One

Introduction

When I retrace the steps that led me to embark on this project, I must begin with a few remarks about my previous work. Trained in anthropology, I have done field research and written about contemporary African culture in the urban and industrial region of Shaba, in southeastern Zaire.¹ Disciplinary divisions and the strong sociological outlook that characterized even cultural anthropology may account for the fact that it took years before I realized I needed to place my work in the context of colonial history. Knowledge of the colonial past was essential for me to understand, among other things, a problem that intrigued me more and more: how did it come about that Swahili, a language that had its origins on the east coast of Africa, would emerge, in different variants, as both a tool of Belgian colonization and a “weapon of resistance”—that is, as the common medium through which displaced labor recruits and other immigrants created spaces of freedom for the vital and complex popular culture I first encountered in the sixties?

Sometime in the late seventies I began to search more purposefully for evidence of a colonial history of Swahili. I looked for early vocabularies, grammars, phrase books, and primers written for use in the Congo Free State, which became the Belgian Congo in 1908. It turned out that the earliest instances of these genres of linguistic appropriation could be found (often as appendixes) in travelogues, and by chance, in the library of my institute, I came upon a truly remarkable example of such writing, Jérôme Becker’s La vie en Afrique (1887). I thus decided to begin
my project with a study of the uses of Swahili in this account of expeditions carried out for King Leopold’s International African Association. For the sake of contrast, I also analyzed a contemporary account of missionary travel from the east coast to the Great Lakes, the White Fathers’ *A l’assaut des pays nègres* (1884). I presented the results in a rather recondite long essay or small book, *Language on the Road* (1984), and this could have been the end of that particular excursion into history and literary interpretation. But the larger project of a colonial history of Shaba Swahili, which I had originally envisaged as not much more than an annotated bibliography, turned into a story that had to be told (*Language and Colonial Power* [1986; reprint 1991]).

A number of questions that came up in the course of my readings for these studies kept intriguing me even after the results were published. For instance, I could not let go of certain strange assertions that had got me hooked on Becker’s account in the first place. Much like other early travelers (and later anthropologists), this author flaunted his authority by liberally larding his story with Swahili terms and phrases. This was an interesting feature, though not exceptional in itself. What made it so gripping was a comment of Becker’s, in a chapter where he assumes the stance of the linguist: “The African, by the way, gets along with a very restricted choice of vocables. Three or four hundred words make up his usual glossary” (Becker 1887, 2:51).

This claim struck me as nonsense, even if it was meant to apply to a reduced variant of Swahili, a kind of trade language. Because I had by then formed a high opinion of Becker as a proto-ethnographer, the statement also made me mad, mad enough to comb the two volumes for Swahili terms and phrases that Becker himself used in the French text. What I found was that his own demonstrated knowledge of the language and the generalizations he asked us to accept contradicted each other. I was able to compile a Swahili vocabulary, interspersed in the French text, of more than four hundred terms and more than one hundred phrases (names, greetings, fragments of conversation, quotations). 2 Considering that all this evidence must be assumed to present only part of Becker’s actual competence in the language (let alone that of his African interlocutors), I could only conclude that Becker was “out of his mind” (as I put it to myself) when he labeled Swahili a poor language and even insinuated, by the singular phrase “the African,” that such poverty reflected reduced communicative capacities or needs on the part of its speakers. This, as best I can recall, was my first inkling of the insights that would later crystallize in the title of the present study.
Other travelogues and early ethnographic reports of roughly the same period and region as Becker’s opened another route that eventually converged with this line of thought. At the time I still had no clear program for systematic research, but my reading evoked an image, diffuse yet lively. There was something curious about a topos, presumably shared by these writers, their contemporary readers, and, I would maintain, most present-day readers as well, a topos that was to become emblematic for the history of exploration in the last third of the nineteenth century: that of the encounter between a European explorer, the intrepid leader of an expeditionary caravan and emissary of science, and the African chief, a local ruler (real or presumed) cast in the role of a representative of his society and culture and invariably identified as either a political friend or foe of European penetration. In numerous instances—sometimes explicitly noted, sometimes to be inferred from descriptions—the African potentate appeared in a state of more or less advanced inebriation, caused by drinking vast quantities of beer, palm wine, or mead and occasionally made worse (or better?) by smoking hemp. But what about his European guest? Though I cannot cite from the sources anything that would directly correspond to the reported states of African rulers (after all, explorers would not be likely to depict themselves in such a fashion), there is overwhelming indirect evidence that European travelers seldom met their hosts in a state we would expect of scientific explorers: clear-minded and self-controlled. More often than not, they too were “out of their minds” with extreme fatigue, fear, delusions of grandeur, and feelings ranging from anger to contempt. Much of the time they were in the thralls of “fever” and other tropical diseases, under the influence of alcohol or opiates (laudanum, a tincture of alcohol and opium, was the principal drug used to control acute and chronic dysentery), high doses of quinine, arsenic, and other ingredients from the expedition’s medicine chest. Luc de Heusch’s roi ivre took on new meaning for me, and I thought there might be interesting material in these travelogues for a paper to be titled “Travel as Tripping.”

As my initial enthusiasm about this discovery subsided—I began to doubt that I could come up with more than a somewhat sensationalist, muckraking, but in the end negligible piece—I kept mulling over possible wider implications. By 1990, I had collected my thoughts sufficiently to present them in a paper (unpublished) that was also a proposal for research. Here, assembled from my notes, is the gist of the emerging project: in popular as well as traditional scholarly opinion, the encounters that took place during European expansion were exemplary enactments
of our civilization. They were guided by self-denying missionary zeal and philanthropic compassion, as well as by a taste for travel and adventure, often combined with scientific curiosity. To be sure, the motives that brought individual travelers to Africa must be judged against a collective background that entailed territorial expansion, the pursuit of military power, commercial greed, and the need to find raw materials and investment opportunities for accumulated capital—not to mention the demands of an emerging “media industry” in search of stories to sell.

