MOTIVATION
oo
DATA
oooo
Methods
oooo
RESULTS
ooooooooo
DISCUSSION
o
References

Narratives from European-African Encounters (1400 - 1900)

Edward Kerby [1]   Alexander Moradi [2]   Hanjo Odendaal [1]

[1]Stellenbosch University, South Africa

[2]University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy

April 5, 2024

www.timetraveller.voyage

Motivation

Research agenda How do narratives develop, diffuse and persist over hundreds of years?

Why it matters?

- **Biases, Beliefs, and Perceptions Drive Behaviour**
- **Power of Narratives**: Stories craft our reality, steering perceptions and guiding decisions. They highlight what matters, influencing our worldview.
- **Narrative Dynamics:** Narratives may emerge organically, but they can also be deliberately shaped by influencers to perpetuate certain worldviews.

Many historical narratives...some survived

1. The Dark Continent: Mystification and Exoticism
   ▶ Exoticism and primitivism (Said, 1978)
   ▶ Noble and ignoble savages (Ellingson, 2001)
   ▶ Europe's civilising mission (Livingstone, 1875)

2. Economic Potential and Exploitation
   ▶ Empty Land (Theal, 1897)
   ▶ Untapped resources and economic potential (Collier, 2019)

3. Historical Denial and Simplification
   ▶ Land without History (Trevor-Roper, 1966)
   ▶ Tribalism and Ethnic Homogeneity (Herbst, 2014)

MOTIVATION
oo

DATA
●ooo

Methods
oooo

RESULTS
ooooooooo

DISCUSSION
o

References

A Directory of Travellers

- Searching Digital Libraries: i) Archive.org, ii) Gallica, and iii) Google Books using the stardardised search terms:

(**voyage*** OR **exploration*** OR **expedition*** OR **travel*** OR **survey*** OR **excursion***) AND **LOCATION** AND (date: **1200** TO **1900** OR **na**) AND (mediatype = **texts**)

where **LOCATION** is defined from a compiled list of historical names of African regions and territories.

- State and non-state actors (explorers, geologists, soldiers, missionaries, journalists, writers,...).
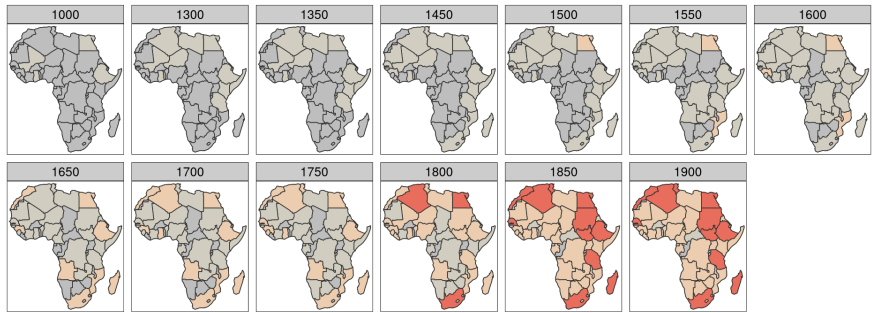
Creating a corpus

Building a Corpus	N^0	Travellers	Journeys
Directory of Unique Travellers		2,171	–
Library of text from meta search	1,987	–	–
Library of text from manual search	477	–	–
OCR texts in English	1,298	962	1093
Pass all data quality checks	855	605	712

Notes: Number of documents exceeds the number journeys as some travellers produced more than one volume of text per journey. The same traveller may enter with multiple journeys.
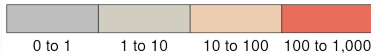
MOTIVATION
○○

DATA
○○○●

Methods
○○○○

RESULTS
○○○○○○○○○

DISCUSSION
○

References

Descriptive statistics of working corpus

Region	Years (Min - Max)	Years (Avg)	Doc's (#)	Pages (#)	Tokens (#)	Tokens/Page
Central	1578 - 1894	1867	41	11,039	1,407,122	127
East	1327 - 1899	1843	141	39,540	4,975,164	126
North	1396 - 1899	1837	381	109,306	13,649,799	125
South	1593 - 1899	1847	153	40,639	5,457,903	134
West	1583 - 1899	1834	139	37,217	4,650,126	125
Totals			855	237,741	30,140,114	127

MOTIVATION
oo

DATA
oooo●

Methods
oooo

RESULTS
ooooooooo

DISCUSSION
o

References

Coverage (1000 - 1900)

Cumulative Number of Journeys

| 0 to 1 | 1 to 10 | 10 to 100 | 100 to 1,000 |

MOTIVATION
○○

DATA
○○○○

Methods
●○○○

RESULTS
○○○○○○○○○

DISCUSSION
○

References

Narrative Triangle (Hero, Victim, Villain)

Core concept in **narrative theory**, widely applicable across types of media - literature, film, theatre, video games (Karpman, 1968).

