

some financial assistance from, the prospective husbands. Indeed, Afigbo explained how the colonial government soon called off the campaign against child trafficking that produced these trafficking records because it produced paltry results.⁴ This raises the question of how much contemporary conceptions of propriety and economic rationality color the analysis of the local historical past provided by oral informants to which the author subscribes.


Nonetheless, using the same colonial records that earlier studies on the Women's War relied on, Chapdelaine's book successfully goes beyond them to establish how exploitation of children's bodies has remained significant to capital and wealth generation within Nigeria's socioeconomic arrangements. Left rather weakly remarked, in my view, is the story of the unrelenting efforts of humanitarians and abolitionists, external and internal, throughout the period of study to expose and extirpate these inhumane child trafficking practices. In addition to this oversight, I also have a few minor quibbles. For example, an oral informant's claim that 'some parents pawned children to European officials in lieu of tax payments' should not have been reproduced without corroborating evidence (123). Also, I would have loved to see more definitive evidence of pawned and enslaved children drafted directly into productive agricultural or auxiliary activities. Finally, this excellent study is not without a few typos and a couple of awkward sentences that must be corrected in its next edition.

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A Resonant Intellectual

Edward W. Blyden's Intellectual Transformations: Afropolitanism, Pan-Africanism, Islam, and the Indigenous West African Church

By Harry N. K. Odamtten. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2019. Pp. xxv + 272. \$49.50, paperback (ISBN: 9781611863208).

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Edward W. Blyden's Intellectual Transformations: Afropolitanism, Pan-Africanism, Islam, and the Indigenous West African Church by Harry N. K. Odamtten presents a revision of Edward Blyden's place in the pantheon of pan-African intellectual contributions to African and African diaspora scholarship. Odamtten steers attention to Blyden's role as a transnational figure, informed by his experiences in various parts of the world. Blyden was born in the Danish West Indies on the Island of St. Thomas to free Black parents in 1832. He moved to Liberia in 1850 and subsequently evolved into 'a voice of conscience and an agent of resistance for people of African descent throughout the world' (xi). Employing the framework of an intellectual biography, which focuses on the thoughts, ideas, and intellectual output of an individual, Odamtten deftly interlaces diverse threads of Blyden's complex personality and intellectual journey into a compelling tapestry, displaying a

⁴*Ibid.* 104–6.

nuanced grasp of the African intellectual tradition and the role of the African diaspora in Blyden's prodigious intellectual output.

The book's six chapters and epilogue coalesce around Odamtten's concept of 'Afropublicanism', which the author coins to explicate Blyden's contributions to intellectual discourse influenced by, and connected to, notions of pan-African expressions. Odamtten defines the Afropublican as an African public intellectual who employs an Afro-positivist discourse, which uses favorable representations of Africa(ns) to counter prevailing Eurocentric narratives, and whose engagement with the transnational public sphere is undertaken from an African epistemic and philosophical perspective. The author draws upon an array of sources, including Blyden's publications, colonial records, and missionary records, to present a new perspective about this complex figure. Odamtten's take is laudatory, while also aware of Blyden's limitations, including his sense of male privilege (even as he advocated equal levels of education for girls and boys), as well as his contentious position that many Africans in the diaspora — including Booker T. Washington — were out of touch with the challenges Africans faced globally and lacked the expertise to craft effective measures to address those situations.

This well-researched and timely publication is strategically located at the intersection of scholarship on Africa and African diaspora. Odamtten situates Blyden along the continuum of West African intellectuals from Anton Amo, Christian Protten, Olaudah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoano before him, to notable pan-Africanists like Joseph Casely Hayford, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Kwame Nkrumah, all of whom came after and bore the hallmarks of Blyden's influence. Odamtten rescues Blyden from continued historical marginalization by delineating for readers the complex development of his ideas within a transnational and pan-African context. This research positions Blyden as a global Black scholar who worked in the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa. This is significant in underscoring and connecting Blyden to the transhemispheric nature that defines pan-African discourse.

