Constructing Whiteness and Locating Power in East Africa:

Desirability and Status of 'Others' with Access

by

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Abstract

In the countries of Kenya and Tanzania whiteness is often understood by local populations as foreign and associated with wealth, privilege, and mobility. White Western women are understood as hypervisible and often desirable ‘Others’ with access to finances and travel to or residence in Western countries. Within a social structure that values heterosexual relationships, white Western women are understood to be desirable by black East African men. I investigate the term ‘Other’ in this context as one invested with power, inverting traditional academic understandings of ‘difference.’ What understandings of race, class, gender and sexuality shape daily and intimate interactions between black East African men and white Western women working in the field of international development in Kenya and Tanzania? How do these individual interactions reflect, reinforce, and potentially resist transnational narratives and ideologies of (neo)colonialism that perpetuate relational value systems of blackness and whiteness, women and men, Africa and the West?

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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. ... It annoyed me because I felt people were kind of harassing me while I had come here to be helpful and so I was just very conflicted...

- Rebecca¹, research participant from Canada

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 with a white woman!" ... [they] looked at me differently in a nice way, they were like, "Oh my God" you know?" ... And many many times if, 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, 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* and go to America." And they're little kids. I think that really shaped my perspective ... [and] really made me just think, if little kids are telling me this ... if little boys think that, then is that so ingrained that like every, is that why ... Kenyan men seem to have some kind of interest in, in white women?

- Lauren, research participant from the United States

The above commentary from research participants illustrates the different ways in which white Western women² are socially constructed as avenues by which black East African men can access the prosperity and mobility of an idealized Western lifestyle. In order to examine the popularized understandings and lived interactions between these two groups, this thesis explores the following questions: What understandings of race,

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

² I employ the terms 'white' and 'white Western woman' not as essentialized identities, but instead as analytical and relational categories, explored further in Chapter 2.

class, gender and sexuality shape daily and intimate interactions between black East African men and white Western women working in the field of international development in Kenya and Tanzania? How do these individual interactions reflect, reinforce and potentially resist transnational narratives and ideologies of (neo)colonialism that perpetuate relational value systems of blackness and whiteness, women and men, Africa and the West? I draw from Kristin Loftsdóttir's (2009) critical questioning of the relationship of race and whiteness to professional practices of international development and personal interactions of development workers. She asks: "How are racial identities [including those of white people] constructed through such encounters, and how is the historical memory of race reinvented?" (2009, p. 4). In other words, how are narratives and histories of race and whiteness – and, crucially I add, sexuality – made meaningful and 'real' through face-to-face interaction?

In examining these questions, this thesis proposes that in the countries of Kenya and Tanzania whiteness is often understood by local black East African populations as foreign and associated with wealth, privilege, and mobility. This locates white Westerners in the region in a position of essential 'difference' from black East Africans, signaling a perceived or presumed disparity between local populations and those crossing into East African national and cultural borders. White Western women are understood as 'Others' with access to finances and travel to or residence in Western countries. This access, both real and perceived, confirms the social and economic power associated with whiteness. Within a social structure that values heterosexual relationships, white Western women are understood to be desirable by black East African men. I investigate the term 'Other' in this context as one invested with power, inverting traditional academic

understandings of ‘difference’ within processes of racialization as marginalization or subordination.

In this thesis I employ the concept of ‘Others’ with access in order to emphasize the construction of white Western women’s identities from the perspective of local black East African populations. In doing so I focus on two key themes: (1) the non-normative and foreign character of white Western women, and (2) white Western women’s subject positioning as access points to the prosperity, mobility, and opportunities of an idealized Western lifestyle. This positioning of white Western women as essentially ‘different’ from local populations and imbued with social and economic privilege is enacted and reinforced through their hypervisible whiteness. Within conventional Western-based processes of racialization, whiteness is constructed as the normative and invisible subject position. Therefore, it is non-white populations that are understood to be inherently different from and ‘Other’ to the norm (Frankenberg, 1993; Korang, 2004). Within this Western framework, white race privilege “refers to an unspoken and invisible advantage that is not earned but conferred based on markers of identity” (Bromley, 2012, p. 53; Ferber, 2007b). This thesis suggests that in an East African context, it is instead the hypervisible social position of whiteness that attributes a heightened status and economic position to white Western women. Therefore, through both its assumed invisibility and hypervisibility, whiteness is privileged and imbued with power in both Western and East African contexts. However, whereas those marked with the status of ‘Other’ are usually excluded, marginalized, and subordinated, the essential difference of whites is instead highly valued. It is this foreign-ness that provides access to the wealth and mobility of the

Western world, making white Western women working in international development desirable intimate partners for black East African men.

Locating Whiteness in East Africa

The presence of white Westerners³ in East Africa, while increasingly common in certain parts of urban regions, provokes a complex range of reactions and interactions for black African citizens of this region. Although for some East African populations white people have been concomitant with colonial exploitation and violence, for others white skin has become more associated with an idealized Western lifestyle of wealth and opportunity. In particular, younger generations of Africans, many of whom are removed from the historical memories of bloody struggles and African independence movements, are drawn to Westerners and the privilege they are assumed to hold. Ira Bashkow (2006) argues that white people and white skin 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” (p. 2). This standard of privilege, modernity, and progress greatly informs contemporary practices of international development and humanitarian aid. These interventions, primarily planned and undertaken by white Westerners, are constructed within a global paradigm that affirms the superiority of the so-called ‘developed’ world, compelling homogenized black inhabitants of Africa to emulate the economic and moral systems – often relating to the domestic realm including, for example, monogamy and fidelity – assumed of the West (Heron, 2007, p. 16). This

³ I utilize the term ‘Western’ in this thesis in order to emphasize the understanding held by many local East African populations that all white people have similar origins, characteristics, and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, as evidenced by research participants, although there are undoubtedly nation-specific mythologies of colonial history and international development, many white Western development workers feel a sense of affinity with others white people, including those not from their country of origin, when they are in unfamiliar territory working overseas.

thesis is concerned with the ways in which white Western women development workers and black East African men experience and negotiate these narratives as they connect with their personal interactions.

Given the thousands of development and aid organizations 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). Whites tend to be more densely located in urban areas, especially those that house national or international offices of international development and humanitarian organizations. Still, strong reactions to the presence of white people are common. Development workers in East Africa, for example, quickly become accustomed to the consistent call of “*Mzungu! Mzungu!*” (white person or European in Swahili). In a context “where physical appearances are so powerfully juxtaposed,” white people are very visible, made conspicuous by their minority skin colour set against majority blackness (Fox, 2012, Origins of Whiteness section, para. 7). The presumed visual character of race makes perceived skin colour the primary, and hypervisible, marker of identity.

Although whiteness and white settler communities in Africa, particularly those whites born in South Africa and Zimbabwe, have garnered academic attention, whiteness is a significantly understudied subject in Kenya and particularly Tanzania (Uusihakala, 1999, p. 30; Fox, 2012, Introduction section, para. 3). Work conducted on whites in this region often emphasizes issues of identity for white Kenyans, particularly their varying commitment to the region amidst an uncertain social position (Uusihakala, 1999). Despite the advancement of this research, even though all whites in the region tend to experience a position of structural social and economic privilege, the experiences of whites born and

raised in East Africa is profoundly different from those individuals born in Western countries and working in the region as development workers. For example, as evidenced by the participants of this study, white Western development workers, particularly those on short-term stays, tend to be more interested in participating in the lives and culture of local black East Africans. Those whites born in Kenya or Tanzania are much more likely to informally segregate themselves and to associate with British culture and practice Western customs. Because these white communities are more insulated, they may not experience the hypervisibility of whiteness in the same way as whites new to East Africa as they participate more frequently in local culture for work and within their social lives. Furthermore, those whites born in the region are likely more accustomed to their hypervisibility because it has been their experience since birth, whereas those foreign to East Africa often feel a sense of discomfort with this hypervisibility because they are used to feeling invisible and normative within the majority population population in their country of origin.

Locating (Neo)Colonialism in East Africa

This study examines issues of race, whiteness, and desirability in international development work as they operate in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As evidenced in research participant interviews, Nairobi is sometimes referred to by the international community, as “Africa-lite,” referring to its Westernized character, which makes it an easier transition into African life for development workers. Nairobi boasts the presence of a myriad of local, national and international non-governmental organizations as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition to a large ex-patriot community, Nairobi is also home to whites born in Kenya, often referred to as

‘old colonials’ or ‘Kenyan cowboys’ by both local black populations and often by themselves, who reside in the city’s Karen neighbourhood located near Nairobi National Park (Uusihakala, 1999, p. 36). Perhaps in part because of these connections to the Western world, Nairobi is its country’s physical representation of the “postcolonial cosmopolitan world,” often purported by local populations to be “a symbol of Kenya’s own modernity,” economic wealth and cultural progress (Joseph, 2008, p. 653). Dar es Salaam is set on the coast of the Indian Ocean, a regional home to the country’s finance and business sectors as well as a centre for beach tourism. With accessible ferry and air access to the island of Zanzibar, a popular destination for travellers, sex tourists, and those wanting to learn Swahili, Dar es Salaam also has a large ex-patriot community. Tourists clamour for East Africa’s safaris, mountain treks and sandy beaches. Those whites who are in the region for work include ambassadors, international politicians and dignitaries, CEOs of multinational conglomerates, import/export partners, foreign journalists, heads of non-governmental organizations, and development workers.

Although social and cultural worlds are also nation-specific, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012) argues that, as a continent, “Africa is currently entangled within as a racially hierarchized, Christian-centric, Western-centric, patriarchal, imperial, colonial and hetero-normative social order” (p. 72). Paralleling much of the West’s norms and value-systems, the legacy of colonialism is undoubtedly implicated in this social and cultural paradigm. The impact of colonialism, continuing influence from the West and, increasingly, the influx of money and people from parts of Asia has had a significant impact on the physical and cultural infrastructure. The “collective African experience” of colonialism “has persistently affected all aspects of social, cultural, political, and

economic life in postcolonial African states” (Heron, 2007, p. 16). Christopher Odhiambo Joseph (2008) borrows the concept of the “cultural bomb” from the influential work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) to characterize the extensive effect of colonialism. This “cultural bomb” of colonialism disrupted, devalued and, in some cases, destroyed local practices, identities, and ways of knowing (Joseph, 2008, p. 131). Derek Gregory (2004) agrees, arguing “from that dispersed moment, marked by the ‘post,’ histories and geographies have all been made in the shadow of colonialism” (p. 7). Ultimately the ‘post’ in post-colonialism does not indicate an end to colonialism. Instead, it represents “a decisive though hardly definitive shift that implicitly or explicitly structures, whether through affirmation, negation, denial, repression or evasion, relations between the races” (Frankenberg and Mani, 2001, p. 485). This shift from colonialism to a state of so-called post-colonialism (or perhaps more accurately neo-colonialism) reinforces the understanding that whiteness and the West as a geographic location signal economic, social, and cultural wealth (Bashkow, 2006, p. 9).

I suggest that the legacy of colonialism is maintained not just within the physical boundaries of cities like Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, but also within the minds and lives of those who inhabit these racialized spaces. This study is transnational in that it is concerned with social phenomena taking shape within two countries with individuals from multiple regions of the world. Perhaps more to the point, it aims to understand how, in its production of discourses of race and sexuality in international development, the legacy of colonialism navigates and extends across spatial and cultural boundaries. Thus, the power dynamics within transnational interracial relationships in the region are not only implicated in a larger “colonial hangover” emanating from the region and its

inhabitants (Bashkow, 2006, p. 233). Indeed, the position of transnational privilege and ‘difference’ in a specifically East African context is an extension of a globalized white supremacy that continues to emerge within ideologies and practices of international development.

This thesis is a transnational study drawing from the experiences of individual participants working and living in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. However, I do not conduct a comparative project of these two cities, nor do I contend that these perceptions of whiteness and these forms of transnational interracial relationships are contained within this region alone. Rather, I draw from the approach offered by Carolyn Nordstrom (1997) in order to frame my work around transnational social phenomena and processes as they emerge in localized configurations. Similar to Nordstrom’s assertion that her work “is grounded in a *topic* and a *process* rather than a *place*,” this thesis is not *only* about conceptions of racial difference and desirability in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (1997, p. 10). Indeed, in addition to understanding how transnational interracial interactions and relationships take shape in this particular context, ultimately I seek to add to broader conversations that consider how desire, whiteness, and race operate across borders.

Research Catalyst

My interest in the subject of whiteness in East Africa grew initially from my own experiences working and living in the region. As a white woman from a Western country interning in the Lake Zone region of Mwanza, Tanzania in 2005 and in Nairobi and the Kisii region, Kenya in 2010, I experienced a sense of whiteness as inherently foreign, an anomaly, and an intensified visibility and attention from black East African men. The equation of whiteness with wealth, and the perception that white women exist as

desirable objects for black men to attain, was evident through my daily interactions and conversation. My experience of a continuum of racialized and sexualized exchanges shifted to an academic interest and took shape through the important studies of whiteness in a primarily American context (for example, see Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993 and 1997; Keating, 1995). The foundational argument in much of this work – that the power of whiteness is in its normalization and invisibility – did not coincide with my experience of whiteness as Other in East Africa.

For this thesis I conducted primary research over the course of May to August 2012. In partnering with Twaweza Communications in Nairobi and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, I engaged with local and regional scholarship and recruited research participants. I conducted nineteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews with white women working in international development or related fields and black East African men of different ethnicities and occupations, primarily between the ages of eighteen and forty. Participants were a mix of those who had and had not engaged in intimate transnational interracial relationships in the region.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on interracial relationships in the United States, particularly that which focuses on the history of slavery, anti-miscegenation laws and contemporary race relations (see, for example, Childs, 2005; Frankenberg, 1993; Steinbugler, 2005; Thompson, 2009). Though this literature is valuable, its historical and social specificity means that limited connections can be made to transnational interracial relationships in East Africa. Those scholars who have written about transnational contexts tend to emphasize intimate relationships initiated within sex tourism or the experiences of those migrating to North America from the global South

(see, for example, Nyanzi and Bah, 2010; Schifter and Thomas, 2010; Maia, 2010). The history behind and contemporary context of white Westerners working in development and engaging in intimate relationships with black East Africans in the region demands a different analysis, one that emphasizes and challenges the specific power dynamics embedded within these interactions. This approach politicizes the personal lives of development workers and aims to understand individual experiences as they are constituted within the broader ideology of international development.

In order to understand both the broader context and the specific implications for Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, I situate this project within critical race theory, critical whiteness studies and feminist post-colonial theory in an examination of whiteness, white women development workers, and their desirability as intimate partners in East Africa. I aim to understand how the idealization of whiteness extends to the increased value of white women development workers as intimate partners for black East African men. The purpose of this research is to question how the desire for whiteness is essentially connected with the desire for acquiring socioeconomic power. This desire parallels the power dynamics within international development, particularly the conception of the West as a 'white saviour' of Africa, often understood to create a relationship of exploitation and dependency. While it may seem that relationships between white Western development workers and black East Africans break down racial and class barriers, I suggest instead that the perceptions and realities of these relationships actually reiterate (neo)colonial power dynamics and racial hierarchies.

Theoretical Implications

International Development as a 'Colonial Continuity'

Three key theoretical frameworks will guide the trajectory of this thesis, each intersecting with the colonial legacy and international development: racialization; whiteness and; conceptions of desire and sexualization. Often shaped by university and organization-based training in development theory and self-reflexive practice, many Westerners decide to work overseas with the desire to 'do good' and 'make a difference' (Fisher, 1997, p. 442; Mahrouse, 2010, p. 169). However, development workers are often caught between these altruistic ideals and the realization that the foundation of development is based upon colonial legacies and racial binaries that attach a dichotomous system of value to the West and Africa (Razack, 2004, p. 13; Bashkow, 2006, p. 61). In employing the term 'colonial continuity,' Gregory states that "the capacities that inhere within the colonial past are routinely reaffirmed and reactivated in the colonial present" (2004, p. 7; Heron, 2007, p. 7). In other words, the salience of the legacy of colonialism endures in new forms, including within discourses and practices of international development.

The framework of analysis in this thesis is informed by a feminist theoretical understanding of continuing colonial power relations embedded within Western development discourse. The ideological underpinnings of international development are based on racial fault lines that maintain the power and influence of the white Western "family of civilized nations" whose purpose is to instruct and improve the lives of those in the South (Razack, 2004, p. 13-16). The self-proclaimed colonial assumption that white Westerners are the emblems and administrators of the most desirable way of life

was built upon an assumption of a 'natural' racial, class and sexual superiority (Stoler, 1989, p. 635; Bhabha, 1983, p. 67). The intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality construct a relational paradigm of the white 'Other' that holds an essential privilege inextricably bound up within histories of and justification for colonialism and development work led by Western nations (McClintock, 1995, p. 5). The oppositional subject of interest produced within this framework is a fundamentally disadvantaged black African, historically understood to be the racialized 'Other.' This paradigm locates whiteness, in particular white female development workers, as an access point to wealth and status that transcends national borders.

Of course not all colonizers have been white or of European descent, nor are all development workers today. However, the continuing paradigm of white hegemony within international development and other social justice programs means that the ideology of 'doing good' continues to be signified by whiteness. For example, Mahrouse (2010) argues that many development and humanitarian aid organizations strategically position white people in non-Western contexts, particularly within potentially difficult or tense situations. In doing so, the heightened status "inscribed upon the bodies of citizens of Western countries" signifies an international or foreign 'expert' presence, which can provide legitimacy to projects and even diffuse violence (2010, p. 172 and p. 175). Indeed, the hypervisible presence of white people can often be understood as a productive strategy because of the power that whites are presumed to hold and the authority represented through their whiteness.

Whiteness

In a Western context, whiteness often masquerades as a universal subjectivity and invisible ontology, unmarked by culture, economics, geography, or colonial history. Whereas in East Africa the power and privilege of whiteness is reinforced through its foreign and non-normative character, in the West whiteness operates relies on its normalization (Leonardo, 2002, p. 41). Critical whiteness scholars like Ruth Frankenberg (1997) are committed to understanding “whiteness unfrozen, whiteness viewed as ensembles of local phenomena complexly embedded in socioeconomic, sociocultural, and psychic interrelations” (p. 2). The structural invisibility of whiteness is inverted in East Africa, where white tourists, business people, students and development workers find themselves faced with an intense sense of hypervisibility. In an effort to reconsider traditional Western academic conceptions of whiteness as the norm and blackness as the easily detectable ‘Other,’ I seek to uncover the continuing “invention of whiteness” and investigate it as a marker of difference and power (McClintock, 1995, p. 8). Though historically-embedded associations connect whiteness with domination and violence in East Africa, whiteness is also often idealized and thought to represent cultural and economic progress. This reconceptualization maintains the operation of racialized dichotomies that mark both whiteness and blackness as visibly different, relational and value-laden.

The dominant archetype of whiteness has traditionally been that of white (European), middle-class (by Western standards, but relatively affluent globally), heterosexual men (Bashkow, 2006, p. 10-11; Heron, 2004, 29). McClintock (1995) critiques the assumption that both colonial subjects and objects – the colonizers and the

colonized – are all inherently male, arguing in particular that it was not only white men who upheld the ideology of colonialism and extended its dominance (p. 6). The involvement of white women in colonial projects was shaped by their precarious social position as, argues McClintock, “the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized women but also over colonized men” (1995, p. 6). While McClintock confirms that white women were active participants in the colonial project, their involvement was at the invitation of white men, and their ability to participate or to resist colonial processes was therefore constrained (1995, p. 365-366).