- **Hero**: Embarks on a journey, faces challenges, usually undergoes some form of transformation. The hero often has a moral high ground and aims to restore balance or justice.

- **Villain**: Opposes the hero, creating conflict and obstacles that the hero must overcome. The villain's motivations are crucial for adding depth to the narrative.

- **Victim**: Often a character that the hero seeks to save or protect, their plight motivates the hero and sometimes the villain's actions. The victim's role highlights stakes and emotional investment in the narrative.

Three Character Text example - hero, victim, villain

"KHAMIS AND CHIEF BORYO. Khamis returned on the 14th with a large flock of goats. He was **gracious enough to allow us sixteen head**. This inclined us to suspect that the **real object of his design was not to explore but to extend the conquests of his master**, Ismaili, farther east through our assistance, and to reduce the natives of Ibwiri into the same state of poverty as the neighbourhood of Ipoto, for instance [. . .] Our men by these tactics returned uninjured without having been engaged in this disgraceful action. Then, as **Khamis was returning to our village, mourning the loss of three of his most active comrades**, he suddenly met Boryo, the Chief of East Ibwiri, and without a word made him a prisoner. Before reporting to me, **Khamis, on arrival, ordered his men to strangle** the chief in revenge for the death of his men. Happening to hear of it, I sent a **guard to take him by force out of Khamis' hands, and placed him in a hut out of harm's way**, and bade Boryo rest quiet until Khamis had departed. We luxuriated during our days of rest. We enjoyed ripe plantains made into puddings with goats' milk ; fritters, patties and bread, sweet potatoes, manioc, yams, herbs, fowls and goat meat without stint."

Stanley, 1887 "In darkest Africa", p. 56.

Using OpenAI: Prompt

```
content = (
    One important mechanism that the old explerors/writers may use to shape public opinion is by framing people, events, and issues in particular ways. I am providing with a list of 3 types
of characters in a model: victims, villians and heroes (VVH).

    A page can have any combination of the 3 character VVH model on it, or only 1 or 2 of the VVH model.

    From the list provided, using the text from between 1400 - 1900, can we find all 3 roles and the following:

    1) Is the VVH ethnicity African/European/Arab/Other? Stick to the 4 classes
    2) Is the VVH a Traveller, Religious figure (Christian OR Muslim OR other), military man, ruler, common woman OR man OR child), merchant, animal, missionary, author/narrator?
Use strict categories
        - No overlap
    3) Role Gender (Man OR Woman OR Child OR Animal OR Object)
    4) Type of role (MAX 3 descriptions)
    5) Reason for role (MAX 3 descriptions)
    6) Reason for ethnicity (MAX 3 descriptions)

    OUTPUT IN JSON FORMAT!

    output example:
    {
        "moses": {
            "role": ["hero"],
            "ethnicity": [
                ["isralite"]
            ],
            "category": [
                ["Religious figure"]
            ],
            "role_gender": ["man"]
            "reason_for_role": ["violence", "abuse", "deception"]
            "type_role": ["leader"]
            "reason_for_ethnicity": ["name"]
        }
    }
),
```

How are Heroes, Villains, and Victims Described?

■ We can compare adjective frequencies for descriptions of villains, victims, and heroes across the corpus.

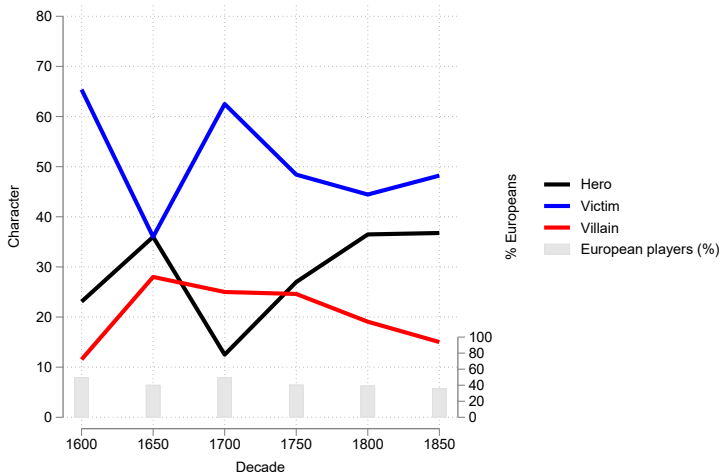■ Find which adjectives are more or less likely to describe a narrative role for a group.

$$\text{log odds ratio} = \ln\left(\frac{\left[\frac{n+1}{\text{total}+1}\right]_{\text{European}}}{\left[\frac{n+1}{\text{total}+1}\right]_{\text{African}}}\right)$$

Where: n is the number of times an adjective in question is used to describe each role, and *total* indicates the total number of words for each group (European/African).

