

# Plain Women and Ladies in a Strange Country

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The concept of home is needed (and in fact can only be thought) only after the home has already been left behind. In a strict sense, then, one has always already left home, since home can only exist as such at the price of it being lost (Van den Abeele).

From the far plains of Southern Africa—from the shady valleys—from the wooded banks of gliding streams and noisy torrents—from the dark recesses of the deep ravines—from the cultivated lands of the industrious settler—from the well-filled cattle-fold of the idle and ferocious savage—from the smoky hut of the indolent Hottentot—and from the tent and bivouac of the soldier—let the Truth be heard! Ye philanthropists—fallacious reasoners on subjects of which ye know nothing certain, who romanticise about savages and slavery till ye get entangled in a web of metaphysics of your own weaving, from which ye have neither the power nor the courage to extricate yourselves—who would leave the savage in undisturbed possession of a vast tract of country as much in need of population as England is of the reverse; who would take the yoke from the slave's neck and send him forth—free, indeed, in body, but trammelled in mind with sin and sorrow, since he knows not how to live, or to earn a living—hear the voice of Truth! (Harriet Ward).

Harriet Ward, far from 'home', writes back from the Cape Colony in 1848, using rhetoric typical of the Victorian colonial voice. Here is the metropolitan vision of darkest Africa, the colonial narrative of the good settler and the indolent indigene,

and the pragmatic declaration to the ignorant liberals who make laws but fail to see the consequences of their actions.

In this article, I intend to examine different forms of rhetoric in the colonial memoir written by English women who settled in Natal, South Africa, during the mid-nineteenth century. The act of retrieving, reading and reporting on unfamiliar texts by women is, of course, in itself a feminist endeavour and it has become a feminist commitment 'to draw on women's daily lives as a resource for analysing society' (Frankenburg 1993:6). The memoirs, which were written during 1852—1876, situate my paper within an historical enterprise, but because they are all written by British colonial women, and because I am a white woman, born and raised in Natal, this paper is, by necessity, a postcolonial critique, both of the texts and of myself, who is implicated in the colonial attitudes on which I will elaborate. In order to discuss the colonial memoir, I will identify a range of different and often competing discourses, using a variety of theoretical tools, including colonial discourse analysis, within a context which is feminist, historical, and postcolonial and which makes use of anthropology to illuminate the deep structures of human interaction.

If justification is required for focusing on the texts of white women in the colonies, I can cite Simon Gikandi's suggestion that 'students of colonial discourse and postcolonial theory do not know what to do with the women of empire' (Gikandi 1996:121). In addition, this is a relatively neglected field in that little attention has been paid to settler writing (although this is becoming more closely investigated than hitherto) because the urge has been, understandably, to research issues surrounding decolonization and black women's writing. My paper benefits, therefore, from recent scholarship on colonialism (see particularly Stoler 1997; Callaway 1987; Mills 1994; Blunt 1994; Whitlock 1996; and Pridmore 1997) which replaces the narrative of men and public events with an interdisciplinary inquiry into those cultural formations that foreground the routines and rituals of everyday life. Following Gillian Whitlock (1996:69), I will avoid 'expressive views of authorship and text in which literature floats free of social and cultural determinants' by situating the texts within their historical and cultural contexts and endeavouring not to elide 'deeply embedded contradiction and resistance' (Whitlock 1996:69). Further, my focus is on settler writing and not travel writing (although the case of Catherine Barter is situated somewhere between the two). Investigations of the discursive formations of the settler or colonial woman differ from those of the 'lady' traveller in that the necessity to accept that the colonised country is 'home' complicates the accompanying need to belong to the imperial centre (abroad). There is thus a difference between the writing of temporary visitors to South Africa and those who are settled.

I will be dealing mainly with three texts: *Alone Among the Zulus*, by Catherine Barter (1866), describing a journey she made by ox wagon from

Pietermaritzburg across the border of Natal and into Zululand; *My African Home or Bush Life in Natal When a Young Colony 1852-1857*, by Eliza Whigham Feilden, describing the domestic life of a middle-class woman in the 1850s; and *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa*, by Lady Barker, describing the year 1875—1876. I shall also make passing references to other memoirs written during this period.

