

Images of Africans in British Slavery Discourse Pro- and Anti-Slave Trade/Slavery Voices in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Monthly Review*, 1772 – 1833

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The year 1787, when the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* was established, and especially the late 80s and early 90s, saw continuous increase in philanthropic feelings, promoting the idea of benevolence towards other human beings that were exploited and enslaved. The principles of the French Revolution and French Enlightenment in particular are considered to have considerably influenced the thinking of the British at such a crucial moment in history. According to Walvin, “There was in a sense, an accumulating critique of slavery – primarily from men of the French and Scottish Enlightenment – which slowly but effectively began to erode the previously unchallenged assumptions and arguments in favour of slavery.” (Walvin 1986: 97) People like Montesquieu in France and Edmund Burke in Britain among others challenged the idea of enslaving people because of their different skin colour.¹ “It would be quite wrong, then, to imagine that the apparently obscure arguments of eminent philosophers remained the monopoly of an intellectual elite, for, very quickly, those ideas were transmuted into the stuff and argument of everyday political argument.” (Walvin 1986: 98) Religious groups like the Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic were particularly influential; people like Anthony Benezet and John Wesley “[...] came out publicly against slavery.” (Walvin 1986: 103)

The aim of this paper is to analyse letters to the editor and reviews of books, poems and plays in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Monthly Review* in 1772, 1787-1791, 1806/07, 1823-24, and 1833 as these highly influential

¹ Later, in his *Sketch of a Negro Code* in 1792 Burke argued for an amelioration of the slaves' conditions rather than for an outright ban, drifting into the argumentation of the slave trade supporters.

mediums of review reflected the diversity of responses to the slave trade/slavery at that time. A further aim is to pinpoint the comments made and arguments used by the reviewers and writers, either pro- or anti-slave trade/slavery. The analysis will thus concentrate on the echo the discussion of the issue of the slave trade/slavery had on the two periodicals, in particular which contributions the editors published either reflecting the government's ideology at that time or counteracting it. It is thus important to define the multi-semantic complexity of literary "mental images" (Lippman 1922: 13) as according to Gadamer, stereotypes of an individual form the historic existent reality and constitute the prerequisite for the process of understanding. (cf. Gadamer 1960: 255-6) According to Firchow, "Imagology can be broadly defined as the study of national/ethnic/racial/cultural images or stereotypes as they appear in literary contexts. Imagology explicitly includes the study of literary images of other groups (hetero-images) as well as images of one's own group (auto-images). Indeed, [...] the one is not possible without the other." (Firchow 1990: 135) The imagological analysis of selected passages from the two periodicals provides a valuable insight into ideological processes and the relationship between in- and outgroup(s); it thus substantially contributes to de-ideologising fixed auto- and hetero-images and reveals "[...] to what extent and how literature transports prejudices via stereotypes." (Kunow 1994: 5) For the preservation of social identity and self-respect stereotypes are instrumental in allowing the individual to "define its place in society." (Hoffrath-Zelloe 1995: 339)

The ideological processes and the relationship between in- and outgroup(s) proved crucial for the continuity of racist 'black and white thinking' over the centuries as the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1833 only marked the beginning of the scramble for Africa and the 'othering' of its black population. Eurocentricity, the belief of European superiority over lesser developed people, actually led to the contention that it was Europe's duty to civilise less-developed cultures: "The fact that universal civilization has for a long time originated from the European center has maintained the illusion that European culture was, in fact and by right, a universal culture. Its superiority over other civilizations seemd to provide the experimental verification of this postulate." (Ricoeur 1965: 277 qtd. in Mudimbe 1988: 19) The various 'racial' images of African natives created and conjured up during the abolition period were instrumental in

justifying the civilising mission of the European powers, arguing that saving Africans from their own degeneration was a humanitarian act bringing them closer to salvation. The analysis of the auto- and hetero-images and the allegedly true discrepancy between "'civilization' and 'Christianity' on the one hand, 'primitiveness' and 'paganism' on the other [...]" (Mudimbe 1988: 20) is most valuable and important as it confirms how in the colonial period these images contributed to forcing Africans "[...] into a new historical dimension" (Mudimbe 1988: 20), that is to strengthen the belief in Africa's inferiority, something I would like to call a 'historical reality.'

The Gentleman's Magazine was founded in London by Edward Cave in January, 1731. The original title was *The Gentleman's magazine: or, Monthly intelligencer* (1731-35); it changed to *The Gentleman's magazine and historical chronicle* (1736-1833), to *The Gentleman's magazine* (1834-June 1856) and finally to *The Gentleman's magazine and historical review* (July 1856-May 1868). In its early years it had a higher renown, wider circulation and larger impact than any other periodical of the time, and it effectively inaugurated one of the most characteristic and influential publishing modes in modern culture as a crucial component and stimulant of the 18th century public sphere. Cave's innovative approach was to create news on a monthly basis commenting on diverse topics. It included regular contributors, as well as quotes and extracts from other periodicals and books. "Cave originally designed the *Gentleman's* not as an original journal but as a summary and reprinting of the best work from dailies and weeklies." (Fader/Bornstein 1972: 98) Cave edited *The Gentleman's Magazine* under the pen name Sylvanus Urban until his death in 1754. "John Nichols alone wore the mask of Sylvanus Urban through the Romantic period, until 1826." (Fader/Bornstein 1972: 103)

The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal was founded in 1749 by the London bookseller and publisher Ralph Griffiths. Politically, it was characterised by the liberal, Whiggish, dissenting stance of Griffiths who founded it to oppose *The Gentleman's Magazine* on behalf of the Tories and the Church of England. After his death in 1803, his son George Edward Griffiths took over. His editorship lasted from 1803–1825; he was succeeded by Michael Joseph Quinn, who was editor until 1832. The last issue of *The Monthly Review* appeared in 1907.

