

# Drives Behind Traveling to Other Countries

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## ***Abstract***

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Although history and literature give many accounts of early voyages, European travel for discovery and exploration purposes significantly increased in the early Renaissance, persisting through and beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century circumnavigation of the globe and journeys in the interiors of the continents. The present paper focuses upon the reasons why people felt pushed or pulled from Europe to Africa and backwards as revealed by some fictional and non-fictional discourses like novels, diaries or letters of well known writers and journalists like Tim Butcher, H. M. Stanley, Graham Greene. Bal Mieke's theory upon reality in fiction as well as Mark Curry's approach of positionality may give the appropriate direction to understanding the works of the previously mentioned authors.

## ***Keywords***

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*drives, travel, expedition, adventure, explorer, colonial and postcolonial discourse*

“Because many people of diverse nations and countries delight and take pleasure, as I have done in times past, in seeing the world and things therein, and also because many wish to know without going there, and others wish to see, go, and travel, I have begun this little book.”

**Gilles le Bouvier**

[1 *Livre de la description des pays,*

Le Bouvier, Gilles called Le Héraut du Berry (1386-about 1455),  
premier roi d'armes de Charles VII, roi de France – éd. E. T. Hamy, Paris, 1908,  
*Recueil des voyages et des documents pour servir à l'histoire de la géographie.*]

These lines Gilles le Bouvier wrote such a long time ago point directly to the topic and to the fact that such drives have been a human preoccupation ever since people started to take pleasure in traveling, but sometimes people who cannot travel have to be given at least the pleasure of reading about places they will never visit. The main concern of the present paper is to show what other reasons humans could have, apart from the above mentioned ones, to go to different places and sometimes to choose remote ones to make a new home. Pleasure and delight might have been good reasons for mediaeval wealthy people to move around the world; it

was fashionable in all times to travel so as to enrich body and mind with stunning feelings of amazement in gaze of exotic places and it still is almost everybody's wish. But if we have a look at a quite long list of motives categorized by specialists into push and pull factors for people to leave their own country and go to other countries, we find harsher ones first on such lists, as we do our best to show in this paper trying to unravel what other reasons could lie in some cases behind seemingly clearly declared ones in written discourses to which we have access.

There have always been drives for people to be on the move, in search of food or better places to settle down – and that challenged their brains to invent the boat and the wheel enhancing possibilities to travel in search of new lands richer and promising of a better life – and that challenged their minds to build roads and bridges and even to settle down on whatever piece of land they found uninhabited as an old Roman law stipulated. Eventually they came in search of help for their accomplishments – and that challenged their spirit to take lands and people under their control or to move the natives where need was.

It then came a time of altruism when the wealthiest, the wisest, the boldest of the world wanted to share with the poor. They wanted to share their religion, their language, their knowledge; consequently, the poor had to share their land, their crops, their animals, their strength, their lives. It may sound like mockery, which is not, as long as altruistic minds have always been considering the cruel realities of this world in order to soothe some of the pain away. The truth is that we cannot count on a balance of good deeds compared to the atrocities that have been carried out worldwide so far, and are still carried on at almost every minute somewhere on the planet.

The history of humanity registered significant cases of the above mentioned reasons that sometimes blended together in big issues for well known anthropological institutions which existed at different moments in the world. They strove to gather information from the new discovered lands declaring as one of their targets to help the people populating those lands as they were considered to be in big trouble and even running the risk to disappear from the Earth. The Aborigines Protection Society, a British movement which had its roots in the 1830s when “humanitarianism had made its greatest impact on colonial policies” is an example of organization interested in “the natural history of human race”, as it was called at that time. The British Association issued and put into circulation “a series of Questions and Suggestions for the use of travelers and others with a view to procure Information respecting the different races of Men, and more especially of those which are in an uncivilized state” [2 Amalie Kass & Edward Kass, *Perfecting*

*the World: The Life and Times of Dr. Thomas Hodgkin*, in *Writing, Travel and Empire*, edited by Peter Hulme & Russell McDougall]. It was thought that a good guiding in that respect was enough for missionaries, explorers, colonial officials, and other travelers to act appropriately while driven by a common interest in research and gathering information. Many of the kind worked in some of the required fields, but manifested themselves more in the literary domain than in the anthropological one. There is rich material in the journals, diaries, official reports, travel accounts, short stories, poetry, novels, and autobiographies that served not only as ethnographic information filed in large collections meant to continually reassess the over debated connections between the Empire, ethnography and travel writings, but also as literary samples and historic data.