The events recounted in these narratives take place after the annexation of Natal by the British in 1845 and before the Zulu victory over the British troops at Isandhlwane in 1879. Britain was reluctant to add yet another colony to the forty-three already under its control, especially as the Boers, who had trekked into Natal in the 1830s to escape British rule in the Cape Colony, were, understandably, unwilling to accept British authority in Natal. However, in an attempt to prevent possible conflict between the Boers and the Zulu, conflict which had the potential to disrupt the chiefdoms south of Natal and endanger the Cape's eastern frontier, the British reluctantly accepted that imperial authority would have to be extended over Natal<sup>1</sup>.

Natal was not deemed especially lucrative although it was known to have coal deposits and was believed to be suitable for cotton cultivation. The Imperial government believed, however, that the Boer families resident in Natal would remain, giving the new colony a white farming population. This belief was dashed when the 'Second Great Trek' of 1847 saw the departure of most Boer families from the new colony. The port settlement of Durban had sustained a small British population since 1824 but apart from the few traders and hunters in the town the only other British inhabitants in the colony were officials, troops and missionaries. It was only after the emigration schemes proposed and initiated by Joseph Byrne (1849-1851) that an established band of permanent settlers came into the area resulting in a swelling of the number of British settlers to 5000 during the period 1849-1852. The African inhabitants in the new colony, many of whom had entered Natal during the 1830s and 1840s as refugees from Zulu rule, were prepared to accept British authority as it offered them a guarantee of protection against retaliation from a resurgent Zulu kingdom under King Mpande. As a result of this fear of Zulu power, and of the fact that the small white settler population in the colony left an abundance of land for the Africans, there was little resistance to the settlement of white farmers among them.

At the same time, Mpande, wary of Boer expansion in the lands north-west of Natal, was anxious to maintain good relations with the colony. Because of this, the

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<sup>1</sup> There seems to have been a sense of responsibility evidenced in the words of Earl Grey: '... the present state of Natal and of the black population which has flocked there for our protection affords a noble opportunity for the diffusion of Christianity and civilisation which it would be a disgrace to this country to neglect'. Earl Grey to Sir Harry Smith, 30 November, 1849, quoted in Hattersley (1950).

Thukela was an open border and 'increasing number of colonists were annually entering the Zulu kingdom to shoot wild animals and barter for cattle and other natural products' aided by the local inhabitants who were hospitable and willing to act as guides and hunters (Merrett 1995:28)<sup>2</sup>.

During the period of two of the memoirs (Barter's & Feilden's; 1852-1855), settlers lived mainly in wattle and daub houses and had access to schools, churches and limited entertainment including hunting and cricket. The memoirs are replete with references to the inconvenience of living with constant dust and mud, of terrifying thunderstorms, of gardening, and of trying to replicate the British way of life in social custom and in dress. In leaving 'home', most aim to recreate the feeling of home in the colony and managed to recreate an 'imagined community'<sup>3</sup>, in part by entertaining mythologies of heritage and family but also by writing home their sense of dislocation between their experience of their new home in Natal and their memory of old home in England.

However, I do not intend to embark on a description of the social customs of the settlers. Moreover, because I wish to avoid a realist rendering of the text, one that purports to provide access to the lives of the writers, the focus of this paper will fall on the discursive strategies used by women colonial writers. Similarly, I would not wish to offer a seamless account of colonialism or of women in colonial situations. Following Roland Barthes's suggestion that the reader is someone at a loose end, I will drop some stitches in this account, knowing that I will not be able to knit a perfect garment. My aim is neither to participate in a recuperation of colonial ideologies nor to judge the attitudes of the women I write about. Rather, I wish to allow the competing discourses to exist in an uneasy juxtaposition in the belief that women's daily lives can only be properly understood 'by "mapping" them onto broader social processes' (Frankenburg 1993:7). As Birkett and Wheelwright (1990:50) suggest:

Rather than explaining [unpalatable facts] away, we began to incorporate them into our subjects' biographies, making them integral rather than peripheral to our understanding of them. Our portraits became not those of simple feminist heroines, but of women rooted in their time.

Since I will be using the discourse of anthropology frequently in this paper, it would

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to John Lambert for his assistance in portraying an accurate representation of the history of Natal during this time.

