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SPECIAL ISSUE: THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN 'AFTER RACE'

(De)Constructing Whiteness, Power, and 'Others' with Access: International Development and Transnational Interracial Intimacies in East Africa

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In the East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania, white Western women are socially constructed as 'Others' with access, or foreign and non-normative avenues by which black East African men can access the wealth, mobility, and status of an idealised Western lifestyle. This access, both real and perceived, confirms the transnational social and economic power of whiteness. I investigate the concept of 'Other' in this context as one invested with power, inverting conventional academic understandings of racialised 'difference' as a point of marginalisation or subordination within relations of power. I examine the ways in which white Western women working in the field of international development are enmeshed within hierarchical racial divides and the operation of racialised power differentiation, processes at the core of international development and 'the white man's (or in this case, woman's) burden.' In this context, these women are understood to be hypervisible embodiments of foreign-ness, wealth, and mobility, and therefore potentially desirable intimate partners to black East African men. These conceptualisations further entrench whiteness as a transnational site of privilege and, rather than losing authority through its visibility, whiteness reasserts its power through its ability to be seen, a visual emblem of success to which local populations should aspire to become.

Keywords: whiteness, East Africa, international development, white woman's burden, hypervisibility of 'race', interracial transnational intimacies

Introduction

My social status changed, everyone was like, "Oh my God, Michael with a white woman!" ... [they] looked at me differently in a nice way ... many people in fact even women, my lady friends black Kenyans used to tell me: "Wow! Stay with

her." You know: "You're going to become rich, you're going to drive a very nice car." (Michael,¹ research participant from Kenya)

I was walking down James Gichuru [a street in Nairobi] and these little boys ... I was just talking to them as I was walking and they asked where I was from and I said America and ... they all said, "I want to marry a *mzungu* [white person or foreigner in Swahili] and go to America" ... I think that really shaped my perspective ... if little boys think that, is that so ingrained, is that why ... Kenyan men seem to have some kind of interest in white women? (Lauren, research participant from the United States)

The above commentary illustrates the ways in which, in the East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania, white Western women are socially constructed as 'Others' with access, or foreign and non-normative avenues by which black East African men can access the wealth, mobility, and status of an idealised Western lifestyle. This access, both real and perceived, confirms the social and economic power of whiteness. I investigate the concept of 'Other' in this context as one invested with power, inverting conventional academic understandings of racialised 'difference' as a point of marginalisation or subordination within relations of power. I draw from Kristin Loftsdóttir's (2009, p. 4) critical questioning of the relationship of race and whiteness to professional practices of international development and the personal lives of development workers. She asks: "How are racial identities constructed through such encounters, and how is the historical memory of race reinvented?" Ultimately, I consider: how are narratives and histories of race and whiteness in international development made meaningful and 'real' through face-to-face and intimate interactions between black East African men and white Western women working in development?

I locate the drawing of hierarchical racial divides and the operation of racialised power differentiation as the core of international development and 'the white man's (or in this case, *woman's*) burden.' I examine the ways in which white Western women are understood to be hypervisible embodiments of foreign-ness, wealth, and mobility, and therefore potentially desirable intimate partners to black East African men. These representations of Western women further entrench whiteness as a transnational site of privilege and, rather than losing authority through its visibility, whiteness reasserts its power through its ability to be seen, a visual emblem of success to which local populations should aspire to become. In deploying the concept of 'Others' with access, I am critical of the perception and embodiment of white Western female subjectivities as 'colonial continuities,' which frame intimate encounters between development workers and local populations (Gregory, 2004). Indeed, the desire for whiteness is constituted by the desire (and the very real need) for acquiring socioeconomic power and social status.

Catalyst and Primary Research

My interest in the subject of whiteness in East Africa grew from my own experiences working and living in the region. As a white Canadian woman interning near Mwanza, Tanzania in 2005 and in Nairobi, Kenya in 2010, I experienced being white as a foreign and non-normative subject positioning and

¹ All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

felt a sense of intensified visibility and attention from black East African men. It was evident through daily interactions that white women were perceived to be desirable objects for local men to attain because whiteness was equated with wealth and a worry-free lifestyle. These experiences provoked my interest in critical race and whiteness studies outside of Western contexts in order to understand how white privilege may be understood and operate differently (see Bashkow, 2006; Goudge, 2003; Heron, 2007). Rather than conceptualizing the power of whiteness as emerging from its structural invisibility and normativity, I contend that in an East African context white privilege manifests and is confirmed through processes of hypervisibility and non-normativity.

I conducted primary research from May to August 2012. I partnered with Twaweza Communications in Nairobi and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam and conducted 19 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants primarily between the ages of 18 and 40. I interviewed nine local Kenyan and Tanzanian men currently living in Nairobi or Dar es Salaam, although some were born and raised in other communities, including Kenya's coastal region and Mwanza, Tanzania. These participants were in various occupations at the time, such as youth development work, music and the visual arts, tourism, and accounting, and/or pursuing university level degrees. I interviewed ten white Western women currently working in different facets of the development industry and related fields, including local and international non-governmental organisations, covering humanitarian aid stories for international news services, conducting research for think tanks, and teaching. These participants, originating from Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, each held or were pursuing university degrees, primarily in the fields of international development, international relations, political science, refugee and/or global studies.