Significantly, white Western women “make up the majority of development workers today,” which means that it is primarily women who enact and maintain the policies, practices and ideology of development ‘on the ground’ (Heron, 2007, p. 15). Despite this majority in numbers, women development workers continue to exist in an ambiguous position. Indeed, white women’s bodies are raced and gendered, simultaneously constructed as symbols of power (whiteness) and marginalization (femaleness). The localized contexts of Kenya and Tanzania draw from a global hierarchy that intersects positions of race and class wherein whiteness “signifies social status and occupies a privileged position,” and is constructed as an identity to which others should aspire (Maia, 2010, p. 75-76). As they cross national and cultural borders, the identities of white women are reconfigured, yet the inherent privilege of their whiteness remains and is reinscribed within their hypervisibility in a new context (Maia, 2010, p. 64).

Desire and Sexualization

This thesis seeks to problematize the naturalization and privileging of ‘genuine’ desire in an effort to examine desire as a process of sexualization, exoticization and Othering. Sexuality and desire are often buried within the private realm and contained within individualized notions of love, intimacy and attraction (Davis, 2002, p. 146). I suggest instead that processes of desire and sexual practices are inherently political and constituted within understandings of race, class and gender and histories of racism, sexism and unequal class relations. As argued by Nadine Ehlers (2011), during colonialism sexuality was “produced, used and strategically integrated into all social realms,” as a site of racial difference, control and dominance (p. 320, 325). In challenging Edward Said’s assertion that sexual relations are only a metaphor for colonialism, McClintock (1995) and Stoler (1989) argue that in fact sexuality is an active participant in and contributor to the functioning and maintenance of colonialism at both the micro and macro level (p. 14; p. 635). Sexuality is not simply a reflection of the colonial system, but ‘colonialism in action.’ Both the fantasy and imagining of desire – particularly in a physical and cultural space in which race and class hold heightened visibility as signifiers of both difference and desirability – shape the actions and lived experience within transnational interracial relationships.

Organization of Thesis Chapters

This thesis aims to disrupt popularized narratives and conventional academic paradigms that always construct non-white communities as racialized ‘Others.’ Whereas non-white racialized people and communities are often subordinated and met with hostility by the dominant white population in a Western context, whites in many non-

Western contexts are instead understood as a desirable minority racial group with which to associate (Bashkow, 2006, p. 13). In East Africa perceptions of race and class, or more specifically financial privilege, construct the desirability of individuals and encourage interactions with certain communities over others. The privileging of whiteness comes from both within and outside of East Africa and is either reaffirmed or challenged within the context of 'real' and perceived characteristics and interactions.

The possibilities that white Western women development workers seemingly hold for black East African men within transnational interracial relationships echo the colonial continuities that reiterate the superiority of whiteness. I am not suggesting here that white Western women are 'victims' of the black East African men with whom they engage in intimate relations, or vice versa. Rather, I contend that individuals involved in these relationships are already embedded in racialized, sexualized, and gendered systems that simultaneously marginalize and privilege, exploit and romanticize. Many individuals struggle to understand themselves and their interactions and relationships outside of binary systems that homogenize diverse experiences. Despite this resistance, these socially-embedded binaries of white/black, the West/Africa, and masculine/feminine continue to shape daily and intimate experiences. Ultimately, the regular contact across race and class reiterate systems of domination and subordination underpinning international development, even as individuals attempt to resist and challenge them.

The introduction to this project outlined the broad strokes of the key themes informing my approach. In the next chapter I extend the discussion of method and methodology and conduct a review of relevant literature. I will delineate key texts and theories in order to historicize, uncover, and further challenge the operation and

perpetuation of an archetype of whiteness, processes of racialization, and the conceptions of desire. In examining these fundamental theoretical concepts, I construct a framework to question the heightened status and power attributed to whiteness even when its Western-based state of invisibility is inverted. Chapter 3 examines popularized understandings of race and racial difference emerging through discourses of international development and the experiences of development workers. Both perceptions of and first-hand experiences with hypervisible white populations reinforce their position as prosperous and mobile. Next, Chapter 4 emphasizes ‘real’ casual and sexualized encounters and intimate relations between white Western women and black East African men. Constructed as heterosexually willing to engage in an intimate relationship, these women are regularly approached by black East African men as they go about their personal and professional lives. Within intimate relationships, individuals struggle to reconcile the assumption that all transnational interracial relationships are inherently exploitative. In working through external perceptions of the relationship, and differing expectations of monetary exchange and gender roles, individuals struggle to find common ground with their partner and to sustain their relationship. Finally, I conclude by exploring the hope of a multi-racial future that can act to break down racial barriers and racist ideologies. In moving forward to future research contributions, this thesis offers a starting point to engage inter-disciplinary work focusing on the intersection of transnational and critical studies of race, whiteness, development, and sexuality.

Chapter 2

Feminist Approaches to Knowledge and Theorizing Race, Whiteness, and Desirability

Feminist Approaches to Knowledge

Orientalism and The Production of Knowledge

Many texts concerned with the global south and so-called ‘developing’ countries, including academic writing, travel novels, and tourist literature have relied on knowledge produced by Westerners, some of whom had not actually visited the places or consulted the people about whom they have written (Wa’Njogu, 2009, p. 76-77). As explored in Edward Said’s (1978) enormously influential work, *Orientalism*, conventionally uncritical academic knowledge produced in the West operates to dominate, restructure and maintain the authority of European nations over ‘the Orient’ and, as now widely acknowledged, over any non-Western peoples (p. 3). Many academic texts implicitly and explicitly bolstered colonial projects, in particular through their reliance on scientific racism and Darwinian theories that claimed that evolution ‘favoured’ Europeans (Wa’Njogu, 2009, p. 76). This resulted in the (re)production of incomplete, presumptuous and ultimately destructive knowledge that permeates mainstream Western scholarship and daily conversation.

Travel writing and colonial adventure novels, some drawing from and exaggerating upon first-hand experiences and others not, in the nineteenth century relied on popular, academic and pseudo-scientific knowledge that proclaimed the moral superiority of white Europeans over black Africans (Pratt, 1992, p. 23; McClintock, 1995, p. 208-209). In these texts Africa was depicted as ‘the dark continent,’ an imagined place filled with mystery and danger waiting to be ‘discovered’ and tamed by Europeans

(Wa’Njogu, 2009, p. 76). Tales of sexual adventure and mystery were particularly salacious and “libidiously eroticized,” and full of “visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes ... [and Africa] had become ... a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears” (McClintock, 1995, p. 23). The intersection of race, sexuality and gender in these texts furthered colonial projects at the time because they outlined, in incredible and sensationalized detail, the moral shortcomings of Africans.

Imagery that connected whiteness with morality and blackness with immorality also emerged through consumer culture and capitalism. McClintock argues that the advent of mass advertising and cultural representation meant that those with little or no education were able to access and identify with this material, which took a unified public stance of support for imperialist projects and the consolidation of racial difference (1995, p. 208-209). For example, the link between “Britain’s new commodity culture and its civilizing mission” was apparent in advertisements for soap, which became an everyday practical symbol for hygiene, cleanliness and the purity of whiteness (McClintock, 1995, p. 208-209). McClintock argues that this was the first time that organized racism “had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated a mass of the populace” (1995, p. 209). This resulted in the widespread identification with and adoption of colonial paradigms of race and racial difference.

Orientalist knowledge and conventional Western-based research is “underpinned by a cultural system of classification and representation, by views about human nature, human morality and virtue...[and] gender and race” (Smith, 1999, p. 59). This framework

presumes the superiority of whiteness, maleness, and European thought which has been (and continues to be) used to justify (neo)colonialism (Smith, 1999, p. 61; Opie, 2008, p. 364-365). In creating what is too often understood as ‘universal’ knowledge and ‘truth’ – knowledge produced from a Western, ‘objective, ‘scientific’ perspective and position of power – Orientalism *produces* a social reality that reinforces the dominance of Western thought (Said, 1978, p. 3). This system of knowledge production constitutes much of what the West ‘knows’ about Africa today and, as Said would argue, much of what the West knows about itself. Whereas these traditional modes of research are structured by assumptions of Western superiority – cloaked through proclamations of scientific ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ – a feminist methodology emphasizes the link between situated experience and broader systems of power.

Feminists seek to uncover the historical and political context of individual experiences in order to challenge the ways in which hegemonic structures and tools of oppression – racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism – intersect and operate to constitute the everyday lives of individuals (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Chandra Mohanty (2003) has heavily critiqued Western feminists’ problematic perspective of the global South, particularly “the production of the ‘Third World woman’ as a singular, monolithic subject” (17). Academic work produced by Western feminists, Mohanty argues, often constructs “Third World women” as “traditional” and “powerless,” positioned relationally to (white) Western women, who are assumed to be modern and liberated (p. 24). Therefore, in an effort to follow Mohanty’s work and that of other critical transnational feminists, I seek to problematize essentialized and homogenized conceptions of individual and group identities as they take shape in the context of the

East Africa. This thesis aims to *be* feminist as much as it seeks to *do* feminism in an effort to contribute to academic and popular conversations that trouble hegemonic and taken-for-granted ideas of approaches to knowledge building. As a feminist researcher with an interest in the lives of formerly colonized communities and in a region with substantive colonial history and continuing (neo)colonial activities, I must be conscious of oppressive paradigms that have, and continue to, inform Western-based research.

The Interview Method

Interviewing is a useful, though constrained, methodological tool. Feminists and anti-racist activists have long interviewed women and other marginalized groups and included their perspectives in public discussion with an aim to enact social reform or transformation (DeVault and Gross, 2012, p. 209). In engaging directly with those I am concerned with – white Western women working in the field of development and black East African men of different professions and ethnicities – I provide insights into constructions of desirability within transnational interracial relationships. In addition to more self-reflexive and perhaps ‘educated’ knowledge about individual lived experiences and how they are situated within broader structures of power, I give credence to the effect of popularized forms of knowledge and individual stories. This knowledge circulates among families and communities and contributes to the shaping of an individual’s sense of self and the world around them. For example, stereotypes, gossip, parables, methods of storytelling, teachings in elementary and secondary school classrooms and first-hand experiences, creates an epistemology or way of knowing that is often dismissed by academics as being essentially ‘tainted’ or ‘untrue’ knowledge.

However, I understand *all* experience and *all* knowledge as inherently political and positioned within ideological systems, whether dominant and/or resistant. Kevin Dunn (2004) argues that experiences expressed by research participants are recalled and interpreted through ideological narratives (p. 486). Joan Scott (1992) writes that “experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straight-forward; it is always contested, always therefore political” (p. 37). Therefore, in this thesis I am not looking for ‘truth’ from participants, as conventionally implied. Rather, I am interested in their experience as they understand it, as they express it, and indeed, in what terms they view themselves and their place in the world. Indeed, individual ‘truth’ is rooted within specific discourses and social contexts and, as explored in later chapters, even though narratives of resistance may offer individuals alternative ways to understand themselves and their experiences, ideas of resistance are often problematic and not fully critical of systems of power.

The Research Participants

The interviews conducted for this project, which normally lasted between one and two hours, focused on participants’ experience with and exposure to international development, stereotypes about white women held by East Africans, stereotypes held by white Westerners about black East African men, general perceptions of relationships between white women and black men in the region, and personal experiences of transnational interracial relationships. The majority of the nine male participants, four interviewed in Nairobi and five in Dar es Salaam, held or were pursuing university level degrees and those who were not were taking part in other forms of formal and informal

education in order to improve their employability and future economic stability. These participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and spoke a variety of languages, though all interviews except one were conducted exclusively in English.⁴ Of the nine men interviewed, five had been or were currently in what they considered to be serious relationships with white Western women. The other four, though they had not engaged in a transnational interracial relationship, had experience with white Western women through work, school, and social groups.

I interviewed ten self-identified white Western women, originating from Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, who were at the time of the interview living and working in either Nairobi or Dar es Salaam. Each participant held or was pursuing university degrees, several at the Masters level and most in the fields of international development, international relations, political science, refugee and/or global studies. These participants worked in different facets of the development industry, including local and international non-governmental organizations, covering humanitarian aid stories for international news services, conducting research for think tanks, and teaching. Of these ten participants, eight had engaged in transnational interracial intimacies, though not all considered their relationships to be serious or moving towards a long-term commitment. Those two who had not dated a black East African man during their time in the region, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, were very conscious of this fact and often worried that it made them seem narrow-minded or even 'racist.'

⁴ One interview conducted in Dar es Salaam was in both Swahili and English with assistance from a translator.

Many participants identified religion as an important aspect of their lives and sense of identity. The men in this study were both Christian, primarily Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist, and Muslim, while the women tended to identify more generally as Christian and one specifically as Evangelical. While religion was not a key aspect of the interviews, and is out of the scope of this thesis, some participants identified religious views as a key site of (in)compatibility. For example, some female participants thought it was refreshing to meet such devout men, difficult to come by in a Western context. Others were profoundly troubled by the culture of religiosity in East Africa and felt that fundamental ideological conflicts would inevitably arise in such transnational interracial relationships. For the male participants, complementary religious beliefs seemed to be preferred, but many stated that they were open-minded as long as they did not have to give up their faith. Ultimately, religion was identified as an ideology that could have either a positive or negative impact on a relationship.

Positionality and Self-Reflexivity

My interest in power dynamics within understandings of race and whiteness drew me to investigate intimacies between black East African men and white Western women. The paradoxical and simultaneous celebration and criticism of interracial relationships – within a transnational perspective that has historically condemned interracial relationships, yet also often venerates black men's intimate (heterosexual) associations and relationships with whites – motivates my work. The aggregate group of white Western women working in development is also key to this project because, even though these women are now key practitioners within the industry, they continue to be ambiguously positioned (marginalized or attributed limited agency as women and

privileged as white) within the trajectory of continuing colonial relations. Furthermore, black East African men are also located ambivalently, holding power as men within patriarchy but marginalized through both historical and present-day colonial processes and a transnational system of white dominance.

Although interviews have the potential to bring valuable experiences to the surface and to create meaningful engagement between the researcher and participants, there are significant limitations within this method. The positionality of the researcher and their relationship to project participants is shaped by complex power dynamics and hierarchical conceptions of legitimate knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 8). My own social location 'in the field,' one of simultaneous privilege and marginalization, impacted my experience of conducting research and interacting with participants in Kenya and Tanzania (Bromley, 2002, p. 98). As a white (Jewish), middle-class, educated Canadian woman and former (and perhaps future) volunteer development worker with reliable access to resources, I was (and continue to be) in a significant position of privilege over many research participants, particularly the black East African men I interviewed. Alternatively, as white Western woman in the context of an African patriarchal society where black people are in the vast majority, I also existed in a position of marginalization as a very visible outsider (Bromley, 2002, p. 98).

In negotiating my positionality, I employed a continuous process of self-reflexivity, the process of being self-aware and critical of the ways in which my social and cultural position within this specific context may heighten pre-existing power dynamics (see Deutsch, 2004; Fine, 1994; Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012, p. 560-561). However, this process does not remove the constraints that histories of racism and

colonialism and the construction of Orientalist knowledge place on interactions within the interview process. Still, my openness to participants about my interest in the subject and my desire for them to encounter the least amount of discomfort during the process – whether because they perceived themselves to be ‘different’ or ‘similar’ to me – tended to open up space for constructive dialogue on the reality of being part of the research process. Though the process of a formal interview can be difficult and tiring, many participants expressed their appreciation for having the opportunity to discuss their perspective and experiences with someone outside of their professional and social circle and external to their everyday life. 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 (only reaffirming the core of this project that white Western women are often viewed as ‘Others’ with access to resources and mobility for black East African men), many appreciated the chance to speak with me about their experiences with other white women, a subject they felt was taboo or difficult to broach with their families or peers. Although this project is limited in scope, one aim was for participants to be provided with a small window for critical (self)reflection.

Scholars, in particular those feminists concerned with inter-cultural and transnational contexts, are instilled with the critical ethical task of being “interpreter[s] of meaning” in an environment in which we are usually heavily invested but continue to live and work as outsiders (Motapanyane, 2010, p. 98). Ultimately, the power relationships within research tend to privilege the knowledge and perspective of the researcher above all else. Indeed, this thesis is constituted by and reflects my own perspective, knowledge base and theorizing. As the one designing and undertaking the study, the data collected

through primary research works collaboratively with my own experiences and academic direction. Interviews are a method through which meaningful material can be gathered (Miller and Glassner, 2004, p. 125). Victoria Bromley (2002) agrees, arguing that rather than understanding the stories shared in this setting as the ultimate ‘truth,’ researchers must understand that the narratives shared by participants are the expression of “social worlds” that create meaning in that individual’s life (p. 126). A framework of situated knowledge, rather than relying on illusions of ‘objectivity’ offers a snapshot into the complexities of an individual’s particular context, identity and social relation to power (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 9; Motapanyane, 2010, p. 96).

Feminist theory pushes researchers to question the naturalness of relationships and social phenomena and enables us to understand our own experiences, and those of research participants, as social constructions (Bromley, 2002, p. 89). Bromley contends that “experiences are relational, contextual, and must be located and historicized to understand how they are constituted” (2002, p. 94). In other words, individual experiences cannot exist outside of history or politics and are actually constituted by them. These socially produced experiences shape individual narratives, language and everyday talk through both hegemonic and resistant lenses, shaping the ways in which knowledge is expressed to me (the researcher) by research participants. Thus, it is important to remember that because these experiences are socially constructed does not make them any less ‘real’ in individual lives, nor does it dissuade their impact. While the operation of power and privilege was not always evident to participants as they explored their individual experiences, my analysis of their narratives, as both socially constructed

and contextually located, aims to uncover both the explicit and implicit ways in which racialization and sexualization structure and organize their interactions and relationships.

Literature Review

Introduction to Literature Review

This literature review provides a foundation upon which to develop an understanding of whiteness as the desirable racial ‘Other’ in East Africa. I locate this project within post-colonial feminist theory, critical whiteness studies, critical race theory and studies of sexuality. This literature review outlines three key frameworks used to construct this study: whiteness; racialization; and sexualization and desirability. Western academics have critiqued conventional conceptions of whiteness as an invisible, unmarked and normalized way of being, made possible by its privileged social and cultural status (Dyer, 1997; Ferber, 2007b; Frankenberg, 1993 and 1997; Keating, 1995; López, 2005). Processes of racialization, constructed through imaginative and material frameworks, have traditionally marked non-white racialized groups as ‘different’ from and threatening to the hegemonic norm of whiteness. In considering an East African context, I invert conventional conceptions of whiteness as normative and therefore invisible. Instead, I examine whiteness as the foreign, racialized ‘Other,’ its power rearticulated through its hypervisible, and marked nature in East Africa. Rather than losing authority through its visibility, as suggested when blackness is the visible, feared Other, whiteness actually reasserts its power through its ability to be seen, a visual emblem of something to which to aspire, to achieve, and to *become*. In this context, I also problematize issues of sexuality and desire, in particular those that transgress racialized cultural dictates, subjects traditionally considered to be private and apolitical.