<sup>3</sup> The term is Benedict Anderson's from his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

be as well to offer a description of the *preterrain*<sup>4</sup> of each of the women whose texts I shall be examining. I make use of this term from ethnography because the women who write their memoirs indulge, themselves, in a form of anthropological description when driven, as they all are, to send home written pictures of the indigenous people with whom they come in contact.

Catherine Barter (1995:1) begins her memoir thus:

I am a plain woman in every sense of the word: plain in person—as the looking-glass informs me; plain in dress as a matter of taste as well as of principle, for it is hardly a wise policy to draw attention by means of decoration to that which is not in itself attractive; plain in understanding, preferring simple matters to those more complicated; and plain in manner, as I have just cause to know, for the fact that I was ‘brusque’ was told me too often in my childhood to be ever forgotten.

I confess I have a partiality for plain speaking, which, although I have had some acquaintance with the world, has remained with me till the present day; and as the feeling has stood so much wear and tear, I believe it to be genuine.

Catherine is at pains to emphasise the veracity of her story, scornful of embellishment of any kind, as the description of her plain demeanour underscores. The voice here is one that immediately suggests a departure from the norm, and self-consciously announces that we are dealing here with a plain, but unusual, woman. The rhetoric defiantly sets itself against the stereotype of the Victorian woman for whom elegant dress and manners are of particular importance.

As the introduction to *Alone Among the Zulus* explains, Catherine Barter's narrative is one of the earliest descriptions of travel in the Zulu kingdom and the first known account by a woman. It is an extraordinary story in which a woman travels with her driver on an ox-wagon to rescue her brother from certain death.

Catherine Barter was born in 1818 in Oxfordshire. Her paternal forbears were clergymen providing her with a legacy of institutionalised religion which she brought with her to Natal<sup>5</sup>. The decision to emigrate to the Natal colony seems to

<sup>4</sup> The ‘preterrain’ is, strictly speaking, the milieu from which the ethnographer departs, or, more loosely, the background of the ethnographer, his/her context. Instead of providing my own background, I prefer to treat the memoirists as the ethnographers and so provide here a brief description of where they come from.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, *Alone Among the Zulus* was originally published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and sold at the depositories in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

have been a fairly impulsive one, suggested by her brother Charles, to whom she was devoted and for whom she felt responsible. She spent a total of twenty-six years in Natal, though these were interrupted by periods spent at home in England. *Alone Among the Zulus* is set during the first period of her stay in Natal, from 1852-1855 and is largely an account of her travel through Zululand in search of her brother, who was injured while on a hunting expedition. Her novel, *Home in South Africa* is packed with informative domestic details concerning life in Natal. In the years that she spent in Natal, she left a remarkable legacy, having on two occasions 'adopted' Zulu children and seen to their education. An unusual feature of her time in South Africa is her determination to learn the Zulu language prior to her arrival in South Africa and her subsequent ability to speak to the people with whom she came into contact. She opened a boarding school in England for the purpose of providing education for African children. Her scheme was to 'buy' African children from their parents, take them to England for an education and return them at age 16 so that they could in turn educate their parents. She successfully achieved her aim with Salome Welayo, the daughter of a Zulu man whom she had converted to Christianity. Salome learnt all the accomplishments of a typical Victorian woman, including playing the piano and speaking French. Catherine built a house for Salome and her husband, an Englishman, on her property *Wychwood* in Winterskloof outside Pietermaritzburg, and later transferred this property to Salome's husband. Salome died in 1895 and was buried at *Wychwood*.

Catherine never married, but saw it as her duty to take care of her brother until he was married, following him to South Africa for this purpose. However, once these duties were discharged and she could safely leave him in the care of his wife, she took up her missionary aims in educating Salome and starting a boarding school. Her text presents the reader with a portrait of a lively, enterprising and ambitious woman.

