

AFRICAN SKIN, VICTORIAN MASKS: THE OBJECT LESSONS OF MARY KINGSLEY AND EDWARD BLYDEN

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WHILE ADDRESSING THE ROYAL AFRICAN Society, founded in honor of Mary Henrietta Kingsley, Edward Wilmot Blyden reflected on one of his more memorable experiences in Victorian England:

During a visit to Blackpool many years ago, I went with some hospitable friends to the Winter Garden where there were several wild animals on exhibition. I noticed that a nurse having two children with her, could not keep her eyes from the spot where I stood, looking at first with a sort of suspicious, if not terrified curiosity. After a while she heard me speak to one of the gentlemen who were with me. Apparently surprised and reassured by this evidence of a genuine humanity, she called to the children who were interested in examining a leopard, “Look, look, there is a black man and he speaks English.” (Blyden, “West” 363)

Blyden, a West Indian-born citizen of Liberia and resident of Sierra Leone, assures his audience that such scenes were not unique for the African abroad, even at the turn of the twentieth century; seen as “an unapproachable mystery,” an African traveler like himself was “at once ‘spotted’ as a peculiar being – *sui generis*” who, as if by nature, “produce[d] the peculiar feelings of the foreigner at the first sight of him” (Blyden, “West” 362, 363). Keenly aware of how non-Europeans were displayed at metropolitan zoos, fairs, and exhibitions throughout the nineteenth century, Blyden puns on the leopard’s spots in order to highlight his experience of being marked as an object of curiosity. Indeed, the nurse’s anxious wavering between curiosity and terror dissipates not because Blyden ceases to appear marked, or “spotted,” but because the taxonomic crisis he arouses by not standing on the other side of the fence has been temporarily contained: she distances the threat of Blyden’s difference as “a black man” while evading the equally threatening possibility of recognizing his sameness as one who “speaks English.” The nurse, to borrow the words of Homi Bhabha in describing the fetishism of such colonial “scenes of subjectification” (Bhabha 81), constructs the man before her as “at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” in a way that attempts to “fix” Blyden’s identity and the Victorian categories his appearance unsettles (Bhabha

70–71), while making the relation between differences and their appended significance appear natural (Bhabha 67). If, by expressing himself in his characteristically impeccable English in order to vindicate his “genuine humanity” (Blyden, “West” 363),¹ Blyden appears to be “putting on the white world” at the expense of his autonomy (Fanon 36),² he simultaneously wages battle in this world at the level of signification in ways that anticipate the work of the later African nationalist and West Indian emigrant, Frantz Fanon. An extensive reader and ordained minister who recognized the politics of exegesis as well as semiosis, Blyden implicitly asks his audience, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jeremiah 13, 23). Posing a rhetorical question that argues rather than asks, that brandishes the very texts often used against him, Blyden subtly deploys this passage typically associated with the intransience of human character in order to defy attempts at determining him entirely from without. Serving as a kind of object lesson demonstrating the need for less objectifying knowledge about Africans and their cultures, Blyden’s anecdote challenged his contemporaries to further the lessons he and Mary Kingsley offered through their writing.

The rhetorical skirmish that unfolds in this anecdote exemplifies some of the more dialogic strategies of Blyden and Kingsley’s writing when considered in relation to methods constructed in Victorian guides to anthropological observation.³ These methods emphasized the collection of visually verifiable facts, governed by the concept of authenticity. Facts, in this usage, frequently resembled fetishes in that they functioned as objects of knowledge and disavowal deployed in an attempt to determine cultural and racial differences, as socially constructed relations passing for objects of common knowledge. Such methods fixed the subjects of a culture not only in an ethnographic present, but also, as Johannes Fabian has argued, in a typologically distinguished, ontologically alienated past that precluded the possibility for intercultural communication. Through such methods, Victorian “anthropology ma[de] its object” (Fabian, *Time* iii). Kingsley and Blyden, by approaching facts as signs in order to highlight the importance of signification as a process that takes place between cultures, restore an element of temporality to their ethnographic writing and its claims to authenticity that often eluded the “fact-hunting materialists” of the nineteenth century (Coleridge 454).⁴ Blyden, moreover, questions anthropology’s visual imperative while adopting more rhetorically coeval narrative positions. The future each writer envisions for West Africa, however, ultimately informs the system of value within which these signs are construed, and Blyden, if he wishes to resist Kingsley’s tinny, typed image of the African trader in “a remote future” – “still with his tom-tom in his dug-out canoe – just as willing to sell as ‘big curios’ the *dèbris* of [Europe’s] importations” (Kingsley, *Travels* 679) – must skirmish with his revered friend as well. Although both authors devoted themselves to combating what was called “race prejudice” by educating their audiences about African beliefs and customary laws in ways that complicated established anthropological methods, Blyden, more so than Kingsley, worked to expose the circular relation between the social organization of labor and race prejudice – between economic and ontological forms of alienation – that underwrote imperial capitalism’s most destructive means.

I.

HAVING READ THE WORKS OF LEADING ethnologists, anthropologists, and naturalists like Edward Burnett Tylor, Adolf Bastian, Charles Darwin, John Lubbock, and Theodore Waitz, as well as guides like *Hints to Travellers*, Mary Kingsley was well outfitted with current

theories and guidelines among her “instruments of observation” before sailing for West Africa (Kingsley, *Travels* 436).⁵ Accordingly, Kingsley ranks the careful observation and detailed recording of facts among her highest priorities. She moreover upholds her contemporaries’ emphasis on authenticity by seeking facts among “the real African[s]” (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xxii), living in regions that “had not been in contact with white culture” (Kingsley, *Travels* 282); she attempted to record as unobtrusively as possible the practices, beliefs, and objects that were “original” or “purely native” (Kingsley, *Travels* 66, 486). Conceiving of her ethnographic writing as “collections of facts,” properly labeled and contextualized like objects in museum displays, she proposes that these facts will speak for themselves (Kingsley, *Travels* 430). Describing her method as “confin[ing] [herself] to facts and arrang[ing] those facts on as thin a line of connecting opinion as possible,” she refers to herself as “a mere photographic plate” (Kingsley, *Studies* ix). Her work nevertheless proves less neutral than these comments suggest. Facts, for Kingsley, become a discursive battleground for representing and, at times, speaking for Africans during a period of unprecedented colonial expansion.⁶

Kingsley’s dedication to informed observation and the collection of facts coincided with late-Victorian methods prescribed to anthropological observers. An emphasis on visual knowledge characterizes nineteenth-century anthropological guides, which James Urry, speaking particularly of *Notes and Queries*, suggests disclose a concise view of the discipline’s methodological and theoretical history (Urry 45, 54).⁷ The very history of anthropology, as Fabian has famously argued, coincided with a history of favoring “the visual as a mode of knowing” in Western culture (Fabian, *Time* 122). Sources of knowledge, he explains, were perceived in the visual world; this knowledge, in turn, was represented visually and spatially, often in the form of maps, charts, and schemes of classification that, especially in the nineteenth century, were used to produce typologies enabling the “order of times” to be perceived in the “sequence of things” “at a glance” (Fabian, *Time* 4).⁸ Douglas W. Freshfield, for example, advises potential fieldworkers in 1889, “Remember that the first and best instruments are the traveller’s own eyes. Use them constantly, and record your observations on the spot” (Freshfield 5). This visual emphasis potentially neglected other perspectives and forms of knowledge, including those valued in the societies under observation. Although Victorian scientists acknowledged that both inductive and deductive methods contributed to the gathering of data,⁹ facts were frequently spoken of as things to be found and collected as if they existed independently of the acts of selection and explication. As Africanist Harry (H. H.) Johnston urged readers in the 1889 edition of *Hints to Travellers*, “It is the duty of every civilised traveller in countries newly opened up to research, to collect facts, plain unvarnished facts” (Johnston 398). While Kingsley playfully alludes to such devoted positivism when narrating her experience “stalking the wild West African idea” (Kingsley, *Travels* 430), her dedication to observing details and tracking African objects and concepts back to their original cultural contexts without bias proves no less earnest.

