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**“Tropics are Tropics Wherever Found”:
Performing Empire in the Travel Writings of Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt**

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I. Introduction

In 1893, Mary Kingsley decided to visit the tropics. She, at first, did not know exactly where she would travel, but declaring that “topics are tropics wherever found,” she set off for West Africa.¹ As she traveled through swamps and forests, Kingsley maintained the persona of a proper Victorian woman, dressed in long skirts and thick petticoats, in order to “support the dignity of a representative of England.”² As she wrote about her travels, she described her close encounters with leopards, hippos, and crocodiles and her distinctly English means of surviving such encounters.³ About fifteen years later, another writer made a similar decision to visit the tropics. More certain of her destination, Mary Gaunt decided to visit West Africa to conduct research for her novel that would partially take place in this region. Gaunt also claimed to have traveled with long skirts and proper dress, but, rather than using this dress to represent English femininity, Gaunt, born in Victoria in 1861, sought to define an Australian femininity. She maintained, throughout her travels, that Australian women were more capable than English women, as they had grown up in tougher climates and with more hardships.⁴ For both women, this performance of gendered national identity depended on a racial hierarchy that positioned these white women as superior to the Black men with whom they traveled. Both women, in their travels, used this performance of femininity to define their own racial, national, and gendered identities, all within the imperial rhetoric of adventure travel.

Both Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt published written accounts of their travels in which they constructed narratives out of their travels. Mary Kingsley first published her *Travels in West Africa* in 1898. The account described her travels from Liverpool, down to Liberia, and as far

¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, (London: Penguin Random House, 2015), 1.

² *ibid.*, 628.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*. London: T. Werner Laurie, 1912.

south as the French Congo.⁵ When she returned to London, she gave a series of lectures about her travels.⁶ Gaunt, who published her *Alone in West Africa* in 1912, had similar success, as she gave lectures in London regarding the differences in English and German colonialism within West Africa in the years leading up to the First World War.⁷

By the time Kingsley and Gaunt traveled through West Africa, European forces controlled much of the region, specifically the British, French, and Germans.⁸ This control was a recent development. Throughout much of the earlier period of European and British imperialism, Africa had remained uncolonized. This lack of colonization happened for a number of reasons, both as a result of diseases, such as malaria, and, as often goes unacknowledged, because the people living there showed great ability to defend themselves from subjugation.⁹ For many centuries, interactions between Europe and West Africa was limited to the coast, as European countries participated in the slave trade. However, as the slave trade began to end at the beginning of the nineteenth century, “exploration” increased throughout Africa. Mungo Park was among the first of these explorers during this period to write about his travels through West Africa and disseminate the “knowledge” that European travelers in West Africa would use for the next century.¹⁰

Kingsley and Gaunt both traveled after this transition. Drugs such as quinine helped to lower fevers and prevent malaria, while new weapons allowed Europe greater military control in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹¹ During the Berlin Conference of 1884, Western

⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

⁶ “Miss Mary Kingsley and her African Explorations,” *The Manchester Guardian*, March 20, 1896, 10.

⁷ “Royal Colonial Institute: Session of 1911-12,” *The London Times*, October 13, 1911, 11.

⁸ M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), xl.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Dane Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australian*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹¹ M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*.

European countries divided nearly the entire continent of Africa amongst themselves, drawing borders throughout the continent of Africa regardless of the different cultures and leaders already living in those regions. However, as European control over Africa increased, so too did their control over European knowledge of West Africa. This control help to create the myth of Africa as “the dark continent” which viewed Africa as a region that had not achieved the same level of historical progress, culture, or morality as Europe.¹²

This myth at the center of much of the writings about Africa highlights the fact that central to understanding the implicit arguments at the center of Kingsley and Gaunt’s works is that each of the words they wrote was part of a performance, and not a statement of objective fact. As Greg Dening argued, “History making—transformations of lived experience into narratives—is a universal and everyday human phenomenon. It has an anthropology, as it has a criticism and a history. This narrating in history-making is itself lived experience, not something apart from lived experience”¹³ From the very beginning of each of their works, Kingsley and Gaunt placed themselves within a tradition of travel writing and adventure stories that blurred the line between fact and fiction and that, nearly always, advocated imperial expansion. However, they both seemed to realize that their gender was the central difference between their writings and other works of imperial fiction. As a result, they used their writing to stage their identities, whether those identities were gendered, racial, or national.

In her analysis of imperial travel writing, Mary Louise Pratt described her attempt to think about travel writing not simply as a means to understand the places traveled or the supposed heroism of the traveler.¹⁴ Instead Pratt recommended that historians “pay serious

¹² M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, 17.

¹³ Greg Dening *Performances*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 104.

¹⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 11.

attention to the conventions of representation that constitute European travel writing, identifying different strands, suggesting ways of reading and focuses for rhetorical analysis.”¹⁵

Understanding the ways in which these pieces of travel writing were performances exposes the ways in which these writings reveal the conventions of gendered and imperial performance at the end of the nineteenth century. In this sense, it is important to note that this analysis of *Travels in West Africa* and *Alone in West Africa* is not about West Africa, rather it is an assessment of the people who traveled through West Africa and the ways in which they dehumanized those who lived there.

In understanding this performance, and in connecting this performance to postcolonial theory, one can better understand both what it is possible to learn from these stories, and the ways in which these stories matter, regardless of if they really happened. While postcolonial theory is primarily a field in literary studies, it has often been closely concerned with questions about how stories both effect reality and are effected by reality. When Kingsley and Gaunt wrote of their travels in West Africa, they created an image of West Africa which their readers believed, even if that West Africa was far removed from the reality of the region. Kingsley and Gaunt, too, were influenced by previous travelers, such as Mungo Park and Richard Burton whose versions of Africa Kingsley and Gaunt read and absorbed before embarking on their own travels. Therefore, considering these pieces of travel writing, it is important to have a clear sense of what readers can learn from these texts. While these works may say little about the reality of West Africa, they can say much about the societies of late-nineteenth century England and Australia.

¹⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 11.

Once one realizes that Kingsley and Gaunt's writings reveal little about West Africa, one can better understand the ways in which they used their writing to create a setting in West Africa that exhibited an idealized past, against which Kingsley and Gaunt could contrast their own "modernity." This positioning of places within a given time reflects implicit whiggish ideology. Yet, while Whigs often wished to use this theory of history to bring "progress" to colonized places, Kingsley and Gaunt often posed European influence as a force which corrupted this idealized past. While some have read these critiques of European empires as inherently anti-imperial, understanding the context of these passages reveals that their desire was not to push these empire's out of Africa—they argued the opposite—but rather to maintain distance between themselves and Africans. In this way, Kingsley and Gaunt used their imagined settings to define themselves.

This creation of self was heavily racialized and gendered. However, while one might assume that, as women stepping outside of traditionally feminine roles, they actively sought women's rights, neither woman considered themselves feminists. In this way, Kingsley and Gaunt contrast with those whom Antoinette Burton described in her assessment of early British feminists and imperial culture.¹⁶ While those women went into the empire to advocate for reforms that they also sought in Britain, Kingsley and Gaunt never advocated for such reforms.¹⁷ The existence of distance was essential to their performance. In writing these narratives neither Kingsley nor Gaunt meaningfully questioned the existing racial or gendered hierarchies, instead, they both used those structures to their advantage, allowing themselves a freedom that did not extend to others, even other white women.

¹⁶ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*.

To give this analysis context, it is important to define patriarchal structures and discourse. This discourse confined both Kingsley and Gaunt in specific ways due to their gender. Kingsley, for example, stayed home and care for her parents until they died, while her brother was free to pursue his own goals.¹⁸ Gaunt, on the other hand, became one of the first women to enroll at the University of Melbourne, but she did not complete her degree as a result of the challenge inherent in being only one of a few women at the university.¹⁹ Yet, beyond these specific instances of gendered disadvantage, the discourse of the time made it difficult for these women to travel. The most obvious aspect of this restrictive discourse was the assumption that the term “explorer” was inherently masculine. This discourse restricted the range of thought and discussion within a society. Examining patriarchy as discourse reveals its social power, because it exists beyond specific laws and is more concrete than a vague, overarching threat. When considering whether an action has moved beyond this discourse, a crucial question is both whether an action disrupts the discourse or simply fits into it. Additionally, one must consider the ways in which this discourse was always intertwined in other discourses, such as those of race and empire.

When examining the discourse that Kingsley and Gaunt created in their performance, it is important to note the ways in which, as white women, their discourse silenced West African voices. When Kingsley and Gaunt traveled through West Africa they used it as a setting and created an image of West Africa that suited their goals. In doing so, they purported to speak for West Africans and thereby silenced their perspectives. Their writing, therefore, was a type of imperial epistemic violence. This violence was closely tied to the violent invasion of West Africa

¹⁸ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986).

¹⁹ Bronwen Hickman, *Mary Gaunt: Independent Colonial Woman*, (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2014).

by Europeans during this period. Therefore, while Kingsley and Gaunt can seem amusing or entertaining, their writing perpetuated inherent violence that continues to persist today.

Both because of these violent myths and the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt used those myths to define themselves, one must read these narratives not as proof of objective fact, but as performance. Examining these narratives as performance sidesteps the, sometimes tedious, question of “did this really happen?” and move toward the more interesting question of why these women decided to tell the story they told and what that story means for the histories of whiteness, gender, and empire. Analyzing the entire accounts with the understanding that any of it could be fiction allows the reader to pay closer attention to why these women included what they did, and ask what that says about the women creating the narratives, the societies they came from, and the stories they constructed in order to maintain their place in those societies. Even if everything these women wrote was true, neither Kingsley nor Gaunt had the space in their books to recount every event they experienced in West Africa. Thus, in writing their accounts, each woman selected the stories that they considered important. Regardless of whether any of these events truly occurred, Kingsley and Gaunt’s writing put together a selection of stories meant to define both Africa and themselves. Therefore, while these accounts are not a reliable means of gathering facts about West Africa, they did construct definitions of race, gender, and nationality that allow greater understanding of how these structures functioned at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

When Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt traveled through West Africa, every choice they made was part of their performance. In traveling, they became characters who served as important players within the British Empire. These stories were ones of education—*bildungsroman*—that demonstrated the upward trajectory of these women towards the masculine

position of imperialist. This educational trajectory reflects, in some ways, the trajectory of whiggish history. In placing themselves within the position of progress through time, Kingsley and Gaunt ostensibly made whiggish progress available to women, even though each woman made clear in her work that most women were excluded from the type of travel in which they engaged. Therefore, to make their argument, they needed to engage in performance, creating definitions of race, gender, and nationality that allowed them to participate in this process. Yet, both Kingsley and Gaunt actively denied the whiggish notion of progress to Africans, as any progress on the part of Africans would implicitly interfere with Kingsley's and Gaunt's own progress. Ultimately, the performances of Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt used oppressive structures of imperialism and patriarchy to define themselves as imperialists, and, in the process, reinforced many structures that they may, ostensibly, seem to have subverted. In examining Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* and Gaunt's *Alone in West Africa*, readers can better understand the ways in which travel writing existed as a performance, and, in these specific cases, these performances reveal that at the turn of the twentieth century, the discourses of gender and imperialism always functioned together.