Transnational narratives and experiences of desire are constituted by boundaries of race and class and profoundly shaped by processes of exoticization and othering.

Whiteness as Normative in the West

Theoretical understandings of the ‘Other’ rely upon normative conceptualizations of ‘whiteness.’ Often masquerading as a universal and invisible form of being in the Western world – unmarked by cultural, economic or political history – whiteness is a socially constructed identity and racial discourse that, until the last two decades, had received little attention in research literature (Leonardo, 2002, p. 31). Currently the status of whiteness is being critically analyzed by a number of academics, primarily American and Australian. AnnLouise Keating (1995) positions white people as a group (though diverse and heterogeneous in itself) that exists in the location of “unmarked superiority” in the Western racial hierarchy (p. 904; see also Dyer, 1997; López, 2005). In her study of the ways in which white American women’s lives are constructed through race, Ruth Frankenberg (1993) defines the identity and operation of whiteness in three different ways: (1) as “a location of structural advantage, of race privilege”; (2) as a standpoint, or “a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society”; and (3) as “a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (p. 1). Critical whiteness scholars are committed to challenging the traditional social location of whiteness, instead understanding it as “ensembles of local phenomena complexly embedded in socioeconomic, sociocultural, and psychic interrelations” (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). A critical and historical understanding of whiteness pushes conceptions of race into the realm of the social, political and economic.

The term 'white' has changed over time and emerges at the intersection of race, class, and often religion. Often used to denote the British or the larger community of Western Europe, who is included within this group is fluid and far from definitive (Keating, 1995, p. 912). For example, certain groups once considered racially 'different' and persecuted as such (despite having similar skin tones to those understood as white), such as the Irish, Jews and Italians, are now largely afforded the privileges of whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 11-12; Nagel, 2010, p. 210). Unstable processes of inclusion and exclusion within traditional power groups reveals the inherent unnaturalness of such groupings, making whiteness visible as both an economic category and a skin colour. The values attached to presumed racial difference, often identified through the hypervisibility of skin colour, are an integral aspect of this thesis. Yet, the assignation of whiteness by (perceived) skin colour is ultimately an imprecise form of racial identification (Arat-Koç, 2010; Heron, 2007, p. 27; McClintock, 1995, p. 53). Sedef Arat-Koç (2010) argues that the understanding and experience of race is an intersectional concept increasingly constructed by class. Scholars like Heron (2007) prefer the term 'bourgeois' to 'white' because it signifies the link between race *and* class identification (p. 27). Indeed, simplified racial classifications are being challenged and reconfigured through changing class status. For example, suggests Arat-Koç, non-white individuals in societies that are not white dominated can be 'whitened' by moving up in the class hierarchy within their home nation (2010, p. 148). These shifts or cracks within the binary of the colour line are emerging through a process of global 'whitening,' marking with privilege those with an elevated socioeconomic status (Arat-Koç, 2010, p. 155-158). In claiming superiority within national racial and ethnic hierarchies and participating in a transnational 'white

class,' individuals not conventionally understood to be racially white are able to take part in white hegemony, simultaneously challenging and furthering its dominance. Ultimately, whiteness and race emerge and intersect with understandings of ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, and religion.

Racialization

The concept of 'race' is used to define different forms of human bodies based on cultural, political and economic interests (Winant, 2000, p. 172; Knowles, 2010, p. 25). Race is a term that has been (mis)used to differentiate and classify groups of humans within a relational hierarchy. It is widely acknowledged by scholars that the concept of race is a social construction, produced by both central power mechanisms and attempts at resistance (Collins, 2000; Gates, 1986; Gilroy, 2000; Knowles, 2010). However, despite the "fluid, situational, volitional and dynamic" character of race, the historical assumption that racial communities are somehow tied to biological or culturally infused differences endures (Nagel, 2010, p. 190). This so-called racial 'difference' often homogenizes entire communities, creating and reaffirming assumptions about a specific group's behaviour and morality, mapping relational systems of power onto the bodies of individually raced persons. Within a Western system of racialization it is the non-white 'Other' that exemplifies that which is different, abnormal and deviant. This racialized 'Other' is positioned against, and in relation to, the assumed 'norm' of the white, Western body (Heron, 2007, p. 34). Homi Bhabha (1983) contends that the power the West holds over non-Western regions is built upon the conception of a fixed and inert 'Other' that acts to define and justify the power of modern Western nations and their mobile citizens (p. 66). This paradigm places constraints on thoughts and actions, as it insists that 'we'

(white, Westerners) are essentially superior, and 'they' (non-white, non-Westerners, in this case the black African 'Other') are inferior (Razack, 2004, p. 13; Dunn, 2004, p. 497). This relational and hierarchal system of racialization, explored by many scholars, acts as a binary system that divides the world and the human communities within it into two distinct parts: modern/traditional, civilized/uncivilized, North/South, and white/black (Dunn, 2004, p. 497). The North, coded as white, civilized, moral, progressive and orderly presupposes that residents of the global South, understood as invariably 'not-white,' are delegated to a life of chaos, immorality, barbarism and disease (Heron, 2007, p. 34). These divisions privilege those in already advantaged positions and uphold the economic and cultural domination of the West. Ultimately, this binary system of racial difference not only informs individual identities, but actually constitutes them.

Racial Terminology

The terms 'white' and 'black' are used in this thesis in order to provide a simplified way in which to identify different social groups. They are not all-encompassing terms, nor are they entirely accurate signifiers of ethnic background or racial identification. The white Western women in this study are most often identified by local populations in East Africa as '*mzungu*,' a Swahili term used during the colonial era and still in use today to identify white people or those of European descent (Edmondson, 1999, p. 30; Gilmore and Natrajan-Tyagi, 2011, p. 327). Although '*mzungu*' appears regularly in the narratives of participants, in my own analysis I employ the term 'white' and often 'white Western' in order to emphasize a social category of transnational structural privilege. Local East African populations may perceive some differences between, for example, Europeans and North Americans and their links to colonial history.

Generally, though, all white people and Western regions are considered to be a broad homogenized grouping with little diversity. The men in this study were asked about the idea behind the term *mzungu* and how they understand what it means to be 'white.' In response, they stated that, although sometimes any foreigner can be called a *mzungu*, it is a term typically used to identify those of European descent. More specifically, participants identified the appearance of 'whiteness' through light or white skin, compared to their own dark or black/brown skin, as the easiest way to 'see' and identify a white person. The construction of white Westerners as inherently foreign to the area, then, identifies their position as both racial and national, emerging through their whiteness and their international citizenship.

The men in this study come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in the region and they identified themselves in different ways during their interviews, including: 'black,' 'Kenyan,' 'Tanzanian,' or simply 'African.' Some spoke specifically of their home region and their ethnic identification (for example, Kisii and Luhya in Kenya or Chaga and Sukuma in Tanzania) and its impact on their exposure to white people. Others, especially those from mixed-ethnic backgrounds, identified with a broader national or pan-African social position. Whereas within people from their region or country of origin the male participants would likely identify themselves by ethnicity and home area, with foreigners they may use more general terms easily understandable by white Westerners.

Ultimately, local populations may identify themselves as 'black' or by their national citizenship primarily when they are interacting with whites and other foreigners because it is the simplest descriptor. Similarly, white Westerners may simply identify themselves as 'British,' 'American,' or even just as a *mzungu*, even though they may

identify more strongly with a particular region in their country of origin. These more general terms likely play a greater role within transnational interactions than if individuals shared the same national or regional origin. Understandings of race and ethnic origin, then, emerge as intersectional concepts constituted by regional location and nationality, further complicating self-identification and local hierarchies. Currently the terminology available for which to name racialized social groups relies on categories that are imprecise and erroneously discrete, as if racial (self)identification is a simple and direct process. Since further consideration of the most meaningful way to identify and name the two groups of research participants is out of the scope of this study, for the purposes of this thesis terms such as 'white' and 'black' operate to simplify the process of identifying and engaging with research participants' social locations.

Whiteness as 'Other' in Africa

During colonialism, black Africans were often constructed as racialized 'Others,' lesser than and threatening (yet also instrumental) to colonial projects and the production of white identities. Whites and blacks have historically been understood as opposites or "antithetical absolutes," positioned at the top and bottom of the racial hierarchy, respectively (Ehlers, 2011, p. 320; Bashkow, 2006, p. 61; Thompson, 2009, p.361). Essentialist discourses of racial difference constructed Western Europeans as superior and, as skin colour became synonymous with race, Africans and black skin were proclaimed as the ultimate manifestation of 'difference' (Thompson, 2009, p. 361; Ehlers, 2011, p. 326). This difference in skin colour was perceived as both a marker and cause of deviation from the white norm, which positioned the appearance of whiteness or blackness as indicative of either superiority or inferiority.

To justify and affirm their own difference from and authority over black Africans, whites expressed a “distinct colonial morality,” shaped by an image of “superior health, wealth and intelligence as a white man’s norm” (Stoler, 1989, p. 645). These presumed superior “racial and class markers of ‘Europeanness’,” and the visual markers of those of European descent is reiterated in contemporary experiences of whites as an aggregate in Africa which emphasizes a transnational community of whiteness (Stoler, 1989, p. 645). Today white Westerners in Africa are often coded within a modernized colonial paradigm as either historical dominator or contemporary saviour (or both), even if it is something to which they do not subscribe. Although understandings of white people are contested and often contradictory, whiteness often comes to represent the opposing experiences of colonial violence and contemporary idealizations of beauty, wealth, knowledge and a privileged lifestyle (Knowles, 2010, p. 29; Fox, 2012, Introduction section, para. 2). Often present-day views of whiteness obscure historical associations of appropriations of lands and resources, death and violence, emphasizing instead the supposed ‘goodness’ of whites, in particular those working in development (Heron, 2007, p. 7). Those colonial whites (and their descendants) who continue to live in East Africa may represent the cruelty of the colonial past. However, as evidenced by the participants in this study and discussed in Chapter 3, those whites more recently arrived are often understood as having *huruma* (compassion or sympathy in Swahili) because of the existence of students and professionals working with local and international charities and non-governmental organizations.

I argue that, in the current context of East Africa, these more recent interventions operate to displace negative historical constructions and recreate whiteness as a desirable

presence and community with which to associate. The presumed wealth and privilege associated with white skin positions racialization in this case as an affirmative process that imbues the white 'Other' with idealized (and real) power. Racialization in this case is a privilege, rather than a disadvantage. Indeed, as Nyanzi and Bah (2010) contend, the perception of whites in East Africa as "the personification of wealth, prosperity and an endless solution to local lack" is both constituted and exacerbated by the tendency of whites in East Africa to enjoy a comparatively upper-class and privileged existence (p. 114). Understandings of race intersecting with class, or more specifically assumptions of financial privilege, and mobility across international borders construct the desirability of all individuals and encourage interactions with certain communities over others. This project demonstrates that, rather than maintaining its position of unmarked superiority in an East African context, the location of whiteness becomes one of significant visibility and the assertion of its idealized superiority endures and takes shape in new ways. Whiteness as a cultural discourse and system of power is embodied by individual interactions between black East Africans and white Western development workers, simulating and reinforcing broader power relationships on a global scale.

Desire and the Politics of Sexuality

Interconnected understandings of race, sexuality, gender and class have shaped the potential for and experience of interracial relationships. Many scholars who study racialized masculinities, femininities and sexualities, and who explore relationships between white and black communities, base their research on historical slave relationships or anti-miscegenation laws that regulated and prohibited interracial heterosexual relationships in the United States (see, for example, Ehlers, 2011;

Frankenberg, 1993; Jackson II, 2006; Mercer, 1993; Staples, 2011; Steinbugler, 2005). Work conducted in an Africa context focuses primarily in South Africa, because of the severe regulation of interracial relationships under an apartheid regime (see, for example, Ratele, 2009). The limited work that has been done in East Africa primarily focuses on the sex tourism industry and the 'beach boy' phenomenon in coastal regions (see, for example, White, 1999; Tami, 2008). Those who have written about sexuality and desire within transnational contexts emphasize intimate relationships initiated during short-term vacations (see, for example, Nyanzi and Bah, 2010; Schifter and Thomas, 2010) or the experiences of those migrating to North America from the global South (see, for example, Maia, 2010).

There has been an explosion of research on sexuality in Africa since the 1980s, but much of it employs limited or problematic approaches concerned only with the intersection of sexuality and health or the (perceived) need for African communities to abandon so-called 'traditional' or 'tribal' cultural practices such as polygamy and female circumcision, often referred to both locally and internationally as female genital mutilation (FGM) (Spronk, 2012, p. 3 and p. 20). This literature focuses primarily on the spread of HIV/AIDS, health risks of FGM, sex work, and the lack of accessible sex education and resources, particularly in rural African regions (see Cornwall, 2006; Cornwall and Jolly, 2006; Magar, 2009; Spronk, 2012). Many of these studies largely "take no account of a global historical context of domination or hegemony," and actually reinforce dominant paradigms of racialized and sexualized difference (Thomas, 2007, p. x-xi; Spronk, 2012, p. 24-25). Rather than understanding sexuality as socially defined and constitutive of individual and group identities, these studies further homogenize and

make abstract the diversity of real social relations. This reinforces paradigms of difference between the presumed static and deviant sexuality of Africans (constructed through discourses of ‘culture,’ ‘tradition,’ and so-called ‘scientific’ studies of the sexual desires and habits of different racial groups), positioned against the individualized and normative sexuality of Westerners (Nobile, 1982; Rushton and Bogaert, 1987).

The connection between international development as an historical colonial continuity, and the intimate lives of those enmeshed in the ideology of development, as workers and recipients, has largely been ignored. Much of what has been written about the social and political nature of interracial intimacies in Africa and other regions of the global south emphasize white Westerners in short-term sexual relationships while on vacation or travelling to specifically engage in sex tourism (see, for example, Nyanzi and Bah, 2010; Shifter and Thomas, 2010; Tami, 2008; L. White, 1990). This project shifts the conversation to encounters that are less obviously problematic in nature, even considered by many as a sign of progress in race relations and a sign of a common human-ness. Some argue that the increase of interracial intimate relationships, marriage, and the raising of bi-racial children is an indication of decreasing racism and increasing racial tolerance. Proponents of this perspective contend that when interracial relationships are embraced, then racism will ‘naturally’ decline and racial divisions will be a thing of the past (Telles and Sue, 2009, p. 134; Childs, 2005, p. 7). The very existence of black-white couples is “often heralded as a sign that racial borders or barriers no longer exist” (Childs, 2005, p. 2). The theory of multi-racialism informs declarations that the world now runs on a system of ‘colour-blindness,’ or what some are calling the ‘new racism’ in an inaccurately rumoured ‘post-race’ world (Vincent, 2008, p. 1432; Ferber, 2007a, p. 14;

Collins, 2004, p. 32-33). Similar to announcements of the ‘death’ of feminism, this colour-blind approach perpetuates the hegemonic ideology that racism is over and its historical implications no longer have an affect on any actions that individuals take, including choices of who to engage with in sexual relations.

This study challenges mainstream assumptions that people simply desire and become intimately involved with anyone that they may find attractive. Instead, I argue that racialized social forces and axes of power denote who individuals spend time with and who is understood as attractive and desirable. Rather than pushing an agenda of racial equality, a colour-blind attitude to dating and other social relations actually “ignores, even disguises, the power and privilege that still characterizes race relations,” further obscuring the operation of racism in people’s daily lives (Childs, 2005, p. 2). In the case of this study, heightened responses from local populations, often of *approval*, to black East African men engaging in intimate relationships with white Western women, demonstrates that the presumed opportunities to be garnered through association with whiteness are often reinforced through these relationships. Ultimately, these processes obscure racist practices, rather than disrupting local and transnational racial hierarchies.

The racialization of sexuality and the sexualization of race took shape through pseudo-scientific and cultural processes and justified colonial interventions. Indeed, as Stoler (1989) suggests, “probably no subject is discussed more than sex in the colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster the racist stereotypes of European society” (p. 635). The construction of racialized “sexual cosmologies” reinforced popularized theories that relied on myths, stereotypes and pseudo-scientific ‘discoveries’ (Nagel, 2010, p. 193). The ‘scientific racism’ of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries produced biological theories of race and racial difference, suggesting that differences in the body – including skull size and shape, hair colour and texture, the size of genitals, and facial features – determined the behaviour and abilities of entire racial groups (Gilroy, 2001, p. 35; Skinner, 2006, p. 461). While at least officially these understandings have largely been disproven or abandoned, the biological deterministic assumption that race denotes mental and physical ability and morality continues to manifest in stereotypes, particularly those related to sexuality and sexual prowess. For example, the enduring stereotype of black men's large penises, propped up by pseudo scientific research that relies on evolutionary theories of sexual difference based on race (Nobile, 1982; Rushton and Bogaert, 1987, p. 536 and p. 545), linked to the assertion of a corresponding small brain size and capacity, operates to determine the assumed character of black masculinity and sexuality.

Pervasive myths and stereotypes about the hyper and deviant sexuality of the black 'Other' endure today and have been reconfigured within contemporary discourse to maintain the morality and the global dominance of white Westerners. An understanding of racial and sexual binary differences between whites and blacks constructs white sexuality as normative, reinforcing whiteness as desirable (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 76; Mills, 2003, p. 709-710; Nagel, 2010, p. 194). Indeed, the racial character of sexual desire has been constructed and performed within constraints to regulate and prohibit the mixing and reshaping of groupings and to position whiteness at the apex of the racial hierarchy (Nagel, 2010, p. 194 and p. 204). As Collins (2004) argues, "White Western normality became constructed on the backs of Black deviance, with an imagined Black hyper-heterosexual deviance at the heart of the enterprise" (p. 120). Therefore, the

sexuality of individuals of colour, in particular black women and men, are understood through racist discourses created by the white imagination. The intersections of sexuality and blackness produce an image of sexual practices and desire that are “excessive, animalistic, or exotic in contrast to the ostensibly restrained or ‘civilized’ sexuality of white women and men” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 75-77; see also Nagel, 2010, p. 199; Ehlers, 2011, p. 319).

The fear of black sexuality and sexual attacks by African men against white women in colonial spaces, known historically as ‘Black Peril,’ constructed black men as the physical embodiment of uncontrollable, primitive and animalistic sexual desire, and presumed to represent a considerable threat to the ‘purity’ of white femininity and chastity (Stoler, 1989, p. 641; Nagel, 2010, p. 191; Heron, 2007, p. 32). Paralleling this, contemporary Western conceptions of black masculinity, and therefore black male sexuality, as inherently uncivilized, untamed, and violent, ultimately renarrates the colonial image of the ‘black male rapist’ (Bromley, 2012, p. 165; Childs, 2005, p. 77; Collins, 2004, p. 27; Frankenberg, 1993, p. 79; Nagel, 2010, p. 188). Ferber (1997a) contends that, like the scientific theories that rooted racial difference in bodily characteristics, the fear of (and, crucially, the desire for) black men’s bodies, with a particular focus on the penis and musculature (both symbols of sexual and physical prowess or aggression) as sites of the expression of an innate identity and behaviour of black men (p. 15). Paradoxically, the desire that white men held for black African women during colonialism was ambiguous, sometimes considered to be acceptable as a way to stave off the loneliness and depression that came with living in the colonies, and other times highly regulated or prohibited (Stoler, 1989, p. 641; Mills, 2003, p. 708). Today

black women's bodies have become "icons of hypersexuality," eroticized and fetishized as objects of sexual spectacle, particularly their buttocks (Collins, 2004, p. 30). This objectification of black women's bodies reduces them to sexual beings only and devalues individual subjectivity, which operates to reinforce the white patriarchy of the West.

