From another perspective, the extraordinary geographical breadth of the information – which derives from Arab and African informants – positions Livingstone’s diary as a unique record of non-Western knowledge circulation in Central Africa in 1870.

However, this knowledge comes at a cost, as historians note: “the British exploration of Africa often occurred in collusion with gateway states” – such as Zanzibar – “that were themselves expansionist in intent” (Kennedy 2013:112, cf. 124).

In Livingstone’s case, this dynamic took the form of his close relationships with some of the Arab traders, as already described.

As a result, although Livingstone casts himself as a champion of African rights in the face of the Arab slave trade (cf. Kennedy 2013:201), the text of the 1870 Field Diary likewise complicates this positioning.

Repeat references in the diary indicate that sometimes the local African populations respond favorably to Livingstone and recognize his intentions, but that at other times they refuse to make distinctions and are “outspoken in asserting [the] identity [of Livingstone and his attendants] with the cruel strangers” (Livingstone 1870e:XIII, 1870i:XLIII, cf. 1866-72:[652], Stanley 1878,2:79-80).

Moreover, this is not just a case of mistaken identity.

Early on, Livingstone cites the role of his Nassicker attendants in taking slaves and in killing local inhabitants in imitation of the Arab traders (1870a:[55]-[62], 1870i:LIII), then later documents how the freed Banian slaves sent to Livingstone by John Kirk, the British political agent at Zanzibar, extend the Nassicker model of violence against locals (1871b:LXXXIV, 1871e:XCI-XCIV, CI).

In each case, Livingstone candidly admits his guilt and complicity in helping to bring such violence to Central Africa, but either justifies the decision (1870i:LII-LIV) or, as he does on the last page of the diary, attempts to assert his own innocence: “I am clear of blood guiltiness” (1871e:CI).