In all these explanations, the terms and the nature of the encounters with those about to be colonized are supposedly determined by motives and goals contained in (and therefore controlled by) faith and reason, as well as political and economic imperatives. This “containment” makes for histories of precolonial or colonial encounter that are predictable, their conclusions inescapable. As a result, the history of Western expansion becomes a celebration of said motives and goals, even in the writings of those who criticize, on moral or political grounds, the blatant misuses of power that were the soul of imperialism. As we have come to realize, many condemnations of imperialism have been predicated on acknowledgment of its success.

One strategy adopted in recent years to counteract that self-fulfilling prophecy is to accumulate evidence for resistance to conquest and to write about that. This is a necessary task, and much more needs to be done to carry it out. But what will such efforts show? That imperialism was weaker than the image it liked to project, or less organized, or less rational? That the colonized reacted, survived, hung on? In that case, what We assert about Them is still but a function of what we assert about ourselves. Even if we can point to deception, misrepresentation, and perhaps blindness in these encounters of exploration, conquest, and exploitation, that is not likely to shake in any fundamental way the belief in the basic rationality, and hence necessity, of Western expansion.

A truly radical critique needs to address the very concept of rationality, especially the built-in tendency of that concept to present itself as outside and above historical contexts. To this end, I would like to pursue another strategy, showing that the actual encounters that paved the way for imperial rule or established it in embryonic form were often inherently contradictory—indeed, anarchic—so much so that their true nature had to be concealed or, better, negated by projecting to the world images of a purposeful oeuvre civilisatrice: intrepid explorers mapping the unknown; saintly missionaries offering their lives for the salvation of pagans; heroic military men vanquishing an enemy that always out-
numbered them; unselfish administrators toiling for the public good; and so forth. This colonial hagiography cannot simply be dismissed as pious legend. It represents a discourse that must be interpreted by reading it backward—from the rationalizations and glorifications to that which was thought to be in need of rationalization and glorification.

*Intrepid, heroic, courageous:* these were but some of the obligatory adjectives preceding the noun *explorer.* In the illustrations of travelogues, those verbal flourishes parallel pictorial ones: the traveler’s quasi-military garb, his faraway gaze, his proud and determined posture. He rides or walks ahead of his caravan; a few porters and guards are recognizable, while the rest blend into a file that gets smaller and smaller until it disappears in the landscape. In these representations of explorers, traces of which we all have stored in our childhood memories (well, all of us above a certain age), the myth of science as an arduous battle for victory over self and nature has been condensed and concentrated; it is always available for consumption in a diluted form. The myth of scientific exploration, inasmuch as it supports our concept of ethnography, has come to us as an extract as well as an abstract of the experiences and practices it invokes. As an abstraction, the myth is in need of the kind of critique that addresses the limits and faults of representation; it calls for deconstructive literary analysis. As an extract, the myth contains “active ingredients” whose potency continues to affect modern ideas and practices of ethnography. It needs, if I may extend the pharmaceutical metaphor, an antidote, one distilled not from presumably superior “modern” ethnography but from a contemporary counterstory—one contained in the accounts of scientific travel and exploration we are about to consider.5

In describing the myth, I may of course have projected my own preconceptions and stereotypes of African exploration. I acquired them, as many educated people have, through the powerful images created and widely circulated in travelogues and the countless rehearsals of these images in literature, art, and the media, as well as through mindless repetition of opinions about the impact of travel and exploration on the formation of anthropology. Recent critical discussion and revision in the literature on colonial travel brought certain doubts into focus and convinced me that an epistemological history of ethnography will prove essential to our understanding of the role of anthropology in the coming century, and of the need for its continued existence.6

Mary Louise Pratt prefaxes her critical study of imperial travel writing with a personal story, much as I have done here. She recollects the
image and myth of Livingstone with which she grew up in her family and speaks of the “redundancy, discontinuity, and unreality” of such images in the literature on travel. The present study joins hers and other recent efforts to overcome the “numbing repetition” of stereotypes. I agree with Pratt’s description of what needs to be done.

The effort must be, among other things, an exercise in humility. For one of the things it brings most forcefully into play are the contestatory expressions from the site of imperial intervention, long ignored in the metropolis; the critique of empire, coded ongoingly on the spot, in ceremony, dance, parody, philosophy, counterknowledge and counterhistory, in texts unwitnessed, suppressed, lost, or simply overlain with repetition and unreality. (1992, 2)

My approach differs in a few ways. I emphasize contradiction rather than contestation, though the two are of course related, and I do cite many examples of resistance. My aim is also more limited, because I address my critique to anthropology and, within anthropology, to ethnography, which is but one of the practices that originated with “imperial intervention.” And I have certain reservations about adopting two of Pratt’s theoretical concepts, “transculturation” and the “contact zone.”

Still, I hope that our efforts will be perceived as complementary.

There is a consensus among cultural anthropologists that ethnography, as empirical research that produces knowledge, justifies our claims to the status of an academic discipline. Modern practices of ethnography were developed from premises, activities, and conventions that guided scientific travel and exploration in the late nineteenth century. I do not subscribe to the widespread opinion that Bronislaw Malinowski instituted fieldwork as an obligatory practice. Others had carried out research in situ before him, and much of his theoretical orientation derived from the positivism inspired by Auguste Comte or Herbert Spencer, figures influential to the generation of explorers who preceded academic anthropologists.

