

As the Sun Began to Set on the British Empire in East Africa: Gerald Hanley's *The Consul at Sunset* (1952)

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Abstract

Among the Irish writers who have constructed fiction set in Africa, the works of none have been lauded more highly than those of Gerald Hanley (1916-1992). However, they have been subjected to very little published scholarly analysis. The present article discusses his first and arguably best novel, *The Consul at Sunset*, which was issued in 1951. It is argued that the unambiguously anti-imperialist stance of this novel counters prevailing notions in colonial discourse theory, which has suggested *inter alia* that either consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, European writing about Africa has lent rhetorical support to the establishment and continuation of European hegemony over that continent and its peoples, and that it has tended to juxtapose colonising and colonised peoples in Manichean categories. Hanley's galleries of British and African characters in the Horn of Africa are both too complex and contain too many nuances to be fitted into such a rhetorical framework.

Keywords: Gerald Hanley, *The Consul at Sunset*, British Empire, imperialism, anti-imperialism, Somalia, Second World War, colonial discourse theory

Introduction

Writing about Africa in English has been extensive for more than three centuries. Explorers, missionaries, traders, educators, military personnel, and

others from Anglophone countries have penned millions upon millions of words about the landscape, ethnography, and other aspects of this continent. From Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope, literary artists, especially novelists, have also found there seemingly bottomless wells of inspiration for their writing. The works of such well-known writers as Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, Rudyard Kipling, and John Buchan have been subjected to extensive and often illuminating analysis. Yet the works of many other *littérateurs* who have composed fictional accounts about Africa remain tenebrous. Broadly speaking, far less has been done to examine how Irish writers have represented African themes than their counterparts in the United Kingdom.

In the present article, I intend to take steps towards filling one of many *lacunae* in the history of Anglophone literary representations of the Horn of Africa by examining in their historical context critical themes in a once heralded but now generally neglected novel by Gerald Hanley, *The Consul at Sunset*. This finely crafted work, published in 1951 and dealing with the crisis of British imperialism in north-eastern Africa during the Second World War, is particularly relevant to an understanding of both colonialist attitudes and decolonisation on the continent. Its significance, however, also extends to literary theory. Hanley's maiden novel challenges certain notions about British writing about Africa that have prevailed for several decades but are arguably overextended and misleading. After briefly introducing Hanley, I shall synthesise those recurrent themes in literary theory, then analyse how he establishes his anti-imperialist argument in *The Consul at Sunset* by exploring three of its central British characters whose attitudes towards the British Empire and their reactions to its imposition of hegemony in north-eastern Africa differ markedly. Their thoughts and behaviour will be juxtaposed with those of characters representing the indigenous population under great stress in a physically challenging environment during a time of war.

Gerald Hanley's First-Hand Exposure to East Africa

Despite the acknowledged literary quality of *The Consul at Sunset*, Hanley maintained a relatively low profile as a writer during his decades of writing, and since his death in 1992 little attention has been given the man and his fiction. One will search most standard literary reference works in vain for even the slightest mention of him. Although Hanley identified himself as

Irish, he spent very little time on the Emerald Isle during the first half of his life. Born to Irish immigrants in Liverpool in 1916 (*i.e.* when Ireland was still an integral part of the United Kingdom but would soon gain its independence), he spent his childhood and adolescent years in that Hibernian ethnic enclave on the Mersey before embarking as a teenager for the British Colony and Protectorate of Kenya in 1934. There this young man was employed in agriculture, learned to speak Swahili, and gained an intimate knowledge of tribal life as well as colonialist attitudes towards the indigenous peoples which would become a dominant theme in his African novels. There is no compelling reason to believe that Hanley rejected or took even a mildly critical attitude towards British imperialism before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. During that conflagration, he joined the King's African Rifles and served in Somalia, the Indian sub-continent, and Burma. Hanley's participation in the Burmese campaign provided the subject of his first book, *Monsoon Victory*, published in 1946. By the early 1950s he was residing in County Wicklow, Ireland, where he pursued a moderately successful career as a writer, crafting both novels and filmscripts; among the latter was that of *The Blue Max* in 1966. His African novels following *The Consul at Sunset* included *The Year of the Lion* and *Drinkers of Darkness*, published in 1953 and 1955, respectively; all three deal with the twilight years of the British Empire. Quantitatively he was a relatively prolific writer but, despite the generally positive reviews given his works, renown proved elusive. He died at Dun Leaoighaire near Dublin in 1992, largely though not entirely forgotten by literary critics in Ireland and elsewhere.

