



Brown, C. (2018) Belonging in the land: land, landscape, and image in southern African missionary encounters ca. 1840-1915. *Mission Studies*, 35(1), pp. 31-56. (doi:[10.1163/15733831-12341546](https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341546))

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/155143/>

Deposited on: 09 February 2018

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Belonging in the Land: Land, Landscape, and Image in Southern African Missionary Encounters ca.1840-1915

Clare Brown *

University of Glasgow

c.brown.6@research.gla.ac.uk

Abstract

To choose a missionary life is to become a stranger at home and abroad, whilst at the same time attempting to construct new networks of belonging. Missionaries have at times identified profoundly with the “foreign,” through economic and political solidarity, or linguistic and cultural immersion, but mission conversely necessitates the attempt to draw the foreign Other into the sphere of Christian fraternal belonging. This paper employs primary textual and visual sources to explore the complex theme of missionary identity and belonging through the lens of landscape. Landscape and its images influenced and were utilized by missionaries, functioning as tokens of belonging, interpretative tools, and sites of territorial possession for example through burial. For indigenous peoples, missionary images of place could also betoken otherness, and conflict with alternative expressions of rooted belonging, for instance in the use of earth as part of the physical substance of indigenous religious art.

* Clare Brown is an AHRC-funded doctoral researcher at the University of Glasgow, in the departments of Theology and Religious Studies and Art History. Her thesis is an exploration of missionary visual culture, focusing on interactions between Britain and southern Africa. Further research interests include visual representations of Christ, particularly in postcolonial contexts, and Victorian religious print culture.

Keywords

Mission; Africa; Victorian; visual culture; landscape

Missionaries and Ambiguous States of Belonging

Victorian missionaries engaged in promoting Protestant Christianity beyond the borders of their native Britain occupied a complex position in relation to land and landscape. They identified themselves as belonging to the physical and imaginative landscape of Britain, and to the spiritual landscape of God's kingdom, yet elected to live as "strangers and foreigners" in another's land (Heb 11:13). In this article, the interactions between these lands and landscapes as sites and visualizations of identity and belonging will be explored, focusing on missionaries to southern Africa ca.1840-1915.

These three lands – British, African, and spiritual – were integral to such missionaries' identity and praxis, and this can be seen particularly through their representation as *landscapes*. The concept of "landscape," in distinction from the spatial specificity of "land," refers to both "place and picture" (Mitchell 2002:8); both a way of seeing and an imaginative construction. As a point of intersection between the natural world, and human activity and perception, landscape functions as a mediatory space intertwining physical and conceptual interpretations of land. W.J.T. Mitchell has argued further that landscape is part of the discourse of imperialism (2002:9), a discourse within which missionaries operated complicity and critically. Combined with the importance of land to missionary activity, as the sites of origin, evangelism and future hope, and to their identity through the dynamic construction of webs of belonging within multiple lands, landscape reveals itself as an important lens through which to view Victorian mission.

While the significance of landscape as “place” in this context is clearly evident, its role as “picture” in the construction and expression of identity and belonging, and in the wider missionary cause, is more difficult. Visual imagery as a whole was not widely acknowledged among Victorian Protestants as having a positive role within the church, although some did advocate its importance. The Oxford Movement of the Anglican Church, which sought to reintroduce art and ritual to worship, was viewed with deep suspicion by the evangelical majority within its own denomination and amongst dissenters. Pre-Raphaelite art envisioned a new religious aesthetic and some did reach a broad devotional audience, most notably William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) with his 1851-3 painting *The Light of the World*, which toured the British empire, including a month in South Africa in 1907 (Maas 1984; Landow 2015:34-5). British missionary societies, as evangelical organizations operating in the context of a dismissal of ecclesial iconography as “Popish,” were more suspicious of images than most. So with the sending of *The Light of the World* to South Africa, organizers of the tour had to negotiate not only the instability following the recently concluded Boer War, but the “rigid conservatism” prevalent particularly amongst the influential Scottish clergy operating in the dominant Dutch Reformed Church (Maas 1984:197). Evangelical missionaries, and their clerical counterparts in settler communities, were also prone to ignore deeper questions of the role imagery could and did play in insidiously influencing ways of seeing. The London Missionary Society (LMS)’s Literature Committee, for instance, was largely silent on the question of pictures for its publications, delegating decisions to the discretion of individual editors (September 1885).

It is only in recent decades that more sustained attention has been paid to the place of pictures within Protestant traditions. Art historian David Morgan has done much to advance understandings of the nature and uses of Protestant visual and material culture in North America. William A. Dyrness, from a more theological perspective, has encouraged a

Protestant re-appraisal of negative attitudes to art, and an acknowledgment of its place within theology and worship (2001). Rich and fruitful work on the interpretative dialogical connections between Bible and art for individual artists and in wider reception history has been done by, among others, Cheryl Exum (1996), Martin O’Kane (2009) and Christopher Rowland (2011). More broadly, the study of visual culture has become accepted as an important arena across diverse disciplines, from art history to anthropology and biblical studies. Yet amongst this growing mass of literature, little beyond passing mention is made of foreign mission. It is because the roles images play in intercultural missionary work has received little recognition, that exploration of the richness and complexity of these interactions is needed.

One exception to this absence is a chapter in Morgan’s *The Sacred Gaze* (2005:147-187), in which he posits a “typology of ways of seeing” in a mission context. Morgan identifies six interdependent “moments” in missionary visual culture, of which two are helpful here: “missive” images, being those “that a culture relies on to prepare for mission work,” and “exported” images, defined as those “images and practices ... actually sent abroad and used by missionaries to teach and preach” (2005:151). A third moment – “imported” imagery sent from missionaries to home supporters, which “contributes to the visual lexicon of the faith in the world from which the mission originally set forth” – is relevant insofar as it forms part of the missive imagery for future missionaries, but will not be considered here in detail.