In contrast to the privileging of white male sexuality, the sexual agency and subjectivity of white women has been constrained and regulated. White women were constructed as "objects of white male protection and as people unable to control their own sexuality" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 81; Mills, 2003, p. 709). This image of the protector and protected supports the notion that white women's bodies belong to white men, that men are subjects and women are objects to be controlled and possessed. It suggests that white women need to be stopped from diverting their sexual interest to relationships with men who are not white. The panic over securing white women's purity, and control over both white and black women's bodies (ostensibly, of *all* women's bodies) produced the white male subject as an idealized hero or 'saviour' of both white women and the white nation (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 77; see also Yuval-Davis, 1997). So-called 'civilized' white Western national identities require the relational existence of 'uncivilized' nations and their deviant citizens in order to affirm the meaning and legitimacy of their authority (Collins, 2004, p. 30).

bell hooks (1992) troubles conceptions of sex and desire, pointing to the exoticization, objectification, and commodification of Otherness as ways to enact racial dominance through sexual pleasure, what she terms 'eating the Other' (p. 21). Maia (2010) agrees, stating that, despite continuing racist ideologies that in some cases may mitigate interracial intimacies, the fascination with these relationships is often the result

of a desire to consume, control and understand the racialized and sexualized 'Other' (p. 65). In the context of East Africa, I argue that the (re)positioning of white Western women as the racialized 'Other' is evident through processes of hypervisibility and the persistent black male gaze. Ultimately, the objectification of white women in East Africa reflects (black) patriarchal power structures in the region, while simultaneously reinforcing white women's bodies as desirable and normative. Rather than white men fulfilling the role of protector and controller of white women's sexuality, it is black East African men who seek to possess white women's bodies, sexuality, and resources. White Western women, then, exist within a contradictory position of privilege and marginalization, as they hold much of the material power in the situation but are still objectified as exotic 'Others' with access.

At the height of African independence movements, Frantz Fanon (1952) introduced his psychoanalytic theory of black men's inferiority complex. In this theory, Fanon contends that some African men may try to 'become' white in order to regain the subjectivity and power stripped of them through colonialism (p. xiv). According to Fanon, this struggle has become a cycle of African men seeking to prove themselves to be worthy to whites. African men's access to power, Fanon argued could occur by establishing a connection with a white woman, either through an official relationship such as marriage, or through the act of sex, as he attempts to possess a white woman's whiteness (1952, p. 45). In utilizing a hypothetical relationship between an African man and a white woman, Fanon explains the psychology behind the strategic use of these intimate relationships and offers an answer to how black men's loss of power may be rectified. Employing the voice of a universalized African man, Fanon states: "By loving

me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man” (1952, p. 45). Within this disclosure, Fanon reveals the colonization of African men’s minds and social beliefs, as the historical power and authority attributed to whiteness is perpetuated by those it has marginalized. Fanon’s work is more than a psychological diagnosis. It serves as a lament to the state of black men’s psyches and the difficult lives they face within an epistemically and physically violent world dominated by whiteness. Although an association with whiteness in this context acts as the antidote to African’s men’s despair, Fanon resists the presumption of the inherent superiority of whiteness. Instead, argues Thomas, Fanon believes that the true antidote is a restricting of the global racial hierarchy and “is committed to a radical, revolutionary dismantling of...colonial conservatism (simultaneously racial and sexual)” (Fanon, 1952, p. 63; Thomas, 2009, p. 77). Indeed, to rise up within the racial hierarchy does not challenge the ideological system upon which it is founded.

McClintock (1995) uses Fanon’s work as a theoretical base and resituates it within the realm of history, politics and economics of a post-independence neocolonial social reality. McClintock links together money, sexuality, fantasy and desire, arguing that they have been co-constructed within ongoing colonial processes and cannot be understood separately (1995, p. 4 and p. 8). Consequently, McClintock offers a theoretical perspective that complicates and deromanticizes desire, positioning race and class as signifiers of desire within contexts where racial hierarchies are particularly salient and visible. Instead, she argues, desirability is shaped through the co-constructions of race, gender, class and sexuality. Taken from this complex understanding of sexuality and desire, this thesis seeks to uncover the nuanced histories behind interactions between

white Western women and black East African men within multifaceted discourses that privilege and naturalize the desire for whiteness.

Conclusion

This thesis is grounded in the work of those who theorize localized and transnational narratives and experiences of whiteness, racialization, and desire. In examining casual interactions and intimate relationships between black Kenyan and Tanzanian men and white Western female development workers, I consider the ways in which these identities and interactions are coded at the crucial intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class. Wealth and privilege are racialized through assumptions of what it means to be a visible, foreign ‘Other’ in East Africa. There are real, tangible benefits for black East African men who form an intimate relationship with a white Western woman, such as living with access to increased financial, occupational, and educational opportunities, and the possibility of residing in the West in the future. Even though all white people are not financially wealthy, as an aggregate on a global scale, material and economic inequalities between white Westerners and black Africans are more than just an imagined difference; they are very real. The following chapter draws on the narratives of research participants to construct the imagined and relational spaces of the West and Africa. These understandings produce a binary perception that identifies white Western women in development as inherently ‘different’ from local populations in their access to material wealth and finances and their mobility across national borders.

Chapter 3

Constructing the 'Other' from Afar: Development and Hypervisible 'Others' with Access

Introduction

Whiteness has global range and holds structural privilege on a transnational level, but is not a unified signifier and is coded differently, particularly at the intersection of racial difference and gender. This chapter aims to unpack the ways in which popularized understandings of racial difference position white people, and white Western women specifically, as inherently privileged through their access to wealth and mobility across national borders. I frame hegemonic narratives that construct a binary of what it means to be white and Western, and black and (East) African, as essential to how individuals experience interracial transnational intimate relationships. The widely held understanding that whiteness and the West equal wealth and access, though not entirely inaccurate, operates to recreate a localized racial hierarchy that at times takes on mythic proportions. Despite the fact that white people are not a homogenized group, the trope of white people and their whiteness as essentially different and privilege is upheld through the beliefs and actions of both black East Africans and white Westerners.

This chapter begins by examining how the white Western women working in the field of international development understand themselves and how they are implicated within hegemonic narratives that racialize work emanating from the West and enacted in (East) Africa. Next I argue that the hypervisible presence of white Western women living and working in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam conflates skin colour and racial difference as deterministic of individual and group capacity. This ability to easily 'see' white Western women as they live and work in these spaces contributes to and buttresses the assumption

that all white people are wealthy and mobile, and are therefore powerful on both an individual and group scale. The knowledge of individuals is often constituted by both direct observations and generalized second-hand knowledge. The epistemology and knowledge-building processes of research participants includes childhood experiences and memories, cultural representations, and stereotypes. As these understandings circulate within families and social groups, they are often either challenged or sedimented over time through lived experience.

It is through these cultural accumulations that white Western women development workers become known as ‘Others’ with access. Indeed, these women are often viewed from afar and located in an idealized subject position by those who may not have direct contact with them. Paralleling this are the dominant Western narratives of the continent of Africa and its citizens who are likewise often imagined in disparaging ways by white Westerners from afar. These epistemologies shape real lived interactions between blacks and whites in East Africa and often reiterate the power and dominance of white Westerners continually positioned with enhanced access to wealth and opportunity. Even though often resisted, including by research participants, this internalized assumption of whiteness as access endures.

White Western Women, International Development, and Imaginative Geographies

White Western Women and International Development

International development has become intrinsically associated with white people, whiteness, and the West, symbols of progress and modernization. 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 civilizing the “dark continent” is renewed as the ‘white *woman*’s burden’ (Wa’Njogu, 2009, p. 76; 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’ (Said, 1978, p. 33). The study of development as a professional field began in the 1950s with application of modernization theory in Latin America and the Caribbean. Export oriented development practices extended to Africa as a response to and extension of decolonization (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 4; Sylvester, 1999, p. 705). In the post-Cold War era, development ideologies are concerned primarily with poverty and sustainable economic growth within the increasingly neoliberal shift towards privatization and entrepreneurship (Kapoor, 2004, p. 635; Sylvester, 1999, p. 705 and p. 708).

Although development continues to take shape differently in specific geopolitical contexts, the dominant narrative that characterizes development and development workers is based on racialized spatial dichotomies that privilege the ideology of the white West over that of black Africa. Despite the historical and ideological roots of development, such as maintaining access to and building infrastructure for raw material and economic resource extraction by foreign nations, mainstream conceptions of its practices position it as ‘good’ for so-called ‘developing’ countries, a term used for those nations presumed to be lagging behind the West in terms of the ‘modernization’ of economics and political, physical, and social infrastructures (Dunn, 2004, p. 489; Goudge, 2003, p. 37; Mielants, 2007, p. 297). Perhaps most controversially, some traditional practices or cultural norms of African countries, such as polygamy, female circumcision, or the state of women’s and children’s rights are also often constructed as

regressive and even dangerous. Portraying these as inherent to particular racialized communities, barriers to ‘development,’ and further proof of the ‘uncivilized’ ways of black Africans, means that the operations of global systems of inequality and racial hierarchies are both obscured and reproduced. Whiteness and blackness, and with them the West and Africa, are reinforced as essential qualities and locations that are ethical or unethical and that denote the capacity for wealth or poverty, success or failure, agency or passivity.

White Western women in the field of international development tend to be educated and well-versed in the areas of global politics, gender, and issues that face refugees. For example, like many of the women of this study, I have completed undergraduate and graduate work in fields related to my work overseas, including African history and geopolitics. Despite this training, before development workers, including myself, arrive in East Africa, their (or our) perceptions of the region tend to still be shaped by romanticized narratives of white people working to ‘better’ the lives of local populations living in conflict and poverty. These women may be skeptical of mainstream Western imagery of Africa – including the most recognizable and eerie pictures of emaciated, fly-ridden and barefoot black children – but these familiar narratives often continue to shape development workers’ perceptions and experiences of their time overseas, even as they resist them.

Most white Western women working in the field of international development feel a personal connection to their work. Each of the women in this study were involved in development and social justice work in their country of origin, often starting from a young age or as teenagers in high school, which often played a role in motivating them to

work in Africa. Some participants spoke of a religious (specifically Christian) background or ideology as informing their interest in development work and others connected their desire for such work to be a humanist approach to ‘making a difference.’ Miriam, a thirty-eight year old British journalist based out of Nairobi for the past ten years, speaks of her personal connection to humanitarian causes:

I remember when I was at university seeing some films by a...documentary maker [who] was doing [a film] about East Timor and its struggle for independence and a lot of human rights abuses. I think I’ve just always been touched by things in the news which I think are unfair and in the clichéd way, wanting to make a difference and improve things, but also to understand the world and the way it works.

Miriam desires to have a positive impact on those in need and to understand the world around her, illustrating her understanding of her sense of self and purpose as a white person in the global sphere.

Leslie, a twenty-nine year old American working with Kenyan-initiated humanitarian work in Somalia, pinpoints her interest in development to a sense of global awareness that was instilled in her from a young age:

That sort of desire ... to help people or to be involved in something that you felt ... was righting a wrong or addressing some need... and then the international focus somehow joined that as well, I think even in high school because I remember a conversation with a friend from Denmark who came for a year in my high school and we decided how our dream was to have a job somewhere in the realm of Sociology and to be able to travel the world and to help people. And that’s all we had figured out but we thought that was a great idea [laughs]. ... [When you work in development] you feel like you’re giving back but you’re able to still live ... when you have that desire to travel and to be in new places all the time ... my parents instilled that in me and when I graduated high school the first thing I did was backpacked around Europe.

The intersection of personal aspirations and the common cause of social justice frame Leslie’s entry into the world of development. The individual ambition to be a leader in international change – to spearhead global transformation and to build a career out of

these actions – reiterates development as a practice emerging from the West and the minds of Westerners. Leslie also recalls a shared sense of purpose with a Danish exchange student, demonstrating feelings of affinity between white Westerners. This group desires to experience new places and cultures and also to enact change for those in need. They see the world outside of the West as a homogenized place in need of intervention.

Caroline is a thirty-three year old from Denmark who works in Dar es Salaam at a regional training centre for East African activists. She locates her identity as a development worker as stemming from her privileged background, as someone who has the desire and ability to enact change so that others may be afforded the same opportunities:

First of all I think it's because I grew up in a very rich country and I had everything in my childhood and I thought, "I guess it will be like that forever." And I've always had this thought that I want to give other people the same possibilities which I had, so it has always been important for me to, to help other people in their, in their daily lives. And I don't know why, I've been travelling a lot all over the world and I've seen so many things and I meet so many people and cultures and I think that, I feel that people are happier in the poorer countries. I feel very comfortable in these countries and I really like to work with people in developing countries.

Caroline seeks to use her structural economic privilege to improve the lives of those in poorer countries. She, along with other women in this study who expressed the same sentiment, also believes that those living in poorer countries are happier than those in wealthier regions, despite economic disadvantages. In romanticizing the lifestyle of those in poverty, participants are able to resituate themselves as someone who is able to learn *from* development beneficiaries, rather than only bringing knowledge *to* these communities. In doing so, the noble values of inherently moral white subjects is

reaffirmed through a belief of being ‘humbled’ through experiences with racialized ‘Others.’

Ultimately, the combination of altruistic values and the perks of travelling, living overseas and building a career challenge the often romanticized ‘burden’ or ‘moral calling’ of development work, while maintaining the illusion (or perhaps the hope) of Westerners’ morality and noble intentions. White women’s privileged identities ‘at home’ – being middle-class, well-educated, and able to procure financial resources to travel and live – reinforces both their desire to do development work and provides them with the ability and agency to actually be development workers. I argue that development work is a way to assuage, but also buttress, feelings of guilt associated with privilege, and is a way in which white Western women can reaffirm their participation in Africa as moral do-gooders. In taking on this ‘burden,’ white Western women who work in development take on a leadership role and challenge the male dominance of the sphere, which can be experienced as emancipatory for individual women.

The Production of ‘Africa’ and ‘the West’

International development is shaped by racialized dichotomies that co-construct the value-laden locations of Africa and the West and the paternalistic relationship between their citizens. The practice of development is “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, Wa’Njogu argues that “most Westerners have never visited and may never visit Africa, yet they hold an image of Africa in their minds” (2009, p. 76). It is these “imaginative geographies,” as Derek Gregory (2004) terms them, which construct inverse

understandings of racialized spaces (p. 4). In fabricating understandings of Africa and the West, the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is reproduced. Loftsdóttir (2009) refers to this as a “racialized devlopscape,” a landscape that is often determined or imagined long before development workers arrive in a country (p. 7).

These imagined landscapes reconstruct the presumed superiority of the West and place it in opposition to the fantasy of Africa, imagined through a homogenized white racial identity living in the West, also coded as white:

This globalized world view is shaped by spatial representations that have remained intact over time; namely, that 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. (Heron, 2007, p. 34)

This description represents the racially coded social and geographic landscapes that underpin the ideology and practice of international development. Similarly, Apollo Amoko (2001) asks: “Why do the highly differentiated national histories that constitute ‘Africa’ continue to emerge as objects of Western knowledge formations overlaid by images of failure, ‘fallen-ness’ and backwardness?” (p. 311). The relational identity of the West as superior to Africa reinforces the status-quo ideology of development work and the way in which development workers relate to the local communities they interact with. Even though development may be a requirement for improving the economic lives of African citizens, how it is understood and defined needs to be interrogated in order to meet the needs of a diverse continent.

The women in this study were very conscious of the racialized power dynamics within their work. Yet, each of the female participants found it to be a difficult task to be

fully reflexive, particularly because their views of Africa as a site of danger and uncertainty was firmly embedded in their minds. For example, before Alice, a twenty-two year old Canadian exchange student interning at the University of Dar es Salaam, had lived in Africa, she was tremendously 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.’” Despite this initial dread, these feelings faded over time with increased exposure to Africans in Canada, and then in finally travelling to the continent, first Ghana and then to Tanzania.

Similarly, Alexandra a twenty-one year old Canadian student volunteering with a small local women’s rights organization in Dar-es-Salaam, had a very particular understanding of Africa before she arrived. As she attempts to articulate her particular interest to work in an African country, she shares her reaction at being posted to Tanzania instead of her first choice, Kenya:

I found out ... “Oh it’s not in Kenya, it’s in Tanzania,” and I was like, “Okay, still Africa, I’m good.” ... I’ve always wanted to go to Africa, this seemed like a good idea, 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, is mind-blowing to me is all the wars on the continent. It’s just the extreme ... it’s just like everything that could be ... ‘fixed’ to put it loosely, all in one continent. ... so it’s just ... constant internal dialogue ... you want to fix it, it’s necessarily, [but] you’re not necessarily the right ... person, specifically, or the West as a whole, but it’s just ... “You’re going to Africa,” I don’t know, there’s something about it that seems, and not many people do it.

This quotation illustrates Alexandra’s personal struggle to negotiate her position as a white Western development worker. Although development workers may have a more complex view of (East) Africa and their purpose in the region, they struggle to reconcile with and detach themselves from more popularized negative views of poverty, conflict,

and desperation. Indeed, as Paulette Goudge (2003) argues, “relationships and events which may appear to be purely personal, even idiosyncratic...can be shown to actually form part of a pattern” constructed through “historical factors of domination and by current day geopolitics” (p. 20). Thus, while Alexandra negotiates her motives and subject position as a white woman in development, she struggles to understand herself as a private, apoliticized individual in a fundamentally politicized situation. Research participants often consciously resisted hegemonic narratives of development, but the undertones of their personal narratives of intent and purpose continued to be fixed within and constituted by that which they resist.

The hegemonic Western-based portrayal of Africa and its position vis-à-vis the West has taken its own shape in East Africa. Paralleling Wa’Njogu’s (2009) point about Westerners’ imaginings of Africa, most East Africans will never visit a Western country, and yet they hold a very specific image of the West. Interview 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, where one can pick money off the trees like fresh mangos. Several of the men in this study stated that many people in East Africa believe that, if they can only get to a Western country, then they will be able to take advantage of the wealth it has to offer. Mark, a twenty-eight year old student from Nairobi, is critical of Western constructions of superiority and how these are ‘packaged’ and disseminated to Kenyans:

The way the West packages itself as, “We are the richest, we are the coolest, we’re the most innovative, you know we make the best things, we are we are the best at relationships.” 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. ... So I think it's the whole packaging of North America and Western Europe as, "We are the rich nations, the first world." Those tags ... first world, second world, third world, so when Africans think of first world, they think of people sitting on clouds sipping all sorts of juices, having a good life, if you want something you can just go [get it].

This characterization of the West as both an imagined and real space of prosperity demonstrates the production of popularized knowledge in East Africa as it emanates from Western countries and Westerners, crossing national and cultural borders. Consequently, the ideological discourses of international development and the West are key to shaping the experiences of development workers and their interactions with local populations when they are living and working overseas. Ultimately, international development relies on dominant Western narratives of Africa as 'underdeveloped,' 'dependent,' 'conflict ridden,' 'drought plagued,' 'poor' and 'needy,' serving to reaffirm its existence and purpose. These homogenized understandings of racialized geopolitical spaces are crucial in constructing and maintaining the moral and racial subjectivity of white Western women in development work.