Kingsley’s pursuit of “the real African,” motivated by her desire to dispel the repertoire of destructive stereotypes that continued to inform British foreign policy, also borrowed from contemporary anthropological methods (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xxii). The concept of authenticity, in particular, underwrote the production of facts through which Victorian anthropological observers constructed their authority, and, by implying that different peoples and their cultural practices could be clearly distinguished and definitively classified, contributed to the shaping of anthropology’s object of study. Guidelines for determining

the authenticity of anthropological data in guides to observation usually warned against European influence, whether resulting from the observer's presence or from a small-scale society's previous contact. August Henry Lane Fox, in the first edition of *Notes and Queries*, emphasizes the importance of a small-scale society's isolation from Europe: "The more remote and unknown the race or tribe, the more valuable the evidence afforded of the study of its institutions, from the probability of their being less mixed with those of European origin" (Fox, "Preface" iv). Bastian similarly solicited "genuine" objects of "indigenous" manufacture and "unclouded originality" (Bastian, "Ethnologie" 530 and "Nachwort" 166), while E. B. Tylor, his admiring contemporary, urged readers of *Notes and Queries* gathering mythic stories "to separate all matter which might have been borrowed from . . . other traditions . . . , so as to leave the native mythology as pure and genuine as possible" (Tylor, "Mythology" 62). Victorian era guides, in turn, repeatedly urged observers to determine whether materials employed by a society were "native or imported" (Franks 100). This emphasis on originality, however, placed particular value on a society's idealized past rather than its present, while reaffirming the fieldworker's authority – spatial, temporal, and ontological – over the observed. As Fabian suggests, and as we see to an extent in Kingsley's writing, "[t]he posited authenticity of a past (savage, tribal, peasant) serves to denounce an inauthentic present (the uprooted *évolués*, acculturated)" (Fabian, *Time* 11). In addition to prescribing ways of seeing, therefore, such guides also constructed a sense of temporality that discouraged coeval engagement while fixing the subjects of one's study.

A fact recorded visually through the medium of photography, in particular, garnered the greatest "trust in its authenticity" among "scientific men" (Johnston 399), even though ethnographic photos were often staged. Charles Hercules Read of the British Museum promoted the use of photography to record "facts about which there can be no question" (Read 87). Photography thus served as a model for the observer's writing at a time when the "thickening" of language, according to Michel Foucault, announced its "ceasing to be transparent to its representations" (Foucault 282). Accordingly, Johnston advised fieldworkers to "[e]ndeavour to make [their] notes like [their] pictures and photographs" and to "[w]rite down things of interest as [they] hear them or see them" (Johnston 399). A quick glance at Alfred Cort Haddon's recommendations to the anthropological photographer in the 1899 edition of *Notes and Queries*, however, reveals the degree of manipulation that went into preparing a "factual" shot. Objects were treated with lime, landscapes cleared, and people choreographed in order to obtain the desired image. Haddon notes how "many photographs are spoiled by the subject looking at the photographer, or being in an obviously erroneous position or location" (Haddon 240). In the hope of containing the object of observation to the space of the image, the indexical quality of the photograph, and thus the spatial presence of the observer, is obscured. Only decades later, in the 1912 edition of *Notes and Queries*, did William H. R. Rivers caution against such attempts at controlling the photographic image in pursuit of authenticity: "Some observers are only interested in such customs and ideas as seem to them 'purely native.' When they find anything suggestive of European influence, they reject it as unimportant and do not record it; just as they clear the imported furniture out of native houses before photographing them" (Rivers 266). Such methods, Rivers suggests, constitute a "falsification of the evidence" that results in an "artificial" "picture of native life" confined to the past (Rivers 266).

Accepting in part the role ascribed to the nineteenth-century fieldworker as observer and collector rather than theorist, Kingsley presents her writing as a collection of photographs

for others to interpret. “I have to show you a series of pictures of things,” she proposes, “and hope you will get from those pictures the impression which is the truth . . . [;] not an artist’s picture, but a photograph, an overladen with detail, colourless version” (Kingsley, *Studies* xi). While “colourless” may hardly seem an adequate description of Kingsley’s often wry and discursive prose, her claim to a black and white photographic realism manifests itself in the wealth of visual details her narrative offers. Kingsley nevertheless acknowledges that even a collection of photographs requires a certain amount of ordering and labeling to render its facts significant: “The state of confusion the mind of a collector like myself gets into on the West Coast is something simply awful, and my notes for a day will contain facts relating to the kraw-kraw, price of onions, size and number of fish caught, cooking recipes, genealogies, oaths (native form of), law cases, and market prices” (Kingsley, *Travels* 73). The fieldworker’s memory, she continues, resembles a “rag-bag” through which one rummages in search of a “particular fact rag” (Kingsley, *Travels* 73). Writing, Kingsley suggests, enables the fieldworker to convert “the varied tangled rag-bag of facts” into the more ordered “results of [a] collection” to lay before “some great thinker,” like one of her most favored confidants, E. B. Tylor (Kingsley, *Travels* 436). To this extent, her adherence to anthropology’s visual-spatial methods aligns her with the more Euro-centric approach to the construction of knowledge that Fabian critiques.

That facts, as rags, as worn fragments of textile, possess little value until woven into the text of the fieldworker’s narrative, however, suggests that Kingsley is simultaneously aware of the materiality of facts and their status as signs whose meanings unfold in time. The fieldworker – as Tylor warned her after her first journey to West Africa – is not only in danger of collecting facts bereft of contextual narratives and thus of value while “empty[ing] [a heap of] them over any distinguished ethnologist’s head” and bewildering him (Kingsley, *Travels* 439), but the fieldworker may also misread or fail to read facts. Until one learns to “see things worth seeing” (Kingsley, *Travels* 103), the forests and the minds of its inhabitants remain “a library whose books you cannot read” (Kingsley, *Travels* 102). Only a careful understanding of African values and belief systems, Kingsley argues, will help render the cultural texts of this library legible. Time and repetition enable the observer to understand these texts, as well as the processes by which their meaning is made, construed, and misconstrued. Kingsley laments while discussing the challenges of performing geographic research how *Hints to Travellers* should verse its readers in “every separate native word, or set of words, signifying ‘I don’t know’” (Kingsley, *Travels* 237), given how frequently European travelers and surveyors had mistakenly recorded this response as the indigenous name for local villages and rivers. Such self-consciousness guides her as a reader as well as writer of texts. Crafting a highly visual ethnographic narrative while relying largely on “trade English” and translators to communicate with her African hosts, she at least recognizes the limitations of the sign systems she employs.¹⁰ Throughout her narrative she moreover acknowledges objects that initially appear out of place and time, like the one-shilling razor found in the remote and thus presumably primitive village of Efoua (Kingsley, *Travels* 272, 399). Such troubling moments of hybridity, which according to Bhabha “revers[es] . . . the process of domination through disavowal” and thereby the fetishism of colonial discourse (Bhabha 112), produce some of the most intriguing passages in Kingsley’s narrative, defying the temporal logic of authenticity. Rather than overlooking such moments or omitting them from her narrative, rather than “clear[ing] the imported furniture out of native houses before photographing them” (Rivers 266), Kingsley engages with these apparent enigmas and attempts to view

facts as multiply interpretable as well as culturally and historically contingent. Nevertheless, as we will see in her encounters with several more cosmopolitan African residents, a residual anxiety surrounding this realization localizes around precisely these imports.