This article focuses on the significance of an expanded conception of missive and exported pictures for British missionary identity and belonging. It will pay particular attention to the role of landscape images in the constructions of identities through visualizations of Britain, Africa and the spiritual Kingdom of God. A concluding section will

consider intersections between indigenous African and missionary uses of land and landscape in relation to belonging, centered on rites of burial.

Landscape and British Missionary Identity

The examples of missive imagery Morgan employs are explicitly propagandist, composed of missionary preaching activity that shaped both a developing worldview and conceptions of national and religious mission. His indicative example is the cover image for the American Tract Society's *Christian Almanac* for 1836, showing a preacher espousing the Gospel to an *al fresco* congregation comprised of various stereotyped ethnicities, accompanied by the words from Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Morgan 2005:152-154). Similarly, his examples of exported images are limited to didactic and devotional pictures, for instance Walter Salman's 1940 *Head of Christ*, and a diagrammatic poster illustrating Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 (Morgan 2005:154-156). My expansion of both of these visual "moments" to include images of landscape – which do not, on the surface, conform to categories of propaganda, didactics, or devotion – is justified by the popularity and prevalence of landscape art in mid-to late nineteenth century Britain, by the centrality of land in the pursuit and effects of African mission, and by the importance of travel/landscape paradigms in contemporary interpretations of Christian spiritual life. Although evangelical Christians, amongst whom most missionary societies were established, tended to be more suspicious of both religious and secular art than their High or Broad Church compatriots, the ubiquity of landscape imagery in Victorian Britain would have made it inescapable for even the most ascetically devout prospective missionary.

Politically conservative landscape painting had been popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, epitomized by the works of John Constable (1776-1837). The spiritualized pastoral landscapes of Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) idealized land in a different, but no less conservative way, responding as did Constable to the dislocations of urbanization and industrialization by constructing an “imaginative refuge” from the harsh reality of the English countryside (Lukacher 1996:128). Such landscapes, conforming to conceptions of both the British and the biblical idyll, served also as a juxtaposition to the exotic unknown of newly discovered lands that resisted taming and interpretation. In contrast, John Martin’s (1789-1854) apocalyptic landscapes, in the tradition of the sublime, embraced the spiritual, existential fears of the time, transposing them onto sensational historical canvases (Lukacher 1996:129). But it was again the Pre-Raphaelites who perhaps best represent a new approach to landscape in the religious art of mid-nineteenth century Britain, and for them it was the naturalistic depiction of middle-eastern landscapes that was seen as necessary, primarily for the upholding of scriptural veracity. Hunt is emblematic of this, spending extended periods in the Holy Land to garner details for, for instance, *The Scapegoat* (1854-56). His contemporary Thomas Seddon’s (1821-1856) *Jerusalem and the Valley of Jehosophat* (1854) is a further example of the approach, and both followed David Wilkie’s (1785-1841) earlier commitment to situating religious subjects in the landscape within which they originally occurred (Giebelhausen 2006:19).

Landscape was similarly used to illustrate the Bible directly in widely circulated works such as Finden’s *Landscape Illustrations of the Bible* (1836), and Alexander Keith’s *Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion* which was published with early photographs of the Holy Land from the 1840s. Views of the Holy Land were also a popular subject in

panorama and diorama exhibitions.¹ Praised for their educational rather than their artistic merit (Wilcox 1988:36-7), panorama displays were popular with evangelical Christians, being considered sufficiently edifying to largely avoid religious censure. Non-biblical landscapes were also found in evangelical publications, including periodicals produced as appropriate Sabbath reading for those who held that excursions, and even the reading of newspapers or consideration of “worldly matters,” were unsuitable Sunday activities. Titles such as *The Sunday at Home* and *The Quiver* repeatedly depicted rural idylls, gendered ideals of home and nature, and rural landscapes as links between the modern, often urban, viewer and a lost Edenic paradise invoked as a place of both origin and return (Ehnes 2012:480).

In the same publications, descriptions and depictions of untamed foreign landscapes contrasted with these ideals, thereby invoking a dichotomy of the civilized versus the heathen wilderness. In so doing, these opposing constructions of landscape performed a missive function, painting a global landscape of salvific need and so of missionary imperative. A future New Jerusalem and a resurrection of the ideal past in the form of Eden were both visualized as models of the imaginative resolution of those landscapes, and combined to influence the construction of mission stations as prototypes of the future, as will be explored below.

Formative “missive” landscape imagery became “exported” imagery, firstly through being taken into the mission arena in the imaginative vocabulary of missionaries, as we will see in examples of the language they used in relation to landscape. It was also exported in material form, though the content of this physical imagery tended to be rather haphazard, due

¹ Panoramas were 360° circular, or large static or moving immersive, landscapes; dioramas were similar but included proto-cinematic effects including lighting, moving figures and sounds.

in part to the missionary reliance on donations from home. Periodical literature, books, and maps were among the items regularly sent out to missionaries by their societies, often having been donated by individual supporters. The acknowledgements recorded in the LMS periodical *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle* document the receipt of various books, prints, and magazines donated for distribution to its foreign missionary workers, and the wider mission community. In December 1837, for example, a lengthy and detailed acknowledgment appears, in reference to a substantial gift of printed material, specifically for Jan Tzatzoe, Xhosa Christian and missionary in South Africa's Eastern Cape. Tzatzoe had been part of an LMS delegation to Parliament in London the previous year (Levine 2007:115), so was prominent in mission literature and consciousness at the time. Items sent to him included copies of the illustrated *Saturday Magazine* and *Penny Magazine*, maps of Africa, and books on subjects including natural history, geography and agriculture. Two globes were also gifted. Evidence for similar donations persist in the *Missionary Magazine* in subsequent decades, and the materials themselves begin to appear in early missionary photographs, as with an interior view of a Madagascan school room ca.1890 (Figure 1), in which wall maps are notably prominent.

