Reading the Red Island: Travel Writing and Maps of Madagascar

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"All accounts of travel are either authentic or fictitious. Those of the former class may be, and frequently are, embroidered by the writer's imagination. This does not, however, alter the fact that in every case the narrative is an account of, either a voyage that has actually been made, or of a voyage that never had any existence outside of the author's imagination" (1963: 8).

-William Eddy

"Maps...even today are, interpreted, according not only to what is objectively out there, but also to what we wish were out there, or hope to find out there" (1993: 24).

-Kent C. Ryden

**Introduction**

In this paper, I analyze a series of travel writing and maps of Madagascar in order to understand the way in which the island has come to be popularly perceived today. The texts I review are not a comprehensive representation of travel writing on Madagascar. Rather, they have been selected for the purpose of executing a diachronic study of the representation of Madagascar in terms of travel. Information from the texts provides a context for the maps, assisting in the process of placing the maps within a social, cultural and historical context.

Following the anthropology of Roland Barthes (and others), I employ an expanded notion of the word *text* in this paper: one that includes other cultural productions such as maps and photographs, as well as the landscape itself. Places must be explored as "intertextual sites" because "various texts and discursive practices based on previous texts are deeply inscribed in their landscapes and institutions" (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 8). According to the theoretical observations of sociologist Michel de Certeau (1988: 115), "every story is a travel story - a spatial practice." That is, every narrative account evokes space in the mind of the reader. Protagonists move through and act within space. However, at times narratives are silent. Children's picture books provoke a narrative in the mind of the child. If he or she cannot read, the story that has been told in the past can be grafted onto the imagery. The narrative arises from within the child's
memory and plays among the pictures on the page. Likewise, the story, told separately from the pictures, provokes mental images of the pictures within the child's imagination. The space within the plot of the narrative, the spatial references within the pictures, and the space within the mind of the child all come together - though perhaps not simultaneously.

In a similar manner, the narrative space in travel writing informs and is informed by visual and mental images of space. Photographs, maps and other cultural materials come together in the mind to form an image. Within the rubric of science, some accounts of space are more objective than other, more subjective accounts. De Certeau (1988: 119) cites a study of New Yorker's descriptions of their apartments used to illustrate the "social interactions and conventions that govern 'natural language" by C. Linde and W. Labove. The descriptions resulted in two types: the map and the tour. Some accounts listed the rooms of the apartment in no spatial order. These were labeled maps because they provided a description that presented a tableau. A tour, on the other hand, is an active description of movements. In these accounts, the apartment dwellers described what it was like to enter the door of their apartment and move from room to room (ibid.).

The differences between maps and tours have been framed by scientific discourse. Satellite images, guide books, and street maps have come to represent a scientific and truthful map. Maps are created to be used in navigating a landscape and in obtaining objective information. In contrast, the tour, which becomes the domain of the travel narrative, is subjective and often anecdotal. Readers of travel texts about Madagascar have engaged both maps (and other images of space) and travel writing in creating an image of the island. They have employed travel texts in the creation of mental maps of the landscape and people, and have recalled these texts in their interpretation of maps, photographs, and other cultural materials. Travel texts create models for future "readings" of landscape.
"A naturalist's paradise, Madagascar lies only 250 miles off the coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean - but is a world apart. Evolving in isolation, Madagascar's plant and wildlife is a living laboratory for naturalists and biologists - an island sanctuary for mammal, bird, and flora species found nowhere else on earth! (In many ways, Madagascar is the Indian Ocean counterpart of the Galapagos Islands!) We'll see several varieties of lemur - unique primates - and an abundance of other birds and wildlife. Our visit here will also focus on the fascinating Malagasy culture, which centers around ancestor worship.

In a fascinating land which few travelers visit, our itinerary combines the best wildlife reserves, fantastic beaches and coastal scenery, rugged highlands, spiny forest, and the traditional tribal peoples of the south" (1994: 67).

-Scott Senauke

Travel books and brochures have a profound effect on perceptions of place. Upon receiving a catalogue from Wilderness Travel which included the 15-day wildlife adventure described above, I began to reflect on the way in which Madagascar has come to be understood and represented in the Western world. Madagascar has been the subject of a corpus of travel tales dating from the distant past to the present. Marco Polo (1298) heard rumors of the mysterious land as he crossed Arabia. He was told of "the biggest and best [island] in the whole world" by Islamic traders (Shoumatoff 1988: 51). Polo is often credited with naming the island as he supposedly confused the island with other Arabic descriptions of Mogadishu and bestowed it with its name, Madagascar. According to Polo, the island was inhabited by all of the animals of the African mainland, including the Roc of Persian and Arabic legend. The Roc [figure 1] was a half-bird, half-lion, "which pounced on elephants, flew up with them to great height, let them go, and then fed on the splattered carcasses" (ibid.).