Leszek Kolakowski (1969) characterized the classical, positivist understanding of science that also informed scientific exploration as “a collection of prohibitions concerning human knowledge” (9), expressing a “normative attitude” (2) that can be summed up in four rules.

1. The rule of phenomenalism: “We are entitled to record only that which is actually manifested in experience” (3).

2. The rule of nominalism, stipulating that “we may not assume that any insight formulated in general terms can have any real refer-
ents other than concrete objects” (5). Thus conceived, knowledge production is essentially classification—Foucault’s “taxonomic” episteme.

3. The rule “that denies cognitive value to value judgments and normative statements” (7; original emphasis). In my understanding, this proscription would also apply to what I will call ecstatic elements in the production of knowledge.

4. The rule expressing belief in the “essential unity of the scientific method,” that is, “the belief that methods for acquiring valid knowledge, and the main stages in elaborating experience through theoretical reflection, are essentially the same in all spheres of experience” (8).

Travel began to serve ethnography more directly to the extent that the latter became methodologized and professionalized, a development studied in depth and detail by Justin Stagl (1995). Trips and voyages turned into expeditions (a term that, after anthropology was recognized academically, coexisted for a long time with “fieldwork”). The professional travelers we call explorers were among those whose practices established modes of knowledge production (and of knowledge representation) that continue to inform present-day conceptions and practices of field research. This connection between travelers and anthropologists, however, is seldom stated and hardly ever analyzed; when touched upon, it is often dismissed by positing clear distinctions that never existed.

In the travelogue—the genre that preceded, often contained, and sometimes paralleled the ethnographic monograph—scientific travelers cultivated images of themselves and of the pursuit of scientific knowledge that appealed to a wide public. Typically, the traveler was depicted as an individual, often solitary, agent, fully in control of himself and others. Psychologically, morally, and intellectually, he was equipped to carry out the assigned task, unless impeded or prevented by persons, events, or conditions beyond his control. Self-control required “other-control,” which above all meant maintaining distance from the country to be explored and its people. This distance was kept with the help of varying amounts of protective equipment and varying degrees of withdrawal. Self-control called for “abnegation,” an ascetic virtue, fueled by the knowledge that exploration in all its respects must be subject to the norms and injunctions of science. To cite but one of many modern examples of such an ascetic stance, here is how Claude Lévi-Strauss put it
in *Tristes tropiques*: “To get to that which is real it is necessary first to repudiate lived experience, though it may later on be reintegrated in an objective synthesis stripped of all sentimentality” (1955, 63).

Taking a view diametrically opposed to Lévi-Strauss’s, I hope to demonstrate that, especially in their first or early contacts with unfamiliar cultures, the emissaries of imperialism got to “that which is real” when they permitted themselves to be touched by lived experience. More often than not, those instances involved them in quandaries and contradictions, in moral puzzles and conflicting demands. What I find striking, and worthy of much more attention than it is usually given, is that explorers frequently overcame these intellectual and existential problems by stepping outside, and sometimes existing for long periods outside, the rationalized frames of exploration, be they faith, knowledge, profit, or domination. This “stepping outside” or “being outside” is what I call the ecstatic. In German, my first language and the one that intrudes whenever I struggle with the philosophical meaning of concepts, we have phrases like *außer sich sein*, “to be beside oneself,” and *aus sich herausgehen*, which my dictionary translates as “to come out of one’s shell.” They elaborate further the meaning I am after: ecstasis can be an act as well as a state.

To avoid getting lost in a cloud of connotations, let me give some precision to the concept by rejecting most of the current meaning of ecstasy as nonrational, erratic, escapist, perhaps enthusiastic behavior (such as that described in, say, studies of cults and movements). Ecstasy, I shall assume, is not so much a kind of behavior but a dimension or quality of human action and interaction—one that creates a common ground for the encounters that will be the subject of this study. Unlike empathy (a concept frequently evoked in reflections on ethnographic fieldwork), ecstasy is neither a moral quality nor a psychological attitude; it is an epistemological concept. In the context of exploration, ecstasy was a “condition of possibility” for the meetings between Europeans and Africans to result in anything more than physical collision. Ecstasy, in a nontrivial understanding of the term, is (much like subjectivity) a prerequisite for, rather than an impediment to, the production of ethnographic knowledge.

In recent anthropology there has been much criticism of the disembodied scientific mind. The importance of gender has been recognized; senses other than vision have, as it were, been rehabilitated, emotions have received attention, and the body as a site of knowledge has been rediscovered. In the perspective opened up by these developments, a crit-
ical study of the objective conditions that determined knowledge of the
Other as reported in travelogues and early ethnographies must consider
the effects of alcohol, drugs, illness, sex, brutality, and terror, as well as
the role of conviviality, friendship, play, and performance. Included in
this approach are the sounds, movements, and objects that made up per-
formances—music, dance, art, material culture, whatever mediated en-
counters and made it possible for the participants to transcend their psy-
chological and social boundaries. Not only do the travelogues we shall
examine offer plentiful documentation of all these elements, they also
contain surprisingly articulate statements regarding their significance.

PROBLEMS OF PRESENTATION

In 1990–91 I enjoyed the luxury of a stay at the Getty Center for the
History of Art and the Humanities, including a part-time research as-
sistant who kept me supplied with books from libraries in the Los An-
geles area. By the end of that year I had read thousands of pages, accu-
mulated hundreds of pages of notes and excerpts, and established a list
of topics and key words. At that point, however, I had to set the study
aside to work on another book (Fabian 1996), and only in 1996 could
I finally close the remaining gaps in my reading of the sources. It occurred
to me then that I had spent at least as much time on this undertaking as
on previous field research projects and the resulting publications. But for
all the reading done, all the exciting ideas recorded, all the carefully or-
ganized notes, and all the opportunities I’d had to test the material in
lectures and conversations, I had never before run into comparable prob-
lems in envisaging the shape of the book to be written.