The Production of Knowledge, Positionality, and Reflexivity

Interviewing is a useful, though constrained, methodological tool. Victoria Bromley (2002, p. 126) argues that rather than understanding the stories shared in this setting as the ultimate 'truth,' researchers must instead understand them as the expression of "social worlds" that create meaning in that individual's life. Understanding knowledge as situated, rather than 'objective,' offers a snapshot into the complexities of an individual's particular context, the ideological narratives that shape their identity, and their social relation to power (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 9). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge here that there are gaps and limitations within the interviews, given that the intimate partners of participants were not interviewed. Therefore, the interviews reflect an individual's perspective as mobilised through tropes that participants use to make sense of their experiences and perceptions. As Joan Scott (1992, p. 37) writes, 'experience' as it is understood, recalled, and relayed to an interviewer is "at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation" (emphasis in original). Experiences are doubly interpreted, first by the individual and then by the interviewer, making experiences inherently political and positioned within ideological systems, whether dominant or resistant. As such, I am not searching for the 'truth' from participants, as conventionally implied. Rather, I am interested in their experiences as they understand and express them, and in what terms they view themselves and their place in the world.

My own social location 'in the field' similarly impacted my experience of conducting research and interacting with participants in Kenya and Tanzania. In particular, my position as a Western white woman undoubtedly shaped the responses I received from participants during the interview process. As a white (Jewish), middle-class, educated Canadian woman and past volunteer development worker, I was (and continue to be) in a significant position of privilege over, in particular, the male research participants. Although as a white Western woman in the context of an African patriarchal society I did experience instances of sexism, more often than not my whiteness and subject position as a foreigner seemed to supersede my gender. Indeed, while I did sometimes feel marginalised for being a *female* outsider, my outsider status as *white* consistently reinforced my status as privileged with a level of economic and personal security not as readily available to local women. In negotiating my positionality, I employed a process of self-reflexivity in order to be continuously aware and critical of the ways in which my social and economic position within an East African context may heighten pre-existing power dynamics and reproduce colonial and Orientalist knowledge (see Deutsch, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012).

Some participants also sought to examine my social location and were often curious about my personal experiences with development work and interactions with local men. In order to create open dialogue, I willingly acknowledged the reality and limitations of my social location, which often put research participants more at ease. Several of the female participants shared their appreciation at being able to speak openly with someone external to their lives, their anonymity allowing them to critically think through their experiences. Though admittedly some of the men I interacted with appeared enthusiastic at the opportunity to talk with a white woman as an end in itself, many appreciated the chance to speak about a subject they felt was taboo or difficult to broach with their peers. While the process of a formal interview can be implemented and experienced in problematic ways, it can also be a rewarding site for critical reflection.

Shifting the Gaze and 'Others' With Access

Critical whiteness scholars like Ruth Frankenberg (1997, p. 2) have critiqued the conceptualisation of whiteness as an inherently invisible, unmarked, and normalised way of being (see also Dyer, 1997; López, 2005). Within conventional Western-based processes of racialisation, whiteness is constructed as a normative and invisible subject position, which diminishes persons of colour and obscures Indigenous histories and contemporary struggles for sovereignty. Within this settler-colonial paradigm, white persons are constructed as 'native' to the settler-colony and therefore the rightful inhabitants of the land (see Byrd, 2011; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007). Non-white populations, therefore, are understood to be inherently different from, 'Other,' and threatening to the norm of hegemonic whiteness. In addition to the important work of studying the operation of whiteness and racial hierarchies in Western contexts, studying the shifts in white privilege in contexts outside of the Western world is an equally crucial tool in the process of dismantling transnational white privilege and white cultural and economic dominance. Indeed, while the work of those scholars who focus on the impact of the presumed universal and invisibilised subjectivity of

whiteness and settler-colonial identity is important, this perspective risks the assumption that whiteness is *actually* invisible to those around it. As Sara Ahmed (2004, para. 2) explains:

It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as a non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent, against which all other colours are measured as forms of deviance ... But of course whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it. For those who don't, it is hard not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere.

The assumed invisibility of whiteness, then, is only experienced from the perspective of those who hold white privilege. The operation of whiteness and white privilege are very visible by those who are not white, just as sexism is often invisible to men but easily seen and experienced regularly by women. bell hooks (1992, p. 338) suggests that, just as whites have a long-standing fascination with the figure of the racialised 'Other,' so too have blacks studied and sought to understand the presence of whites in their lives. This knowledge garnered by persons of colour about white people—often thought of as "ghosts," "barbarians," and "strange apparitions"—comes from a cruel history of white domination, slavery, and colonisation. These views of whites as symbols of terror illustrate that contemporary understandings of whiteness as normative are not its only or 'natural' formation and also, crucially, that communities of colour have long seen, marked, and thought critically about the operation of whiteness in their lives (see Baldwin, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Moreton-Robinson, 2005; Lawrence, 2004). Increasingly, critical race and whiteness studies is meaningfully engaging with the transnational operation of whiteness and critiquing the assumed invisibility of whiteness. Suvendrini Perera (2005, p. 31), drawing from David Theo Goldberg, asserts that, rather than an invisible or unseeable presence, whiteness often manifests "as a palpable, material and eminently quantifiable category against which those to be excluded [are] measured, rather than one that function[s] as an implicit structuring presence." In other words, the workings of whiteness are deeply felt by most and it is this reality that provokes me to conceive of whiteness as always already visible, even if not immediately to whites themselves.