Regardless of who was specifically responsible for the migration of images to mission sites, and how much (or little) consideration was given to their theological, ideological or aesthetic worth, these eclectic sets of pictures formed a new visual landscape, set to have wide religious, epistemological and artistic implications in southern Africa.

Visions of Africa: Landscape

Landscape art and imagery, then, influenced the ways in which missionaries – literally and metaphorically – saw Africa. All European explorers and settlers had to find ways to make

sense of Africa in relation to existing narrative and visual structures. As John McAleer, in his monograph *Representing Africa* (2010), has argued, this did not occur in a homogenous or inevitable way, but through a multiplicity of landscape discourses.

Referencing the Familiar

The comparison of African landscape with British landscape, and the interpretation of African land in terms of British land, recurs in the writing of missionaries and explorers. David Livingstone describes various African landscape features in terms of the Clyde and its environs (1858:81, 390, 702). The 1888 Free Church of Scotland Report on Foreign Missions describes the mountainous landscape around the Overtoun mission in South Africa relative to Scotland's Ben Nevis, and places it in an order of merit in relation to the Scottish Highlands as a whole: "For magnificent highland scenery no part of South Africa equals Overtoun, and few in our Scottish Highlands excel it" (1888:43).

It is a commonplace device to employ known objects or places as points of reference, particularly when describing something or somewhere to those who cannot experience it for themselves. The description of one place in terms of another (in this case, South Africa in relation to Scotland), goes beyond being a simple referential or descriptive tool, however, and expresses an understanding of the relative positions of those places as territorial and imaginative spaces (Luig & von Oppen 1997). In a Church of Scotland lantern slide (Figure 2) that superimposes the outline of Lake Nyasa (Malawi) onto that of Scotland, such an act of visual and imaginative appropriation and manipulation, to draw the alien into the sphere of the familiar, is neatly demonstrated. The convergence of the two landscapes deprives the lesser known element, Lake Nyasa, of its independent identity, contributing to a visual lexicon that defines Africa in relation to European categories and localities.

This same impulse to understand the alien through the familiar is seen in the employment of aesthetic techniques, such as the picturesque or the sublime, in late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century representations of foreign landscapes. McAleer's detailed exploration of this phenomenon (2010) clearly demonstrates how such representations situated foreign lands within preconceived categories of knowledge. The transformation of land into literal or mental landscape images enabled the construction of distance between missionary viewer and heathen land. It also fostered a sense of ownership amongst mission supporters at home:

We get quite spoiled in this country. [...] Silver strands are nothing compared with the beauty that this adventurous land has in the eyes of people at home. The work of exploring this age-old granite has been so romantic, that you have but to take your hat round to get capital to utilize its resource ([anon] *Life and Works in British Central Africa* 1894:3).

Beauty, adventure, exploration, the romantic, and the exploitation of resources are combined in this evocation of a land of ancient beauty and commercial utility, ripe for discovery and investment. The useful (for example fertile) landscape, as McAleer remarks (2010:73), was more likely to be considered beautiful.

Such a conception of the land is also redolent of the language of both British landscape art and travel literature, in which the beauty of natural features ("age-old granite") is enhanced by human shaping ("to utilize its resources"), yet from which human figures themselves are absent. The tendency to remove indigenous people from landscape images was not new, English painter Humphrey Repton for example revising his *View from My Own Cottage in Essex* in 1816 to erase the figures and symbols of the presence of the local poor (Lukacher 1996:117-8). Africans were, furthermore, interpreted as uninterested in, and ill-

equipped to understand, land and landscape, their own erasure from its visualization contributing to justifications for European occupation and control. This attitude applied to landscape as image as well as physical space. So, the American educationalist Ernest Coffin could claim of southern and west-African people that “they resemble children of our race. Thus they can appreciate human and animal pictures, but not landscape, and have no idea of perspective” (1908:16). That Coffin’s work was explicitly recommended by Commission V on the training of teachers at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, highlights the ubiquity and acceptability of such views.

It is also notable in the passage from *Life and Works* above that it is the view “in the eyes of people at home” that precipitates acts of financial support. That is, it is the constructed image of place that speaks to British donors. Images of indigenous modes of representation did also travel back to Britain – in the form of material objects and visual images – and could indeed encourage missionary donations, but their function in so doing was quite different. Depictions of indigenous “idolatrous” images, particularly prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century (for example in the LMS monthly *Missionary Sketches*), highlighted the need for missionary activity to counter widespread heathen activities. It was their very alien-ness, their untranslatability into existing European epistemological norms, that spoke through their silence to the desire for their destruction.

Imagining the Mission Station

Another popular subject for the *Missionary Sketches*, and an important element of missionary interaction with landscape, was the mission station. These were constructions in and of the land to make familiar spaces for missionaries to call home, and to be models of Christian and civilized virtue. Mission stations were typically centered on a church, a school, and a mission

house built in square European style. These, and the attendant enclosure of agricultural and garden land, literally shaped a new Christian landscape. These sites served to give missionaries far from their native country a sense of home (Aitken 1900:18-19), and as a means of creating a new moral and cultural order in line with western Christian values, and of imposing new African Christian identities. The application of these values was often aspirational, rather than actual, as missionaries struggled to make headway in their efforts at spiritual or cultural conversion through much of the nineteenth century. Livingstone himself, for example, famously only succeeded in converting one man, chief Sechele of the Bakwain, who was later excommunicated for resuming relations with an ex-wife (Ballard 2008:105). Figure 3, of the mission station at Kuruman (South Africa), is typical of the visual constructions that accompanied station establishment. Tenuous settlements became exportable landscape images depicting firm foundations for colonial, humanitarian and divine advancement. British missions physically altered the landscape in southern Africa through architecture and cultivation (McAleer 2010:139) and, as Luig and von Oppen rightly add, the landscape also shaped the people (1997:16).