Eventually I had to fall back on setting down a preliminary table of
contents. I managed to find a sequence for the topics that were impor-
tant and capable of bringing together what was dispersed in the sources.
My account would move from description to analysis to critical reflec-
tion. But then I began to doubt whether filling those rubrics with prose
would serve my intentions. What, I asked myself, would prevent this
study from becoming just another book on travel? It could only be the
evidence of ecstasis in exploration, of lack of control, of an inability to
follow plans and carry out schemes, as well as a capacity to go beyond
plans and schemes. How can the ecstatic in the making of knowledge be
given a fitting literary form?

Since I am not a writer gifted with, say, Michael Taussig’s knack for
collage,⁸ I had to consider other possibilities. A tempting one, given the
wealth of material, was to divide my presentation between an account of proto-ethnographic knowledge processes in the positivist-ascetic vein and a counterstory made up of striking instances of ecstasis. In the end I made limited use of this strategy, realizing that alternation between examples and counterexamples would quickly grow old and essentially reduce the argument to anecdote.

Another possibility was to search for “proof” that the very accounts these explorers gave of their endeavors contradicted, in fact destroyed, the myths of objective science and its ascetic servants. The elements of the myth would generate the topics, beliefs, and assertions to be disposed of one after the other. However, though debunking myths is what critical analysis tries to achieve and is also one of my goals in this project, it is not all that I hope to accomplish.

My larger goal is to use the exploration of central Africa as a historical detour toward critical reflection on the processes of ethnographic knowledge. To that end, I strive to lead the reader through the past without compromising the primacy of the epistemological critique addressed to the present. The connection between history and epistemology (a dangerous one if we remember the positivist tenet that a science is legitimated by the history of its successes) is perhaps best understood if we accept that a discipline, in order to be critical of itself, needs a history not only of its findings but also of its ways of searching, that is, of the practices of knowledge production and presentation. That this latter history should, in this case, resemble an ethnographic treatise was inevitable. Much of ethnographic writing, starting with the travelogues we examine, has been presented, though rarely directly, as responses to research questions set down in such authoritative works as the famous *Notes and Queries*. A critical, historical study formulating notes and queries on an ethnography that was inspired by *Notes and Queries* probably cannot avoid resembling the target of its critique.\(^9\)

Beneath superficial resemblances is a more fundamental issue: the dialectical nature of ethnographic knowledge. Before I began to write the present study, I had argued in an essay on ethnographic mis- and non-understanding that we must acknowledge negativity as a condition of knowledge, as a subject of critical reflection on knowledge, and as an element in the (re)construction of processes and practices of knowledge production (Fabian 1995). Every positive assertion about science and knowledge should be confronted with its negations and contradictions; every feat of science with defeat; every gain with loss.
Yet to show this negative dialectic at work is but the first step toward a more important aim. Positivists will admit defeat and loss; what they will not accept is the presence and inevitability of the ecstatic in our practices of knowledge production: the necessity of being out of our minds as well as being in control of our aims and methods. I anticipate the objection that nowadays positivism is, if anything, a straw man; an adversary stuffed and sewn by the opponent and therefore no adversary at all. Still, in intellectual debates we always address adversaries not so much as they are but as we construe them; that is the difference between discursive and real fights. Setting up straw men is how we get arguments going. The more I think about vital questions regarding the history of my discipline—especially its connections with colonialist and imperialist politics—the closer the links become between positivist conceptions of science and imperialism. If I am fighting a straw man, this is a formidable one.10

THE TEXTS

The selection of texts was guided by themes that grew out of my reading and subsequently refined by narrowing the geographical area and the historical period to be covered. I decided early on not to include authors such as Livingstone, Cameron, Stanley, Schweinfurth, Nachtigal, and Emin Pasha, whose lives and works are covered by many popular and scholarly biographies and secondary studies. I sought out travelogues off the beaten path, works that are known, if at all, only to specialists. Becker’s account (1887) was my first, purely serendipitous find; I was struck by the wealth of information it conveyed and the literary quality it displayed. When I mentioned my discovery to a Belgian colleague, he directed my attention to a book that is in many respects a companion piece.11 Its author is Camille Coquilhat (1888), whose intelligence, sensitivity, and flair for writing—reminiscent of Joseph Conrad—rival Becker’s (Coquilhat and Becker were contemporaries and mutual admirers).

I then took up the writings of German explorers of central Africa: Paul Pogge (1886), Curt von François (1888), Hermann Wisssmann (1889, [1890], 1891), and Wisssmann and his associates (1891). A valuable help in sorting out the connections among German expeditions, as well as those between German and Belgian endeavors, was the complete series of Mittheilungen der afrikanischen Gesellschaft in Deutschland
(hereafter MAGD), published by the African Society in Germany, the
sponsor of most of these expeditions. MAGD appeared between 1878
and 1889, when the society was dissolved. Only after I had completed a
first draft of this study did the travelogues of three contributors to
MAGD (Büttnner 1890, Schütt 1881, and Wolff 1889) and the posthu-
mously published letters of a fourth (Böhm 1888) become available to
me. Therefore, most of the quotations from their reports come from
MAGD rather than from those books.\textsuperscript{12} Leo Frobenius (1907) and Emil
Torday (1913, 1925) are the most recent authors in my selection. Tor-
day and his companion M. W. Hilton-Simpson (1911) were included
because their travels partially overlapped with those of Frobenius and Wiss-
mann and could not have been undertaken without approval and support
from the Congo Free State.