We have mentioned but a few of the general reasons that pushed and pulled people to travel almost everywhere in the world during colonial era and we'll proceed by guiding our analysis towards Africa nowadays, more precisely to the "heart of Africa" or the Congo, and the Western Africa or Liberia and Sierra Leone, all of which being places where unbelievable atrocities have been taking place ever since foreign masters became closely interested in them.

Our main interest was aroused by a short video of Tim Butcher, a well known Daily Telegraph journalist, who was a war correspondent in Africa and the Middle East between 1990 and 2009. He was speaking precisely about the reasons why he became almost obsessed with the idea of retracing a route that Sir Henry Morton Stanley explored and charted between 1869 and 1877:

I had spent three years preparing for this moment, planning and researching, and it had already taken a week of delays and hassle just to reach this spot, but the most dangerous part of my journey was only now beginning. Feeling as if my legs were about to collapse, I croaked a faint curse against the obsession that had drawn me to the most daunting, backward country on Earth. [3, xiii] [3 *Blood River* is the book he issued in 2007 after having accomplished the journey to the Congo.]

In this book he admits that he "felt a personal link to the Congo and its turbulent history" when he read that "it had all been started by another reporter sent to Africa by the Telegraph more than a century before him", H. M.S tanley, the world's best-known journalist of the time, who after having tracked down David Livingstone, a famous Scottish missionary and explorer, went back to Africa to solve "the continent's last great geographical mystery by mapping the Congo River". [3, 5]

Butcher retells some of Stanley's famous deeds as they were described in a very successful book of the epoch, *Through the Dark Continent*, published in 1878, at the same time making assumptions about what had really pushed him towards Africa. Here we are facing two different points of view expressed in non-fictional discourses. These writings may serve as samples for Wayne Booth's theory concerning the art of persuasion in fiction, largely developed by Mark Currie in *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. Both consider that any author makes use of his position being in the service of an argument in order to manipulate the reader who is targeted to sympathize with a certain character. [6, 19]

In our case we speak about the two authors who narrate their adventures in books generally called travelogues, which have gained remarkable positions among similar non-fiction writings. Tim Butcher made a thorough research before launching himself in severe accusations pointing not only at Stanley, judged for "having changed history more dramatically than anything the newspaper (Telegraph & Herald jointly) has ever been involved with" [3, 6], but also at Leopold II, king of Belgians, who made use of Stanley's potential in order to become the owner of the larger colony ever in possession of a private colonizer.

It is not our goal to write about the atrocities both Leopold II and Stanley were responsible for, but about the fact that other world personalities "mostly men interested in commerce and finance", all gathered in a meeting of high importance organized by Leopold, where a new project was presented as an "expedition founded on the ideas of peace and equity, which was to make its way by paying not by fighting". [11, 607] [4 *H. M. Stanley's Wonderful Adventures in Africa*, a book issued from Stanley's own fragmentary writings by "literary men of eminent ability and high reputation as graphic writers": Hon J. T. Headly & Willis Fletcher, editors]

That was "the starting gun for the Scramble of Africa" [3, 6], a very serious drive for numerous Europeans to "travel" to Africa.

