. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 518-81.
- McClintock, Anne (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Midgley, Clare (1998). "Gender and Imperialism: Mapping the Connections." *Gender and Imperialism*. Ed. Clare Midgley. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. 1-18.
- Pakenham, Thomas (1992/1991). *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent From 1876 to 1912*. New York: Avon Books.
- Paxman, Jeremy (2009). *The Victorians: Britain Through the Paintings of the Age*. London: BBC Books.
- Porter, Bernard (2004/1975). *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-2004*. London: Longman.
- Pugh, Martin (1999). "The New Imperialism." *Britain Since 1789: A Concise History*. London: Macmillan Press. 129-36.
- "Queen Victoria's Empire." (2000). Prod. Channel 5 and the History Channel. DVD. 4 disks.
- Ramos, Iolanda (2003). "Manliness, Character and the Making of the British Empire." *Revista Anglo-Saxónica* 19: 65-74.
- Rattansi, Ali (2007). *Racism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, Martin (1995). *The British Empire*. Harlow: Longman.
- Said, Edward W. (2003/1978). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Penguin Books.
- Sinha, Mrinalini (1995). *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Smith, Simon C. (2000/1998). *British Imperialism 1750-1970*. Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press.

"The Human Family Tree." (2009). Prod. The National Geographic. DVD.

"The Victorian Web." <<http://www.victorianweb.org>>

Treagus, Mandy (2008). "Agents or Objects? Maori Performances in Britain." *Victorian Traffic: Identity, Exchange, Performance*. Ed. Sue Thomas. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 124-42.

Valeri, Mauro (2003). "Negro." *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture*. Ed. Guido Bolaffi *et al.* London: Sage Publications. 205-206.

Wade, Maurice L. (2000). "From Eighteenth- to Nineteenth-Century Racial Science: Continuity and Change." *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Berel Lang. New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Wee, C. J. W.-L. (1999/1994). "Christian Manliness and National Identity: The Problematic Construction of a Racially "Pure" Nation." *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*. Ed. Donald E. Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 66-88.

Wilson, A. N. (2003/2002). *The Victorians*. London: Arrow Books.

Young, Robert J. C. (2000/1995). *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.



# **Challenges and Deadlocks in the Making of the Third Portuguese Empire (1875-1930)**

*José Miguel Sardica*

Research Center on Communication and Culture  
Faculty of Human Sciences / Portuguese Catholic University



## Challenges and Deadlocks in the Making of the Third Portuguese Empire (1875-1930)

### **1. Introduction: the identity myths of modern Portuguese colonialism.**

In 2011, the sheer extent of the role played by the overseas empire throughout the entire modern and contemporary history of Portugal, as one of its ever-present principles and key lines of strength, is no longer easy to grasp. Settled swiftly in a spate of decolonisation in 1974-75, Portugal was left reduced to its strictly European dimension following the advent of democracy after the 25th April revolution, combining with the mental reorientation stipulated by membership of the EEC/EU. These represented important breaks with the past and may indeed be posited as one of the most profound ruptures experienced throughout Portuguese history. Based upon precisely this assumption, a recent study by Fernando Tavares Pimenta advocated that the Portuguese 20<sup>th</sup> century ended in 1975. What happened after that date already enters into a qualitatively new era and what had hitherto happened was the history of an entity that no longer exists, the Euro-African (or Luso-African) State-Empire that overshadowed the short history of the Portuguese 20<sup>th</sup> century (1890-1975) with eminently colonial colours, dynamics and problems.<sup>1</sup>

From the moment the small country that geography and history etched onto the western most strip of Europe and the Iberian Peninsula reached out beyond its Atlantic borders to conquer Ceuta, in 1415, through to the moment when airlifts brought back those labelled “retornados” (returnees) from Africa in 1975, Portugal was always a pluri-continental state with an identity defined by its inscription within a globalised geography. Throughout five centuries, all regimes, and especially all currents in modern nationalism, converged around the central role occupied by the empire as they sought out the political,

---

<sup>1</sup> Pimenta, 2010, 8-10.

economic, social, mental, cultural and even the artistic paths for the country, thus solidifying the belief that Portugal would barely survive and struggle with great difficulty without such overseas possessions. The oceanic projection — the sea and the colonies — was that which rendered grand on a global scale a country that had never given up on being small in Europe. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the coastlines of Africa and dominance in the Orient catapulted Lisbon to its status as the macrocephalic capital of a kingdom dominated by international trade. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the national focus switched to Brazil, becoming the “jewel in the crown”, the best and most essential asset of the Portuguese Atlantic Monarchy — as Father António Vieira explained to King D. João IV at the time of the Restoration in 1640, or as the Prince Regent D. João recognised in 1807 when he withdrew the Court from Lisbon in favour of Rio de Janeiro in the face of the Napoleonic threat and the first French invasion. After Brazil went its own way, it was Africa, thus far generally overlooked, which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as the manifest destiny of the Portuguese, as a new frontier to settle and to explore.

Many features separate and distinguish the three political experiences of the contemporary Portuguese period stretching from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — the Constitutional Monarchy, the First Republic and the New State. However, at least one theme underpins them in almost perfect continuity: their African passion. Whatever the political-institutional outlook of the regime, there was an overarching conception of an imperial nationhood endorsed by an Africanist nationalism. Particularly exacerbated as from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, the last years of the Monarchy, this conception would be handed down from the Republic to the New State. This was the common link — and perhaps the only link — bringing together, for example, three politicians as mutually different as Sá da Bandeira, Norton de Matos and Oliveira Salazar.

There thus existed, as a defining essence to a national history handed down throughout centuries, what Valentim Alexandre has termed the “myth of sacred legacy” corresponding to the belief that the possession of an overseas empire represented a heritage bequeathed from generation to generation for which all strove as a truly inalienable historical imperative.<sup>2</sup> Discussing the eventual

---

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre, 2000, 220.

disposal of even a piece of the empire was perceived as practically national betrayal. From the Minho (in North Portugal) to East Timor, as stated the formula consecrated by the New State, the nation was one and the same with its empire. Only very late on did Portuguese nationalism encounter anti-colonialism and what was later deemed to be Salazarist (and Marcelist) “autism” in hanging onto Portuguese Africa against the winds of history was a retrospective post-colonial projection unthinkable within the mental frameworks of those ruling up until 1974. Throughout decades, public debate would be occupied (and was occupied) with discussing models of colonisation; what nobody would admit was to seriously discussing the goodwill and utility of such acts. The mournful laments of a Franco Nogueira, in imagining that defeat in Africa, in the Colonial War ongoing after 1961, would perhaps leave Portugal exposed to annexation by Spain, was not more than the latest proffering of a discourse that had lasted decades turning into centuries. Indeed, it was highly similar to the all but apocalyptic statements of the first Portuguese liberals in the 1820s, when Brazil became independent and while the ‘new’ Africa still remained an incognito.

The “myth of sacred legacy”, in turn, was bound up in the contemporary era by another myth labelled also by Valentim Alexandre as that of “Eldorado”, the knowledge, the belief that Portuguese Africa held fabulous riches, which would not only compensate for the traumatic loss of the Brazilian colony in 1822, but also be able to sustain Portugal itself, generating prosperity both for those living in the metropolis and for those who would end up settling in Angola, Mozambique and other lands making up the empire.<sup>3</sup> To a large extent, the Portuguese history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was the history of these myths — how they conditioned national life and how the men, ideas, energies, resources and national institutions were convoked and rallied around this mirage of Africa. The taking of any more sceptical or reserved positions — in parliament, in the press, in literature — in relation to this African potential was quickly smothered not only due to the calculations of the economic value of the potential sources of profits (and just when they would be arriving from the colonies), but especially due to the weight of tradition, that is, the historical value encapsulated by those territories.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Alexandre, 2000, 220.

<sup>4</sup> V. Marques, 1999, 387-399.

The First Republic was the shortest and most accident prone in the three regimes making up contemporary Portuguese history through to 1974. It lasted just sixteen years (1910-1926) but still represented an important period in the life of what Gervase Clarence-Smith referred to as the Third Portuguese Empire — the African, following in the trail of the Oriental and then the American/Brazilian.<sup>5</sup> The start and end dates of the Republic mean little within the specifically colonial framework. More important than 1910 is the earlier date of 1890 and the British ultimatum, resulting in a patriotic turn-around that served as the driver of modern Portuguese “Africanism”. Similarly, more important than the year of 1926 is the subsequent date of 1930, when the Colonial Act was enacted as the “organic law” for Portuguese overseas holdings. This would concentrate Republican efforts in Africa and boost the imperial actions and imaginary of the New State certainly through to at least the 1950s when, under the auspices of the constitutional revision of 1951, Portugal gave up on having “colonies” to instead possess... “overseas provinces”. Correspondingly, sketching the history of the colonial empire during the First Republic implies incorporating a broader temporal perspective on the challenges and deadlocks of 1910-1926. After all, the regime founded on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1910 not only provided continuity to earlier monarchical efforts to promote Portuguese Africa, even if within a renewed discourse, but also bequeathed the Military Dictatorship and the New State with an (always) incomplete colonial project that the authoritarian regime would make its own. Nothing that happened in the Portuguese empire during those sixteen years may be broken off from that which preceded or correctly understood without a critical comparison with that which followed.

## **2. The awakening of Portuguese Africanism in the final decades of the constitutional Monarchy.**

Throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese Africa was little more than a highly fragmented and fragile myriad of coastal enclaves, without any particular means of communication with inland regions, penetration of which lacked even the most basic medical provisions. Irrespective of the independence of Brazil, proclaimed in 1822 and recognised by Lisbon in 1825, the former colony remained central to the Portuguese imperial economy as

---

<sup>5</sup> Clarence-Smith, 1990 [1st English edition: 1985].

the end destination of the slave trade sourced from Africa. Hence, throughout the first decades of nineteenth century liberalism, Angola basically only served as an export base for slave labour dispatched to Brazil or to Cuba with Mozambique sharing an identical relationship with French colonies in the Indian Ocean.

In the 1830s, partly in reaction to this state of affairs and partly out of a sense of voluntarism, not to mention his sheer vision, the Marquis of Sá da Bandeira came up with the celebrated idea — which became a favoured slogan of Portuguese nationalism — of turning Portuguese Africa into “a new Brazil”. Very specifically, Sá da Bandeira referred to Angola and Mozambique, rather than the other African or Asian territories (India, Macau and East Timor). Comparable to the approach made by António Sérgio to Portuguese expansion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Sá da Bandeira project consisted in a “settlement policy” that would occupy, colonise and render profitable the Africa discovered by the 15<sup>th</sup> century explorers. This overturned the “transport policy” within the framework of which the African colonies were no more than trading posts for the capture and export of slaves. However, throughout years, Sá da Bandeira preached in the wilderness, even after the advent of Regeneration (1851-1890) establishing more favourable conditions for African development.

As from 1851, the relative political calm in the metropolis, the greater financial means available under “Fontism” in addition to ongoing changes in the international scenario (such as the decline in the slave trade following its abolition by Brazil in 1850), combined to favour strengthening ties with Africa, reflected in the greater trading links around the triangle Lisbon-Luanda-Lourenço Marques and missions of exploration in the 1850s and 1860s (the Congo and Zambezi campaigns, for example).<sup>6</sup> However, despite such signs, a general inertia still prevailed, and Africa gained little in significant investment from the metropolis whether in financial or in human resource terms. The dominant point of view was still that the ‘black’ continent remained what the title of a book by Frederick Rankin aptly summed up as “the white man’s grave”<sup>7</sup> — and with a large majority still opting for Brazil when emigrating. It was only in the 1870s, just as his life was drawing to a close,

---

<sup>6</sup> V. Alexandre, 2000, 234-238.

<sup>7</sup> V. Marques, 1999, 377.

that Sá da Bandeira finally saw the Portuguese legislature move to abolish slavery (1869) and indentured labour (1875) and the government awake from its lethargy towards Africa, very much within the spirit of rising international imperialism that marked the closing decades of the century.

On the European diplomatic chessboard and within the framework of economic competition fostered by the second industrial revolution, the great powers of Europe began looking to Africa as some extension of Europe, a vast new continent of virgin territory whose division would determine the future pecking order in the old world. Quite simply, whoever prevailed in Africa would subsequently prevail in Europe. Germans and Belgians joined the British and French in a race for Africa, an international scramble that collided directly with the unconcerned and amateurish routines of Portuguese colonialism in those lands. The *realpolitik* of imperial ambition and conquest transformed the ambience of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with opinion testifying to the superiority of white, western civilisation increasingly going mainstream with the correlating mission to educate the lesser races. The argument was allegedly philanthropic but with inherent veins of social Darwinism, xenophobia and racism that stirred an exacerbated sense of struggle, competition and survival within end of century nationalisms.