The Abolition of the Slave Trade

The 1770s

The Somerset Case in 1772 deserves a special mention both in *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Monthly Review*, the GM printing Lord Mansfield's decision, "We cannot say the cause set forth by his return is allowed or approved of by the laws of this kingdom; therefore, the man must be discharged." (GM June 22, 1772: 293-4) His verdict can be considered a decisive point in the struggle for the abolition of the slave trade, fuelling the controversy between pro- and anti-slavery advocates spanning the next 30 years. In 1772 the GM publishes two articles, one written by A West Indian who considers the 'negro' a property sanctioned by an act of Parliament:

They are vested as goods and chattels [...] a trade is opened [...] The medium of this trade on the one hand are, manufactures, goods, wares, and other merchandize; on the other, captive Negroes, or slaves, which, for these commodities, are given in barter and exchange. It will be allowed, I presume, that these British traders, or merchants, have an absolute property in their merchandize. ("A West Indian" GM 1772: 308-9)

The writer of the second article claims that even though the slave is "[...] a thing to be valued [...] the Negro [...] has, certainly, a superior right and title to his own person; a claim of *natural* property in himself, which is *inestimable*, far above all *pecuniary* consideration." ("An Argument" GM 1772: 309) The MR also voices doubts about the right to enslave other people, especially about the claim that the slave trade rescues Africans from barbarous kings and princes who wage wars against each other, thus being a relief from conditions even worse. Mr. Hargrave questions the legality of the trade by calling it

[...] at least doubtful [...] the oppressive manner in which it has generally commenced, the cruel means necessary to enforce its continuance, and the mischiefs ensuing from the permission of it, furnish very strong presumptions against its injustice, and at all events evince the humanity and policy of those states, in which the use of it is no longer tolerated. (Mr. Hargrave MR Vol. 47/Art.III, 1772: 424)

The *MR* publishes a poem allegedly written by an ‘unhappy negro’ who shot himself on board a vessel, directly addressing readers to respect the right of every human being to freedom and liberty, distorted by Britain’s greed for gold.

And thou, whose impious avarice and pride
Thy God’s blest symbol to my brows deny’d,
Forbad me or the rights of man to claim,
Or share with thee a Christian’s hallow’d name,
Thou, too, farewell! – for not beyond the grave,
Thy power extends, nor is my dust thy slave.
Go bribe thy kindred ruffians with thy gold,
But dream not Nature’s rights are bought and sold.
In vain heav’n spread so wide the swelling sea;
Vast watry barrier, ‘twixt thy world and me;
Swift round the globe, by earth nor heav’n controul’d,
Fly proud oppression and dire lust of gold.
Where e’re the thirsty hell-hounds take their way,
Still Nature bleeds, and Man becomes their prey.
 (“The Dying Negro” *MR* Art. 14 , 1773: 63)

The reviewer, however, vindicates the brutality of the planters by arguing that it is necessary in order to restrain the uncontrollable passions of slaves:

He expresses the highest sense of human liberty, and vigorously asserts the natural and universal rights of mankind; in vindicating which, he, of course, condemns and execrates our West-Indian planters, &c. whose tyranny over their unhappy slaves will, we are afraid, in many instances, but too amply justify the severity of his muse [...] The fiery passion, and desperate resolution, which so strongly mark the negro’s general character, are well expressed in this epistle.
 (“The Dying Negro” *MR* Art. 14 , 1773: 63)

The 1780s and early 1790s

While the *GM* opens the debate about the slave trade a year later, the *MR* takes up the issue of slavery in 1787 by emphasising the backwardness of slaves in the review of *Christian Directions and Instructions for Negroes*, equating liberty with Christianity:

The *miserable state of the negro slaves* is ill suited to receive the doctrines of Christ [...] The first step to convert these *miserable wretches* would be to grant them their *liberty*, and suffer them to enjoy the *temporal benefits* which our *excellent religion* is capable of bestowing. The masters of these *oppressed people* seem, themselves, to be in much

want of Christian instruction. ("Christian Directions" *MR* Vol. 76/Art.85, 1785: 94)
[my emphasis]

The reviewer of Edward Rushton's *West-Indian Eclogues* agrees with Rushton that a not inconsiderable number of slaves are exposed to the violence and brutality of the planters but tries to play it down,

[...] writers have greatly exaggerated in their account of the *cruelties* exercised towards the Negroes, we have every reason to believe. The African is undoubtedly ruled with a rod of iron, - but then it should be remembered that (as many contend) he is not to be worked on by *affection*, but held in obedience by *fear*; and that the owner is driven to that mode of rule by a kind of political necessity: by the consideration that it is in such a conduct, in such a government, that the safety of himself and family depends. If, therefore, the punishment of the refractory slave is occasionally severe, it is not inflicted in wantonness, but for the purpose of keeping his brethren in awe, and for deterring them from mutiny and revolt, to which they are not a little prone. ("West-Indian Eclogues" *MR* Vol. 77/Art.VII, 1787: 283-4)

In 1788 the abolition movement gains momentum: the London Society helps to organise a national petition campaign against the slave trade; Parliament passes a law regulating the conditions of the slave trade; the *Privy Council Committee for Trade and Plantations* conducts an enquiry into British commercial relations with Africa, and provincial abolition societies organise. In response to the growing concern about conditions in the 'Middle Passage' the Dolben Act limits the number of enslaved people a ship is permitted to carry. The *MR* reminds readers of how morally reprehensible the British have acted towards the African people by calling "[...] Europeans that carry on this infernal trade [...] devils, and not human beings;" ("An Account" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.24, 1788: 343) and 'My heart,' says he, 'detests it as the gates of hell.' This is a good old Monthly Review sentiment." ("A Letter" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.25, 1788: 344) The *MR* reminds readers of the fact that slaves are to be rescued from their inferiority: once "[...] converted to Christianity...they might be more easily informed; till, at length, by the mild and uniform operation of Christian principles, slavery itself may be abolished." ("A Letter" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.26, 1787: 65-6)² The