II. Defining the Genre

“It was in 1893 that, for the first time in my life, I found myself in possession of five or six months which were not heavily forestalled, and feeling like a boy with a new half-crown, I lay about in my mind, as Mr. Bunyan would say, as to what to do with them. ‘Go and learn your tropics,’ said Science. Where on earth am I to go, I wondered, for tropics are tropics wherever found, so I got down an atlas and saw that either South America or West Africa must be my destination, for the Malayan region was too far off and too expensive. Then I got Wallace’s Geographical Distribution and after reading that master’s article on the Ethiopian region I hardened my heart and closed with West Africa.”

-Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*²⁰

“It was the tale of a boy named Carlo who was wrecked on the coast of West Africa—nice vague location; he climbed a cocoa-but tree—I can see him now with a rope around his waist and his legs dangling in an impossible attitude—and he was taken by savages. His further adventures I do not know, because a man came riding in shouting that the cold paddock was on fire [...] I never finished the story of Carlo. Where he went I can’t imagine, but I can’t think the savages ate him else his story would never have been written; and from that moment dated my interest in West Africa”

-Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*²¹

As Kingsley and Gaunt set the stage for their performances, they, much like other travel writers, found the need to justify their travels and their writing about these travels. In doing so, each of these women placed themselves within a larger tradition of travel writing, both fictional and otherwise. Kingsley, for example chose to reference John Bunyan and *Pilgrim’s Progress*

²⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 1.

²¹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 2.

while Gaunt referenced a possibly fictional story of a boy named Carlo. In this sense, it became clear from the beginning that they wished to place themselves with this tradition of travel and adventure writing—a genre that has often confused the line between fact and fiction. This genre has included works from *Robinson Crusoe* to works of missionaries who also traveled to West Africa, such as Thomas Birch Freeman. However, as each woman made clear in her opening, this tradition of adventure writing has always been heavily gendered and, thus, Kingsley and Gaunt each transformed themselves into a “boy” to begin their performances as imperial adventurers.

The connection between fiction and travel writing goes as far back as the history of the English novel. Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*, often considered the first English novel, often confused fiction and reality. The novel begins as Crusoe sets off from England only to quickly be enslaved in North Africa.²² Two years later, he escapes and sets off again, and is shipwrecked once more. This time, however, he is the one with the power. “Alone” on an island, Crusoe begins to make that island British.²³ Crusoe furthers this British colonization when he encounters a footprint—proof that there are others on the island. When he encounters a man whom he names “Friday,” Crusoe soon makes him a slave and justifies this action by his ability to “reform” a cannibal.²⁴ This novel can serve as an allegory for the history of the British Empire and how the British saw themselves. As Linda Colley argued in *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World*, “Crusoe seems at one level the archetypal; conqueror and colonizer, he is also representative of British imperial experience in a very different sense. Before his shipwreck, Crusoe is captured at sea by Barbary corsairs and becomes a ‘miserable slave’ in Morocco.”²⁵

²² Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, (New York: Norton and Company, 1994).

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World*, 1.

The novel clearly explored the transition from the powerlessness and fear that Britons would be enslaved to the imperialist power of taking over an island, making that island British, and then enslaving its inhabitants. Two aspects of how initial audiences read the novel particularly emphasize the relationship of the novel to “true” travel writing.

The first of these two aspects is the fact that, after its first printing, many readers believed that the stories were true. They believed the Crusoe was a real man who has been shipwrecked on an island near the Caribbean and that the Moors have enslaved him. This blur between fictional travel writing and “real” travel writing is mirrored by the fact that many other pieces of supposedly true travel writing were actually fictional. Yet, despite the fictional nature of these stories, people’s belief in their “truth” ultimately shaped both people’s perceptions of the world and how they interacted with the world, as with the travel writings of Kingsley and Gaunt.

The second important aspect of how audiences read *Robinson Crusoe* was the selective manner in which it was remembered. When people recall *Crusoe*, they very rarely focus on the captivity narrative that makes up part of the beginning of the story. Instead, audiences remember the aspect of the novel in which Crusoe fulfills the promise of what the British Empire will become in the years following both the novel’s publication. This promise includes the Treaty of Utrecht, which in 1713 ended the War of Spanish Succession and gave the British control of the Spanish Asiento and a number of islands surrounding the Atlantic.²⁶ In this sense, travel writing, both fictional and otherwise, is influenced not simply by what the fiction says about reality, but by what reality has to say about fiction. As this essay will later discuss, the perception of the writings of Kingsley and Gaunt have also been shaped by shifting worldviews in the century

²⁶ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 29.

following their publication, as historians have shifted from seeing them as imperialists to seeing them as feminists.

While *Robinson Crusoe* tells a fictional travel narrative that encouraged future travel and imperialism, two ideas that often went hand in hand in these types of writing, Johnathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* gave a different message to those who, in the early-eighteenth century, wished to travel the world. While *Robinson Crusoe* told its readers to travel and to expand the British Empire, Gulliver returns to England with the opposite admonition. He returns disgusted with England, unable even to eat with his family as they resemble the Yahoos that he met on his journey.²⁷ Furthermore, Gulliver explicitly argues against English conquest within any of the regions in which he traveled. When Gulliver returns from his travels, he remarks:

The *Lilliputians* I think, are hardly worth the Charge of a Fleet and Army to reduce them; and I question whether it might be prudent or safe to attempt the *Brobdignagians*: Or, whether an *English Army* would be much at their East with the Flying Island over their Heads. The *Houyhnhnms*, indeed, appear not to be well prepared for War, a Science to which they are perfect Strangers, and especially against missive Weapons. However, supposing myself to be Minister of State, I could never give my Advice for invading them.²⁸

Unlike Crusoe, in Swift's satire, Gulliver has allowed his travels to change the way in which he sees the world. While Crusoe left England assured that England was superior and returned with the same notion, Gulliver allowed himself the freedom to see past these structures. Yet, it was this freedom that leads to Gulliver's repulsion with his own family, and his uncertainty of his own identity.

²⁷ Johnathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁸ *ibid*, 439.

In this respect, Gulliver is an example of what Kingsley and Gaunt could never become. Kingsley and Gaunt travelled to give themselves a higher place in the existing hierarchy, not to tear down that hierarchy. Thus, unlike Gulliver, Kingsley and Gaunt could never allow themselves the freedom to consider Africa in the way that Gulliver considers the Houyhnhnms. As Colley puts it, “Confined on the island of the Houyhnhnms, creatures utterly unlike himself and far superior, he becomes so caught up in their society that he succumbs to its values.”²⁹ This ability to fully understand and embrace the values of another culture was a freedom that Kingsley and Gaunt lacked, because if they indulged this freedom, they would be unable to maintain their imperialist reasons for traveling.

In her book *Travel, Gender, and Empire: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, Alison Blunt, in describing Kingsley’s use of literary devices, discussed how travel writing was akin to fiction writing:

Travel writing seems to mediate ‘fact’ and fiction, often seeming to transcend conventional distinctions between scientific and literary writing. This is predicated on the authority of the author and representing experiences that are not easily verifiable. It can also seem that the travel writer enjoys a superior status to the reader because ‘the speaker in any travel book exhibits himself [*sic*] as physically more free than the reader, and this every such book is an implicit celebration of freedom. Such freedom is illusory.’³⁰

This illusion of freedom was an important part of Kingsley’s performance, as she kept herself restrained by patriarchal and imperial expectations even as she gained the freedoms to participate in an activity associated with masculinity. So, while some, such as Katherine Frank, have read

²⁹ Linda Colley, *Captives*, 2.

³⁰ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender, and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 21.

Kingsley as breaking out of patriarchal discourse toward a West African freedom, neither Kingsley nor Gaunt can truly step outside the patriarchal and imperial discourses as Gulliver can.³¹ Thus, their supposed freedom could only exist in a system in which they were confined. In this sense, while Gulliver had the ability to travel outside of European discourse, Kingsley and Gaunt could never allow themselves that freedom.

This fictionalized travel writing, present in novels such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* continued to exist throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. Unlike many of the stories in the early-eighteenth century, which were written before the height of the British Empire, many of these stories involved travelers exploring places that had already been “discovered.” These stories often worked as bildungsroman, allowing their central characters, often young boys, to grow up and define himself within a colonial setting, such as the case in Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim*. However, as Edward Said observed in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Almost without exception these narratives, and literally hundreds like them based on the exhilaration and interest of adventure in the colonial world, far from casting doubt on the imperial undertaking, serve to conform and celebrate its causes. Explorers find what they are looking for, adventurers return home safe and wealthier, and even the chastened Kim is drafted into the Great Game.”³² This observation is significant in understanding the positions of Kingsley and Gaunt in writing about their travels through West Africa. These writings, too, can be read as bildungsroman, in which Kingsley and Gaunt grow up and define themselves.

However, as Philippa Levine has argued, women did not belong in these adventure novels or in stories like *Kim*. She has argued that “In Kim’s world, women did not belong in the male arena of risk and were simply a nuisance. They distracted men from the business at hand.

³¹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out*.

³² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Random House, 1993), 187-188.

They required protection. They demanded polite society and sexual fidelity.”³³ Traditionally, in these stories women never held significant roles. Instead, they existed on the sideline, safe from the masculine space of empire. It, therefore, made sense that, in writing their own adventure stories, Kingsley and Gaunt needed to transform themselves into boys at the beginning of their journeys. While they, later, to varying degrees, emphasized their femininity, Kingsley and Gaunt’s initial transformation into boys reflected this transition from a male adventure story to a female one.

Defining the form of the bildungsroman is useful in understanding Kingsley’s and Gaunt’s work. The common notion of a bildungsroman as simply a story of growing up is overly simplistic. Rather, the term refers not simply to a novel about education but rather to a genre defined by the central characters finding their place within a society.³⁴ This idea comes from the premise that education always shapes the ways in which people interact with society and allows them to grow or “progress” into an effective member of that society. Within the context of empire, this education often lead to the integration of the central character into an imperial position. Such a transition was easier for a white man whom society expected to fill that position, it was harder for a woman—and harder still for an Australian woman. Therefore, in writing stories about their travels, Kingsley and Gaunt had to perform the role of man, or of British woman in a way that connected to their gender, class, and nationality.

When comparing the writings of Kingsley and Gaunt to works of fiction, it is important to note that Gaunt wrote books advertised as fiction, in addition to her travel writing. Oftentimes she used her travels as research opportunities to explore the setting of future novels. When

³³Philippa Levine, *The British Empire*, 160.

³⁴Enrique Lima, "The Uneven Development of the "Bildungsroman": D'Arcy McNickle and Native American Modernity," *Comparative Literature* 63, no. 3 (2011): 291-306.

traveling through West Africa, Gaunt used this opportunity to conduct research for her novel *The Uncounted Cost*. Significantly, these novels often reflected the typical adventure novel of the time. As Martin Tucker has suggested, “the plot of *The Uncounted Cost* reads like one of Kipling’s adventure stories, and in its sympathy-without-commitment for the wrongs of the African it has a Kiplingesque atmosphere.”³⁵ However, unlike many of those masculine novels, Gaunt’s novels often centered women and, like her travel writing, questioned the role that women should play within the British Empire. *The Uncounted Cost*, for example, describes the romantic lives of two single women and two men who are positioned in West Africa. It argued that without women in West Africa, men will inevitably become unfaithful to their wives.”³⁶ Within this novel, it becomes clear that without women’s presence in West Africa, men’s British morality would degrade, ultimately harming the imperial project as a whole. In this sense, Gaunt’s novel argued that women could exist within West Africa, while still maintaining discourse of gendered difference. Gaunt’s travel writing reflected this central argument of her novel, as she argued for women’s place in empire while never questioning structures neither of imperial adventure fiction nor of racial or gendered hierarchies.