Inverting the white gaze—in this particular context shifting from the white gaze to the black or African gaze—has the potential to disrupt normative conceptions of whiteness and often forces white persons into an awareness of their position of power and privilege. In using the term 'Other' in this context to indicate white power and privilege, rather than processes of whites marginalising other racialised communities, I do not intend to take away or neutralise its use, or to suggest that its conventional usage is obsolete. Instead, I deploy the term 'Others' with access in order to unpack the production of white Western women's subjectivities in East Africa and to expose the continuing privileging of whiteness on a transnational scale. Ultimately, these women, their whiteness imbuing them with essentialised power and privilege, are afforded personal and professional opportunities because they are understood to have access to the benefits of an idealised Western lifestyle.

In this article I frame the experiences of participants through the theoretical concept of 'Others' with access in order to emphasise the construction of white Western women's identities from the perspective of local black East African

populations. The context that informs this article—an African majority-black setting, rather than a Western majority-white context—requires a theoretical shift in how racial encounters emerge and are conceptualised. In opposition to racialisation and 'Othering' as an affirmation of privilege, as is the case with 'Others' with access, scholars have typically critiqued processes of marking 'difference' as a source of marginalisation and subordination (see Yancy's [2008] work on the white gaze). I understand white Western women's experience and embodiment in East Africa as a way in which their social and economic privilege is (re)enacted and reinforced. In doing so I focus on two key themes: (1) the non-normative and hypervisible character of white Western women's subject positioning, and (2) the assumption that white Western women are access points to the wealth, mobility, and opportunities of an idealised Western lifestyle. Processes of Othering produce conceptions of 'difference' and are constituted through relations of power. In this case, the power and privilege of being a white Western woman in development work is conferred through a process of localised racialisation, which constructs an understanding of what that whiteness has *come to represent*: wealth, mobility, and opportunity. Although white privilege emerges differently in East Africa than it does in Western contexts, the result is comparable, as the level of material power, privilege, influence and status that *most*, if not all, white Westerners living and working in the region uphold, is only afforded to a select group of local black East Africans.

International Development and the 'White Man's (and Woman's) Burden'

Given the thousands of development and aid organisations operating on the continent, it is estimated that there are more white people in Africa today than there were during the colonial period (Heron, 2007, p. 14; Stirrant, 2000, p. 33). Nairobi, sometimes referred to as 'Africa-lite' because its Westernised character makes it an easier transition into African life for development workers, boasts the presence of a myriad of local, national, and international non-governmental organisations. Dar es Salaam is regional home to the country's finance and business sectors as well as a centre for beach tourism. Although for some East African populations white people have been concomitant with colonial exploitation and violence, for others white skin has become associated with an idealised Western lifestyle of wealth and opportunity. White Westerners are often coded within a modernised colonial paradigm as either historical dominator or contemporary saviour. Global narratives that uphold whiteness as an identity inherently associated with wealth and opportunity are often contested by localised associations of whiteness as a source of terror, destruction, and death (Dikköter, 1990; Fox, 2012; hooks, 1992). Understandings of white people are often contradictory and whiteness often comes to represent opposing experiences of colonial violence and contemporary idealisations of beauty, wealth, knowledge and a privileged lifestyle (Fox, 2012, para. 2). Many present-day views of whiteness obscure historical associations of appropriations of land and resources, death and violence, emphasizing instead the supposed 'goodness' of whites, in particular those working in development.

The perspectives of Westerners who do development work overseas are often shaped by university and organisation-based training in development theory and self-reflexive practice. Development workers are frequently caught between an altruistic ideal to 'do good' and 'make a difference' and the recognition that

development is based upon a colonial legacy of racialised and dichotomous systems of value and progress. In employing the concept of colonial continuity, Derek Gregory (2004, p. 7) states that “the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present.” In other words, discourses and practices of international development are a reactivation and continuation of colonial ideology. Today white women are the primary practitioners of international development ‘on the ground’ in Sub-Saharan Africa, ambiguously positioned through their subordinated gender and privileged racial identity. In this context ‘the white man’s burden,’ the often cited masculinist task of civilising the so-called “dark continent” is renewed as the ‘white woman’s burden,’ a tool often used to alleviate the burden of white guilt for the atrocities of colonialism (Wa’Njogu, 2009, p. 76; McEwen & Steyn, p. 3; Razack, 2004, p. 4). This ‘burden’ is a socially fabricated but deeply felt duty embodied by white Western women to govern, teach, and discipline those ‘less fortunate.’

The practice of international development, then, is both “an important site of encounter between individuals from the developing world and the West, and a source of images of certain regions of the world as displayed in the West” (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 4). Indeed, John Wa’Njogu (2009, p. 76) argues that “most Westerners have never visited and may never visit Africa, yet they hold an image of Africa in their minds.” These “imaginative geographies” (Gregory, 2004, p. 4) or “racialized developscape[s]” (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 7) rely on homogenised and inverse understandings of Africa and the West, a landscape often determined long before development workers arrive in a country. Barbara Heron (2007, p. 34) explains:

The countries of the North—home to the former metropolises of empire and their white-settler dominions such as Canada—are places of greater civilization, or order, cleanliness, and a truly good quality of life, which has an evident material basis of comfort and security, while those of the South—the former colonies—languish in anachronistic space, where chaos often reigns, disorder and disease are rampant, and life seems (from our perspective) to be hardly worth living.