Eliza Feilden's *My African Home or Bush Life in Natal when a Young Colony* consists of a series of letters together with sections from her journal intended to interest friends who may have been curious about her life in Natal. The Feildens were well connected, Eliza's husband Leyland being the son of Sir William Feilden, a wealthy and influential cotton manufacturer who was naturally interested in exploring Natal as a potential area for lucrative farming, and who sent his son to Natal on the *Edward*. Returning briefly to marry Elizabeth Kennedy, the couple sailed in 1852 on the *Jane Morice*, with intentions to make their home in Natal. Leyland soon discovered that sugar was likely to be a more lucrative crop than cotton, but stayed in Natal, at *Sea View*, only four years, before returning to England and living there until his death in 1915. Eliza's text makes references to his ill-luck in making a success of sugar and other crops but is frustratingly expurgated by her desire not to depress either herself or her family with bad news. We are told of

catastrophes and reversals of fortune, accounts that are cut short with statements such as 'we have had many troubles which I have not liked to write down in my journal, to make it painful to read' (1887:94). Most extraordinary of all is the passing reference to the arrival of a premature child without a mention of pregnancy beforehand (I presume that this is a reference to a miscarriage).

Feilden's text provides details of domestic life in Durban, the centre of which consisted largely of sand dunes and bush, houses of wattle and daub with verandas and thatched roofs. G.C. Cato's store was regarded as the upmarket end of town but there were also busy manufacturers at the corner of Smith and Gardiner Streets. There were no roads and the grandest house, brick with a slate roof, belonged to Henry and Tom Milner. Drifting sand seems to have been the worst problem. Hattersley records that it was not uncommon for the open verandas to fill up with sand blown in by the fierce winds<sup>6</sup>. The text also contains descriptions of social events, trouble in obtaining suitable servants, visits from other colonials and a large section devoted to her neighbour, an elderly woman living on her own.

Finally, Lady Barker, born Mary Ann Stewart in Jamaica (1831) joined her first husband, Sir George Barker in India. After his death in 1861 she married Frederick Broome and accompanied him to New Zealand. Well travelled and used to living in diverse continents, Lady Barker adopts the habit of sending 'letters home' from wherever she finds herself living. After her stay in New Zealand she returned to England where she published eight books. In 1875 her husband was appointed Colonial Secretary in Natal and the family (two sons) spent a year in Natal, a period which forms the basis of the text *A Year's Housekeeping In South Africa*. The book, an account of early Pietermaritzburg, is chiefly a description of the battle to accommodate to a life of dust, mud, snakes and insects while raising children and carrying out the function of the 'lady of the house'. Being the wife of a government man meant that there was no shortage of servants, as experienced by Eliza Feilden, while there is more emphasis on the responsibilities attached to official duties, travels to surrounding areas and entertaining.

In turning now to an analysis of the complex discourses which construct the colonial memoir of Natal, I am indebted to Sara Mills and J.M. Coetzee for their descriptions of the range of discourses available to the colonial writer. Coetzee, in *White Writing*, notes a tendency to provide a catalogue of characteristics intended to denote the differences between the normative white and the extraordinary other. Repeatedly, this 'repertoire of remarkable facts' is presented for our edification within a framework of samenesses in which are identified physical appearance, dress, diet, medicine, customs, habitation, religion, laws, economy, language and character

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<sup>6</sup> For this and preceding information about early Durban, see Alan Hattersley's *The British Settlement of Natal* (1950).

(this list is Coetzee's 1988:14, emended for the purposes of this paper). Sara Mills contributes to the idea but takes it further by applying it to women writers. Using Foucault's notion of 'schema', Mills identifies particular textual strategies, available to colonial writers, which colour their descriptions of the strange and exotic. These include a distancing by means of language and an assignation of dirt and disorder to the other. By aligning themselves with this schema, women writers, says Mills, 'assume the powerful textual position afforded by colonialism in much the same way as men do' (Mills 1991:91).

The tendency to catalogue the African according to a list of *samenesses* is vividly apparent in my chosen texts. These moments of anthropological description are interspersed throughout Feilden's letters and journal entries and are intended to inform her family back home:

The Zulu Caffres are really an intelligent-looking race, shrewd, keen at a bargain, cunning and lazy. Our young Caffres save up their wages to purchase cows, and a certain number of cows will buy them a wife. As they grow richer they increase the number of their wives, who do all the work required at the craals, the last or lowest wife, I believe, always taking the hardest work. The man seems to do no work about the craal, so far at least as I have yet learned. They are very jealous of intruders in their craals, which are built (if I may call it building) in a circle, looking like so many bee-hives, with a hole about as large in proportion, through which they creep in and out. Each wife has her own, and each one bears her share of the burden. The men are lazy, self-indulgent fellows. They enjoy their easy state of barbarism too well to become easily Christianised; Christianity being a religion of self-denial and moral restraint, strikes at the root of all their sensual enjoyments.

