

Mobility, Identity and the Supernatural in Late-Victorian Fiction

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Abstract: *This paper discusses two late-Victorian works set in Africa and how the English national identity in these stories is defined within broadening spectrum of contexts. It argues that there is a great sense of belief in multiculturalism reflected in these works which allow different nations to enjoy cultural exchange as well as develop their own identities within this broader context.*

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My enemy is purity. What I believe in is cultural mixture. I think on the whole there is more creativity, intellectually and artistically, in societies where there are contrasts available [...] Therefore, I'm not looking for a pure Africa or a pure Europe that I'm going to elevate above all the others. What I am interested in are zones of mixture and cultural creativity. (Dyson, 1992, p. 16)

Starting from the early days of England, the singular and pure concept of English national identity has never actually existed. Instead, Robert Young (2008), for instance, traces the making of a “transnational” identity and a “globalised race” and concludes that Anglo-Saxonism presumably represents the “first hyphenated identity” (p. 180). In this respect, travelling beyond national territories, thus, exceeding global space, not only has renewed the concept of English national rootedness but also has required the English to define who they are, “or strive to be, within an ever-broadening spectrum of contexts” (Schoene, 2009, p. 30). H. Rider Haggard’s two works on different territories of the African continent and how the English national identity is defined within this broadening spectrum will be the focus of this article. The first explorer who brought Africa into the popular imagination was David Livingstone who published his exploratory notes in a book titled *Missionary Travels* (1852). With his publication, Livingstone helped to define the explorer as a popular

cultural icon (Brantlinger, 1985). Livingstone's exploration was followed by another traveller, Henry Morton Stanley who contributed two key books to the late nineteenth-century British psyche: *How I Found Livingstone* (1872) and *In Darkest Africa* (1890). *In Darkest Africa* is an exploration of adventures, of violence as well as the "savagery" of Africans which acts as a justification for Western "civilization" and missionary intervention in native affairs. Stanley's book follows the eighteenth-century tradition of scientific exploration which is separated from earlier conquests by European crusaders, and as Mary Louise Pratt (1992) puts it, it becomes an "anti-conquest" in which the explorers risk their lives in the pursuit of knowledge rather than territory (pp. 37-83). Published seven years after Stanley's novel, Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* (1897), has a different approach towards British colonisation, which she criticises, while showing a deep sympathy for West Africa's native people. What she believes in her book is that the Western colonial powers are the true reason behind the erosion of the African native cultures which will result in a "sheeting mass of infamy, degradation and destruction" (p. 278).

Haggard's African works seem to combine these two aspects of exploration narration, in which there is a constant flow of movement which paves the way for travellers to contact not only native people and their customs but also their inner selves and national identities; defined in a wider cosmopolitan environment. And in this respect, it will be discussed how his works seem to take an "autoethnographic" approach; where a "pre-" or "proto-ethnography" of England and English national identity is constructed throughout different journeys, far away from national borders (Buzard, 2005, p. 21). This article, thus, will examine the English race beyond English shores by looking at the interaction between the English and the "Other" and explore how the "contact zone" locates Englishness in a transnational context in Haggard's two African novels: *The Ghost Kings* (1908) and *The Holy Flower* (1915). This zone has been defined by Pratt (1992) as a social space where cultures meet and clash in accordance with domination, subordination and "transculturation" where the constructions of subordinate others have been developed by European dominance (pp. 4-5).