These racially coded social and geographic landscapes underpin the practice of international development and reinforce a status-quo ideology that equates Western and white with progress and superiority.

For those white Western development workers who have lived and worked in the region, the popularised idea of ‘Africa’—as the quintessential representation of underdevelopment, poverty, and conflict—is often both the reason they entered the industry and a site of personal tension. Loftsdóttir (2009, p. 7) contends that individuals are “entangle[d] or ensnare[d]” within contemporary manifestations of colonial narratives, demonstrating that even the most self-aware of individuals are caught within larger racialised phenomena taking shape around them. The female research participants were very conscious of the racialised power dynamics within their work, yet, they also found it a difficult task to be fully self-reflexive of their own complicity in these processes, in particular the ways in which (neo)colonial narratives emerged in their personal histories and interest in development. Before Alice, a 22 year old Canadian exchange student interning at the University of Dar es Salaam, had lived in Africa, she was fearful of what it would involve. She recalls: “I didn’t think I used to be interested in development.

I mean, you'd always see things on the news and I was mostly afraid of the undeveloped world and didn't understand it at all, like 'Africa! That sounds like a death zone! I'll never be there.'" Similarly, Alexandra, a 21 year old Canadian student volunteering with a small local women's rights organisation in Dar es Salaam, struggled to negotiate her relationship to the continent:

I've always wanted to go to Africa ... go 'save the world,' all that good stuff [laughs] ... It's just the extremes, it's like nowhere else, it's just such poverty, what [is] really mind-blowing to me is all the wars on the continent ... everything that could be ... 'fixed' to put it loosely, all in one continent ... you want to fix it ... [but] you're not necessarily the right ... person, specifically, or the West as a whole ...

While Alexandra is questioning her purpose in the region, she is also unable to fully detach herself from more popularised negative views. Despite their knowledge of colonial history and the problematics of development, participants were constrained in their ability to resist dominant cultural discourses.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012, p. 72) argues that, as a continent, "Africa is currently entangled within a racially hierarchized, Christian-centric, Western-centric, patriarchal, imperial, colonial and hetero-normative social order." The legacy of colonialism is undoubtedly implicated in the reinforcement of a social and cultural paradigm that romanticises the West and whiteness, as white people have become the global symbol of "Western modernity, wealth, and race privilege, personifying the legacy of imperialism, the ideal of development, and the force of globalization" (Bashkow, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, the impact of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the region has significantly shaped the expectation that the West is a source of wealth, while Africa is debt-ridden and in need of financial assistance. First introduced by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in East Africa in the 1980s, SAPs have been propagated as an avenue for which 'developing' countries are able to pay off outstanding debts and modernise their national economies as a way in which to eradicate poverty (see Rono, 2002; Vavrus, 2005). However, SAPs have actually increased the gap between the rich and the poor. A foreign-focused economy has eroded the availability of social services in the region, including health care, education, and food subsidies, and does not provide the foundation for local economies to generate full-time, permanent employment opportunities (Rono, 2002, p. 84, 88-89; Vavrus, 2005, p. 175). Widespread poverty and fewer opportunities for higher education and meaningful employment, coupled with popularised images of the West as a land of wealth and opportunity, buttress an idealised perception of the West as the answer to Africa's problems.

The male participants readily acknowledged that the Western world—sometimes seriously or jokingly referred to as '*mzungu*land'—is believed to be bursting with wealth, resources, and educational and career opportunities. The observations of Mark, a 28 year old communications student from Nairobi, are particularly apt as he explains the construction of Western superiority disseminated to Kenyans:

The way the West packages itself as, "We are the richest, we are the coolest, we're the most innovative, we make the best things ..." That has in some way made East African men to believe anyone that's white is probably rich and comes from a rich continent, which is true, because North America is the most privileged continent and probably North American women, whether you're rich, poor or

middle-class, you're probably more privileged than an average African.

This 'packaging,' originating from the West itself, operates to ensure that favourable images of a Western world of development and progress proliferate. Mark also points to the reality of the wealth and privilege of the Western world; indeed, the benefits of white privilege are not only a localised fantasy. Racial hierarchies operate to materially privilege the West and whites relative to the rest of the world. As Cheryl I. Harris (1993, p. 1758) contends, all whites are necessarily privileged more than populations of colour, in that "it does not mean that all whites will win, but simply that they will not lose, if losing is defined as being on the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy." Ultimately, then, even those whites who are not wealthy by Western standards are affluent and privileged on a global scale.