Just as fiction reflected travel writing, “true” travel writers also used literary tropes to imagine the setting they were in and the people whom they visited. The writings of many male explorers in West Africa used these tropes. This creation can especially be seen in the writings of Thomas Birch Freeman, a missionary who traveled through the Asante Empire in the 1830s. Once reaching Kumasi, Birch focused heavily on the idea of human sacrifice. When reading his work, it seems as though every aspect of Asante culture related to this practice, as nearly every

³⁵ Martin Tucker, "The African Novel: The Confrontation of Mary Gaunt," *Africa Today* 11, no. 8 (1964): 9-11.

³⁶ Mary Gaunt, *The Uncounted Cost*. London: T. Werner Laurie, 1913.

object in the city reminded him of human sacrifice. While this part of the writing could have been true, it is important to note the ways in which he selectively focused only on aspects of their culture that gives the reader the impression that the entirety of Asante culture focused on human sacrifice. For example, as he described his entrance into Kumasi, he almost exclusively mentioned objects that connected to human sacrifice, while passing over other aspects of the city. Freeman furthered his performance as he began speaking for the Asante, whose language he never learned. When expressing sympathy to the victims of human sacrifice he wrote:

Have these poor sufferers no voice? No tale of woe to relate? Methinks I hear them crying to British Christians especially, ‘come pray come, and look on our unhappy country! See how it groans beneath the iron despotism of the prince of darkness! True, it is a beautiful country, its fertile soil produces a hundred-fold! Bur what avails its beauty or fertility, when it is converted into an immense slaughterhouse? O ye who enjoy the high blessings of Christianity, allow us to entreat you to direct your energies toward this scene of moral desolation!’³⁷

In this passage Freeman began by questioning whether those in Africa had a voice, before deciding to speak over them and further silence them by creating characters who he presented as a true vision of Africa.

Like Freeman, Kingsley and Gaunt staged fiction about the Africans and the Africa that they encountered. While neither woman saw Africans as crying out for God, they presented a limiting image of the continent that conformed to their worldviews. This image too, was a type of fiction, a performance telling a useful, if false, story that allowed Kingsley and Gaunt the freedom to travel within the restraints of their society. As Mary Louise Pratt has discussed, while

³⁷ Thomas Birch Freeman, *Journal of Various Visits into the Kingdoms of Ashanti, Aku, and Dahomi, in Western Africa, to Promote the Objects of the Wesleyan Missionary Society* (London: The Wesleyan Mission-House, 1844).

readers have often seen travel writing as an objective means of learning about a region, it, in reality has said much more about the people visiting than about the place visited.³⁸ Pratt described how writing about travel literature has tended to be “celebratory, recapitulating the exploits of intrepid eccentrics or dedicated scientists” or read in order to gain “information about the places, peoples, and times they discuss.”³⁹ This reading of travel writing reveals ways in which this genre is nearly always influenced by past perceptions of a region, and then, in turn, influences later accounts. This form, thus, both came from and reinforced European structures of empire. In part because they were women, writing about Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt has often been celebratory, as historians and other writers have hailed them as feminist figures, breaking out of the Victorian and Edwardian patriarchal structures that would typically prevent these women from traveling without a husband; however, their writings, too must be read with the same critical lens that Pratt applied to her examples. This knowledge that these travel writers created, therefore, was part of a larger performance of empire.

When Mary Kingsley opened *Travels in West Africa*, she carefully and intentionally performed her connection to West Africa as an English subject. In her opening declaration that “tropics are tropics wherever found,” Kingsley framed much of the existing empire as a singular “other” existing in opposition to England, a mistake that Gaunt would be far less likely to make.⁴⁰ This positioning seems to suggest that, from her position within the metropole of London, the colonized world seemed to blend together. In this respect, Kingsley’s opening began to define not only herself, but also England and its distinct power in the world. Yet, in addition to this national performance, Kingsley’s transition to travel writing required a gendered

³⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.

³⁹ *ibid*, 10.

⁴⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 1.

performance. When describing her freedom to travel to West Africa, she wrote that she felt, “like a boy with a new half-crown.”⁴¹ In other words, her desire and ability to travel to West Africa transformed her, temporarily, into a boy, asserting, from the very beginning, that she was a woman stepping into a male role, but one that still had the limited power of a child. Furthermore, she asserted herself as a boy with money, and, thus, a boy who had the opportunity to become someone important. This transition was important as well, because, while much of the existing imperial travel literature included men or boys, it rarely included women or girls. However, Kingsley seemed to realize that a transition from woman to man would be too large—or too unbelievable—a jump. She, therefore, insisted to be read a young male child.

The opening of *Alone in West Africa* utilized a similar performance as Gaunt described her transition into West Africa through the lens of fiction and stories. She described reading a book in her Australian childhood, which inspired her to travel, about a young boy named Carlo who was lost in West Africa. As Gaunt described the story of Carlo, it remained unclear whether Carlo’s story was real or fiction. Gaunt, however, believed the story to be true, or at least a true enough depiction of West Africa to inspire curiosity of the place. Significantly, Carlo was a young boy, so Gaunt, like Kingsley felt the need to put herself into the position of a young boy when entering West Africa. Like Kingsley, Gaunt used this opening to describe West Africa as an other, as she expressed her worry that cannibals had eaten Carlo, therefore implying that West Africans were cannibals and, thus, morally inferior to Europeans. However, unlike Kingsley, Gaunt’s opening allowed for more differentiation between the regions of travel. Gaunt, as an Australian, understood the difference between various parts of the empire because she, herself, had grown up in them. As Angela Woollacott has discussed in her assessment of Australian

⁴¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

women traveling to London, “the British Empire, itself an imagined community, shaped local, colonial, national, and global identity. The variation in referents for these local, colonial, national, and global identities, was, of course, immense.”⁴² Gaunt’s position in the Empire, thus, shaped her view of that empire. Unlike Kingsley’s insistence that all tropics are, fundamentally the same, Gaunt described Carlo’s West Africa as “nice vague location,” reflected a more nuanced approach to the region.⁴³ Additionally, she had traveled to other parts of the world, such as China before setting off for West Africa.⁴⁴ The distinction, therefore, signifies a difference in Gaunt’s travel writing as her position was less firmly established as part of a metropole, and she had to, therefore, work harder to create her own home, along with the region through which she traveled.

Despite their differences, it is important that both Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt began their narratives by comparing themselves to males. This shift reflected the ways in which the structures and discourses of patriarchy the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries denied the ability to travel, especially to travel in Africa to women. This restriction was especially true of Mary Kingsley, both because she lived in the metropole and because her family expected her to spend her time taking care of her family.⁴⁵ Thus, when Kingsley referred to being free to travel, this freedom came only after the death of her parents, because she no longer needed to care for them, in contrast to both her uncle and her father, both well-known travelers, who did not need to worry about these family concerns.⁴⁶ Therefore, within this discourse, women occupied an inferior position to men. Boys, too, occupied this inferior status; however, unlike

⁴² Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 142.

⁴³ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 2.

⁴⁴ Bronwen Hickman, *Mary Gaunt*.

⁴⁵ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out*, 41.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 15.

women, they could eventually grow into the status of men. In positioning themselves as boys, Kingsley and Gaunt placed themselves on a path toward filling that equal role. While Kingsley frequently argued against the admission of women to traditionally masculine roles, the performance of Kingsley and Gaunt allowed them to achieve two things. First, it allowed them to fill roles of boys in other imperial adventure stories. Second, it placed them on an upward trajectory, one that would end with their ability to fit into imperial and patriarchal structures, thus allowing them power within the imperial project.

However, they each realized, at some level, that they would never be able to fully fill the position of protagonists within these imperial performances. Once again, one can see why both Kingsley and Gaunt found the need to transform themselves, temporarily into males. As Antoinette Burton discussed in her essay “‘A Pilgrim Reformer’ at the Heart of Empire” this gendered performance was not unique to women travelers. Her essay discusses Behramji Malabari, a Parsi man who traveled to England to advocate against child marriage in India.⁴⁷ Although he was a Parsi man, he performed the position of a Hindu widow, saying, “I, on the other hand, speak *for* the widow, and *as* the widow.”⁴⁸ Burton explained this performance by writing that Malabari “keenly understood that one of the ways in which British rule was justified was through the feminization of its colonial subjects. Because he wanted to control the colonizing project in order to secure his own exemption, he mimicked that process when he insisted on the effeminacy of Hindu conservatives.”⁴⁹ In their own performances, Kingsley and Gaunt also recognized the ways in which colonial subjects were feminized as well as the inverse, that colonizers were masculinized. Therefore, in transforming themselves into both the

⁴⁷Antoinette Burton, ‘A Pilgrim Reformer’ at the Heart of the Empire: Behramji Malabari in Late-Victorian London,” *Gender and History*, no. 8 (1996): 175-196..

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 183.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 183.

protagonist of an adventure novel and the imperial explorer, Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt needed to transform themselves into males before embarking of their travels.

This performance indicated that, like many boy protagonists of these imperial adventure stories, their story would be one of progress and education. While they had not yet achieved the power available to a man, they had transformed themselves into a being that would eventually become one. The performance, therefore, becomes a bildungsroman, allowing its protagonists to grow in an almost whiggish fashion. In part because the women—at least ostensibly—wrote pieces of travel writing in addition to pieces of literary fiction, they also placed themselves within a history of travel writing. However, as T.B. Freeman demonstrated, this travel writing has always been part of a performance and, so too, was the writing of Kingsley and Gaunt. Ultimately, the opening of each narrative told its audience not to expect a strictly objective account of West Africa, but a lively performance full of witty characters, literary tropes, and imperial ideology.

III. Staging the Performance

“You do not expect to hear things called ‘diverting spectacles’ on the Rembwé; so I turned round and saw standing on the bank against which our canoe was moored, what appeared to me to be an English gentleman who had from some misfortune gone black all over and lost his trousers and been compelled to replace them with a highly ornamental table-cloth. The rest of his wardrobe was in exquisite condition, with the usual white jean coat, white shirt collar, very neat tie, and felt hat affected by white gentlemen out here”

-Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*⁵⁰

“The native untouched by the white man has a dignity and a charm that there is no denying; it seems a great pity he cannot be kept in that condition. The man on the first rung of civilization has points about him, and on the whole one cannot help liking him, but the man who has gathered the rudiments of an education, as presented to men in an English school on the Coast, is, to my mind, about as disagreeable a specimen of humanity as it is possible to meet anywhere. He has lost the charming courtesy of the untutored savage and replaced it by a horrible veneer of civilization that is blatant and pompous.”

-Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*⁵¹

In reading Kingsley and Gaunt’s travels through West Africa, the reader comes to understand this setting only through the stage these women chose to set when telling their story. Both women carefully selected each detail about West Africa as part of an argument that sought to prove that a British imagination of Africa *was* Africa. By creating this setting, these travel accounts confirmed the idea present in other writings that European imperialism benefited West Africa while also contrasting some of the arguments made by missionaries through its portrayal

⁵⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 345-346.