² "He also describes not only the treatment they actually *do* meet with, but the manner in which they *ought to be* treated, in order to render their state of bondage not only comfortable to themselves, but justly beneficial to their masters." ("Observations on the Treatment of the Negroes

'racist' assumption "[...] that the 'profound ignorance' of the negroes 'keeps them humble and happy' and that they 'cannot *possibly* have the least *relish*, or even *conception*, of the enjoyment of Liberty'" ("Slavery no Oppression" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.23, 1788: 430) is rejected outright by characterising the author as "[...] offering so very defective a production to the eye of the public." ("Slavery no Oppression" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.23, 1788: 430) By contrast, in the review of James Tobin's *A Farewell Address to the Rev. Mr. James Ramsay* the writer extends the invitation not to accept Africans as equal human beings by emphasising the importance of England as a nation; by doing so, he once again accentuates the supposed inferiority of the black "breed":

Let England take and extend the hint, and not suffer our national character to be corrupted by too much intercourse with the numerous blacks which are found among us; and who from such intimacies with the common people particularly, as may in time contribute more than we are aware of, to alter the breed. (James Tobin *MR* Vol. 78/Art.18 1788: 428-9)

People are persuaded into believing that the slave trade saves Africans from their own cruelty: the reviewer agrees with the author when he opts for a "*qualified and duly regulated servitude*," advantageous not only for the master, but also promoting "the real welfare of the slave." ("Thoughts" *MR* Vol. 78/Art.39, 1788: 254)

The *GM* gives preference to pro-slave trade contributions where the writers/reviewers argue for a regulation of the slave trade in order not to endanger Britain's supremacy in Europe, by combining a humanitarian approach with the racist idea of the backwardness of Africans:

When European ships do not come, they starve or kill their numerous slaves [...] prisoners, if not sold, would be killed [...] the abolition of slavery in Europe would not be followed by the abolition of it in Africa, nor by any mitigation of the treatment of slaves by their own masters there. ("A Voyage" *GM* Vol. 58, May 1788: 434-5)

The act of contrasting the two nations and attributing negative qualities to Africans automatically casts a positive light on Europeans. In *Memoirs and Anecdotes of Philip Thicknesse* the reviewer approves of the racist undertone

in Jamaica, Including some Account of their Temper and Character, with Remarks on the Importation of Slaves from Africa, Hector M'Neill," *The Monthly Review* Vol. 79/Art. 24, 1788: 547)

when the author asserts that “White men cannot bear the violence of the sun in those climates, even without labour; but GOD has given the Negroe hair to protect him from the coup du soleil.” (“Memoirs” *GM* Vol. 58, May 1788: 632) It is in Africa where “[...] among them only cruelties are exercised” and where “[...] hundreds of free-born Englishmen are actually in slavery under the barbarian Moors in Africa, who are not thought of.” (“Memoirs” *GM* Vol. 58, May 1788: 632) The review of William Beckford’s *Remarks upon the Situation of the Negroes in Jamaica* cites the following passage:

‘The mind of a negro is vacant; and if he be healthy and vigorous, his labour is rather an employment than a toil. His condition is impressed upon his birth; and the least innovation, be it *even an introduction to freedom*, would not compensate his removal from his native soil, his dependence upon future events, and the abdication of general protection, and certain food.’ (“Remarks” *GM* Vol. 58, 1788: 809)

The reviewer agrees with the author that “[...] in the relative situation of master and slave, humanity is the foundation of interest,” but a total abolition of the trade would rather harm than help slaves. Baptizing heathen slaves would at least make them “[...] our equals [...] in Christianity; let them be instructed [...] in the moral and obedient duties of life; and be taught to love, rather than fear, their masters.” (“Remarks” *GM* Vol. 58, 1788: 807, 809) Polinus Alter stresses England’s civilising role by stating that “Every attempt to humanise the Africans must be a properer method than to emancipate them. In the one case, we qualify them to become members of society; in the other, we turn them loose on their fellow-creatures of Europe.” (Polinus Alter *GM* Vol. 58, July 13 1788: 599, 598)

In 1789 pro-slave trade voices in the *GM* substantiate the increasing racist attitude towards African slaves. The critique of the slave trade is presented as

[...] absurd and impolitic. It is founded on a mistaken notion of humanity, or rather on ignorance, folly, and enthusiasm. The Negroes of Africa, in their native country, are apparently useless in the great scale of human society [...] The only way to promote their civilization, to make them serviceable in their generation, and happy in themselves, is to introduce them into a state of activity and industry [...] Instead of SLAVES, let the Negroes be called ASSISTANT-PLANTERS; and we shall not then

hear such violent outcries against the slave trade by pious divines, tender-hearted poetesses, and short-sighted politicians. (No Planter *GM* Vol. 59, April 23 1789: 334)

As a result, philanthropic feelings should rather be directed towards people in workhouses:

Whoever compares an English poorhouse with West Indian Slavery has never heard a single discontent from the variety of characters whom hard necessity compels to seek relief in a workhouse, where their pride, their vanity, and oftentimes some of their finer feelings of the human mind, must inevitably be violated, and where, consequently, much distress must be endured in silence. ("Considerations" *GM* Vol. 59, 1789: 633-4)

The entries in the *MR* reflect an interesting development of argumentation towards a humanitarian point of view. The Africans are capable of an idea of "[...] *civil government, or moral distinctions, of religion, of a God, and a future state of existence;*" ("Am I" *MR* Vol. 80/Art.21, 1789: 69) and