All of this gained “Africanism” a new audience in Portugal. In late 1875, the Lisbon Geographic Society (SGL - *Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*) was founded, becoming a major forum for national elite discussion of the empire and a spokesperson on behalf of Portuguese Africanist sentiment in the final decades of the century.<sup>8</sup> In his speech to the first formal SGL session, its President, General Viscount of São Januário, gave full expression to this new enthusiasm for African lands while simultaneously recognising the immensity of the civilising work that he urged to take place there: “For over four centuries, we have advanced before all the nations of Europe in the exploration of African coasts [...] What use have we made of this precious legacy? [...] We should not wait much longer to harvest the abundant wheat field that has for centuries awaited a harvester. Much remains to be done and it is time that Portugal reactivate the broken chain of generous endeavours. May our aspirations be at the level of our duties and we shall never falter. Our path has

---

<sup>8</sup> V. Guimarães, 1984.

long since been set; let us embark resolutely upon it and thus shall be our motto: *res non verba*".<sup>9</sup> In 1877, the voyages of exploration undertaken by the generation of Hermenegildo Capelo, Roberto Ivens, Serpa Pinto, Paiva de Andrade and António Maria Cardoso began and remained highly active throughout the 1880s. In 1879, Portuguese Republicanism took up the case with political appropriation of the colonial cause set ablaze by protest rallies against the Treaty of Lourenço Marques, denounced as proof of the fragility and exposure of Lisbon to British imperial designs on the Mozambican capital.

Many in Portugal began to make a link between the future of both the country and the monarchical regime to the destiny of far flung African territories. In July 1881, the SGL addressed the country a solemn «*Appeal to the Portuguese People in the Name of Honour, Righteousness, Interest and the Future of the Nation*» resulting in a widespread national subscription movement raising funds for planning the settlement of "civilising stations" in Africa. In annex to the appeal came a map darkly shading the inland region between Angola and Mozambique — echoing the old project of uniting the coastlines and pre-empting the future "rose-coloured map". In the «*Appeal*» text, one can also find references to how Africa would prove "another empire even more powerful" than Brazil, along the setting out of the general objective of overseas policies: "developing the Africa that belongs to us, integrating it with its natural additions, raising it to a situation that turns impossible and unfair the expression — expropriation due to humanitarian utility". This was "the commitment proposed to the living forces of the generations that proceed onwards", and enforced upon all as an "irrefutable task".<sup>10</sup>

Attentions on Africa gathered strength in the following years with the outcome of the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) and particularly with the scandal of the British Ultimatum (1890). Out of the Berlin Conference came new international law applicable to colonies that gave precedent to effective occupation over historical rights of discovery and conquest. This turnaround was of clear concern to Portugal, whose role thus far in Africa may be fairly compared to an absentee landlord, an owner of poorly defined and barely pacified lands, shorn of almost all administrative and similar resources.

---

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by Guimarães, 1984, 49-50.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Guimarães, 1984, 36 and 39.

Exploratory voyages were then stepped up<sup>11</sup> while simultaneously, in reaction to the strict and dangerous overreliance on British protection under the auspices of old alliance, Lisbon sought to bring about diplomatic diversification, seeking German and French backing for its presence in Africa. The renowned “rose-coloured map” was the result of talks between Minister Barros Gomes and the German government of Bismarck. Received with great enthusiasm, as both a project and a symbol of what would prove to be a new Portuguese Africa (involving a continuous coast-to-coast connection between Angola and Mozambique), the map collided head on with the great British project of an empire stretching from the Cape to Cairo.

For some years, and up until the ultimatum of January of 1890, the diplomatic tension between Lisbon and London due to African related questions and the exploration missions dispatched by both countries steadily rose. The problematic issues of the “Age of Empire” definitively entered into Portuguese public opinion. As may be testified, somewhat sarcastically, by Oliveira Martins who, in 1889, declared that “among us swarm the Africanists of idle chatter, the explorers of *Arcada* and the Salisburys and Bismarcks in the *Havanesa*”.<sup>12</sup> The subject was nevertheless serious and Oliveira Martins himself — the political prophet of the “New Life” for the end of century monarchy — did not underestimate it. The defence of Portuguese interests in Africa, he considered, should be “a question greater than the petty oversights that among us we refer to as politics, greater than the merciless party political rivalries, lifted up high by all to the elevated lands of the dignity of the nation and of Portuguese patriotism”.<sup>13</sup> In truth, “the colonial question is a vital one for

---

<sup>11</sup> See, among the many exploration voyage accounts, that of Capelo and Ivens, 1886. In the preface of Vol. I, the pair place special emphasis on the turning of European attentions towards Africa over the course of the 1880s: “The arid and inhospitable aspect of the great continent, the barbarism of its inhabitants, the horrors of savage life that had previously framed the ideas on those strange lands, represent notes that began to fade [...] Today, nobody sees Africa as anything other than one of the vast neighbourhoods of the world, as appropriate to life as any one of the others known [...] Indeed, from the forgotten and occult that it was, it shall quickly become opulent, desirable and well visited [...] Over two dozen years will be sufficient to radically transform matters on that extensive continent” (Vol. I, pp. XXII-XXIV).

<sup>12</sup> Martins, 1957 [1889], 198.

<sup>13</sup> Martins, 1957 [1889], 195.

the country and at no moment should it ever be overlooked in the name of this or that convenience of the occasion”.<sup>14</sup> And hence Martins advocated in his journalistic prose: “all the acts we engage in with the sense of demonstrating the solicitude and the energy with which we seek to resolve the colonial problem are just so many other factors of strength with which to boost our traditional rights and with which we may support the just demands of our diplomacy”.<sup>15</sup>

The ultimatum crisis, caused by the telegram dispatched from the British government to Lisbon in January 1890, threatening war if Portugal did not withdraw immediately from the African inland between Angola and Mozambique, brought about various and different effects. The most immediate was the devastation caused to the reputation of the monarchy under King D. Carlos, crystallising in public opinion the perception that the throne was not able to capitalise, let alone defend, the African domains. This interpretation fed through into collective national pessimism — which turned from the hope of a “new life” to the tedium of the “vanquished in life” — alongside radical patriotism. The Republicans would be the first to benefit from this, transforming the uncertainties surrounding the empire into material for political propaganda and a charged hurled violently at the monarchical regime, weakening and undermining its capacity for self-defence and turning Africanism into one of the great driving strengths of Republicanism. In the medium term, however, within the scope of the Portuguese-British treaty of June 1891, the ultimatum crisis had the effect of solidifying the empire. The megalomania was substituted for the possible; the utopia of boundless African lands was replaced by more palpable borders and — more importantly — formally recognised by Great Britain that, to all intents and purposes, served as the final referee on the international scramble for Africa. Over the longer term, 1890 consecrated (in the terms of Valentim Alexandre), the definitive “sacredness” of empire, hence, the intensification of the colonial ideology in the form of a genuine “mysticism”, warrior, heroic, racist, active and conquering, that would define the future of the Portuguese empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Martins, 1957 [1889], 215.

<sup>15</sup> Martins, 1957 [1889], 215.

<sup>16</sup> Alexandre, 2000, 222-224.

even while the tone of assimilation was played down in the later stages of the New State.

In conjunction with the political and cultural elites and the newspaper reading and rally attending masses, providing a physical expression to Portuguese public opinion, the military also quickly adopted the “Africanist” mantle. Throughout almost a quarter of a century, from 1894 to 1918, and all but continuously, they waged war in Africa on a conflict far less well known or recognised but no less important than the Colonial War of 1961-1974. This involved what were termed “pacification campaigns”, in reality occupation and colonisation campaigns, designed to stave off European rivals and convince them that Lisbon very much had the means necessary to take care of that which was its own and to break pockets of resistance, on occasion actual localised powers or “kingdoms” that weakened the territories under national control.<sup>17</sup> Within this framework, a new military heroism emerged, earning fame for such men as António Enes, Alves Roçadas, Paiva Couceiro, Caldas Xavier, Aires de Ornelas, João de Azevedo Coutinho, Freire de Andrade, João de Almeida, Gomes da Costa and the greatest star of his generation, Joaquim Mouzinho de Albuquerque, who prevailed in the Gaza campaign in the south of Mozambique in 1895 with the capture of the Vátua ruler Gungunhana. The military efforts of this generation were visible in various campaigns such as those in Barué, in Zambezi, and Bailundo, on the central Angolan plateau, both in 1902, as well as Cuamato and Libolo, in the south of Angola, in 1907 and 1908.

The military victories in Africa effectively broadened the area of ‘de facto’ Portuguese sovereignty at a point in time replete with rumours of international movements hostile to the colonial domination of Lisbon. The pretext was the financial position of the metropolis but the alleged and real objectives sought after by European rivals were always the same: dislodging and expropriating the Portuguese colonial legacy. At least on two occasions, in 1898 and in 1912-1913, Great Britain and Germany agreed that in exchange for loans to Portugal the guarantee would be handing over Mozambique and Angola (or at least large chunks of them), should Portugal not be able to settle its debts. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lisbon escaped having to “pawn” its

---

<sup>17</sup> See Bethencourt and Chaudhuri (coords.), 1998, 182-208.

possessions due to the Anglo-Boer war that put the British in need of seeking favours from the Portuguese in Lourenço Marques. On the eve of World War One, the empire was saved by London and Berlin, ready to go head-to-head on the battlefield in Europe, never being able to fully reach agreement over the dividing up of Portuguese Africa.

In the final years of the Monarchy, the progressive expansion in the extent of effectively controlled land forced the rethinking of colonial administration models. There is consensus among historians about the general direction thereby established and which the First Republic would follow and further deepen — the substitution of a predominantly military form of rule by a civil apparatus favouring decentralisation with the concession of colonial autonomy.<sup>18</sup> Demilitarising and decentralising seemed, from the perspective of the last monarchical forces and then the republicans, the best future pathway for the management of an empire that was, at the time of the founding of the Republic, Europe's third largest in extent:<sup>19</sup> some 2 million square kilometres, hence twenty times the narrow metropolitan strip making up European Portugal, scattered across three different oceans at a great distance from each other and where there was only a scant white settler presence in 1910.

### **3. The First Republic and the Portuguese colonies.**

At the time of the 5<sup>th</sup> October proclamation, the Third Portuguese Empire was undergoing full construction and redevelopment, with enthusiasm resulting from the territorial gains, although permanently threatened by larger international powers and a practically proverbial shortage of financial resources. Having always been keen Africanists, the Republican movement very much shouldered the burden of consolidating this “new Brazil” in Africa in the expectation that it might prove to be a far greater asset than the real Brazil itself. Symbolical of this disposition, which was after all not a rupture with but rather the continuity of monarchist policies, in 1911, the Republic moved to found the Ministry of Colonies, thus providing ministerial status to a policy field that had previously been subsumed within the monarchist Naval Ministry. A total of 35 ministerial mandates (including some repeated ministers) were

---

<sup>18</sup> See Wheeler, 2000, 139 and ss., Alexandre, 2000, 238, and Proença, 2009, 206-209.

<sup>19</sup> Wheeler, 2000, 134.

attributed between 1911 and 1926, the sheer number bearing fair witness to the chronic instability that the Republican regime experienced in Lisbon rather than any eventual lack of merit in those vested with the ministerial post. There was also an important pick up in the numbers migrating to Africa in the early years of the regime, certainly the consequence of the First Republican clashes and political strife, but also out of the genuine hope that Africanism then represented.

According to the Republicans decentralisation was simply not enough in itself. Article 67 of the 1911 Constitution specifically stipulated “special laws appropriate to the state of civilisation” of each colony, therefore seeking to recognise their respective characteristics. This legislative predisposition would however prove pointless without the correspondent development of agriculture, trade and commerce and the exploitation of natural resources and raw materials, in conjunction with projects to provide infrastructures, public thoroughfares and means of communication, while also promoting education alongside some civic and political liberties. These were the most important lines of action undertaken by the leading figure in Republic Africanism — Norton de Matos — in Angola, the most important colony of the Third Portuguese Empire.<sup>20</sup>

At that time, José Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos was an army major and had already held positions in the Portuguese colonial administration in the Orient (India and Macau). Through to the end of his life, he remained loyal to a unitary conception of a pluri-continental nation, seeking constantly to deepen relationships between the metropolis and the overseas territories, taking as his principle that “national grandeur was absolutely bound up with development and progress in the colonies”, as “without them, or with these abandoned and undervalued territories, we shall gain nothing”.<sup>21</sup> The “enhancement of the colonies” was thus equivalent to “enhancing the nation”, as “there is no colonial policy — there is only the policy of the Nation. Realising national unity and consolidating it are the highest duties of the Republic” — he added.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> V. Dáskalos, 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Matos, 1944, 87.

<sup>22</sup> Matos, 1944, 21.

As Governor-general of Angola between 1912 and 1915, Norton de Matos approved the famous 1913 *Regulation*, endowing a civil administration and broad autonomy to Luanda (based on a complicated hierarchy of decision making bodies) and launched various plans to foster economic growth and bring about humanitarian reforms to labour contracts and relations. This was a “policy of attraction”, as he would say, that should follow the old policy of war and conquest — and represents a distant and early precursor, at least from a formal point of view, of the “Africanization strategy” attempted by António de Spínola half a century later in Guinea Bissau. As he himself explained in a speech in Luanda in the summer of 1913, metropolitan Portugal and the Angolan territory were not “different countries”, or “peoples belonging to diverse nationalities”, but “one and the same nation, living under the same flag and under the protection of the same Republic”.<sup>23</sup> In August 1914, the Lisbon government seemed to recognise of the sense behind the Norton de Matos approach when approving legislation that provided for the drafting of *Organic Charters* for each of the colonies. World War One delayed progress but these documents were finally set out between April and November 1917, in Cape Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, Guinea Bissau, Angola, India, East Timor and Macau, but not in Mozambique.

