



Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa

Johannes Fabian



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Explorers and ethnographers in Africa during the period of colonial expansion are usually assumed to have been guided by rational aims such as the desire for scientific knowledge, fame, or financial gain. This book, the culmination of many years of research on nineteenth-century exploration in Central Africa, provides a new view of those early European explorers and their encounters with Africans. *Out of Our Minds* shows explorers were far from rational--often meeting their hosts in extraordinary states influenced by opiates, alcohol, sex, fever, fatigue, and violence. Johannes Fabian presents fascinating and little-known source material, and points to its implications for our understanding of the beginnings of modern colonization. At the same time, he makes an important contribution to current debates about the intellectual origins and nature of anthropological inquiry.

Drawing on travel accounts--most of them Belgian and German--published between 1878 and the start of World War I, Fabian describes encounters between European travelers and the Africans they met. He argues that the loss of control experienced by these early travelers actually served to enhance cross-cultural understanding, allowing the foreigners to make sense of strange facts and customs. Fabian's provocative findings contribute to a critique of narrowly scientific or rationalistic visions of ethnography, illuminating the relationship between travel and intercultural understanding, as well as between imperialism and ethnographic knowledge.



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