[...] *free-born Britons, nursed in the lap of Liberty, [should] pay due regard to the natural rights of our fellow-mortals, - and [...] lend [their] best assistance to promote the benevolent design of freeing the poor Africans from the bondage in which they have been so long, unjustly, and so cruelly held.* ("On the African Slave Trade" *MR* Vol. 80, 1789: 96) [my emphasis]

In reviewing *Reflexions sur l'Esclavage des Negres* the reviewer M. Schwartz admits that the slave trade is "[...] contrary to every sentiment of humanity, and to every principle of true religion" and that it is based on "[...] corrupt dictates of commercial avarice and political expediency [...];" but he then adds that "[...] even as freemen, they [the slaves] will form a society distinct from that of the whites." ("Reflexions" *MR* Vol. 80/Art.XXIII, 1789: 661)³

In 1790 the *MR* strikes a balance between abolishing the slave trade and improving the situation of slaves: "[...] it is madness to extend liberty to the Negroes in the islands, till they are capable of its proper enjoyment." ("Observations" *MR* Vol. II/Art.23, 1790: 233) British civilisation "[...]

³ William Dickson in his *Letters on Slavery* declares that "[...] the capacities of the Africans are by no means inferior to those of the Europeans [...] he seems to have been...convinced of their natural and indefeasible claim to the common privileges of mankind, and of the wickedness, injustice, and cruelty of our depriving them of those natural rights [...];" (*Letters on Slavery, William Dickson, The Monthly Review* Vol. 80, Art. 18, 1789: 351).

would quickly have the misty cloud of general ignorance dispelled [...] and its inhabitants become again converts to Christianity.'" ("Liberty or Death" *MR* Vol. I/Art.19, 1790: 330) The humanitarian argument, the civilising/proselytising of slaves, is used to hide the underlying 'racist' idea of the inferiority of Africans. In *The Negroe equalled by few Europeans* the reviewer ridicules the idea of Africans being equal: "If Negroes were indeed [...] so superior are they in virtue to Europeans, that instead of being our slaves, they ought to be our masters." ("The Negroe" *MR* Vol. III/Art.46, 1790: 348) On the contrary, in the review of Nisbet's *The Capacity of Negroes* human qualities are attributed to slaves:

[...] we think the author has fully proved *that the Negroes are capable of being actuated by religious and moral principles; or, in other words, that a Negroe is created with the power of conscientiously discharging his duty towards God and man* [...] ("The Capacity" *MR* Vol. II/Art.53, 1790: 120)

The *GM* emphasises the merit of planters in gaining profits for the mother country and warns against abolishing the slave trade; it is the Parliament's duty to accept the rights of colonists to private property.

The rights of the British colonists are as inviolable as those of their fellow-citizens within any part of the British dominions [...] The authority of a British Parliament is not competent to destroy, nor partially to mutilate, private properties. ("West India Intelligence" (*GM* Vol. 60/Part I, 1790: 171)

In 1791 in the *MR* the humanitarian justification of the slave trade is used by the pro-slave trade lobby to emphasise the arrested development of Africans, from which they cannot be rescued:

The author considers the trade in slaves as a moral evil, a religious evil, and a political one: it is certainly all three; and we are sorry to add, that it is one of those evils which the mass of mankind never were, and in all probability never will be, sufficiently enlightened to eradicate [...] Bring the African here, and he will be entitled to the civil institutions in force here: but at home, he enjoys all to which he is entitled, according to the usages that prevail in his own country; and they appear to be, what the author declares to be contrary to the intentions of his Creator; wanton butchery, or sale into captivity, from neither of which it is in our power to release him. ("Reflections" *MR* Vol. 6/Art.32, 1791: 223, 224)

It is England's duty to buy slaves from other nations in order to save them from worse treatment: "[...] it is a real kindness to purchase them out of worse hands. What begins in slavery, then, will soon relax into common service for *common protection*." ("Reflections" *MR* Vol. 6/Art.23, 1791: 224 [my emphasis])

The *GM* has recourse to the humanitarian argument by portraying planters as benevolent masters: African slaves

[...] are commanded to obey their masters with cheerfulness and delight, with sincerity and good-will; and masters [...] use their authority over them not imperiously and with rigour, but mildly and with gentleness. They are told to govern with moderation and temper, knowing that *their* Master also is in Heaven. (Paul Gemsege *GM* Vol. 61/Part I, 1791: 206)

The 1800s: The "Abolition Act"

In 1806 the *GM* reviews *Notes on the West Indies* by George Pinckard praising its author as "[...] subservient to the interests of Humanity and his Country; and by turns we melt at his pathetic descriptions of the horrors of slavery, and its concomitant ill effects on the moral as well as the physical character of our fellow-men." (George Pinckard *GM* Vol. 76/Part II, 1806: 740) By quoting several passages from the book the reviewer depicts the merry life of slaves on the plantations describing their music and dances "[...] during their gala hours of Saturday night and Sunday [...]", but then spoils its positive effect by characterising their music as "of a savage nature [...] wholly deficient in softness and melody" and their dances as "highly indecent [...] peculiarly striking, indeed almost ridiculous." (George Pinckard *GM* Vol. 76/Part II, 1806: 741)