The first Norton de Matos mission to Africa was left incomplete. He always lacked both the money and the people to transform Angola. In fact, and despite the rhetorical voluntarism of the politicians, the situation in the colonies could not but reflect the poverty of state coffers and the crass political ineffectiveness stalking the corridors of power in Lisbon. The empire was always a terrain where theory and intention strayed far from practice and actual achievements. As Douglas Wheeler has already highlighted, colonial subjects came in for widespread discussion and an abundance of legislation (sometimes to respond to merely conjunctural problems), according to the longstanding Portuguese belief that a new law would be enough to produce results. The consequence was that the regime faced in Africa “more laws than mosquitoes”, when what was lacking were human and material resources.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Matos, 1913, 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Wheeler, 2000. The author provides an example: in 1917 alone, colonial laws covered more than 2,100 pages of official legislative publications (142).

World War One introduced a sub-period into Republican history and colonialism. Indeed, to a great extent, Portugal declared war due to its empire so as to immediately protect it from German aggression, registered early on in the south of Angola and in the north of Mozambique, and because, in the medium term, belligerence seemed the only means of Portugal staking a claim at the table of the probable winners, thus preventing Portuguese colonies being included in the post-war carve up of the spoils. Even before the Portuguese Expeditionary Force had taken its place in the trenches in Flanders, since late 1914 Portuguese soldiers had already been in conflict against the *Reich* in inhospitable reaches out in Africa. In total, through to 1918, Lisbon dispatched some 35,000 men to the colonies, 1,800 of whom perished, whether in combat or especially due to disease.<sup>25</sup> The consequences of World War One to Africa were various in nature. From the outset, the war once again highlighted the role of the military that, apart from occasional actions, had gone into hibernation following the major campaigns in Cuamato and Libolo, in Angola, in 1907-1908. Organised military expeditions against German invaders also served to accelerate the overwhelming of some remaining points of resistance among indigenous peoples, thus bringing to a close the “pacification” operations first waged some two decades earlier. However, in parallel, the war forced a recentralisation of decision making in Lisbon. The legislation of 1914 and the *Organic* Charters approved in 1917 were revoked in July 1918 by the government of Sidónio Pais.

Having aligned on the side of the winners and thus at the Conference of Versailles, in 1919, Portugal saw not only its right to sovereignty and control over its colonies reasserted, guaranteeing that London would not compensate Berlin for defeat in Europe at the cost of the Portuguese Empire, but also obtained the small and symbolic compensation of the return of the region of Kionga, de-annexed from German East Africa and integrated into Mozambique. Notwithstanding, the post-war was to prove a time of additional difficulties in the history of the Portuguese empire. However much Lisbon might desire a return to the past and the best years of 1911-1914, Europe and the world had irreversibly changed. The beginning of the 1920s coincided with the first clouds heralding economic crisis, socio-political instability, the

---

<sup>25</sup> Wheeler, 2000, 143.

bankruptcy of liberalism and the spectres of Bolshevism and Fascism, the two new radical political ideologies that dominated the inter-war years. Against this backdrop, and directly impacting upon Portuguese colonialism, the post-war period also saw the founding of the League of Nations. While experiencing constant organisational crisis, its principle democratic powers proved a constant source of pressure to Lisbon on the colonial front.

The League of Nations was greatly influenced by the philanthropic liberal humanism of the United States president Woodrow Wilson, who set out his *Fourteen Points* explicitly advocating equality or parity between colonising countries and colonised peoples in the debate on issues of colonial sovereignty, thus opening up the floodgates that eventually led to widespread decolonisation. The major European governments, almost all colonialists themselves, clearly did not endorse such a perspective. However, the fact remains that, among the outcomes of Versailles, there was a vast campaign of opinion and pressure, particularly accusing Lisbon of failing as a colonial administrator. The European presence in Africa now demanded a new liberal policy able to encourage the education of local peoples with a view to greater local autonomy at some stage in the future, following in the trail of the British approach to its empire, transforming it into a far more malleable “league of states”. Portugal, it was stated internationally, was not doing this. In Angola and in Mozambique, the civilizational lag remained huge and ancestral forms of labour, bordering on the forced, still perpetuated neo-slavery practices that the legal framework did not provide for and which moral liberalism certainly could not accept. As recently studied by Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, the question of indigenous labour conditions was always one of the major weak points of the Portuguese Empire and its international public image even while other colonizing countries committed identical abuses in the exploitation of colonial labour. The accusations against Lisbon were primarily issued by one of the new League of Nations bodies, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) — when not out of private interests such as, for example, the well known case of the British confectionary company Cadbury in relation to labour on cocoa plantations in São Tomé<sup>26</sup> —, and threatening to become a *casus belli*, that might, in the extreme, set the League of Nations to apply the international

---

<sup>26</sup> Proença, 2009, 516, and Jerónimo, 2010, 89 and ss.

“mandate” regime to Portuguese Africa, which was then in utilisation for the reorganisation of the fallen Ottoman Empire.

In summary, and across various fields, the international community was demanding structural reforms that Portugal hesitated in carrying out... and which, if undertaken, would lead to the opening up of Portuguese colonies to foreign influences jeopardising the national “colonial pact” on which colonial integrity rested. Obviously, the philanthropic humanism of the League of Nations was adopted in the service of various national interests. The British were past masters at this and continued, now backed up by the powerful Union of South Africa in their manoeuvrings over Mozambique. The French also schemed over Guinea and the region adjoining the gulf with the Belgians keen on the enclave of Cabinda. Furthermore, the Italians and Germans never gave up on their perspective on Africa as the territory on which they could gain greater national grandeur — set against the German humiliation at Versailles and the lack of Italian satisfaction with its war gains and hence long marked by the 1918 *vittoria mancata*.

It was to respond to these new times and the new challenges emerging out of the post World War One context that the Lisbon government took important measures, within a period of heightened Africanism not only in terms of political rhetoric but also throughout the media, literature and public opinion in general. In May 1919, the *Organic Charters* of 1917 came back into effect. In August 1920, in compliance with the constitutional revision and the need to boost the level of decentralisation and the specific autonomy of each colonial territory, High Commissioners were established and designed to flag a new era of development following the end of the pacification attained within the scope of World War One military operations. Taking on these positions at the beginning of 1921 were Manuel Brito Camacho in Mozambique and the inevitable Norton de Matos in Angola (also responsible for the territories of Cape Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe and Guinea Bissau). This was a return to the self-government project first launched in 1913-14, that the war and the rule of Sidónio Pais had suspended but that the League of Nations as well as the white settlers already established in Africa both strove for. The High Commissioners had broad legislative and executive powers across the political, administrative, economic and financial affairs of the colonies.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> See Proença, 2009, 507-516.

Perhaps this represented the problem that most undermined the feasibility and success of this administrative regime: autonomy forever depended on countless definitions as to the responsibilities of the High Commissioner towards Lisbon and that placed Brito Camacho and Norton de Matos under constant crossfire. In reality, whenever they moved to strengthen autonomy, they incurred the displeasure of the much politically integrationist sensitivity in Lisbon and especially the large colonial bourgeois class in the metropolis. Out of political training and economic interest, the latter class — the “living forces” of the metropolitan capital — were both traditional and mercantilist, and hence distrusted colonial autonomy, did not like inflows of foreign capital into Africa and right from the outset defended the maintenance of colonial protectionism against any liberalisation of trade. When, in contrast, giving way to pressures from the “colonial pact” lobby and the closed market, Camacho and Norton were perceived as excessively obedient to Lisbon they raised protests led not only by African colonialists but also by the major international financial companies (such as *Diamang*, in Angola, or *Companhia do Niassa*, in Mozambique), providing the capital investments essential to the sustainability of Portuguese Africa.<sup>28</sup>

Brito Camacho did not last any longer than two years in Mozambique, his period as High Commissioner taken up with containing the pressure of the Union of South Africa along its southern extent and attempting to encourage transports and communication links with inland and northern regions of the colony. As under the “Old Republic”, Norton de Matos, the High Commissioner of Angola, played a more distinguished role. Resuming the developmental work broken off in 1915, he oversaw new public construction works and rising levels of white immigration and fostered agriculture production while striving to substitute indentured forms of labour with free labour market practices. The early results were promising. Portuguese Africa experienced real economic expansion with noticeable increases in local production and metropolitan investment. The myth of “Eldorado” resurged, attracting Portuguese settlers and awakening the attentions and desires of adventurers in search of easy money, such as the young Artur Alves dos Reis, the owner of the *Banco Angola e Metrópole* and indeed an intimate friend of Norton de Matos.<sup>29</sup> In 1923,

---

<sup>28</sup> See Proença, 2009, 218, and Pimenta, 2010, 46-47.

<sup>29</sup> Wheeler, 2000, 154.

the High Commissioner was more enthusiastically back on the Africanist propaganda trail. Angola was proof of the special “historical purpose” of the Portuguese in Africa: “in this hour of tremendous difficulties for our Nation, it is consolation that we may raise our spirit, lift our hearts up high and drink the great gulps that we so cherish, with a very firm vision, very secure, very well defined, of the great destinies that are reserved to us in this portentous Africa, glorious field of our efforts and our struggles”.<sup>30</sup>

However, the problems were not long in coming. The empire reproduced the administrative instability and financial disorganisation visible in the metropolis throughout the 1920s, and Norton in particular, in Angola, further worsened this aspect in contracting international loans that heightened inflation, caused currency devaluation and the rising incapacity of Angola to settle its own debts. In Lisbon, the Republican governments of this decade lacked both the political stability and the financial room for manoeuvre to support the development programs of their High Commissioners. Hence, the excessively high profile role taken by Norton de Matos opened up a flank for the opposition. In the grand metropolitan capital, the sensibilities of more conservative political factions launched a violent campaign against the High Commissioner of Angola after 1923, which was, in reality, a far broader condemnation of Republican colonialism and the freedom and autonomy granted in Africa. The figure behind this rightwing counteroffensive was Francisco Cunha Leal, one of the key players in the Nationalist Party and an old enemy of Norton, who was a Democratic Party militant. In March 1924, the Parliament did pass a vote of confidence in the High Commissioner and cleared him of accusations of squandering state resources and separatism. However, aged 57, Norton de Matos was simply tired. No longer believing in support from Lisbon, he resigned in June and switched Luanda for the Portuguese Embassy in London.<sup>31</sup>

The failure of Norton de Matos meant the failure of Republican Angola. Subsequently, the most valuable Portuguese colony of the time would be handed over to lesser names and wills and remained subject to the negative scrutiny of the international community. In 1925, a report written by the

---

<sup>30</sup> Matos, 1923, 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Wheeler, 2000, 157-159.

North American sociologist Edward Ross tore into the labour practices in effect in the Portuguese empire.<sup>32</sup> In addition to this international condemnation, the colonial financial problem steadily worsened and soured Portuguese politics and still further worsened at the end of this year by the revelations making up the Alves dos Reis scandal, which led to the collapse of the *Banco Angola e Metrópole*. In the final throws of the First Republic, Luanda was all but without government and characterised by an environment studded with rumours of colonial separatist conspiracies.<sup>33</sup> And, while Angola clearly remained the jewel in the Portuguese colonial crown and yet still faced such a desperate plight, one may only imagine the far worse extent of the situations encountered in Mozambique, in Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, where drought and hunger were frequent as were localised uprisings without Lisbon ever being able to reach out with effective relief or improvement — not to mention the holdings in the Far East, handed over to missionaries (in the case of East Timor), or dangerously dependent on British (in India) and Chinese (in Macau) goodwill.

Thus, among the causes of the military takeover in 1926 — not by chance commanded by an “Africanist”, General Gomes da Costa — was the fear, shared by many sectors of national life, that the incapacity of Republican governments to instil order in Africa would lead international powers to intervene and divide up among themselves the sacred and so promising African support for Portuguese nationalism, alongside the correlating desire for a new political order able to bring about authority, security and discipline in both the metropolis and in Africa. Having striven for power since late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in defence of a “sacred legacy” that the Monarchy seemed to be neglecting, the Republic ended up dying at the hands of a surge in imperialist nationalism throughout the 1920s. The fulcral colonial problem was in the very essence exactly that which had already weakened the Monarchy and would constantly undermine the *Estado Novo*: the unrealistic contradiction between the grand projects and dreams of “Africanism” and the chronic shortage in financial and human means to actually implement them.

---

<sup>32</sup> See Jerónimo, 2010, 211 and ss.

<sup>33</sup> Pimenta, 2010, 48.

#### 4. Conclusion: the “sacred legacy” in the Portuguese 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As from 1926, the Military Dictatorship took this “sacred legacy” into its charge and based upon the administrative, social and economic structures erected by Monarchists and Republicans in Africa, began to set out the Portuguese colonial policy that would shape the construction and ideological definition of the Salazarist New State. Despite some continuity, the Republican principles of decentralisation and autonomy were soon abandoned with the abolition of the High Commissioners and their replacement by Governors far more dependent on Lisbon. The colonial finances were also stabilised and with emphasis on economically strengthening the “colonial pact”, thus closing Angola and Mozambique off to international capital and turning Portuguese Africa into a market reserved for the supply of raw materials to the metropolis in exchange for textiles and wine.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, the military regime made a point of affirming, symbolically and legislatively, the colonial and African vocation of the country, consecrating the imperial reality in the mystique of a “unique nation” in various diplomas of which the Colonial Act (1930) represented the most important<sup>35</sup> — and a diploma that Salazar would first insert into the Constitution in 1933, before rendering visually manifest to both the Portuguese and the world in the *Portuguese World Exposition*, in 1940.