Haggard's adventure novel set in the north of Central Africa, firstly in Natal

and Zululand at the time of Dingaan and then later set towards the north to the kingdom of dwarf-like people, *The Ghost Kings* was published by Cassell in September 1908. *The Ghost Kings* is an African fantasy adventure with the theme of predestined love and its struggle against occult powers and evil conditions. Born English, Rachel Dove is the daughter of a missionary whose mission is to encounter Dingaan and to “induce him to see the error of his ways and change the national customs, especially those of fighting and, worse still, of polygamy” while imparting to the natives a rigid form of Anglicanism (Haggard, 1908, p. 5). Rachel, however, develops her own independent wisdom and insight which is also seen in many of Haggard’s strong female characters such as Ayesha and Jess. In this respect Rachel is developed in parallel to her mother Janey Dove who has foresight, “like her mother and several of her Scottish ancestors” (Haggard, 1908, p. 4). Kaffirs think that Rachel is a Heaven-herd, a magical person and give her the title *Inkosazana-y-Zoola* (which means Chieftainess, or Lady of Heaven) upon hearing the tale of her rescue from the flood when she was a child where “she could walk upon the waters, for otherwise how could she escape the flood?”

(Haggard, 1908, p. 21). Rachel is summoned by Dingaan to Zululand and Haggard’s introduction to the country is similar to his description of the landscape in his earlier romances. When they are forty miles from Durban, they camp:

on a stream, a tributary of the Tugela River, which ran close by, and formed the boundary of the Zulu country. It was a singularly beautiful spot, for to the east of them, about a mile away, stretched the placid Indian Ocean, while to the west, overshadowing them almost, rose a towering cliff, over which the stream poured itself, looking like a line of smoke against its rocky face. They had outspanned upon a rising hillock at the foot of which this little river wound away like a silver snake till it joined the great Tugela. In its general aspect the country was like an English park, dotted here and there with timber, around which grazed or rested great elands and other buck, and amongst them a huge rhinoceros. (Haggard, 1908, p. 23)

Comparing the scenery and narrating his female protagonist’s wish to stay away from Zululand, Haggard builds an English



park based upon the sight of this country in the far interior borders of Zululand. With a twist in the plot, the romance leads to several interesting discoveries and alternative turns when they meet Inkoos Ishmael or Lion-who-dells-in-the-wilderness who wears “zebra-skin trousers” and is “a subject of King George –an Englishman” (Haggard, 1908, p. 25). Contemplating Ishmael, Rachel concludes that he has been transformed into some kind of Zulu English, as he substitutes Zulu words for English words periodically while talking, and even employs Zulu idioms in his sentences, “doubtless because for years he had been accustomed to speak and even think in that language” (Haggard, 1908, p. 37). It is significant to note that Haggard’s construction of Ishmael, who has almost gone native, changes with the flow of the narration. When he visits the Doves, he is described as an English gentleman who has “discarded his garment of hide, including the picturesque zebra-skin trousers, and appeared dressed in smart European clothes” which he orders from Durban and a “large hat with a white feather” (Haggard, 1908, p. 45). This transformation of Ishmael into an English gentleman carries almost the same concerns Allan Quatermain has in *The Treasure of the Lake*

(1926) where he narrates that he helps John Arkle dress in shirt and a Norfolk jacket, when he ponders “a hat must be found” so that he can represent the Anglo-Saxon race in the proper way (pp. 96-97). It is also significant to note Ishmael’s going back to his national roots, enacted by Rachel, an English woman’s presence in the African space. In the final chapters of the romance, the setting changes from Zululand to the northern remote interior where Rachel is imprisoned among the dwarf-like people, worshippers of the tree. Assisted by the good Mothers of these trees, she tries to identify Richard in several spirit forms: “Shapes headed and marshalled them by races and by generations” and “[t]hey came in myriads and in millions, in billions and tens of billions, men and women and children, kings and priests and beggars, all wearing the garments of their age and country [...] They came for hours and days and years and centuries,” and each of them pointing at her asks the same question: “Is it I whom thou seekest?” (Haggard, 1908, p. 157). She comes across several kings, several generations and countless races among whom she is trying to detect only one person: Richard. Born an Englishwoman, sharing most of her mother’s Scottish personality and respected

in the Zulu country as a goddess, Rachel's time travel, through this "soul affinity" thus places the construction of English national identity in a more global context. Yet, all English characters in this work, in the end, are defined in relation to the crown of England as "a subject of King George –an Englishman" (p. 25), which accordingly connects their identity to their national roots.