The founder of Kuruman, Robert Moffatt, remarked in his *Missionary Labours* (1843:193) that: “[i]t is easy for men to degenerate in religion and civilization, especially when compelled to lead a wandering life, which is by no means favourable to the cultivation of devotion in the soul.” Directed at semi-nomadic societal structures encountered in sub-Saharan Africa, this also has pertinence for missionaries themselves. In the first half of the nineteenth century, missionaries were often rather itinerant, some forced to move from place to place due to war, hostility from local people, or climatic unsuitability of sites. Others – Livingstone foremost – prioritized exploratory travels over rooted settlement, though the latter was advocated as an eventual aim of such expeditions.

The mission station as hub is expressed by George Aitken, missionary at Bandawe, British Central Africa (modern-day Malawi), in his description of it as “the metropolis of a wide district, the focus of its social life” (1900:19). Those at the station are conceived as observers, viewing the diorama of life that passes before them from the still center around which activity flows. The constructed edifices of civilization embodied in European-style buildings, gardens and settlement lay-outs create both a model of home to which the missionary can belong, and an aspirational model to which converts must conform in order to belong to the Christian community. The opinion of Bishop Gray who, with his wife Sophia designed and encouraged the building of 25 Anglican churches in South Africa between 1848 and 1873, is revealing with regard to this familiarity and conformity (Martin 2005:8). He believed that “correct churches” must be built, by which he meant neo-Gothic stone buildings such as could be found across England, with as little vernacular adaptation of style, materials, or construction method as was possible (Martin 2002:47). Such ecclesiastically appropriate constructions were thought to edify those who built, and those who viewed, them (Martin 2002: 48-49).

Even for mission stations in regions with less developed infrastructure and fewer resources, the manner of constructing and conducting the mission was considered important. Lord Overtoun, in his introduction to William Elmslie’s *Among the Wild Ngoni* (1901:12), expressed the belief that:

peaceful homes and cultivated land [...] tell of the triumph of the Gospel of God, and how, through the labours of [missionaries] Dr. Laws, Dr. Elmslie and their noble band as well as those who have gone to their rest, the wilderness and solitary place is glad for them and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose.

Overtoun employs the language of the prophet Isaiah that “the wilderness and solitary place is glad ...” (35:1), to allude to the contribution of the labors and the eternal rest of missionaries to the fertility of the land in physical agricultural and aesthetic terms. In so doing, he also points forward to the New Testament and the sowing of the gospel seed (Matt 13, Mk 4).

Construction of the mission station hub created a “tentative home” (Aitken 1900:25) for expatriate Britons, its familiar structures creating a place to which they could feel a sense of belonging. It was “tentative,” however, in relation to the isolation of the station as a “land within a land,” and was for Aitken called into question by death. When first his brother, then his wife, died in the course of their missionary work, the homely civilization symbolized by the busy front path from which he surveyed the activities of life was overshadowed by the quiet back path leading to the cemetery: “The bustle and stir of the front path, and the quiet seclusion of the back path, do not lie far apart” (Aitken 1900:27). The building of stone houses and churches, as in Lovedale and surrounding stations in South Africa, did nonetheless give a certain solidity to many of these hubs. Some permanence of dwellings, schools and churches also made it easier to preserve and display visual materials including school materials and church decoration. In 1893, for example, Blantyre Church in what was then British Central Africa received a marble font, decorated with “monograms, dove, cross, and glory, on four of the faces” gifted from St. Andrews, Scotland, and in 1896 a stained-glass window depicting the baptism of Christ. At the nearby Domasi station in 1895, a new lectern decorated with “a most beautifully carved cross” was also received (*Life and Works in British Central Africa*).

Visions of Africa: Cartography

Visual art and mental imagery, architecture and decoration, were important contributors to the missionary vision of and for Africa. Another side to African visualization can be found in the form of cartography: as exported images, maps were practically useful for navigating regions little-known to Europeans, but they were also a broader tool for the imaginative and physical possession of land. Maps showed not only physical topography, but reflected the “conceptions, interests and objectives” of their makers (Bridges 1994:16). A case in point is the widespread use in the nineteenth century of cartographic blank spaces, which purportedly indicated gaps in European knowledge, but were simultaneously interpreted as vacant territories awaiting colonization (Bassett 1994:324). Another example of mapped spaces being transposed onto physical reality might be that of the Xhosa who, following defeat in the Mlanjeni War of 1853, had their land removed from them, and territorial lines redrawn. An area of open land, from which it was thought rebellion would be difficult to take hold, was designated for the “troublesome tribe,” with their former lands reallocated to white settlers and other, less rebellious, ethnic groups. In the European Scramble for Africa in the 1880s and ‘90s, this drawing of lines and demarcation of land reached a larger scale, still evident in the straight lines that form national boundaries today, for instance between Namibia and Botswana (see also O’Brien 1994:4-5).

Maps were also central to mission teaching of geography, as they were in British education. They aided the shift from knowledge of the land being etched on the collective memory of a community, to being images of land on paper or globe, set at a remove from the (historical) experience of the people. The unknown author of an article in *Life and Works* in 1893 demonstrates an awareness of this:

The natives have the clearest and most consistent knowledge of relationship, boundaries of land or influence, and laws of succession, but diligent investigation is needed to get at it, if one would learn the truth. The history of the Yao conquest,

the conquering chiefs, the divisions of the conquered land, are as clearly written in the memories of the old men round about us, as was the Iliad upon the heart of the Homeric bard. ([anon], January 1893:4)

History was written onto the land and into the memories of the people, but the increasing presence of missionary schools was already changing the ways in which those “natives” related to the land. Acts of cartographic and artistic representations that made Africa intelligible and navigable for the incomers contributed to the process of alienation of indigenous populations, physically and spiritually, from their lands.

