

Conclusion

I embarked on this study in the belief rather than the conviction that the nineteenth-century metropolitan poor should be seen as an object of imperial, not merely domestic concern. Well known from writings on the poor were the frequent references to non-European peoples and places. Henry Mayhew found 'wandering tribes', George Sims 'savage tribes of outcast Blackamoors', and William Booth 'pygmies' on the streets of London; J.C. Parkinson discovered the orient in Bluegate Fields, and Charles Masterman likened the abyss of the East End to a tropical forest. On reflection, I found this evidence unconvincing. Such metaphors could have been little more than reflections of contemporary linguistic practices; they did not in themselves prove the existence of imperial discourses.

More compelling were the explicit references in evangelical writings to the situation in India. Frederick Meyrick looked to the 1857 revolt and found there a portent for a pauper population living beyond the 'wholesome restraint' of Christianity. And Joseph Mullens compared the heathenism of London to that of Calcutta, concluding that both constituencies faced eternal damnation. Here, to my mind, were discourses that drew upon imperial concerns to construct narratives of progress. This seemed a more productive way of proceeding, and so I studied evangelical and travel writings on the metropolitan poor and India in order to understand better the ways in which they were structured by, and the mechanisms they displayed to express fears about, the progress of imperial modernity.

Although I anticipated certain homologies between constructions of the metropolitan poor and colonial subjects, there were few direct cross-references. Travel and evangelical narratives on London infrequently acknowledged the existence of writings on India; conversely, apart from passing mention of the need of a Dickens to describe Indian life, travellers in India did not seem drawn to the style or vocabulary of urban explorers such as Mayhew or Greenwood. What became apparent was that these

homologies operated at a deeper structural level, and it was to parallels in narrative form, chronology and rhetoric that I should look for evidence of their existence.

Bernard Cohn's suggestion of the creation of a unitary field between Britain and India in the late eighteenth century seemed to provide a good working model of how such homologies may have arisen. Prior to this period links between the literary appropriation of the metropolis and India were tenuous. Despite the crucial role of travel narratives in promoting nascent Enlightenment thought and the attraction of the East for eighteenth-century writers, the metropolitan literary imagination remained insular to the point of deprecating travel, particularly in pursuit of imperial ambition. With the ascent of British power in India and the attendant demand for information, argues Cohn, metropolis and colony were brought onto a common terrain, the boundaries of which were defined by the production of knowledge, namely, the project to gather, order and classify useful information on topography, history, population, trade and culture, and make it available in various forms. The field was cultivated by an empiricist methodology and epistemology; more importantly, I felt, it had an articulating principle of progress. The idea of progress – thought exclusively in terms of Western civilization – took hold at precisely that moment when the unitary field was created, and came to be of critical importance in structuring narratives of metropolis and colony, particularly by identifying antithetical forces seen to threaten the future of the imperial nation.

Much of this study, therefore, has focused on the faltering attempts by various agencies to know and hence control perceived threats to British commercial, political and cultural authority in London and India during the long nineteenth century, and make known their deliberations to a general readership. Travel accounts and evangelical writings exerted the formative influence on perceptions of London and India. Government and East India Company reports and detailed statistical surveys were not read widely; rather it was the likes of Colquhoun, Egan, Mayhew, Mearns and Booth who revealed London, and Grant, Ward, Forbes, Heber, Montgomery Martin and Kaye who revealed India to the British public.

The transformation of London in the late eighteenth century engendered literary forms and modes of inquiry that strove to see, define and understand its poor. The intervention of Colquhoun was instrumental in discovering the residuum, but his intervention was part of a wider concern to make sense of social relationships that could no longer be captured by descriptive and anecdotal taxonomies of diverse paupers preying upon an unwary bourgeoisie moving about the streets of the metropolis. For now recognition was forced that poverty was the inevitable concomitant of prosperity, the pathological consequences of which had to be controlled,

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initially by revealing 'suppressed connections' of the social order in its totality. Thus the historical insight to be gained from knowledge of the immense and plural unity of the metropolis was part of the same project to confront the forces of disorder that threatened the commercial progress of the nation.

Semi-factual accounts are more difficult to place. They shared a totalizing vision, but in stumbling pursuit drew freely upon diverse genres and inhabited awkwardly contradictory epistemologies. Egan's *Life in London* was an early and enormously popular account of the high and low in metropolitan life, but in many respects a transitional work. Its depiction of the grotesque and exotic among underworld characters encountered on the tour may have drawn upon Elizabethan popular literature and its eighteenth-century successors, and yet its narrative devices and concerns anticipated much of the work of urban travellers and novelists.