Whiteness and Hypervisibility

Invisibility, the ability to go unnoticed and to be perceived as normative, is typically understood as an advantage; thus, correspondingly, hypervisibility would be a disadvantage. However, in the case of East Africa, hypervisibility actually reflects and reinforces the privilege of white people. Indeed, in a context "where physical appearances are so powerfully juxtaposed," white people are very visible and development workers in East Africa become accustomed to the consistent call of '*Mzungu! Mzungu!*' (Fox, 2012, para. 7). The politics of who is 'looking' and the positioning of 'the gaze' are implicated in this inverted (for Westerners) racialised context. White women in East Africa are implicated in the experience of looking *at* others, people different from themselves, and also in the process of being looked *at*. E. Ann Kaplan (1997, p. 4) asks: "What happens when white people look at non-whites? What happens when the look is returned—when black peoples own the look and startle whites into knowledge of their whiteness?" For many white Western development workers, arriving in East Africa may be the first time that they feel exposed and visible as a white person, and thus, they are forced to recognise their social location and privilege and to understand *themselves* as the hypervisible racialised 'Other.'

Though increased social attention can be amusing or flattering at first, most white Western women quickly become frustrated with the constant scrutiny. Rebecca, a 25 year old Canadian working on issues of affordable housing in informal settlements, struggled to find her place in Nairobi:

I didn't like being stared at all the time, I didn't like feeling different, I didn't like people asking me for money, I didn't like the impression that people wanted to talk to me because of the colour of my skin ... I'm from a small town in Canada, most people are white, I'm used to it being the majority ... I'm used to blending in and not really being judged on colour ... when I first arrived, I did feel like it was negative, I didn't like being pointed out for that.

Rebecca laments her visible status as an outsider, the privilege of being white shifting to feelings of discomfort. Her sense that her hypervisible whiteness was met with 'negative' sentiment, as opposed to her receiving attention because her colour was associated with affirmative qualities, illustrates her difficulty in confronting her privileged position. Anna, a 32 year old German woman working

with civil society organisations in Nairobi, echoes this sentiment: "What I hate sometimes ... I often feel like I'm shining. Among all these blacks I can't just disappear in the crowd ... [you're the] one which sticks out of the crowd. Everybody sees you." These women describe a loss of a sense of self and a discomfort with how their white selves have been reinscribed in East Africa through their inability to fit in and to be the norm. This "feeling of standing out and constantly being noticed," often experienced as a source of embarrassment, of being discriminated against or stigmatised, is frequently understood as a consequence of a *perceived* reduction in authority and power (Heron, 2007, p. 62). However, in this context, the attention paid to white Western women actually *confirms* their power, rather than acting as a force of marginalisation.

Whiteness and Wealth

The wealth associated with white skin positions racialisation as an affirmative process that imbues the white 'Other' with idealised, and very real, power. As Nyanzi and Bah (2010, p. 114) contend, whites are often understood to be "the personification of wealth, prosperity and an endless solution to local lack." Whiteness as a category associated with "endless wealth and affluence" is a common subtext in sub-Saharan Africa (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 7; see also Heron, 2007, p. 78). For example, Matthew, a 26 year old graduate student in Dar es Salaam, states that when a white development worker visits a local community, particularly in poorer regions both rural and urban, some East Africans think "a warrior has arrived ... we are going to be out of trouble because they have arrived." Mark (Kenya) agrees, saying that white people are often viewed as "cash cows" and the "great white hope" for Africa. Implicated in unbalanced economic relationships between the West and Africa, the economic location of white development workers "seems to negate their humanness, reducing them to a big open purse" (Nyanzi & Bah, 2010, p. 114). This is well encapsulated by Michael, a 28 year old who started his own tourism company in Nairobi, who says that white people are perceived to be "a walking ATM machine."

Whiteness represents a financial freedom to which local populations aspire through a coupling of wealth and modernity, a class difference that is both naturalised and a status to which one can aspire (Bashkow, 2006, p. 9). Miriam, a 38 year old British journalist based out of Nairobi, comments on the normalised class and status separation between whites and blacks in Nairobi:

A lot of people [call] me 'Madam' and it annoys me [laughs]. But that kind of tells you everything really, in the sense of, "This woman we assume her to have power, we assume her to have wealth," and a sense of fear I think as well ... immediately you are in a different class because you're white, there's a very clear racial hierarchy ... white people equals money, equals all those opportunities in life that a lot of Africans don't have, so you have a definite sense of power.

Anna (Germany) similarly questioned the tendency of local populations to associate white people with wealth and power as she contemplated her positionality:

So I think, "Why do they think I have money?" ... This is annoying, but on the other hand in thinking about it, I think they are right, because there might be bloody rich Kenyans and the gap between Kenyans is so much bigger, but I've

never seen white people living here in the slum.

Anna struggles to disengage herself and her identity from the conflation of whiteness and prosperity and finds it difficult to confront how she is implicated in these systems. From Miriam and Anna's description, it is not that being white is *positive* in the sense that it 'feels good'. In fact, both often feel uncomfortable and 'annoyed' by the way in which they are perceived because they are white. However, their whiteness is an affirmed identity because local populations assume that they are wealthy, powerful, and elevated in the local racial hierarchy—and, in reality, they *are* in a significantly higher economic and social status than most local people. As both readily acknowledge, the privileges associated with the conflation of whiteness equals wealth equals social power automatically positions them in a 'different class.' For Miriam and Anna, their status as racial 'Other' and foreigner is an acknowledgement of their relative economic freedom, their whiteness marked as privilege and entitlement.