The *MR* publishes the review of Captain Beaver's *African Memoranda* describing Captain Beaver's exertions in establishing a colony on the Western coast of Africa, on the island of Bulama. The reviewer seems to support Captain Beaver's view of civilising Africa with "[...] the benevolent design of introducing civilization and its concomitant blessings among the savage Negroes of that immense peninsula [...]." The review of the book is a classic example of contributions published in the magazine: the reviewer agrees with the author that the slave trade is a dreadful and appalling example of exploiting and enslaving human beings to be done away with, but first the civilisation of Africa should be accomplished, "[...] in time [...]" by bringing her in contact with more enlightenend nations, and by

establishing a communication between her and the Christian world on principles at least not abhorrent to Christianity." The ideological ambiguity in the process of colonising Africa and its inhabitants manifests itself in the claim that the sole intention of the colonisers is "[...] to purchase land in Africa from those who claimed a right to the soil, and not to take forcible possession of it; to try whether it could not be cultivated by free natives, to induce the degraded Africans to labour and industry, and to ameliorate their condition by the introduction of religion and letters." Even if the reviewer creates the illusion of a rightful purchase of African soil, he again falls into the trap of the 'racist' claiming that Africans are degraded, and that in Captain Beaver's words everybody [the coloniser] is possessed by "[...] a lowness of spirit, a general despondency [...]" once setting foot on African soil. The abolition of the slave trade should be "[...] left to the gradual, but sure, operation of reason, and example," that is to gradually enlighten the people of Africa instead of eradicating "[...] vices, customs, or prejudices, immemorially rooted in an unenlightened people, by shocking [...]" as this has "[...] done a great deal of mischief already." (Captain P. Beaver *MR* Vol. 49/Art.II, Jan-April 1806: 357, 358, 360, 364, 365)

In 1807 fewer voices address the issue of the slave trade as the whole discussion seems to lose ground. The *MR* observes that the trade in slaves "[...] stimulates the Africans to make war on each other; and that, if Europeans withdrew from this nefarious commerce, a powerful temptation to crime in the negroe princes would cease." ("A Defence" *MR* Vol. 52/Art.38, 1807: 220) The review of George Pinckard's *Notes on the West Indies* in 1807 cites different passages from the *GM* in 1806. The reviewer illustrates the impolicy of the system of slavery by citing the excerpt where Pinckard avers that "[...] we could not but remark that the manner of executing the task [whipping of slaves] afforded a striking example of the indolence of climate and of slavery. Nothing of diligence, nor industry appeared among them; the same task could be performed by English laborers rather than "[...] by a dozen of these indolent meagre-looking beings." (George Pinckard *MR* Vol. 53, May-August 1807: 172)

The *GM*, on the other hand, claims that an outright ban of the trade would result in placing "[...] the Negro under the protection of just and *well-administered* laws [...] open[ing] a trade, upon an honorable basis [...] civilize[ing] and [...] convert[ing] Africa to the Christian Faith." (Benevolus *GM* Dec 2 1807: 130)

The Abolition of Slavery

The 1820s

The *Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery* throughout the British Dominions, later called *The Anti-Slavery Society*, was founded in 1823 including members like William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, Henry Brougham, and Thomas Fowell Buxton who took over when Wilberforce retired in 1825. "The Anti-Slavery Society called for the adoption of measures to improve slave conditions in the West Indies, together with a plan for gradual emancipation leading ultimately to complete freedom." (Oldfield 2001) Emancipation of slaves in the colonies came to prominence when the slave revolt in Demerara and the death of the white missionary John Smith in jail revived the fight between abolitionists and the plantocracy in the West Indies. According to Walvin, "By the mid-1820s a commitment to emancipation was not merely a popular feeling, but had been embraced by powerful sections of British society [...] By that time abolitionism had also taken on a new perspective [...] The question of the economics of slavery became ever more prominent in political argument." (Walvin 1981: 70, 71) The rights of man and the fact that black slaves in the colonies were British subjects entitled to the same rights by divine law (cf. Walvin 1981: 73-4) dominated the discussion of the 1820s as more and more religious groups condemned slavery as contrary to religious feeling.

In the *MR* the reviewer of Wilberforce's *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire* and Macaulay's *Negro Slavery* reminds readers that "*Particular instances of cruelty must always be kept before the public eye, or slavery will never be abolished,*" (William Wilberforce *MR* Vol. CI/Art. II+III, May-August 1823: 129) acknowledging that the English public is reluctant to believe that planters have ameliorated the conditions of slaves in the colonies. Paternalism prompts the British nation to protect slaves "[...] from every species of cruelty, so to instruct them, and so to improve their situation generally, that they may in some degree rise from the prostration in which they have so long been kept." (Zachary Macaulay *MR* Vol. CI/Art. II+III, May-August 1823: 142) The instruction consists in converting them to Christianity in order to counteract "[...] an almost universal destitution of religious and moral instruction among the slaves in the West Indies" where "[...] generation after generation passes away in the same Pagan ignorance and brutal degradation." (William Wilberforce *MR*

Vol. CI/Art. II+III, May-August 1823: 139) The emancipation of slaves seems manageable but only in connection with an apprenticeship during which “[...] opportunities and inducements are given to them; the Africans are by no means an indolent race [...] every encouragement, then, should be extended to their industrious endeavors.” (J. Stewart *MR* Vol. CII/Art. VI, Sept.-Dec. 1823: 50) Although free labour is considered to be more profitable than slave labour, the decisive factor in their education is “[...] correcting the habits of the slave, and accustoming him to industry and forethought [...] until we cease to regard and treat them as brutes, it is vain to expect to conduct themselves like rational and responsible creatures.” (J. Stewart *MR* Vol. CII/Art. VI, Sept.-Dec. 1823: 50, 51)

The *GM* publishes T. Walters’s letter in which he appeals to the readers not to give up Africa as it is actually the country itself that has produced the “Negro race.” (T. Walters *GM* Vol. XCIII, July-Dec. 1823: 126) He agrees with Dr. Wells, whom he also cites in his letter, that their appearance and deficient mental faculties can be developed by settling the African coast and increasing the commerce with Africa.