A portrait of David Livingstone from the LMS archives (Figure 4) demonstrates the type of relationship between land, viewer and representation enacted and advocated within British mission. Depicted with a map of Africa and Madagascar to his left and, through a large window aperture to his right, a glimpsed landscape of Africa itself, Livingstone is shown as explorer and map-maker. He also functions as a mediator between the viewer and Africa. Situated in an interior, civilized space, the map beside him symbolizes the knowledge of Africa he both gained and shared. Following the example of earlier exploratory missionaries, including John Campbell and Robert Moffatt, who pushed north from the Cape charting territories as they went, Livingstone’s careful trans-continental observations informed some of the most influential maps of southern Africa of the second half of the nineteenth century (Stone 1995:50). As well being used navigationally by later travelers, maps of his missionary journeys were widely disseminated in Britain to educate and inspire, as were maps of the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul, together forming a significant strand of missive imagery. The foregrounding of the cartographic representation of the reality partially viewed through the window in the LMS picture also suggests an understanding of the knowledge and utility of place being more significant than its lived reality. Distanced and romanticized through the aesthetic device of the window (Andrews 1999:111), “Africa” is

reduced to an expanse of sky and the emblematic exoticism of a lone palm tree (Bar-Yosef 1995:110).

A similar effect was achieved through the medium of the panorama or diorama which, as we saw above, acted to bring the alien into the possession of the British viewer through the construction of a still distant, but expansive, view. Scott B. Wilcox's claim that "To those who would later visit the sites represented, the panorama image provided a framework for the actual experience of reality" (1988:40) is seen in practice if we return to Aitken's account of experiencing mission-station life at Bandawe:

The mission station is the metropolis of a wide district, the focus of its social life.

Along the highway, past our door, streams of native industry, commerce and curiosity interflow all day; in this diorama full-blooded heathenism and its attendant degradation is very evident (1900:19-20).

Again we encounter here the interior/exterior composition of a colonial view that privileges the perspective of those within Christian civilization, embodied in the mission house, who are looking out on the heathen streams flowing along the highway outside.

Spiritual Landscapes

Landscape has been seen thus far in relation to the construction and invocation of a material sense of home for the migrant missionary, and in attempts physically and cognitively to possess the land of Africa. It could also, and often in parallel cartographic depictions, be understood in the context of a pathway to the Kingdom of God. Millennial theologies associated the widespread conversion of "heathen" peoples to Christianity with the conditions necessary for Christ to return and usher in a new world. Such expectations of the end-times cast Africa not only as the "dark continent," but as integral to the prophetic fulfilment of

divine promise for the world at large. Henry Smith, linked with the Anglican Church Mission Society, thus described mission as an effort of “extending the borders of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth” (Smith 1866:vi). Missionary society maps acted as visualizations of this progression of divine light across the globe.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was a key model of spiritual landscape in the nineteenth century. Spiritual striving and journeying was mapped onto an imagined landscape through which a fictional pilgrim travelled, through hardships, towards the eternal Celestial City and salvation. Believers used the *Progress* to aid successful religious life, and travelling missionaries interpreted their difficulties in terms of points along the pilgrim's path such as the Slough of Despond, or Hill Difficulty (Hofmeyr 2004:63). Isabel Hofmeyr goes so far as to say that it was “not so much a book as an environment, a set of orientations, a language, and a currency shared by most evangelicals” (2004:61), and could thus lay claim to being a major missive influence. It was certainly also one that was exported, becoming the most translated missionary work after the Bible. Many of these translations were also illustrated, and while in the nineteenth century these featured repetitions of pictures from British and American editions, in the early twentieth century localized images became more common (Hofmeyr 2001:331-3). A 1902 Ndebele edition, *Ugwalo lu ka Bunyane ogutiwa uguhamba gwomhambi*, is an early instance of the growing trend, illustrated with line-drawn images of Christian and his fellow pilgrims as African people, within African landscapes.

The European narrative of the Kingdom can also be found literally inserted into the African landscape: in an early twentieth century LMS postcard (Figure 5), the narrative of global salvation in the form of Harold Copping's *Hope of the World* (1915), is reproduced and displayed in an African setting. The viewer is led to focus on the imagined Kingdom-picture, rather than on the surrounding physical landscape – a process of visual exclusion also commonly practiced in the display of biblical and European magic lantern images that

necessitated the relegation of the surroundings to the invisibility of darkness. That the African child looking at Copping's image is intended to see him or herself in the seated figure of the black child, and thus to find a place within the landscape of Christian salvation, identity and belonging, enhances the sense that visions of the Kingdom were intended to blot out the African landscapes in which they were placed. However, such visualizations foreground an ambiguous self-identification for African converts, as simultaneously belonging within the Kingdom, and racially alienated from its central white Christ figure.

Tensions and disagreements over the relation of the earthly land to the eternal also manifested themselves in conflicted conceptions of the land as God's, or as belonging to God's earthly agents:

We actually heard of a missionary saying, that we were like the Israelites and that God gave the native's land to us to possess. What a Dutch idea! Surely we forget that the Messiah came to make Himself, and to help civilization to become, the food and sustenance of the world instead of its slaves" ([anon] *Life and Works* May 1894).

Civilization as the handmaid of the Messiah complicates the divinely-ordained humanitarianism in this passage, as the mission of civilization was often thought to be achieved through colonization. A distinction should however be made between the "brutal" settler colonialism of Dutch South Africa, and the more subtle interactions of missionaries associated with, but not necessarily wholly complicit in, British imperialism (Etherington 2010:5). Nonetheless, it is valid to underscore the deeper difference, which lies in the Afrikaner identification with the Israelites, and thus with their chosen-ness, expressed in both cases through the claiming of land as divinely given at the expense of indigenous inhabitants (Akenson 1992:69-70). Whatever their errors, the relation of most British missionaries to the

land of Africa was not derived from such a belief in divine entitlement and, as the *Life and Works* writer indicates, the anti-slavery narrative of (often qualified) equality prevalent in earlier years continued to echo even into the high imperial era.