Intrigued by Becker's extraordinarily harsh rejection of Joseph Thom-
son's two-volume travelogue (1881), I eventually added that work to my
list. Thomson had joined a British expedition sponsored by the Royal
Geographical Society.\textsuperscript{13} It was nevertheless connected to the Belgian and
German operations as an attempt not to be outdone in the work of ex-
ploration. Thomson was twenty-four when his expedition returned—
gloriously, as we are told. His is in many ways the freshest of the ac-
counts, full of interesting observations reported without guile; his
youthful impetuosity and Scots radicalism made him come up with
statements that need to be taken with more than a grain of salt, yet I
found myself wanting to excerpt entire pages. When the draft of this
study was almost completed, I decided to pick some of the most strik-
ing passages, which I now present, without direct comment, as epigraphs
throughout the book.

I also include Hermingildo Capelo and Roberto Ivens (1882), whose
account resembles Thomson's in many respects. Their expedition was
organized to safeguard Portuguese interests in view of German activities
in the area, and their travel routes crossed those of several authors in our
corpus. Their travelogue contains a wealth of eminently quotable state-
ments and observations. I refer to it occasionally and quote a few irre-
sistible excerpts.

With few exceptions, the texts I have chosen have not been available
in English. Extensive quotations, in my own translation, will make at
least fragments of these sources accessible to English-speaking readers.

The mainly Belgian and German sources that are the focus of this
study cover an area that became the target of exploration during a dis-
tinctive period. Sponsorship by the International African Association and
its German affiliate gave the various expeditions an institutional focus (more about this in chapter 2). This is not to say that these sources cover all exploratory activities that went on in that area during the thirty years between roughly 1878 and 1908. I do not include several reports by marginal or temporary members of German-sponsored expeditions (Lux 1880 and Soyaux 1879; both authors briefly traveled with Pogge) or books published by individual travelers who had little or no connection with the activities reported in the main corpus (for instance, Casati 1891; Chavanne 1887; Dupont 1889; Mecklenburg 1909; and Wiese 1983 [originally in Portuguese, 1891]). Nor do I include, with the exception of Coquihat, authors whose main activities were military, commercial, or administrative (such as Alexandre Delcommune, who devotes nearly a thousand pages to these themes in his 1922 memoir). By the same token I exclude literature on the “exploration” of Katanga whose real purpose was breaking resistance to the incorporation of that area into the Congo Free State.

Since my critique of ethnography in its early manifestations is also a historical study, I have taken care to respect historiographic standards. However, for practical reasons alone, I was unable to cover two kinds of sources that historians would normally consult. One consists of the vast and diffuse material found in contributions by these authors to newspapers and illustrated magazines of the period; the other is the private correspondence and the unpublished diaries and expedition logs preserved in German and Belgian colonial archives. Though I did not consult these sources directly, the authors made use of their letters and especially their diaries when they wrote their travelogues. In some instances, often amounting to substantial parts of a travelogue, they state that they are simply copying their journals, letters, lectures, and other documents.

To concentrate on published, widely circulated travelogues implies a generic choice, which in this case amounts to what philologists used to call a lectio difficilior, a “more difficult reading” that makes a virtue of the shortcomings of a corpus of texts.\textsuperscript{14} Presumably, much of the information I am after—especially evidence for the uncontrolled, ecstatic aspects of ethnographic knowledge production—that might be found in unpublished letters and diaries would have been filtered out of travelogues addressing a popular readership. It is hard to tell how much censorship was formally exercised by those who sponsored exploration, but that it existed, given the fact that these travelers were also in the business of gathering political, economic, and military intelligence, cannot
be doubted. To such outside control we must add self-imposed restrictions, which reveal themselves when we compare what different writers wrote of the same expedition. That a wealth of often astounding information nevertheless passed all these filters can only strengthen the arguments I intend to build on these sources.

TIMES AND SPACES

Ranging from the last quarter of the nineteenth through the first decade of the twentieth century, the sources cover an important period in the exploration of central Africa. In 1873 the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des äquatorialen Afrikas (German society for the exploration of equatorial Africa) was founded. Perhaps the most influential promoter of this organization was the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian, who had written about his travels to the center of the old Kongo kingdom as early as 1859 and would also publish in 1874 the first substantial report on German exploration of the Loango coast. The next important date was 1876, the year when Leopold II of Belgium convened the Geographical Conference of Brussels, attended by eminent travelers and presidents of geographical societies, as well as several important financiers, from most major European countries. The announced purpose of the conference was to pool existing knowledge about Africa and promote the gathering of new knowledge. The published declaration, however, defined the goals more concretely. An organization was to be created “to attain the goal of the Brussels conference, that is, to scientifically explore the unknown parts of Africa, to facilitate the opening of routes along which civilization can penetrate the interior of the African continent, and to seek means to suppress the black slave trade in Africa” (Exploration 1 [1876]: 4–5).