Responding to failures of the previous century to represent the diversity of metropolitan life, Colquhoun and Egan in their different ways opened up radically new projects of knowledge production. Colquhoun brought the systematic use of statistical materials to reveal the extent of criminal activity. This delinquency, he anticipated, placed before his readers in such a detailed and prominent manner, must excite astonishment. Egan, on the other hand, represented the new ambulatory observer attempting to capture the dislocating experiences of the metropolis by first-hand observation. Theoretical knowledge – that derived from the closet – was incapable of ascertaining real life; the object of his heroes was to see its quotidian plurality through direct experience of London's streets and diverse haunts.

Although India was distant, it was arguably no less known to the bourgeois reader than East London, and presented the same problems for those wishing to address the prevailing state of ignorance. Robertson and Mill pursued theoretical inquiry without ever visiting India. For Mill this was a point of principle; a man could, he argued in stark contrast to his contemporary Egan, gain more knowledge of India in 'his closet in England than he could during the course of longest life, by the use of eyes and ears in India'. Travel writers, on the other hand, celebrated the virtues of first-hand observation. Predating by some years the genre of urban travel, Forster, Kindersley, Nugent, Forbes and Graham struggled to grasp and represent the mysterious complexities of Indian life. Sensitive to the fanciful nature of previous accounts, they strove for veracity based on personal experience. Forster, in a move anticipating many nineteenth-century urban travellers, relied on disguise and knowledge of indigenous languages to gain access to Indian culture.

If anything united the imagery in these early accounts it was plurality and contradiction. Following a century in which knowledge of India and metropolitan low life advanced little, travellers to India reproduced

variously tropes of depraved and barbarous customs described in previous accounts, stereotypical characterizations based on environmentalism, and more sympathetic orientalist perspectives. In a metropolitan context, tricks-of-the-town narratives traceable to the writings of Elizabethan pamphleteers had in the course of the eighteenth century degenerated into stale formulae, then to be displaced by the intervention of Colquhoun. In contrast to the finely resolved taxonomies of exotic criminal activity, Colquhoun created an endemic, predatory and organized underclass located in the riverside areas of East London. This shift was profoundly to influence the criminalization of collective activity in the nineteenth century.

Less riven by internal contradiction was the intervention of evangelicals. Informed by coherent and powerful narratives on the revelation of divine grace, evangelicalism brought together groups of people from various social backgrounds committed to missionary work wherever the need was recognized. The Clapham Sect, for example, united the efforts of influential persons including Wilberforce, Bernard, Grant and Colquhoun to fight on the fronts of abolition, poverty and conversion of the heathen. Their members were largely responsible for the pioneering work of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (SBCP), various schemes to relieve distress in the metropolis, and the campaign to eradicate restrictions on missionary activity in India culminating in the introduction of the pious clause in the Company's charter of 1813.

It was the Baptists, however, who spearheaded missionary work in India, to be followed by the LMS and the CMS. Such work was commenced some forty years before serious evangelical activity in the metropolis. The result was that significant strands of evangelical thought were developed in India and then applied to the metropolitan poor. While the SBCP was encouraging the moral regeneration of the poor through frugality, self-help, industry and purity, Grant wrote in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution of the necessity of reconciling the depraved and corrupt natives in India to British rule. He conceded that Indians had never existed in a savage state but proposed that any attempt to convert them to light, knowledge and hence improvement would be mitigated by the debilitating influence of climate, despotic government, caste and Hindu mythology. Carey at the Serampur Mission inhabited a more inclusive vision of humanity, and yet could justify foreign work on the grounds that barbarous, poor and naked heathens in India were denied the truth through lack of Bibles and Protestant ministers. Over time evangelical attitudes hardened. Thus in the writings of Claudius Buchanan and Ward we see an embryonic racial separateness and virulent demonization of the rites and superstitions of a heathen and degraded population lost in a state of darkness, ideas that were to influence evangelical sentiment in both

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metropolis and India throughout the nineteenth century.

With the emergence around 1813 of a certain consensus on the nature of imperial rule, projects were initiated to create a totalizing vision of India. The Company commissioned Francis Buchanan to undertake a survey of its territories. A product of the Scottish Enlightenment, Buchanan brought to the work a scientific and empiricist methodology. Little was of necessity excluded from his inquiry, and he recorded with unprecedented accuracy details of topography, trade, agriculture, population and flora. In contrast, the information used in Hamilton's *East India Gazetteer* (1815) was not gathered from empirical inquiry, and the publication was not initiated by the Company, but it was part of the same desire to think India in a more rational, ordered and coherent fashion. Finally, Forbes's *Oriental Memoirs* (1813) marked a defining moment in the travel literature of India. The product of an obsessive and protracted interest, it strove diligently to record a more complete picture of India's natural and human landscape.