Other ways were found to incorporate Africa into the divine narrative. As well as pointing forward to the end times, Africa was conceived as a primeval landscape interpreted in terms of paradise, although this created an additional tension, between missionary views of African land as needing conversion from wilderness to civilization (McAleer 2010:134), and of the land as a primitive paradise evidencing God's creational power. Africans themselves, where they were seen to show interest in Christian teaching, were interpreted as "Ethiopians stretching out their hands unto God" in fulfilment of the words of Psalm 68 (Calderwood 1858:102).

(Re)claiming Counter-Visions

Although broadly, as the nineteenth century progressed, the colonial vision won out in European dealings with Africa, there is evidence that the humanitarian counter-narrative recurred in missionary discourse and practice, and this should not be overlooked. While criticism of even these more benevolent missionary approaches as paternalistic and opposed to the genuine assertion of African identity, especially from the critical perspective of post-1945 African nationalist and nativist movements, is to an extent justifiable, it is not the whole story. Working in a treacherous borderland between cultures and religions, and pulled between their own nationalist and religious allegiances, these missionaries were of course people of their time, but they also displayed moments of courageous support and advocacy for the claims of the colonized among whom they labored. Postcolonial efforts at "renegotiating the structures of power" (Sugirtharajah 2002:191) have more recently

emphasized the complexity of colonial-colonized interactions, within which some of the progressive value of missionaries can now be reclaimed. The binary positions of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century missionary hagiography (e.g. Pitman 1888; Lawrence 1927; see Rowbotham 2000 and Neely 1999), and the oppositional writings of the decolonizers (e.g. Majeke 1952; Zulu 1972) have in consequence been superseded by more nuanced views, as in the work of Justin Livingstone (2009), or Ezra Chitando (2011).

In relation to land, examples of more radical missionary responses emerged through their complication of the colonial narrative through defense of indigenous land claims and even, in the case of Jan Tzatzoe, of African rights by virtue of belonging to Britain. Such positions were more evident in the decades before imperial expansion and racial categorization hardened the lines of identity and ownership, with African converts taking up high profile leadership roles (Tzatzoe, and the Reverends Samuel Crowther and Tiyo Soga for instance), and missionaries immersing themselves fully through marriage (e.g. LMS missionaries James Read and Johannes van der Kemp). Even in the 1880s and '90s, however, *Life and Works* magazine repeatedly expressed defense of African claims to land over the moves towards dispossession under the influence of Cecil Rhodes: "It is not a conquered country," an anonymous writer declared: "We have no right to treat it as such."

The role of the land within the construction and maintenance of identity and belonging was not confined to issues of political conquest and possession – though these were undoubtedly important. While the reclaiming of some qualified positives in missionary positions of indigenous advocacy is a valuable corrective to the foregoing binaries, this must not be at the expense of indigenous voices and visions which, when placed alongside those of the missionaries, reveal both significant disjunctions and connections between European and African uses of the land in art and identity.

Land arguably functioned very differently in nineteenth century southern African art and imagination from the ways in which it appeared in European forms. European, and particularly British, art distanced the observer from the land through the construction of *landscape* that privileged the “view from afar,” and the alteration of the land itself to conform to civilized and aesthetic ideals. Counter to such aesthetic modes are examples of southern African forms where the earth itself participated in art; where the land formed a constituent material element of a created image. A carved wooden figure from the Congo region of central Africa, exhibited in the 2013-14 Smithsonian National Museum of African Art’s “Earth Matters” exhibition, is explained as follows:

During at least the 19th and 20th centuries, Teke² men made wood figures with cavities into which healing materials were inserted and around which earth and other medicines were packed. Such figures were produced at precisely the time when the Teke peoples lost their territories because of colonization [...] Each figure was kept inside a man's home upon a mound of sand or dirt so as always to touch the earth (Smithsonian, 2014).

This exposition highlights not only the deep significance of the earth in religious praxis and identity construction for the Teke, but the dynamic nature of their artistic expression. At a time of territorial uprooting, these figures provided a means of “earthing” or connection, a representational and spiritual response to the alienating effects of colonialism.

Proposing this as an example of an indigenous land narrative is not intended, however, to indicate an African/European dichotomy of intimacy/distance in relation to the land. As Luig and von Oppen have argued (1997:21), rural African people cannot be seen as just

² Teke are a Bantu people, predominantly from the Congo region.

living “inside” nature,” as they were so often depicted in colonial pictures. Rather, they have distinct and multiplicitous aesthetics of nature, a prerequisite of which is a relationship of distinction or distance from, and appropriation of, the land.

A more specific point of connection between indigenous and British associations with land and landscape is found in the significance of burial, which was historically and symbolically important for both European and Africa territorial claims. Many indigenous societies were, and remain, linked to areas of land through the burial of ancestors, and the ongoing ritual remembrance and participation of them in the life of the community (Asante 2009:148). Among nineteenth-century Yao, ancestor veneration, centered on the grave-huts of chiefs, participated in political and territorial claims as a locus of identity through rituals of supplication and religious memorialization (Alpers 1976: 175-6). In the context of dispossession, burial becomes an even more important part of the claiming of land, and of the visualization of that claim. In South Africa, for example among the Chego in Mpumalanga Province, the presence of and rights of access to historic ancestor-burial sites became important in twentieth-century disputes over land entitlement (James 2009:245-7).