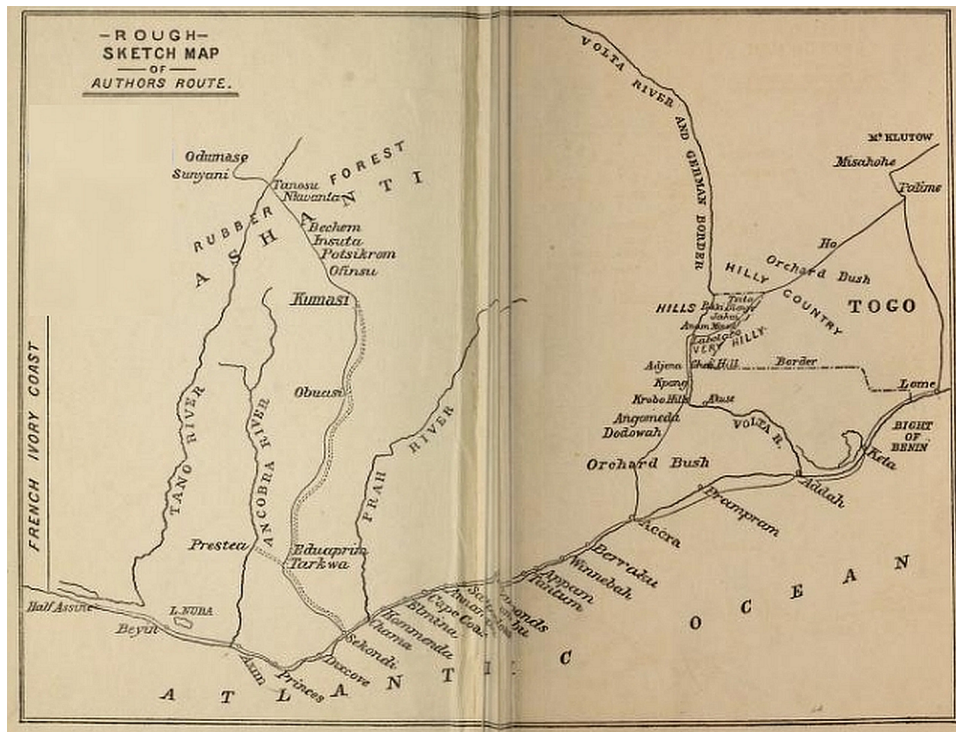
⁵¹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 296.

of Africans. Ultimately, this setting did more to allow these women to position themselves within an imperial project than to inform their readers about West Africa, despite what their intentions may have been. Like other travelers and imperial anthropologists, Kingsley and Gaunt invented a setting through which to travel.

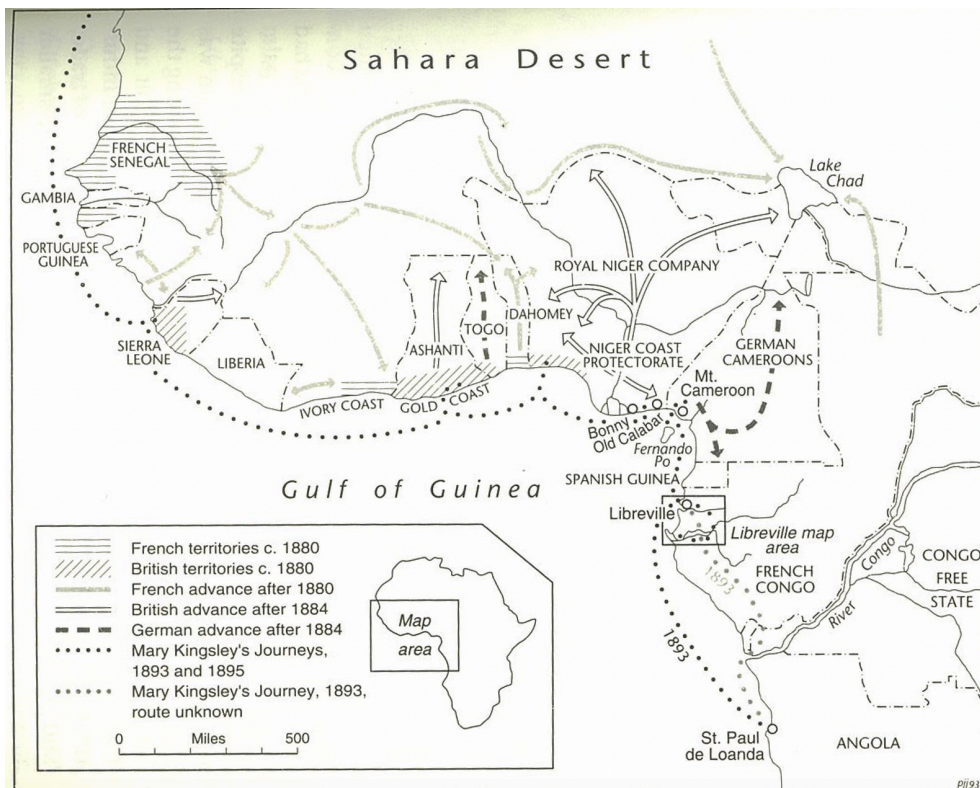
Kingsley's travels began in Liverpool, where she boarded a ship set for Sierra Leone. While her *Travels in West Africa* covered multiple trips, and often told stories out of order, her general path began in Sierra Leone and traveled south, through Liberia and to the Gold Coast, visiting Accra where she spent time in the Asante region. She then traveled further south, down the Ogowé River and through the French Congo.⁵² From there she went back north and ended her journey in Cameroon. Gaunt, on the other hand, began her journey further north, in Gambia. She then spent a larger portion of her time in the Asante region, ending her journey in Togo.⁵³ As the maps below demonstrate, Kingsley traveled more extensively through West Africa, while Gaunt remained primarily in the Asante region. While each of these women spend considerable portions of their travel accounts discussing the individual aspects of these places, they often existed simply as a setting in which Kingsley and Gaunt could define themselves.

⁵² Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

⁵³ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.



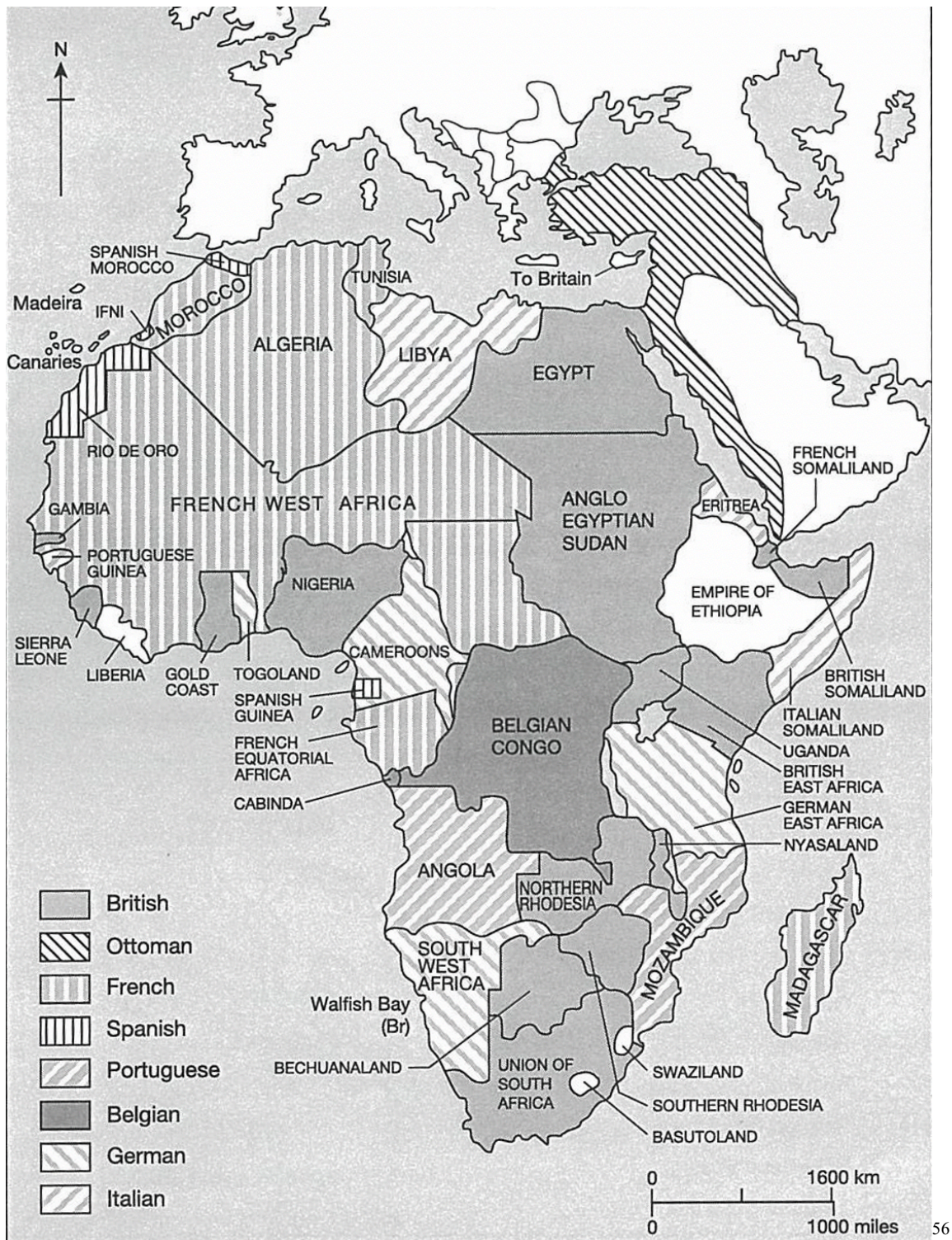
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⁵⁴ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

⁵⁵ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender and Imperialism*, 49.



⁵⁶ M. E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, xl.

Yet, as previously mentioned, by the time Kingsley and Gaunt traveled through these regions, Europe had divided and controlled them, and very little of West Africa governed itself. As seen in the 1914 map above, Britain, France, and Germany controlled much of the region Kingsley and Gaunt traveled through. Gaunt spent considerable portions of her *Alone in West Africa* discussing the differences between British and German imperialism, and even gave lectures back in London on the topic in the years leading to the First World War.⁵⁷ Yet, when examining this map it is important to note that, like the writings of Kingsley and Gaunt, this map is a European construction. While Europe wanted to have complete control of these regions, the reality of African resistance and agency complicated this assumption of control.

While most historiography of Kingsley and Gaunt has focused on the women themselves, their expressed purpose of much of their writing was not to tell about themselves but to explain West Africa. This goal was especially clear in the writing of Mary Kingsley, who dedicated five chapters of her *Travels* to understanding the West African idea of the fetish and whether it served as a religious idol.⁵⁸ She also wrote an entire book of anthropological research entitled *West African Studies*.⁵⁹ While many historians have argued as to whether Mary Kingsley should be considered an anthropologist, her writings about West Africa certainly fall into the trap that much imperial anthropology created by imagining a setting that was both completely othered and ready for imperial expansion. As Emmanuelle Sibeud has shown, anthropology, throughout the nineteenth century, was largely connected to racism.⁶⁰ Travelers who visited Africa often told

⁵⁷ "Royal Colonial Institute: Session of 1911-1912," *The London Times*, October 13, 1911.

⁵⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

⁵⁹ Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies*.

⁶⁰ Emmanuelle Sibeud, "A Useless Colonial Science?: Practicing Anthropology in the French Colonial Empire, circa 1880–1960," *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (2012): S83-94.

stories of Africans which emphasized their difference and ultimately dehumanized them.⁶¹

Ultimately, she argued that anthropology helped to create an imperial racial divide.