The facts about fetishism, in particular, attracted Kingsley's attention and placed her at odds with many of her contemporaries. Expressing reservations toward Tylor's definition of fetishism as a branch of animism in which "spirits [are] embodied in, or attached to or conveying influence through certain material objects" (Kingsley, *Studies* 97), Kingsley warns against potentially misleading corollaries drawn about African notions of objecthood. The concept of the fetish, she argues, represents a larger system of religious belief comprised of both embodied and unembodied spirits; it is in no way reducible to the "worship of a material object" (Kingsley, *Studies* 100). "What strikes a European when studying [West African Fetishism] is the lack of gaps between things," she explains: "To the African there is perhaps no gap between the conception of spirit and matter, animate or inanimate" (Kingsley, *Studies* 109). Such a company of spirits, populating the spaces within and between humans and things, renders the animate and the inanimate, the seen and unseen, the corporeal and the spiritual, continuous rather than distinct. What may initially appear to be a quibble over terminology emerges in Kingsley's discussion as an attempt to think outside of European dichotomies between spirituality and materiality, between subjects and objects, which had underwritten representations of Africa and the very history of the term "fetish" since at least the Enlightenment. As William Pietz explains, the "fetish" as a word and a concept emerged through the conflict of European and African systems of economic and cultural value and consistently "involve[s] the object's untranscended materiality" (Pietz, "Fetish I" 7). Faced with the mystery that different societies might honor different spheres and rules of exchange, Dutch and later French and British traders concluded that the small gold ornaments African traders refused to sell must be endowed with spiritual powers that precluded the objects' status as potential commodities. This perception of the fetish's resistance to commoditization as a form of material transcendence, in turn, was projected onto European constructions of African character as incapable of elevation beyond the material world (Pietz, "Fetish I" 7). In contrast, fetishism for Kingsley represents an immanently spiritual, rather than untranscended, materialism that is nevertheless neither godless nor arbitrary.

According to Kingsley, the best preparation for adopting a "perfectly natural," less human-privileged "view of Nature" in order to understand fetishism entails rethinking our relation to objects (Kingsley, *Studies* 104). An anecdote detailing a mariner's relation to his steam engine encapsulates such a perspective:

[T]he wisest way is to get into the state of mind of an old marine engineer who oils and sees that every screw and bolt of his engines is clean and well watched, and who loves them as living things, caressing and scolding them himself, defending them, with stormy language, against the aspersions of the silly, uninformed outside world, which persists in regarding them as mere machines, a thing his superior intelligence and experience knows they are not. (Kingsley, *Travels* 441–42)

Representing a less objectifying encounter with the object world without, in turn, anthropomorphizing it, the mariner's relation to his steam engine in this slightly humorous yet strategic approach to comparative ethnography provides an example of the fluid boundaries between humans and things that, for Kingsley, fetishism implies. The choice of example

proves significant, as European maritime technologies figure prominently in the discourses about fetishism that Pietz recounts. Serving as an example of hypostatization (Pietz, “Fetish I” 6), specifically as the “propensity to personify European technological objects” resulting in “a false perception of causality” (Pietz, “Fetish II” 41, 42), Africans’ ostensible perception of European ships and machinery as “living things” represented to Enlightenment theorists of fetishism a false – that is, without natural-scientific basis – understanding of nature and its mechanics. In contrast, Kingsley employs the natural-scientific methods of nineteenth-century anthropology to reassess the facts about African fetishism available to her while exposing and, to a certain extent, undermining European perspectives that disavow African differences. If, as Bill Brown suggests, “accepting the otherness of things is the condition for accepting otherness as such (Brown 12),”¹¹ then Kingsley’s account of African fetishism offers her European readers a model for respecting difference.

Respecting contemporary indigenous institutions and systems of value in West Africa, rather than merely “salvaging” them for posterity, thus formed one of Kingsley’s primary objectives. When recounting transactions at a missionary store in the French Congo, for example, she explains how each item in the store belongs to a particular class of value recognized by local customers; traders need to understand these different classes and their respective worth, despite the variance of such valuation from a European accounting of the cost of acquiring each item (Kingsley, *Travels* 203). When helping to negotiate the payment of a fine at a local colonial office, she recounts how a European official’s “gallantry” interferes in the transaction when he balks at accepting five women as part of the payment and in assessing their relative “true worth” in ivory (Kingsley, *Studies* 378). Kingsley connects this intentionally shocking yet light-hearted example with more immediate concerns. The Hut Tax War of 1898 that erupted in Sierra Leone in response to colonialist injustices generally and the English Crown’s taxation on African dwellings to help fund the railroad, in particular, represented for Kingsley an “object lesson” illustrating the need for consulting indigenous systems of value when introducing new legislation directly involving land and property rights (Kingsley, *Studies* 332). Kingsley’s reinvestigation of West African religions, family structures, and judicial practices as rational and internally coherent systems contributes to this project of revaluation. Even her bold defense of plural marriage, influenced by John Mensah Sarbah, relates to her support of indigenous social organization and communal access to land. Traders rather than Crown Colony administrators emerge in this project as the understanding, comparatively benevolent imperialists of the future, and Kingsley lobbies for expanding relations with Africa through trade instead of direct colonization and “the introduction of European culture – governmental, religious, or mercantile” (Kingsley, *Travels* 675).

Kingsley, herself a trader sensitive to a range of African values she observes in the present, nevertheless tends to privilege European values when envisioning object lessons of the future. If, as Fabian suggests, “the hegemony of the visual as a mode of knowing may . . . directly be linked to the political hegemony of an age group, a class, or one society over another” (Fabian, *Time* 122), then Kingsley’s “pictures of things” prove less disinterested than one might expect (Kingsley, *Studies* xi). According to Fabian, the visual and spatial activity of anthropological fieldwork that emerged with the professionalization of the discipline “reflect[ed] the organization of a segment of bourgeois society for the purpose of serving that society’s inner continuity” (Fabian, *Time* 122). Not surprisingly, Kingsley’s visual-spatial methods coincide with a bourgeois interest in furthering economic imperialism

in West Africa. Traders, she suggests, will assist in educating Africans in the market value of certain commodities, such as coffee (Kingsley, *Travels* 642), and in remedying the “wasteful” techniques employed by African rubber collectors (Kingsley, *Travels* 677). As when she proposes enhancing “the little trickle of native trade” by transporting goods from the interior on European steamships rather than the caravans of African middlemen (Kingsley, *Travels* 637), the value of efficiency emerges in her argument as the product of future ideological conditioning: “What Africa wants at present, and will want for the next 200 years at least, are workers, planters, plantation hands, miners, and seamen; and there are no schools in Africa to teach these things or the doctrine of the nobility of labour save the technical mission-schools” (Kingsley, *Travels* 671). It becomes evident in the valuation of mining and planting over bookmaking and printing that her ideal educated African is being prepared for entering the working classes of an emerging global capitalist market (Kingsley, *Travels* 671). Prolific West African intellectuals like Blyden, who contributed regularly to local newspapers, would likely have taken issue with this limited role. Despite his mutual support of agrarian development in the interior (Blyden, *Customs* 9), Blyden also looked toward other areas of development: “The great African works of the future . . . whether in literature, religion, or science, will proceed from sources least affected by the conventional ideas of Europe, though influenced probably by the European system and employing European methods” (Blyden, *Kingsley* 28). The doctrine of the “nobility of labour,” moreover, arguably serves as the ideological counterpart to the alienation of labor under capitalist forms of production, while Kingsley’s emphasis on efficiency and “teaching [Africans] how to work” supplies the familiar moral pretense (Kingsley, *Travels* 680).