In 1824 the *MR* reviews *The Slavery of the British West India Colonies delineated* supporting the call of abolitionists to alleviate the sufferings of slaves by improving “[...] the moral and intellectual condition of the slave population.” (“The Slavery” *MR* Vol. CIII/Art. VII, Jan.-April 1824: 288) Religious conversion assumes a central position within the abolition discourse as more and more people consider religious instruction the means to civilise slaves:

The promulgation of religious knowledge among the slave-population of our colonies is in so many various ways desirable [...] We should hope that the character of the slave, for instance, would rise in the estimation of his master, on his becoming a member of the same church with himself: since the heathen superstitions of this unfortunate race have, hitherto, been alleged by their oppressors as an excuse for treating them like creatures with whom it was impossible to entertain any community of feeling [...] The conversion of the Negroes, therefore, we must regard as one step towards their liberation. (“Report” *MR* Vol. CIV/Art. 24, May-August 1824: 335)

The *GM* publishes Juvenis’s letter to the editor on April 10 where he reverts to the stereotypical depiction of African slaves as indolent, uncivilized and not ready to be set free. He replies to his own question, “How, then, if it be

true that they have lived and still do live under an accumulated mass of misery, hardship, and oppression – how, it may be asked, has there lived and prospered, and does still live and prosper, a sufficient population to keep in cultivation the whole of those islands?” (Juvenis *GM* Vol. XCIV, Jan.-June 1824: 518) by rekindling the negative image of slaves and at the same time awakening age-old fears:

They are ignorant of the bonds which cement human society; illiterate; uncivilized, and the greater part of them more inclined to spend their time in indolence, lasciviousness, and debauchery, rather than apply themselves to industrious pursuits, they are susceptible of every impression which carries in it a spirit of rebellion; their dispositions are cruel in the extreme, and when their savage minds are bent on bloody deeds [...] their ferocity towards the whites knows no bounds; there is no species of barbarity so horrid that they will not practice on their unfortunate victims. The blood which circulates in their veins, flows as it were from a poisoned source, bearing with it whatever savours of corruption. (Juvenis *GM* Vol. XCIV, Jan.-June 1824: 518)

Christian instruction proves once again to be the pillar of European modernised and civilised society as only by being educated African slaves have a small chance of being considered equal. “It is no more in the nature of Africans to be ferocious, than it is of Europeans; on the contrary, when kindly treated, they are susceptible of the most grateful attachment even as slaves; but hard bondage and cruel usage are calculated to exasperate the gentlest natures;” it is thus the “[...] duty [of] Christians, and their interest as men, [to] anticipat[e] and promot[e] its speedy abolition” and to “[...] promote the religious improvement recommended.” (*GM* Vol. XCIV, July-Dec. 1824: 106, 107, 108)⁴

The 1830s

The year 1833 presents a completely different picture as by then a pro-slavery argumentation was no longer tenable; still, Mrs. Carmichael in *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured, and Negro*

⁴ He proposes certain measures to be taken in order to emancipate slaves: no separation of families; they should be educated; no more lashes; they should be called Africans; working hours are continually reduced until they are set free; a ‘middle’ class should be created to bridge the gap; children are born free; schools should be established for children; employment should be offered; dissemination of Christian knowledge; as a result, Africans will become industrious members of society.

Population of the West Indies claims that slaves are better off than peasants at home. The reviewer ironically asks:

Not see the driver flog? Why to be sure not – what! – do it in the presence of an English lady? No, no, - the system of negro ill-treatment stands upon a better organized footing than that [...] he [the slave] is seen smiling and singing and making his labour a source of amusement [...] he is then shewn to be an object of tenderness, should his little black finger only ache; and, in short, the prosperous state of the negro is not more to be admired than the generosity of the paternal government under which he has the good fortune to live!! (Mrs. Carmichael *MR* Vol. III/Art. X, 1833: 124)

Additionally, the *MR* reviews books that deliver a death blow to slavery claiming that waged labour is more profitable than slavery, and that enslaving human beings is inhumane and unjust: “[...] slave holding is as unprofitable as it is criminal [...] as costly as it is unjust [...]” (Josiah Conder *MR* Vol. II/Art. VIII, 1833: 231) In *Records of a Voyage to the Western Coast of Africa* the reviewer calls slavery “[...] the foul commerce in human flesh [...] a crime of one man chaining another down to slavery.” (Peter Leonard *MR* Vol. II/Art. III, 1833: 21-2)

The *GM* deals with the compensation - about 20,000,000 pounds - the planters are entitled to and the apprenticeship of slaves. There are still voices that warn against boosting the slave trade of other countries resulting in making “[...] Foreign Slave Colonies flourish at the expense of our own.” (Domestic Occurrences May *GM* 10, 1833: 460) An account of the West Indies after the abolition of slavery saw planters and slaveholders naturally alarmed, demanding justice. On August 7th “The Slavery Abolition Bill was read a third time, and passed” (Proceedings in Parliament *GM*, Aug. 7 1833: 167) in the House of Commons and on August 20th “The Colonial Slavery Abolition Bill was read a third time, and passed” (Proceedings in Parliament *GM*, Aug. 20 1833: 169) in the House of Lords.

Conclusions

The attempt to speculate about the influence magazines in the second half of the 18th and early 19th centuries had on the reading public - in this particular case *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Monthly Review* - is quite futile as

The small sale of such journals did not accurately represent real circulation, for most people preferred to read the local coffee-house copy rather than to subscribe individually. Thus the middle class educated itself as best it could from coffee-house periodicals and library novels. (Fader/Bornstein 1972: x);

in addition, periodicals at that time were only available at “extraordinarily high price.” (Fader/Bornstein 1972: x) None the less, the magazine “[...] had the advantage of containing all the pertinent news and controversy of the month” which “[...] made it appeal to a wider circle of readers than the average journal [...],” revealing the “[...] dual character of the age [...] its baseness and idealism, its egotism and humanitarian aspiration, its smugness and inquiring spirit, its self-sufficiency and its liberal adventurousness.” (Carlson 1938: 62, 61, 239)

Quite similarly, the attempt to find an answer to the question in how far magazines reflected public opinion at that time can also only prove futile. Even if Carlson claims that the magazine provided readers with a “kaleidoscopic view of the culture of a century,” reflecting “[...] the developments of popular taste,” (Carlson 1938: 58) it is hardly possible to say to what extent the periodical’s news – in particular letters, reviews, and reports dealing with the slave trade and slavery – had a direct bearing on how people reacted to and gauged the issue of slavery and its development from 1772 to 1833.