For missionaries too, the importance of burial sites as symbols of their own struggles for the Kingdom, is evident. The mortality rates amongst missionaries across southern Africa tended to be high throughout the nineteenth century, and their interment in the soil of Africa was redeemed by a sense that the deceased fertilized a claim to the land within which they lay, whether for the earthly or heavenly empire. George Aitken’s description of the mission-station cemetery as “that enclosure of dearly-bought soil” makes explicit the sense that the land had been purchased by the blood of the missionaries, and the claim perpetuated through the memorialization of missionary predecessors and compatriots. In a similar way, Horace Waller’s 1887 *The Title Deeds to Nyassa-Land*, though professing the centrality of “facts, and not sentiments” in the case for British control of the territory during the Scramble for

Africa, devotes an entire page to the burial of Livingstone's heart in its soil. A later paragraph, ascribed the marginal heading "Principal clause in title-deeds," reinforces the idea that burial asserts territorial claim:

Dotted here and there, from the mangrove swamps at the Kongoné mouth of the Zambesi to the furthest extremity of Lake Nyassa's shore, we pass the graves of naval officers, of brave ladies, of a missionary bishop, of clergymen, Foreign Office representatives, doctors, scientific men, engineers, and mechanics. All these were our countrymen: they lie in glorious graves; their careers have been foundation-stones, and already the edifice rises (Waller 1887:32).

Buried missionaries and other Europeans are the foundation of the colonial edifice, indicating the progressive building of the future upon the past.

While we can connect European and African land-claims through burial, there are of course significant and extensive distinctions in practice and meaning. The importance of burial in many African traditions extended not only to the dead, but the placentas of the newly-born which were also interred, indicating, in contrast with European tradition, a belief in the cyclical, interdependent pattern of life and death (Lefèber and Voorhoeve 1998:46-47; also Asante 2009:20-22). Played out day-to-day in many parts of southern Africa, the distinct acts of Christian and non-Christian burial rites were often in overt competition as symbols not of territorial possession, but of the fate of souls and the relative strength of religions in opposition (Schoffeleers and Linden 1976:268-9). And of course, while links may be drawn from a historical perspective, the competing claims to land through burial were, and in some cases remain, a source of conflict rather than connection.

Conclusion

This article is an attempt to begin an exploration of landscape as a significant visual and physical token of missionary identity and belonging in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and represents a work in progress towards a fuller picture of the role of imagery in Protestant missionary interactions in Africa. Some preliminary conclusions are offered here, and an acknowledgment that continuing future research into the images and accounts of missionary societies, missionaries and converts will help to shine a clearer light on this complex subject.

Within Victorian foreign mission, land was a material arena of conformity and resistance, belonging and alienation. In addition, the construction of visual and conceptual landscapes participated in the development of missionary and indigenous identities. Missive landscape imagery imbibed at home in Britain helped to shape missionary identity and spiritual perspective, before being physically and imaginatively exported to African mission sites. Indigenous people in contact with missionaries and mission institutions through education, work, and worship, were then exposed to landscapes of Britain, externalized landscapes of Africa, and the ideal landscape of the divine Kingdom. British missionaries, having absorbed and internalized these narrative and aesthetic landscapes, meanwhile employed them as interpretative tools to shape knowledge of foreign lands. They enabled the alien to become familiar, and missionaries to feel that Africa belonged both to the physical empire of Britain, and to “that Empire upon which the sun never sets – the Empire of Jesus” (Aitken 1900:9).

Although too often complicit in the colonial dislocation of people from the land to which they belonged, missionaries did at times defend the rights of indigenous people to their land. However, they also constructed and promoted alternative centers of belonging physically in the form of mission stations, and spiritually in the Christian communion. Burial sites as *loci* of community and land possession represent an area of tension and connection between missionary and indigenous land-claims and religious ritual. Suspicion and resistance

that preceded the twentieth century explosion of African Christian identity, and the postcolonial agonies that followed African independence, tell more broadly of the alienation that persisted and the complex, tentative nature of the belongings missionaries had attempted to enact.

References Cited

Aitken, George (1900). *Home in Heathen-Land: Sketches of Missionary Life and Work in British Central Africa*. Aberdeen: Fraser.

Akenson, Donald Harmen (1992). *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Alpers, Edward A. (1976). "Towards a History of the Expansion of Islam in East Africa: The Matrilineal Peoples of the Southern Interior." In T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo, eds. *The Historical Study of African Religion*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 172-201.

Andrews, Malcolm (1999). *Landscape and Western Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anon (1893). *Life and Works in British Central Africa*. Blantyre, British Central Africa: Blantyre Mission Press.

Anon (1894). *Life and Works in British Central Africa*. Blantyre, British Central Africa: Blantyre Mission Press.

Asante, Molefi Kete (2009). "Burial of the Dead." In Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, eds. *Encyclopedia of African Religions*. London: Sage: 20-22.

Ballard, Martin (2008). *White Men's God: The Extraordinary Story of Missionaries in Africa*.

Oxford: Greenwood World.

Bar-Yosef, Eitan (1995). *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bassett, Thomas J. (1994). "Cartography and Empire Building in Nineteenth-Century West Africa." *Geographical Review* 84, 3:316-335. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/215456>.

Bridges, R.C. (1994). "Maps of East Africa in the Nineteenth Century." In Jeffrey C. Stone, ed., *Maps and Africa: Proceedings of a Colloquium at the University of Aberdeen*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University African Studies Group.

Bunyan, John (1902). *Ugwalo lu ka Bunyane ogutiwa uguhamba gwomhambi*. Trans. D. Carnegie, M. Carnegie. London?: Matabeleland District Committee of the London Missionary Society.

Calderwood, Henry (1858). *Caffres and Caffre Missions*. London: Nisbet.

Chitando, Ezra (2011). "The Role of the Churches in the Struggle for Liberation in Southern Africa: A Thematic Survey." In Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff and Klaus Hock, eds. *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*. London: Continuum: 50-62.

Church of Scotland (1892-1897). *Life and Works in British Central Africa*. Livingstonia Press. Council for World Missions/London Missionary Society Archives. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Committee lantern slide collection. Centre for the Study of World Christianity, University of Edinburgh. Accessed November 2016, International Mission Photography Archive <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15799coll123>.