Kingsley’s responses to individual Africans, in scenes that parallel Blyden’s encounter with the curiously uneasy British observer, reveal comparable ideological investment. Given Kingsley’s simultaneous emphasis on preserving indigenous values while furthering European trade in the future, African cultural and economic middlemen of the present – and their imports – intrude upon her studiously visual narrative as a threat to both “the real African” and free trade. While contemplating Xenia, a Liberian émigré with a presumably “chequered past,” she indirectly associates American imports with political corruption: “I wonder whether he is a fugitive president or a defaulting bank manager? They [Liberians] have copies of all the high points of American culture there, I am told” (Kingsley, *Travels* 606). Her emphasis on “copies” identifies the newly independent republic as a culture of mimicry, a familiar charge that inspired Blyden’s “The Liberian Scholar,” and what initially conjures her suspicion of Xenia is his propensity for wearing pants and assertion that he once wore “better boots than [hers]” (Kingsley, *Travels* 606). Toward the end of her narrative, we discover the primary root of her scorn toward Liberia: taxation. Not only does she implicate Liberia in the coastal African “monopoly” on the rubber trade, but she also denounces Liberia for levying taxes on the shipment of labor required by European merchants (Kingsley, *Travels* 649–50).¹² Similarly, when introducing a primary consumer of European goods, “the Sierra Leone dandy” (Kingsley, *Travels* 20), she identifies him as “that perfect flower of Sierra Leone culture, who yells your bald name across the street at you, condescendingly informs you that you can go and get letters that are waiting for you, while he smokes his cigar and lolls in the shade, or in some similar way displays his second-hand rubbishy white culture” (Kingsley, *Travels* 20). While Kingsley interprets this “second-hand” or imported culture as part of a performance that defies Europeans like herself as figures of authority, she presumes that the actor, rather than his audience, is made to feel insecure (Kingsley, *Travels* 20). Were

Kingsley completely at ease, however, she might not have devoted such attention to the “dandy” or declared a “wish to punch his head, and split his coat up his back” – a desire that once again fixates on an article of European clothing (Kingsley, *Travels* 19–20). When comparing Sierra Leoneans with the middleman traders at Fernando Po, she attributes to both a “‘Black gennellum, Sar’ style” (Kingsley, *Travels* 72); an adopted style recognized as insolent yet unintended mimicry. According to John Flint, “She liked the old African as he was, and hated the new pushful and ambitious educated men, who in fact were the men of the future” (Flint lxiv).

Only later, when meeting the smooth-speaking Prince Makaga along the River Rembwé, does Kingsley admit her discomfort at encountering African adoptions of European cultural goods. Laura Ciolkowski suggestively reads this encounter as an “ontological drama . . .” (Ciolkowski 344–45), which stages “the fabulous confrontation between an African man impersonating a European gentleman and a provincial woman with a cockney accent impersonating a cultured European lady” (Ciolkowski 344). Makaga nevertheless represents for Kingsley the difference between a “gentleman” and a “gennellum,” which roughly coincides with the distinction between apparent assimilation and overt insubordination:

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 and collar, very neat tie, and felt hat affected by white gentlemen out here. Taking a large and powerful cigar from his lips with one hand, he raised his hat gracefully with the other and said: “Pray excuse me, madam.” (Kingsley, *Travels* 340)

Donning his attire like “an English gentleman” caught without his card case (Kingsley, *Travels* 340–41), speaking flawless English, and reminiscing about London, Paris, and Liverpool, this “black gentleman” of European culture unnerves Kingsley and inspires her to display a comparable level of cultured sensibility (Kingsley, *Travels* 341): “I felt I had got to rise to this man whoever he was, somehow, and having regained my nerve, I was coming up hand over hand to the level of his culture when Obanjo and the crew arrived, carrying goats” (Kingsley, *Travels* 340). Unlike Blyden’s encounter with the nurse, this scene stages Kingsley’s lingering anxiety about recognizing Makaga as all too human – that is, white. She introduces Makaga as “an English gentleman . . . gone black” rather than as “a black man” who “speaks English.” Yet in the absence of detectable insolence, Makaga’s virtuoso performance of European “refinement,” in which European objects do not overtly appear as properties (mis)used to challenge imperial authority, takes him a long way toward acquiring Kingsley’s reserved admiration. Whereas her captain, Obanjo, considers Makaga “too much of a lavender-kid-glove gentleman to deal with bush trade” and “spoilt by going to Europe,” Kingsley defends the “fine polish” exhibited “without the obvious conceit usually found in men who have been home” (Kingsley, *Travels* 341). It is not entirely clear whether the “home” of Europe signifies home for her readers, herself, or Makaga. Makaga, we learn, once worked for a large European trading company in Gabon, before “[t]hinking that he could make more money on his own account” and becoming an independent trader (Kingsley, *Travels* 341). One wonders whether his portrait would have been different had his venture been more successful; since “a lot of his trust had recently gone bad” (Kingsley, *Travels*

341), he served as a convenient object lesson to Anglicized African traders competing with European firms.

Kingsley's vision of the future African trader fades before the threateningly refined figure of Makaga, while the imported objects populating this scene once again reveal broader historical interests. The future trader, she imagines when arguing for the resilience of African cultures amidst commerce with Europe, will be "just as willing to sell as 'big curios' the *dèbris* of [European] importations to his ancestors at a high price," and "a Devos patent paraffin oil tin or a Morton's tin" may become as valuable as "Phoenician 'Aggry' beads." (Kingsley, *Travels* 679).¹³ Like the old shilling razor that Kingsley encounters while trading with the Fang, she envisions the empty packaging of exhausted commodities emerging as the overvalued object of African consumer desire. This scene implicitly associates such empty articles of tin with the articles labeled "rubbish," "trash," or "trifles" that African traders of the interior accepted in exchange for items of European value, like gold. Kingsley's light-hearted anecdote corresponds with a long history of denigrating West African systems of value, a history that fueled Afro-European fetish discourse and attempted to impose European values on Africa – whether economic, aesthetic, moral, or political. The Devos paraffin oil and Morton's salt tins simultaneously reveal the ways in which commerce was, in fact, changing African society. Palm oil, from West Africa, and salt, from North Africa, had been two of the main commodities in African trade for millennia. The vital resource of salt figured prominently in trans-Saharan trade, for which West Africans offered northern traders gold in exchange. Palm oil served as a versatile commodity significant not only in West Africa, but also in England after the Industrial Revolution and before the distillation of kerosene (paraffin oil) and oil from petroleum when it was used in making palm wax candles and lubricating machinery.¹⁴ That Europe, not to mention America, would be shipping the refined resources of oil and salt in all its modern packaging to Africa is more than an unacknowledged irony by a writer noted for her irony; it highlights the imbalance of trade that accompanies the development of economic imperialism, which Kingsley advocated for West Africa's immediate future. The memory of Makaga, man of the future, troubles Kingsley's present as a disturbing anachronism and disrupts her future as an uncanny double with an alternate narrative of development.