These three projects in their different ways were the product of a new empiricist mode of observation that attempted a total vision of India, but simultaneously recognized the vision's inherent instability. Despite the vaulting ambition that drove the work, at its core remained a sense of epistemological insecurity. Buchanan, overwhelmed by the task, was forced to rely on sources over which he had no control and in which he had little confidence. The material he accumulated was never published. This has conventionally been blamed on the worsening relationship between Buchanan and the Company, but more likely it signalled a failure to comprehend and organize the massive body of inchoate material. Hamilton faced similar problems. Soon after the publication of his *Gazetteer* he embarked on a project to reduce the geography of India to a more systematic form, but was forced to recognize the impossibility of providing reliable information on so vast a country. And Forbes's *Memoirs* was ultimately not only an awkward mix of materials gathered from incommensurable modes of inquiry, but also a project framed by a profound shift in consciousness from an orientalist sympathy with Indian culture, to a hard-line evangelical condemnation of it.

Modes of inquiry in a metropolitan context displayed the same modernizing impulses. In the work of Egan and his contemporaries we can detect for the first time an attempt to grasp London's diversity combined with recognition of its futility. Although Egan, Smeeton, Badcock and James Grant drew upon a distinct urban mentality, they were conscious of the limited potential of eighteenth-century literary appropriations to comprehend London's immense, labyrinthine totality. They therefore developed novel ways of representing the metropolis based on their status as observing subjects. Its totality, however, lay beyond the reach of their

awkward compilation of fiction, first-hand observation and extracts from previously published materials. Likewise, Mayhew's project to capture London's street life, in part by allowing the poor to speak, was brought to the point of collapse by the sheer mass of material seemingly beyond classification. Ultimately, London – like India – remained ineffable.

This epistemological insecurity combined with a mounting sense of political crisis fostered the racialization of imperial and metropolitan subjects. The form, chronology and rhetoric of these racializations are similar enough to suggest they were part of the same process. In both contexts the 1830s and 1840s were critical to order and progress. Domestically, the 1832 Reform Act, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act had transformed class relationships and installed a harsher disciplinary regime confident enough to confront chartist agitation. However, the 1842 Chadwick Report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population, journalistic and evangelical accounts of metropolitan life, and the popularity of urban novels, most notably those of Dickens, rediscovered the poor and reminded a middle-class public that the relative tranquillity of the period in the immediate aftermath of social and political turmoil could be shattered. Colonial rule was also transformed during this period. Enlightenment universalism had failed to challenge the British sense of innate superiority over Asians and Africans. Even British orientalists, while celebrating the richness and longevity of Indian culture, and the common heritage of Indo-European languages, derided contemporary Indian society and remained aloof from its people. But such attitudes were not rigid and impacted little on the hierarchies of colonial administration; only under the new imperial ethos of the early nineteenth century were indigenous rulers excluded from positions of colonial authority, the British elite removed from the influence of indigenous culture, and marginal groups subjected to investigation and control.

Many social and political factors accelerated the tendency around 1840 to construct class and imperial relationships in terms of race. The abolition of slavery, expansion of imperial rule, and rediscovery of the metropolitan poor threw into stark relief a range of concerns, resolution of which was thought possible only through measures predicated on the racialization of subject peoples. If the Anglo-Saxon race was to progress, in other words, critical problems such as wage labour, citizenship, rationality, hybridity, sexuality, civilization, order, hierarchy had to be addressed, and all of these had an urgency in both imperial and metropolitan contexts.

Travel and evangelical writings in India had from the end of the eighteenth century displayed various forms of embryonic racist sentiment. Environmentalism and zealous religious orthodoxy created regional stereotypes. Bengalis, for example, were represented as an effeminate, enervated, idolatrous and uncivilized people, seen occasionally as a race

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apart. Over time, and used in combination with class-based and gender-based discourses, these sentiments became harsher and more elaborate, and were generalized to encompass the whole of India. The existence of threatening forces of disorder beyond the knowledge of British authority provided the initial impulse. Thus dacoits, Thugs and tribals were singled out as objects of particular concern, and attracted the most vicious forms of racial coding. They were represented in ways redolent of the criminalization of the metropolitan residuum by Colquhoun and Mayhew. Here too were nomadic, predatory, organized, secretive and hereditary gangs acting outside the law to plunder innocent victims. Their sheer unknowability prompted detailed investigations centred on the reconstruction of criminal biographies and the decipherment of cant. Many were used as specimens to test – and bolster – nascent theories on racial physiognomy. And to counter their activities wholesale changes were introduced in surveillance, policing and the operation of law.