In addition to being independently wealthy, white development workers are assumed to have direct connections to sources of Western funding for projects and communities. Even though Rebecca (Canada) felt that she was very low in the development workers' hierarchy in terms of experience and seniority, she perceived her local coworkers treating her as if she could solve all of their financial problems. She recalls:

They [her black East African coworkers] were just still asking me for investments, or to start programs for them, do things that I just, I didn't even know how to do ... a guy even asked if I could buy him a computer and I was just like, "I am an unpaid intern, I have a big student loan" ... they just saw that I was white and ... they just assumed that I had all these answers and solutions.

Rebecca struggles to reconcile the very real economic privilege that she holds, even as an unpaid intern burdened by student loans, in comparison to most local populations. Even though she is relatively inexperienced compared to her local colleagues, and is not earning a regular salary, Rebecca felt she was treated with reverence and as an 'expert' in finances, investment, and development projects. Amenities considered basic in the West—running water, flush toilets, regular meals—and the lifestyle enjoyed by the middle to upper class—secure housing, reliable transportation, travelling on holidays, and extra spending money—are readily available to most white Westerners in Kenya and Tanzania. The perception that white Westerners can provide solutions to local financial difficulties often inflates expectations of development workers, symbolically filling the monetary funds of the development industry as a whole into the pockets of individual workers.

Whiteness and Mobility

The term *mzungu*, originally associated with colonialism, signifies those 'wondrous' white foreigners who brought with them knowledge of the rest of the world. In popular parlance, however, the term means to 'go in circles,' or to seemingly move without purpose (Edmondson, 1999, p. 30). *Mzungu* is now also often linked with the mobile lifestyle of white people and their identity as 'travellers' venturing across borders. Stephen Castles (2003, p. 16) contends

that mobility is a global “stratifying factor” and has become a privilege visually demarcated through racial difference. The ability to cross national borders—to actually fly from a Western country to Kenya or Tanzania—is a currency of sorts and a sign of power. Sarah White (2002, p. 409) reflects on the privilege attributed to the mobility of white development workers in Africa: “It seemed to me then that, as it was for currency, so it was for people: simply crossing a border radically inflated exchange values.” The ability to travel to East Africa from a Western country, even for those unpaid interns like Rebecca, is in itself a privilege not available to many.

Abdallah, a 26 year old accountant originally from Kenya’s coastal region, contends: “You can’t see a *mzungu* who says, ‘I don’t have money.’ You would be like, ‘You flew, you didn’t come here by bus, so you must have money.’” A key aspect of being white is having “great power of mobility and great spatial reach,” argues Bashkow (2006, p. 73), which is made possible through monetary wealth. This is reiterated in development worker’s presumed (and real) ability to come and go at will, their whiteness acting as a badge of privilege and convenience (Goudge, 2003, p. 11). Rebecca (Canada) is very aware of her privilege in being able to decide to travel to and work in Kenya:

There’s so many people who are white, who come here to give money, or are here to work with NGOs or businesses or invest, that it’s reasonable for them [Africans] to think that they might have a chance to get money. And if we flew all the way over here, of course we have money [laughs]. Now I’m just like, “Obviously!” ... I’m very privileged to be able to come over here and just drop myself in a different culture and immerse myself in it and have money to be secure and be happy here.

From Rebecca’s description, she holds a degree of agency in deciding where she goes and what she does as a development worker in Kenya. As a white Western woman in East Africa, Rebecca’s privilege as a white person seems to supersede her subordinate gender position, enabling her to exercise her access to the finances required to travel.

Transnational Interracial Intimate Desire and Relationships

Outside of some connections to studies in the field of female sex or ‘romance’ tourism, there has been little critical attention paid to the intimate relationships of white Western women in development work overseas. Since the 1990s scholars have been tracking an increase in white European and North American women travelling to the Caribbean and the Western and Eastern coasts of Africa in hopes of fulfilling sexual fantasies with “rent-a-dreads,” “rasta-men,” and “beach boys” (Bauer, 2014, p. 21, 24; see also Tami, 2008). The desire to engage in intimate encounters with African men is constructed through fetishised conceptions of a hyper-sexual virility that code local black men as sexual objects available for white Western consumption (Bauer, 2014, p. 23). This desire for black African men’s bodies emerges from histories of fear of black sexuality and sexual attacks by African men against white women in colonial spaces. Known historically as ‘Black Peril,’ this historical trope constructed African men as the physical embodiment of uncontrollable, primitive and animalistic sexual desire presumed to represent a threat to the ‘purity’ of white femininity and chastity

(see Heron, 2007; Nagel, 2010; Stoler, 1989). Colonial histories of relationships between white women and colonised men, then, are not non-normative in the sense that they are unusual or novel.

In a related vein, the desire for white women as 'Others' with access can be understood as non-normative because these women are often positioned outside of every day life and localised power relations. Ultimately, the desire for exoticised black bodies is socially constructed through racial and economic power structures that normalise the white gaze and white control and scrutiny of black bodies. Given that white persons are often used to taking on the role of the person *behind* the gaze, rather than the one being gazed *at*, this article demonstrates that the gaze is not one directional. This inverted (for white Westerners) gaze simultaneously (re)constructs white Western women's sense of self and, despite some personal and individual discomfort, reaffirms the privileged position of whiteness in an East African development context.