This critique of anthropology echoes the work of Edward Said, who, in *Orientalism*, discussed the ways in which imperial knowledge of a place allowed control of the place.⁶² When discussing Arthur James Balfour's description of Egypt Said wrote, "to have knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it [...] British knowledge of Egypt *is* Egypt for Balfour."⁶³ Yet, significantly, as Said pointed out, "it does not occur to Balfour to let the Egyptian speak for himself."⁶⁴ Additionally, central to Said's critique was the fact that these scholars used the other in order to define themselves. Through writing about their travels about West Africa, Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt used the other in order to define themselves and, in the process, silenced the Africans about whom they were writing.

In *Performances*, Greg Denning described the way in which this history and this archeology was always a means not of understanding the other but understanding the self. He wrote, "knowing the past, which we call history, and knowing the other, which we call anthropology, are the two great cultural metaphors by which we know ourselves and knowing ourselves constitute ourselves."⁶⁵ The travels of Kingsley and Gaunt were both history and anthropology. Thus, history is always a performance, and even histories which appear simply to be a series of objective facts are, in reality, a series of metaphors.

This role of Africans as setting was central to the idea that Kingsley and Gaunt traveled "alone." Among the most obvious of the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt dehumanized

⁶¹ Emmanuelle Sibaud, "A Useless Colonial Science?"

⁶² Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1978).

⁶³ *ibid*, 32.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 33.

⁶⁵ Denning, *Performances*, 200.

Africans was their constant references to their supposed solitude. It even defined the title of Gaunt's book. Yet, throughout their time in West Africa, neither woman was ever really alone. African guides who carried their things, provided them with information, and showed them the way constantly surrounded each woman.⁶⁶ What Kingsley and Gaunt meant, therefore, when they referred to traveling 'alone,' was that they traveled without white men. Yet, to use the phrase 'alone' implied that they traveled without any other people, and, thus, dehumanized the Africans with whom they traveled. This type of dehumanization continued when Kingsley described not only her own supposed solitude, but the solitude of the colonial officials within West Africa. She wrote, "The isolation for a white man must be terrible; sometimes two months will go by without his seeing another white face but that in his looking-glass, and when he does see another, it is only by a fleeting visit such as we now pay him"⁶⁷ This passage cements Kingsley's definition of 'alone' as 'without white people' rather than simply, 'without people,' continuing her dehumanization of Africans.

The fact that whenever Kingsley or Gaunt mentioned a particular African man, both women made excuses for not referring to them by their names allowed these women to maintain the idea that they traveled alone. When Kingsley referred to those with whom she traveled for months, she wrote, "the first two mentioned are Christians, the other two pagans, I will refer to them by their characteristic points, for their honorable names are awfully alike when you do hear them, and, as is usual with Africans, rarely used in conversation."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Gaunt described how "I'm afraid I must plead guilty to not knowing my men by sight; for a long time a black man was a black man to me, and he had no individuality about him."⁶⁹ Not only do these moments

⁶⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*; Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

⁶⁷ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 149.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 241.

⁶⁹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 117.

dehumanize the African they traveled with, but they also reinforced the idea that all Africans constituted a singular identity against which they could define themselves.

Thus, implicit in the performance of Kingsley and Gaunt was the idea that these people were not characters in their performance, but props. They existed as part of a setting that was necessary to their travels, as they often physically carried the women through West Africa, but not as complete people. This representation of colonized people reflects the position of many Australian women's experience in Ceylon. As Angela Woollacott has described, Australian women who stopped in Ceylon on their way to London looked forward to the prospect of riding on a rickshaw.⁷⁰ As one woman, Louise Mack, described the experience:

You feel like a queen. You own the world [...] [The rickshaw driver] is so thin that you fear he will break in pieces, that you will be arrested for cruelty to dumb animals. Bones stick out of his shoulders, elbows, knees and feet. He is a very highly-polished trotter. His skin catches the sun on it and shines like a looking glass [...] you have changed your identity.⁷¹

In this moment Louise Mack treated the rickshaw driver as her subject, discussing him in terms one might use to describe a horse. She then, in comparing him to a looking glass, emphasized the fact that once she had objectified him, she could use him to define herself. This objectification was reflected in the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt transformed the African men they traveled with into props.

However, when Kingsley and Gaunt conducted this transformation from the human to the object, they denied Africans the progress that they sought for themselves. Central to this description of Africa and Africans was the whiggish idea of history. This type of history is

⁷⁰ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*.

⁷¹ *ibid*, 38.

defined by the idea of progress through time. This articulation of history was nearly always racial, arguing that Europe, and particularly England, had achieved the most progress and, thus, had the most history. This argument nearly always contributed to discourse of imperialism, as the argument followed that Britain needed to bring its progress to the rest of the Empire. This “progress” applied to both the land and to the people. Among the more noteworthy of the whiggish historians was Thomas Babington Macaulay who used his “Minute on Indian Education” to argue that India was intellectually “behind” England. He asserted that no orientalist would deny that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” He then used this assertion to argue that some Indians needed to receive an English education in order to be “raised” to the status of Briton.⁷² Macaulay argued that “we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”⁷³ In arguing that Indians—or other colonial subjects—could “advance” to the position of “Briton,” Macaulay put individuals on the same whiggish trajectory as nations or continents. However, fundamental to his argument, was the qualification that these colonial subjects would never be fully British, as their race would never allow them to fully achieve this position. In creating this distinction, Macaulay ensured that the British would always be superior within this discourse.

As a result, the setting of these stories was not Africa but an imagined Africa defined by whiggish worldviews. One can see this imagining early in Kingsley’s work through the ways in which she positioned the places she travels not simply geographically, but in time. She writes, “Fernando Po is said to be a comparatively modern island, and not so long ago to have been

⁷² Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education,” 1835.

⁷³ *ibid.*

connected with the mainland, the strait between them being only nineteen miles across, and not having any deep surroundings"⁷⁴ This positioning of Africa in time placed the continent within a whiggish model that imagines that Britain has achieved more progress and has more history than Africa, thus simplifying Africa, Africans, and their history. Although Kingsley argued that Fernando Po was “comparatively modern,” her writing implied that this modernity came from proximity to Europe and its history. Gaunt did the same thing when she wrote of West Africa:

They have touched the fringe of civilization for so many hundred years; for this Coast of the great days of the slave trade, and along this seashore, by this roaring surf, beneath the shade of these cocoa-nut palms, have marched those weary companies of slaves, whose descendants make the problem of America nowadays.⁷⁵

In this moment, Gaunt not only credited the slave trade with bringing civilization to West Africa, but she also reinforced the whiggish view that history and civilization came from Europe and that this process needed to continue within West Africa.

This whiggish trajectory also related to the path that Kingsley and Gaunt placed themselves on as women. As Antionette Burton noted in her discussion of British feminism, “British feminists argued that female emancipation was necessary not simply because it was just, but because it was nothing less than the embodiment of Britain’s national self-interest and the fulfillment of its historical destiny.”⁷⁶ As Burton pointed out, British feminists viewed their progress as an essential part of the whiggish trajectory towards a more liberal and equal Britain—even when they used that vision to perpetuate oppression and inequality throughout the colonies.⁷⁷ While Kingsley and Gaunt never identified themselves as feminists—Kingsley

⁷⁴ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 54.

⁷⁵ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 65.

⁷⁶ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*, 6.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

actively resisted that title—their writings reflect this whiggish desire for female progress, especially in the ways that it allowed women, themselves, to become imperialists.

Therefore, while Kingsley and Gaunt did not actively contribute to the physical violence of expanding empires, they did contribute to the epistemic violence by perpetuating models and theories that maintain the power structures of empire. Among these models was the narrative of whiggish history, as both Kingsley and Gaunt positioned places they visited not only in geographical terms, but also in terms of time and modernity. Both women asserted not only that West Africa existed, to some degree, in the past, but also that its survival depended on Europe. In this way, these women contributed to imperial epistemic violence simply through their act of writing about and, therefore, claiming authority over West Africa. Through writing books that were read by white audiences who knew very little about Africa, Kingsley and Gaunt shaped popular opinions about the continent within the metropole. Additionally, neither Kingsley nor Gaunt allowed the Africans they encountered to be distinct from each other or to have agency. As noted, both women referred to traveling alone only when they were traveling without white men, even when they were, in fact, traveling with Africans.

Yet, while Kingsley and Gaunt's descriptions of West Africa reflected the fact that they viewed Africa and Africans as existing in the past, they, unlike missionaries and other imperial writers, wished Africa and Africans to stay in the past. When Africans did appear as individuals in these stories, it was often because they acted not like Africans, but like Europeans, which both Kingsley and Gaunt portrayed in a negative light. At one point Kingsley recalled encountering:

What appeared to me to be an English gentleman who had from some misfortune gone black all over and lost his trousers and been compelled to replace them with a highly ornamental table-cloth. The rest of his wardrobe was in exquisite condition, with the

usual white jean coat, white shirt and collar, very neat tie, and felt hat affected by white gentlemen here.⁷⁸

Neither Mary Kingsley nor Mary Gaunt liked missionary work or fully approved of the civilizing mission, as they believed it made Africans appear ridiculous. While some historians have used these passages to argue that these women opposed empire, other passages in which Kingsley and Gaunt demonstrated their overt racism and support for the extraction of resources out of Africa, contradict this conclusion. Instead, these passages against the civilizing mission demonstrate Kingsley and Gaunt's racist belief that Africans can never "raise" to the status of Britain.

While the image of educated Africans amused, or at most unsettled Kingsley, Gaunt more firmly condemned the education of Africans. She claimed that Africans with English educations were "about as disagreeable a specimen of humanity as it is possible to meet anywhere."⁷⁹ In this difference one can begin to see the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt differed in nationality while they were similar in their race and gender. While Kingsley sought to be an English lady, Gaunt sought to be an Australian imperialist. This Australian imperialism was largely connected to a complete dehumanization of Aborigines people, who were seen as existing in the past. It makes sense, then, that Gaunt would apply similar logic to West Africans.

Homi Bhabha's work on mimicry and mockery in *The Location of Culture* helps in understanding Kingsley and Gaunt's resistance to educated Africans as people who disrupted colonial discourse. In the chapter "Of Mimicry and Man" Bhabha discussed the Macaulay "Minute" and the ways in which it required the colonized to mimic—rather than fully become—the colonizer.⁸⁰ Bhabha argued that this space between colonizer and colonized created an

⁷⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 346.

⁷⁹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 296.

⁸⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge Classics, 1994).

ambivalent sense of “not quite/not white.”⁸¹ Yet, significantly, as Bhabha argued, because of this space between the colonizer and the colonized that those such as Macaulay insisted on, this mimicry inevitably becomes mockery. In Bhabha’s words:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come. What they all share is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’. [...] so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.⁸²

Bhabha later defined this “menace” by writing, “the *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I’ve described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object.”⁸³ In other words, when colonial education and mimicry became mockery, that mockery disrupts the colonial discourse that claimed that colonial subjects needed to improve themselves in order to become British. This disruption comes as one can see either that this education is not inherently an improvement or can begin to see the lie that colonizers will ever see colonial subjects as fully British.

While Kingsley and Gaunt clearly differed from Bhabha in their opinion on imperialism and colonial discourse, their writing suggests that they could begin to see the ways in which the

⁸¹ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 131.