Hanley never forgot his stint of military service in Somalia and the spectrum of ethnic groups he encountered there. It is virtually impossible to imagine him writing *The Consul at Sunset* without that rich experience. Moreover, his quasi-autobiographical *Warriors and Strangers*, written after a visit to north-eastern Africa and published in 1971, is richly endowed with memories from the regional campaign against the Italians in the early stages of the Second World War.

Fundamental Assertions in Colonial Discourse Theory

Since the 1960s one recurrent theme in the scholarly analysis of colonialist writing about Africa, repeated with sufficient frequency to become a virtually an article of faith in the minds of some scholars, is that authors from

colonising countries have persistently depicted colonised ethnic groups in deprecating terms. Under the pens of British novelists, travel writers, missionaries, and journalists, for example, the Zulus, Kikuyu, and members of other tribes throughout especially the sub-Saharan regions have been described as primitive, immoral, irrational, unintelligent, violent, dishonest, sexually unrestrained, and incapable of governing themselves or making appropriate use of the natural resources at their disposal. This tendency, of course, helped to arm the rhetoric of imperialism with high-calibre ammunition. Who better than the efficient, enlightened, and benevolent administrators of the British Empire, it was implied, could provide the Africans with sorely needed guidance to ‘uplift’ them into lives on a higher plane of civilisation?

This point was made by Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow in their heralded *The Africa That Never Was*, which amalgamated the findings in their doctoral theses submitted at Columbia University. They looked with varying degrees of acuteness at the works of Henry Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, Joyce Cary, and other British writers who had used Africa and its people at their subjects and found consistently descriptive themes running through their works. Hammond and Jablow then went a crucial step further and theorised that in these writers’ perceptions inhered a dichotomous system of values in which their own colonising nation was vastly superior to the continent they were indirectly helping to subjugate: ‘Seen through British eyes, Britain and Africa represent the two poles of a single system of values. These are variously phrased as light opposed to darkness, civilization to savagery, good to evil. Africa is the “continent of dark negation”’. (Hammond & Jablow 1992: 183).

In the 1980s Abdul R. JanMohamed, a Kenyan-born literary scholar at the University of California, identified several of the principal ‘familiar rationalizations’ which had been concocted to justify colonisation and manifested themselves in imaginative literature: ‘the superiority of the white races, their mission to civilize the rest of the world, the inability of natives to govern themselves and to develop their own natural resources, the blacks’ tendency towards despotism, their ease in reverting to atavistic barbarism, their lack of intelligence, their hyperemotional and uncontrollable personalities ...’. He pointedly speculated that these oft-repeated assumptions were not ‘accurate appraisals of reality but rather projections of the settler’s own anxieties and negative self-images’. Engaging briefly in a psychological turn

on this well-known rhetorical phenomenon, he quoted Joel Kovel approvingly in support of his assertion: 'Whatever a white man experiences as bad in himself ... whatever is forbidden and horrifying in human nature, may be designated as black and projected onto a man whose dark skin and oppressed past fit him to receive the symbol'. To JanMohamed, it seemed that this projection could be to either individual Africans or 'the whole African continent' (JanMohamed 1983: 3).

Attempting to hone his argument, he adduced the assertion from Frantz Fanon's popular study of the psychological impact of imperialism on colonised peoples in simplistic, dualistic categories which underscored the supposedly 'evil' nature of the dominated:

The colonial world is a Manichean world. It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation[,] the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil (JanMohamed 1983: 3-4)¹.

'Fanon's definition of colonial society as a manichean organization is by no means exaggerated', JanMohamed pronounced. 'In fact, the colonial mentality is dominated by a manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object' (JanMohamed 1983: 4).

Even in her more restrained and decidedly less ideologically driven study, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature. Migrant Metaphors*, Elleke Boehmer declared that a two-fold, contrastive juxtaposition of colonising and colonised peoples prevailed in literary texts. A key element in her theoretical framework is her perception that it was largely a matter of Europeans creating opposites of themselves. The people who were (or were to be) subjugated were described as, for instance, 'woman or slave, servant

¹ For the crucial context within Fanon's influential book, see Fanon (1963: 41).

or beast'. Boehmer did not use the terms 'Manichean' and 'binarism', and her commitment to such a reading was apparently less categorical than JanMohamed's. Nevertheless, her understanding of this comes very close to Manicheanism: 'Images of the native, alien, or other reflected *by contrast* Western conceptions of selfhood—of mastery and control, of rationality and cultural superiority, of energy, thrift, technological skilfulness. Europe ceaselessly reconfirmed its own identity and individuality by finding for itself around the lobe subterranean or reverse selves, dark mirror-images: the Oriental, the Thur, the African, the New World Indian, the Quashee, Caliban, Friday, Jewel' (Boehmer 2005: 78).