Yet Blyden was distinguished from many of his pioneering pan-Africanist peers because his work was intended not only for the local cosmopolitan audience, but also 'engaged African, African diaspora, European, Mediterranean, Islamic, and Jewish public spheres' (8). By emigrating to Liberia, Blyden attained the political status of a non-colonial subject and citizen of an independent country, which was not a common feat for many Africans who, like Blyden, had been born in the so-called New World. Although politically independent, Blyden was for a time an ardent believer in the importance of Christian mission; from his location in Liberia, he actively influenced West African intellectuals to push for Africanization of the church in West Africa. By presenting readers Blyden in these contexts, Odamtten encourages reflection on the complex trajectories of African thinkers and their various intellectual contributions. Much of this is well known and has been addressed by other scholars. Perhaps the book's most laudable contribution is in how Odamtten uncovers Blyden's epistemic grounding, bringing to light an established African-informed intellectual tradition that existed on plantations among individuals that Odamtten describes as plantation intellectuals. According to Odamtten, these were African-born enslaved thinkers who participated in discourse concerning the plantation system, often through resistance including open revolt. The author draws upon the established notions of a shared racial and cultural identity among these enslaved populations, especially those in St. Thomas, as 'the anvil on which Blyden's Pan-Africanism was shaped' (60). Blyden's subsequent intellectual development and expression as he transitioned from a free subject living in the West to a citizen of two West African countries, presents him as a transnational actor who remained grounded in his own personal experience, as well as the famous father of pan-Africanism who pioneered the notion of the 'African personality', which would later inform the thinking of leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah.

Edward W. Blyden's Intellectual Transformations broadens the scope of existing literature on African intellectual histories, and the African diaspora, by identifying and deploying a pan-African conceptual framework that recognizes a shared sociocultural and, often, political identity among all African peoples and their descendants across the world. Through this lens, the book

insightfully articulates themes of diasporic movement to Africa and the too often disregarded, yet ongoing dialog between the continent and her diaspora. Consequently, the offerings of this monograph stake a claim of notable significance as a contribution to reverse diaspora scholarship that examine the influences of the African diaspora on Africa as opposed to the established unidirectional scholastic gaze on how Africa influenced the diaspora.


Odamtten's book has the potential to become a very important publication. In the wake of the African Union's declaration of the African Diaspora as the sixth region of Africa, this book will prove useful as diasporic African interest in study abroad trips to the continent increases in tandem with a marked growth in migration by African descendants from the global African diaspora to Africa.¹ Blyden's ability to straddle both the diaspora and Africa can inspire global Africans to see themselves as part of a long tradition of diasporic return to and connection with their homeland. On the other hand, this book may prove challenging for readers not comfortable with the idea of African intellectual and philosophical agency without overt European stimuli. Thankfully, Africa's historiography is no longer based on such racist and paternalistic assumptions. Harry Odamtten's study now takes us even further, through the concept of 'Afropolitan', which might still prove unsettling to some. The book provides an elegant exposition of both the term and its exponent, Edward Blyden, in an accessible way, to a broad spectrum of readers ranging from intellectuals to the cursory reader. Importantly, having established Blyden's importance, Odamtten is able to show how the Afropolitan concept might be applied to pan-African thinkers like Du Bois and Nkrumah. This book is an important contribution to and essential interpretive analysis of the African intellectual tradition and is deserving of a wide readership.

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Action on the Margins

Boundaries, Communities and State-Making in West Africa: The Centrality of the Margins

By Paul Nugent. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
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Paul Nugent builds on the African borderlands literature that he has helped to forge to bring our attention to the ways that three social constructs — boundaries, communities, and states — have helped define much of the political history of West Africa from the eighteenth to the twentieth

¹See, for example, 'Back to Africa movement gathers pace', *New African*, (<https://newafricanmagazine.com/17835/>), 4 Jan. 2019; A. Jordan, 'The American entrepreneur leading the Back to Africa movement', *Forbes*, (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adriennejordan/2020/05/01/meet-the-american-that-decided-to-self-quarantine-in-ghana/?sh=279abaf01712>), 1 May 2020; E. Harrison, 'Stevie Wonder to move to Ghana permanently because of racism in the US', *The Independent*, (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/stevie-wonder-ghana-us-racism-b1807398.html>), 25 Feb. 2021.