Assumptions guiding the interpretation

- ■ The underlying proportion of good (=hero), evil (=villain), powerless (=victim) people across ethnic groups is more or less the same across time.

- ⇒ A biased free narrative would choose equal proportions of hero, victim, villain among populations.

- ■ Note: There is no time trend in the prevalence of narratives per page.

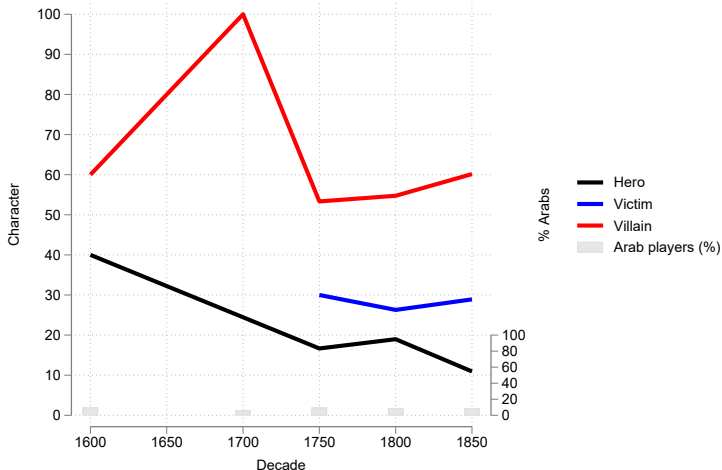- ⇒ The attractiveness of the three character model did not change over hundreds of years.

MOTIVATION
○○

DATA
○○○○

Methods
○○○○

RESULTS
○●○○○○○○○

DISCUSSION
○

References

Three character model - Europeans perceiving themselves

Three character model - "The Others" Africans

MOTIVATION
oo

DATA
oooo

Methods
oooo

RESULTS
ooooo●oooooo

DISCUSSION
o

References

Three character model - "The Others" Arabs

MOTIVATION
○○

DATA
○○○○

Methods
○○○○

RESULTS
○○○○○●○○○○○

DISCUSSION
○
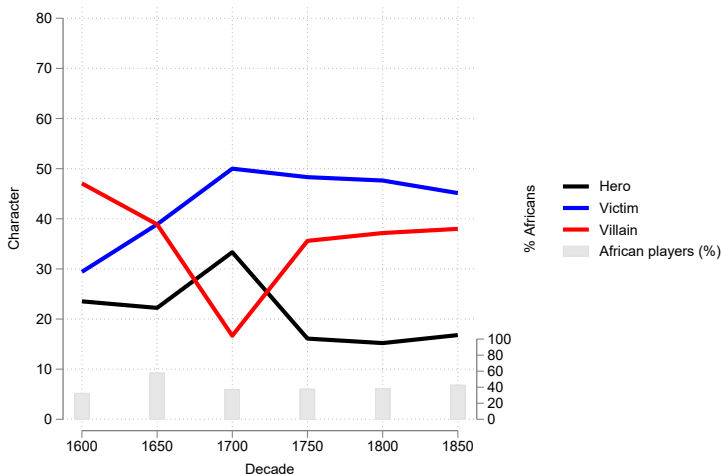
References

Narrative adjectives: How Heroes are described...
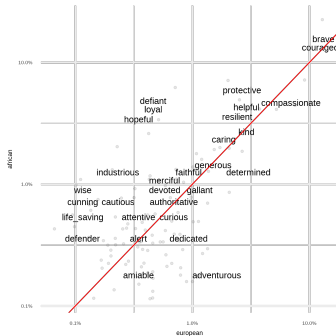
Figure: Relative Representation
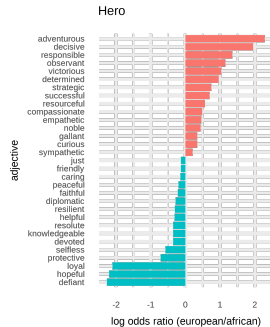
Figure: Log Odds Ratio
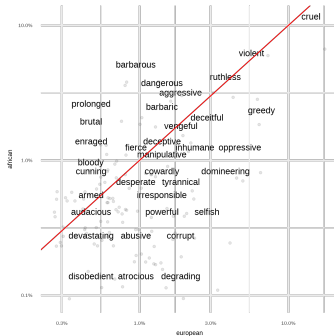
Narrative adjectives: How villains are described...