Considering the work of Kingsley and Blyden together highlights how the production of knowledge about Africa placed Victorians and Anglophone Africans in dialogue and often debate with each other. In her open letter to Liberia published in *The New Africa* shortly after her death, Kingsley urges Euro-American educated Liberians, like "[her] friend, Dr. Blyden," to study indigenous African cultures and to mediate relations between Europe and West Africa (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xix). "Mutual misunderstanding" would continue to impede political relations, she argues from a familiar liberal position, until "you who know European culture, who are educated in our culture, and who also know African culture, will take your place as true ambassadors and peacemakers between the two races and place before the English statesmen the true African" (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xvi, xvii).¹⁵ Writing to Kingsley just one month before her death, Blyden responds to her still unpublished address: "Your exhortations are lost upon the majority of Anglicised Africans" (Blyden, *Letters* 460). Those who would best understand her arguments, Blyden explains, would not likely be able to read them in English. Those with missionary instruction in English, he furthers, have been taught that native languages and customs are, at best, not worth knowing or, at the worst, pernicious (Blyden, *Letters* 460). Blyden, subsequently remembering Kingsley as "a spirit

sent to the world to serve Africa and the African race” (qtd. in Flint lxvii), nevertheless took seriously her suggestions and her final warning: “unless you preserve your institutions, above all *your land law*, you cannot, no race can, preserve your liberty” (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xviii). In his Emersonian address as president of Liberia College in 1900, Blyden echoes Kingsley’s parting words to his country while identifying “The Liberian Scholar” as one who would “understand the African in his native state, and know how to give the world a correct knowledge of him” through a study of “native *law*, tribal organization, native languages, native religion, [and] native politics” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 266). Blyden’s 1908 *African Life and Customs* represents his most direct attempt at promoting such scholarship of the future while intervening in colonial policies of the present. Rather than trusting wholly to the powers of mutual understanding and offering his readers a picture of West African life and customs, however, Blyden employs the methods of nineteenth-century comparative ethnography to construct a more explicit argument against the imposition of European values on African societies.¹⁶ Juxtaposing African and European institutions, often to the detriment of the latter, he encourages his readers “to leave by imaginative effort the limits of their surroundings in Europe; their constant habit to refer all propositions to the standard of what is necessary and becoming in family or social [or, we might add, economic] life” (Blyden, *Kingsley* 14). Even the most imaginative of writers like Kingsley struggled with such limits.

2.

BLYDEN – A HIGHLY EDUCATED, missionary-trained, meticulously postured, extensive traveler, who valued his European suits and gold watch chain – met Kingsley in her native habitat. Unlike Kingsley’s encounter with Makaga, or Blyden’s with the nurse, their meeting fostered a productive friendship cultivated through conversations, letters, and the exchange of books. Kingsley’s writings on West Africa undoubtedly impressed Blyden, who cites them frequently in his later works. Her careful pursuit of facts as well as her attentiveness to the signifying systems and cross-cultural conversations from which they emerge provided Blyden with a model for anthropological inquiry. Her pursuit of authenticity in order to dispel the “purely imaginary African” that England exported with its representatives overseas (Letter qtd. in Blyden, *Kingsley* 14), moreover, spoke to his own investment in promoting a more African-centered identity among indigenous and diasporic communities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Blyden’s experience of race prejudice throughout his life, however, motivated his pursuit of ontological as well as cultural authenticity through the attainment of greater autonomy than Kingsley’s vision of the future would allow.

Like Kingsley, Blyden recognized “facts – or what seemed to be facts” as socially constructed relations and concerned himself with writing about Africa for the present (Blyden, *Christianity* iii). “[T]he theories of the noisy and blustering anthropologists of forty or fifty years ago,” he explains in *African Life and Customs*, proposed “all sorts of arguments based upon estimates of physical phenomena as conceived by phrenology or physiognomy, using signs and symbols taken from every part of the man – from the heel to the skull – to prove the mental and moral inferiority of” Africans (Blyden, *Customs* 8). Rather than serving as self-evident facts, physical attributes appear to Blyden as signs possessing arbitrary, socially-conventional meanings dependent upon interpretive systems that were subject to manipulation.¹⁷ As early as his 1857 essay, “A Vindication of the African Race,”

Blyden comments on the misuse of such signs in the construction of racial types. “Caucasian naturalists and ethnologists,” he argues, juxtaposed in geographies and ethnographies select pictures of ideal Europeans with images of the most “degraded” Africans for the purpose of representing the races as a whole (Blyden, *Spokesman* 131). By laying bare the processes by which discriminatory significances were attached to visual differences, Blyden attempts to intervene in the production of anthropological knowledge that continued to shape his everyday experience even in an independent Liberia.

The anthropological methods resulting in racial typecasting that Blyden cautiously locates in the past had not completely disappeared by the turn of the twentieth century. The developing field methods of physical anthropology were in fact well represented in guides to anthropological observation like *Notes and Queries*. Given the limitations of black and white photography for Victorian racial theory, late-Victorian field guides attempted to indoctrinate the observer in how to perceive variations in bodily appearances that anthropologists would later decode. All editions of *Notes and Queries* from 1874 to 1899 consequently included hair, eye, and skin pigmentation charts, furnished by the comparative pathologist Pierre Paul Broca, which revealed anthropologists’ anxious awareness that even the perception of presumably objective attributes such as color varied with the individual observer.¹⁸ The swatches of disembodied colors ranged in rows and columns bring to mind Bhabha’s claim that “[s]kin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses” (Bhabha 78). Skin pigmentation, as a fetish, is presented in *Notes and Queries* as a transparent medium for determining racial difference, rather than as a signifier arbitrarily aligned with a signified. What may have passed as “common knowledge,” however, could not be entirely regulated in the eye of the ethnographic beholder or even in print. These charts, designed to determine and to fix subjective impressions, faded and discolored beyond recognition in the first edition: a problem – or, perhaps, an appropriate irony – lamented by subsequent editors.

In much of his writing, Blyden attempts to unhinge such typological fixations by employing methods similar to those of Kingsley; that is, by attending to the function of time and repetition in the semiotics of racial and cultural differences. As early as 1862, he considers the pervasive appearance of Africans and African-Americans performing the lower status jobs available to them as one of the most visible yet insidious ways in which an image of inferiority could be produced, fixed, and repeated. Such images, he suggests, promote the misleading conflation of class with race, of oppression with aptitude: “He is almost universally the servant of the white man; so that, as soon as a Negro is seen, the presumption at once is that he is menial. His colour at once associates him with that class of persons, and the general feeling is to treat him as such” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 13). Whereas this image of inferiority results from economic and political oppression, its seemingly autonomous repetition and reinforcement within a broader system of signification helps to obscure its conditions of production. Africans trained in European systems of education, Blyden explains in 1881, “often receive direct teachings which are not only incompatible with, but destructive of, their self-respect” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 235). Popular print culture reinforces and extends these teachings: “After leaving school . . . [an African] finds the same things in newspapers, in reviews, in novels, in *quasi* scientific works; and after a while . . . they begin to seem to him the proper things to say and to feel about his race, and he accepts what, at first, his fresh and unbiased feelings naturally and indignantly repelled. Such is the effect of