Christianity says, 'Up and be doing'; but their feelings say, 'Sit still; what good do we get by exertion? We are comfortable as we are here lying in the sun, chewing tobacco; what's the use of making ourselves uncomfortable?' Yet they can work if made to do so, and a white man standing by to see they do not sit down and idle (Feilden 1887:15f).

Eliza Feilden's catalogue is accurate only on the most superficial level. As an anthropological account, however, it does not pay attention to the deeper structures of Zulu culture. Indeed, the Zulus belonged to a homestead economy prior to settlement by the Europeans and housed themselves in *imizi* or small self-contained dwelling places just as Eliza describes them. In fact, the same pattern survives in rural areas at the present time. The central cattle kraal is surrounded by the huts belonging to the wives, dependent relatives and widowed mother of the head. Yet,



there is a strict social division of labour with men responsible for animal husbandry, the building and maintenance of huts and cattle kraals and the digging of grain pits. Women and girls are responsible for agricultural production, domestic labour, thatching huts and carrying water and fuel for fire. In addition, the men made iron and wooden articles while the women made pots and mats. Thus, Eliza's judgement of the men as 'lazy' and 'self-indulgent' is misguided and pays scant attention to social structures.

There are also several markers which situate this passage within a colonial framework: the use of the possessive 'our' in 'our young caffres'; the error in assuming that the women do all the work when the work is strictly differentiated according to gender and the kind of work involved; the crude jibe at the type of rounded hut ('if I may call it building'); and the identification of the Zulu with the bee, not an innocent simile, since behind it lies an implied hierarchy of being situating the English at the top and insects way down. The lowness of the form is further implied by the word 'creep'.

Underlying the passage is the clash of two ideologies: the Victorian work ethic and the African accommodation to white domination. Coetzee devotes a chapter to the subject of idleness in *White Writing* and although his remarks are directed to European attitudes to the Hottentots in the Cape during an earlier period, they have relevance to the Natal attitudes of the 1850s and beyond. Coetzee begins by describing the racist attitude of the observers of Hottentots:

It looks on the Hottentot and sees only squalor, disease, and blank torpor, closing its eyes to the possibility that given a choice between idleness (with accompanying poverty) and the wretchedness of lifelong, manual labour, people may deliberately choose the former. In contrasting inherent European diligence with inherent Hottentot sloth, it seems to forget the history of the early phase of industrialisation in Europe, where it required a reformation of 'character' occupying generations before the labouring class would embrace the principle that one should work harder than is required to maintain the level of material existence one is born into (Coetzee 1988:27).

A further instance of anthropological categorising is the following by Lady Barker:

When a chief or the induna of a kraal passes this way, I see him clad in a motley garb of old regimentals, with his bare 'ringed' head, riding a sorry nag, only the point of his great toe resting in his stirrup. He is followed closely and with great *empressement* by his 'tail', all 'ringed' men also; that is, men of some substance and weight in the community. They carry bundles of sticks, and keep up with the ambling nag, and are closely followed by some of their wives, bearing heavy loads on their heads, but stepping out

bravely with beautiful erect carriage, shapely bare arms and legs, and some sort of coarse drapery worn around their bodies, covering them from shoulder to knee, in folds which would delight an artist's eye, and be the despair of a sculptor's chisel. They don't look either oppressed or discontented. Healthy, happy and jolly, are the words by which they would be most truthfully described (Barker 1894:120f).

As well as being a catalogue, Lady Barker's description is reminiscent of another discourse noted by Coetzee who speaks of the tendency of the colonial traveller to resort to the discourse of the picturesque when describing the African landscape or its people. A particularly good example occurs at a later stage in Barker's text describing her visit to the mission station at Edendale. The reader will notice that the most approving comments are reserved for what Barker (1894:195f) deems to be most orderly, a synonym perhaps for picturesque:

Sitting at the doors of their houses are tidy, comfortable-looking men and women, the former busy plaiting, with deft and rapid movements of their lithe fingers, neat baskets and mats of reeds and rushes .... Fat black babies squat happily in the dust, munching the boiled husk before it is shelled; older children are equally happy cleaning with finger and tongue a big wooden spoon just out of the porridge pot .... No grass-thatched huts are here, but thoroughly nice respectable little houses of adobe brick, nearly all of the same pattern, with vermilion or yellow ochre doors, and all half-covered with creepers. Whoever despairs of civilizing the Kafir need only look here and at other similar stations to see how easily he adapts himself to comfortable ways and customs, and in what a decent and orderly fashion he can be trained to live with his fellows.