This integrationist and re-centralisation strategy for the overseas territories produced some palpable results. It was in the Estado Novo period that the Angolan and Mozambican economies boomed and the numbers of Portuguese emigrating to Africa finally began to turn the two Portuguese colonies into something really resembling a “new Brazil”.<sup>36</sup> However, the very Salazarist success with the African colonies in once again breathing new life into the myths of “sacred legacy” and “Eldorado”, were exactly what stripped the New State of any room for manoeuvre within the context of the decolonisation

---

<sup>34</sup> V. Alexandre, 2000, 240-241.

<sup>35</sup> Article 2 of the 1930 Colonial Act was indeed a written assertion, stated in a dogma-like tone, of the sacred cause of African nationalism inherited since the golden era of maritime expansion: “It is part of the organic essence of the Portuguese nation that its historical function is to possess and colonize its overseas domains and to civilize the native population contained therein”.

<sup>36</sup> In 1924, Angolan white population did not exceed 25,000 people (Wheeler, 2000, 156). In 1940, the total had risen to 44,000 and in 1970 to 173,000 (Alexandre, 2000, 242).

winds of freedom that began picking up strength in the aftermath of World War Two. As the ultimate avatar of colonialist nationalism, even with different forms of action to those of the First Republic, the Salazar and Marcello Caetano regime never wanted to and hardly even attempted to renounce the five hundred year long imperial history. They simply never had the scope for any such move. In summing up, the structural problem of Portuguese colonialism, irrespective of the earnings and wealth generated or the existence of international allies sanctioning such gains, was indeed its sheer excess of history — the omnipresent weight of Prince Henry the Navigator and Vasco da Gama on Portuguese politics, as pointed out by the American diplomat George Ball in 1963 —, in a country that never had the means to extract from this history anything more than a problematic present or a future mirage.

Three and a half decades following on from the closure of the centenary long cycles of Portuguese empire, and in a time such as ours of “post-colonial” studies, interdisciplinary approaches and analysis on the “hybridisation” of cultures within a global geography, “colonial” studies still remain an indispensable and highly clarifying historical anchor. That was the very purpose of this text: to throw out some clues for reflection and some insights into an important temporal slice of the history of contemporary Portuguese colonialism and, through this, opening up the more general issue of the Portuguese way of being through world history.

## References

- ALEXANDRE, Valentim (2000), «A África no imaginário político português (séculos XIX-XX)» and «Portugal em África (1825-1974): uma visão global», in *Velho Brasil, Novas Áfricas. Portugal e o Império (1808-1975)*, Oporto, Afrontamento, 219-229 and 231-244.
- ALEXANDRE, Valentim (2010), «A República e a construção do Império», in *Viva a República, 1910-2010* (coord. Luís Farinha), Lisbon, National Commission for the Republic's Centenary Commemorations / INCM, 145-149.
- BETHENCOURT, Francisco; CHAUDHURI, Kirti (coords.) (1998), *Do Brasil para África (1808-1930)*, Vol. IV of *História da Expansão Portuguesa*, Lisbon, Círculo de Leitores.
- CAPELO, Hermenegildo; IVENS, Roberto (1886), *De Angola à Contra-Costa. Descrição de uma viagem através do Continente Africano*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional, Vol. I.

- CLARENCE-SMITH, Gervase (1990), *O Terceiro Império Português, 1825-1975*, Lisbon, Teorema.
- DÁSKALOS, Maria Alexandre (2008), *A política de Norton de Matos para Angola, 1912-1915*, Coimbra, Minerva Coimbra.
- GUIMARÃES, Ângela (1984), *Uma corrente do colonialismo português. A Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, 1875-1895*, Lisbon, Livros Horizonte.
- JERÓNIMO, Miguel Bandeira (2010), *Livros Brancos, Almas Negras. A “Missão Civilizadora” do Colonialismo Português (c. 1870-1930)*, Lisbon, ICS.
- MARQUES, A. H. de Oliveira (coord.) (2001), *O Império Africano, 1890-1930*, Lisbon, Editorial Estampa.
- MARQUES, João Pedro (1999), *Os Sons do Silêncio: o Portugal de Oitocentos e a Abolição do Tráfico de Escravos*, Lisbon, ICS.
- MARTINS, Joaquim Pedro Oliveira (1957 [1889]), «A política e as questões africanas» and «A questão colonial», in *Política e História*, Lisbon, Guimarães Editores, Vol. II.
- MATOS, J. M. Ribeiro Norton de (1913), *Discurso pronunciado em 1 de Agosto de 1913, pelo Major Norton de Matos, Governador Geral de Angola, na Sessão de Abertura da Junta Geral da Província*, s.l. [Luanda].
- MATOS, J. M. Ribeiro Norton de (1923), *A Missão Colonizadora de Portugal em África. Discurso proferido pelo General José Mendes Ribeiro Norton de Matos, Alto Comissário da República em Angola, na Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, no dia 23 de Novembro de 1923*, Lisbon, Papelaria e Tipografia Fernandes.
- MATOS, J. M. Ribeiro Norton de (1944), *Memórias e Trabalhos da Minha Vida*, 2.ª ed., Lisbon, Editora Marítimo Colonial Lda., Vol. I.
- NEWITT, Malyn (1981), *Portugal in Africa. The Last Hundred Years*, London, Christopher Hurst & Co.
- PIMENTA, Fernando Tavares (2010), *Portugal e o Século XX. Estado-Império e Descolonização (1890-1975)*, Oporto, Afrontamento.
- PROENÇA, Maria Cândida (2009), «A questão colonial», in *História da Primeira República Portuguesa* (coord. Fernando Rosas and Maria Fernanda Rollo), Lisbon, Tinta-da-China, 205-228, 503-521.
- WHEELER, Douglas L. (2000), «“Mais leis do que mosquitos”: a Primeira República Portuguesa e o Império Ultramarino (1910-1926)», in *A Primeira República Portuguesa entre o Liberalismo e o Autoritarismo* (coord. Nuno Severiano Teixeira e António Costa Pinto), Lisbon, Colibri/FCSH-UNL, 133-168.

***The History of the Sevarambians:*  
The Colonial Utopian Novel, a Challenge  
to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century English Culture**

*Adelaide Meira Serras*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa



## ***The History of the Sevarambians: The Colonial Utopian Novel, a Challenge to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century English Culture***

**T**he *History of the Sevarambians* was the English utopian novel of the seventeenth century. It first appeared in 1675 (Part I) and in 1679 (Part II), and later, in 1738, an expanded edition came to press. Besides presenting a model commonwealth as expected from any utopian text, it also adopts a narrative mode instead of the more usual descriptive approach, somehow contradicting the expectations created by its complete title:

*The HISTORY OF THE Sevarites or Sevarambi: A Nation inhabiting part of the third CONTINENT, Commonly called, Terra Australes Incognitae. WITH an Account of their admirable GOVERNMENT, RELIGION, CUSTOMS, and LANGUAGE. Written By one Captain Siden, A Worthy Person, Who, together with many others, was cast upon those Coasts and lived many Years in that Country.*

Instead, the reader is invited to follow and share with the narrator the incidents of the voyage to Batavia, today's Jakarta, as well as the emotions and surprises Captain Siden, the narrator, and the seamen aboard the *Golden Dragon* went through. In so doing, the story becomes livelier and the suspense arises along with the travelers' incursions into unknown waters and territories, thus avoiding the prescriptive tone prevalent in many utopias.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the work in its own time and during the following century, too many questions concerning its authorship clouded it. The differences in the English and French versions which were printed between 1675 and 1738 also contributed to its multifaceted reception. John Christian Laursen and Cyrus Masroori, in their introduction of the 2006 edition, name several possible authors, such as Sir Philip Sidney, the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (Laursen: 2006, vii-viii), or the Dutch scholar from the University of Leyden, Gerardus Vossius. Others, like Richard Phillips (1809, 50-51), after consideration, discarded the possibility

that the work had been written by Pierre Bayle, the well known author of *A Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1695-1697) and also a French Huguenot, and advanced the name of Bernard Mandeville, another Dutchman who had studied in the Leyden University, and then established himself in London. Most critics and researchers agree, however, that the text must belong to Denis Veiras or Veirasse, probably a French Huguenot (1622 - c. 1700) who spent part of his life in France, but was forced to travel to England and the Netherlands owing to the revocation of the Edict of Fontainebleau, also known as the Edict of Nantes, in 1685 by Louis XIV. Immanuel Kant, in his political writings, acknowledges Denis Veiras as Lord of Allais, and considers him a writer and utopist whose ideas are as brilliant as those in Plato's Atlantis [in *Timaeus* and *Critias*], More's *Utopia* (1516) or Harrington's *Oceana* (1656). (Kant: 1991, 188) Moreover, in John Locke's correspondence with Jean le Clerc, a scholar at Geneva, there is some written evidence that he was from Provence (Marchand: 1758, 10-13). Veiras's close acquaintance with John Locke, in London and in Amsterdam, mentioned in le Clerc's letters, is consistent with the religious and political persecutions both suffered. In fact, Locke's activities in his capacity of Lord Shaftesbury's secretary during the crisis about the Exclusion Bill (1768), an Act to exclude the king's Catholic brother, James of York, from the line of succession, led them together with Lord of Monmouth, one of Charles II's illegitimate sons, to escape to the Netherlands to avoid certain condemnation. Denis Veiras had, apparently, been in London, perhaps as a spy, for almost a decade, which corresponded roughly to the period Lord Buckingham and the other four members of the Cabal, to wit, Thomas Clifford, Sir Henry Bennet, Baron Arlington, Anthony Ashley, earl of Shaftesbury and John Maitland, earl of Lauderdale, ruled England under Charles II (1667-1673).

In order to assert Veiras's authorship of the *History of the Sevarambians*, Laursen further highlights the similarities of the front page of a French grammar he published in 1681 with the title page of the first edition of the utopian novel. Furthermore, the names both of the narrator and main character of the story, Captain Siden (Denis), and of the founder of the edenic society, Sevarias (Vairasse), are obvious anagrams of the author's name and surname, which clearly point out to the conceiver of such adventures and, especially, of his perfect commonwealth.

In addition to the entanglements of the authorship attribution of the work, there is also the almost simultaneous existence of versions in two

languages. The first version entitled *The History of the Sevarites or Sevarambi* appeared in English in 1675, followed by Parts II and III between 1677 and 1678 in French, with the title *Histoire des Sévarambes*, and then, in 1679 came to print Parts IV and V of this French version. In that very same year the second part of the novel in English was also published, and a year later another English edition reunited Part I and Part II, whereas the first full version, from a translation of the French texts, appeared in London in 1738, under the title *History of the Sevarambians*. Although most of the work runs similarly in both versions, there occur significant differences between the English and the French Part II. This paper opts to focus in what may be considered ‘original’ texts published in England; thus, only the first and second volumes in English, the 1675 and the 1679 editions, respectively, will be dealt with here.

The story is introduced by means of a letter from the publisher, D.V., to the reader in so as to ensure the reliability of the forthcoming narrative. The opening argument the publisher presents being its apparent distinction from More’s *Utopia* or Bacon’s *New Atlantis*:

“There are many, who having read Plato’s Commonwealth [better known as The Republic], Sir Thomas More’s Utopia, the Lord Verulam’s Atlantis, (which are but Ideas and ingenious fancies) are apt to suspect all relations of discoveries to be of that kind; and chiefly when they find in them any thing extraordinary and wonderful. But although these persons are to be commended for being wary and cautious, yet it is but so long as they keep within the bounds of moderation, and do not pass to the excess of incredulity. For as some men, through a believing simplicity, are easily imposed upon, and receive that for a truth, which in effect is not one: So others, on the contrary, through a contrary humour, are apt to reject, as fabulous, that which often proves to be a real truth. (Veiras: 2006, 2)

He then uses a rather undefeatable argument. Regardless of the fairly recent discovery of new territories and entire continents, these regions remain very little known to Europeans. Actually, what may sound more surprising, is that the same happens with several parts of Europe, and even the British Isles or Ireland were pretty badly described before the Civil War. So, if people seem to find it hard to explore and be acquainted with their neighbour countries and regions, it is little wonder that those very distant areas be still envisioned as fantastic, exotic places. The trade relations the English and the Dutch peoples have established with such countries, not to mention the Portuguese and the Spaniards before them, did not contribute much to remedy this ignorance.

Of course, several cartographers applied themselves to map drawing, some better than others. Nevertheless, it is evident that no one was sent in these maritime enterprises with the specific purpose of recording the places they found, the peoples they met, their laws, religions, and customs. It is quite obvious that their aims resided solely in the financial and economic sphere:

“Few Travellers make it their business to write Histories, and make descriptions of those countries they have travelled in, for most of them being Merchants, or Seamen, they mind little more than their Trade; and being intent upon gain and profit, seldom busie themselves in making observations. Besides, few of them are qualified for the writing of Books if they were never so willing; and fewer have time and opportunity to apply themselves to that study;” (...) Among all Continent, commonly called, *Terra Australis*. It is true, Geographers give some small and unperfect descriptions of it, but it is with little knowledge and certainty; and most of their draughts may be suspected, and looked upon, as imaginary and fictitious”. (Veiras: 2006, 2-3)

D.V. (the acronym used by its publisher) is absolutely correct about the state of the art as far as the Australian continent is concerned. Although *Terra Australis Incognita* was just an imaginary continent, following on a concept introduced by Aristotle based on the geometrical symmetry axiom stating that to counterweigh the mass of land in the northern hemisphere, there had to be a similar one in the southern hemisphere. During the Renaissance, on account of Ptolomeo’s calculations, the cartographers introduced depictions of this continent in their maps as a wide stretch of land south of the Indian Ocean, no matter how inaccurate they were. For instance, Abraham Ortelius and Mercator, two sixteenth-century respected geographers and cartographers inscribed *Terra Australis* in their maps and globes.