Whereas white female tourists may revel in the temporary heightened sexual attention they experience, particularly those who may not fulfil Western idealised standards of body shape and beauty (see Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Nyanzi & Bah, 2010; Tami, 2008), the development workers interviewed for this research project tended to loathe the array of casual sexualised encounters with black East African men as they go about their daily lives. Wanting to be taken seriously in their workplace and craving affirmation as professionals, these women often found the constant attention under the male gaze—heightened through intersecting gendered and racialised power relations—to be frustrating and demeaning. Caroline, a 33 year old from Denmark who works in Dar es Salaam at a training centre for East African activists, is regularly approached by black Tanzanian men for her phone number. As a result, she has felt unable to cultivate platonic friendships with Tanzanian men because initial meetings very quickly became avenues for romantic expressions such as "I miss you" and "I love you." Lauren, a 24 year old American about to begin a position with the United Nations in Nairobi, echoes this sentiment stating that, "being white is a little strange just in that people talk to you, ask you for things, hit on you, ask to marry you, ask you to have their children."

However, rather than increasing the likelihood of building a romantic connection, such encounters tend to mark local men as insincere, suspect, and difficult to trust for the white women interviewed. Alexandra (Canada) describes the 'wall' she feels between her and local men in Tanzania because "they're constantly staring at me ... they're talking to me because they think I'm rich." Similarly, Kim, a Canadian in her fifties who teaches in special needs education, abhors constant catcalling, such as 'Hey baby, I love you!', as she runs errands in Dar es Salaam. These women wish to shed their foreign-ness, to blend in, and to have 'genuine' relationships with local populations, but instead their whiteness, and the persistent local male gaze, acts as a barrier. Although these women have likely been at the centre of the 'male gaze' in their home context, through catcalling and being approached by men in public spaces, participants perceived the male gaze in East Africa to be a different and more unsettling experience. Indeed, these women were used to being seen *as women* only, reflective of their understanding of their whiteness as a neutral subject positioning at home. The experience of being seen *as white women* specifically, however, was jarring. Their whiteness was hypervisible not only to those around them, but now also to

themselves, which profoundly shifted research participants understanding of their identities, social positioning, and racial privilege.

For some black East African men, entering into a romantic relationship with a white Western woman created a perception among their peers, and sometimes themselves, that their status 'at home,' financial stability, and potential to move to her country of origin would increase. This is because such relationships can be framed through the quintessential African "rags-to-riches" trope of migrating to the West and emerging from poverty (Edmondson, 1999, p. 36; Nyanzi & Bah, 2010, p. 115). Abdallah (Kenya) confirms this African dream:

When I was a little kid ... I used to say to myself, "My first wife will be a white woman" ... my dad used to go to Europe ... I started having this perspective, "That place must be really cool, I really want to go there, see how it is" ... when I started dating [a white woman] ... I was getting into a new world that, it made me look at this other world like, "Guys, this is the life."

Michael (Kenya) described his experience of dating a white woman from Switzerland as 'different' because of the increased attention that he received from his family, friends, co-workers, and even strangers. Although in some ways he enjoyed being seen differently by his peers, the attention was also frustrating because some assumed that he was with his girlfriend only because she was white and wealthy:

It's funny when people see you with a white woman, they respect you so much because they believe it's very hard to get one. So my social status changed, everyone was like, "Oh my God, Michael's with a white woman!" ... [they] looked at me differently, in a nice way ... My lady friends black Kenyans used to tell me: "Wow! Stay with her" ... "You're going to become rich, you're going to drive a very nice car" ... And these things used to really get me ... even now I hear people still asking me, "How come you don't date white women anymore? Why don't you, you know they have money?" ... They ask me that ... because of the money, not because of anything else.

Michael articulates how the cessation of his relationship with a white woman meant his friends viewed him as 'giving up' a prize or valued commodity. However, the assumption that those black East African men who are able to build an intimate connection with a white Western woman will necessarily revel in their 'better' life is a problematic and perhaps romanticised perspective. White Western women's identities, presumed by some local women and men to be based on their status as wealthy, free to travel, and imbued with the agency to make their own decisions, have the potential to both buttress and threaten the conventional male role of responsibility and authority. Although not all participants performed or desired traditional gender roles, within this particular context of a heteronormative and patriarchal society, the construction of normative black East African masculinity, such as dominance and being in charge of family finances, emerges alongside hegemonic expectations of femininity, including being demure and dependent on men. The "social value and respect" of men is based on their ability to financially provide for their family (Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 194). This localised construction of hegemonic masculinity in East Africa emerged after decolonisation in the 1960s as men became heads of the household and the primary economic provider for their families in an increasingly monetarised economy (Nyawalo, 2011, p. 130; Nyanzi & Bah, 2010, p. 114;

Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 192). However, high unemployment rates and crushing poverty in both rural and urban areas undermine the capacity for men to affirm and uphold conventional masculine roles as economic providers for their families. Economics, therefore, renders masculinity vulnerable to domination by others, particularly by female partners who are more financially privileged.