Currently, Dannon's commercial for yogurt includes a reference to the exotic and distant location from which the company obtains its vanilla. An old map of Madagascar is flashed on the television screen with a description of their travel to this far away place to obtain the highest quality vanilla. Similarly, a
recent Wendy's commercial has Dave, the founder of Wendy's, in an elite, "snooty" dinner party with a couple who are wearing opera glasses and tuxedos. When Dave questions the minuscule portions and content of the haute cuisine on his plate, the couple respond (as if to impress him) that the appetizer was flown in from Madagascar. Dave is unimpressed, and leaves for a more plentiful and "American" meal at Wendy's. While Dannon's and Wendy's propaganda or the description by Wilderness Travel are hardly classic examples of travel tales, they have certainly been informed by earlier descriptive texts and images like those of the exotic Roc in Marco Polo's account.

Marco Polo can be seen as one of the first great travelers, and as we all know, travel is almost always followed by a recounting of events for others. The infamous slide shows and home movies that accompany an invitation to dinner following a neighbor's vacation, are manifestations of a desire to relate an experience of place for an audience. In these cases, we find ourselves pushing food around our plate in boredom, while being bombarded by images of our neighbor's kids in sunglasses next to a giant mouse. However, there are times when tales of travel have been sought out for entertainment or used as informative models by those who are preparing to travel. Souvenirs and accounts of travel to exotic places are the focus of museum exhibitions, television shows, and popular literature. The more alluring and dangerous the place or difficult the journey, the more interesting the resulting material. Experience is shared and democratized through popular accounts and public displays. For example, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Huckleberry Finn* capture the experience of travel for all who can read.

Madagascar has long manifested ideas and images of the exotic and remote in the minds of many Europeans. Journalist and travel writer Alex Shoumatoff (1988: 46) says, "for as long as I can remember, the word [Madagascar] has had a magic ring, has been swathed in visions of the exotic bordering on the unreal." In Swift's time, many speculated that the mutinied marooning of Captain Gulliver was modeled after the pirates who sought refuge on its shores (Moore 1968: 102-3). Readers crowded around their maps and globes to attempt to decipher the cryptic code within Swift's text and to locate Lilliput on the map. These readers were attempting to transform an invented world into the "real" world by overlaying the text onto the map. In these situations, Swift's text was transformed from *tour* to *map.*
In his examination of metaphors of death at Niagara Falls, geographer Patrick McGreevy (1992: 50) notes that many visitors have seen landscape as a kind of text to be interpreted. They wish to "read" its signs and understand its meaning. Many say that they are "attracted" by the water and throw themselves in--creating a kind of "suicidal tourism." By reading poems, novels, travel journals and other texts written by Niagara's visitors, McGreevy (ibid.) found a source for the pervasive theme of death. He (ibid.) claims that people often come to understand Niagara Falls through textual representations of the landscape, which temper their experience of the falls. Simultaneously, because people view and act towards Niagara in terms of the death metaphor, it becomes a source for similar writing [a veritable "self-fulfilling prophecy"]. Hence, McGreevy shows us that travel writing about Niagara Falls has served as a prescription or a map for future travel. In de Certeau's words (1988: 120), the structure of the travel story is "marked out by the 'citation' of the places that result from them or authorize them." The stories of Niagara Falls produce a representation of the landscape for future readers while imposing an order of interpretation on the site (ibid.: 122). This imposed order is actuated throughout the practice of taking a tour of Niagara, both physically and through reading textual references to the Falls.

Madagascar presents a situation similar to that of Niagara Falls. The corpus of travel writing on Madagascar presents a series of themes which are consistent throughout. In Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 5) explores how travel and exploration writing produced "the rest of the world" for European readers. Travel writing, according to Pratt, is organized in the service of establishing boundaries between Europeans and others. She notes that travel writing of the 1740's was marked by "an orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history" (1992: 15). A type of travel writing arose which privileged the description of the landscape. Travel narratives became mediators between the scientific discourse of classification and the larger European public.

The natural history approach to writing was adopted by poets as well. The poet Rimbaud was critical of the exoticism employed by other contemporary poets in the late 1800s. He addressed his concern in the poem "Ce qu'on dit au poète à propos de fleurs:"
De vos forêts et de vos prés,
O très paisibles photographes!
La Flore est diverse à peu près
Comme des bouchons de carafes!

Toujours les végétaux Français,
Hargneux, phisiques, ridicules,
Où le ventre des chiens bassets
Navigue en paix, aux crépuscules-

O blanc Chasseur, qui cours sans bas
A travers le Pâtis panique,
Ne peux-tu pas, ne dois-tu pas
Connaître un peu ta botanique?

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Tu ferais succéder, je crains,
Aux grillons roux les Cantharides,
L'or des Rios au bleu des Rhins,-
Bref, aux Norvéges les Florides.

[In the fields and forests of your verse
-Oh, you peaceful photographers!-
The flora is about as diverse
As bottle corks and stoppers.

Always this French vegetation abounds,
Grouchy, coughing, silly and sick,
Where the bellies of basset hounds
Wallow through the growing dark-

O White Hunter, bootless in a
Panicky Pasture, it
Might really help to recall
Your botany a bit.

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I'm afraid you'd follow up
Russet crickets with Cantharides
Blues of Rhine with Rio golds
-In short, Norways, with Floridas.