In fact, the first record of a European ship sailing into this far away region with its correspondingly drawn chart was the *Duyfken*, in 1606, captained by Willem Janszoon, a Dutchman. Of course the spice trade, especially of black pepper, between Europe and India via the Cape of Good Hope, had already been established since Vasco da Gama’s exploring voyage in 1498. Soon the merchants realized that it was far more profitable to trade between different parts of South and East Asia than to supply their home country. So, during the first decades of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese supplied clover and nutmeg to India and Hormuz. However, the routes used by the Portuguese



Mapamundi by Abraham Ortelius (1570), depicting *Terra Australis Incognita*.

called on some dangerous ports and hostile countries. These set up obstacles to the regular circulation of people and goods to which one must add the ever-growing competition among the European maritime powers with aggressive sea skills, the hazardous geographical conditions, and the marked imperial ambitions. Indeed, such obstacles helped them try, and finally achieve the pulling out of the dominating Portuguese ships from the area. At the end of the day, they had secured the monopolistic trade of the spices. Having managed to establish a direct route from the Cape of Good Hope to the Sunda Strait in what is now Indonesia, the Dutch seamen and the Netherlands became the dominant power, thus replacing Portugal in the Far East. As a result, in 1602, the Dutch East India Company came into existence. From the military point of view, the capture of the Portuguese Moluccas or Mollucan Islands by the Dutch forces in 1641 ensured the Dutch monopoly of the clove and nutmeg plantations, turning the Netherlands into a major spice trader in Persia, Arabia and India. (Dockin: 2003, 170)

From the sixteenth-century forties to 1770 several Dutch crews belonging to the company and some British ones too, starting to follow upon them, dared to sail these waters, trying to observe and ascertain more and more commercial routes and entrepôts. Among them were Abel Tasman's who charted the north, west, and south Australian coasts, then known as New Holland. Tasman, who also discovered New Zealand in 1642, considered it, however, as part of the Aristotelian Australian continent. Only after 1770 was James Cook, the English navigator, in a position to chart the east coast of Australia and claim it for Great Britain, under the instructions of George III, and naming it New South Wales. The complete map of the Australian coastline by the English navigator Flinders would eventually come to print in the next century, in 1814.

Part I of the *History of the Sevarambians* is very much in tune with the travelling records of the time. There is even an almost journalistic style in the tone of the narrative, giving a strong emphasis to the reliability and verisimilitude of the facts related. The narrator introduces himself to the reader as a lawyer, with some previous experience as a soldier, who, after the death of his parents, decides to leave his homeland and become a traveler. First, he visits several European countries, and in 1655, staying in the Low-Countries, he grabs the opportunity for sailing from there to the East Indies, that is to the Dutch colony of Batavia, in a ship named The Golden Dragon. The route he describes reminds one of the usually planned voyages to the same destiny. He departed from Texel, the port of Amsterdam, crossed the English Channel, and set sail to the Canary Islands where they stopped to restock with new provisions. Afterwards they were to sail to Cape Verde, proceeding to the Brazilian coast, and then doubling the famous Cape of Good Hope, they would pursue to 38 degrees of South latitude. (Veiras: 2006, 11) The favourable winds and general good navigating conditions are reiterated more than once, but with great sobriety, not detaining himself in any episode or element of fanciful nature, as he assures his readers:

“It is true, we saw several sea Monsters, flying Fishes, new Constellations, etc. But because those things are usual, that they have been described by others, and have for many years lost grace of Novelties, I purposely omit them, not being willing to increase the Bulk of this Book with unnecessary relations which would tire the Readers patience and my own.” (Veiras: 2006, 11)

The objectivity of the narration, together with the several realistic details that pervade it, vouches for the 'truthfulness' of the following events. Soon after, the climatic conditions changed dramatically. A tremendous storm ravaged the sea and the air, in a situation reminiscent of what happened, for instance, in Francis Bacon's account in his *New Atlantis* of the ship that, sailing from Peru to China, was caught in a tremendous tempest and contrary winds, which caused them to drift aimlessly away until they finally came to Bensalem. In captain Siden's report, the bad weather spared the men aboard the Golden Dragon, but again heavy winds followed by dense fogs, eventually brought on the shipwreck. Nevertheless, everybody survived this dreadful ordeal that lasted several days. Yet, they were not able to reach Batavia, having landed on an unknown coastal area: "our Vessel stuck upon a Bank near the shore of a great Island or Continent." (Veiras: 2006, 13) Again, in what respects of the authenticity of the narrative, it had already been established in the prefatory letter written by the publisher. Appended to it, was a second letter from a Dutch lawyer confirming the shipwreck of the Golden Dragon on the South continent coast, with several details about the vessel and its respective crew and considering the tricky weather of those whereabouts the reason of the unfortunate accident:

"The Land of this Country is reddish, and barren, and the Coasts as if they were enchanted by reason of frequent storms, which hinder much those who will land there: And that is the reason why the aforesaid Frigots lost their Boats and men. They could not land every where; and this Seaman is of opinion, they could not find the right place." (Veiras: 2006, 6)

The rest of the narrative deals with the dispositions adopted by the community of the wrecked men and women. Actually, we are told of how they elected captain Siden as their leader, their concern with the fortification of the camp against any possible enemy, either wild animals or other peoples; how they managed to build smaller boats with the remaining materials of the Golden Dragon, how Captain Siden organized some small groups in order to explore the place and search for water and food, and finally how they removed themselves to a more suitable location on the island. Once again the actions Siden and the group of castaways undertook are the result of sensible decisions under the circumstances, and taking into account the hierarchical society they came from. The most conspicuous measure in the eyes of the average

sixteenth-century European would certainly be the distribution of women to the men:

“We considered that as long as we had Women among us they would be the occasion of trouble and mischief if we did not betimes take some good course, and allow our men the liberty of using them sometimes in an orderly manner. But we had but seventy four women, and above three hundred men, and therefore could not give every Man a Wife. We consulted long upon a Method, and at last pitched upon this, We allowed the principal Officers each of them one woman wholly for himself, with the privilege of chusing according to his rank. The rest we distributed into several divisions, and ordered it so, that every man, who was not past fifty years of Age, might have his woman-bedfellow every fifth night;” (Veiras: 2006, 29)

In spite of this apparently liberal view about sexual relationships, the narrator insists that the enforcement of this polygamist system aimed at avoiding any disruption among the community. But he also highlights how unnatural this arrangement was insofar it even brought infertility:

“Here we had a very great proof that the multiplicity of men to one woman is no friend to Generation, for few of these women, who were common to five men, proved with Child; and on the contrary, all those who lay but with one man presently got a great belly. I think that is the natural reason why multiplicity of Husbands was never allowed in any Nation, although Poligamy of Wives and Concubines was ever used, and is still practiced in most Countries.” (Veiras: 2006, 30)

It is in Part II of the *History of the Sevarambi* that some essential features of European culture are set in an implicit comparison with the customs and beliefs of that people. After one of the exploring groups chanced to meet some local inhabitants, the whole community was very welcome by them at the city of Sporundè, on the periphery of the kingdom. Later on they were invited to proceed to Sevarindè, the heart of the country, and be introduced to the King. In the meantime they learned about the people and the country and what they heard did surprise and humble them on account of the deep contrast with the European states' relations:

“...we have no need to fight amongst ourselves, this Country is more free from all disputes and contentions than any other under the Sun. We are not pinch'd with those necessities that are apt to make you Europeans so mad and furious one against another. There is nothing of oppression or violence to be seen here. We are never assaulted by any Enemy: All our Thieves, Robbers and disorderly persons are confined

to the skirts of our Dominions where they live to plague one another, but they are not suffered to abide in the middle and bowels of the kingdom.” (Veiras: 2006, 61)

Actually, the Sevarambi inhabit or rule a vast domain made up by a central area in the mainland and several islands, and the most important cities and regions are the most protected, either by the natural geophysics, such as the high Mountain which somehow hinders the capital entrance, or by the work of the inhabitants. As a matter of fact, those who live in the central area of the kingdom are also the most perfect men and women, whereas the ones living on the periphery are the imperfect members of this society, that is, those who committed crimes against the laws of the Sevarambi. Both the natural landscape and resources, and everything resulting from the people’s labour raise prodigious wealth and beauty, as much as they have reached a higher level as yet unknown to westerners.

As in most utopian societies, the Sevarambian commonwealth is very strictly organized, with a hierarchic structure ruled by an absolute, but sage king at the top enjoying powers similar to the European enlightened despots. Down the social ladder there are several delegates scattered by the multiple provinces. Although seemingly equal, there are elected officials occupying distinct ranks. As far as the economy is concerned, the agriculture is certainly prosperous. Indeed the climate boosts several crops a year and the people are hard working too. They are also industrious in architecture and the arts, that being the reason why their public works are so impressive, as is the case, for instance, with the canals, bridges and sluices they built to let flow plenty of water from the mountains down to the plain. (Veiras: 2006, 55) The state is the owner of all property, distributing whatever they need to the citizens so they manage to live comfortably happy. There is no currency, so gold and silver are used just to adorn their dwellings and in other communitarian applications. Nonetheless, the Sevarambians are not perfect. Illness and corruption occur, as some of the inserted stories illustrate. Aiming at getting rid of these flaws, boys and girls are educated together, in spite of the strict moral code prevalent among them. No one is allowed to have sexual relations before marriage and adultery is considered one of the most hideous crimes. Moreover, marriage, like the military service, is compulsory to both men and women, since it helps social stability as far as the persons’ behaviour is concerned, and, on top of it, provides a wealthy demography. Life is elaborately regulated with numerous civil and religious rites marking every stage of personal development.

If a Sevarambian person sins, in particular against chastity, he or she is denounced for the occurrence of deformities. Like in medieval times in Europe, the parallel between the illness of the soul and the body point to an organic world view. The notion of belonging to a divinely created universe where one occupies a privileged position is strongly enhanced by their belief in being the inhabitants of a second paradise:

“...we have some Records that tell us that the earthly Paradise, which during the old World, was in *Asia*, was then transported hither, and all those rare Trees, with Jewels and Riches, were carried hither by Angels, and planted in this remote corner. And because there was no man then fit to inhabit so blessed a place, of the sons of *Noah*, a new couple were formed, not out of the slimy Earth as the former, but out of a purer and more delicate substance, out of some Metal mixed with Gold and Silver: hence it is, that their bodies are so clean, pure, glorious, and splendid as you shall see. This couple, named *Chericus* and *Salmoda*, are the Parents of all the *Sevarites*”; (Veiras: 2006, 66-67)

The impressive beauty of the people, and their moral superiority are equal to the luxurious environment: the exuberant forests, the richly varied wild animals, real like jackals, tigers, bears, or imaginary ones, like unicorns, and the huge and fantastic mineral resources all seemingly concurring to the confirmation of their divine favour. However, all these riches are nothing but the material reverberation of their divine spiritual and intellectual brilliancy. As in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* (1666) there is a detailed description of monumental buildings made of precious metals and stones. Much to the reader's surprise, they use their gems indifferently, both to adorn themselves and to pave the high-ways. (Veiras: 2006, 73) Notwithstanding, the narrator also refers to the use of sapphires, diamonds and other gems to develop technological devices, or even to engrave on them the immense knowledge their scholars have gathered. In fact, the Sevarambian people are excellent in Mathematics, Geometry and Astronomy. All these activities are to be seen in galleries close to the glittering caves where the royal sepulchres are kept. They actually remind us of Bacon's account of the several research departments of Salomon's House in *New Atlantis*. (Bacon: 1974, 239-245) The grandeur of both the natural environment and the human constructions, on and below the surface, convey a profuse and baroque depiction of a society where ethics and aesthetics reflect the Platonic dictum: fair is good and good is fair.

Their religion is a combination of theism and sun-worship, that is, they

believe in an abstract God. A black rectangular curtain symbolizes His mysterious and unattainable nature in their rituals, and it obviously seems to have something in common with the notion of divine balance popularized by Pacioli's work, *Divina Proportione* (1509) later immortalised by Kubrick's dark parallelepiped in 2001, *A Space Odyssey*. As already mentioned, they also worship the God-sun and their king as the best corporeal representations of the divine Being. However, their deep faith does not hinder them from being tolerant towards those who have other creeds, as long as they do not jeopardize the social order. Clearly, the contemporaneous religious conflicts between Catholic and Protestant countries, or among Protestant groups within a country, not to mention the author personal experience and the almost certain influence of Locke's ideas on the matter, namely in *a Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), made him very much aware of the importance of tolerance as an essential factor to achieve social harmony, and therefore progress. Thus, the emphasis on a more ecumenical attitude, instead of the imposed Christianisation of the colonised peoples as occurred in every European maritime enterprise.