Since the 1990s, the present writer has dissected a relatively broad spectrum of British, German, and Scandinavian literary works about African topics and found that broadly speaking the generalisations about the representations of Africans advanced by the above-mentioned theoreticians do not apply well to them. Such serious novelists as the German Christian Ludwig Willebrand (Hale 2007), the Swede Gunnar Helander (Hale 2001), and the Englishman Francis Brett Young (Hale 2016), to cite but three examples, did not shoehorn the colonised Africans whom they created into the deprecating mould which colonial discourse theory would have us believe was typical, nor did they depict Europeans in Africa as a generally virtuous, intelligent, and benevolent lot whom subjugated Africans should emulate for their upliftment. By contrast, when one reads sensational adventure stories intended for popular consumption, such as those by H. Rider Haggard, the Manichean dichotomies cited previously appear to ring at least partly true, though even in Haggard's works the dualism is not necessarily categorical.

But how about *The Consul at Sunset*? Is a reading of Hanley's maiden novel and particularly his representation of the British, Italian, and African ethnic groups enlightened by colonial discourse theory? Or can it be probed more deeply by readers armed with an awareness of authorial concerns and attitudes which actually contradict the coloniser-colonised framework?

Plot Summary of *The Consul at Sunset*

As Hanley's first novel is not well known, a summary of its plot is in order. A rudimentary awareness of the historical situation is particularly useful for

understanding certain themes and especially interethnic tensions in *The Consul at Sunset*. Italy had participated in the imperialistic ‘Scramble for Africa’ in the 1880s, though only on a small scale by occupying what is now the southern part of Somalia during that decade. A unified nation-state had never existed there; various clans controlled their respective fiefdoms, many of the borders of which were unstable because of the nomadic life of people in much of this arid or semi-arid region and their long history of feuds with each other. This Italian colony was never well developed or even economically exploited to a noteworthy degree. As Robert L. Hess observed in his groundbreaking study of this half-hearted imperial venture, ‘From Mancini to Mussolini, Italian colonialism in East Africa was characterized by its lack of full commitment to the responsibilities of being a colonial power’. Its historical significance did not extend markedly ‘beyond the establishment of an Italian presence in East Africa’ (Hess 1966: 176. 182). Efforts to expand Italian Somalia westward into Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) were unsuccessful due to armed resistance, especially at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. However, in 1935 Mussolini ordered the invasion of Haile Selassie’s Abyssinia. As European governments and the League of Nations did virtually nothing to halt this aggression, Italian forces numbering ca. 120,000 men subdued most of the country within months. After the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, British forces invaded Italian Somalia in 1940 and drove the Italian colonial army far northward, pushing it out of most of Somalia within a few months. The following year the British began their invasion of Abyssinia (Shillington 2012: 380-382).

The plot of *The Consul at Sunset* is developed in this context of British military administration of the former Italian colony. Told by a conventional omniscient narrator and following a generally linear narrative, the novel spans approximately 250 pages and is divided into twenty chapters. The story unfolds over a period of several months in 1941. In this vast and desolate occupied territory, British-led military forces (including many *askaris* from various colonies) stand idle much of the time. Having disarmed many of the local tribal warriors who had lent military support to the retreating Italians, they now have the unenviable task of imposing a temporary military government and maintaining some measure of peace between traditionally rival tribes. Much of this takes place in a remote upcountry village, El Ashang, the specific location of which remains vague. It seems to be even further inland than the opening scene at a fort at Malak which the British

have captured from the Italians and used as a regional headquarters supposedly a thousand miles² north-west of the fictitious coastal city of Korma (apparently a fictional proxy for Mogadishu), the site of the British military headquarters during and after the generally successful invasion and expulsion of the Italian forces and administration. No love is lost between the two main Islamic tribes at and near El Ashang, namely the dominant Omar Bilash, who have not surrendered many of the weapons they bore when assisting the Italian forces, and the Yonis Barra, who have complied with the British demands to disarm. Both eke out a marginal existence in a harsh, arid environment by maintaining herds of camels, beasts of burden and suppliers of food which are entirely dependent on access to coveted and jealously guarded waterholes³. Some of their ethnic fellows, however, have settled in El Ashang as traders and merchants. A small British garrison overlooks the village. Its principal officers are, initially, Captain Milton, the political officer, and Captain Turnbull, who is responsible for purely military matters and is generally subordinate to Milton and the latter's successor, Captain Sole.