One might suppose that the two respective periodicals had a certain editorial policy favouring either pro- or anti-slave trade/slavery comments and contributions, but it is not as simplistic as that. It is certainly true that *The Gentleman's Magazine* can be said to have given preference to pro-slave trade/slavery arguments – but still, it varied over the respective period - while *The Monthly Review* tended more towards focussing on the humanitarian aspect of the issue of slavery. As has been shown, the magazines basically included the argumentation from both sides with the editors and contributors judging the situation, which then makes it

practically impossible to assess how they influenced the public's stance on slavery.

Public opinion hardly ever reflects the approach of the majority of the people to a certain topic, "[...] the circulation of a journal does not necessarily measure the prevalence of the views it advocates [...] for every organ tends to exaggerate the support its views command." (Bryce 1971: 8) Public opinion is closely interwoven with different social groupings and "[...] it articulates and formulates not only the deliberate judgements of the rational elements within the collectivity but the evanescent common will, which somehow integrates and momentarily crystallises the sporadic sentiments and loyalties of the masses of the population." (Bauer 1971: 6)

What the periodicals or its editors did was to 'reproduce' or 'circulate' an ideology about a certain issue to a limited readership, presenting pro- and anti-slave trade/slavery comments to readers. According to Habermas, public opinion is the "enlightened result of the common and public reflection upon the foundations of the societal order." (Habermas 1990: 167/my translation) Since public opinion can only represent the class ethos and social identity of the ruling class and not the actual attitude of the mass of people, the respective periodicals were in part misused as a means to spread stereotypical images of African slaves, not only by supporters but also by abolitionists. Habermas also avers that "true politics can't take a step without having paid tribute to morality first," (Habermas 1990: 179/my translation) but actually it did. Morality was/is inextricably interwoven with ideology; only when abolitionists introduced the moral and/or humanitarian argument of slaves suffering from cruel treatment to which Great Britain should put an end to, the 'moral authority' of the empire suggesting that enslaving Africans would save them from their own degeneration began to crumble, or at least was challenged.

Quite similarly, abolitionists took this humanitarian argument to proclaim that slaves should be freed from their misery since they had the right to be free, but they never questioned the social standing of Africans. Their inferiority in regard to their social position within the European ideological conception of rank still marked them as being below Europeans; what they still required was to be educated, both morally and religiously:

On the other hand the abolitionists were faced with the facts of black technical inferiority which allowed them to be captured and turned into slaves. Their problem, as they saw it, was to explain to the public why the African did not

comport himself like a European, why he had different social codes which by European standards were 'immoral,' and why above all, he was not a Christian, did not believe in Christ, and exhibited no great desire to do so. To say that it was his nature was to fall into the racist's trap: since he was inferior, why not use him for inferior slave work? To say that he was the same in all respects as the white man was patently untrue if one judged all blacks – as they did – by the narrow standards of the literate, wealthy European gentleman. (Gratus 1973: 277)

How did they deal with this dilemma? According to Jack Gratus,

Their answer was to say that slavery made the black man what he was, but that by converting him to Christianity – and freeing his soul from barbarous paganism, if not freeing his body – he could be made virtually the same as the white man. In their view he could never be exactly the same [...] they, too, were unable to conceive of the emancipated slaves as men equal in every respect to their former white masters. Wilberforce, when he referred to emancipation always spoke of the future ex-slaves as the 'greatful peasantry'.⁵ (Gratus 1973: 277)

The slave was still a heathen once liberated and thus, still had a white master:

Once he became a Christian he was on the road to equality, but as it was only the white man who could give him what he lacked, who could bring to him the light of the Gospel, he would always remain to some extent inferior even when he was converted. The relative position of white and black would therefore in their view always be that of teacher and students, minister and congregation, or, as it turned out, governor and governed. (Gratus 1973: 277)

Summing up, in 1772 both the *GM* and the *MR* attach significance to the natural right of every human being to liberty. Although a review in the *GM* capitalises on the fact that slaves are to be treated as chattel to justify their enslavement, it is the personal liberty of every human being that is to be granted to slaves. The *MR* describes the trade in slaves as unjust and illegal highlighting the humanitarian act of saving slaves to provide them with a secure life under European guidance, and the Christian act of disputing

⁵ 'Thought by Christianity, they will sustain with patience the sufferings of their actual lot, while the same instructions will rapidly prepare them for a better; and instead of being objects at one time of contempt and at another of terror...they will soon be regarded as a grateful peasantry.' (Wilberforce, *An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire in behalf of the Negro slaves in the West Indies* 73, qtd. in Gratus 1973: 277.)

slavery; nevertheless, even if human liberty is a natural right, the education of slaves justifies violence.