The approbatory foregrounding of orderliness here is significantly attributed to missionary (or colonising) influence, and not to the people themselves. Edendale Mission is situated in the text as small enclave in the African bush, a preferential example of the success of the missionary impulse. Further, the description of people as objects of aesthetic pleasure ('fat black babies') is yet another means of creating distance between the colonising observer and the object of the gaze. Similarly, the repeated refrain, running throughout all the memoirs, of the laziness of the indigene, serves the same purpose, establishing a huge gap between 'us' and them.

In the Barker and Feilden texts, the implied reader is an important textual feature. While Feilden is careful not to upset her family in England with too much bad news, Lady Barker seems to be most conscious of entertaining both her received guests and her readers back home. Not only are her descriptions of indigenous Africans tinged with irony, her drawings are likewise verging on caricatures.



LOUISA.



A KAFIR DANDY.



INDIANA AND FAMILY ON THE "TREK."

WITCHFINDER DETECTING A THIEF.



The need to entertain is echoed in a central scene in her text in which she invites the local 'witchfinders' to amuse her guests:

All this time however I am longing to tell you of a famous tea-party I have had here lately. A regular 'drum', only it beat all your London teas hollow because in the corner of my cards were the words, Tea and witches. Now I ask you, could any one wish for a greater excitement than that to enliven a summer afternoon? (Barker 1894:169).

Barker describes in detail preparations for the occasion including the early arrival of the 'witch-finders', 'escorted by nearly the whole black population of Maritzburg'. As the only white person present, Barker expresses a moment of nervousness: 'Remember there is not a white man nearer than Maritzburg, and there is nothing upon earth to prevent any number of these excited, shouting men and boys from walking into my little house, or at least helping themselves to anything off the tea-tables which the servants are beginning to arrange in the verandah' (Barker 1894:171), but it is clear that in reality she feels no danger because, as the white madam, she is in charge, and this description serves the purpose of providing suspense for her implied readers, elevates her courage in their eyes, and suggests the meekness of the indigenous population before the might of the colonial power. When the white guests arrive in anticipation of having their fortunes told, 'their lost trinkets found, and heaven knows what beside' (Barker 1894:172), Lady Barker puts on her official voice and explains that these are not witches but witch-finders and that she does not approve of their practices. The *izangoma* then take the stage:

Grave, composed, erect of carriage, and dauntless of mien, these Amazonian women walked past the verandah raising their hand as the men do with the low cry of 'Inkosi' in salutation (Barker 1894:172).

Barker's prose here is a strange combination of respect and colonial scorn. She is clearly impressed by the stature of the women who act like men but explains how their actions are now unlawful since they contradict British ideas of fair play. She asks her interpreter to explain to the witch-finders that she does not approve of their behaviour and that her curiosity is the chief reason for their being invited:

I begged Mr Y—to explain to them that the only reason I had wanted to see them arose from pure curiosity to know what they looked like, how they were dressed, and so forth; and that I quite understood that it was all nonsense and very wrong, and against the law to do so really, but that this was only a play and a pretence (Barker 1894:173)

Barker's official pronouncements are quite evidently in contradiction to her real feelings. As the wife of a government official Lady Barker is acting in an official capacity and must be seen to be upholding official policy. However, her interest in and excitement about the *izangoma* is tangible, as her description of Nozinyanga suggests:

Conspicuous from her great height, Nozinyanga first caught my eye, her floating helmet-like plume of the tail feathers of the saka-bula bird shading her fierce face, made still more gruesome by wafers of red paint on cheek and brow (Barker 1894:176).