The ethnic nexus, therefore, is far more complex than a simple dichotomy of European colonisers vs. colonised Africans. Within the region, the British are at war with the Italians, who have been imperialists but are now being driven out of one part of Mussolini's empire. However, the Italians have been allied with some of the Africans in their struggle against the British. At the same time, the two Islamic tribal groups seem just as eager as the Europeans to extend their spheres of influence, at least hydrologically, in this arid microcosm, and the tribesmen in question hold black Africans in their midst, most of them migrants from further south. Hanley makes much of the parallels between the various kinds of struggle for hegemony in his

² The stated distance of a thousand miles can hardly be regarded as an objective distance, as that would place Malak impossibly far from the coast in the interior of Somalia or Abyssinia. It is probably most meaningfully read as an impressionistic figure to suggest the vastness of the wasteland which the British had captured by driving the Italians out of most of Somalia and to underscore the remoteness of this outpost.

³ Historical and anthropological studies of Somalia have underscored the significance of watering rights as a major, though not the only, factor behind the nation's baneful legacy of frequent blood feuds among its clans. See, for example, Lewis (1961: 252-253), and Castagno (1975: xvi).

case against the continued British imperial presence in north-west Africa.

He skill-fully introduces the British principals Milton, Turnbull, and Sole, as well as their superior, Colonel Casey, in the early chapters, beginning with a lengthy, brandy-fuelled conversation between that senior officer and Sole, whom he is about to send to El Ashang to relieve Milton. The dialogue reveals their perceptions of each and also much about both Milton and Turnbull as perceived by Casey. Clearly conveyed in this is the fact that their attitudes towards the maintenance of the Empire differ markedly.

After arriving at El Ashang, Sole discovers that Milton's co-habiting mistress, Aurella, is a member of the Yonis Barra. Milton has done little to lessen tensions between that tribe and the Omar Balish, and he looks forward to leaving El Ashang. Soon Sole becomes more keenly aware that war may erupt between the two tribes, thus causing further headaches for the British, and he pressures Milton into requesting troops from Korma as a preventive measure. Milton initially drags his feet because Aurella, always interested in gaining advantages for her tribe, fears that the arrival of further British forces might compel the Yonis Barra to give up their temporary rights to local waterholes and use only those further south. Fearing abandonment by her if he keeps his promise to Sole and calls for troops, Milton procrastinates and in the end does nothing. However, believing that he would honour his commitment to request troops, she repeatedly spits on him and plots to have him murdered. Omar Balish chiefs use both flattery and promises of camels and other rewards to recruit a young fanatic named Fara to kill Milton, which he does by stabbing him in that officer's house shortly before he was to depart for Korma. Perceiving a need to continue her influence over local policy, Aurella flaunts her sexuality to seduce Turnbull, who hitherto has despised her. He assumes that the Omar Balish have killed Milton. Turnbull therefore incarcerates their chiefs without evidence or due process of law. Their followers storm the prison adjacent to the British fort and free the chiefs. Reluctant to fire on civilians, Sole is severely wounded by a spear in this assault but survives. When the greedy Fara foolishly returns to his victim's home intending to steal personal property, he is apprehended, and Turnbull not only places him into a gaol cell but also demands that he be tortured until he provides information about unrest in the area. Frustrated and humiliated, Turnbull becomes vengeful and furtively starts a fire which destroys many of the modest houses accommodating the local populace. Extensive homelessness and attendant suffering ensues.

Without a strong British military presence in the area, the Omar Balish go on a rampage against the Yonis Barra, massacring them at coveted waterholes. Colonel Casey arrives to investigate the murder of his fellow officer. He correctly suspects Turnbull of setting the fire. The latter repeatedly denies involvement. His mental health has declined, however, and Casey sends both Turnbull and Sole to Korma for treatment. In the final chapter, Casey inspects an evening flag ceremony at El Ashang and understands that the sun has begun to set on the Empire, but he cannot understand why that is the case.

The Roots of Violent Competitiveness: Somali Tribes in Their Environment

Hanley devotes much space to portraying the Omar Bilash and the Yonis Barra but considerably less to smaller tribes which are indigenous to the desert and only a bit to the black (or 'flat-nosed') Africans from further south who for various reasons live in El Ashang. For the most part, the description of the nomadic tribes is unflattering. It is also subjective. Much of it is voiced by the narrator, who at times seems to be offering detached, disinterested observations but is often channelling the perceptions of one or another member of the British forces. That the Omar Balish and the Yonis Barra are prone to violence and hatred he leaves no doubt.