repetition” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 235). Repetition, as seen in Kingsley’s writing, may help to unravel misrepresentations as well as to construct alternate representations inductively. Also associated with the colonizer’s anxiously fetishistic need to reassert discriminatory knowledges (Bhabha 81), repetition here serves as the vehicle by which constructed beliefs gradually displace “unbiased feelings” in both colonialists and colonized subjects. Moreover, suggests Blyden in 1881, the ideal self-image with which Africans are conditioned to identify is white: “The standard of all physical and intellectual excellencies in the present civilization being the white complexion, whatever deviates from that favoured colour is proportionally depreciated, until the black, which is the opposite, becomes not only the most unpopular but the most unprofitable colour” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 235). By 1896, Blyden, like his contemporary W. E. B. Du Bois, describes this sense of conflicted identification and damaged self-respect as feeling “alienated from himself” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 256). His analysis thus traces the circular relation between economic and psychological alienation: from unpopular employment to unpopular color to unprofitable color to unprofitable and unpopular employment. As Fanon later argues, “If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: – primarily, economic; – subsequently, the internalization – or, better, the epidermalization – of this inferiority” (Fanon 11). Throughout his writings, and especially in *African Life and Customs*, Blyden attempts to interrupt this circular process of producing value – economic and psychic, scientific, and aesthetic.

Originally written for the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* and reprinted in London, *African Life and Customs* addressed Africans as well as Europeans in a way that challenged the temporality of nineteenth-century ethnography. Fabian describes standard ethnographic writing as a dialogic exchange taking place between the “I” of the ethnographer and the “you” of the listener, who discuss the third person – or rather the “non-person” (Fabian, *Time* 85). The “non-person” neither participates in the dialogue nor engages with its speakers in the present (Fabian, *Time* 85). The present tense, suggests Fabian, signals an “*observer’s language*” and “presupposes the givenness of the object of anthropology as something to be *observed*” (Fabian, *Time* 87), while “freez[ing] a society at the time of observation” and potentially reinforcing stereotypes about the “repetitiveness, predictability, and conservatism” of small-scale societies (Fabian, *Time* 81). Victorian guides to ethnographic writing like *Notes and Queries* prescribed this format through the use of the second person in which the “I” of its authoritative contributors addresses exclusively the fieldworker as “you.” Although Blyden begins his study proposing to discuss “the African pure and simple – . . . the man untouched either by European or Asiatic influence” (Blyden, *Customs* 10), he increasingly adopts the first person plural when discussing “our Native System” (Blyden, *Customs* 46). As Blyden’s ethnography consistently reevaluates African customs at the expense of their European comparators, this “we” proposes a solidarity that attempts to reconcile Anglophone West Africans of the coast to the interests of their countrymen in the interior. Blyden may well have appreciated how Kingsley in her writings occasionally adopts the second person and places her reader – “you” – immediately in the scene she observes. Whether luring her readers into a mangrove swamp where they are in danger of becoming fossilized for a future museum collection or placing them in the position of needing to return a defunct protective charm to the local medicine man, this strategy contributes to the irony of her narrative and allows her to draw subtle comparisons between Africa and England. Moreover, positioning the reader as both listener and object of ethnographic inquiry – the “non-person” – not only troubles the reader’s ability to maintain

adequate distance from the object but also uncannily threatens to convert the reader into the ethnographic object himself or herself. By disrupting the “observer’s language,” and by inserting Europe more directly into his comparative ethnography, Blyden works toward narrating Africa in the present.

Although Blyden’s categories of inquiry frequently resemble those of Kingsley, he subtly revalues key terms in her discussion while emphasizing African oral narratives over visual description. Indeed, the political implications of anthropology’s visual-spatial practices were not lost on him. Whereas Kingsley represents the Hut Tax War as an “object lesson” promoting English trade rule in West Africa (Kingsley, *Studies* 332), Blyden proves all too wary of the argument that British capitalists have the best interests of their African customers at heart. Blyden draws a counter “object lesson” from his immediate environment (Blyden, *Customs* 30): in particular, from the cooperative practices of animals and insects that inform African proverbs (Blyden, *Customs* 39). Comparing African institutions with contemporary British socialism, Blyden suggests that Europeans may learn something from a system that “is cooperative not egotistic or individualistic”; such a system, he suggests, produces neither capitalists nor proletariat classes (Blyden, *Customs* 30), nor waste nor poverty (Blyden, *Customs* 37–38). From the perspective of African cooperative industries, part of a larger “communistic order” (Blyden, *Customs* 39), Blyden attacks a common stereotype held against Africans who resist entering a global capitalist workforce:

It is charged against the African that he is lazy, . . . and yet a hundred steamers constantly dog the coast to take away his produce – created not by the help or supervision of the white man. He is lazy, yet steamers frequently lie in West African ports for days landing cargo. All this stuff must be presents to a lazy and worthless set of men, who give nothing in return. How benevolent our kind friends in Europe must be! (Blyden, *Customs* 51–52)

Resistance to “exploiters” and to alienation, rather than laziness, he explains, accounts for the practices of African laborers (Blyden, *Customs* 51); contrary to Kingsley’s argument, they do not need instruction in “how to work” or “the nobility of labour” (Kingsley, *Travels* 680, 671). “The ‘dignity of labour,’” Blyden counters, “is glorified . . . only among those who have various means . . . of alleviating or brightening it”: “To the millionaire there is ‘dignity in labour’; to the hod-carrier there is only drudgery” (Blyden, *Customs* 35). Herein lies the significance of the indigenous land laws that Kingsley presciently defended: communal access to land and water resources, contrary to the designs of capitalism and its dependence upon disenfranchised labour produced through primitive accumulation, ultimately stands in the way of colonial expansion. For Blyden, defending West Africa’s land laws also entailed defending them from the unregulated, potentially exploitative practices of traders and the economic system they imported.

Although Blyden dedicated *African Life and Customs* to the influential Liverpool trader William John Davey, its argument relies much more on the work of socialist Sidney Olivier whom Blyden commends in his introduction. Olivier, long before Bhabha theorized the stereotype of colonial discourse after Freud’s model of fetishism, exposed imperial race prejudice as a form of fetishism. Speaking especially of the Belgian Congo in 1906, Olivier writes, “The old familiar cant is gravely repeated that the indolence of the natives needs to be extirpated and the understanding of the dignity of labour instilled, that the native must be civilised by being taught to work, and moreover that he ought to pay taxes for

the benefits conferred on him by the administration in setting up the machinery for this educative process” (Olivier 116). “A hierarchy of extortion” is consequently set in place (Olivier 116), and colonial capitalist machinery institutes “the policy of forcing the native to work, by direct taxation, or restricting the area of land which he may occupy” (Olivier 97). The capitalist’s need for economic alienation, moreover, motivates the social and psychic forms of alienation that Blyden analyzes. “[R]ace-prejudice is the fetish of the man of short views” (Olivier 173), Olivier argues, in that “trained hatreds” are presented as natural antipathies and used to promote economic exploitation (Olivier 170). While acknowledging the impossibility of returning completely to tribal communal institutions in a country whose citizens “have accumulated money under the individualistic system of Europe” (Blyden, *Customs* 46), Blyden cautions against adopting European values and systems of production wholesale: “All their wealth, sooner or later, goes back to the European, in spite of the most stringent provisions of Wills and Codicils. . . . It is not a *rule* but a *law* – the law of disintegration under the European competitive order” (Blyden, *Customs* 47). Blyden’s resistant vision of the future, even more than that of Kingsley, resonated with later African nationalists.