Research participants are privy to a considerable amount of gossip and other types of informal knowledge. Because this popularized knowledge both confirms and challenges their knowledge through first-hand experience, participants often struggle to situate themselves and their own beliefs within these problematic discourses. Indeed, despite their knowledge of colonial history and the problematics of development, participants were constrained in their ability to influence or resist dominant cultural discourses. Loftsdóttir's (2009) 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 phenomena taking shape around

them (p. 7). The experiences of white women in development and of black East African men, then, are not *only* the story of individuals; rather, they are one part, and a reflection of, much larger historical and social phenomena embedded in complex cultural accumulations.

Skin, Race, and Hypervisibility

This section considers the visibility of racial difference in the region, particularly through the appearance of black and white skin. For many white Western development workers, travelling to a country in the global south may be the first time that they feel exposed and visible as a white person, where their skin colour is an issue. Arriving in East Africa and disembarking from the plane may be the first time that they are forced to recognize their social location and privilege. As Frankenberg (1997) suggests, “it is only in those times and places where white supremacy has achieved hegemony that whiteness attains (usually unstable) unmarkedness” (p. 5). For example, in Canadian cities, despite increased immigration and a diversity of ethnicities, whiteness remains the expected and accepted norm. In Kenya and Tanzania, however, whiteness is not the dominant skin colour, therefore, whiteness is more easily ‘seen,’ and a white presence is magnified. White becomes ‘Other,’ in a sense, as it exemplifies difference. This is an inversion of the ‘Otherness’ of racialized people, which white Westerners have become accustomed to ‘at home.’

Skin as Visible Marker of Racial Difference

The hypervisibility experienced by white women in East Africa moves beyond merely skin tone. It is due largely to the perceptions of and value attached to their whiteness. White skin is easily identifiable as a mark of privilege among a majority of

black Africans. In this context there is a heightened sense of being able to ‘see’ and understand racial difference through skin, a primary visual marker of the body and of racial groupings (Bashkow, 2006, p. 9 and p. 21; Fox, 2012, Origins of Whiteness section, para. 7). The issue of skin as it connects to race, standards of beauty, and desirability is receiving increased attention. Scholars argue that the appearance and embodiment of skin is a powerful site of social identity as is made external (Glenn, 2008; Mire, 2001; Tate, 2007). Understandings of race and racial difference, then, are not abstract concepts, but are actually seen, felt, and embodied through the skin. The visible character of skin and its colour operates to reinforce the image of whiteness as fundamentally foreign and privileged within a context where ‘blackness’ is in the majority.

Despite many positive associations with whiteness and white skin, several participants told stories of unflattering local portrayals of whites. For example, though white skin was often considered to be exotic and attractive, other local populations were disturbed by the redness of sunburned faces and felt that white Western women always looked unkempt and did not put enough effort into their appearance. These understandings typically exist as local jokes or commentary of the skin and bodies of foreigners. However, they do not neutralize the enduring structural socioeconomic privilege of whites, even if their visibility provides a small instance of resistance to the symbolic power of white skin.

The Politics of ‘Looking’ and Hypervisibility

In the West many whites consider themselves and their skin colour (or perhaps the point here is that they do *not* consider their skin colour at all) to be ‘normal’ and

therefore invisible or neutral (Ferber, 2007b; Frankenberg, 1993). Yet, when white Western women are in East Africa they are unable to disappear into the norm.

Accordingly, they experience a process of racialization wherein being 'seen' becomes an unusual, and often an uncomfortable part of everyday life. The intensified attention paid to whites, including the often cried, "*Mzungu! Mzungu!*" marks their visibility and otherness. Miriam (Britain), despite having lived in Nairobi for a number of years, still notices how her (in)visibility shifts depending on whether she is in Kenya or in England:

...noticing you're white, you're visible. And I love it when I go back to London and I'm invisible. And there was a time, quite a while ago, there was this kind of mad man who used to follow me around and in town and like whenever he'd come and start talking to me I'd just have to go run into a shop. But he'd always be like, "I know you, you work in [office location], you've been here." And you have that sense of a lot of people do know who I am, know my movements because I stand out and that's not a nice feeling.

In situations like that which Miriam describes, white Western women are not only recognized by local East Africans as white, but they are also forced to understand *themselves* as the visible 'Other.'

This is not only a question of being a minority as a white person; the politics of who is 'looking' and the positioning of 'the gaze' are implicated in this inverted (for Westerners) racialized context. E. Ann Kaplan (1997) explains that "travel implicitly involves looking at, and looking relations with, peoples different from oneself" (p. 5). White women in East Africa are very much implicated in the experience of looking *at* others, people different from themselves, and particularly significant for this project, also in the process of being looked *at*. Kaplan 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?" (1997, p. 4). Though the

hypervisibility and increased attention, sexual and otherwise, can be amusing or flattering at first, most white women quickly become frustrated with the constant scrutiny.

Rebecca, a twenty-five 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 and so even though it wasn't actually negative ... when I first arrived, I did feel like it was negative, I didn't like being pointed out for that. It annoyed me because I felt people were kind of harassing me while I had come here to be helpful and so I was just very conflicted...

Rebecca laments her very visible status as an outsider, the privilege of being white shifting to feelings of discomfort. Anna, a thirty-two year old German woman working with civil society organizations in Nairobi, echoes this sentiment:

... I remember when I came here I was thinking there are a lot more white people here [laughs]. And what I hate sometimes it's just, I think it's colour, I often feel like I'm shining. Among all these blacks I can't just disappear in the crowd, that's what I think is the worst sometimes. ... wherever you go ... [you're the] one which sticks out of the crowd. Everybody sees you. And that's what I don't like at all, so sometimes I would just like to disguise myself and just be one of many.

Finally, Leslie (United States) speaks about negotiating her foreign-ness and white identity:

I think there are moments when you feel like an outsider or you feel this sense of annoy ... there's a feeling that's quite annoying where you wish that you could get out of it where ... you have so much more privilege and you're in this other place that you can't really relate [to] at a level with everyone, or you can't be Kenyan and you want so badly to be. But ... they'll always make fun of you when you speak Swahili, it'll never sound right, or maybe that's just me [laughs].

Each of these women describe a loss of a sense of self, and perhaps a discomfort with how their white selves have been reinscribed in East Africa through their inability to fit in, to be the norm, or 'become' Kenyan or Tanzanian. Heron (2007) contends that "the

feeling of standing out and constantly being noticed” intensifies the experience of being perceived as part of an essentially different racial and classed community (p. 62). Often experienced as a source of embarrassment, or even feelings of being discriminated against, the constant and hypervisible outsider is frequently a consequence of a *perceived* reduction in authority and disempowerment.

Inverting the dominant ‘white gaze’ and replacing it with the ‘black gaze,’ Fox (2012) argues that the intense way in which black people look upon whites can be understood as a confrontation with and resistance of white power, and as an act of power over others (Origins of Whiteness section, para. 5). For these women, being looked at by men, both black and white, can represent an objectification and sexualization of their bodies and the assertion of a “dominating male gaze” (Kaplan, p. 4). Fanon’s infamous telling of being easily identified as racialized by a small child who exclaimed to her mother, “Look, a Negro!” connects with the feeling of hypervisible difference felt by research participants (p. 89). In the moment of being recognized as an emblem of difference easily ‘seen’ based on external features and outer appearance, the women in this study are recognizing themselves, as if for the first time, as the racial and privileged ‘Other.’ Indeed, white Western women are understood to be desirable because their foreign character is associated with wealth and privilege, articulated through their visible whiteness. In this context, then, the attention paid to white Western women actually confirms their power, rather than acting as a force of marginalization.

Invisibility, the ability to go unnoticed and to be perceived as normal, is typically understood as an advantage; thus, correspondingly, hypervisibility, would be a disadvantage. However, in this case, hypervisibility actually reflects and reinforces the

privilege of white people and their whiteness. In East Africa, skin colour is highly contrasted and different ‘races’ – for example, African or European, most commonly associated with ‘black’ and ‘white’ skin tone – are often (at least perceived to be) easily distinguishable from each other. As a result, race is often constructed through the visual marker of skin colour. The understandings of and values attached to race and racial difference becomes what individuals are able to *see*.

Locating ‘Others’ with Access: Wealth and Mobility

This section examines how white Western women in development work are recognized and racialized as ‘Others’ with access and heightened status. In doing so I aim to understand how this process of differentiation maintains the privilege and imagined superiority of whiteness stemming from the colonial era. I follow Bashkow’s (2006) efforts to explore how the conventional Western-imposed ‘they’ (non-white, non-Westerners) view ‘us’ (white, Westerners). The racial(ized) difference of white Western women is represented through their white skin and differential access to material wealth and mobility, both of which provide opportunities to take charge of and improve their lives. Because of this access, these women are perceived to be essentially foreign and different from local African populations. This “conventionalization of racial differences” represents and reinforces the legacy of colonialism, the contemporary place of development in the region, and the West’s cultural influence on the rest of the world (Bashkow, 2006, p. 53). These ideas can and do come from direct face-to-face interactions, but, crucially, they also come from within the region and the people themselves, “a colonial legacy that the people themselves have internalized as a part of their culture in the course of their history” (Bashkow, 2006, p. 62). Even for those

individuals, including some research participants who do not necessarily subscribe to the cultural phenomenon of idealizing whiteness and the West, the transnational culture of white domination is embedded within the fabric of East African society.

Popular Culture and Popularizations of Love

Ideas about racial difference emerge from a variety of sources, including images from popular culture, memories from childhood, and popularized stereotypes that, though true to a certain extent, construct perceptions of a homogenized white Western lifestyle. The media and popular culture are significant sources for global identity construction, particularly because they add to the visual character of identifying and valuing racial difference. East Africans produce their own advertising, music videos, and radio and television shows but, as Joseph (2008) contends, these local cultural productions are competing with the promises made by the European and American mass media (p. 131). American and Mexican soap operas (avidly watched by East Africans of all ages, including those who do not speak English and cannot understand the voice-overs or read the subtitles) and Hollywood romances and romantic comedies offer romanticized ideas of love and lust as experienced in another world (Joseph, 2008, p. 137; Spronk, 2012, p. 230). These television shows and movies are usually filled with ‘beautiful’ and wealthy white (or white-looking) women and men and are viewed as a lifestyle, however dramatic, to which one aspires. Some of my East African research participants, for example, said that the first time they saw a white person was on TV. It was action heroes like James Bond and Sylvester Stallone that they noted were idolized by young African boys. Young girls tried to emulate the beauty styles of white Western models on magazine covers, often imported from Western countries and filled with advertisements

for whiter skin and Western standards of beauty. Thus, in a world of post-colonial mass media and digital communications, the Western media continues to have a hold on the value system of East Africans.

Childhood and First Encounters

One of the most common images of Africa in the West – used by the media, in promotional photographs for charitable donations, jobs, activities, and events, and inevitably part of most development workers personal photographic (re)collections – is that of a single white person surrounded by dozens of smiling black children. Often an integral moment in the writing of Western ethnographers in Africa and experienced by many whites travelling to the continent, is the feeling of being treated like a celebrity. Sometimes they note that they are the first white person to interact with a community, and consequently everyone wanted to see and touch them (Fox, 2012, Introduction section, para. 2). Most of the African participants had memories of first interactions in childhood with white people that shaped enduring racial associations. Tom, a twenty-one year old student in Nairobi, remembers children in his rural home area believing that white people were “aliens with goodies,” dropped off in their village to give out gifts. The ‘difference’ of white women is fascinating to many children, including Mark (Kenya), who remembers being fascinated with the bare white legs of his French teacher, a young white woman who taught in his primary school. While many of these understandings changed through the teenage and adult years, especially with increased exposure to and interaction with whites on professional and personal levels, the memories of these experiences were fresh in participants’ minds.

The West, Wealth, and Development

In an East African context, the racialization of white Western women reflects and reinforces the idealized (and real) wealth and privilege associated with white skin. As minority groups in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, white people are understood to be powerful on the presumption that they have access not available to black East Africans. Indeed, the perception of whites as “the personification of wealth, prosperity and an endless solution to local lack” is both constituted and exacerbated by the tendency of whites in East Africa to enjoy a comparatively upper-class and privileged existence (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 114). This conflation of white Westerners with the identity of the economic saviours of black East Africans is reiterated by most research participants, including Leslie (United States):

It feels like there's an assumption that if you're white, that you have money, you're from someplace that's rich and you're here and you've got ... you'll be more likely to have money, either that or to give money or I think maybe there's the assumption that you're more likely to feel guilty and give to people, or that you are obligated in some way...

Kim, a Canadian in her fifties who specializes in special needs education and is currently head of an international pre-school in Dar es Salaam, states that local populations place white Westerners on a “pedestal.” She states further: “One, they all think we're rich and have a lot of money. Two, they all think that we think we're better than they are. And three, they all perceive that we live the same as what they see on TV.” Kim's commentary identifies the wealth, prosperity, and presumed superiority of white people as the three key identifiers that construct whites as essentially ‘different’ to black East Africans.

Matthew, a twenty-six year old graduate student in Dar es Salaam, echoes this sentiment: “If you go to the very grassroot level, majority of people still think that whites are the hope for Africans. When they see you, even in a village or, people might think that uh they are going to have money, they are going to be assisted. There, there is still that kind of thinking to the very local people.” He goes on to state 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 all white people, including white women, are viewed as “cash cows” and the “great white hope” for Africa. Whiteness as a category associated with “endless wealth and affluence” is a common subtext in sub-Saharan Africa (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 7; Heron, 2007, p. 78). 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 and Bah, 2010, p. 114). This is well articulated by Michael, a twenty-eight year old who started his own tourism company in Nairobi, who says that white people are perceived to be “a walking ATM machine.”

The power and privilege of white Westerners is both imagined and ‘real.’ They are imagined because most white women development workers live modestly by Western standards, particularly student and unpaid volunteers. However, they are also real because, by East African standards, whites *are* wealthy, and they engage in a lifestyle that is luxurious by local standards. 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 options, travelling on holidays, and having extra

spending money – are readily available to most white Westerners in Kenya and Tanzania.

For instance, Tom (Kenya) describes his amazement at the shopping habits of white people in the Westernized grocery stores in the wealthier parts of Nairobi:

They're quite free people in shopping, you know you can easily notice that shopping, they move here and there [snaps fingers], they call upon those people, "What's this about?" If they get African food in the, in the shops, they'll always be asking, "What's this about? What does it really do?" Then they do big shopping, big as in heavy shopping. You know they use the biggest trolleys around and that's something distinct about them. For Africans you get the small basket, for them they have these big shopping things.

This assessment of white people's tendency to 'shop big' and to show interest in local products positions whites vis-à-vis the local population, as having money to burn on a variety of material goods. Leslie (United States) confirms this point, arguing that because whites tend to shop and eat at Westernized stores and restaurants, which are inevitably out of the price range of many local citizens, many assume that white people actually *want* to pay more money to affirm their position of privilege and affluence. These consumer practices, while normal in Western countries, are status symbols in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam for East Africans and thereby come to represent the idealized white lifestyle.

Whiteness, understood through a consumerist-driven lifestyle, represents a status and sense of financial freedom to which local populations aspire through a coupling of wealth and modernity (Bashkow, 2006, p. 9). This desire to be on the same 'level' as white Westerners creates fundamental barriers between development workers and local black East Africans. Miriam (Britain) comments on the normalized separation between whites and blacks in Nairobi:

...when I first came I was struck by the fact that a lot of people were calling 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 sometimes. ... 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.

Goudge (2003) refers to this experience of privilege as a “badge of whiteness,” which acts as a hypervisible sign of authority and superiority (p. 12). However, white Western women in development work do not always feel the operation of privilege and power in their everyday lives. For example, Miriam questioned whether or not, as a woman and an outsider, she really did hold any tangible power. Nonetheless, being white is an unspoken statement of power and a site from which to enact privilege in East Africa. Anna (Germany) also questioned the tendency to associate white people with wealth and power as she contemplated her positionality:

So I think, “Why do they think I have money?” and a woman who might have so [much] more money than me [who] is Kenyan, who just gets [charged] a normal price. So 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. In doing so, however, Anna comes to the conclusion that the lifestyle of white development workers maintains both the appearance and reality of structures of economic dominance, even as she finds it difficult to confront how she is implicated in these systems. Development workers, with their ‘big’ shopping habits, the ability to frequent Westernized stores and restaurants, and comfortable living conditions, “have a radically different lifestyle from the majority” in East Africa (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 6). Indeed, even those black East Africans who are wealthy and live in large, modern houses or

apartments are often referred to be ‘living like a *mzungu*,’ which suggests that being affluent is an essentially white characteristic.

In addition to being independently wealthy, individual white development workers are assumed to have direct connections to sources of funding for projects and communities, especially big funders based in the West. In addition to being asked to sponsor individual children’s school fees or the specific entrepreneurial endeavours of local families they become close to, development workers may also be asked to launch a development organization in a specific local area. Mark (Kenyan) contends that this is particularly true in rural areas and, as soon as a white person visits a village or becomes friendly with a member of the community, people will start asking for projects to build water tanks or to improve housing. Diana, a twenty-five year old musician from Austria studying Social Work, works with local street youth in Dar es Salaam on advocacy projects through music and visual media. She says that the local individuals believe that, if they make a white friend, then they will be cared and provided for. She explains:

Many people here, friends of mine here, they say, “I never had a friend like you.” And for me, I am treating them as my friends and my friends I treat them good, I am supporting them, I am helping them when they’re in a difficult situation, I am there for them if they have any problems they can come ... but they’re not used to it. So I ask myself, “Why are they not used to it?” Even they have a lot of friends, a lot of people, but still when they are in a difficult situation and there’s nobody.

Therefore, to work with development workers or to make a white friend increases the possibility of being supported financially, whether out of feelings of goodwill or obligation. Diana’s desire and ability to help her friends, whether financially or emotionally, is understood by local populations as a ‘special’ quality, seemingly only practiced by whites. Rebecca (Canada), even though she was very low in the

development workers' hierarchy in terms of experience and seniority, was still treated by her local coworkers as if she could solve financial problems. She recalls:

They [black East African coworkers] would know that I didn't have any power within the organization, but they were just still asking me for investments, or to like 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.

This tendency to regard white Westerners as the answer to financial difficulties experienced by local East Africans conflates the (perceived) wealth of individual development workers with the monetary power of the development industry (Loftsdóttir, 2009, p. 7). This understanding inflates the expectations and power of development workers, shifting the monetary funds of the development industry as a whole into the pockets of individual workers. White Western development workers become a desirable community with which to associate, further heightening the importance of black East African men pursuing intimate relationships with this group of women.