Sole initially seems to believe that violent clashes between the nomadic tribes is virtually a given fact of life in the region, a phenomenon defies explanation or resolution. Belatedly, however, he begins to understand one fundamental cause of the local residents' proclivity to violence in their dealings with each other. Sole theorises that they do not emerge from the womb prone to killing members of rival groups, but rather that this tendency results from severe competition for the limited resources on which their survival depends (Hanley 1988: 88). At no point does he condone their violence; indeed, he laments it and believes that the harshness of the environment is one fundamental reason for terminating the British presence there. At no point does Sole propose a solution for helping the nomads resolve their environmental crisis and thereby reduce intertribal violence. (This anti-imperialistic young officer's enlightenment about the roots of severe discord among them will be discussed further below.)

Despite Sole's insight, the overall impression of the nomads,

especially the Omar Balish, is one of their hatred giving birth to unrestrained violence against the enemies of the tribe. Nowhere does this emerge more horrifically than in Chapter Ten, where Omar Balish warriors twice massacre Yonis Barra rivals whom they confront near a waterhole. In savage detail Hanley paints their sadism born of ethnic hatred:

The last of them alive was held down while a young man tried to cut out his eyes, but the fallen one covered them with his hands, until another hacked off his arms with a sword, and the young one had his pleasure. He had been waiting for this hour most of his adult life. They savaged the dead and dying, being unable to leave them while, so overpowering was their hate for these who had forgotten their place in the order of men (Hanley 1988: 140).

After requisitioning the Yonis Barra's camels, the same Omar Balish warriors add another dimension to their genocide by smashing the water containers which the women whose lives depended on them watch helplessly, 'knowing that they would be left to wander and die of thirst' (Hanley 1988: 141).

Colonel Casey as Atavistic Defender of the Empire

As the senior officer, Colonel Casey is consciously presented as a stereotype of his kind, a representative of the old school. In their initial conversation, Sole perceives him as 'a British colonel from an American film' who is 'handsome and arrogant, yet humorous and reliable' (Hanley 1988: 19). Fifty-nine years old, he has devoted his career to the maintenance of the Empire. Casey believes that imperial rule has been beneficent, but precisely how he does not reveal, other than preserving the peace in some parts of the globe and occasionally convincing one or another African chief to give up 'some barbarous and revolting custom' (Hanley 1988: 15). He sees ominous signs that the Empire's days are numbered but attributes this not to a legitimate desire for independence by colonised nations but rather to the 'mouths' of 'bloody little Labour M.P.s' about 'exploitation of the native peoples'. Casey laments that 'we are becoming afraid to rule' and fears that natives will interpret signs of such reluctance as weakness which can be used to promote their independence (Hanley 1988: 25).

The purpose of the Empire, however, especially in the wasteland in which he finds himself, does not seem to cross his mind; it is little more than maintaining control for the sake of forestalling a lack of control. To him, the errand of imperialism has far less to do with conveying British civilisation to ostensibly backward people than with controlling them through an amalgam of bureaucracy and military force. 'The Empire is a filing system which runs the country—indeed, the Empire', Casey informs Sole. In practical terms, he sees the core of his mission as stopping the barbarous 'savages' 'from killing each other'. All else is subordinate: 'Progress, education, agriculture, it can, it must, all wait' (Hanley 1988: 14). He totally lacks respect for Islam as practised locally: 'These people are murderous religious maniacs[,] and kindness to them is a matter of finding and hurting the men who would lead them on a killing raid' (Hanley 1988: 14-15). The epithet 'savages' is frequently on his lips. By contrast, Casey regards himself as a gentleman, and he does not doubt that 'it takes gentlemen to deal with savages, or natives anywhere for that matter' (Hanley 1988: 7). His fixation on social class and conviction that only men from the higher rungs of British society are capable of administering the Empire remain consistent themes in his mentality. These traits in his personality aid him in dealing superficially with short-term crises by imposing order through administrative measures and military force, but they blind him to the fact that they deepen the cleavages which separate British rule from the aspirations and needs of the ruled and are thus fuelling demands colonial demands for independence.