The reviews of 1787 clearly show the discursive patterns used in the argumentation against abolishing the slave trade: the reviewers, on the one hand, make use of humanitarian and religious arguments admitting that the condition of slaves is inhumane, but on the other argue for a continuation of the trade under regulated conditions - entailing the civilising and proselytising of the poor creatures. The chasm/contrast between African slaves and civilised Europeans that is built up confirms the racist attitude towards Africans hiding under the cloak of humanitarianism and religion; the promoters discredit the arguments of the abolitionists, and picture Africans as being treated accordingly. In 1788, while in the *MR* the pro-slave trade faction argues that a qualified trade would not only be beneficial to the country's economy but also enhance the situation of the slaves, raising the question of the equality of Africans, in the *GM* the slave trade supporters claim that inferior slaves are saved from their own cruel fate in Africa by being deported and civilised. In 1789 the racial argumentation features prominently in the *GM*, categorising African slaves as useless in the great scale of humanity and therefore, in need of being civilised. Quite contrary, the focus of attention in the reviews of the *MR* shifts to the Africans' right to liberty and to the fact that slavery is contrary to religion and humanity. In 1790 the voices in the *GM* are only pro-slave trade arguing in favour of the planters being the pillars of economy who have a right to their private property; the same can be said of the *MR* where the argumentation of the pro-slave trade lobby fuses economic and racial arguments asserting that a regulated trade would make it easier to civilise the 'ignorant sufferers'. In 1791 the slave trade supporters in the *MR* distance themselves from eradicating such an abominable business. The anti-slave trade contribution comments on the duty of the British to support the MPs in favour of abolition. A review in the *GM* portrays planters as benevolent, hinting at the fact that other nations are also oppressing 'inferior' peoples. The anti-slave trade contribution characterises supporters as "miserable men" who sacrifice the natural rights of man, human feelings, religion, and justice to "self-interest."

As the final blow of the slave trade in 1807 drew nearer, the argumentation of both opponents and supporters in 1806/07 tended towards coming up with a solution to the problem of compensation, blaming other countries for

their ongoing trade, making sure that economic ties with Africa would result in a profitable trade, and bringing civilisation to the people in Africa - the issue of humanity being closely related to the principle of justice but also to the idea of Britons civilising poor African heathens.

In 1823 the contributions in both periodicals highlight the importance to educate Africans but with the difference that the *MR* by accusing slaveholders of rapine and fraud maintains that the first step is to stop regarding Africans as brutes whereas the *GM* focusses on the racial argument confirming the intellectual and cultural gap between Europeans and Africans, and on the economic argument warning Britain against her total economic ruin. In 1824 the *MR* stresses the humanitarian assistance Britain should provide for the poor slaves in order to improve their situation; this is to be accomplished by religious conversion being one step towards liberation. Since slavery is a system of rapine and murder opposed to the principles of justice and humanity, it is Britain's duty to fight against not only her own economic greed but also that of other nations. The *GM* warns against rushing into total ruin by reminding readers of the economic viability of the colonies. A gradual emancipation and the introduction of free labour should serve as an educating process for slaves: British benevolent masters would eventually eradicate the barbarity of Africans by religious instruction.

The year 1833 finally sees the abolition of slavery with the *MR* describing slavery as unprofitable, illegal and inhumane and the *GM* ruminating on compensation and the apprenticeship of slaves.

The analysis of the two periodicals around the respective keydates (1772, 1787 to 1791, 1806/07, 1823/24, and 1833) substantiates the clash between the egalitarian and racist paradigm, abolitionist/anti-slave trade argumentation against gradualist/pro-slave trade argumentation. The overall argumentation had a certain inherent racist undertone as either way African slaves were considered inferior, at least culturally. Thus, the whole discussion about whether to abolish the slave trade is dominated by remarks about the cultural and biological inferiority of African slaves as racial discrimination permeated western society at that time. The argumentative clusters used to argue against the slave trade/slavery were based on a humanitarian, legal, national and religious approach with which abolitionists tried to persuade the public into feeling compassion for enslaved Africans. In contrast to the supporters of the slave trade who

overtly called the attention to the inferiority of Africans, the abolitionist approach also implied the idea of the inferiority of Africans as only religious education and civilisation would make them equal members on the scale of humanity.

The relevance of the analysis of auto- and hetero-images for African studies becomes apparent when we consider the continuity of racial thinking and the continuity of stereotypical representations of non-Westeners in today's 'modern thinking.' According to Elleke Boehmer,

European hegemony was its strong belief in the potential for universalization of its knowledge in science, politics, and religion, and, in particular, of its own forms of rationality. European colonisers held the conviction not merely that the rest of the world could be understood in its terms, but that the rest of the world also could [...] be encouraged to interpret reality in a European way. (Boehmer 1995: 79)

The 'European way' included the humanitarian intervention in Africa, that is colonising, civilising and christianising Africa: "[...] at its most radical and far-reaching it was nothing less than the intention to use British national power in the cause of world-wide Christian morality." (Curtin 1964: 298) Immanuel Wallerstein lists Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda's four arguments why Amerindians ought to be civilised, christianised and colonised: 1) because they were savages void of any skills and therefore destined to be governed, 2) because having violated "divine and natural law" by offering up sacrifices to their idolatrous gods they had to be punished, 3) because it was the civilised nation's duty to civilise poor heathens, 4) thus facilitating "Christian Evangelization." (Wallerstein 2006: 5) This 'humanitarian mission' implied portraying non-Europeans as inferior human beings in need of salvation from their own vices; exactly these images spread to support the ideological mission laid the foundations for the profoundly detrimental psychological impact A. Adu Boahen describes as follows:

[...] the generation of a deep feeling of inferiority as well as the loss of a sense of human dignity among Africans. Both complexes were surely the outcome not only of the wholesale condemnation of everything African already referred to but, above all, of the practice of racial discrimination and the constant humiliation and oppression to which Africans were subjected throughout the colonial period. (Boahen 1987: 108)

That is why Boahen brands colonialism as “[...] a period of wasted opportunities, of ruthless exploitation of the resources of Africa, and on balance of the underdevelopment and humiliation of the peoples of Africa.” (Boahen 1987: 109) Wallerstein, quite similarly, states, “Unlike European civilization, which was asserted to be inherently progressive, the other high civilizations must have been somehow frozen in their trajectories, incapable therefore of transforming themselves into some version of modernity without the intrusion of outside (that is, European) forces.” (Wallerstein 2006: 33) Thus, it is of crucial importance to scrutinise images of the ‘other’ conjured up in the 18th and 19th centuries in order not only to lay bare the foundations of racist thinking but also to shake the foundations of a society built on black and white thinking.

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