Coffin, Ernest (1908). "On The Education of Backward Races." *The Pedagogical Seminary* 15, 1:1-62.

Comoroff, John L. & Jean Comoroff (1992). *Ethnography and the historical imagination*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Dyrness, William A. (2001). *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Ehnes, Caley (2012). "Religion, Readership, and the Periodical Press: The Place of Poetry in Good Words." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45, 4:466-487.

Etherington, Norman (2010). "Indigenous Southern Africans and Colonialism: Introduction." In Peter Limb, Norman Etherington & Peter Midgley, eds. *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous African Responses to Colonialism, 1840-1930*. European Expansion and Indigenous Response 6; Leiden: Brill: 1-12.

Exum, J. Cheryl (1996). *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*. London: Bloomsbury.

Free Church of Scotland (1888). *Report on Foreign Missions*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Special Collections, University of Glasgow.

Giebelhausen, Michaela (2006). *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hofmeyr, Isabel (2001). "Bunyan in Africa: Text and Transition." *Interventions* 3, 3:322-335.

Hofmeyr, Isabel (2004). *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

James, Deborah (2009). "Burial Sites, Informal Rights and Lost Kingdoms: Contesting Land

Claims in Mpumalanga, South Africa.” *Africa* 79, 2:228-251.

Landow, George P. (2015). *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lawrence, Una Roberts (1927). *Lottie Moon*. Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Lefèber, Yvonne and H. W. A. Voorhoeve (1998). *Indigenous Customs in Childbirth and Child Care*. Assen:Van Gorcum.

Levine, Roger (2007). “Savage-Born but New-Created: Jan Tzatzoe, Xhosa Chief and Missionary in Britain, 1836-1838.” *Kronos* 33:112-138.

Livingstone, David (1858). *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*. New York: Harper.

Livingstone, Justin (2009). “Ambivalent Imperialism: The Missionary Rhetoric of Robert Boyd.” *Literature and Theology* 23, 2:165-191.

Livingstone Picture Collection. Council for World Missions/London Missionary Society Archives. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

London Missionary Society (1866-1901). Literature Committee Minutes. Council for World Missions/London Missionary Society Archives. London: School of Oriental and African Studies.

London Missionary Society (1837-1842). *Missionary Magazine and Chronicle*. Accessed November 2016, <http://archive.org>.

Luig, Ute & Achim von Oppen (1997). “Landscape in Africa: Process and Vision an Introductory Essay.” *Paideuma* 43:7-45.

Lukacher, Brian (1996). “Nature Historicized: Constable, Turner, and Romantic Landscape

Painting.” In Stephen F. Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Maas, Jeremy (1984). *Holman Hunt and The Light of the World*. Aldershot: Wildwood House.

MacAleer, John (2010). *Representing Africa: Landscape, Exploration and Empire in Southern Africa, 1780-1870*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Majeke, Nosipho (1952). *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*. Johannesburg: Society of Young Africa.

Martin, Desmond (2002). “The Churches of Bishop Robert Gray and Mrs Sophia Gray: An historical and architectural review.” PhD diss., University of Cape Town.

Martin, Desmond (2005). *The Bishop’s Churches: The Churches of Anglican Bishop Robert Gray*. Cape Town: Struick.

Mitchell, W.J.T. (2002). *Landscape and Power*. 2nd edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moffatt, Robert (1843). *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Africa*. New York: Robert Carter. <https://archive.org/stream/missionarylabour00moff#page/n5/mode/2up>.

Morgan, David (2005). *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. London: University of California Press.

Neely, Alan (1999). “Saints Who Sometimes Were: Utilizing Missionary Hagiography.” *Missiology: An International Review*, 27, 4:441-457.

O’Brien, C.I.M. (1994) “Africa and Maps: A Mapmaker’s View” in Jeffrey C. Stone (ed.) *Maps and Africa: Proceedings of a Colloquium at the University of Aberdeen. April 1993*.

Aberdeen: Aberdeen University African Studies Group.

O’Kane, Martin (2009). *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter*. Sheffield: Phoenix Press.

Overtoun, Rt Hon. Lord (1901). “Introduction.” In W.A. Elmslie, *Among the Wild Ngoni: Being some Chapters in the History of the Livingstonia Mission in British Central Africa*. Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 5-12.

Pitman, Emma Raymond (1888). *Heroines of the Mission Field: Biographical Sketches of Female Missionaries who have Laboured in Various Lands among the Heathen*. London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co.

Rowbotham, Judith (2000). “‘Soldiers of Christ’? Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom.” *Gender & History* 12, 1:82–106.

Rowland, Christopher (2010). *Blake and the Bible*. Yale University Press.

Schoffeleers, Matthew, and I. Linden (1976). “The Resistance of the Nyau Societies to the Roman Catholic Missions in Colonial Malawi.” In T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo, eds. *The Historical Study of African Religion*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 252-273.

Smith, Henry (1866). *Gospel Husbandry; or The Pilgrim in the Mission Field: A Series of Short Devotional Readings, with Illustrative Anecdotes*. London: Macintosh.

Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. 2014. “Power of the Earth: notes from Earth Matters Exhibition.” <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/earthmatters/power.html>.

Stone, Jeffrey C. (1995). *A Short History of the Cartography of Africa*. African Studies Volume 39. Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Sugirtharajah, R.S. (2002). *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Waller, Horace (1887). *The Title Deeds to Nyassa-Land*. London: Clowes.

Wilcox, Scott B. (1988). "Unlimiting the Bounds of Painting." In Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania! the art and entertainment of the "all-embracing" view*. London: Trefoil in association with Barbican Art Gallery.

Zulu, Lawrence (1972). "Nineteenth Century Missionaries: Their Significance for Black South Africa." In M. Motlhabi (ed.) *Essays on Black Theology*. Johannesburg: University Christian Movement: 85-90.