Also their hospitality and the king openness to establish trading relations with them or their country representatives, albeit with some caution not to endanger the peace and innocence of the Sevarambians, is a good example of their forwardness. (Veiras: 2006, 82) The narrator is here proposing a kind of economic liberalism *avant la lettre*, countering the prevalent mercantilism, and thus fulfilling one the great imperial objectives: to find new markets and increase commerce.

It is arguable if *The History of the Sevarambians* is, in fact, a utopia, insofar it needs several sequels to complete itself, that is, to complete or perfect what should be perfect at the first description. The emphasis on the adventurous voyages and encounters with unknown peoples and places may draw this fiction nearer to Defoe's hero, the wandering Robinson Crusoe. However, Robinson is the carrier and living proof of western superiority both in knowledge and proficiency to improve the ways of humanity, thus acting according to the current imperial ideology. Captain Siden, on the other hand, is the one on whom new data and an apparently preferable model of society are bestowed. Again, the entwinement of mythical elements with a futuristic view of a transnational world causes an oscillation between an embellished past, a lost but dreamed of Golden Age and a project to better humankind earthly condition, both spiritually and materially.

The logics of empire building may be challenged when, or if confronted with other potentates, equally, or even more powerful than the European rising empires. Or perhaps Veiras, while unfolding his story, part after part, is just showing his readers how men must struggle to progress, little by little, very aware, deep down in their conscience, as Kant was that “out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made nothing entirely straight can be built”.<sup>1</sup>

## References

- Bacon, Francis (1974). “New Atlantis”. *The Advancement of Learning and New Atlantis*. Ed. Arthur Johnston. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 213-248.
- Cavendish, Margaret (1994). “The Blazing World”. *The Blazing World and Other Writings*. Ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 119-225.
- Donkin, Robin A. (2003). *Between East and West: The Moluccas and the Traffic in Spices Up to the Arrival of Europeans*. Darby, PA: Diane Publishing Company, 170.
- Kant, Immanuel “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht” (1784) *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin Academy Edition. Vol. 8, 17-31. Retrieved 30-10-2010. [www.manchester.edu/kant/helps/AcadEd.htm](http://www.manchester.edu/kant/helps/AcadEd.htm).
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1970/1991). “The Context of the Faculties”. *Political Writings*. Ed. Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 176-190.
- Locke, John (1991). *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus. London & New York: Routledge.
- Marchand, Prosper. *Dictionnaire historique: ou mémoires critiques et littéraires concernant la Vie et les Ouvrages de divers Personnages Distingués*. Tome Premier, A - I, 10-13. Retrieved 05-08-2011. [books.google.com/books?id=H8Y.AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA12&clpg=PA12&dq=Le+Clerc](http://books.google.com/books?id=H8Y.AAAAcAAJ&pg=PA12&clpg=PA12&dq=Le+Clerc)
- Ortelius, Abraham (1570) *Mapa Mundi*. Retrieved 20-09-2010. [http://www.google.com/imgres?q=Ortelius,+Abraham\(1570\)+Mapa+Mundi.&um=1&](http://www.google.com/imgres?q=Ortelius,+Abraham(1570)+Mapa+Mundi.&um=1&)
- Phillips, Richard (1809). “Extracts from the Port-folio of a Man of Letters”. *The Monthly Magazine or the British Register*, 27, 50-51. Retrieved 05-08-2011. [http://books.google.com/books?id=4k1764ko\\_WwC&pg=PA51&Ipg=PA51&dq=Rich](http://books.google.com/books?id=4k1764ko_WwC&pg=PA51&Ipg=PA51&dq=Rich)
- Veiras, Dennis (2006). *The History of the Sevarambians. A Utopian Novel*. Edited and with an Introduction by John Christian Laursen and Cyrus Masroori. Albany: State University of New York Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> “[A]us so krummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmert werden.” Immanuel Kant, “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht” (1784) *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8.

# Isaiah Berlin and the Anglo-American Predicament

*Elisabete Mendes Silva*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Instituto Politécnico de Bragança



## Isaiah Berlin and the Anglo-American Predicament

**D**uring almost three centuries Britain managed to create and maintain a vast worldwide empire. (Gamble 2003: 5) In mid-Victorian period Britain was the dominant sea-power, the leading colonial power and the world's industrial giant. (Reynolds 2000: 8) However, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its world supremacy was practically extinct. Britain had lost nearly all its overseas possessions and its industry and economy were on the verge of collapse after two World Wars. The Second World War marked the irreversible decline of Britain and the loss of India in 1948 was the first step to decline. (Aldred 2004: 2-3) The solution lay on the co-operation and alliance with the United States of America, one of the superpowers resulting from the war. Despite being on the edge of bankruptcy, Britain also tried to act as a superpower (Reynolds, 2000: 2), but it could only behave as such with the diplomatic, intelligence and economic American co-operation. In addition to finding itself involved in a difficult balancing act between claiming great power status and needing American help, (Hopkins 2005: 1) Britain also had to determine its post-imperial role. The British still shared feelings of imperial nostalgia and insular parochialism which had been appointed as some of the causes for decline. (Reynolds 2000: 1)

In British society and politics there were two opponent positions regarding the Anglo-American relations. On the one hand, there were those who believed the Anglo-American association would diminish British sovereignty. On the other, some people believed this alliance would bring great benefits to Britain as it would reinforce its economic and cultural status in the world.

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), British philosopher, historian of ideas and an Oxford don, mostly known for the essays/studies *The Hedgehog and The Fox* (1953), *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958) and *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (1990),

belonged to those who saw a positive outcome concerning the Anglo-American alliance. His own experience in Washington and New York during the Second World War and also in Russia as a diplomat working for the British Ministry of Information allowed him to be aware of the realities of both the United States of America and Russia. Even though Berlin did not consider himself a political scientist, he did in fact take very clear positions on this subject. Berlin (2009: 131) delivered on the BBC Third Programme on 21 September 1949 what he called 'a violently pro-American broadcast' which was named 'The Anglo-American Predicament'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this paper's main goal is to analyse Berlin's position regarding this alliance which, in my opinion, was based on a liberal framework and sustained by a broader vision of the world. I also intend to highlight the reactions to Berlin's arguments and the controversies in Anglo-American relations still framed in an imperial stance.

Despite prior cultural, linguistic and historical links, the USA and Britain strengthened a special relationship (Dumbrell 2001: 2) during the Second World War which was sustained by the financial support granted by the American loans to Britain. The Lend Lease Programme passed Congress in 1941 and it represented to Britain a valuable help to face the expenses of war. (Hopkins 2005: 5) Additionally, the Marshall Plan was introduced in 1948, deepening therefore the dependency of Britain towards The United States of America.

The Anglo-American predicament did not lie on the acceptance of such alliance between America and Great Britain, but on how to balance the different interests and ideals of both countries which obviously instigated unavoidable resistance. There were some dissonant voices in both countries which vociferously criticised this union. On the one side, defenders of Britain were worried about the financial dependency that such a co-operation would cause. They longed that this dreadful union forced upon them by the demands of war would not last forever and 'that one day they will breathe freely, liberated from the fear of plutocracy and materialism, and political witch-hunt, and racial intolerance, and the death of individual life and art'. (Berlin 2009: 747) The problem was, according to Berlin (2009: 744), on 'how to get the ancient and powerful organisation to fit into the political and economic pattern

---

<sup>1</sup> It was later published in the *Listener* on the 29<sup>th</sup> September of the same year.

that governs the thinking of the policy-makers of the State Department or the Senate or the White House.' American help would thus menace Britain's ideals and interests in keeping her leading role in the world.

On the other side, there were some Americans who shared anti-British feelings during the Second World War, which still persisted in 1949. Americans saw the British as idle, inefficient, economically blind and embittered nationalists. Berlin (2009: 744) explained that 'the purpose of the traditional anti-British outcry was to liberate the United States from what were conceived to be the tentacles with which the sinister British octopus had all but enveloped an all too trustful American democracy'. However, the central problem for the Americans was related to the policies of Britain and its Empire which the Americans viewed critically. Britain was still seen as a 'great unredeemed imperialist oppressor'. In the reports that Berlin frequently wrote while he was in the British Propaganda office in Washington, Berlin (2009: 400-403) collected a list of things which Americans held against the British. British imperialism, the rigid class system in Britain, the fact that the British believed in 'balance of power, in divide and rule', encouraging therefore wars; 'irritation caused by over-civilised English accent as opposed to Scots, Welsh or any other home-bred accent' represented some of the American criticisms towards the British, which were based 'on racial, inherited political prejudices and widespread ignorance'.

Nevertheless, this 'stereotyped mythological image' of Britain as a great unredeemed imperialist oppressor (Berlin 2009: 745) has become altered in America. For Berlin, the main reason for such a change of attitude was immigration. Immigrants had an extremely important role in American thinking about foreign nations once they pooled their grievances many years ago. For Berlin (2001: 20), the American vision was larger and more generous than the European vision. The American thought 'transcended barriers of nationality and race and differences of outlook, in a big, sweeping, single view' whereas for the Europeans that attitude seemed flat and colourless. Despite such two disparate cultures, Roosevelt and Churchill had put their differences away during the war and fought for a common goal: the regeneration of the Western world.

After the war, Berlin (2009: 746) stated that the union between both nations was inevitable and, despite expected frictions, both parts had to collaborate with each other as this was the price of a transformed world condition:

The celebrated marriage between Britain and America for which Mr Churchill has sighed so often, and which seemed so desirable and unattainable a goal in the England of 1940-1, has almost come about. It is a marriage from which, in the view of one of the partners at least — the American — there is no hope, or fear, of ultimate divorce. The marriage may at times be unhappy, but it cannot be annulled without destroying both partners equally.

In Berlin's (2009: 131; 746) point of view the Americans were more realistic than the British because they considered this alliance the best way of keeping away the Soviet menace and thus maintain a tolerable life in Western Europe. Berlin (2009: 747-8) believed that this union would guarantee the values that he praised so much and had always been the citadels of a liberal society, liberty and individual life:

To anyone lately returned from the United States it seems that British irritation with America (...) goes beyond the norm to be expected even of a people as naturally reluctant to recognise a shift in world balance as we obviously are; goes beyond the degree to be expected of a people deeply irked by the need to receive benefits at all, even if only temporary, and even though (...) these benefits are but a small return for the heroism and suffering which Britain showed when she saved humanity by her example. It is an irritation which arises partly from a lack of historical imagination, which is a faculty born of the buffetings of fortune from which this once happy island has so long been mercifully preserved; and it leads to a desire to close one's eyes to the kind of close relationship which must be maintained with the great American giant if we are to preserve not merely an adequate standard of living, but life and liberty itself.

Berlin (2009: 132) compared the British rulers to acrobats on a tightrope with a large net cosily below them. If they fell, they would fall into the net, that is the USA, and would suffer at worst loss of face but not of life. The British would never be allowed to sink completely, because they subconsciously knew the Americans would help them to rise. Besides, Berlin warned the British leaders that the time was excellent for conditions of business with America, but not for spectacular heroism or ideas of genius.

Berlin also defended that Britain should dismiss the alignment with the European Community project or the Eastern Bloc. The political pressure, the purges and persecutions by the Soviet Union in the East European satellite countries represented a danger to civil liberties. Dictatorships in Portugal and Spain under the regimes of Salazar and Franco did not also guarantee full

liberties. Civil liberties were thus under threat in Eastern Europe more than they were in the United States, which Berlin described as a free American democracy. Similarly, being part of the project of the European Union represented decreasing the standard of living and nobody was ready for that (Berlin 2009: 145; 748):

A Western European Union, desirable as it may be in itself, is a very rickety structure unless integrated with the economies of both America and the British Empire; an Eastern orientation is scarcely compatible with the preservation of civil liberties.

However, Isaiah Berlin's views on the Anglo-American alliance triggered lively reactions. In 1949, *The Evening Standard* of 5 October published a column written by Lord Beaverbrook headed 'Mr Berlin' criticising the arguments voiced by Berlin. Berlin's (2009: 129) point of view was considered as:

propaganda in favour of the immediate recognition by the British public that a state of marriage exists between Britain and America. He pictured the American partner as resigned to marriage, but frustrated and irritated by the failure of the British to recognise that the marriage lines had been spoken. So Mr Berlin spent the greater part of his 20 minutes trying to convince his listeners that the marriage was both desirable and inevitable.

The Anglo-American union was somehow considered a tough setback to the once proud and most powerful nation in the World. Consequently, Berlin was also accused of being a pro-American traitor and of not being an Empire man. The writer of the column deplored that Berlin did not even mention the third alternative, which consisted of exploiting the Empire resources (Berlin 2009: 130):

Isaiah Berlin did not even mention the third alternative: that Britain should ride out the storm alone, placing her faith in the strength and the resources of the Empire. Why is Mr Berlin so blind to the attractions of this simple creed? The answer is as simple. He is not an Empire man. His disdain for the Empire is as extensive as his ignorance of its glory. He cannot be expected to appreciate the value of the imperial tradition. Mr Berlin is therefore trying to induce Britain to abandon a faith which he does not understand in favour of a condition of life which he has not experienced.