At no point does Casey evince noteworthy respect for colonised people or an interest in contributing to their welfare. For him, the Empire is simply a matter of imperial control of ethnic groups which he reduces to the ethnophaulism 'wogs'⁴. Decolonisation is unthinkable. For this career officer, maintaining the *status quo* is the determinative policy. Accordingly, Casey is hostile to any challenges thereto: 'It was the freedom but that was at the bottom of the world's troubles', he thinks. 'All the wogs on earth were after freedom now, and it was just no use, a chap could not govern any more'. Far from endearing colonised groups to the British, such efforts as schools

⁴ Coined perhaps in the early decades of the twentieth century, 'wogs' was used especially by British colonial military personnel as a derogatory term to refer loosely to Arabs, Indians (especially from the labouring classes), and other dark-skinned people of the Empire. As an ethnophaulism, it gained popularity during the Second World War.

and medical missions merely erode imperial control. 'The polite fantasies of schemes for uplifting these savages would eventually cause revolt', he fears, convinced that the murder of Captain Milton at the hands of a tribesman foreshadows uprisings to come (Hanley 1988: 201).

Captain Turnbull as Instrument of Imperialism

Turnbull's origins are nowhere clearly identified. His hometown in England is not disclosed, and his speech does not betray any particular dialect. Before joining the armed forces, he toiled delivering sacks of coal door to door in an unspecified 'small town' in England, and his wife was a factory worker with rough hands (Hanley 1988: 50-51). At age forty, he has been an army man for more than a decade and worked himself up through the ranks of the enlisted through efficient service before gaining a commission as an officer. Turnbull is strong both physically and in his devotion to his job, and he regards himself as a loyal servant of the Empire who has done his duty to maintain it in India and elsewhere. Throughout most of *The Consul at Sunset* he does not question the legitimacy of British rule. Symbolic of his role as a functionary in this maintenance through military strength and efficiency, Turnbull's personal Bible is the *King's Regulations*, i.e. the published rules which had governed military conduct since the eighteenth century. Otherwise, he is described by the narrator as 'scrupulously clean and neat, almost stupidly honest, hardworking, and childishly faithful to his wife, the king, his regiment, his old commanding officer, and the army in general' (Hanley 1988: 51).

His relationship to the subjugated peoples under the Union Jack is somewhat ambiguous. Possibly owing to his working-class origins, Turnbull has found it easy to interact harmoniously with some black people on a personal level, as he did with Arabs during earlier service in Palestine. Furthermore, perhaps reflecting his awareness of his own success in climbing a ladder out of his modest origins in England, Turnbull dislikes white residents of British colonies in Africa past and present, such as Kenya, Rhodesia, and the Union of South Africa. He allows that they 'understood African people' but, unlike himself, he believes, they adhered to 'unwritten rules on how to keep them from progress' (Hanley 1988: 62).

In his evolving attitudes towards the Empire, Turnbull is clearly a transitional character, and he undergoes a transition in *The Consul at Sunset*.

He respects the senior generation of colonial military officers as ‘great men, men of character’ but understands that they have become dinosaurs in the age of ‘the petrol engine, the radio, the aeroplane’; they were misfits in a world where they failed to grasp ‘the fact that a human being was a being with certain rights, even when he was black’. Nevertheless, Turnbull’s predominant attitude towards decolonisation is one of caution. ‘It was not that he would deny people their rights, even savages’, observes the narrator, ‘but it was all moving too quickly’ (Hanley 1988: 91).

Much later in the narrative, *i.e.* after deciding to torch El Ashang, Turnbull continues to have this negative attitude. ‘He had a sympathy for the coloured peoples of the Empire’, the narrator states, ‘but this sympathy did not envisage a desire on the part of the coloured peoples to rule themselves’. Complicating Turnbull’s sentiments, despite his underlying perception of the colonised and his personal lack of a ‘colour bar’ in his willingness to interact with them on a personal basis, he regarded himself as more enlightened than most of his ‘white comrades and fellows’ and imagines that ‘he knew what was best for disturbed natives, savages, or tribal peoples’ (Hanley 1988: 182).

Furthermore, Turnbull’s many years of submersion in the purposeful discipline as well as the pride of imperial military life have profoundly affected his personality and interpretation of events that challenge his identity. This is perhaps most clearly seen in his perception of challenges to military rule as ‘humiliation’. The narrator explains that both his ‘long tradition of military pride’ and his ‘vanity of personality’ had been wounded by the successful invasion of the prison. With his emotional defences thus lowered, Turnbull relives the ‘scars of older humiliations at El Ashang’ and an unprofessional spirit of revenge takes control of his mind. Because he perceives Sole’s restraint in dealing with the indigenes as utterly ineffective, he despises him as ‘one of those ‘peace at any price’ chaps’ (Hanley 198: 183). The ‘savages’ who had ‘trampled on his pride’ would have to suffer, Turnbull concludes. In an observation which diametrically contradicts the notion of Manichean dichotomies separating the British from the subjugated Africans, the narrator notes that Turnbull’s hatred ‘was the same as that which enlivened the hearts of the savages, whom he had come to hate’ (p. 183). He vows to teach them a ‘lesson which they would never forget’, and in imparting it he would personally be ‘the British for them’ (Hanley 1988: 182). It is at this point that Turnbull chooses to burn much of El Ashang as