It is often assumed by local populations that white Western women are 'less feminine' than local black East African women because they are placed within, and tend to expect, a social and economic position of power. Indeed, Miriam (Britain) relishes her 'honorary' (read: white) social position in Nairobi, where she is released from social prescriptions of demure femininity and accepted as her outgoing and boisterous self. She recounts:

When I started going out with my ex we'd go out to some *nyama choma* [barbecued beef] joint Saturday afternoon ... And so the other [Kenyan] girl would sit and drink soda, very quiet, not say much. I would start drinking beer and arguing politics [laughs] ... you're given an honorary status, you're not a normal woman. You're kind of like a woman who is a bit liberated or masculine in terms of her behaviour, you feel that you can behave in a much freer way than a Kenyan woman could.

Because of her white privilege and 'status' as foreigner, Miriam is able to act in a way that local women are not necessarily able (or desire) to, including engaging in so-called 'masculine' behaviours. The sense of empowerment that Miriam feels in this context manifests through the understanding that her heightened white privilege supersedes her gender subordination. Miriam locates herself outside of normative Kenyan gender roles and expectations and, at least temporarily, embodies the status of 'honorary man' within a complex and intersectional gendered hierarchy (Edmondson, 1999, p. 37; Jacobs, 2009, p. 55). While this is empowering for Miriam, this perception relies on the assumption that her white privilege does not also operate at home in the United Kingdom, albeit differently manifested. Indeed, the research participants hold comparable white privilege in their countries of origin, however, it was often only once they were in East Africa that they became meaningfully aware of this privilege and how it intersects with gender subordination. While their whiteness was immediately visible to local populations, it is through entering a different context of racialisation and racial histories that enabled these women to partially acknowledge the operation of race privilege in their lives.

Similarly, Michael (Kenya) and Abdallah (Kenya) also spoke about white Western women rejecting hegemonic gender roles as they were viewed as 'controlling' and 'take charge' in romantic relationships. Abdallah considers this characteristic to be rooted in whiteness, a sense of racial superiority vis-à-vis their black Kenyan partner. He argues that interracial relationships tend to follow the pattern akin to that of master and servant, wherein the black man's masculinity is devalued and the white woman's superiority is confirmed: "The white one is always right, the white one is always above ... they become superior and we, inferior ... It's always like ... you are the queen, but I'm not the king. I'm the servant." Miriam's perception of herself as able to transcend hegemonic gender roles due to her whiteness relies on similar tropes of white privilege and superiority used by Michael and Abdallah to explain their experience of the power dynamics of intimacy in their relationships with white women. Racialised scripts

are rearticulated as problematic, while the complicity of white Western women and black East African men in localised gendered power relations is obscured. Indeed, the discussions here of the hierarchical relationships between white Western women and black East African men—both simultaneously ambiguously positioned based on gender and race oppression—ignore the reality that black East African women (and women of colour in Western contexts) are often marginalised by both white women and black men.

For some men, the (un)desirability of white Western women may change over time. Initially Miriam felt that her black Kenyan husband was attracted to the daily perks and the status boost he received through their relationship. However, as she explains, eventually he found these qualities were the same ones that resulted in the demise of their marriage: "I think one of the things that attracted him was what he came to hate in the end ... He's like, 'This is a white woman, I have status being with her. She has money' ... but then ... you go back to traditional gender roles, he's supposed to be the man, he's supposed to be the provider." In this case, that which was once desirable was ultimately a quality deemed undesirable, even threatening, according to Miriam. Her self-described failure to conform to patriarchal notions of femininity, which presumes male superiority, fostered her husband's feelings of resentment. Associating with whiteness, then, can both enhance black East African men's wealth and privilege as well as threaten their masculinity.

Conclusion

This article argued that, in an East African context, white Western women are understood to be homogenised racialised 'Others' with access to wealth, resources and mobility. In engaging (or attempting to engage) in intimate relationships with these women, black East African men hope to enhance their social status locally and to be provided with access to finances and perhaps transnational mobility. This conceptualisation of white Western women as 'Others' with access is, in itself, a colonial continuity, a rearticulation of racial hierarchies of value and privilege. A key purpose of critical whiteness studies as it intersects with anti-racist movements is to demystify naturalised conceptualisations of whiteness as a normative, neutralised, and apolitical identity and social position. In shifting the gaze from black bodies to white bodies, I aim to reconsider transnational narratives of whiteness and white privilege from a non-Western context. While many of the participants in this study felt that the more 'innocent' or romanticised idealisation of white people and their whiteness has diminished over time and with increased exposure, whiteness still retains a numinous quality in popularised East African cultural contexts. Indeed, participants often struggled between ascribing to and resisting hegemonic understandings of the heightened value of whiteness.

This article contributes to research within whiteness and critical race studies, studies of transnational interracial intimacies and sexualities, as well as critical studies of development. In particular, this article troubles continuing resistance to the inclusion of more politicised issues of race and sexuality within both the academic and practical realms of international development. The willingness of development practices and policies to mainstream gender, but to stay "determinedly 'colour-blind'"—and, I argue, defiant to more complex questions of

sexuality—is indicative of a continuing failure on the part of the development industry to meaningfully engage with and address with the uncomfortable tensions of race and colonialism in the private lives of development workers (White, 2002, p. 416). It is crucial to turn our attention to the patterns emerging within the personal lives of Western development workers as they engage with local populations while overseas. The lives of individual development workers inform, and are informed by, broader discourses and practices of racialised power and privilege in a transnational context.

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