As the afternoon's entertainment draws to a close, the guests grow restless and suggest a final 'game'. One of them has lost a silver pipe-stem, which was highly valued, and asks that the *izangoma* ascertain what it is that is lost and how to find it. The response of the *izangoma*, Nowaruso, is a high point in this text as it is the only time that one of the colonised talks back:

Is this real? Is it a test? Is it but shadow? Do the white chiefs want to laugh at our pretensions? Has the white lady called us only to show other white people that we can do nothing? Is anything really lost? Is it not hidden? It is lost. Let me see what it is that is lost. Is it money? No. Is it a weighty thing? No: it can be always carried about—it is not heavy. All people like to carry it, especially the white Inkosi: it is made of the same metal as money. I could tell you more, but there is no earnestness in this—it is only a spectacle (Barker 1894:183).

This is a wonderful moment in the text. The greater knowledge of the *izangoma* is wholly in evidence here, as is her perspicacity in understanding the intentions of her white audience. They are put to shame by her utterances, which they cannot understand being spoken in Zulu, but since the story is being related at one remove from the occasion, the implied readers are being given a lesson that the guests did not benefit from. The scene is multiply inscribed at this point. The *izangoma* is addressing the indunas (the important men of the tribe) while the white audience watches, unable to understand the utterances. Lady Barker's description fills in the missing meaning for her implied readers in England. Thus the actual audience and the implied audience interpret the event quite differently.

The missing pipe-stem is correctly identified. Lady Barker delivers a 'little speech' of thanks, whereupon the following, translated, speech is given in reply:



Messages were sent to us at our kraals that an English lady who loved our people wished to see us and witness our customs. When we heard these messages our hearts said 'Go to the English lady,' so we have come, and now our hearts are filled with pleasure at having seen this lady, and ourselves heard her express her thanks to us. We would also, on our part thank the lady for her kindness and her presents. White people do not believe in our powers, and think that we are mad; but still we know it is not so, and that we really have the powers we profess (Barker 1894:185).

Significantly, Lady Barker refrains from further comment on her own feelings about the scene. Instead, she describes incidents told to her by 'some of the gentlemen' present about the terrible massacres that resulted from the power of the *izangoma*, thus apparently erasing the effect of the *izangoma*'s final speech.

Catherine Barter's description of the *izangoma* reveals an entirely different register. Barter (1995:43) is careful to remain 'objective', presenting her reader with an almost scientific discourse:

I had heard much in Natal of the manoeuvres of the witchdoctors; but had never had an opportunity of witnessing them so as to understand the principle upon which their alleged discoveries are made.

Continuing in this vein, Catherine describes a healing she has witnessed, but which clearly does not impress her:

The first act of the comedy was now played. The condition of the patient was ascertained. The more difficult part remained—to discover the cause of the illness and its proper remedy. Let not the reader suppose that any knowledge of the laws of Nature or of Hygiene was required to settle this question. The disease must be produced by supernatural causes alone (Barter 1995:4f).

The *izangoma*'s findings are called 'guesses' and Barter proudly informs her reader that she easily conquered an *izangoma* by telling her that 'I was the servant of One far greater than her spirits, and that I knew she could not go on with her (so-called) enchantments if I did not choose' (Barter 1995:45). By using the rhetoric of devout religion (reminiscent of exorcism, holding the cross to the Satanic), Barter aligns herself with the greater force of colonial Christianity. It is clear from Barter's rhetoric that she believes the healing power of the *izangoma* to be bogus, a magic cult vastly inferior to western medicine. However, a scene from a colonial memoir not thus far mentioned, brings Barter's emphatic conclusions into dispute. Marina King, unlike

the other settler women, was brought to Natal at an early age and spent her formative years there. She is more predisposed to be open-minded towards the local inhabitants, and her discourse is less prone to colonial prejudice. She describes a scene in which she is called out to attend to a dying child of a neighbouring farmer. The child is clearly asphyxiating from the effects of diphtheria and King seems unable to save his life. A young Zulu man who is employed as a house servant asks if he may intervene, whereupon he sharpens his knife, collects a reed and performs a successful tracheotomy. King comments that this medical procedure had only just been discovered in England at the time (1880) whereas it had been an ancient medical practice in Africa (King 1935:123).