retribution. After viewing the results of his incendiary act, he is 'exultant', and his pride 'was alive again, fierce in his heart, shaking him' (Hanley 1988: 188). When the sympathetic Sole suggests that 'relief measures' to alleviate the suffering of the homeless be given priority, Turnbull's attitude is dismissive: 'Haven't we had enough humiliation already?' (Hanley 1988: 192). He expresses a similar statement in a conversation with Casey, who is reluctant to deploy troops to quell outbreaks of violence between the Omar Balish and the Yonis Barra. 'When are you going to show these blokes the flag?' he asks. 'Don't you think we've had enough humiliation already?' But Turnbull's self-revelatory questions merely prompt the crafty colonel to suspect that he started the destructive fire. 'I thought it could only be you who'd done it', declares Casey (Hanley 1988: 217).

Yet even Turnbull becomes at least partly disillusioned with the British venture in Somalia, though for un-idealistic reasons far removed from those which nurture Sole's anti-imperialism. It is essentially a matter of Turnbull's wounded ego, his feeling of guilt after committing adultery in a lonely outpost, and his underlying selfishness. In the penultimate chapter, as he and Sole prepare to fly to Korma, the former 'earnestly' tells the now 'haggard' Casey, who will soon be the only British officer at El Ashang, 'Well, it's *your* empire, sir'. When Casey asks him to explain his cryptic comment, Turnbull becomes evasive: 'Can't we talk about something else except the bloody empire?' (Hanley 1988: 247).

How well Turnbull understands the self-interest factor in his change of heart is never clarified. However, well before that time it is fully clear that his conduct frequently runs counter to his declared principles. It may be a case of the white man's degeneracy in Africa, a theme well known to be found in the works of Joseph Conrad and other *littérateurs* who have explored European conduct on that continent. Turnbull believes that by adhering to the *King's Regulations* he cannot go wrong. However, he repeatedly violates the military code; he *inter alia* burns civilians' houses and tortures a prisoner. He believes that he is bearing the blessings of British civilisation to Africans and other people in need of upliftment, but in fact he disregards such fundamental British values as fair play and justice through due process of law. He believes that in contrast to Milton he is a faithful husband, though only before allowing Aurella to seduce him. He believes the indigenous people of the area are thoroughly dishonest, but he repeatedly and disingenuously denies starting the fire which destroyed El Ashang. No

wonder that well before the end of *The Consul at Sunset* Turnbull's health deteriorates and he feels a need to confess his sins, though he does not understand this longing in himself (Hanley 1988: 216).

Captain Sole as Disillusioned Representative of the Anti-Imperial Generation

Sole is 'glad he is English' but early in the narrative the narrator discloses this young officer's awareness that the cost of this national identity was having to be 'prepared to accept hatred all over the earth because . . . of what grandfather had done, because there were many Englishmen in power who still believed grandfather was right and did old-fashioned things all over the earth in the name of the English people' (Hanley 1988: 37-38). Consequently, virtually from the outset Sole questions the value of imperialism, and more clearly than his fellow British officers, Sole sees the absurdity of maintaining a British presence in the wasteland he sees around him. His 'hellish journey' to El Ashang, which he regards as the 'least coveted' place in the 'senile' Empire drives yet another nail into the coffin of whatever commitment he previously had to the British presence in various colonies. He 'wished to give it away', preferably to its inhabitants. 'Let them kill each other' for it, Sole thinks (Hanley 1988: 36).

Sole respects the hardiness of the tribal people who dwell there. At no time does he appear to overlook their willingness to take up arms with one another to ensure access to water. To him, it is the struggle for survival rather than an innate tendency towards violence that drives their 'cruelty'. In an unarticulated nod to a naturalistic view of humanity, Sole theorises that their conduct is an extension of their environment: 'And these people were cruel because their country was cruel, and because in the early formative years of their lives they must live like wolf cubs, snapping at whatever morsel they saw', he thinks. Because they are reared 'without discipline or the softening influence of happy people', they become 'violent and quick-tempered' men and women who lack pity. Survival would otherwise be impossible in a land where 'all men coveted your camels and would kill you for their possession' (Hanley 1988: 88).