The imperial tradition was rooted in the minds of those who still longed for a return to the glories of Empire. Even in the minds of the politicians of that time, namely Churchill, the Commonwealth was still seen as one of the most important spheres for the recovery of the country, together with American aid

which could prevent withdrawal from the Empire and the abandonment of the Labour government's reforms. (Hopkins 2005: xv) However, Britain's attitude towards the Empire altered, hastened by the destructive effects of war and the growing power of the United States. Instead of imposing political control over the former colonies, Britain secured financial, commercial and industrial connections through treaties, alongside an enduring and stable Anglo-American agreement. (Parmar 1995: 42)

Despite the awareness of Britain's crumbling economic situation and of the change in the political world status-quo, the national discourse still lingered on imperial nostalgia, backed up by the sense of superiority over the other nations of the world. Social patriotism that had triumphed during the war period remained somewhat influential. Even though the glory of the Empire was fading away, the hope of greatness still lived on people's mind. The Whig discourses of national greatness endorsed by G. M. Trevelyan and Bertrand Russell in the post-war period glorified the Empire and Britain's civilizing mission on the colonies. Imperial values were yet again intimately related to national feelings of Britishness. As Kenneth O. Morgan (2001: 577) emphasized, Britain still hanged on glories of the past, instead of moving forward: 'The sense of Britishness seemed to rest on obeisance to the past, as shown in the flourishing heritage industry of the 1980s extending from Chaucer to Churchill, to the delight of tourists and scorn of social critics'.

Oliver Franks (1996: 56), British Ambassador in Washington from May 1948 to the end of 1952, reported an episode that illustrates this obstinate approach:

In April 1948, my wife and I were asked to lunch by Mr and Mrs Churchill at Hyde Park. (...) After lunch he [Churchill] suddenly took his napkin and with a pencil drew on it three interconnecting circles. 'Young man' he said, looking sternly at me, 'never let Britain get out of any one of these circles'. They represented the three dimensions of British foreign policy, the American dimension, the Commonwealth dimension and the European dimension. In those years after the war the Prime Minister Attlee, and Ernest Bevin, on the one hand, and Mr Churchill and Anthony Eden, on the other, all accepted this view. They were at one in seeing it as the foundation of Britain's power and influence in the world. They all knew that our economy was weak (...). But they believed that if Britain stayed firmly within the three circles of her destiny, she would recover and continue as a Great power and go on being entitled to a seat at the top table where world decisions were taken.

The Suez Canal, together with Palestine, was usually seen as the heart of British Empire. Britain needed to stay in the base-area of Egypt-Palestine as a means to control Middle Eastern oil and to keep the British commercial routes in North West-Africa and the Indian Ocean. Abandoning the area might mean growing dependence on the United States of America and might reduce Britain to a client state of the Soviet Union. (Hopkins 2005: 36) However, Britain would indeed lose control over these strategic places in 1956. The Suez Crisis marked a humiliating drawback in the British international affairs. The British had to withdraw from Egypt and lost their position in the Suez Canal.

However, there was a new world order 'that was built by the old, wise and experienced Imperial Britain and the new, uncertain but incredibly powerful United States'. (Parmar 1995: viii) Despite initial retreat and distrust, Britain would then join the European Economic Community in 1973.

The recurring British insular idea of being proudly alone was rooted in the trendiest symbols of identity — the crown and the commonwealth — alongside with national self-esteem, self-sufficiency and a Whig sense of elected people. Kenneth O. Morgan (2001: 60) explains that the emergence of Britain as one nation after the war was embedded not only in an accepted collectivism at home but also in a spirit of complacent nationalism towards the wider world.

However in 1949 Britain struggled to survive and the symbols of the nation, despite their importance for the national character, did not bring out the key for the economic crisis. The links with continental Europe were not that strong. The only immediate solution was to reinforce Anglo-American Relations. Despite differences about political strategies over China, over Palestine and the Suez Canal, the Anglo-American relationship represented one of the most important decisions in modern times for Britain. (Parmar 1995) Yet, American supremacy and power was confirmed in the most vital element for Britain, the financial help. Nonetheless, Britain always tried not to lose ground over the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold war, by keeping the pace in the manufacture of nuclear weapons, for example. It seemed that this obsession with nuclear power had to do with world power status which was fading away as the Empire slowly collapsed. (Clarke 2009: 13)

Berlin stood for a political position when he broadcast *The Anglo-American Predicament*. Berlin tried to show the benefits of this union which were grounded

on the ideals of liberty and human decency, as the British economic survival depended on the American help. However, Berlin was always very sensitive to criticisms and easily moved to regret. Even though he did not deny his opinion on the Anglo-American Alliance, Berlin (2009: 140) was not able to uphold his position very strongly or insistently, as he himself recognised:

The Time article plunged me, of course, into the deepest dismay; you must remember that I suffer from the deepest contempt for everything that I have ever written — no sooner does it appear in print that it seems hollow, false, vulgar, glib, clumsy (...), but above all it has long ceased to convey anything I wish to say ; and if I defend it, it is out of pure pique — it always seems to me that everything that my detractors say is always profoundly true and unanswerable. This is what happened with my broadcast — immediately I felt I had overdone it, I had understated the British position, insulted my compatriots, over-praised America and, anyhow, failed to convey all the elaborate nuances upon which everything depends.

In conclusion, even though Berlin felt English as he lived most of his life in England, one must not forget that Berlin was also an immigrant in Britain and, in our opinion, that feature allowed him to view the world in a wider perspective than the British themselves. Berlin was a critical observer of the world issues and, quite correctly, he foresaw the solution to the problems of Britain lying on the Anglo-American alliance which was reinforced during the Thatcher/ Reagan governments and still represents today a very strong association, despite all the political and cultural nuances.

## References

- ALDRED, John (2004). *British Imperial and Foreign Policy 1846-1980*. Series Ed(s). Martin Collier and Rosemary Rees. Oxford: Heinemann.
- BERLIN, Isaiah (2001). *Personal Impressions*. Ed. Henry Hardy. Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- (2009). *Enlightening. Letters 1946-1960*. Ed(s). Henry Hardy & Jennifer Holmes. London: Chatto & Windus.
- CLARKE, Bob (2009). *Britain's Cold War*. Gloucestershire: The History Press.
- DUMBRELL, John (2001). *A Special Relationship. Anglo-Americans Relations in the Cold War and After*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GAMBLE, Andrew (2003). *Between Europe and America. The Future of British Policies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- FRANKS, Oliver (1996). "The Special Relationship". *Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture*. Ed. William Roger Louis. Austin: University of Texas, 1996.
- HOPKINS, Michael F. (2005). *Oliver Franks and the Truman Administration. Anglo-American Relations, 1948-1952*. London: Frank Cass.
- MORGAN, Kenneth O. (2001). *Britain since 1945. The People's Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PARMAR, Inderjeet (1995). *The State and the Anglo-American Alliance. 1939-1945*. London: Frank Cass.
- REYNOLDS, David (2000). *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. Harlow: Pearson Education.



# **Nabobs and the Foundation of the British Empire in India**

*Isabel Simões-Ferreira*

University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES)  
Escola Superior de Comunicação Social - Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa



## Nabobs and the Foundation of the British Empire in India

**N***abobs*, from the Mughal term *nawab*, meaning an Indian Muslim prince or governor, was the name given to East India Company servants (merchants, factors, residents or soldiers), who returned to England with fabulous fortunes. This figure first appeared in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, between 1757, the year of Robert Clive's victory at Plassey which marked the conquest of Bengal and symbolically laid the foundation of the British empire in India, and the years 1783-84, known for a series of Parliamentary regulating acts, which tried to subordinate the power of the East India Company to the British government and to impose upon its employees the obligation of ruling, as Edmund Burke, the political philosopher and Whig statesman, put it in the debates over Warren Hastings's impeachment, as "trustees" for the people of India.

During this period the arrival of nabobs in England, who conspicuously and lavishly exhibited their recently made fortunes, produced a widespread stir among the British upper classes. Horace Walpole's outbursts are frequently cited as part of a reaction against their pernicious effects upon British society. In July 1773, he wrote: "What is England now? — A sink of Indian wealth, filled by nabobs and emptied by Macaronis! A senate sold and despised! A country overrun by horse-races! A gaming, robbing, wrangling, railing nation without principles, genius, character or allies". (Lawrence 47-48) In a letter to one of his friends he even suggested that they should be held accountable not only for plunder and starvation in India, but also for famine at home, caused by their luxury and opulence, "raising the price of everything, till the poor could not purchase bread". (Edwards 13) His venomous remarks somehow illustrate the amount of public interest generated by the abuses and

despotism of the East India Company, particularly after the practices of Robert Clive in Bengal started to be investigated by Parliament for its legality.

It is at this moment of overt criticism and self-analysis that we turn to Samuel Foote's play, entitled *The Nabob*,<sup>1</sup> first published in 1773 and performed at the Theatre Royal in the Haymarket. Apparently Samuel Foote knew what his audiences wanted and he presented them with a farcical comedy in three acts. So, our main concern throughout this paper will be to analyze the literary denunciation of the nabob as a figure of derision in relation to the play's inner and outer worlds. Therefore the politics of representation brought onto the stage by Samuel Foote will have to be contextualized, on the one hand, in relation to the pragmatism and idealism of trade and empire-building and, on the other hand, in relation to the dialectics of otherness, gentlemanly class and the materialism of imperial history.

The fictional Sir Matthew Mite is described as a vulgar, boorish person, a sink of iniquity whose knack for mischievousness is ostensibly denounced by one of his former school-mates:

Who could have thought that you would have got so up in the world? for you know you were reckoned a dull one at school. [...] one fifth of November, I shall never forget how you frightened a preaching Methodist taylor, by throwing a cracker into the pulpit. [...] for mischiefful matters there wasn't a more ingenious, caterer lad in the school [...]. Now here's a pretty purse-proud son of a \_\_\_\_\_ who, forsooth, because he is grown great by robbing the heathens, won't own an old friend and acquaintance, and one too of the livery beside! Dammee, the great Turk himself need not be ashamed to shake hands with a citizen! (58-60)

Mite's attempts to force Sir John Oldham's daughter, Sophy, to marry him as a repayment for her family's debts and his intentions to foreclose on their estate in the case she didn't accept his proposal provide the plot of Foote's play. At the outset, we hear the complaints of Mrs Oldham to her husband, the descendant of an ancient, honourable family with financial difficulties:

---

<sup>1</sup> Denunciations directed against nabobs were very common in mid-eighteenth century England. The anonymous poem, "The Nabob or the Asiatic Plunderer" (1776), amongst many other literary texts, illustrates the importance of the theme. For a more comprehensive discussion of the treatment of nabobs as a literary subject, see Juneja, Renu, "The Native and the Nabob: Representations of the Indian Experience in Eighteenth-Century English Literature", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 27, 1, 1992, 183-198.

At this crisis, preceded by all the pomp of Asia, Sir Matthew Mite, from the Indies, came thundering amongst us, and, profusely scattering the spoils of ruined provinces, corrupted the virtue and alienated the affections of all the old friends of the family. [...] And you can tell, but you may be soon forced to part with your patrimony, to the very insolent worthless individual, who has been the author of your distress? (3-4)

Mr Mite has, therefore, two ambitions: firstly, to win acceptance in the upper circles of British society, and secondly to purchase a seat in the House of Commons. His efforts to learn the manners of etiquette and decency are ludicrous and a permanent source of laughter. Suffice it to recall here the colloquial language of deference and education on the part of his servants *versus* the rudeness of Sir Matthew Mite's manner of speaking; or his waiter's lessons on how to cast a dice and behave properly, so that Sir Matthew may be able "to tap, flirt, dribble, and whirl with any man in the club". (28) In addition, his donations to the Antiquarian Society are also illustrative of his intentions to cause a positive impression upon men of learning. Amongst those relics, there were, for instance, Falstaff's corkscrew, Henry VIII's nutcrackers, a green chamber pot allegedly the sarcophagus of Mark Anthony's coachman and the "eminent" cat of Whittington, former Lord Mayor of London.

*Mite* Gentlemen! Not contented with collecting, for the use of my country, these inestimable relics, with a large catalogue of petrifications, bones, beetles, and butterflies, contained in that box, [...] I have likewise laboured for the advancement of national knowledge: For which end, permit me to clear up some doubts relative to a material and interesting point in the English history. Let others toil to illumine the dark annals of Greece, or of Rome; my searches are sacred only to the service of Britain! The point I mean to clear up, is an error crept into the life of that illustrious magistrate, the great Whittington, and his no-less-eminent Cat: And in this disquisition four material points are in question.

- 1st. Did Whittington ever exist?
- 2d. Was Whittington Lord-Mayor of London?
- 3d. Was he really possessed of a Cat?
- 4th. Was that Cat the source of his wealth?

That Whittington lived, no doubt can be made; that he was Lord-Mayor of London, is equally true; but as to his Cat, that, gentlemen, is the Gordian knot to untie. And here, gentlemen, be it permitted me to define what a Cat is. A Cat is a

domestic, whiskered, four-footed animal, whose employment is catching of mice; but let Puss have been ever so subtle, let Puss have been ever so successful, to what could Puss's captures amount? No tanner can curry the skin of a mouse, no family make a meal of the meat; consequently, no Cat could give Whittington his wealth. From whence then does this error proceed? Be that my care to point out! The commerce this worthy merchant carried on, was chiefly confined to our coasts; for this purpose, he constructed a vessel, which, from its agility and lightness, he aptly christened a Cat. Nay, to this our day, gentlemen, all our coals from Newcastle are imported in nothing but Cats. From thence it appears, that it was not the whiskered, four-footed, mouse-killing Cat, that was the source of the magistrate's wealth, but the coasting, sailing, coal-carrying Cat; that, gentlemen, was Whittington's Cat.