Much of the interplay between coloniser and colonised in the texts under discussion occurs within a domestic space where colonial women play an important role in shaping attitudes back home as well as influencing the cultural norms in the colony. Insufficient attention has thus far been paid to this significant aspect of colonialism in postcolonial and colonial commentaries. Anthropologist Mary Douglas's theory of dirt and disorder sheds light on the emphasis given to the desire to keep a good house in several of the colonial texts written by women:

As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment to re-order our environment, making it conform to an idea. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created (Douglas 1966:2,4).

Douglas' ideas are useful in explaining settler colonial women's reactions to their environment. Something out of place offends the schema or pattern, which the colonial brings to the new territory. In order to reassert the idea of a system, the environment must be re-encoded according to the old schema. Thus Lady Barker complains on arrival at the Cape, that Table Mountain is too flat—it does not accord with her schema of a beautiful mountain, which is pointed, like the Alps. Barker and Feilden both comment on the incongruence of the habit of the Zulu to don military attire but to wear it according to what is most practical. Thus only the jacket will be worn, revealing bare brown legs, making it cooler and easier to negotiate muddy terrain but clearly offending the English women's idea of what is correct. In this way, the incongruencies of the environment are 'placed' against the context of the old system. As Douglas (1966:37) says, building in a conservative bias brings a sense of confidence:

At any time we may have to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions.

In letter after letter, detailed descriptions of the day's menus, troubles with servants, keeping a clean house, the lack of metropolitan luxuries, and the difficulty in keeping up appearances under colonial conditions fill the pages of Feilden's and Barker's memoirs. When we consider that family and home provide the means to maintaining discipline and social control according to Victorian ideology, this seemingly tiresome monologue makes more sense. It is tantamount to an act of survival for 'these unsettled settlers' (Coetzee 1988:4) to maintain the orderliness of hearth and home in this liminal space in which, as Victor Turner (1992:23) suggests, 'the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape'.

We must also remember the particular liminality of the colonial woman who is caught in a dialectic between compliance with colonial ideologies and resistance to imperialist masculine enterprises from which she is excluded. She is in a sense colonised by the ever-present shadow of the metropolis, which she has left, yet partakes in colonising her indigenous servants. The domestic sphere is thus the only space that she can call her own and which is hers to control. Moreover, in matters of domesticity, we observe a fierce dialectic between two differing versions of 'home' as dwelling place. For the Englishwoman (and man), home has four walls and tolerable levels of comfort; it has a garden in which flowers, vegetables and fruit are produced, and it has a border to mark it as distinct from the surrounding wilderness and other people's territories. Most significantly, keeping home accords precisely with imperial values as the following definition of 'a lady' by the doughty Hildagonda Duckitt (1902:71f), suggests:

The meaning of the old English word 'lady' is said to have been 'loaf-giver' implying a person as practical as Solomon's beautiful description (Prov.xxxi) of the 'virtuous woman' whose 'price is far above rubies' and the heart of whose husband 'doth safely trust in her', and of whom it is said, 'she looketh well to the ways of her own household, and eateth not the bread of idleness'.

As we have seen in Feilden's description of the *mnini*, the Zulu has a completely different version and vision of home, which is perceived as a communal space with separation occurring according to gender and rank, and in which cattle are the most important commodities.

Thus, the repeated chorus of references to dirt, smell, disorderliness, unwillingness to partake of European comfort for any length of time and, above all,

the laziness of the Zulu is at odds with the imperative to make a performance of a gendered British identity.

Future investigation into colonial discourse by women could fruitfully engage with other issues such as the shifting nature of the gendered interactions between mistress and servant. Interesting work can be done on the ambiguous relationships that existed between colonial lady of the house and the (usually) male servant. While the memoirs are often filled with grumbling, there is also evidence of strong bonds being formed on both sides, thus upsetting the received versions of the tyranny of the mistress and the resentful servitude of the servant.

In conclusion, looking back over this paper, I fear I have left an overly negative impression of the women settlers I have been reviewing. I have had to read these texts from two positions: a feminist one which admires these colonial women who were strongly spiritual, often committed to improving the intellectual lives of the people they encountered, self-deprecating, compassionate and courageous; the other a postcolonial one, disapproving of racism, noting the lack of knowledge of indigenous peoples, loathing the snobbery and the pretension, wanting to hear the voice of the other. It has been a disturbing and fascinating experience.

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