Blyden’s encounter with the British nurse and children, in fact, strikingly resembles the familiar, traumatic scene of identity formation conjured by the disruptive refrain “Look, a Negro!” in Fanon’s chapter, “The Fact of Blackness” (*L’expérience vécue du Noir*). Focusing on “the lived experience of the black,” this chapter furthers one of the larger arguments made in *Black Skin, White Masks*: that racial discrimination cannot properly be understood through objectification; that is, without at least “feel[ing] [one]self into the despair of the man of color confronting the white man” (Fanon 86). In this formative scene, Fanon considers how his “corporeal schema” – the implicit “slow composition of [the] *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world” that forms a “dialectic between [one’s] body and the world” (Fanon 111) – could be underwritten by the social construction of race:

Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by “residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, visual character,” but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more. “Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. (Fanon 111)¹⁹

This scene of misrecognition functions as a formative moment for both the white child, who identifies with the white parent, and the black man, whose identification with the passersby has been denied him upon being recognized, in the words of Blyden, as “a peculiar being *sui generis*” (Blyden, “West” 362). As Fanon explains, “I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus” (Fanon 116). Alienated both from others and from his own bodily consciousness by the “white eyes” that “dissect” and “fix” him as the overdetermined product of “a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (Fanon 116, 111), Fanon highlights the tension between a lost sense of originality – of imagining himself and his engagement with the world as the origin of his own present identity, as in Blyden’s “unbiased feelings” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 235) – and a “galaxy of erosive stereotypes: the Negro’s *sui generis* odor . . . the Negro’s *sui generis* good nature . . . the Negro’s *sui generis* gullibility” (Fanon 129).

The dialectical sense of self and world that Fanon associates with the corporeal schema, as Bhabha suggests in the essay inspired by this scene, corresponds with that of the imaginary order first entered during the mirror stage.²⁰ At this stage in the process of colonial subject formation, the ideal image with which the colonial subject attempts to identify – Lacan’s “ideal-I,” or “orthopedic” frame (Lacan 71) – is not only whole but also white and thereby introduces particular difficulties for black colonial subjects continuing to identify with this image while attempting to enter a society whose institutions privilege whiteness discriminatively. Fanon writes, “And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. . . . The real world challenged my claims [i.e., of recognition]” (Fanon 110). Denied acknowledgement as a subject, as a human, he is cast into a “neurotic situation”: being forced to “*turn white*” – an impossibility for those not recognized as such – “*or disappear*” – only a possibility for those who accept being denied ontological status and agree to “keep [their] place” by corresponding with the stereotypes that objectify them (Fanon 100, 34). Accepting the position of object, whether of anxiety or desire, within a white imaginary (Fanon 35), however, represents a form of castration that figures his “Negro consciousness” as “lack”(-ing whiteness) (Fanon 135): “I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?” (Fanon 112). The stereotype, like the fetish, supplements this lack, making the black subject’s difference “palatable” to fetishists in the white world (Fanon 176), and serves as a memorial to and defense against this difference (Freud 154). For Fanon, however, this substitution of “pseudopodia” for the human feet on which he “wanted to rise” proves unacceptable (Fanon 33, 140). Fanon, like Blyden, resists the ontological imperative to “turn white” – to “change his skin,” like the leopard its spots – “or disappear.”

Blyden, as an émigré educated on both sides of the Atlantic, describes this imperative spatially as a form of exile that he experienced, “consciously and unconsciously” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 240), in colonial societies as well as postcolonial Liberia. “In the depth of their being,” suggests Blyden, black residents “always feel themselves strangers in the land of their exile, and the only escape from this feeling is to escape from themselves” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 235–36). As Fanon observes, “In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence” (Fanon 60). Identifying such exile in the moral and aesthetic privileging, if not deification, of whiteness in European Christian art that “exhibited only the physical characteristics of a foreign race,” Blyden argues that such “models for imitation” and “the canons of taste” they promote disrupt Africans’ “normal development” (Blyden, *Christianity* 14, 15). One African-American at a prayer meeting in New York, he recounts, unthinkingly invited parishioners to turn white: “Brethren, imagine a beautiful white man with blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and flaxen hair, and *we shall be like him*” (Blyden, *Christianity* 15). Better not to represent one’s supreme deity visually, as in Islam, Blyden suggests, than to depict this figure only as white. This unconscious whitening resembles that of the Antillean children writing in French like “real little Parisians” with their “*rosy cheeks*” (Fanon 162), and Blyden, like Fanon, emphasized throughout his career the importance of introducing Africans at an early age to a symbolic world that does not estrange them from themselves (Fanon 148). While Blyden’s biographer Thomas W. Livingston tends to diagnose him as one of Fanon’s neurotic, postcolonial subjects of conflicted identification,²¹ I would argue that Blyden theorizes and takes issue with this position.

3.

RETURNING TO THE DIALOGUE, both explicit and implicit, between Kingsley and Blyden ultimately helps to recast both writers' current critical legacies. Kingsley, while frequently celebrated for her strategies of "irony and subversion" (Pratt 213),²² as well as her relative comfort in "not knowing" and "not seeing" (Pratt 215), is also criticized for her Eurocentric humor (Ako), her imperialism (Flint, Nnoromele), her suspicion toward Westernized Africans (Flint, Nnoromele), and her tendency "to fossilise the [economic and political] conditions of the 1880's" in West Africa (Flint lxiv). As if aware of such potential objections, Kingsley attempts in her letter to Liberia to make peace with the Euro-American educated Africans she often criticized: "I know I have been a nuisance. I know I have spoken words in wrath about the educated missionary-made African, and I am glad to hear you will tolerate me" (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xix). Blyden, a contemporary "m[a]n of the future" (Flint lxiv), did more than tolerate Kingsley, as he read, embraced, and criticized her ideas. As an early African nationalist, influential pan-Africanist, and precursor of Négritude,²³ Blyden leaves behind a legacy analogous to that of Kingsley and simultaneously reaffirms her influence on West African authors.²⁴ Blyden's reception, in turn, has been the most positive in West Africa and the Caribbean,²⁵ and it is no coincidence that he knew these regions best and cared for them most. Criticized both for his support of African-American emigration to Liberia, which placed him partly at odds with Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Dubois, and even his former colleague Alexander Crummell,²⁶ while in dubious alliance with southern white oligarchs like J. C. Hemphill,²⁷ and for his at times almost fetishistic advocacy of cultural nationalism,²⁸ Blyden has, by even some of his most sympathetic American critics, been accused of "'putting Whitey on' to effect Negro advancement" and in the process becoming "a black apologist for the very structures that . . . denied his manhood" (Livingston 204, 205).²⁹ Reading Blyden in relation to his imperial contexts may not lessen the strength of the criticism launched against him, but it does shift the perspective from which to evaluate his critical contributions: contributions that focus more on his rhetorical engagement with colonial and postcolonial relations between West Africa and England.