The most palpable and consequential result of the meeting was the founding of the International African Association (hereafter IAA). When this organization was first proposed at the Brussels conference, its awkward but more revealing name was Association internationale pour réprimer la traite et ouvrir l’Afrique centrale: the international association to curb the slave trade and open central Africa. With headquarters in Brussels and national committees in many European countries as well as in the United States, the IAA ostensibly served to raise funds and coordinate the many projects of exploration that were planned or under way, so as to avoid conflict and duplication, and generally facilitate travel through the establishment of what the king in his invitation had called
stations hospitalières, scientifiques et pacificatrices—hospitable, scientific, and pacifying stations. In the resolutions of the conference the third adjective was discreetly omitted; it was too early to name ulterior goals openly.\textsuperscript{15}

A few months after the Brussels conference, still in 1876, a German affiliate of the IAA was founded under the name Deutsche Afrikanische Gesellschaft (German African society). Since this society and the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des äquatorialen Afrikas shared members of the board and were pursuing similar goals, they merged in 1878 to become the Afrikanische Gesellschaft in Deutschland (African society in Germany). The new entity proclaimed central Africa, especially the Congo Basin, the target of its operations. Both the IAA and the German association sponsored German travelers to the region—a confused situation reflecting the increasing intensity of the “scramble for Africa.”

During the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, the IAA mutated into the Congo Free State, and the imperial powers named much of East Africa between the coast and the Great Lakes, as well as parts of West and Southwest Africa, German colonial possessions. In 1887, citing the fact that the conditions of research had changed with “the German Empire becoming active in African politics,” the Afrikanische Gesellschaft in Deutschland decided to dissolve itself. The decision became valid by imperial decree in early 1889.\textsuperscript{16} Finally, in 1908, the Congo Free State, up to then a private possession of King Leopold II, became a colony of Belgium.\textsuperscript{17}

All the principal sources reported activities during the period just described, but not all their expeditions were covered in the travelogues I selected. One of the most difficult tasks in preparing for this study was getting a reasonably clear picture of the trajectory of all major expeditions, of their duration, and of their leadership (which changed often, because of high mortality among the travelers; see the appendix). Though this book examines only travel documented in substantial travelogues (and in reports to MAGD, a quasi-official bulletin of central African exploration), references in our sources show that aside from officially sponsored expeditions, there was “heavy traffic” in central Africa. Travelers of all sorts—private scholars and artists, adventurers and hunters, traders and nonaffiliated missionaries, not to mention literate Arabs,\textsuperscript{18} Indians, Africans, and perhaps others—might have left records I did not consult.

In a narrow sense of the term, the central Africa that was to be explored was practically identical with the Congo Basin. It became the de-
clared target of operations at a time when some of the geographical riddles that had occupied learned societies and the public around the middle of the century—the sources of the Nile and the location of the Great Lakes—had been solved by explorers, before the beginning of our designated period. The travels of Richard Burton and John Hanning Speke, Georg August Schweinfurth, David Livingstone, and Gustav Nachtigal had shown that the center of Africa was accessible from the north as well as the south. Verney Lovett Cameron’s expedition and Henry Morton Stanley’s tour de force proved that the continent could be crossed from east to west. They also marked a shift in motivating exploration,\(^\text{19}\) with geographic curiosity overshadowed by political and economic imperial interests. Exploration of unmapped space turned from a universalist project into the pursuit of knowledge in the service of European nation-states (closely watched and often supported by the United States).\(^\text{20}\) Leopold, whose true intentions did not become public for a few years, was extremely clever to stage his conference as a pooling of intelligence and a spectacle of peaceful collaboration among nations. Obviously, this national orientation would affect the perception of space for exploration and its demarcation; it also encouraged the glowing patriotism our authors often displayed.

But the national orientation had a deeper significance as well. As we know from the history of anthropology and sociology, two theoretical paradigms dominated scientific thought in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Most vociferous was evolutionism, which ostensibly provided the foundation for a universalist, natural-history approach to human diversity; less obvious, but equally pervasive, was the consolidation of nation-states, reflected in the emerging modern theories of culture and society. Geographic space to be discovered and explored turned into a laboratory in which scientific assumptions were to be tested, as well as into a territory that was to be occupied. That both the laboratory and the territory had to be desired and imagined before they were “opened up,” as it was put at the time, accounts for the peculiar mixture of fact and fiction that characterizes our sources. It is important for a dialectical understanding to realize that, notwithstanding all the protestations to the effect that the light of science was to remove the darkness of fiction about central Africa, the tension between imagination and observation, between desire and disinterested research, between devotion to ideals and the pursuit of pragmatic goals, had to be maintained if exploration was to be initiated and carried out. It was as a catch basin of all these features—personal, scientific, economic, and political—not just
as a geomorphological feature, that the Congo Basin can be said to have defined the space for exploration that united the various accounts we will examine.

The image of a space that was simply there to be entered was, of course, part of the myth of exploration. Yet even public calls for support of African exploration—for instance, those issued by the German societies in 1873 and again in 1878—contradicted this image. They signaled the need to break the “tough resistance” this continent had put up to European attempts at penetration. The authors of the first call went so far as to state that Europeans themselves were in part responsible for the obstacles to exploration and that their ignorance of Africa was self-inflicted: “It would be an honorable task for our time, and its humanist aspirations, to regain knowledge that was lost for Europe through the slave trade, its heaviest guilt. And wherever such goals were to be reached, the German people have always stood in the first line” (Bastian 1874–75, i:xii).

Such was the power of the metaphor of the basin, a vessel waiting to be filled, that the notion of central Africa as an empty space that had only to be reached in order to be put on the map could nonetheless be sold to the European public. The enterprise of exploration was ridden with contradictions even before it really got under way. When it did, the protagonists of our story came to realize sooner or later—though they dearly wanted to believe in the myths that had made them volunteer for African exploration—that “the interior” had remained mythical and unknown for so long because of political rather than merely geographical reasons. Acting quite rationally, African (and to some extent Arab-Swahili) populations and their rulers had brought trade between the interior and the coasts under their control. Naturally, they resisted what they recognized as attempts by Europeans to break their monopoly on trade and communication with areas of economic interest in the interior. Central African geography was geopolitics, a fact already expressed by the Brussels conference when it declared the Arab slave trade a crime to be fought in the service of humanity.