With the suppression of dacoity and thuggee, the steady growth in missionary work and improvements in the information order, a certain optimism prevailed in the late 1840s and early 1850s. The 1857 revolt shattered this complacency, and confirmed the worst fears of the British about the latent threat from a population living in a darkness and degradation. Some of these fears reverberated in the metropolis as evangelicals like Meyrick pointed to the disastrous consequences of allowing a submerged population to continue to live beyond the influence of (Christian) civilization. The aftermath of 1857 coincided with a sense of crisis in the metropolis as fears of social disorder and imperial decline mounted. In this climate racial theory intensified and took a sinister and menacing turn. Race was increasingly articulated with the tropes of degeneration, dirt and blackness; together they were used to explain the social pathology of the residuum and the savagery of imperial subjects, both of which constituted potent threats to the future of the Anglo-Saxon race.

This agenda attracted the attention of the Victorian intelligentsia. Scientists, anthropologists, linguists, philosophers, cultural theorists, political scientists, theologians, historians and writers employed their talents to reveal the dimensions of race, as a result of which racial attitudes were articulated much more pervasively than heretofore, and their own disciplines were energized and empowered. Race became an intellectual and political testing ground for many of the fledgling sciences; the metropolis and India provided the laboratories. It was in this period that London was transformed from Egan's cyclopaedia to Sims's dangerous labyrinth of darkness and contamination, Mullens compared the heathenism of London to that of Calcutta, and the Anglo-Saxon subject was valorized in defence against threats from degeneration and hybridity.

This agenda, however, prompted different responses to anxieties about

the future of the imperial formation. In India, racial fears were augmented by renewed uncertainties over the state of colonial knowledge. To address these, authorities instigated totalizing projects best represented by the Census and the *Imperial Gazetteer*. These massive endeavours were framed loosely by ethnological categories, by far the most important of which was caste, which was erected as the metanarrative of Indian history and culture. It explained contemporary society as the outcome of the primeval struggle between light-skinned Aryans of Indo-European stock and dark-skinned, indigenous and debased races. Extant hierarchical ordering was therefore described in evolutionary terms, and complex racial taxonomies emerged based on notions of racial purity. In the metropolis, travel writing identified the degenerative tendencies of racial mixing, and threats posed by internal orient. Intimations of class rather than caste informed these perspectives, but during the political crises of the late 1880s the crowd, transgressing the spatial confines of East London, entered into the symbolic sites of bourgeois fears.

Integral also was Charles Booth's project systematically to map London in its totality. Comparable in scale and ambition with Hunter's *Imperial Gazetteer*, Booth's volumes comprised the most comprehensive and detailed attempt to record the spatial, material, occupational and, to a lesser extent, cultural aspects of metropolitan life. His social categories were based loosely on class rather than caste but there was the same recognition of degenerative strains in the imperial formation. To say that in Booth the residuum equates with Hunter's aborigines greatly oversimplifies the complexities of ways in which both constituencies were constructed, and yet in terms of narratives of racial conflict between a bourgeois/Aryan elite and a low other the parallels are striking. With the emergence of such massive projects of knowledge production in the latter stages of the nineteenth century, the influence of travel and evangelical writing receded. In the metropolis a modernist sensibility in the writings of Masterman, Madox Ford and London called upon a repertoire of degeneration and racial decline to articulate fears of crowds from the abyss. In India, there was, well, Kipling. Fascinating though it may be to explore connections within this body of work – the use of jungle as metaphor in Masterman and Kipling is one that immediately springs to mind – there is neither space nor time here.

So, to conclude, does the production of knowledge in travel and evangelical writings of the nineteenth century reveal the establishment and retention of a unitary field between metropolis and India? The internal coherence and integrity of evangelical narratives and the common objective of mission work to provide spiritual salvation to heathen populations created strong homologies. Evangelical perspectives on the nature of these populations and the work to be undertaken with them originated, it has to

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be recalled, in the colonial 'periphery' and were then applied to the metropolis some years later. The emphasis on spiritual rather than political or material salvation, particularly when confronted by constituencies that seemed impervious to their influence, did not override social or cultural differences, but did engender a degree of stability and continuity at times of profound political change. Travel writings were less coherent. They drew contradictorily and differentially upon longer traditions to produce epistemologically insecure visions of both metropolis and colony. Overarching both genres – and arguably the field of knowledge production as a whole – were narratives of progress. It was these that at times of political unease and perceived crisis in the information order engendered racialized and totalizing visions, which eventually rendered obsolete the projects of travellers and evangelicals to create a knowledge of India.