Stanley's "wonderful adventures" read as clear, complex, detailed account of what the expeditions through Africa were according to the new authors' interpretation of what Stanley presented as real facts, although he himself gave a subjective account of what he saw and lived. Intuitively the editors gave the highest assurance of their literary formation and also claimed to have used Stanley's original writings to gain the public interest and favorable assessment. As Michel Foucault claimed a discourse cannot exist as acceptable without being endowed with the author function. [5 Discourse presented at College de France conference on "What is

an Author?”, February 22, 1969, to be found in *Dits et Ecrits*, Gallimard, 1994] Quoting Foucault, Mieke Bal argues that there is also “a politics of reading that draws its legitimacy from political positions not from any fictitious ‘real’ knowledge.” This guides us to the importance of interpretation. She claims that “reality in fiction should be seen in its subjective aspects. [...] There is no reality in fiction nor is there reality in discourse on ‘reality’. [...] I understand a structure of reality as a reductive, selective and particularizing view of the world.”[2]

Applying this theory to the texts we have focused upon we could simplify by arguing that the authors wrote according to the reality of their time. Both texts are explicit, but in a rather different way: Butcher enumerates and explains the reasons that pushed him towards Africa in spite of his other thrilling experiences, while Stanley gives accounts of his daring adventures preceded by careful financial negotiation, first with Bennett, Herald’s manager, later with any native trader, in his pursuit to get The Congo for Leopold II. The reader can imply that for him, the fatherless child with almost no living relatives, poor schooling and diminished resources, such an arrangement represented a strong drive as it meant fame and wealth.

For Butcher traveling to Africa was also the chance to try to find out some answers to questions that have kept bothering his mind ever since he was a hardworking pupil, interested in history and literature. We understand that the global racial problems represented real issues for him and his friends who used to have long arguments meant to clarify how much truth was in Chinua Achebe’s incrimination that Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* represented a shameful sample of racist writing. Butcher admits their talks were implying that “black Africa was in some way inherently evil”[3, 5]. Besides, this opinion was totally different from his mother’s who had kept only “rose-tinted” memories of her own journey to the Congo in late 1958, and who seemed to know nothing of the brutality the Belgians had used in order to maintain their rule.

All of these gave Butcher the strength and courage to travel to Africa again, this time “in the footsteps of Graham Greene” [6 G.Greene wrote *Journey Without Maps* in 1936 after having accomplished a long and almost killing trip to Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1935], and to write a second successful book. [7 *Chasing the Devil. On foot through Africa’s Killing Fields*, 2010] It was a good opportunity to make enquiries about G. Greene’s reasons to travel at such a young age – he was only thirty years old – exposing himself to huge risks, as he did not waste time to make an appropriate preparation of the journey. All these facts are

made clear in a letter reproduced in Butcher's book, representing a skeptical Foreign Office assessment of Greene's plan to cross Liberia. Butcher writes about the mystery that "has always clung to the motivation for Greene's trip to Liberia" [4, 19].

Greene himself described the 1935 trip as "little more than a flight of fancy, an adventure inspired by his personal belief in the magnetism of Africa, an innate connection he suggested we all have with the continent if we look deep inside ourselves" [4, 20]. Butcher claims that was only part of his motivation for money represented a good reason as well, his writer status being that of a relatively successful one but with a demanding young family at that moment. It seems that he had persuaded his publishers to pay him in advance for an adventurous travel book. Although there have been speculations about a possible secret mission for the British government, Butcher did his best to find proves in this respect and all he could find was a clear evidence that he had been sent and paid by The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society.

It was that society which had imposed Greene a certain route crossing first Sierra Leone and then Liberia where slave trade was still a practice. In the 1930s that fact represented one of the international community's most acute foreign policy issues: "the country's ruling elite, descendants mostly of freed black slaves from America who founded the country in the mid-nineteenth century had been caught systematically selling into slavery their compatriots from the hinterland – freed slaves had become slavers". [4, 20]

It has always been argued that postcolonial writing is filled with subjectivity while some optimistic researchers claim that colonial and postcolonial writing may still provide texts to be freshly scrutinized, especially the autobiographic ones, for the use of literary and historical studies as well as for cultural history and anthropology. The personnel of Empire traveled in different settings of the world, sometimes one and the same person serving as state official in colonies placed far apart like Africa, Australia, New Zealand or West Indies. For these people as well as for postcolonial travelers it was more than mere curiosity to discover exotic places and weird cultures; traveling was a source of inspiration, a real well of unexpected realities together with a valuable passport for the realm of wealth and fame. Nowadays journalists or different other kinds of people are attracted to Africa for they are really interested in making changes in order to help this continent to live at least a decent life.

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