**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

In the chapters that follow I will rely heavily on quotations from the sources. The reader will be confronted with and perhaps—until the protagonists’ statements and my comments bring them into focus—confused by the names of a score of travelers. To introduce them, I add a list with
brief biographical information for each, compiled from standard sources (among them obituaries in MAGD, entries in *Deutsches Coloniallexikon*, *Biographie coloniale belge*, Essner 1985, and Heintze 1999).22

Bastian, Adolf (b. Bremen, June 26, 1826; d. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, February 3, 1905). A physician and later professor of ethnology at the University of Berlin and director of the Royal Museum of Ethnology, which he helped found. In 1851–59 he traveled around the world as a ship’s surgeon (in Africa visiting the Congo and São Salvador), and in 1861–65 he undertook scientific travels in Asia. He founded the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des äquatorialen Afrikas in 1873 and was a mentor and sponsor of German exploration of central Africa. He resumed his travels in 1873, first to the Loango coast and then to the Americas, the islands of the Pacific, Australia, Southeast Asia, and finally the West Indies, where he died. A prolific writer and major theoretician, he was one of the outstanding anthropologists of the nineteenth century.

Becker, Jérôme (b. Calmhout, August 21, 1850; d. Antwerp, April 30, 1912). A lieutenant transferred to the Institute of Military Cartography. In 1880, as a member of the IAA Third Expedition, he departed for the first of three stays in Africa. He returned to Belgium in 1883 but left for Zanzibar that same year to lead the IAA Fifth Expedition. In mid-1885 he resigned his command for health reasons. In 1888 he traveled to the lower Congo as an agent of the Congo Free State. Appointed a liaison officer with Hamed bin Mohammed el Murjebi (called Tipo Tip), he remained loyal to his Arab-Swahili friends when the Belgians embarked on their anti-Arab campaign. He fell into disgrace with the authorities and left their service to explore on his own, accompanied by Arab friends, reaching the area north of the Uele River before returning to Europe in 1890. During the following decade he traveled widely to North Africa, America, and the West Indies, but his later years were clouded by accusations of financial misconduct and of the attempted murder of his much-admired commander Captain Jules Ramaeckers; he was exonerated by a military tribunal. He died in Antwerp from cerebral bleeding after a fall.

Böhm, Richard (b. Berlin, October 1, 1854; d. “Katapäne in Urua,” March 27, 1884). A zoologist and specialist in ornithology, he received his doctorate at the University of Jena under the theoretician of evolution Ernst Haeckel. Recruited by the famous explorer Gustav
Nachtwegal, he became a member of the German East African Expedition in 1880. A bullet wound incurred during a punitive expedition organized from the Belgian station Karema became badly infected, and he took months to recuperate. He then joined Paul Reichard on a trip to northern Katanga, where he died of fever.

Buchner, Max (b. Munich, April 23, 1846; d. Munich, May 7, 1921). He began his travels as a ship’s surgeon. In 1878–81 he headed the German expedition to the Lunda; after 1884 he had a short colonial career in Togo and Cameroon. In 1887 he was named director of the Ethnological Museum in Munich. Conflicts with his superiors and problems of health led to his early retirement in 1907.

Böttner, Richard (b. Brandenburg an der Havel, September 28, 1858; place and exact date of death unknown [1928–35]). Trained as a botanist and mineralogist, he traveled in the lower Congo between 1884 and 1886 as a member of the German Congo Expedition. In 1890–91 he headed a research station in Togo. Afterward he became a secondary school teacher in Berlin.

Capelo, Hermingildo do Carlos de Brito (b. Palmela, Portugal, 1841; d. Lisbon, May 4, 1917). As a naval officer he participated in various expeditions to Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, and China. With Roberto Ivens, and for some of the time with Alexandre de Serpa Pinto, he was a member of expeditions to explore the Congo-Zambesi watershed (1877–79 and 1884–85). He later worked in cartography and served three Portuguese kings as aide-de-camp.

Coquilhat, Camille (b. Liège, October 15, 1853; d. Boma, March 24, 1891). A lieutenant who, like Becker, was transferred to the Institute of Military Cartography, he joined the Upper Congo Expedition in 1882. He founded and served at several stations along the river and accompanied Stanley to the Bangala. He returned to Europe in 1885 but went back to the Congo the following year to lead a relief force to the embattled station of Stanley Falls. Wounded upon arrival, he grew ill on the way back and returned to Europe to recuperate and write his book. He traveled in Switzerland and Egypt and became a close collaborator of King Leopold II. In 1890 he returned to the Congo as vice-governor-general; he died a year later at Boma.

François, Curt von (b. Luxembourg, December 2, 1852; d. Berlin, December 1931). A lieutenant and member of the Wissmann expedition
of 1883–85. In 1888 he led an imperial expedition to explore the Togo hinterland and in 1889 served as commander of the Schutztruppen (colonial forces). Until his retirement from the colonial service in 1895, he was a leading figure in crushing African resistance in German Southwest Africa (today’s Namibia).

Frobenius, Leo (b. Berlin, June 29, 1873; d. Biganzolo, Italy, August 9, 1938). A largely self-educated ethnographer, he worked at several ethnographic museums before leading twelve expeditions to Africa, the first to the Congo Free State in 1904–6 with the artist Hans Martin Lemme. A successful fund-raiser and friend of influential people (among them the former kaiser Wilhelm II), he created his own research facility, the famed Frobenius-Institut, which was originally planned for Munich but established in Frankfurt am Main. From there he propagated his theories of Kulturmorphologie and published a large number of studies. He began teaching at the University of Frankfurt in 1932 and became director of that city’s museum of ethnology in 1934.