(Translation by Ross in Ross 1993: 358-59, 362).
Rimbaud was speaking to other poets, particularly the French, however his poem provides poignant criticism of a larger literary audience. In her literary analysis of Rimbaud's poetry in relation to geography, Kristin Ross (1993: 357) notes that the entire poem reflects contemporary European constructions of place as colonial space. She points to the plurality of Norways and Floridas in Rimbaud's poem as examples of his disdain for the colonial approach to writing about places. She says, "Florida is not a place in all of its particularity, but a hodgepodge of exoticist clichés, textual citations, and trumped-up botanical references. By simply changing the bird, the insect, the color, PRESTO! We're in Norway" (1993: 362). In his book, Mapping the Invisible Landscape, folklorist Kent C. Ryden (1993: 221) explains that "the natural history essay...teaches primarily about pattern and beauty and meaning in the natural landscape, not about the human presence and imaginative life which the landscape sustains." This tendency persists in travel writing about Madagascar into the twentieth century.

Each author had his or her particular reasons for visiting Madagascar. Some were servants of colonial states or churches, others were entrepreneurs or adventurers. Their individual motivations notwithstanding, common themes and meta-narratives can be recognized in their written accounts. One of these themes is the exotic nature of the landscape and wildlife, characteristic of the natural history genre, as well as the complementary "wildness" of some of the people. The flora and fauna provide an element of the exotic as they are unique only to Madagascar and thus resemble little found in Europe and America. In discussing the human population of Madagascar, a distinction is commonly drawn between the more "civilized" Merina who inhabit the capital city in the center of the island, and the more "exotic" or "savage" peoples of the surrounding areas. These representations are not monolithic, yet the presentation of hierarchy of culture among the peoples of the island and the privileging of the landscape over human populations are consistent within the texts.

In 1861, the Reverend William Ellis, a British missionary, completed his travel accounts of three visits to Madagascar. Ellis' professional focus was the religious life of the Malagasy people yet he felt that it was important to provide a written account of all he had witnessed in his travels. Ellis (1861: vi) claims that his text describes "the novel and often singularly beautiful aspects of the country through which [he] passed, and the chief incidents of [his] visits, as they occurred, leaving [his] readers to form their own
opinions of the character of the people, their resources, and present civilization." He discusses the rare flora and fauna of the environment and the unique customs of the people. He tells of his annoyance with fellow travelers who smoked, and of the beautiful mountain scenery.

In describing his environment, Ellis adopts the natural history approach to writing about his travels. While Ellis' text was published over a century after the boom in natural history exploration, the influence of this form of cultural expansion and its textual descriptions is evident in his work. Ellis (1861: 480) speaks of a lemur on board the ship during his first trip to Madagascar. He says "It was a fine animal, and during the twenty-eight days of our passage I had frequent opportunities of observing its disposition and habits...It was gentle and sociable, seemingly grateful for any trifling notice or kindness." He also provides an account of the Malagasy people coming to his residence

"...to see whatever might be new...to look at the books and pictures that were generally lying on my table...To these objects of curiosity, a still greater attraction was added in my photographic apparatus...long and earnest were the comments and questionings about how it could be done. One man said it was *zamahary* - a word they sometimes used for God, by which they probably meant wonderful or supernatural" (Ellis 1861: 157-58).

Both of these accounts, one of a primate and the other of humans, are written similarly and in the manner of scientific documentation with bits of personalized musings. This approach to the description of the human and faunal populations of Madagascar links the two in a representation of "otherness," determined by the authority of his scientific writing. He also provides us with a tour (in de Certeau's terms) of the island's landscape. As he moves through the island, he creates an account of a mapped territory and provides an interpretation of the landscape. The place of the landscape is transformed to space through his movement (de Certeau 1988). That is, the geographically mapped territory is a "geometrical" place that is changed into an "anthropological" space by human movement and engagement with it (de Certeau 1988: 118). When reading the text, we in turn transform the place of his text into a practiced space by engaging with his perceptions and interpretations.
According to de Certeau (ibid.), "stories carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places... (and) they organize the play of changing relationships between places and spaces." As he goes about naming and describing the species of the island, Ellis assists in "collecting the value and importance of (Madagascar) because from thence we learn its produce of every kind" (John Adams in Pratt 1992: 34). While creating the exotic through his narrative, Ellis simultaneously provides us with pragmatic knowledge of the productive aspects of the island. He transforms the place of the landscape into a marketable space.

The marketability of Madagascar was of particular interest to another traveler. Walter D. Marcuse traveled to the island in search of a "remarkable bean," not the sweet, aromatic one coveted by Dannon, but a more hearty relative of the lima bean. In Through Western Madagascar: In Quest of the Golden Bean, Marcuse provides a documentation of the:

"cultivation and exportation of the Madagascar butter-bean and the effects on the native Sakalava cultivators of the resulting influx of money and its concomitant blessings and evils... [providing] a vivid glimpse of the first encroachment of a complex civilization on a crude barbarism, of European industry on Malagasy indolence" (1914: 8).

Marcuse provides a descriptive narrative of the south western region of the island. He also covers cattle-raising and rubber-gathering, the other important industries of western Madagascar (1914: 9). Marcuse's text, while distinctly different from Ellis' in terms of time and focus, again provides us with a representation of Madagascar congruous with the general themes of the "wild and exotic." Marcuse includes in his text, photographs of Bara mothers and sorcerers, Sakalava festivals, and himself in front of a banyan tree.