⁸² *ibid*, 123.

⁸³ *ibid*, 126.

image of the educated African disrupts their discourse through mimicry and mockery—a discourse that they relied upon to define both Africa and themselves. Yet, when they put themselves on the trajectory towards becoming fully English or Australian, they failed to question the ways in which they disrupted the discourse of imperial patriarchal discourse. Therefore, Kingsley's and Gaunt's continued belief and participation in this discourse perpetuated its violence.

Like Mary Kingsley and other travel writers, Mary Gaunt's travel writing worked to stage the other in order to perform the self. Through establishing that she had the power to define West Africa, Gaunt established herself as an imperialist, making the claim not only that women could fill this role, but that Australians could as well. Gaunt traveled and wrote shortly after Australia became part of the Commonwealth, which allowed Australia greater autonomy regarding domestic concerns, while still subject to Britain's international affairs.⁸⁴ Gaunt's writing worked to construct the Australian nation as its own entity that had gained authority from its racial connection with Britain and that was now able to colonize on its own. While Angela Woollacott has discussed the ways in which Australian women traveling to London used this travel to construct the Australian nation during this period, she has not fully discussed the way in which travel to different parts of the British Empire furthered this defining.⁸⁵ This argument was especially important for the internal colonization of Aboriginal peoples and Australian explorers outside of Australia, such as Gaunt, reinforced this argument. Therefore, in each of the moments in which Gaunt attributed an aspect of her identity or any of her actions to Australia, it is not necessarily that Australia had defined her, but rather that Gaunt had used her travel narrative to define Australia. In this way, Gaunt's writing, along with Kingsley's, said far more about the

⁸⁴ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 16.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

traveler than about the places traveled. To discuss the writings of Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt is not, therefore, to discuss West Africa, but rather to discuss those whose writing creates a representation of Africa that was useful to the writers.

In traveling through and writing about West Africa, Kingsley and Gaunt constructed a setting through which to travel. This setting was completely othered. As a result of this othering, the people in West Africa served not as characters in their performance, but as props, part of the setting rather than whole individuals. Their need to describe West Africa as fundamentally different becomes clear as the women described the effect of European education on West Africans. As they described the ways in which their perception of educated Africans disrupted the colonial—and therefore their own—discourse, it becomes clear that in order for these women to define themselves, they had to first create a contrasting setting.

IV. Conjuring the Self

“Why, I do not know, but English women are regarded as heroines and martyrs who go out to West Africa with their husbands. Possibly it is because I am an Australian and have had a harder bringing-up that I resent very much the supposition that a woman cannot go where a man can. From the time I was a little girl I have seen women go as a matter of course to the back-blocks with their husbands, and if, barring a few exceptions, they did not stay there, we all supposed not that it was the country that disagreed with them, but the husband. We all know there are husbands and wives who do not agree. And I can assure you, for I know both, life in the back-blocks in Australia, life in many of the towns in Australia, with its heat and its want of service, is far harder for a woman than it is in West Africa”

-Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*⁸⁶

“When a person is traveling, intent mainly on geography, it is necessary, if he publishes his journals, that he should publish them in sequence. But I am not a geographer. I have to learn the geography of a region I go into in great detail, so as to get about; but my means of learning it are not the scientific ones – Taking observations, Surveying, Fixing points, &c., &c. These things I know not how to do.”

-Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 31.

⁸⁷ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 110.



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In any memoir, the presentation of the writer is a piece of fiction created by the author. In this way, the first step for Kingsley and Gaunt in creating their travel narratives was to create their central characters. In doing so, they positioned themselves firmly within structures of race, gender, and nationality. In reading these works, the first step is to realize that the “I” in these stories were not the historical figures themselves, but the images of themselves that the two women had created. In this creation, Kingsley and Gaunt created specific definitions of race, gender, and nationality that allowed them the freedom to travel while maintaining the structures of patriarchy and white supremacy that might otherwise prevent this freedom. Rather than create a story that broke the structures, these women created characters who were able to perform

⁸⁸ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

⁸⁹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

within the system to argue that white women were superior to Black men, and they were able to create these characters without questioning structures of racial or gendered superiority.

Much of the existing historiography of Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt paint these women as feminists for participating in the male-dominated activities of travel and travel writing. While this praise clearly ignores their racism and imperialism, it also ignores the specific relationship that these women had to gender and patriarchal discourse. Yet, often this definition of feminism is vague, as the term's meaning has changed drastically over the course of the last century. The term also meant different things to Gaunt than it did to Kingsley, as, by the time of Gaunt's travels, Australian women had more rights than English women.⁹⁰ Additionally, when each woman questioned whether white women could travel in West Africa, they often presented themselves as exceptions to most women, rather than argue that all women could do anything men could do.⁹¹ While neither woman explicitly mentioned it, this exception also applied to their class, as women without the financial resources to travel could not afford this experience. This limited feminism seemed especially clear in the writings of Mary Kingsley, who both valued her own freedom to travel and also sought to limit the voices, and, therefore, freedoms of other women. Throughout her life, Kingsley argued that women should not have the right to vote and that the Royal Geographical Society should not admit women. As Burton has argued, "'New' Women who, like, Mary Kingsley or Augusta Ward, did not call themselves feminist ran the risk of being labeled one, and not in a complimentary way, simply because they were active in the public sphere."⁹² Kingsley's vocal anti-feminism, in some ways, allowed her to break the barriers that she did. London society largely accepted Kingsley despite the fact that

⁹⁰ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 13.

⁹¹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

⁹² Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*, 28.

she broke many traditional conventions of the traditional Victorian women. The central question, then, when describing the works of Kingsley and Gaunt, is not whether these women were feminists, because they, clearly, were not. Instead, the question remains whether their travels in West Africa granted them freedom from the constraints of patriarchal discourse.

Despite the fact that Kingsley never claimed to be a geographer, many historians have framed her insistence that the Royal Geographical Society not admit women as hypocritical. This emphasis on hypocrisy demonstrates that these historians have read Kingsley as a geographer. This presentation of Kingsley as a geographer is exacerbated by the fact that National Geographic publishes her *Travels*. Yet, as Kingsley herself claimed, “I am not a geographer. I have to learn the geography of a region I go into in great detail, so as to get about; but my means of learning it are not the scientific ones – Taking observations, Surveying, Fixing points, &c., &c. These things I know not how to do.”⁹³ The fact that many attempt to fit Kingsley in to the position of geographer demonstrates that these historians have sought to put her in a place which would disrupt a discourse which claimed that geographers were men. This claim that Kingsley was, in fact, a geographer, facilitates the shock of those discovering that she opposed women’s admittance to the Royal Geographical Society. This shock and assumption that Kingsley was a geographer has these historians to read Kingsley more easily as a feminist.

Yet, in characterizing herself in this way, Kingsley contributed to the character that would make her account more interesting to readers. Blunt pointed out that Kingsley’s *Travels in West Africa*, was far more successful than her *West African Studies*.⁹⁴ While *Travels in West Africa* was driven largely by narrative and by Kingsley’s characterization of herself, *West African Studies* was far more academic, as she explained her findings and opinions of fish, fetish,

⁹³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 110.

⁹⁴ Alison Blunt, *Travel, Gender, and Imperialism*, 61.

and witchcraft in West Africa, rather than her own experiences.⁹⁵ The popularity of the first book, which sometimes reads like an adventure novel, suggests that readers were more interested in the character of a female explorer than the “discoveries” the explorer made.

Mary Gaunt’s writing often added another layer to this relationship with patriarchal discourse, claiming that while most English women would not survive travel in West Africa, she could specifically because she was Australian. While Kingsley and Gaunt each broke gendered expectations, neither went as far as to question the patriarchy or the assertion that men were superior to women. This difference raises important national differences between the position of Kingsley, as an English woman, and the position of Gaunt, as an Australian woman. As Gaunt, herself, frequently argued, Australian women were allowed more flexibility both in Australia and abroad than the more “proper” Englishwomen.⁹⁶ This point reflects that of Woollacott, who argued that “in the early twentieth century white Australian women were, in contrast, seen by the dominant culture as newly enfranchised citizens, the beneficiaries of a liberal political system and of the progressiveness of Australian men. In this context, it was easy for white Australian women to define themselves as free and modern.”⁹⁷ Yet, it is always important to note the difference between defining oneself as free within a performance and truly escaping or disrupting patriarchal discourses.

Both Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt used their writings to prove that white women were superior to Black men. While some historians read their writings and praise them for breaking gendered barriers, these historians often ignore the ways in which their travel and their writings were facilitated not only by their whiteness, but by their desire to prove that, within a paradigm

⁹⁵ Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies*.

⁹⁶ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

⁹⁷ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 13.

that asserted that Europeans were superior to Africans and that men were superior to women, white women were superior to Black men. The overtly racist comments that each woman made throughout each book proves this point. Additionally, while Gaunt praised England for eliminating the slave trade, she also credited the slave trade with bringing West Africa into contact with civilization. Though some historians, such as Gaunt's biographers, argued that this racism was not important, as most white people were racist during the nineteenth century, understanding how and why these women constructed and performed race in the manner that they did is essential. In acknowledging Gaunt's racism and in placing that racism in context, one can understand not only how people imagined race in the nineteenth century, but also how they used that imagined structure to reinforce ideas of gender, nationality, and imperialism.

Additionally, for both Kingsley and Gaunt, the performance of self also worked to stage nationality. In her article "Travelers' Tales: Empire, Victorian Travel, and the Spectacle of English Womanhood in Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa*" Laura Cailkowsky argued that Kingsley's performance as a conventional Victorian woman was essential to her travels in West Africa and that it was only in West Africa that Kingsley could perform this role. Kingsley was born just days after her father and her mother, who had been a servant in the household, married. Cailkowsky argues that, as a result she was never able to fulfill bourgeois womanhood in London. It was only when she entered West Africa that Kingsley could perform this expected womanhood. Cailkowsky writes:

The lady traveler of Kingsley's text is defined by her "feminine" sensibilities in times of danger ("I am habitually kind to animals, and besides I do not think it is ladylike to go shooting things with a gun," 545) just as much as she is by her dress, her modesty, and her English good manners. Even the ambiguous class status with which Kingsley

struggles as a sub-standard Kingsley back in England is swiftly resolved upon the same colonial terrains that promised to rehabilitate English second sons and to remake children of the working classes.⁹⁸

Thus, rather than resisting the patriarchy, Kingsley's travels simply worked to provide of new way of stepping into and performing that structure. Yet, as Cailkowsky noted, this performance was distinctly English, rather than more widely British. She wished to fit into the imperial projects specifically from the wealthy metropole of London.

For Mary Gaunt, assertions about both her gender and her race were nearly always tied to her nationality. In general, Gaunt was far more willing to argue that women were equal to men, but she nearly always extended this thinking only to Australian women, whom she argued could endure far more than English women, as they had grown up in a harsher climate.⁹⁹ This thinking was also reflected in the fact that, by the time Mary Gaunt traveled to West Africa, Australian women had the right to vote, while women in England would not gain suffrage until 1918.¹⁰⁰ However, while Gaunt was more willing to challenge patriarchal discourse, she was also more likely to be overt in her racism, bringing up racial differences far more than Kingsley. This difference between Kingsley and Gaunt can, perhaps, be traced to geographical difference. As Gaunt was Australian, her white identity was closely tied to the internal imperialism of Aboriginal people and, thus, her identity depended on dehumanizing non-white people.