Figure: Relative Representation

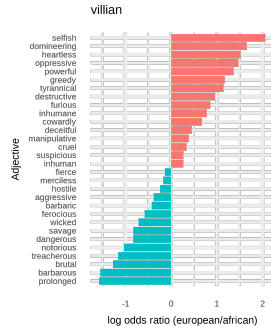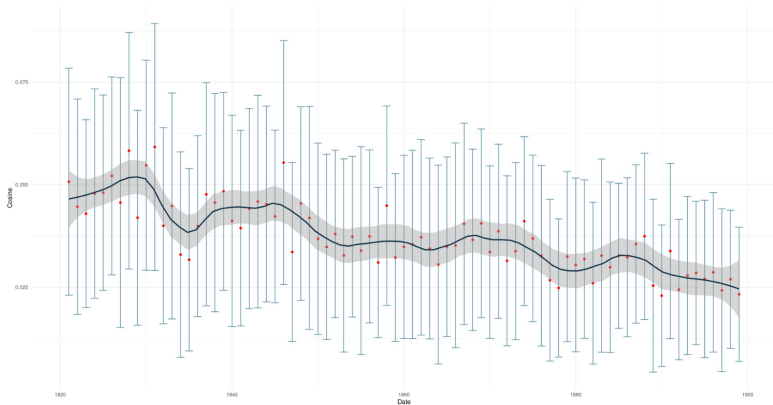

Figure: Log Odds Ratio

How long do narratives persist?

Figure: "Before 1820" and "After 1820" we find that the half-life of narrative similarity is 80 years.

Derogatory Terms in the Description of Africans

- Examining the historical context, usage, and evolution of derogatory terms can offer insights into societal attitudes, power dynamics, and cultural shifts.

- Analysing the use of terms related to 'ethnicity', 'intellect', 'religion' (or lack thereof) and 'moral character', we aim to reveal how colonial narratives, racial hierarchies, and xenophobia have been perpetuated through language.

A narrative back home?

Type of Derogatory Prejudice
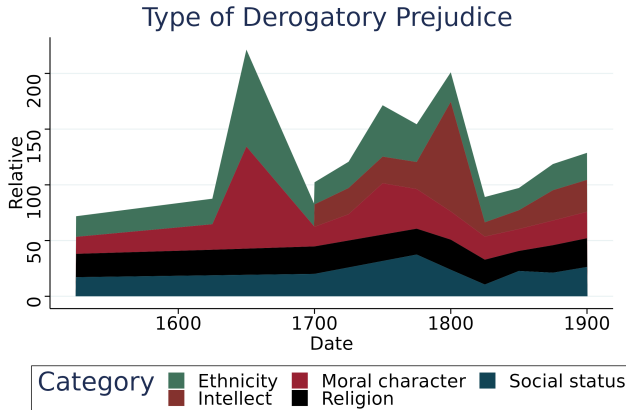
Discussion

- ■ Inherent psychological constructs that govern our perception of ourselves and others.
- ⇒ The "Others" are not perceived the same (cf African vs. Arab) & character roles changed over time.

- ■ Narratives have a tendency to fade.
- ⇒ Perceptions changed over time.

- ■ More work: What are the underlying parameters that caused narratives to change? Who are the players that intentionally directed narratives.

References I

📄 Collier, Paul (Mar. 2019). *The Political Barriers to Development in Africa*.

📄 Ellingson, Ter (2001). *The myth of the noble savage*. Univ of California Press. ISBN: 0520226100.

📄 Herbst, Jeffrey (2014). *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control*. Vol. 149. Princeton University Press.

📄 Karpman, Stephen (1968). "Fairy tales and script drama analysis". In: *Transactional analysis bulletin* 7.26, pp. 39–43.

📄 Livingstone, D. (1875). *The Last Journals of David Livingstone: In Central Africa, from 1865 to His Death*. R.W. Bliss.

📄 Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalizm*. London: Peregrine, p. 156.

📄 Theal, G.M.C. (1897). *History of South Africa Under the Administration of the Dutch East India Company: History of South Africa*. v. 1. Swan Sonnenschein.

📄 Trevor-Roper, H.R. (1966). *Historical Essays*. Academy library. Harper & Row. ISBN: 9780883072745.