In the chapter, "Imperial stylistics, 1860-1980," Pratt (1992: 204) claims that she has found it useful to outline three conventional methods that create "qualitative and quantitative value for the explorer's achievement." The first is the aestheticization of the landscape. This is best exemplified by the panoramic descriptions of scenic vistas found in nearly all travel writing on Madagascar. The second is the density of meaning in the passage which links the landscape with things appreciated or detested at home. Pratt
provides tropes like "emerald green" and "steel-colored mountain" as examples of things appreciated at home. In Marcuse's writing (1914: 60), we find examples like "myriads of evil-smelling, hideous, and hairy boring crabs, basking at the mouths of their burrows in the oozing slime, [so that] I felt that had Doré visited a mangrove swamp before illustrating Dante's Inferno, it would probably have doubled the vividness of his depiction."

The third method is that of mastery of the landscape; the author has the "power if not to possess, at least to evaluate this scene" (Pratt 1992: 205). In almost all of his photographs of the flora and fauna, Marcuse is present. This is both a form of legitimization and a sign of ownership. With Marcuse in the picture, we are provided with proof of his authority and his "being there" (Geertz 1988). His presence also supplies a tangible image of colonial control. The camera Ellis' natives marveled at "captures" the landscape for Marcuse.

According to Pratt (1992: 34), "commercial prospects placed science arguably within the general public interest." Marcuse (1914: 261) says that Madagascar possesses plentiful natural resources and "only awaits the solution of the question of labour to make it France's finest colonial possession." He notes (1914: 267), however, that they have encountered a great problem which continues to dominate discussions of Madagascar in the media today. Marcuse says (ibid.) that the "French colonists have made a great point of the need for legislation to prevent the Malagasies from burning the forest." Here the topic of deforestation is addressed within the paradigm of commerce. For Marcuse, the rainforests are bounties of exploitable resources which are wasted as it is burned.

Marcuse demonstrates a disdain for the Malagasy in parts of his text. While he praises their endeavors in some instances, he continues to represent them in a negative light. In a discussion of the southern regions of the island, Marcuse (1914: 315-16) says:

"In traversing the native paths in the bush country on the Mahafaly borderland, great caution has to be exercised in avoiding contact with the spiny scrub, for if the flesh is lacerated, a troublesome form of skin disease called 'plaies malgaches,' or 'Malagasy wounds,' is very easily contracted by a European. Probably the unclean bodies of the Mahafaly have
contaminated the thorns bordering the tracks - at least this is the only solution of the problem that suggests itself to me" (1914: 315-316).

In the following paragraph, Marcuse speaks of a type of blindness which can result from the airborne minute hairs of the prickly-pear cactus. With evidence that the spines of cacti are harmful, why would he believe all the spikes in the spiny forest were contaminated by "dirty natives?" While I can only speculate about Marcuse's motivations, a theme of colonial superiority can be found in his statement. This colonial perspective, regardless of contemporary notions of political correctness, continues to permeate Western perceptions of Madagascar. While I am not claiming that the Malagasy are identical to Western populations, as if they were "simply made over in the European image," (Comaroff 1993: XI), contemporary examples from Western culture continue to reify the colonial perspective of the Malagasy people.

An excellent example of the way the colonial perspective infuses contemporary travel writing is found in Dervla Murphy's _Muddling Through in Madagascar_ (1985). In writing about her trip to "the Great Red Island," Murphy (1985: 24) says that "the Malagasy Embassy in Paris is singularly unbureaucratic...as you appear, before you've said a word of self-identification, swarms of small pale-brown happy-looking people, with soft welcoming voices, smile delightedly; and no one is interested in trivia like passport numbers and health certificates" (1985: 24). Here we find a Malagasy people who are like Rousseau's "noble savage." They are delighted to have a visitor, and are unencumbered by silly bureaucratic practices, even after relocating to Paris! These Malagasy only wish to welcome visitors to their island without bothering themselves with security or concerns for health, in contrast with the less-than-hospitable practices of other "obscure" countries (Murphy 1985: 23).

Murphy (ibid.: 30) cites the "most quoted description of Madagascar" as "an island with the form, colour, consistency and sterility of a brick." Far from any other descriptions of the island I have come across in my reading, I struggle with Murphy's citation. According to Pratt (1992: 217-18), from the 1970's on, "few pristine worlds remain for Europeans to discover, and the old ones have long since belied the myth of the civilizing mission. The impulse of these post-colonial metropolitan writers is to condemn what they see, trivialize it, and disassociate themselves utterly from it...Much of what they are lamenting is
the depredations of western-induced dependency." Perhaps this is the impulse of which Murphy's citation is an example. She (1985: 32) criticizes a companion with whom she shared a taxi because the companion held the Malagasy in contempt for their "illogical inefficiency," feeling that they "should have stayed at home if logic and efficiency were so essential to their peace of mind." In her own moment of weakness, however, Murphy (ibid.) exclaims that a woman working behind a bank desk in the hotel "was our first grumpy Malagasy; perhaps she has too much time for introspection."