Of course not all attitudes towards the wealth held by whites are necessarily positive feelings of admiration. Being wealthy can represent unclear and contradictory connotations. The prosperity of whites can be attributed positively through hard work and determination, or negatively through understandings of devious and immoral behaviour, especially when whites seem to accumulate their wealth in ways not related to manual labour (Bashkow, 2006, p. 21; Fox, 2012, Origins of Whiteness section, para. 3). Indeed, many research participants characterized white Western women in particular as 'soft' and unable to be challenged physically. Furthermore, some black East Africans have begun appropriating the concept of *mzungu* to symbolically denote local people who are doing well financially. Paul, a thirty-one year old artist working in visual media who now lived

between Austria and Dar es Salaam, suggests that naming a black Tanzanian '*mzungu*' equates that individual with success, power, and money. He explains:

You can say that [*mzungu*] of a Tanzanian, too, sometimes, "Hey *mzungu*, *vipi zungu*? [What's up? How's it going?]" But it's like ... you have earned something ... you have money. You have made a step, like success ... you have the money, but then you have your friends ... it's like you can help somebody out, you can reach out...

Paul's comments suggest that success and monetary wealth, and even the expectation of offering financial assistance to friends and family, are symbolically associated with whiteness and white people. This statement further suggests that there is a cultural expectation that those with power and privilege can transfer these to those in need. Accordingly, there is both a rhetorical and real reproduction of power structures inherent in the structures of development work. Paul states further that it is quite common in Dar es Salaam for local individuals to say to each other, "You're so *mzungu*!" as a way to comment upon their achievements, or perhaps making fun of someone for trying to emulate whiteness or act superior to other local people. Ultimately, however, even these unflattering portrayals, or the appropriation of the term *mzungu* do not substantively challenge the realities of white economic dominance. Even though it is a black Tanzanian individual who holds the wealth and embodies prestige, their status continues to be symbolically associated with whiteness as it intersects with wealth.

Mobility

One of the most common understandings of white Westerners is that they are constantly moving across national borders because they are unencumbered by monetary limits and can easily gain entry to any country in the world. In responding to those whites who argue that they are not actually wealthy, Abdallah, a twenty-six 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, which is made possible through monetary wealth (2006, p. 73). This is reiterated in development worker's presumed (and real) ability to come and go at will, another indication of how whiteness acts as a convenient badge (Goudge, 2003, p. 11). Rebecca (Canada) is very aware of her privilege in being able to decide to travel to and work in Kenya. She explains how the linking of wealth and mobility to development work puts her in a privileged position:

I do understand it now ... especially working with low-income groups. 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!" So ... I understand that part, but also ... 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 wealth and travel.

Furthermore, this ability, as Rebecca puts it, to "drop" herself into any international situation she pleases, can be related back to Tom's (Kenya) childhood remembrance of white people as aliens. This term denotes an identity of foreigners coming from another world who enter and leave a community with seemingly little knowledge of or thought about the situations in which they place themselves. 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. The privileged economic access of white Westerners makes extraneous travel possible, much different from the experiences of many in East Africa who may move with the mediated purpose of those with little means.

Despite the potentially insulting connotation of popular understandings of *mzungu*, the fact that an individual has travelled from the Western world to East Africa boosts a white person’s status in a similar way to that of an African who visits, studies or lives in a Western country raises their status ‘back home.’ 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) 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” (p. 409). Castles (2003) asserts that mobility has “become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor” globally, and has become visually demarcated through racial difference (p. 16). Michael (Kenya) is frustrated at the association between white Westerners and travel for pleasure:

There was always this superiority level in terms of everything ... in Africa when somebody [said] in the past, “I’m going to Europe,” it was such a big thing, even in the village everybody would be like, “Oh my God you’re actually going to enter a plane?” ... Europe and America and Canada, and everywhere ... you had to go on a plane, and these planes are made by the Canadians, by the British, by everybody that’s white. That’s why there’s always this superiority. Coming back to the industry I’m in, we have a problem ... if you ask a Kenyan, “Do you know where Nanyuki [is]” [a tourist destination in Kenya] ... people do not know, but a

mzungu...knows because they are the ones who travel. ... most people think, even in Kenya today, that [safari] tours are for white people. That shows you again there is still that [understanding of] superior/inferior.

The ability to travel and explore different parts of the region, along with the assumption that this is simply what whites *do* and the affluence that makes travel possible, is interpreted as a marker of white superiority. Consequently, even as mobility is coded as white, racialized power differentials are enacted and reenacted simultaneously. Even students who volunteer overseas and are not considered wealthy by Western standards still signify power. From an East African perspective, the very fact that a person has travelled so far means that they do hold wealth, they do hold power, and they are emboldened with decisions and opportunities of which many in the region could only dream.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the popularized and homogenized understandings of racial difference that position white people and their whiteness as essentially different and superior to local populations in East Africa. The imagined space of Africa is positioned alongside the mythical construct of the affluence of the West, symbolized through the hypervisible bodies of white women development workers. White Western women working in international development are understood by local populations to be racialized 'Others' with access through their perceived and real wealth and mobile lifestyle. Such commonplace homogenized representations of whiteness in East Africa promote the assumption that all white people are wealthy and mobile, easily moving across national and cultural borders. The diverse experiences of whiteness are obscured in favour of an image of a single, unified and desirable white identity. The following chapter explores

the complex realities and struggles within experiences of intimate relationships between white Western women in the field of development and black East African men from a variety of backgrounds.

Chapter 4

The Intimate ‘Other’ as (Un)Desirable: Sexualized Interactions, Enhanced Status, and Masculinity Under Threat

Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the ways in which white Western women are hypervisible and their identities are conflated with wealth and mobility in an East African context. These popularized conceptions, I argue, homogenize all white Westerners into a unified group of racialized ‘Others’ that symbolizes the highest echelon of status within a globalized racial and socioeconomic hierarchy. This chapter explores casual sexualized interactions as well as intimate relationships between white Western women in development work and black East African men. Much of the scholarly literature about transnational interracial relationships emphasizes sex tourism and more overt forms of exchange of money and other material goods for sex. While these relationships may not be explicitly constituted by economic and sexual exchange, they are still significantly shaped by perceptions and expectations of financial security and status.

Formal and informal exchanges of desires act as a starting point from which both local populations and foreigners understand all transnational interracial relationships. Black men’s desire for money, status, and the potential to travel to the West is exchanged for white Western women’s desire for black men’s bodies and sexual prowess. Research participants situated their own intentions and behaviours as fundamentally different from sex tourism and the ‘beach boy’ phenomenon on coastal regions of Africa (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010; Tami, 2008). It is within this broader context that I locate my research, emphasizing the ways in which transnational interracial intimacies are still constituted by

assumptions of racial difference and socioeconomic disparities, even if they are not part of the sex tourism industry.

Ultimately, within a social structure that normalizes heterosexual relationships and venerates whiteness, white Western women are constructed through narratives of desire as a point of access to wealth, status, and mobility for black East African men. When local men associate with whiteness, they can have both direct and indirect access to the '*mzungu* lifestyle' of wealth and privilege both locally and internationally. Desirability is based on both the *real* and *presumed* status of the white person and their *presumed* and *real* access to the West. I contend that the ways in which white Western women are commonly understood by local populations in East Africa constructs them as desirable 'Others' with access. This understanding reproduces a (neo)colonial paradigm that positions local men and foreign women within a gendered, racialized, sexualized, and socioeconomically classed hierarchy. Accordingly, whiteness is reinforced as a symbol of privilege and the means to a 'better life.'

Desire in East Africa: Beyond Sex Tourism

Sex Tourism

Sex tourism is a phenomenon conventionally associated with wealthy white men travelling to exoticized and eroticized locales, particularly in Asia and the Caribbean, to have sex with local women and girls, and sometimes men and boys (see, for example, Brennan, 2004; Kempadoo, 1999; Kibicho, 2005 and 2009; Thanh-Dame, 1990). Often understood as an extension of patriarchy and gendered power relations that emphasize white men's sexual pleasure, these activities are constituted by the fetishization of people of colour. The industry of 'female sex tourism' or 'romance tourism,' which has emerged

in a realm once limited to white men, has received increased attention from scholars (see, for example, Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001; Jacobs, 2009 and 2010; Tami, 2008). The identities of white Western women tourists travelling to other countries, especially in the Caribbean and African coastal countries, are constituted by these women's increasing mobility and sexual 'liberation' (Tami, 2008, p. 1-3). Some black East African men seek out intimate relationships with white Western women with the explicit intention of financial gain, heightened status, and the possible opportunities to travel to and/or reside in a Western country. 'Beach boys,' located in the coastal areas of both Kenyan and Tanzania, participate in what is sometimes referred to as "*mzungu* hunting" by local residents of Dar es Salaam (Tami, 2008, p. 4). In this practice local men target, or are targeted by, female tourists or short-term-stay development workers.

The coastal regions of Kenya and Tanzania have become increasingly popular destinations for sex tourism for both white Western men and women. As Asian countries attempt to regulate the industry of sex tourism within their national borders, academics have begun to turn their attention to countries in West and East Africa. It is these locales where the laws are still ambiguous and where the operations of commercial sex workers and informal exchanges of money for sex are increasingly active (Kibicho, 2005, p. 256; Kibicho, 2009, p. 41-42; Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 108). The coastal regions of East Africa exemplify "the hallmarks of the tourist experience" through the "Four S's – sun, sea, sand, and sex" (Berdychevsky et al., 2013, p. 144). The combination of picturesque beaches, conveniently located for those travelling from Europe and Australia, and the legal uncertainty and 'open secret' of sex tourism positions East Africa as a key site for the fulfillment of sexual pleasure for Westerners. Coastal regions are positioned as

locations where Westerners are able to enact narratives of desire based on ‘ethnosexual’ fantasies of local black populations (Nagel, 2010, p. 193).

Kibicho (2009) argues that tourism, and its counterpart sex tourism, is a key economic development strategy because of the influx of cash into local economies, particularly for owners of hotels, safari companies, and craft markets (p. 81). However, the majority of sex workers – indeed, the majority of people – in African countries are still living in poverty. It is the presumed and real wealth of white Westerners that pushes local Africans to seek out sexual liaisons with foreigners as a means of supporting themselves and their families. Some Africans who engage in these interracial relationships are commercial sex workers, while many other local people engage in such relationships and grasp the opportunities for personal gain as they arise. Others still enter into such relationships only when they are in serious financial struggles, seeing foreigners as a temporary fix for their financial woes.

Intimate relationships between white Western women and black African men within sex tourism are often understood in two ways: (1) as inherently exploitative and one-sided, with wealthy and sex hungry Westerners taking advantage of the poverty of local populations and their forced entry into the industry; or (2) as potentially exploitative and/or empowering on *both* sides, with both Westerner and local populations consciously choosing to enter these relationships for personal gain (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 108 and 118). Within the first understanding, local populations are assumed within a racialized and fetishized paradigm as “traditional object[s] of desire,” without agency and only with the need to survive by any means possible (Kibicho, 2009, p. 79). In the second case, however, both parties are assumed to receive a benefit from the relationship.

White Western female tourists who travel to the coastal regions of Africa without the specific intention of having sex with local men or participating in sex tourism may still engage in intimate relationships during their time overseas. Indeed, many women tourists may respond positively to increased attention from local men because it instills within them a heightened sense of self-esteem, differing from a Western context of demanding specific standards of beauty for white women (Herold, Garcia and DeMoya, 2001, p. 984-985). Sexual interest from attractive local men, especially for those women who may not feel heterosexually attractive in their country of origin makes entering into a sexual relationship while on vacation an attractive and exciting option. Many white Western women travelling – and working – abroad desire the freedom to have sexual experiences with individuals ‘different’ from those in their country of origin. When away from home and struggling with isolation, loneliness, and homesickness, foreigners may desire to ‘go native’ – to immerse oneself in local culture and people, often through intimate relationships – in order to feel a sense of community and belonging (Edmondson, 1999, p. 36). Furthermore, because these women are far away from their ‘home’ context, they can engage in relationships seemingly without consequence or without anyone from their daily life at home knowing or judging. However, many women likely would feel uncomfortable formally participating in sex tourism and rather conceive of their experience of exchanging money and gifts for sex and romance as an opportunity to temporarily assist a local friend in need. Although tourists may be aware that they are being approached because they are assumed to be easy and wealthy targets, the fantasy of sexual desire may be more appealing if it is under the pretense of ‘real’ feelings and reciprocity.

For white Western women, their sexual fantasies of black hypersexualized male bodies are fulfilled by the black African men who engage in the exchange; and for the African men who participate, they are compensated with money and/or gifts. Even for those relationships that involve (in)formal exchanges, a couple may develop more ‘genuine’ feelings and desire a more long-term commitment. Local men who chase female tourists often do so with “the hope of making a sexual connection, providing an addictive sexual experience, or simply falling in love” and following their partner to the West (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 115). In doing so, ‘beach boys’ anticipate being able to live an idealized white lifestyle of wealth and prosperity. The participants of this study understand their transnational interracial relationships to be external to the sex tourism industry. Despite this, participants continue to struggle to reconcile popularized stereotypes and binary understandings of racial and gender difference and their belief in and experience of a more ‘genuine’ love that does not involve explicit exchange. Ultimately, the popularized assumption, often ascribed to by both local and foreign populations in the region, that all transnational interracial relationships are shaped by an exchange of desires profoundly affects and shapes experiences of real casual interactions and intimate relationships between white Western women and black East African men.

Sexualized Interactions

Outside of the sex tourism industry, there has been little critical attention paid to the intimate relationships of development workers overseas. The intimate relationships of white female development workers abroad are almost invisible in the literature. Yet, white Western female development workers engage in relationships with local men in a variety of forms. The women in this study had experienced a mixture of casual and/or

short-term relationships, long-term relationships that had either ended or appeared to be moving towards a more serious commitment and/or marriage, and others were in the middle of divorces and had children with their spouse. Because of development workers' altruistic notions of their work overseas, they tend to be more cautious when deciding to engage in intimate relationships with local men. Citing their more long-term commitment to their work and the region, participants desired to be taken more seriously by local populations by not engaging in multiple casual relationships or being identified exclusively by their (presumed hetero)sexual desires.

Whereas female tourists may revel in the temporarily heightened sexual attention, development workers tend to loathe, especially after a few weeks or months in-country, the array of casual sexualized encounters with black East African men as they go about their daily lives. Given the prevalence of (sex) tourism in both Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, it is perhaps not surprising that white Western women living and working in these cities experience daily encounters with black East African men, often implicitly or overtly sexual in nature. For example, Caroline (Denmark) explains that, especially when she is walking alone in Dar es Salaam, she is regularly approached by black Tanzanian men who want to talk with her and get her phone number. Lauren, a twenty-four year old American about to begin a position with the United Nations in Nairobi, echoes this sentiment stating that, in Nairobi, "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." These interactions often shape the potential for and expectations within 'real' relationships between black East African men and white Western women.

Often under a pretense of wanting to be ‘friendly’ and welcoming to foreigners, or perhaps spurred by curiosity, or even with an explicit intention of initiating romance, black East African men are bold in approaching white women from abroad. The female research participants were well aware that local men pursued them through casual interactions in hopes of financial gain and increased status. However, rather than increasing the likelihood of building a romantic connection, for research participants such encounters tend to operate to mark local men as insincere, suspect, and difficult to trust. Alexandra (Canada), for example, describes the socioeconomic “wall” she feels between her and local men in Tanzania because “they’re constantly staring at me ... [and] they’re talking to me because they think I’m rich.” She goes on to say that she is constantly bombarded with comments that she is beautiful and men openly declaring their love and proposing marriage just a few minutes after meeting.

As I argued in the previous chapter, white women working in development experience a heightened sense of visibility and of being ‘seen’ by local populations. At first these women may enjoy the increased sexualized attention from local men (relative to what they may experience in their country of origin), but with time most come to find it embarrassing, annoying, and uncomfortable (Jordan and Aitchison, 2008, p. 334). Kim (Canada) loathes the constant catcalling of “Hey baby, I love you!” as she runs errands around the city. Similarly, Alice (Canada) expresses her frustration at the constant attention she receives from local men as she spends time on and around the University of Dar es Salaam campus:

Any time I’m walking and a guy sees me on campus and I’m like “*Mambo?* [How are you?]” because I’m trying to be nice and greet people. ... [They] greet you, have a conversation ... normally this is ... what everybody does and then they’re like, “Okay, well [I’d like] your contact information.” “Oh I very much want to be

your 'bestie.'” “Oh do you have a boyfriend?” “Where do you live?” You know? And it's just like the style that men have here ... they hope to get something out of it ... Sometimes I'm just like, “No, I'm sorry.” I have a hard time being kind of rude like that.

In her attempts to be friendly in accordance with local custom, and not to appear as an ill-mannered foreigner, Alice struggles to be respectful in casual conversations that too often and too quickly turn sexual.

Caroline (Denmark) echoed this sentiment, stating that her own gestures of friendship upon being approached by local men often turn romantic. Her expectation of platonic interactions was quickly dispelled upon arriving in Dar es Salaam:

I guess I'm a little bit tired of ... all these young African men who constantly come and say hello and I talk with them for a few minutes and they want more ... They want you to be their girlfriend and then if you give them your number, you will get a lot of messages, “I miss you” and “I love you” and it's just too much ... When I came here I thought it would be easier to make friendships here but it's actually, it's not that easy, it's, it's very difficult ... the guys you never know what their intentions are.

Local men's insistence that Caroline give them her phone number opened up the possibility of continued communication beyond their initial encounter. Despite and perhaps because of the declarations of love and affection that Caroline receives regularly from men, she is unable to trust the motives or intentions of the black East African men in her life. The women in this study commonly struggled with such experiences and feelings, as they too felt the constant target of uninvited male attention when outside of their homes. Their wish to shed their foreign-ness, to blend in, and to have 'genuine' relationships with local populations, unencumbered by expectations of their whiteness is supported in the literature (Jordan and Aitchison, 2008, p. 338). Ultimately, the persistent local male 'gaze' confirms the hypervisibility of whiteness and reinforces the essential 'difference' of white Western women.

Rebecca (Canada) has similar concerns about her attempts to build platonic friendships with local men, or even to simply have a conversation with a waiter or a *matatu* [bus] driver that is not constituted by sexual innuendo or romantic inferences:

I find for the most part I feel like they [local men] are hitting on me. ... We [white women] try to, when we meet Kenyan guys, we try to just create a friendship ... it's hard to really create, I still feel like they're all a little bit interested in something else ... I've heard from Kenyans that guys and girls who are Kenyan aren't actually friends. If they're hanging out, it's a guy and a girl, they're together ... the Canadian conception of that is quite different, like a lot of girls just have guy friends to hang out with.

In time, Rebecca had come to the conclusion that it was simply 'easier' to join in on the flirty and sexual banter, rather than being rude and leaving a conversation, since most of her daily interactions were inevitably shaped by sexual overtones.

... that always kind of shapes the conversation because you're talking, you're just having fun and all of a sudden you just feel like you're kind of pushing them away a bit and trying to not, you're aware of what you're saying and trying not to kind of allude to anything sexual or just be very neutral, very friendly about it...

Paul (Tanzania), who seemed to be well known among his male friends for his sexual interactions with white Western women, explained that many black East African men are "foreign friendly" and find white women easy to approach:

It's more easier actually to start a conversation with a white woman [than] a Tanzanian lady, you know? Because in my opinion [laughs] ... you always have something to say, you can say, "Hey where you from?" You know, it's already a starting point or ... "Is it not too hot?" ... People they just want to know where the other people are from or where they're going, if they speak Kiswahili, if they have learned something so these are the type of questions they start ... "Where are you from, what are you doing? Is it not too hot for you?" [laughs] "Yes it is too hot..." "Then would you like to get a soda?" [laughs].