Angela Woollacott explored the identity of Australian women who, like Mary Gaunt, traveled to London at the beginning of the twentieth century. She described how their identities were shaped by being both colonizer and colonized, often emphasizing their racial connection

⁹⁸ Laura E. Ciolkowski, "Travelers' Tales: Empire, Victorian Travel, and the Spectacle of English Womanhood in Mary Kingsley's 'Travels in West Africa,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1998, pp. 337–366.

⁹⁹ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*.

¹⁰⁰ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 13.

with England to legitimize their internal imperialism of Aboriginal people. As Woollacott described:

“In the early twentieth century white Australian women were, in contrast, seen by the dominant culture as newly enfranchised citizens, the beneficiaries of a liberal political system and of the progressiveness of Australian men. In this context, it was easy for white Australian women to define themselves as free and modern, in specific contradistinction to the constrained and “primitive” lives Aboriginal women led.”¹⁰¹

Woollacott also described how these white women often emphasized their whiteness especially when encountering racial structures outside of Australia. Woollacott described how Australian women occupied “an in-between ranking in imperial hierarchy” as these women “sought to elide the inferiority inherent in their colonialness by emphasizing their whiteness and their economic and cultural privileging. Exposure to colonial racial structures that were different from those in Australia at times compelled women to articulate notion of themselves as white that were integral to developing Australian identities”¹⁰² Gaunt’s performance reflected these two aspects of Australian female identity at the turn of the century. Gaunt’s travels allowed her to define herself as “free and modern” while her overt racism reinforced her Australian identity as both imperial and white.

In performing their characters in ways that emphasized their ability to participate in empire, Kingsley and Gaunt allowed themselves a type of whiggish progress. It is here that we can return to Bhabha, rereading his conception of colonial mimicry and mockery in terms of their gendered performance. As previously discussed, Kingsley and Gaunt each placed themselves at the beginning of a whiggish trajectory towards progress. In placing themselves in the position of

¹⁰¹ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 13

¹⁰² *ibid*, 34.

an imperial boy, they suggested that they could eventually fill the position of the imperial man. Many of their actions, including their initial decision to travel to West Africa, reflected a performance of the “advancement” of femininity toward masculinity. This performance was relevant even as Kingsley and Gaunt actively resisted the label of “feminist.” However, as Bhabha suggested, the process of mimicry within this model inevitably becomes mockery. Furthermore, this mockery “ruptures the discourse [...] so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.”¹⁰³ Thus, even as Kingsley and Gaunt worked within structures of patriarchy and never questioned whether women were not inferior to men, the simple fact that they engaged in performative whiggish progress within these systems disrupted the vary discourse that they relied upon.

It is in this context that we can begin to understand many of the existing biographies of Kingsley and Gaunt that paint these women, who actively fought against feminism and for imperialism, as feminists rather than imperialists. Much of the historiography surrounding Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt has attempted to argue that the actions of these travelers contributed to the rights of women. They argued that, because the field of colonial exploration and travel had, to that point, primarily included men, that these women were feminists because they disrupted the patriarchy simply through traveling. As Bronwen Hickman wrote of Gaunt in *Mary Gaunt: Independent Colonial Women*, “She lived at a time when neither ability nor determination was considered desirable or ‘nice’ for a young lady. She broke down barriers and championed the right – the desirability – of women to earn their own living and provided great role models by ensuring that many of her heroines did just that.”¹⁰⁴ However, the fact that these women did not

¹⁰³ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 123.

¹⁰⁴ Bronwen Hickman, *Mary Gaunt*, 8.

fully fit their expected feminine roles does not mean that they worked to break barriers for other women, or for women in circumstances different from their own.

Katherine Frank, for example, argued that Kingsley's journey to West Africa liberated her from patriarchal structures. For Frank, Kingsley identified more with Africa than with England, because it offered her an escape from the confines of caring for her family. Frank argued that after her first visit to West Africa, Kingsley began to see it as her home.¹⁰⁵ According to Frank, Kingsley viewed Africa as a place of liberation from gendered constraints, a place where she had absolute freedom from the constructions of Victorian Britain.¹⁰⁶ Another of Kingsley's biographers, Dea Birkett, made a similar argument when discussing both Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt, writing that "women travelers celebrated their freedom, in particular freedom from sexual harassment."¹⁰⁷ However, these readings misunderstood the many ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt used, rather than resisted, the confines of imperialism and patriarchy in order to travel and write about their travels to West Africa.

Historians and biographers have written far less about Mary Gaunt than about Mary Kingsley. Neither of the two biographies written about her was by an academic. In 2014, Bronwen Hickman published her book *Mary Gaunt: Independent Colonial Women*,¹⁰⁸ while in 2010 Susanna De Vries published her book *To the Ends of the Earth: Mary Gaunt Pioneer Traveller Her Biography*.¹⁰⁹ Neither book engaged much scholarship on either Mary Gaunt or other female travelers or travel writing. Instead, the books cited, almost exclusively, books written by Gaunt herself, rarely questioning the worldviews of racism and imperialism explicit in

¹⁰⁵ Katherine Frank, *Voyager Out: The Life of Mary Kingsley*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out*, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*, (New York: Blackwell, 1989), 155.

¹⁰⁸ Bronwen Hickman, *Mary Gaunt*.

¹⁰⁹ Susanna De Vries, *To the Ends of the Earth: Mary Gaunt Pioneer Traveller Her Biography*, (Brisbane: Pargos Press, 2010).

the text they cited. Instead, much like early historiography of Mary Kingsley, these women spent their time praising Gaunt for her supposed ability to break patriarchal discourse and fulfill roles typically filled by men. Neither of these writers dedicated much of their book to critiquing Gaunt's worldview and often accepted her racist assumptions as fact. Therefore, this historiography has overwhelmingly argued that Kingsley and Gaunt disrupted patriarchal discourse. However, this reading ignores the fact the ways in which that discourse can never be separated from discourses of race and empire.

When traveling through West Africa, Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt used their setting to define themselves. As is the case with much of travel writing, their works said far more about the traveler—or at least a version of the travelers that the travel writer portrays—than it did about the place that they visited. Through examining the characters that Kingsley and Gaunt performed during their travels through West Africa, we can better understand how they related to the systems of nationalism, race, and patriarchy and the ways in which they, then, staged those systems for themselves.

V. Telling the Tale

“The men who were carrying me staggered along, stumbling over every inequality of the ground, and I remembered my youthful reading in ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ and felt I very much resembled Legree. There was, too a modicum of sympathy growing up in my mind for Legree and all slave-drivers. Perhaps there was something to be said for them; they certainly must have had a good deal to put up with. Presently my men dropped the hammock, and I scramble out and looked at them angrily”

-Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*¹¹⁰

“It is at these times you realize the blessing of a good skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of many people in England, who ought to have known better, and did not do it themselves, and adopted masculine garment, I should have been spiked to the bone, and done for. Whereas, save for a good many bruises, here I was with the fullness of my skirt tucked under me, sitting on nine ebony spies some twelve inches long, in comparative comfort, howling lustily to be hauled out.”

-Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*¹¹¹

As discussed above, Kingsley and Gaunt used their performance to create both setting and character. It was in this encounter between setting and character that they created the plot of their performance. The question then becomes, to what extent did the two influence each other as the women traveled through West Africa. The ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt required West Africa to remain in the past to create themselves helps to answer this question. As their education progressed and they transformed themselves into the image of the white, male, imperialist, Kingsley and Gaunt understood the ways in which their setting could not make that journey as well. If Africa “progressed” in the ways that Kingsley and Gaunt allowed themselves, then the

¹¹⁰ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 92.

¹¹¹ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 278-279.

position that they had allowed themselves to possess would become obsolete, as their arguments did not stem from the idea that men and women were equal, but rather from the idea that white women were superior to Black men. As white women, Kingsley and Gaunt were more aware of the line that these men crossed and threatened through colonial mimicry. Each woman's telling of theatrical, often absurd, stories in which they chose to present white womanhood as directly superior to Black men illustrated this fact. Ultimately, these women needed Africa to remain completely othered as seen by the ways in which their characters interacted with their created setting.



THE AUTHOR CROSSES THE TANO RIVER.

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One of the most striking of these scenes occurred in Gaunt's *Alone in West Africa*. In a passage in which African men carried her, Gaunt remarked that "the men who were carrying me staggered along, stumbling over every inequality of the ground, and I remembered my youthful reading in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' and felt I very much resembled Legree and all slave-drivers.

¹¹² Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 283.

Perhaps there was something to be said for them; they certainly must have had a good deal to put up with.”¹¹³ This passage is revealing in a number of ways. First, it demonstrates that although Mary Gaunt read American abolitionist literature, her Australian upbringing caused her, somehow, to find sympathy in the almost cartoon-like villain of the novel. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* describes Legree’s cruel treatment of enslaved people in stark detail, including his murder of Tom and his repeated sexual assault of Cassy.¹¹⁴ Legree’s abuse of Cassy is both racialized and gendered, and an example of the importance of intersectionality when discussing both race and gender. Because Cassy is a Black women, she is victim of a type of violence inflicted neither on Black men nor on white women.

The converse is also true—Legree has the power to do what he does because he is both male and white. It is within this structure that Mary Gaunt chose to place herself. However, because she was a white woman, she had to choose either her gender and find sympathy with Cassy, or identify with her race, and choose Legree. She chose Legree. She chose to identify with her race over her gender, and, in the process, she contributed to the imperialist rhetoric of Australia in which race mattered more than gender. This moment was representative of much of Gaunt’s writing. While she often claimed that Australian women could do anything that men could do, it was not because she was a feminist who believed that women were equal to men, but rather because she chose to emphasize her race over her gender. While this ideology was present throughout her writing, it was in this moment that it became explicit that her writing was not a form of feminism, as it becomes clear that her perspective constitutes epistemic violence towards women, as well as towards Africans.

¹¹³ Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 92.

¹¹⁴ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003).



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Kingsley made a parallel argument when she performed a scene in which she fell into a pit filled with spikes. Kingsley wrote:

It is in these times you realize the blessing of a good thick skirt. Had I paid heed to the advice of people in England, who ought to have known better, and did not do it themselves, and adopted masculine garments, I should have been spiked to the bone and done for. Whereas, save for a good many bruises, here I was sitting on nine ebony spikes some twelve inches long, in comparative comfort, howling lustily to be hauled out.¹¹⁶

In this brief piece of storytelling, Mary Kingsley made the argument not only that it was possible to travel in West Africa dressed as a proper Victorian woman, but that it was *only* possible to

¹¹⁵ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*.

¹¹⁶ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 278.

travel in West Africa dressed in this manner. Shortly after Kingsley described her own fall, she described how an African man, who she called 'Silence' fell into another pit shortly after her guides pulled her out of the first one. She described, "Then we set about hauling poor Silence out, binding him up where necessary with cool green leaves; for he, not having a skirt, had got a good deal frayed at the edges on those spikes."¹¹⁷ This passage, therefore, worked not simply to claim that white women were capable of surviving in West Africa, but also that they were even more capable of surviving there than Africans themselves, and specifically more capable than African men. Kingsley's writing, therefore, failed to question either the established structures that insisted that men were superior to women or that white people were superior to Black people. Instead, she argued that white women were superior to Black men. She, therefore, like Gaunt, chose her race over her gender.