As one of Haggard's neglected exploration stories, *The Holy Flower* revolves around a holy orchid and its white goddess guarded by a monstrous gorilla. "I do not suppose that anyone who knows the name of Allan Quatermain" narrates Haggard "would be likely to associate it with flowers, and especially with orchids" (Haggard, 1915, p. 1), and this account is justified through Quatermain's hunt for the holy orchid. He not only encounters East African slave traders but also discloses native mysteries which lead to his discovery of the place of a white woman among native rituals, a theme substantially illustrated in *She* (1886) and in *Allan Quatermain* (1887). Formerly captured by a slave trader Hassan-bin-Muhammed, Mrs Eversley replaces the former Mother of the Flower upon her death at a great age and is taken across the lake Kirua and installed on

an island called Pongo-land. The trader, as Monsman (2006) interprets, is based upon the "Zanzibari Hamed-bin-Muhammed (or Tippu Tip, 1837-1905), a notorious Swahili slave trader of mixed Arab (the so-called White or Red Arabs) and African slave parentage" (p. 216). These Pongo people well-known for their great magicians, worship the gorilla and the holy flower associated with the white goddess. Mrs Eversley, who is pregnant when she is kidnapped is supposed to be succeeded by her daughter who is also white but believed to be born of a white woman and a black man. An Englishwoman by birth, Mrs Eversley's story reminds the reader of the captivity of John Every in *Maiwa's Revenge* (1888), though temporal and contextual circumstances are substantially different in the latter. It is interesting to see several white encounters with natives in Haggard exemplified in his African romances which bear similarities to Henry Stanley's famous discovery of Livingstone: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" (as cited in Brantlinger, 1988, p. 195). "Oh! I thank God that I have lived to see a brave English gentleman again" (Haggard, 1915, p. 148), exclaims Mrs Eversley in perfect English while Allan's observation on John Every conveys quite the opposite condition of the

Englishman in the “contact zone”: “I sat and listened to him [...] But he didn’t talk as I have told it, in plain English. He spoke very slowly, and as though he had got something in his mouth, continually using native words because the English ones had slipped his memory” (Haggard, 1888, p. 119). The social space in this “contact zone” is thus relatively different in Haggard’s travel writing. In the same context of African travel literature, Pratt has defined the moment of the imperial gaze highlighting the “I”s of the viewers’ motives. Lindy Stiebel (2001), following Pratt’s contribution of the “I” view, has approached Haggard’s romances, especially *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) as a narration of imperial “bird’s-eye-view”. In Haggard, it is true that there is a masculine gaze upon the African landscape; however, the characters do not stay elevated or superior through the lines of the story plot as can be seen with the Englishman in *Maiwa’s Revenge* or in the enslavement of the Englishwomen in *The Holy Flower*. Ironically, the “contact zone” located in *Maiwa’s Revenge*, as well as in *The Holy Flower*, does not allow English characters to impose their superiority or authority upon native people. For the same reason, Allan Quatermain is reminded of his lack of

power in the native wisdom passed to him by a witch doctor Mavovo, Zikali’s pupil as early as in *The Holy Flower*:

[Y]ou white men are very clever and think that you know everything. But it is not so, for in learning so much that is new, you have forgotten more that is old. When the Snake that it is in you, Macumazana, dwelt in a black savage like me a thousand years ago, you could have done and did what I do”. (p. 34)

Haggard’s ability to create a common ground for both his English and native characters is the key element which displays his cosmopolitanism; his characters neither give up their national roots nor detach themselves totally from the unfamiliar. As all journeys lead, one way or another, to “encounter difference and otherness”, Haggard’s English characters seem to survive any confrontation that involves a constant “negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space” (Thompson, 2011, p. 9).