1 *Antiquary* What a fund of learning!

2 *Antiquary* Amazing acuteness of erudition!

1 *Antiquary* Let this discovery be made public directly.

2 *Antiquary* And the author mentioned with honour. (54-56)

The parody and the burlesque of the scene cannot be dissociated from other grotesque manifestations, namely his idea of founding a seraglio/harem in the town — where women would be guarded by “three blacks from Bengal, who have been properly prepared for the service”. (38) As he further explains, “they [seraglios] are of singular use in the Indies”. (37) Mrs Matchman, the procuress, reminds him of the illegality of the idea in a country like England: “to confine the ladies against their consent and that too in a country of freedom”. (37)

The satirist's laughter which emerges either before the presence of a grotesque mind or the burlesque displays of pretentious knowledge and false erudition is always placed above the object of his mockery/derision, that is, the nabob, Sir Matthew Mite. Unlike ambiguous laughter, which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, expresses “the point of view of the whole world”, that is, “he who is laughing also belongs to it” (201), this is negative, corrosive laughter, deprived of any intention of inclusiveness or forgiveness. Thus Foote's play voices with remarkable forcefulness the discursive process of othering nabobs as aliens, in a word, as “un-English” barbarians.

Interestingly, the historian Michael Edwards notes as follows:

[...] the nabobs were certainly not barbarians, nor on the whole men who had emerged from nowhere. Many came from merchant families with a traditional interest in the India trade. [...] Another sort of recruits appears to have been the sons

of the Anglican clergy [...]. After Plassey and the spread of tales of the great fortunes to be made in Bengal, employment with the East India Company became of interest to widening sections of the British upper classes. (32)

The binary opposition between nabobery and civilized behaviour is further accentuated by the text's latent orientalism aimed at producing an ontological distinction between East and West in order to denaturalize and stigmatize nabobs as people different from the old British stock, the British aristocracy and other social and political elites.

As we are reminded by Lady Oldham, the source of Sir Matthew's vices, as of his wealth, lies in the Indies: "with the wealth of the East, we have too imported its vices". (13) In this case, the geographies of place and empire are at the service of other geographies: the internal geographies of class and the geographies of private interests *versus* public virtues. Corruption and rapacity are evils to be uprooted, and the play strongly suggests that Sir Matthew Mite and the plundering nabobs are contaminating British society with vices endemic to India. Sir John Oldham is quite emphatic in his criticisms:

[...] corrupt as you may consider this country to be, there are superior spirits living, who would disdain an alliance with grandeur obtained at the expence (sic) of honour and virtue. [...] I would much rather see my child [...] reduced to an indigent state, than voluptuously rioting in pleasures that derive their source from the ruin of others. (48, 65)

The satirist's superior morality is once again reasserted at the end of the play through the intervention of Sir John Oldham's brother, Thomas Oldham, a merchant himself, whose code of honour has not been tainted by excessive greed and wishes of self-aggrandizement. Thomas Oldham pays for his brother's debts and so he outmanoeuvres Sir Matthew's attempted financial takeover. Here are his final words: "[...] however praiseworthy the spirit of adventure may be, whoever keeps his post, and does his duty at home, will be found to render his country best service at last!" (71)

What concrete and wider purposes, then, do this emplotment and the process of othering British merchants adventurers in India serve?

British had been in the Indian subcontinent for the past century and a half. The East India Company was granted a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, from which, according to merchants' opinions, "great benefitte" would "redound to our country, as well as for the annoying of Spaniards and Portingalls". (Foster 127-128) Shortly thereafter, in 1616, Sir Thomas Roe, the

first Merchant Ambassador of England at the Mughal court, carried a letter from the king of England, James I (also a shareholder of the East India Company), to ask permission to open trade at Surat and other strategic places, which would place English commerce on a firm and enduring basis. What is important to note is that at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the interests of English merchant capital and those of the state were closely connected. Yet, by mid-eighteenth century, as Sara Suleri argues, they were fraught with tensions owing to “the merchant’s desire to act as a state and the state’s desire to own the power of the merchant”. (25)

After the East India Company outmanoeuvred the French in the Carnatic Wars, and took definitely hold of Bengal, getting rid of its independent Nawab and putting in his place Mir Jafar, a puppet maintained by Clive and his army, the mask of balanced, honourable trade was torn off. As a result, the Company not only started to enjoy undisputed right to trade all over Bengal and adjacent Bihar and Orissa — practically the whole of eastern India — it also secured revenue-farming collecting rights. This is tantamount to say that it used these internal tax revenues to finance the purchase of goods it annually shipped to England, instead of having to buy bullion in European markets to pay for Indian products. In addition to these new acquisitions and privileges, enormous cash payments and presents given to Company employees became a regular practice, as soon as Indian princes understood the importance of purchasing the goodwill of Company officials and having the English on their side in the political chaos of the Indian subcontinent, caused by the disintegration of the Mughal empire. Thus Bengal was, using Clive’s words to the governor of Madras, “an inexhaustible fund of riches”. (Metcalf 51) “It is not by accident” — as Barbara and Thomas Metcalf explain — “that the figure representing Calcutta in the *East Offering its Riches* is placed at the centre of the painting with the richest gift, that of a basket of jewels and pearls. From such images came an enduring picture of India for the British”. (50)

Bearing in mind the figures presented by Michael Edwards, Robert Clive, the most famous of all nabobs (a sort of arch-nabob and role model), amassed a fortune unmatched by any other Englishman in India:

£ 230,000 of it was in Dutch bills, £30,000 in diamonds, £41,000 in bills on the Company, £ 4000 on certificates on East India Company ships, £ 5000 on Bombay and £ 7000 in the form of a bill of exchange drawn on one of the Directors of the Company, Lawrence Sullivan. There was also the income from Clive’s *jagir* of

£ 27,000 per annum. (31)

Hailed by the then Foreign Secretary for War, William Pitt the Elder, as the “Heaven-born general” who had defended Britain’s honour, while it was being lost in other stages of conflict, sixteen years after his victory at Plassey, Clive had to come to terms with a mud-slinging campaign aimed at discrediting nabobs and the actions of the East India Company, a situation made worse by the fact that the Company itself, almost on the verge of bankruptcy due to serious cash-flow problems, seemed unable to fulfil its annual subvention of £ 400,000 to the government . Hence in 1772 a Parliamentary investigation was set up in order to uncover the affairs the East India Company and the methods by which the nabobs had made their fortunes. In May 1773, Clive already a member of House of Commons, was forced to defend himself against its accusations. Having managed to keep his fortune intact, he escaped from this trial relatively unblemished, if we take into account personal jealousies and the logic of party politics at work at the time. It was Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India (1772-1784), who, in spite of being committed to an understanding of the culture and civil structure of the subcontinent, was asked to answer to the new morality. A scapegoat had to be found for the mismanagement of the Company and the misbehaviour of some of its officials. Hastings’s impeachment lasted for eight years (1786-1794), tickets were sold for the trial, even though at the end he was acquitted.

What is of crucial importance to note is that at this moment of imperial history the realms of politics and moralizing spectacle became closer than ever before. Read against this backdrop, Foote’s play serves a twofold purpose: firstly, it seeks to intervene in the ongoing political debate on the need of the reform of the structure of the East India Company, by exploiting the rising uneasiness against this group of nabobs — a group of East India Company officials that were adamant on gaining access to Parliament and dethroning the power of the landed aristocracy, thus giving rise to a feeling of powerlessness and social dislocation at home; and secondly, it tries to draw our attention to the eighteenth century British spirit of enlightenment and superiority in search of some kind of ethical basis for the newly born empire. A superiority based on the principles of justice, equity and respect for the rights of individuals.

In this context, the words of Edmund Burke on the occasion of Fox’s

East India Bill (1783), aimed at restraining the power of merchants and articulating an ideal of good governance for India, are worth quoting:

The Asiatic conquerors very soon abated of their ferocity, because they made the conquered country their own. They rose or fell with the rise and fall of the territory they lived in. [...] If their passion or avarice drove the Tartar lords to acts of rapacity or tyranny, there was time enough, even in the short life of man, to bring round the ill effects of the abuse of power upon the power itself. If hoards were made by violence and tyranny, they were still domestic hordes, and domestic profusion, or the rapine of a more powerful and prodigal hand, restored them to the people. [...] But under the English Government all this order is reversed. [...] Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the grey head of an Englishman; young men, boys almost govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people than if they still resided in England; nor, indeed, any species of intercourse but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement. Animated with all the avarice of age and all the impetuosity of youth, they roll in one after another, wave after wave; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting. (446)

However, despite the overbearing power of morals and decency over “moneyocracy” and self-gain — a power rendered bitter through the action of satire — Foote’s play reveals some cracks in its hegemonic representation of nabobery portrayed as a deformation of Englishness. Particularly noteworthy, it is the comic subplot concerning the electoral negotiations between the members of the Christian Club of the parish of *Bribe’em* and Sir Matthew Mite to sell their votes, declaring a bond between “*Bribe’em*”, supposedly an English borough/parish, and Bengal. This ironic play on words linking the British presence in Bengal to the spread of corruption and illicit money produces paradoxically a counter-hegemonic effect, since it puts into evidence the nepotism and corruption of English eighteenth century politics and the interplay between outsiders and insiders, that is to say, between *them*, those that bribe, nabobs like Sir Matthew Mite, and *us*, those that are bribed, the mayor of *Bribe’em* and Mr Touchit, members of the so called Christian Club, whose Christianity boils down to dividing the money or the payments drawn from the electoral process on equal parts among themselves. The text is thus fraught with a theatrical exchange between nabobs depicted as “a little better than Tartars or Turks”

(40) and the “Tartars in us” (40), that is to say, the Tartars residing in the British self, an inherent part of British selfhood. As a result, the satirist’s laughter, at the end of the play, stumbles against Sir Matthew Mite’s complaint and observations, in spite of the Oldhams’ tactical victory:

I am sorry, madam, to see one of your fashion, concur in the common cry of the times, but such is the gratitude of this country to those who have given it dominion and wealth. [...] Nowadays, riches possess at least one magical power, that, being rightly dispensed, they closely conceal the source from whence they proceed. That wisdom, I hope never to want. (66,70)

The temporary suspension of the burlesque and carnivalesque laughter undermines the rhetoric projection of an ideal imperial self and confronts the spectator/reader with the materialism of History, namely the fact that the greatness of eighteenth century England was ultimately dependent on the power of merchant capital and the fearless actions and political expediency of her men on the spot, men like Robert Clive and many others like him.

As Linda Colley argues, the ties between Britain’s ruthless pursuit of colonial markets and its struggles with the other main contender for imperial and commercial primacy, France, helped to forge the nation after the Act of the Union (1707):

[...] commerce, especially foreign commerce was the engine that drove a state’s power and wealth [...]. The great trading companies like the East India Company, the Levant Company and the Russia Company [...] supplied successive governments with their most substantial creditors. [...] More important still, it was domestic and foreign trade that supplied the bulk of taxation. [...] until the end of the eighteenth century, customs and excise levies together supplied over 60 per cent of government revenue, and sometimes more than 70 per cent. (62,64-65)

As we can see, behind Thomas Oldham’s moral stance at the end of the play and the idealized distinction between domestic commerce and adventurism abroad, there is much that was left unsaid. At the time, minimizing the benefits of colonialism and Indian overseas trade, an area where the acts of honest commerce and rapacity were sometimes ambiguous, was an act of self-delusion. That is why Foote’s play, as Jyotsna Singh refers, reveals “the faultlines in the emerging eighteenth-century colonial discourse in Britain”. (76) Reaching monologic closure is practically untenable, when we have, on the one hand, morality, and on the other hand, the interests of merchant and industrial capital and, ultimately, the interests of a whole nation. What needs

stressing here is that “Clive and Hastings had created an empire in what was, in effect, a moral vacuum”. (Lawrence 58) The youthfulness of the British empire in India needed therefore an ideological underpinning: the vision of a benign Raj towards satisfying Burke’s demand.

“The image of the European colonizer” — as Rana Kabbani explains — had to remain an honourable one: he did not come as exploiter, but as enlightener. He was not seeking mere profit, but was fulfilling his duty to his Maker and his sovereign, whilst aiding those less fortunate to rise towards his lofty level”. (6) This was what Rudyard Kipling called in the next century “the white man’s burden”. And this was also one of the reasons that made Clive — the unquestionable founder of the British empire in India — something of an embarrassment for Victorian imperialists, because he was never an idealist.

## References

- Burke, Edmund, *The Complete Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 2, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1866.
- Colley, Linda, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, London: BCA, 1992.
- Edwards, Michael, *The Nabobs at Home*, London: Constable, 1991.
- Foote, Samuel, *The Nabob; a Comedy, in Three Acts*, London: ECCO, [1773], 2010.
- Foster, Sir William, *England’s Quest of Eastern Trade*, London: A&C Black Ltd., 1993.
- Lawrence, James, *Raj. The Making and Unmaking of British India*, Great Britain: Abacus, 2008.
- Kabbani, Rana, *Europe’s Myths of Orient*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988.
- Metcalf, Barbara & Metcalf, Thomas, *A Concise History of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Morris, Pam (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader*, London: Edward Arnold, 1997.
- Singh, Jyotsna, *Colonial Narratives/ Cultural Dialogues*, New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Suleri, Sara, *The Rhetoric of English India*, Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1992.