In these in these moments that it became clear the extent to which Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt relied on racial difference in order to construct their own idea of self in a way that gave them power that resembled that of white men. While Kingsley's assertion that one needed to dress like a proper Victorian lady in order to study swamps and Gaunt's assertion that she truly sympathizes with Legree both seem unbelievable and ridiculous, they both fit neatly into a performance that used the other in order to create the self. Because Kingsley and Gaunt relied on imperialist and patriarchal structures to create their own progress, they could not allow others to subvert, and therefore, disrupt these structures. Consistent with Bhabha's insights, they realized that the mimicry and mockery that comes from colonial education or any assertion that Black men could, in any way, be superior to white women, would completely disrupt this structure. These women depend on the structures of patriarchy and empire to maintain their place. While

¹¹⁷ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 279.

they may seem to have disrupted the patriarchy, they ultimately needed it to maintain their travels and their performances.

In her book *Burdens of History*, Antoinette Burton discussed this critical relationship between white women pushing the limits of patriarchal structures and imperial ideology. While Burton's writing mostly focused on women who defined themselves as feminists, and while Mary Kingsley consistently refused to bear this title, there is much similarity between the women Burton described and Kingsley and Gaunt. Burton wrote:

Among other things, empire provided British Citizens with 'a world view which was central to their perceptions of themselves.' They understood it as something that set them apart from the rest of the world, and they accepted it as a testament to their national, cultural, and racial supremacy. For feminists, the British Empire was evidence of the superiority of British national culture and, most important, of the obligations that British women were required to discharge—for the benefit of colonial peoples and, ultimately, for the good of the imperial nation itself."¹¹⁸

For Kingsley and Gaunt, though they, themselves, did not consider themselves feminists, they, too, saw the British Empire as a means of defining their own superiority, even if they did not extend that agency to all women.

If we, once again, return to Bhabha, we can see the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt depended on patriarchal and imperial structures throughout their writing. They each realized that while they allowed themselves whiggish progress towards masculine imperialism, they could not allow this "progress" to the African man. Such an extension would, inherently, have prevented them from making that same progress. As Uday Singh Mehta has argued, within the Indian

¹¹⁸ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*, 27.

context, the liberal argument for empire, which emphasized the idea that empire would spread progress and modernity, would eventually lead to a destruction of those very systems once the colonized figure gained the ability to speak the language of the colonizer.¹¹⁹ However, this threat of liberal thought was more present for Kingsley and Gaunt, as, for them, a destruction of these structures would also have destroyed the structures within which they tried to advance.

In this context, we can consider the ways in which Kingsley and Gaunt seemed to understand the concept of colonial mimicry and mockery that Bhabha has analyzed. Because their own performances existed within the discourse of imperialism and patriarchy, their created identities required that discourse. While fewer historians have described Kingsley and Gaunt as anti-imperialists than as feminists, some historians have taken these quotations out of context, and see Kingsley and Gaunt as actively disrupting colonial discourse, rather than simply discussing the ways in which that discourse should not be disrupted. Among these moments is when Kingsley wrote that:

Nothing strikes one so much, in studying the degeneration of these native tribes, as the direct effect that civilization and reformation has in hastening it. The worst enemy to the existence of the African tribe, is the one who comes to it and says: ‘now you must civilize, and come to school, and leave off all those awful goings on of yours, and settle down quietly. The tribe does so, as the African is teachable and traceable; and then the ladies and some of the young men are happy and content with the excitement of European clothes and frequent church services¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹²⁰ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 410.

While a few historians, such as Frank, have seen Kingsley's insistence that Africans not be "civilized" as evidence that she resisted European imperialism, one must examine the context of this quotation.¹²¹ Kingsley never challenged the idea that Britain should rule Africa or that Africans were inferior Europeans. Instead she suggested that Africans could never be "raised" to the level of Briton and that, therefore, Britain should rule Africa.

This point was made clear by the juxtaposition here between Kingsley's assertion that she needs European dress to survive in West Africa, but this "progress" cannot be accessible to Africans themselves. As Kingsley writes that those providing European clothing to Africans was part of the problem, she contradicted the point she made earlier in her work when discussing the skirt and the ditch. While in that moment she had suggested that one needed to dress as a proper Victorian woman in order to travel in West Africa, in this moment, she suggested that introducing this, supposedly necessary, survival tool simply made Africans look ridiculous. This seeming contradiction makes clear the fact that Kingsley believed Europeans and Africans to be fundamentally different, and that this distinction was necessary in her travels.

As Kingsley and Gaunt traveled through West Africa, they never left the discourse of patriarchy and imperialism. However, as travelers, they did have their own type of freedom. They had the freedom to tell their story as they wanted. Because they traveled without people who would follow them back to England or who was likely to read the books they wrote, both Kingsley and Gaunt had the power to tell their audience what they wanted. If Kingsley had worn pants when traveling through West Africa, no one could reveal the truth when she returned to England. Therefore, what Kingsley and Gaunt achieved in their writing was not necessarily the ability to escape these gendered discourses, but rather the ability to perform their expected roles

¹²¹ Katherine Frank, *A Voyager Out*, 221.

when they returned to Britain, regardless of whether they truly fit into these roles throughout their travels.

In the performances of Kingsley and Gaunt, it is impossible to understand race as separate from gender. The discourses of patriarchy and empire operated as one, and thus, because they each engaged in empire, they could never truly disrupt patriarchal discourse. Therefore, when Kingsley and Gaunt chose to engage in empire, they also chose to fit into patriarchal discourse. The travel writing of Kingsley and Gaunt demonstrates that, even though Australian women, such as Gaunt, seemed to enforce empire while disrupting patriarchal discourse, one must understand these systems worked together, and thus, it was impossible for these women to operate outside patriarchal discourse while they created imperial narrative.

VI. Conclusion

*“And so I have visited ‘the land I had dreamed about as a little child in far-away Australia. But no, I have never been to that land. It is a wonderful country that lies with the long, long thoughts of childhood, with the desires of youth, with the hopes that are in the heart of the bride when she draws the curtain on her marriage morning. Beautiful hopes, beautiful desires, never to be fulfilled. We know, as we grow older, that some of our longings will never be granted exactly in the way we have expected them to be granted, but that does not mean that good things will not come to us, though not in the guise in which we have looked for them. Therefore, though I have never visited Carlo’s country, and never can visit it, still I have seen a very goodly land, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land worthy of a high place in the possessions of any nation, and yet, I think, a land that has been grievously misjudged”*¹²²

-Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*

*“After being in West Africa some little time, particularly if you have been away in the bush, your wardrobe is always in a rarefied state. For example, when in Cameroons I had one dress, one only that I regarded as fit to support the dignity of a representative of England, so of course, when going to call on the representative of another Power I had to put that dress on, and then go out in open boats to war-ships or for bush walks in it, and equally of course down came tornadoes and rain by the ton.”*¹²³

-Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*

When Kingsley and Gaunt returned to England and began writing about their travels they each engaged in a performance that allowed their writing to create imperial discourses of gender, race, and nationality. These definitions, in part, justified and explained their travel in regions

¹²² Mary Gaunt, *Alone in West Africa*, 290.

¹²³ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 628.

that, for Europeans, were limited to men or, occasionally, to missionary wives. In this performance, Kingsley and Gaunt balanced their femininity with this inherently masculine performance. Yet, in order to perform their own identities, they each needed to create a setting in West Africa. This setting required that their African guides not be people, but props. This dehumanizing of Africans demonstrates the ways in which, through their writings, Kingsley and Gaunt participated in epistemic violence, controlling knowledge and discourse of a region that furthered the imperial project.

Yet, in order for Kingsley and Gaunt to define themselves against Africa, positioning their characters as a protagonist of a bildungsroman, on an upward, whiggish trajectory towards becoming a masculine imperialist, Africans themselves could not participate in that trajectory. Because, as women, Kingsley and Gaunt could never be equal to white men in a Victorian or Edwardian hierarchy, they needed to insist that African men were below them, and that they could not make the “progress” that missionaries and many British politicians claimed that they could make. Indeed, while Kingsley found Africans with English education slightly unsettling, and, perhaps, amusing, Gaunt found the mimicry more profoundly disturbing. This difference points to a national distinction between Kingsley and Gaunt. While Kingsley’s nation, England, was firmly established, both as a nation and as an empire, Gaunt’s was less so. As Gaunt sought to define Australian womanhood, she wrote about a new nation that had only recently begun to gain independence from the British Empire. The insecurity of Australian identity made Gaunt even more defensive of British imperialism in West Africa.

While the set of Kingsley and Gaunt’s performances was ostensibly West Africa, England for Kingsley, and Australia, for Gaunt, always remained in the background, framing the entire performance. These performances, therefore, distinctly articulated the discourses of

patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and nationalism within England and Australia. When Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt wrote of and published their travels through West Africa, they each created a performance that allowed them the ability to justify their travels through that region. This performance created a West Africa that allowed Kingsley and Gaunt to define themselves, creating a far clearer picture of the discourses of identity present in the places they traveled from than of the specific places through which they traveled.

When Mary Gaunt concluded her journey through West Africa, she ultimately concluded that the West Africa she had read about as a child was a fiction. She could see that the exaggerated portrayal of the boy named Carlo could only exist in writing, and that, therefore, she could never truly visit that region. Yet, what Gaunt's conclusion failed to see was the way in which she, too, created a fictional world like that of Carlo. While Gaunt proclaimed to have seen the "real" West Africa, she, too, had created a world through writing that she could only travel through by creating her own identity. Kingsley and Gaunt created this identity through defining a self within discourses of race, gender, and nationality that were all intertwined with themselves and with empire. Because these discourses were so intertwined, it is impossible to see the ways in which Gaunt seemed to push against patriarchal discourse as separate from her imperial nationalism, which served to confirm women's place within Australian internal imperialism.

The performative nature of this feminine imperialism can be further examined in Kingsley's conclusion. When Kingsley concluded her *Travels*, she noted that by the time she reached Cameroon, she had only one dress that was presentable, and that her performance would, inevitably, ruin her dress. In this sense, one can see the ways in which West Africa, Kingsley's stage, wore away at her performance. These final moments, therefore, expose the inherent impracticality of Kingsley's performance, and the simple fact that proper Victorian women's

dress was not the most practical clothing for West Africa. Yet, at the same time, Kingsley's final remarks about her clothing revealed the necessity of wearing these garments, as they "support the dignity of a representative of England."¹²⁴ This moment, therefore, revealed the real reason that Kingsley needed to dress in this way, as her dress gave her a position that was gendered, racial, and national. Kingsley's final remarks on dress therefore, continued to emphasize the intersectionality of her performance.

When Mary Kingsley decided that "tropics are tropics wherever found," she began a performance which said more about the traveler than the place traveled. While Kingsley would eventually go on to describe specifics of the region of West Africa, her travel account ultimately revealed more about Kingsley and her own culture than about West Africa, defining her own gender, race, and nationality. The same was true for Mary Gaunt. However, as an Austrian woman, Gaunt's performance differed in that it reflected the newly formed Australian identity that was largely connected to the internal imperialism of Aboriginal peoples. Yet, for both women, the discourses of race, gender, and nationality in which they placed themselves, could not be seen as separate from each other. Thus in writing about their travels in West Africa, Mary Kingsley and Mary Gaunt revealed that within colonial spaces gender and race were inextricably linked.

¹²⁴ Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa*, 628.

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