

**Tribhuvan University**

**Rhetoric of Empire in Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa***

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Central Department of English in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in  
English**

**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Shuv Raj Rana Bhat has completed his dissertation entitled “**Rhetoric of Empire in Mary Kingsley’s *Travels in West Africa***” under my supervision. He carried out his research from August 2011 to July 2012. I hereby recommend that his dissertation be submitted for viva voce.

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Dr. Beerendra Pandey

## Approval Letter

This dissertation entitled “**Rhetoric of Empire in Mary Kingsley’s *Travels in West Africa***” submitted by Shuv Raj Rana Bhat to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Honest intellectual achievement is never, under any circumstance, an individualistic enterprise. Everyone works in relation to others' lives and work, whether or not she acknowledges this. Moreover, our mental faculties are not, in fact, disembodied. The brain is in the body. Thinking is bound up organically in feeling and sensation, just as the life of the thinker is involved, inextricably, in the lives of those who comprise her social world. We do not think only in the head or feel simply in the heart any more than we work merely on our own apart from the lives of others.

Carter Heyward

As quoted above, this dissertation is the result of many people's contributions: there are those who provided the intellectual stimulus, and those who offered the emotional support. There are those who critiqued and praised, those who listened to me and those I listened to. Acknowledging all of them here would be impossible. I hope they will forgive me if they find an idea or expression of their own borrowed without particular acknowledgement.

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## Abstract

In this dissertation, I provide an analysis of *Travels in West Africa* by Mary Kingsley that falls within the genre of travel writing, currently a flourishing and highly popular literary genre. Moving away from Kingsley's insistence on her real or authentic experience during her sojourn in West Africa, I argue that her visit to Africa is motivated by imperial ambition which is evidenced in the rhetoric that threads the text, particularly imperial stylistics, rhetorical tropes and racist discourse. To show this colonial thinking, I accept Mary Louise Pratt's and David Spurr's invitations in *Imperial Eyes* and *The Rhetoric of Empire* respectively to employ their critical reading strategies to investigate European /British ethnographic discourses of African cultures.

In addition to these, I also draw on the methodology of the discourse historical approach developed by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak to explore the development of racialized constructions of West African identity. Contrary to Kingsley's claim on factual accuracy of her work, my findings show that Africa is negatively constructed as a land to be surveyed, debased, appropriated, negated and conquered by the European power particularly British. Moreover, Africans are constructed as savage, capricious, inferior and undeveloped, clearly justifying British intervention. Many a time, the Africans are defined in terms understandable to the British, fitting them within a scheme that is knowable and acceptable within ethnocentric British ideology. These findings lead me to draw the conclusion that imperial ideology is embedded in the very language the colonizers use. In other words, language is not a neutral entity, carrying transparent meanings but is charged with ideology.

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