Clearly there are gendered understandings of such encounters. White Western women, such as those in this study, would likely view interactions as insincere annoyances and as a product of the value attached to their whiteness. In contrast, black East African men

imagine such friendly banter as a legitimate way to engage, and potentially to establish a romantic relationship, with white Western women. These encounters are specifically gendered, as men are cast in the role of sexual initiator, while women are positioned as sexual gatekeepers (Berdychesky, 2013, p. 146). In this gendered role-play, the script dictates that white Western women are willing participants in such encounters. She remains the object of (heterosexual) affection passively waiting for the right man to persuade or seduce her with his charm, at which point she exercises her choice. As Edmondson (1999) argues, this constant coding of “heterosexual, presumably willing female” reinforces the assumption that the lives of white Western women living and working abroad are perpetually available for romantic encounters (p. 37).

These seemingly scripted sexualized interactions are not isolated to casual encounters with strangers. Rebecca (Canada) disclosed that conversations with local men at work are also regularly and overtly sexual:

[I'm in] a really relaxed office so they instantly included me in all the jokes ... they really treated me like one of their own. ... All the men proposed once or twice, and they're all married and it was actually really joking and it would be funny, there would be experiences where conversations would come up and I was just thinking, “In Canada, this is illegal.” [laughs] ... I still every once in a while get a text from one about, “Having beers, come and join me,” and I know he has just like one child with his wife [laughs] ... but because they're all, they got used to me turning them down or joking about it, so it became okay. And all the (local black East African) women find it hilarious ...

Rebecca characterizes her interactions with the black Kenyan men she worked with as part of a larger office ‘joke’ and almost a rite of passage to acceptance as a woman in the office. This constructs the workplace as being the domain of men for which women are granted entry through the acceptance of their place as sexual objects. For Rebecca,

however, this sexualized office culture made her feel more welcome as an outsider, her gendered identity actually helped her 'fit in' with the group.

... I actually, I kind of liked the attention because it, they welcomed me into their own, if they were joking and I wasn't part of it, I would feel weird, but this way was, it was funny and I would just answer that I need two husband because I want to be polygamous or they'd have to send all the cows to my parents in Canada for dowry, so I one-upped them most of the time [laughs].

Anna (Germany) seems to agree with Rebecca's sentiment that a lot of informal interactions between black East African men and white Western women are encountered 'jokingly' or as part of a 'game,' at least for the men:

It's more playing, more trying, how will she react? Like when you get to know, interact and talk to somebody, "Ah do you have a sister?" and things like that, but I think it's more play and I think us, we take it more serious, and I think that's also the trouble when young volunteers come. I've just talked to another intern upstairs [about how] sometimes younger men are interested in having a white girlfriend ... but I think it's sometimes more a game, a trying, you try ... will she ... react on it, get into that game or not?

The characterization of such gendered interactions as a 'game' is not uncommon; however, this categorization is not as innocent as suggested. Indeed, the goal of the game is to 'win' the affections and/or favour of a white woman, turning her into a highly valued and much sought after commodity and prize. Moreover, Edmondson (1999) argues that these interactions often take place in front of an audience of highly invested viewers from the local community (p. 37). For example in this case study, it was inferred that other black East African men might be watching from the sidelines to see who 'succeeds' in convincingly wooing a white woman, so that they might try a similar approach in the future.

Overall, the women in this study felt that the daily-sexualized encounters initiated by black East African men were not only annoying and frustrating but clear confirmation

of insincere intentions. Although some participants thought such interactions were casual or funny, for others it made the possibility of a 'real' or genuine relationships with a local man improbable. Lauren and Alexandra, the two women I interviewed who had not dated a local man, had mixed feelings about their lack of experience in this regard. Alexandra (Canada), for example, tended to avoid unnecessary contact with black Tanzanian men. She explained that she felt uncomfortable and awkward in such interactions because of the way local men stared at and approached her:

All I know is that they're the ones that are staring at me as I walk down the street or staring at me when I, well when I'm doing whatever. I mean they'll talk to me on the street but it's kind of like, it's hard to interpret as being, whether they're just friendly or ... they're friendly because I'm a female, ... would [they] do that if it was a guy and they're just a friendly person or if it's like, "Oh she's a white woman, I'm going to say hi to her," even though in some of the cases it is because they don't say hi to other people that are walking around me and they're like ... "Hey, *mzungu*."

Alexandra elaborated on her feelings of unease stating that she did not think that she really *knew* any local men, other than the occasional conversation with someone at work because she avoided all direct contact. This discomfort significantly constrained her ability to spend time with local people.

Lauren (United States) worried that she might be perceived as racist or closed-minded because she had not dated a black Kenya man. Her conscious decision to (at least so far) not date local men while living and working in Nairobi was largely based on her discomfort with the power dynamics and expectations that define interactions between the two groups:

In some ways I don't want to be the person who's like, "Oh fuck you, don't talk to me," be really closed off, but at the same time in my experience, most of the time people do want something from me. ... Sometimes I feel like it's the same question, being asked out, versus being asked to get to America. ... For some people, it can be clear that that's their motivation for taking an interest in a

foreigner, it's the visa And then another time ... I was walking down James Gichuru [a street in Nairobi] and these little boys ... they asked where I was from and I said America ... they all said, "I want to marry a *mzungu* and go to America." And they're little kids. I think that really shaped my perspective too...

Lauren's narrative illustrates a cynical – or perhaps realistic – view of the authenticity of local men's feelings towards her. Indeed, as she states, if an individual grows up idealizing and fantasizing about a particular group, it may be difficult for an earnest and sustainable relationship to emerge.

...well if little boys think that, then is that so ingrained that like every, is that why ... Kenyan men seem to have some kind of interest in white women? And then that just makes me really skeptical [laughs] ... because it's not just that you're exotic or you're, you might have money, or you're different or something like that, it's straight up, "I want a visa and I, you know, grew up thinking that's my ticket to, to getting a visa." And then there's something else kind of like objectifying in a way ... if someone grows up thinking they want to marry a *mzungu*, so then you're just a white person that kind of fits that bill and it's not really the, the details of your personality that are exciting to them.

The precarious position embodied by both black East African men and white Western women is well illustrated by Lauren's analysis of her experience with the group of young Kenyan boys. She attempts to reconcile dating a local man while knowing the way in which they are socialized to desire whiteness based on its social and economic value.

Problematizing the Binary of Desire

The perception that transnational interracial relationships are inherently insincere and agenda-driven complicates experiences of 'genuine' desire and love in the region. This so-called 'genuine' romantic love is a Western construct that is "assigned a positive value and a privileged status" (Davis, 2002, p. 145). Elevating love to a virtuous and genuine feeling makes it "appear natural, essential, and immutable," often concealing the operation of power dynamics (Padilla et al., 2007, p. ix; Thomas and Cole, 2009). It is not only those intimacies that emerge within sex tourism that are constituted by economic

disparities and shaped through politicized understandings of race; indeed, *all* experiences of desire and love are shaped and mitigated by these assumptions. This challenges mainstream hierarchical understandings of love as either genuine or insincere, which relies on a dichotomy that does not accurately reflect the practical motivations behind *all* relationships.

In defining their relationships as genuine, the participants in this study positioned themselves in opposition to formal exchanges of money for sex. In the case of transnational interracial relationships, desire is understood as binary and is therefore either positive or negative. Those relationships on the ‘positive’ side of the binary are considered to be ‘genuine’ and sincere forms of intimacy and love characterized by ‘real’ and mutual feelings of affection between a couple. Conversely, those intimacies understood to be ‘negative’ are those that involve more explicit forms of material and sexual exchange where an agenda to gain from the relationship (other than love itself) is the purpose of the relationship. This binary is problematic for two reasons. First, it inaccurately assumes that love emerges as an ‘innocent’ emotion within an apolitical vacuum, devoid of conscious reflection and strategy. For example, Michael (Kenya) commented that he thought that people should enter into relationships for the “right reasons” (‘genuine’ love), yet his relationship with his white Swiss girlfriend broke up because they could not agree on where they would live and build a future together. Michael’s relationship ultimately ended for practical reasons, *despite* the love that existed between the couple. Second, this binary obscures the advantages, access, and status that may be gained as a result of all intimacies with whiteness, even if they are not the goal of the relationship. For example, even though Paul (Tanzania) did not marry his (now ex)

wife explicitly because he believed he could access travel and finances through her, he was still able to move to Austria and pursue a career there. That is, even if taking advantage of a white Western woman's access is not the explicit intention of a relationship, it is indeed the relationship that makes this travel and financial security possible. In essence, then, the line between these 'genuine' and 'insincere' desire is not as clearly demarcated as is often assumed.

Perceptions of Transnational Interracial Relationships

Most transnational interracial relationships continue to be understood locally and internationally as an extension of or participation in sex tourism. The assumptions attached to the 'beach boy' exchange model remain the cultural lens through which all transnational interracial relationships are understood and measured locally, even if they occur outside of the coastal regions. The dominance of this view made it difficult at times for some people to differentiate my research on transnational interracial relationships from those in the sex tourism industry. Consequently, those external to these relationships, including friends, family and work colleagues of research participants – even strangers – often misemploy binary distinctions in sex work of exploiter/exploited. This binary understanding positions those engaged in transnational interracial relationships “as either perpetrators or victims who use, or are used by, their respective partners for economic, social and/or sexual gain” (Tami, 2008, p. 4). In this sense both local men and white Western women can be understood as both and either exploited or exploiter, as the women are assumed to use the men for sex, while the men use women for financial gain.

Samuel, a thirty-two year old man who is married to a black Tanzanian woman and living in Dar es Salaam, works with cultural development projects for youth in the region, states that interracial relationships tend to be exploitative, and often on both sides:

It's like the host and the parasite, one is, is leeching on the other, and sometimes it's a two-way traffic ... this is a win-win situation. Like, "I use you," you know, "and you use me" ... it's unfortunate that ... [people have ruined] true love between two different races ... sometimes we misjudge, but in some cases you can clearly see that this relationship is based on one thinking that there is an opportunity to move into a developed country ... or gain temporary financial gain, get a visa, invited to visit this country and probably they'll stay there ... and some ... they just fall in love ... they start to date and it's hard to fall in love, it's possible but it's hard.

Although he admits that 'genuine' love can and does happen within these transnational interracial relationships, Samuel argues that negative perceptions make it difficult for either partner to trust the intention of the other when it comes to pursuing a 'real' relationship.

Gilbert, a twenty-five year old Tanzanian who used to work in hotel management and is now studying to complete his secondary school degree, states that it is the intentions of the individuals in the relationship that makes it 'real' or not. There can be other motivations that can prohibit genuine love. For example, he suggests that white Western women tend to use the promise of money and gifts to entice local men to enter into intimate relations:

There are some white girls who look at me and they see sexual desires. So they are like, "Whoops, what if I get that boy and he'll be my boyfriend? And how will I get him quickly?" And they use their weapons. Their weapon is, "I have money, [you] don't." So I use their money to get them. So you [white woman] walk in the bar and see the guy dancing, you like him and you are like, "Hey, do you want a drink?" You know? You offer a drink. "Yeah, it's okay," you give a drink, spend money all night [with] the guy, but the aim is you want [sex]... So you can find money is the source, but who starts it? Me or a white person? ... If I see you and I think you have money and I come to you. That will be my problem. If you see me and you think you can get me because you have money, that's your problem.

Gilbert's account insists that the issue of money is always present in such relationships, whether it is used as a means to achieve a goal, or an end in itself. While Gilbert understands interracial relationships as mutually exploitative and fulfilling, Lauren (United States) explains that a white Western woman is commonly perceived to be exploited by the black East African man that she is dating:

... the white women in the relationship are being used or maybe are kind of stupid, fell for something. ... I guess it's the scenario where a lot of white women, just that I personally know, who are dating black Kenyan men who, they wind up paying for them almost entirely. Some of their boyfriends or whatever don't have jobs so they are essentially supporting them ... I think there's a lot of scenarios of the woman supporting the man, the foreign woman and so I think in that case it's seen maybe taken, taking advantage.

Lauren views the economic expectations placed on white women differently than Gilbert. She is clearly positioning white Western women as victims, disempowered and exploited by their local boyfriends. Yet, most of the research participants identified this "you use me, I use you" way of thinking as quite common in the region. However, they also lamented the effect that it had on the perception of their own (potential) relationships. Leslie (America) describes her experience of being out at restaurants with her black Kenyan boyfriend, where she is often assumed to be providing the finances for their dates:

There's an assumption also that she's the 'sugar mama,' you know that maybe she's getting some sort of physical accompaniment or having her needs met [laughs] but she's going to be taking, she'll cover all the bills and sometimes even the servers at restaurants will put the bill towards me, or they'll like put it towards him [boyfriend] first, and then be like, "No she's paying," you know? Or we, he [boyfriend] and I joke about it, you know ... of who's going to pay, where is he going to put the bill, you know? [laughs]

This description confirms local perceptions of the mutual exploitation assumed to take place within transnational interracial relationships. Even though Leslie and her boyfriend

consider themselves to be a 'genuine' couple, their relationship continues to be judged within the realm of sex tourism. Ultimately, Leslie and her boyfriend are able to find some amusement in this characterization of their relationship; however, their hypervisibility often makes them targets in public. Indeed, the ability of those external to the relationship to easily 'see' interracial couples confirms them as unusual and potentially suspect, and thereby reinforcing particular, often negative, understandings of such relationships (Vincent, 2008, p. 1427). As in the case of Leslie's relationship, localized assumptions and expectations of the interaction of race, gender, class, and sexuality are mapped onto the bodies of individuals.

Michael (Kenya) felt that, within the local population, his status and image become enhanced because of his white girlfriend. However, he had the inverse experience when he worked at a development organization in Nairobi. He ultimately quit his job when his relationship with his boss, a younger white man from Switzerland, drastically changed after he started dating a white Swiss woman:

But when I started dating this lady, somehow [in] that one month he really changed, and I could see he didn't like it ... sometimes he used to shop at the same place with his girlfriend [a white Swiss woman] ... and when we'd meet them, the lady was very friendly, but this guy [I] could see he doesn't like [it] ... He was different and he changed completely, he became very cold and ... the boss who was between me and him was Kenyan and he told me, "This guy doesn't like the fact that you're dating a white woman, he used to make negative comments like, 'So this guy thinks he's going to go to Europe,'" some really nasty comments ... even after the lady [Swiss girlfriend] left he kept throwing at me very nasty comments ... one day I walked out.

Michael's experience provides some insight into the disdain that some white Westerners have towards relationships between white Western women and local men. His boss took a very particular interest in – and seemingly a personal offense to – him dating a white Swiss woman. The boss seemed particularly indignant that Michael's intention was to

gain access to Switzerland, as if it was the boss' role to protect Michael's girlfriend, and with her the borders of Europe.

Participants who had been or were currently in long-term committed transnational interracial relationships were often met with delight and pride when they were introduced to their partners' Kenyan and Tanzanian families. Abdallah's (Kenya) wife was treated like "a queen" by his family and Peter's (Tanzania) parents told his Danish girlfriend to call them if he ever treated her badly so that they could 'sort him out.' Miriam (Britain) remembers being brought to her (ex)husband's rural home in Kisii, Kenya:

I went to [his] grandfather's funeral, soon before we broke up in 2010, which is a very big gathering in the village in Kisii and some of the speeches were like, "Look how well this family's done, they've even brought a *mzungu* into the family!" [laughs] So certainly from the Kenyan side there's like "He's married up, he's done well" and his father's quite tribalistic ... to marry a *mzungu* is outside of Kenya's tribal, you know, animosities and, and it's a leg up in the world.

While some participants thought that their older relatives may be cautious in inviting a white person into the family because of the negative memories associated with colonialism, for others the continuing resurgence of ethnic clashes in the region makes marrying an individual outside of the local ethnic struggles a desirable option.

Kim's (Canada) experience of heightened value and desirability has actually put a strain on her marriage. Married for three years to a black Tanzanian man from a very poor background, Kim describes the onslaught of requests for money she receives from her husband's family:

For the first while we were even having a lot of phone calls from family ... they would say 'small money,' but small money would be like, "Oh, 200,000, 400,000," [Tanzanian shillings, approximately \$100 - \$250 CAD] some even more. "Oh I just need, yeah, oh it's just small money, we just need some small money for the business," ... it's like "Woo! No, I wish I had that small money!" ... For the first while we were just bombarded almost with people asking for

money and people just dropping in ... So sadly because of that, we've actually been very very distant from his family, other than his father ... He can go see his family any time he wants, I'll never say "You can not see your family," but sorry they're not invited to our home ... You have to be tough, you have to make that wall, and it has to stay.

As a white Western woman brought into the family, Kim was expected to provide monetary gifts upon request. Kim struggled to reconcile her commitment to her husband and her feelings of frustration and the expectations of monetary gifts from his extended family. Kim's frustrations also highlight the common understanding that, if a transnational interracial couple are relatively 'equal' in terms of socioeconomic status, then their relationship may be perceived to be more 'genuine' and not based on exploitation. Furthermore, black East African men who are university-educated and are gainfully employed, may be more desirable partners for white Western women because then they will not feel the responsibility to financially support their partner and his family.

In contrast to understandings of white Western women as particularly desirable intimate partners, when Tom (Kenya) had the opportunity to attend Harvard University as an undergraduate student in Engineering, his father was concerned that he would marry someone whose family and background were far removed from their life in Kenya. Tom recalls the conversation they shared that ultimately caused him to decide to study in Nairobi instead:

[My father said to me] ... 'why do you really think you need to move to Harvard?' I'm like, 'You know one thing, good education ... a global kind of interaction with people from all over,' but I finished with one thing: 'Get a chance to get to a white lady.' Okay I have a friend ... he got to marry a white lady ... whenever he was coming around we were like, 'Wow, this is the man, this is the man. He has this special white lady,' and you know all these things that, apparently he owns ... an airplane, so I thought, maybe this interaction led to him getting the airplane and all those things. So I also wanted to get them.

Ultimately, Tom's father warned him: "Don't ever do a mistake of marrying a white."

The understanding that white Western women were fundamentally different and alien to a Kenyan way of life and Harvard was very far away in terms of distance led Tom to rethink his desire for a white wife and the material goods he assumed would follow from such a marriage. The contradictions and unclear conclusions present in the narratives of the men in this study reveal the ambiguous positioning of white Western women in East Africa. Ultimately, both the desirability and undesirability of these women stem from their 'otherness' and essentially foreign life in the West.

Black East African Hegemonic Masculinity and White Western Femininity

Research on a diversity of African masculinities (see, for example, Lindsay and Miescher, 2003; Morrell, 2001; Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005; Uchendu, 2008) is growing alongside scholarly work on black masculinities in the context of the United States (see, for example Collins, 2004; hooks, 2004; Jackson and Hopson, 2011). Within a Western context the idealized model of hegemonic masculinity is "defined as white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied" (Bromley, 2012, p. 156). Men who are presumed to be racially and/or sexually inferior by failing to meet the Western norms of hegemonic masculinity are denied the full range of male privilege in the West. In an East African context, the patriarchal structure constructs and reaffirms masculine identities based on their dominance (over women and sometimes other men) and sexual virility (Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 197).