Ivens, Roberto (b. São Miguel, Azores, June 6, 1850; d. Dafundo, January 28, 1898). As a career officer in the navy, he saw India, São Tomé, and South and North America. He traveled with Capelo through Angola (1877–79) and from Angola to Mozambique (1884–85).

Kaiser, Emil (b. Zerbst, Germany, December 7, 1855; d. Lake Rikwa, November 1882). A topographer and astronomer with a doctorate from the University of Bonn, he was a member of the German East African Expedition.

Pechuél-Loesche, Eduard (b. Zöschen, near Merseburg, July 26, 1840; d. Munich, May 29, 1913). A member of the German Loango expedition (1874–76), initially recruited by Bastian. In 1882–83 he assisted Stanley during the exploration and occupation of the Congo that preceded the establishment of the Congo Free State. After 1886 he had an academic career, retiring for health reasons in 1912 from the University of Erlangen, where he had been a professor of geography.

Pogge, Paul (b. Zierstorf, December 27, 1838; d. São Paulo de Loanda, Angola, March 26, 1884). After law studies and a period managing his parents’ farm, in 1865 he went on a hunting trip to Natal and the Cape. He later offered his services as a hunter for an ex-
pedition organized by the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des äquatorialen Afrikas. Accepted as a volunteer by Bastian, he arrived with four others in Loanda in February 1875. The commander, Major Alexander von Homeyer, and the others soon returned to Europe for health reasons, and Pogge alone completed the assignment to reach the Lunda capital, returning to Germany in 1876. In 1880 he was back in Africa, accompanied by Wissmann, to head an expedition to found a station at the Lunda capital. Suffering from a painful infection of the jaw, he got as far as Nyangwe on the Lualaba. Wissmann continued to cross the continent while Pogge returned to the station he had founded on the Lulea River. His health forced him to travel back to the coast, where he died before he could leave for Europe.

Reichard, Paul (b. Neuwied, December 2, 1854; place of death unknown, 1920). Trained as an engineer, he joined the German East African Expedition in 1880 as a volunteer, traveling at his own expense. After unsuccessful attempts at establishing scientific stations near Tabora in Tanzania, the expedition directed its activities westward to Lake Tanganyika and beyond, as far as Katanga. Reichard returned as its sole survivor in 1886.

Schütz, Otto H. (b. Husum, Germany, January 6, 1843; place and date of death unknown). A former topographer working in railway construction for the Ottoman Empire, he was recruited by the German association in Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) to continue the work of Pogge’s first expedition. His 1878–79 expedition, on which he was accompanied by Paul Gierow, almost reached Luba country but had to return under pressure from the Lunda. Back in Europe, he immediately took up service for the Japanese government and left the publication of his travel account to an editor, Paul Lindenberg.

Thomson, Joseph (b. Thornhill, February 1858; d. London, August 2, 1895). He began his 1878 journey to the Great Lakes as the companion of Keith Johnston and, after the latter died, led this expedition sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society. Another trip followed, in 1883–84, to the Masai region and Lake Victoria. In 1885 he traveled on the Niger, in 1888 in southern Morocco, and in 1890–91 in South Africa.

Torday, Emil (b. Torda, Hungary, 1875; d. London, May 9, 1931). While in the service of the Compagnie du Kasai, he first made contact with the British Museum (and his later collaborator and coau-
thor T. A. Joyce) in 1904. In 1906 he left the company and returned to England, where he organized an expedition sponsored by the British Museum (accompanied by M. W. Hilton-Simpson and the artist Norman Hardy). Returning to England in 1909, he worked on his publications and began to study medicine. During World War I he became an enemy alien and was put under house arrest. He lost his property when his native town became Romanian and he refused to take up citizenship. He died after undergoing surgery.

Wissmann, Hermann (von) (b. Frankfurt an der Oder, September 4, 1853; d. Weissenbach, Austria, June 15, 1905). A lieutenant of the Prussian army, he joined Pogge on his second expedition in 1880–83. When health problems forced Pogge to return to Loanda, Wissmann continued to the east coast, a trip counted as the first crossing of the continent from west to east. In 1883–85 he headed another expedition to explore the Kasai region. He left Africa for health reasons but returned in 1886 to accomplish a second crossing of the continent from west to east in 1887. Afterward he served as imperial commissioner in German East Africa and was a leader in defeating the Bushiri uprising. In 1895–96 he was governor of German East Africa; he retired for reasons of health. He later traveled to Siberia and South Africa and lived as a country squire in Styria, where he died of a self-inflicted wound from a hunting gun. His death was ruled accidental by a court.

Wolf, Ludwig (b. Hagen, January 1850; d. Ndali, Dahomey, June 26, 1889). After traveling for the North German Lloyd as a ship’s surgeon, he served as a military physician before joining the 1883–86 Wissmann expedition. He became the expedition’s leader in 1885. From 1887 on he was employed in the German colonial service and charged with the exploration of the Togo hinterland. He died of fever or poison on one of his missions.

Wolff, Wilhelm Albert (called Willy) (b. Berlin, March 6, 1852; place and date of death unknown). A member of the German Congo Expedition, 1884–85. After reporting on his trip and his opinions on colonial policy, he seems to have cut his ties with German colonial and ethnological circles. His travelogue was dedicated to King Luís I of Portugal, and he received a Portuguese decoration. He later practiced as an ear, nose, and throat specialist in Berlin.