By the time his departure for Korma is imminent, Sole has gained further insight into the underlying contradiction in the behaviour of men like Colonel Casey who were unable to adapt to the winds of change blowing

across the colonies. Recalling that officer's earlier comment that the Empire was a 'filing system', Sole concludes that such men 'had begun to destroy it by staying as they had always been, by being unable to change'. He respects the 'sincerity' of Casey's generation of colonial officers and sympathises with their 'bewilderment in a world which did not want them any more'. Sole is keenly conscious of the aspirations of the subordinate people in the Empire. To him, they are 'like ghosts of resentment' and 'the uneducated masses ... were now screaming on the horizon' (Hanley 1988: 225).

Near the end of *The Consul at Sunset* Sole finally puts aside his restraint and bares his opinions to Casey. 'I can't believe in my job any more', he confesses. The colonel suggests that he should therefore leave the Colonial Service after the war has been won. Sole's anti-imperialism strikes this conservative Englishman as possibly communist inspired. 'You sound a bit *bolshy* to me', he suggests. 'Are you a bolshy [*i.e.* Bolshevik]?' (Hanley 1988: 239). Casey remains unimpressed by Sole's denial, and the wedge between the imperialist and the anti-imperialist is driven deeper by the younger man's admission that he began to 'hate' his job only a year after beginning it in 1937. Moreover, it is not merely his own position which he rejects: 'I hate the Empire', Sole admits. He adds that men like Casey 'look on the Empire as a religion' but he himself cannot, and he adds that most people of his own age share his views. Sole questions the idealism of Casey's generation of colonial officials. Rather than patriotism, they were motivated by the 'freedom' and 'decent rewards' for their service (Hanley 1988: 239-241).

Without using the term, Sole then expressed his vision of something akin to the Commonwealth (which already existed when Hanley wrote *The Consul at Sunset*) replacing the Empire. 'Something useful, if we really want to use it, as a means of uniting Europeans, Africans, Indians, and all the others', he tells Casey, should replace the 'stupid and untrue' Empire. Such an association of various nations would tell 'the natives with one voice that we are all the same'. Writing less than three years after the accession of the National Party to power in the Union of South Africa and the beginning of that country's apartheid era, Hanley cannot resist the temptation to state through Sole that (white) South Africans might resist such an egalitarian approach. Sole's most devastating words in this conversation are directed squarely at Casey. Believing that the survival of the Empire necessitated some measure of unity between the British and the other peoples in it, he

informs his superior: 'It is people like you, sir, sincere and sure of yourselves, who have destroyed the Empire you built, because you never tried to identify yourselves with the people' (Hanley 1988: 241).

Conclusion

That *The Consul at Sunset* is explicitly and vociferously anti-imperialist hardly needs to be amplified. Hanley uses various devices to argue his case against colonialism in general and in particular against the continued British presence in what are now Somalia and Abyssinia. He underscores the resentment of the indigenous people, their incompatibility with the British, the inability of the older generation of colonial officers to adapt to contemporary conditions, the selfishness of employees of the Colonial Service, the lack of resources in the area, and the dilatory effects which living in that utterly inhospitable and unforgiving environment have on human behaviour as reasons for not being there.

But what does Hanley's characterisation of the British and the African peoples in this novel reveal about the points in colonial discourse theory which we broached at the outset? In brief, *The Consul at Sunset* contradicts the underlying notion of Manichean dualisms separating the colonisers from the colonised. To be sure, there are passages in the text, perhaps most notably the Omar Balish massacres of the Yonis Barra and Fara's killing of Milton, which suggest agreement with the depiction of African people as violent, irrational, evil, and so on. Certainly one finds very little positive in Hanley's portrayal of them, and at times their conduct can hardly be exonerated by reference to Sole's theory that competition for extremely limited resources in their environment has made them cruel from an early age. The stumbling block lies in the mixed but largely negative portrayal of the British military personnel. With the sole exception of Sole, they are an unsavory lot with few redeeming traits. Turnbull, to be sure, has characteristics which would have made him commendable to British readers in the middle of the twentieth century, but his moral and mental decline, including his betrayal of some of the principles he initially embodies, becomes a controlling theme in Hanley's plot. To a great extent, the British are not significantly less violent or boast higher moral standards with regard to such matters as truthfulness, selflessness, and marital fidelity than the tribal peoples whom they are poorly administering.

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