In a later chapter titled "Lemurs and things," Murphy engages in the enterprise which distinguishes her contemporary travel writing from that of Ellis or Marcuse. As we have seen, travel writing of the late 1800s and early 1900s was marked by the colonial voice, a sort of "monarch-of-all-I-survey" presence (Pratt 1992: 205). This approach to writing about Madagascar involved a "particularly explicit interaction between esthetics and ideology" and resulted in "what one might call a rhetoric of presence" (ibid.). These writers are not afraid of expressing their opinions on the indolence of the Malagasy, or the lack of civilization they found during their travels in Madagascar. They are not afraid to be tourists or to behave in an imperialistic manner. Murphy (1985: 23), on the other hand, is dismayed by tourists, although her excuse for travel in Madagascar is to write for them.

Murphy is engaged in a form of exploration and discovery. She explores a territory relatively unknown to most of the population. She is startled when her daughter came to her while they were among the Betsileo and exclaims, "Tourists are going to Tulear! Two of them, on our bus!" (ibid.: 130). Murphy quickly allays her daughter's fears by pointing out that anyone attempting to travel from where they were to Tulear could not possibly be a tourist. Upon meeting the two suspected tourists, she confirms her assumption that they were indeed, not tourists. The fellow travelers are students "just down from Cambridge...belong[ing] to that new breed of rather serious-minded young - the post-hippie generation - who like rapidly to scout out three or four continents before the age of twenty-three...usually taking a concerned interest in 'North-South' problems" (ibid.). Here, the terms of travel determine the authenticity of the travel experience for Murphy.

We can see the description of Madagascar as a "wild" and "exotic" place wielding a presence over the text. Ellis and Marcuse paint a picture of a savage land to be discovered. They marvel at the wildlife
and the landscape. For Murphy, these are her prototypes. She must come up with similar tales and must experience the landscape as if she were the first. As a travel writer, Murphy must compete with mass tourism by creating an in-depth account of a place. According to Pratt (1992: 221), "in the 1960s and 1970s, exoticist visions of plenitude and paradise were appropriated and commodified on an unprecedented scale by the tourist industry." In reply, "real" writers provided "degraded, countercommodified" versions of reality (ibid.).

For Ellis and Marcuse, the influx of European influence on the lives and industry of the Malagasy was a positive and necessary force. They rejoice at Western intervention in the affairs of the Malagasy because they consider it to be progress. Ellis and Marcuse give us a picture of a Madagascar that is struggling to break free from its primitive bondage—a land with a unique and exploitable landscape and environment. For Murphy, things are reversed: the more influence from the outside, the less authentic her experience. The more Europeans in her path, the less she has to write about. She (1985) uses phrases such as, "a moment before, we had been in a normal though exotic environment...here we might have been on another planet," or "this is a lost world" to dramatize her singular and authentic experience.

The singular and the authentic are the key elements for travel in the 1980s and 1990s. With the world getting smaller and smaller, and the "global village" forming beneath our feet, travelers seek the unique and personally engaging. Politically correct travel includes such inventions as ecotourism where travelers purport to harm the environment less than other "mass" tour groups and to help support the preservation of wildlife by pumping tourist dollars into the coffers of international conservation agencies and governments of the Third World countries they visit. A second impetus for contemporary travel is the search for a sense of connection and identity. Helena Drysdale (1991: 1) begins her book, Dancing with the Dead: A Journey to Zanzibar and Madagascar, by stating:

"In these rootless days we have to choose where we belong. I am drawn to the islands, especially to the edges of islands, so I choose Dartmouth, on the southern edge of the British Isles...To belong somewhere is to have something to escape from...perhaps it is in my blood, for it is not just the living who root me here. In the fat hills and steep woods, down in the caves where the tide sucks and booms, lurk shadows of my ancestors,
generations of buccaneers who set off from this smugglers' coast to ride the winds and currents around the seas of the world."

Drysdale discovered that an ancestor of hers was a part of a firm which traded with Madagascar. She immediately set out to "see what the people of my past had seen" (1991: 11). Drysdale's expedition was filled with wonder and curious experiences. She (ibid.: 94) was struck, however, by the "cruelty...the live chickens swung from their feet like bunches of parsnips, and the child beggars who curled up each night in doorways, ragged five-year-olds chanting tonelessly: 'Donnez-moi de l'argent, donnez moi cent francs.'" She (ibid.) says that some local residents urged them not to pay the beggars because "the women borrowed babies to tug at our hearts and would never work, however much they were paid." She (ibid.: 95) quotes the wife of a French businessman, with whom she and her husband dined, saying, "you can tell you have just arrived, you still think it's all wonderful...We should tell them the truth, how awful it is here. They're savages. They'll steal anything, just you wait, and they can't do anything properly."

Pratt (1992: 219) addresses this kind of travel writing as a kind of discourse of "negation, domination, devaluation, and fear that remains in the late twentieth century, a powerful ideological constituent of the west's consciousness of the people and places it strives to hold in subjugation." Drysdale does not find much of Madagascar to be beautiful. Her account contains some anecdotal information about snippets of art, culture, and her own positive experiences. However, the tone of her writing is similar to earlier colonial writing. Pratt (ibid.: 220) says, "No longer cornucopias of resources inviting the artful, perfecting intervention of the west, newly assertive, de-exoticizing places and peoples become in the eyes of the seeing-man repugnant conglomerations of incongruities, asymmetries, perversions, absence, and emptiness." While the Malagasy attempt to "modernize" and move out of dependence on Western countries, they are still perceived by Drysdale and others as exotic and bizarre.