Robert Michalski (1996), notes that “some literary critics of the late nineteenth century considered a transfusion of ‘savage’ blood a necessary antidote to

cultural decadence” (p. 92). Subsequently, Laura Chrisman (2000) reads bodies of Zulu warriors as a source of revival for the enervating British soldiers who could ingest and be rejuvenated by the spirit and culture of the Zulu (p. 118). In *Nada the Lily* (1892) as well as in *King Solomon’s Mines*, dead Zulu bodies can be considered as a principle antidote to the decaying British body and as a subject of metropolitan consumption (Chrisman, 2000, p. 119). In *The Holy Flower*, this transfusion of blood is performed between the chief of the Mazitu tribe “a numerous and warlike people of bastard Zulu blood” and an American traveller, Brother John, who wanders around South and Eastern Africa, collecting butterflies and flowers:

Later they discovered that I had skill in medicine, and their king, Bausi, came to me to be treated for a great external tumour. I risked an operation and cured him. It was anxious work, for if he had died I should have died too, though that would not have troubled me very much,’ and he sighed. ‘Of course, from that moment I was supposed to be a great magician. Also Bausi made a blood brotherhood with me, transfusing some of his blood into

my veins and some of mine into his. I only hope he has not inoculated me with his tumours, which are congenital. So I became Bausi and Bausi became me. In other words, I was as much chief of the Mazitu as he was, and shall remain so all my life. (p. 6)

It could be concluded from the blood brotherhood between the Anglo-Saxon race and a native race that Haggard’s works are substantially informed by the global cosmic processes of change and flux. As Alan Sandison (1967) suggests, Haggard’s engagement with the native people in his romances shows that there is an emphasis on the relativity of culture: he perceives the basic universality and invariability of human nature (p. 30). While Siebel admits that there is a sense of such cultural relativity in Haggard, he cannot escape from her accusation of imperialistic racism which she bases on a series of contradictions in Haggard’s work.

As a member of the Anglo-Saxon race, the American traveller, Brother John, is commissioned to be Allan Quatermain’s company in this story. The same way in which Quatermain engages with the Other, his “intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences”

(Hannerz, 1996, p. 132) enable him to define his English national identity in a rather cosmopolitan environment. Brother John shares his cosmopolitanism in such a way that both Allan Quatermain and Brother John develop as members of “the unbounded series of the world-in-motion” (Anderson, 1998, p. 132). Yet everybody “who moves about in the world,” is not cosmopolitan, as Ulf Hannerz (1990) observes (p. 238). Haggard’s characters, neither as tourists nor as exiles, become a part of a larger cosmic unit with their involvement in another culture which is not forced but rather brought about willingly.

To conclude, Haggard’s intensive writing on African people and customs indicates that he disagrees with the notion that “nationalism tends to assume that people’s identity is inextricably tied to their nation, and that people can lead meaningful lives only within their own national culture” (Kymlicka & Straehle, 1999, p. 71). His English explorers’ cosmopolitanism suggests that the depictions of English national identity in Haggard’s romances are neither detached from their national affiliations nor from what is unfamiliar. There is a strong attachment to national roots as well as England, yet this attachment is not an

obstacle for them to develop an understating of the native people and their customs. There are times when both English characters and native people are developed interchangeably. Through this interchangeable construction, it can be observed that Haggard’s romances take an autoethnographic approach that offers a better opportunity to understand England and English national identity.

It could also be inferred that there is a great sense of tolerance and belief in multiculturalism reflected in Haggard’s African romances which allow different nations to enjoy cultural exchange as well as develop their own national identities within this multicultural unit. The basic meaning of cosmopolitanism involves the idea that in a human community as well as “in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together association” (Appiah, 2006, p. xvi). Haggard develops this coexistence successfully in his African travel writing, where most of his explorers are willing to learn African customs as well as preserving their own traditions.

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