

Abstract. In her influential book, *Imperial Eyes* (1992), Mary-Louise Pratt portrays eighteenth-century scientific travellers as accomplices of colonial expansion. Within the discourse of natural history these researchers would, according to Pratt, erase indigenous people from their representations, or would reduce them in representations to their bodily features disregarding their culture. This article intends to amend Pratt's account.

Firstly, I would like to demonstrate that Pratt performs a highly selective and reductive reading on very complicated texts, while disregarding many other texts. Reading the texts of the writers who are quoted by Pratt more carefully and taking into consideration a broader range of travel accounts of eighteenth-century travellers in South Africa, it appears that ethnography forms an important part of these texts, as a component of a wider encyclopaedic interest in South Africa. This ethnography is in general sympathetic towards the culture of indigenous South Africans and critical of Dutch colonial rule.

Secondly, instead of being directly instrumental to colonial expansion, the travellers used the existing colonial infrastructure and the colonial regime for the benefit of their own research. Following the terminology of Actor Network Theory one could speak in this instance of *intéressement*, the ability of researchers to obtain support for their projects from actors outside the scientific network.