Drysdale (1992: 268-69) ends her book with an account of all of the other places her ancestors had been. She speaks of charting them on the map, of continuing their adventure. She says, however, that she:

"had come to see our lives as being lived at the end of elastic, able to stretch across the world but pinned down by the base point of our home and our families. They waited to spring us back. When
we returned we would miss the elastic tension, feel at a loose end, but I was beginning to fear that if we stretched too far and too long the elastic would snap and we would whirl away into oblivion, as rootless and hungry as an unloved Malagasy ancestor...What I liked best about islands, I decided, is leaving them.
Maps and the Visual Landscape

Drysdale leaves us with an image of the earth, in all of its circularity, stretched tight by an elastic band around it. If all travelers were connected to their points of origin by elastic bands, the earth would resemble a child's rubber-band "ball." The world would be a mass of interwoven, rubber fibers permitting us to mark the paths of travel throughout history. Common themes link travelers to Madagascar like Drysdale's piece of elastic. In looking at texts and their ability to inform subsequent readings of a landscape, I have thus far explored the effects of travel writing on perceptions of place. As illustrated above, common themes permeate travel writing about Madagascar. However, written accounts of travel are only one method of representing landscape. Visual representations also play an important role in creating a mental image or idea of place. Travel guides, advertisements, and maps contribute visual texts. Geographer John Pickles (1992: 226) says that interpreting maps requires involvement with two symbolic systems: graphical images and writing systems. He (ibid.) reminds us that "not only does the image exist in a reductive relationship to the world, but graphical systems always also exist as an interplay between images and linguistic texts and contexts, thus creating a multiplicity of cross-cutting structures."

I began this paper with an account of Dannon's commercial for vanilla yogurt where an old map of Madagascar was used to convey distance and exoticism. De Certeau (1988: 120) notes that throughout history, maps have "slowly disengaged [themselves] from the itineraries that were the condition of [their] possibility." For this reason, Dannon chose the older, more "artistic" or "aesthetic" map for their advertisement. By making a connection between the "itinerary" of obtaining the best vanilla, and the location from which it was obtained, they are establishing an emotional association with their motivations to provide their customer with quality. Employing an older, more picturesque map also assists in exoticizing vanilla—a flavor often associated with "blandness" or lack of variety.

De Certeau (ibid.) tells us that "the first medieval maps included only the rectilinear marking out of itineraries." He says that these maps functioned primarily to prescribe actions in pilgrimages. That is, they provided information as to which stops one should make and the amount of time each stop should take. Geographer and journalist Adelheid Fischer (1994: 32) notes that even after Marco Polo's trip around the
world where he "provided cartographers with accurate profiles of new lands," scholars persisted in depicting a circular world where the East (the location of the rising sun and the risen Christ) was located at the top and Jerusalem was in the center. Here a worldview is being projected and graphically depicted by the mapping of space [figure 2 and 3]. A map by E. Le Testu (1555) [figure 4] provides another example of the way in which the worldview of the map-makers made its way onto images of Madagascar. Three warriors, clothed only in loin clothes, prepare to protect themselves from a lion. A giant sea monster looms in the distance, demonstrating the courage and daring of all who travel to this dangerous, distant place.

But sometimes changes in worldview are reflected within the lines of maps [figure 5]. These two maps show the world beginning to be depicted as a rounded entity. They date from just after the seminal trip of Christopher Columbus. De Certeau (1988: 121) reminds us of the way maps have changed over time and lost their graphical depictions of ships and wind. Cartographers "eliminate[d] little by little, the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce[d] [maps]" (ibid.). The means of their creation are no longer included in the worldview being represented by the map. A map by de Flacourt [figure 6] includes a drawing of a ship moving toward the island. The ship is the mode of transportation which took him to the island around 1657, and is an important component of the map. Like older ethnography and travel writing, maps became seen as fact and began an endeavor of depiction where the methodology of their invention was not situated.

Maps of the 14th and 15th centuries provided evidence of their creation through their artistic rendition as well as pictures of ships. The technological aspects of their production - sketchy, hand-drawn lines - signified the drafting skills of their creators [figures 7, 8, and 9]. These maps appear as if they were drawn with a pen and ink set. Mountains are represented by shaded hatching to make it appear more physical...more real.

As mentioned earlier, beginning around the 19th century, maps began to be viewed as objective representations. They were bestowed with the power of accurately representing and depicting landscapes. An example from 1871 provides topographical information about the vegetation, roadways, riverways and some ethnographic labeling [figure 10]. The articulation of interior features further enhances the apparent
accuracy of the map. The shape of the island begins to resemble its shape on maps today. De Certeau (ibid.: 126-27) says that a "region' is the space created by an interaction...[emerging] from the operation of distinctions resulting from encounters." Much in the way that travel writers have "encountered" Madagascar and written about the "regions" they have traversed, maps of ethnic groups and vegetation designate "regions" visibly. He (ibid.: 129) says, "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across." Here, de Certeau is speaking primarily of the way stories traverse boundaries and move through space as our travelers did above. However, he points out that "the map cuts up." The map divides space into pieces designating ownership, ecological areas, and governmental jurisdictions.