"There will be an authentic disalienation," argued Fanon from a Marxist as well as psychoanalytic perspective, "only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places" (Fanon 11–12). Blyden, even more than Fanon, preserved the concept of authenticity in promoting an autonomous African subjectivity located in an African-centered culture, and he unfortunately expressed these views frequently at the expense of his influential colleagues of mixed race in ways that reinforced the reactionary and dualistic thinking of his contemporaries.³⁰ Authenticity, ontological as well as cultural, nevertheless remained an indispensable concept underwriting both Blyden's work and West African nationalist movements. Kingsley, working in the spirit of Victorian liberalism, preserved the concept of cultural authenticity to the extent that it enabled her, like Blyden, to question some of the fixed and fixating ideas of her contemporaries. Her defense of indigenous groups like the Fang as "true African[s]" with a distinct character also influenced West African nationalism (Letter qtd. in Macmillan xix); however, it did not account for the challenges of negotiating relations between indigenous groups of the interior with a postcolonial coastal elite, nor did it suggest an option outside of the dichotomy between authenticity and inauthenticity.³¹ The visualism of her writings may moreover have served as the formal correlative to political views in conflict with the

very cultures she studied, and Blyden may well have found himself in her vision of a remote future merely “an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon 109). Blyden and Kingsley’s comparative ethnographies – as broader textual and political practices – nevertheless worked toward promoting that which they did not fully possess themselves: freedom from “the slavery of the mind” (Blyden, *Spokesman* 228). In this regard, their writings remain timely.

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NOTES

1. Ironically, Blyden also knew Greek, Latin, Arabic, Hebrew, and several European languages.
2. As Fanon explains of the postcolonial Antillean, he “will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” (Fanon 18).
3. My use of the phrase “anthropological observation” signals the intended general audience of these late-Victorian guides produced by the Anthropological Institute, after its consolidation of the Anthropological and Ethnological Societies in 1871 (Stocking). The first edition of *Notes and Queries* in 1874 was comprised of two main sections that roughly coincide with present-day divisions between biological and cultural anthropology: “The Constitution of Man,” renamed in the 1892 edition as “Anthropography,” and “Culture,” renamed in 1892 as “Ethnography.” Distinct from current uses of the term, which refer mainly to the participant-observer methods developed in the early twentieth century, ethnography was defined in the 1892 and 1899 guides as a branch of anthropology dealing with the social and intellectual aspects of human beings rather than the structural and functional ones (*Notes and Queries*, 1892: 1). Most nineteenth-century guides to observation, as well as foundational works in the field like Prichard’s 1813 *Researches* (fourth edition published in 1855) and Tylor’s 1881 *Anthropology*, included both sections, thereby structurally affirming Robert J. C. Young’s argument: “Race has always been culturally constructed. Culture has always been racially constructed” (54).
4. For the purposes of the present argument, in which I focus more broadly on the ethnographic characteristics of Kingsley and Blyden’s work, I do not distinguish between different genres of writing, whether essay, printed speech, or travel narrative.
5. Kingsley explicitly recommends to her readers several mid- to late-nineteenth-century anthropological works: “I do not say, do not read Ethnology – by all means do so; and above all things read, until you know it by heart, *Primitive Culture*, by Dr. E. B. Tylor, regarding which book I may say that I have never found a fact that flew in the face of the carefully made, broad-minded deductions of this greatest of Ethnologists. In, [sic] addition you must know your Westermarck on *Human Marriage*, and your Waitz *Anthropologie*, and your Topinard. . . . Add to this the knowledge of all A. B. Ellis’s works; Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*; Pliny’s *Natural History*; and as much of Aristotle as possible” (Kingsley, *Travels* 435–36). While Blyden also praises Tylor’s work (Blyden, *Kingsley* 44), he ranks authors like Burton among the “blustering anthropologists” not worth reading (Blyden, *Customs* 8).
6. On Kingsley, ethnography, and gender, see Blunt (especially *Imperialism* 78–80), Brisson, and Early.
7. According to Fabian, “Much of ethnographic writing . . . has been presented, though rarely directly, as responses to research questions set down in such authoritative works as the famous *Notes and Queries*” (Fabian, *Minds* 10).
8. Fabian, in turn, borrows these phrases from Bossuet 2.
9. See, for example, Herschel’s introduction to *Manual for Scientific Inquiry*.
10. Kingsley describes trade English as a “peculiar language” “not only used as a means of intercommunication between whites and blacks, but between natives using two distinct languages”

(Kingsley, *Travels* 431–32). She moreover explains the widespread use of this hybrid form of English: “On the south-west Coast you find individuals in villages far from the sea, or a trading station, who know it, and this is because they have picked it up and employ it in their dealings with the coast tribes and traveling traders” (Kingsley, *Travels* 432).

11. Brown is openly paraphrasing Theodor Adorno in this formulation.
12. Kingsley’s characterization of African traders as monopolists, Flint suggests, dramatically overlooks the Niger Oil Company’s amalgamation of local British trading firms and its attempts in the early 1890s to form an even larger monopoly by merging with the oil traders of Liverpool (Flint xlvi–xlix).
13. The value of Phoenician “Aggry” beads, as opposed to their cheap European imitations, was nothing to scoff at, since they fetched their weight in gold during Kingsley’s day. See Price.
14. Petroleum was not discovered in the Niger Oil River region of present-day Nigeria until 1956. On the production and uses of Palm Oil, see Kiple.
15. Blyden also cites this passage in *The African Society and Miss Mary Kingsley* 7.
16. Nineteenth-century comparative ethnography promoted the collection and collation of information concerning diverse small-scale societies in the hope of discerning common, primary forms of cultural production that would ostensibly help to illuminate earlier, presumably analogous stages of European development. Blyden, and to a certain extent Kingsley, revises this temporal relation by presenting African and European societies as contemporary.
17. Symbols, in the contemporary semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, were considered a subset of signs founded on social convention.
18. Even the extensively revised 1912 edition of *Notes and Queries*, famously carried into the field by Bronislaw Malinowski, largely omitted the section then titled physical anthropology only because the growth and specialization of this field necessitated a separate volume, to which sufficiently qualified readers were referred.
19. Embedded quotation from Lhermitte, *Corps* 17.
20. According to Lacan, the subject at this stage of development identifies with and feels alienated from a misrecognized, mirror image of the self – one that, contrary to the subject’s experience of bodily fragmentation, appears inaccessibly perfect, whole, and therefore other – and thus experiences the dual reaction of narcissism and aggressivity, recognition and alienation, that will characterize all subsequent encounters with others in society. On Fanon’s divergence from Lacan, see, for example, Bhabha, JanMohamed, Gates, and Macey.
21. See especially 206–23 for Livingston’s biographically detailed and nuanced assessment.
22. See also Blunt, Brisson, and Stevenson; for a critique of the political efficacy of irony and the significance of unconscious desire in Kingsley’s narrative, see Lane.
23. See, for example, Lynch and Livingston.
24. Flint acknowledges her influence on African nationalisms through the 1960s.
25. See, for example, Douglass-Chin, Lynch, Nwauwa, Senghor, Twe, and Wa’Thiongo.
26. Curiously, no critic to my knowledge has examined the mounting tensions precipitating the break between these two reverends, Blyden and Crummell, in the light of Blyden’s sympathetic turn toward Islam by the 1870s.
27. On Blyden’s controversial position in African-American history, see Livingston (especially 184–223); on the similarities between Blyden and Du Bois, see Echeruo.
28. For this issue as well as Blyden’s affinity with Washington, see Posnock.
29. Livingston also discusses Blyden’s eventual disillusionment with Liberia and his proposal by the turn of the century for an interim imperial government.
30. See Livingston.
31. Fanon’s parallel between racism and anti-Semitism, in which he quotes the following passage from Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* (Sartre 135), further illuminates the potential limitations of Kingsley’s liberalism: “It is our words and our gestures – all our words and all our gestures – our anti-Semitism, but equally our condescending liberalism – that have poisoned him. It is we who constrain him to

choose to be a Jew *whether through flight from himself or through self-assertion*; it is we who force him into the dilemma of Jewish authenticity or inauthenticity" (qtd. in Fanon 181–82).

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