A map of ethnic groups in Madagascar provides an example of the way "the map cuts up" [figure 11]. Ethnic groups are placed within their respective boundaries. As travelers move through the island, they can see themselves moving from ethnic area to ethnic area. Anthropologists have been criticized for their tendency to carve out bounded "billiard balls" of culture (Wolf 1982: 17). Maps like this one are graphic representations of the practice of binding or artificially constructing limited cultures.

Geographer J.B. Harley deconstructs the modern assumption that new technology has launched geography into a more "scientific" realm. He (1992: 231) says that, "one effect of accelerated technological change--as manifest in digital cartography and geographical information systems--has been to strengthen its positivist assumptions and it has bred a new arrogance in geography about its supposed value as a mode of access to reality." In a photograph of earth from space, we see Madagascar covered over by a thin film of clouds [figure 12]. This even-more-than-a-bird's-eye view summons an authority unparalleled elsewhere. The map's means of creation--the satellite camera, helicopters, planes and fractal formulas used to manufacture the image of a coastline--are eliminated from the image itself. In other words, the space represented by the map is not permitted to be represented as place.

In Mapping the Invisible Landscape, folklorist Kent C. Ryden challenges the power of the scientific by quoting another folklorist, E.V. Walter who inverts de Certeau's terms space and place, giving space the definition of place. Walter (in Ryden 1993: 39) says:

"Modern 'space' is universal and abstract, whereas a 'place' is concrete and particular people do not experience abstract space; they experience
places...since places are fusions of experience, landscape and location, they are necessarily bound up with time and memory as well...the landscape of a place is an objectification of the past, a catalyst for memory" (E.V. Walker in Ryden 1993: 39).

Walter's conceptions of space and place, although inverted, are similar to those of de Certeau. Ryden (1993: 37) tells us that "considered as space, the world is a blank surface on which aerial relationships, physical landforms, and social patterns are dispassionately outlined; it is a matrix of objective geographical facts distilled from the messiness of real life." These "objective geographic facts" are the linear articulations depicted in maps.

Harley (1992: 232) challenges the "objective geographic facts" as he "search[es] for the social forces that have structured cartography and to locate the presence of power - and its effects - in all map knowledge." He (ibid.: 233) draws upon the work of social science theorist Jacques Derrida to "read between the lines of the map" and sees maps as both text and art. For him maps, like art, are "far from being 'a transparent opening to the world', are but 'a particular human way...of looking at the world'" (Blocker in ibid.: 233). Issues of power in mapping cannot be ignored. Harley (ibid.: 241) says that in "'plain' scientific maps, science itself becomes the metaphor. Such maps contain a dimension of 'symbolic realism' which is no less a statement of political authority and control than a coat of arms or a portrait of a queen placed at the head of an earlier decorative map." He points out that because maps are seen as "a mirror of nature," secret or illegal mapping is actually an act of illegally entering space. He quotes newspaper headlines reading, "Russians caught mapping" as examples of the power of mapping. If one can get caught mapping, it must be a significant activity. That is, the narrative of the map must have something important to say.

In Madagascar, satellite images of deforestation have been used to justify the "re-regionalizing" of land and the implementation of ecologically motivated policy. Cartographers and geographers have used these maps as points of departure for projecting into the past to calculate rates of deforestation in the island's rainforests. These maps are deemed "scientific" and devoid of cultural information. But are they? When they are read, the historical projections are imbued with values and morals pertaining to the correct
use of land. Fischer (1994: 32) says that cultural perceptions have influence over the ways we read and make maps. He (ibid.) says, "maps are cultural constructs, and the values and priorities of a society are lodged in the way we plot our relationships in space."

In representing areas of deforestation, we are representing our values and concerns. The map itself, with its blotches of green and tan is a space, that appears to be uninhabited by opinion or valuation. However, just as the act of stepping into a space previously described and the act of reading a travel text are examples of practiced space, so is the act of reading a map. When we see a map of Madagascar as an indication of the havoc being wreaked on its environment, we are bringing our values to the "place" of the map. According to Harley (1992: 238), the map hides "behind a mask of a seemingly neutral science...den[y]ing social dimensions at the same time as it legitimates...whichever way we look, [however], the rules of society will surface."

Both Doug Aberley and Derek Denniston, anthropological and geographic scholars and political advocates, encourage "mapping for local empowerment." Denniston notes that maps include sections marked “uninhabited.” The areas considered vacant are often the lands of indigenous peoples. He (1994: 28) says “securing legal protection for their homelands is perhaps the fundamental challenge indigenous peoples face in preserving their way of life.” Denniston advocates the employment of land-use maps to mark off these lands as occupied for the record. He (ibid.) concedes that “while land-use maps are not border police, they do establish who occupies a piece of land and how it is being used, while proving it is not empty and up for grabs.” After interviewing families in a number of Honduran and Panamanian villages, Denniston compared his hand-drawn accounts of place with the governmental maps of space. He (ibid.: 29) found that not only were the hand-drawn maps (resulting from the information imparted to Denniston by the indigenous villagers) proportioned correctly, but many of the features of the government maps were found inaccurate. When employed in legal land tenure disputes, the maps provided a graphic and credible base from which to launch political campaigns on several issues, including legalizing communal homelands, stemming the incursions of colonization by settlers and development by multinational companies, and resolving the relationship between Indian homelands and national protected areas.
Denniston (ibid.: 30) quotes Mac Chapin, the director of the mapping project: “Indians are never allowed to speak. These congresses give the Indians a chance to talk about *their* issues.” Here Chapin and Denniston give voice to the maps. They activate a “reading” of maps as text. The very title of the essay, “Defending the Land with Maps,” imbues maps with power enough to ward off intruders. Aberley provides a manual called, *Boundaries of Home: Mapping for Local Empowerment*, for executing this process. In his book, he provides a step by step guide to making maps for mapping your own terrain. That is, he provides a map of how to create a map.
Conclusion:

Aberley advocates a mapping of one’s own space. Yet the visual and verbal accounts of the landscape in Madagascar reviewed in this paper are far from the Malagasy’s “own.” Because I have not yet conducted extensive research in Madagascar, I cannot say whether, on a whole, the peoples of Madagascar share the view of themselves presented above. However, it is evident that their views were not of interest to either mappers or travel writers. The construction of Madagascar as a wild, exotic, and distant place has persisted in Western popular representations of the island. These narratives are created, consumed and re-created by Westerners “talking” about Madagascar. They come to life in public policy and media representations. The creation of national parks and nature reserves on the island are a result of Western valuations of place. While the Malagasy may agree with many of the policies being put into place in their nation, they are often not the architects of reform like the mappers in Denniston’s essay. The power of science, come to life in deforestation maps, has dictated the structure of land tenure. Its voice, while equally important as those of the Malagasy, can rise above the din with the aid of technology and access to the media. The voice of the Malagasy, not yet completely drowned out by other more powerful voices, continues to speak whether or not we chose to listen.

While conducting preliminary research on nature tourism and tourist arts in Madagascar in the summer of 1995, I made the acquaintance of a number of Malagasy employed in the tourist industry. My Malagasy friends informed me that these images of the "exotic" and "wild" are the fuel or foundation of their tour packages. They explained the ways they have appropriated Western representation of Madagascar in their tourist art--such as a map indicating the location of various historical and natural sites (figure 13) or in a map indicating the location of semi-precious stones (figure 14). While this paper does not focus on this most important perspective, I intend to address this issue through future research.
Notes:

1 There are many texts written by French authors in relation to the history, religion and government of Madagascar. However, in examining travel writing, I found the best examples of each genre and time period to be the ones I have chosen. According to Mary Louise Pratt, travel writing has been characterized by particular stylistic methods and topics of interest at various times in history. The examples employed in this paper are, in general, more popular and thus more widely read than other examples and, in my opinion, best support Pratt’s assertions about the travel writing genre. In addition, many of the French examples are linked in an administrative manner to French colonialism of Madagascar and better illustrate the political aspects of colonialism. For further reading, some interesting French language examples include:

   Oliver, Pasfield (Ed.). 1897. *The voyages made by Sieur D.B. to the islands Dauphine or Madagascar and Bourbon or Mascarene in the years 1669, 70, and 72*. London: David Nutt.

2 In using the term "democratize," I am in no way claiming that the experience of travel is accessible for all. Rather, I am using it to connote the dissemination of information through popular culture which is consumed by many and is said to cut across populations.

3 An interesting example of a textual reference to the Falls are older cartoons where the villain goes over the falls in a barrel each time he fails to execute his evil scheme. Here the ultimate sign of failure is death—by accident or suicide.

4 This tendency persists today at the hands of international environmental organizations fighting to preserve the diversity of species on the island.

5 The Malagasy practice swidden agriculture and also burn trees to produce charcoal for fuel. The controversial practice has continued. Today, segments of land are carved out for nature reserves and parks.

6 A rubber-band ball is a round object with rubber bands wrapped around its exterior creating a ball similar to that of yarn which bounces.

7 These maps are etchings which look like drawings.
WORKS CITED:


WORKS CITED:

Fischer, Adelheid.

Geertz, Clifford.

Gould, Peter and White, Rodney.

Gravier, Gabriel.

Harley, J.B.

Lane, Edward William.
1879. *The Arabian nights' entertainments; or, the thousand and one nights*. Philadelphia: William T. Amies.

Lanting, Frans.

Marcuse, Walter D.

McGreevy, Patrick.

Moore, J. R.

Murphy, Dervla.

Pickles, John.
WORKS CITED:

Pratt, Mary Louise.  

Ross, Kristin.  

Ryden, Kent C.  

Senauke, Scott.  

Shoumatoff, Alex.  

Stein, Howard F. and Niederland, William G.  

Wolf, Eric R.  
Figure 9:

This map of Madagascar was drawn by Karen Abney Korn. The references to ethnic groups and their locations come from Hilary Bradt’s (1994) *Guide to Madagascar*, published in London by Bradt Publications.
This vendor displays an embroidered wall hanging for sale at the Artisan’s Market in Antananarivo, Madagascar.
A shadowbox display of fragments of semi-precious stones for sale in the Zoma Market, Antananarivo, Madagascar.