Patriarchy is a social system that attributes men unearned status and positions of power and privileges as so-called 'masculine' attributes of dominance. Hegemonic categories of masculinity and femininity are produced within the constraints of patriarchy

and act as the standard to which individuals are compelled to aspire. Contemporary understandings of men separate notions of manhood and masculinity and recognize race, class, and sexuality as key aspects of the co-constructions of masculinity on the one hand and femininity on the other (Jackson and Balaji, 2011, p. 20). Mich Nyawalo suggests (2011) that the social construction of an East African privileged and hegemonic masculinity based on economic agency stems from the era of decolonization in the 1960s. He relates this emergence to the materialization of a regional politically powerful black East African bourgeoisie (Nyawalo, 2011, p. 130). During this era, political power and material wealth were not synonymous. However, after Kenya and Tanzania gained independence from Britain in 1963 and 1961, respectively, understandings of masculinity were reconfigured to unite economic power and manhood. As men became heads of the household and primary economic provider for their families and the wider community, in an increasingly monetarized economy, a regional definition of hegemonic masculinity was attained (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 114; Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 192). However, due to high unemployment rates and crushing poverty in both rural and urban areas, many men struggle to affirm and uphold their masculinity and role as economic providers for their families.

The construction of black East African masculinities emerges alongside expectations of black East African femininities, which are typically expected to be performed in opposite and complementary form. Fairly rigid conceptions of 'masculinity,' such as aggression and dominance, are constructed opposite conventional constructions of 'femininity,' including being withdrawn and passive. Although of course these characteristics are not embodied as easily or as strictly as they are socially

mandated, the underpinning of dominance versus passivity, or of taking care of and being cared for, endure in expectations of masculinity and femininity and within prescribed gender roles. For example, women are expected to depend on the man in their life (first father, then husband) for financial security, thus the “social value and respect” of men is based on their ability to financially provide for their family (Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 194). Despite these social prescriptions, today East African masculinities are often expressed contradictorily. For example, according to Silberschmidt, men continue to exhibit “aggressive, ‘macho’ behaviour” while they are unemployed, yet they spend much of their time at the bar and claim to be disrespected by their wives (2004, p. 193). Given high unemployment rates among men, black East African women take on work in and around the home environment, such as mending clothes, hairdressing and selling fruit and vegetables at the local market. However, men are still expected to bring in the bulk of wealth from outside of the home and to provide money for rent and children’s school fees.

Within a patriarchal system that should privilege men with tangible power, many black East African men are unemployed and feel a profound sense of disempowerment. For many local men in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, economic agency is the key symbol upon which their social value as men is established (Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 190-192). Masculinity is “inextricably tied to the social and sexual control” that black African men “supposedly should have over black (and sometimes white) women” (Jackson II and Hopson, 2011, p. 28-29). However, men’s control over women is seldom uncontested. And, the loss or diminishment of the economic provider role that men are presumed to hold is in constant jeopardy in East Africa where poverty and economic insecurity

prevail. Scholars refer to this economic disempowerment as a relentless threat to black East African men's masculinity, a metaphoric curse of impotence and emasculation (Jackson II and Hopson, 2011, p. 28-30; Nyawalo, 2011, p. 125; Spronk, 2012, p. 217). Economics, therefore, renders masculinity vulnerable to domination by others. Moreover, such imaginings of manhood are dependent on the reproduction of masculinity through heterosexual relationships.

Both foreigners and local black women perceive black East African men to be controlling, dominating and untrustworthy sexual partners. Several of the women in this study commented that, as soon as they arrived in the country, one of the first warnings they received from black East African women was to be careful of dating local men. Leslie (United States), for example, was cautioned by her local female friends not to trust the local men who were hitting on her because of the widely held stereotype that Kenyan men all cheat on their girlfriends and wives and they are constantly juggling multiple women. Similarly, Lauren (United States) and Miriam (Britain) were advised to be restrained in their intimate engagements with local men, constructed both locally and internationally to be disloyal and misogynistic 'cheaters.' Although these stereotypical notions of black East African men were confirmed through numerous negative interactions, they were also challenged by those white Western women who were currently in meaningful relationships.

Black East African women are often constructed through a Western lens as the group most subordinated and burdened, which shapes the identities of white Western women differently based on narratives of independence and emancipation. Gilbert (Tanzania) explained that, (unmarried) black Tanzanian women are constituted through

the guidance and control of their parents, which prohibits them from entering into romantic relationships or pursuing their chosen career path. In contrast, he comments that white Western women are viewed very differently from black Tanzania women because “they [white Western women] are free, they understand themselves better and they have their own decisions ... they can travel, go to Tanzania ... they can have a boyfriend, they can have love affairs, no problem.” In highlighting both white Western women’s (presumed) sexual freedom and in particular their mobile lifestyle, Gilbert points to a key aspect of the access available to white women through their ‘otherness.’ This seeming appropriation of “the normally masculine subjectivity of the modern travelling subject” reconfigures white Western femininity as inherently different to that of black East African women (Jacobs, 2009, p. 44).

In transnational interracial relationships, black masculinity is set parallel to white Western femininity as it is inserted into relationships with black East African men. The masculinity of black East African men is thus simultaneously reaffirmed, challenged, and reconfigured through intimate relationships with white Western women in the region. Indeed, although both women and men may be expected to behave in particular ways within both African and Western patriarchal societies, individuals struggle to ‘fit’ within these prescribed identities. Binary assumptions of how gender and gender roles should be fulfilled continue to plague transnational interracial relations, despite the contestation of what it means to be ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’ male and female.

Idealized Status

The aspiration to achieve professional and financial success, and to build and provide for a family, characterizes the idealized male role in the region. In aspiring to *do*

and *be* more successful, more economically secure, more enterprising, and ultimately more masculine, young men in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam work to build an economically secure future. One way in which black East African men can secure their masculinity and a better future is through associations with whiteness. Such encounters are viewed as opportunities to access wealth, status, travel and better living circumstances all of which can enhance masculinity. However, these assumptions are not as straightforward as black East African men may imagine. Indeed, white Western women's identities, presumed by black East African 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 male role of responsibility and authority under African patriarchy. This (stereotypically presumed) liberated white Western woman was understood by the men in this study as potentially desirable and undesirable as intimate partners. Matthew (Tanzania) explains:

These people [white Western women] come from the group of the haves, you know what differentiates blacks and whites is the nature of living conditions ... but I must say, especially for young people, there has been that thinking that if you get a white woman, you marry that woman, you have an opportunity to go to Europe, you can have access to some opportunities which, without marrying that person might not be, you might not be able to access. And there are people who even went to marriage with that thinking.

This suggests that relationships between some black East African men and white Western women working in development are strategic. Such a strategy holds the specific intention to 'borrow' her status and access for their own purposes. Although not all African men strategize in this way, by entering into a romantic relationship with a white Western woman their status 'at home,' financial stability, and potential to move to her country of origin are all increased. Whether a strategic plan or not, the quintessential African

“rags-to-riches” dream of migrating to the West and emerging from poverty, can be realized (Edmondson, 1999, p. 36; Nyanzi and 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, he had this cousin in Switzerland, so he would go there and come back with a lot of stuff, the simplest t-shirt you get from Europe, you wear it and people are like, “Wow, where did you get this from?” I started having this perspective, “That place must be really cool, I really want to go there, see how it is,” as well as continuing with my studies. ... when I started dating [a white woman], the experience was very, I was like getting into a new world that, it made me like look at this other world like, “Guys, this is the life.”

Abdallah eventually did marry a white woman from Switzerland, with whom he shares a young daughter, though he and his wife are currently getting divorced. He comments that it was once he had moved to Switzerland that they started to recognize that they differed in their expectations of each other in the relationship, and they also had uneven ambitions for furthering their education and careers. Abdallah wanted to pursue his Masters and was working low-wage jobs (despite his Kenyan-based university education), while from his perspective his wife was content with little money. Abdallah comments on his distress over the end of his marriage:

It was pure love from the beginning, and when it ended it really hurt so much, but she couldn't see that. She never saw that. You know we had a baby and everything was okay, but the moment we started going separate ways, I was there desperately trying to convince her, like “Listen, this thing is real,” she never got it ... It's something I'm going to regret for the rest of my life. It was, the only problem we used to have was about ideas. She thinks in this direction and I think in this direction and it escalated to a point of, I don't know but it just couldn't work anymore.

Even after they were married, had a child, and settled together in her home country, Abdallah's wife still questioned whether his intentions in their relationship were sincere. Now back living and working in Kenya, Abdallah came to realize that the reality of a

transnational interracial relationship was not as simple as he had imagined, nor was attaining the African dream.

In East Africa heterosexual relationships are the norm. They are highly valued and naturalized. Accordingly, heterosexual relationships between black East Africans and white Westerns both confirm the heterosexual norm and add value to individuals for being in a relationship. That value, as I have demonstrated, also increases men's status and contributes to perceived and real privilege. The concept of 'borrowing' status in transnational interracial relationships in the region includes a transfer of both material and intangible power. One such intangible is the affirming and amplifying of black East African masculinity at the local level (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010, p. 116). For example, when Gilbert (Tanzania) walks around Dar es Salaam with his fiancée, a bi-racial Canadian woman perceived to be white by local East Africans, they receive considerable attention. In fact, strangers often approach Gilbert, give him the thumbs up and 'congratulate' him on his success in dating a white woman. Matthew (Tanzania) explains that being in an intimate relationship with a white woman is "seen as a credit, you know, 'You were able to convince a white woman' [laughs] ... you are a bit clever, you went to the more clever than you [laughs]." In other words, those men who make the effort, and are 'clever' enough, to climb the racial and socioeconomic hierarchy through a relationship with a white woman, are highly respected locally.

Michael (Kenya) described his experience of dating a white woman from Switzerland as 'different' because of the increased attention that he received. Although in some ways he enjoyed being looked at by his peers "in a nice way," the attention was also frustrating because of the assumptions about his intentions:

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!" because we were very public about it, we'd walk and hold hands ... Yeah but yeah everybody around ... [they] looked at me differently, in a nice way, they were like, "Oh my God" you know?" ... 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 because I used to wonder, "God gave you all that intelligence to come and think like this after all these years?" [laughs] ... I 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 ... because of the money, not because of anything else.

Because Michael had been open about his relationship with his white Swiss girlfriend, including holding hands with her in public and taking her to meet his family, his friends seemed to react strongly to the fact that he is no longer in a relationship with a white woman. Now that he is dating a black Kenyan woman, his friends appeared to view this changed behaviour as a signal for distress, as if he had 'given up' a prize or valued commodity. Interestingly, several other participants, including Rebecca (Canada), commented that there was a widely held understanding that, "when a Kenyan guy is dating a white girl ... he'll never break up with her." That a local man would break up with a white Western woman is counter-intuitive to many, given the advantages assumed to emerge through the relationship. Furthermore, while at first his heightened visibility and the increased attention was exciting for Michael, similarly to the experiences of the female research participants, over time he felt that he and his girlfriend were being objectified and even misunderstood as a couple.

For some black East African men, the status and presumed wealth that accompanies dating a white Western woman, places them in an awkward position with their friends who also want to share in the material gains. Matthew (Tanzania) explains: "Their [friends] hopes and expectations might be high ... [they] might start thinking that

you are wealthy, you are somehow well off and you'd be able to take care of some things on your own and they might even depend on you somehow, thinking that you are now well off, how you afford a *mzungu* woman?" In other words, being intimately involved with a white Western woman requires a constant cycling of wealth, both coming *from* her and needed in order to maintain her style of living. Peter's (Tanzania) experience is similar, particularly after he visited his Danish girlfriend in the UK and he became the focus of his friends' requests for money:

[They] think that he's in a relation with a white, he has money. So some people they can call you, "Hey Peter, can you give me, *naomba* [can I have], maybe 10,000 [Tanzanian shillings, approximately \$7 CAD]?" When you tell them, "Ah I don't have money, I don't have, my friend." What they know is, "Ahhh you were in Europe or you were in UK or you were in some..." [laughs] Going there it doesn't mean that I have. Or being in relation with white, it doesn't mean that she has money. She is not a bank. Yeah? [laughs] She's not an ATM where I can go, and there, and take out money. Even if she's a white, she has her own way of life and I have my own way of life. I'm working, she's working ... So I'm not depending on her.

Peter struggles to redefine the objectification of his girlfriend and, even if he is not directly taking money from her, the imaginations of locals who define him as someone with considerable access and influence is nonetheless cemented.

Significantly, the men in this study expressed concern about the construction of identity of those black East African men who attempt to gain status through partnering with white Western women. Mark (Kenya) describes this as a "split personality" of desire and jealousy, and pride and shame. Kenyan men, in struggling to prove their worth to other Kenyans, are seen to separate themselves from the wider community and are understood to believe themselves to be superior to others in their community:

If you are a Kenyan man, and you are seeing another Kenyan man with a white lady, what comes to mind [is] "Wow" ... "he's got himself a white lady." ... They look at you as [if] now you've gone into another sort of class, so to speak, a notch

above, higher ... I suspect it is just born out of our own insecurities, we feel like ... “your own African lady isn’t good enough for you?” ... Must you get a white lady?” ... “What are you trying to show? Are you trying to show off that you can get a white lady?” It’s some sort of insecurity that is mixed with identity ... [It] has to do with how we perceive ourselves as individuals, or as Africans ... it’s actually the man [dating the white woman] who changes ... He begins to act all weird around his old friends, he begins to act like, “Well now I can no longer walk with you because, well, I’m walking with a *mzungu* and she’s classy” and all that, “So we’ll be seeing less of each other.”

Local men who ‘succeed’ in dating a white Western woman – considered to be a difficult achievement – are seen to view themselves as having joined an inherently different and higher class through their association with whiteness. Local men’s status is heightened and the symbol of whiteness and privilege is bestowed upon them, a status that would be difficult to attain otherwise. Black East African men engaging in intimate relationships with white Western women are often perceived as clever to have ‘convinced’ their partner to be with them. Their character, rather than being suspect and devalued, is viewed as ambitious and revalued upwardly as a signifier of working towards build a better life. In contrast, in relationships between local women in the region and white Western men working in development (or as tourists) the lines of cultural acceptability are drawn differently.

The gendered dimension of transnational interracial relationships is not isolated to those between white Western women and black East African men. When black East African women enter into relationships with white Western men, their character is immediately suspect. Such relationships are viewed as a type of prostitution, particularly when there is a significant age difference in the partnership. The development workers I interviewed told stories of other Westerners being embarrassed at seeing their white male colleagues with local women at malls or grocery stores, or instances in which local

women were evicted from hotel suites because they were assumed to be sex workers. The presumed 'suspect' character of local women crosses cultural lines, confirmed by both foreign and local populations. Constructing black East African women as sexual objects with nothing else to offer a white partner, the gendered conceptions of these relationships reflect the devaluing of local women's identities and ambitions under patriarchy.

Samuel (Tanzania) explains the differing perceptions of these two relationships:

The local people get very upset when they see a fellow African woman, an African woman dating a *mzungu*. I mean, they feel like they are undermined because they feel like she's being abused, she's being a whore, she's being a prostitute, she's selling her body, you know because in most cases women are seen to depend on a man ... there's still the male dominance ... thing, you know? So if you're with a man they expect that you're there because this man can also afford you. And so when you're with a *mzungu*, they feel like you went to a *mzungu* because you think the *mzungu* will give you a better life...

In this commentary local women are culturally gendered feminine through both a perceived and real need for financial support from men, black or white. Conversely, white Western women are defined as independent, and in the case of interracial relationships, their ability to provide for their male partner. Local men are attributed the opportunity to build a future through a relationship with a white woman, but local women are expected to stay within the borders of their racial – and often 'tribal' – group. Miriam (Britain) explains her view: "I think there's quite a lot of discourse about black women selling out ... 'Are our own men not good enough?' And I think the men tend to feel a sense of ownership over their women and that they [black Kenyan women] should kind of date within their own community, whereas maybe for the [black Kenyan] man he's just making the best of opportunities." Ultimately, those black East African women on the receiving end of romantic and sexual interest from white men may turn down the

opportunity because the cultural prescriptions against transnational interracial relationships may outweigh the potential benefits.

African Masculinity Under Threat

Similar to many heterosexual relationships in which partners are of the same racial background, not all black East African men feel a sense of empowerment through the status gained from their white partner. Instead, some men may feel threatened by the more dominant role that white women take in the relationship, both in having more monetary wealth and in the less feminine roles they tend to take on in the relationship. In other words, the heightened status of white Western women may be viewed as a threat to men's role as breadwinner, as well as to his desire to have social and economic value to his family. When African men, indeed most men, feel powerless, they may experience feelings of inferiority and hurt pride or shame because they are unable to fulfill their position of provider within patriarchy (Silberschmidt, 2004, p. 195). In (re)gaining social and economic status through intimate association with a white Western woman, black East African men may feel a contradictory sense of a strengthening and threatening of their masculinity. In feeling that they are relying on their white female partner to (re)claim their masculine status, black East African are precariously positioned as in between gender roles. They crave the status that comes with being with a white Western woman, but may be forced to question their masculinity in the process.

Michael (Kenya), for example, explains his frustration with his 'controlling' Swiss girlfriend. He states that her assertiveness was impinging on his right to make decisions about their relationship:

We used to fight about these things, you know she had this controlling side and I realized most European women are like that, from even my friends who date, they

want it done this way and if you don't want to go this way, then there's not supposed to be any way. And that one we're going to fight, trust me, because I am a typical African man and you know that we don't believe in women telling [us] what to do. We believe in women ... you're supposed to make me want you ... because I found you this way I cannot change you but we just have to co-exist.

Michael's narrative suggests that, as a "typical African man," he wants to be the decision-maker, rather than having his girlfriend dictate the terms of their relationship. He draws from gendered scripts of heterosexual intimacy, positioning white Western women as not performing conventional 'feminine' characteristics, but are actually infringing upon his location as head of the relationship. This behaviour is set in opposition to that of black East African women who, according to Paul (Tanzania), tend to be demure and more compliant with their boyfriends.

Similarly, Abdallah (Kenya) believes that white Western women are controlling and that they prefer to take charge in a relationship. He 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 ... she's the one deciding where to go, and we let it go like that, to that point [where] they become superior and we, inferior. That is the things I've seen. Every time I see a white person interacting with a black person, even if the black person is more learned than the white person, the white person looks more clever than the black person, especially the man ... because I have fifteen friends of mine, Kenyan friends married to white women, very good friends of mine, I see the way they relate to each. It's always like ... you are the queen, but I'm not the king. I'm the servant.

Abdallah points to the ways in which white Western women are able to circumvent local gender expectations and redraw gendered power dynamics in transnational interracial romantic relationships through their white privilege.

For some men, the (un)desirability of white Western women may change over time. Initially Miriam's (Britain) black Kenyan husband was attracted to the daily perks and the status boost he received through their relationship. However, eventually he found that these desirable qualities of whiteness 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." He used to like driving around in my car ... 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 transformed into undesirable. Miriam's failure to conform to African notions of femininity, which presumes male superiority, fostered her husband's feelings of resentment and resultant emasculation. By having to rely on his wife as the provider, Miriam's husband experienced a diminishing of his manhood and sense of self. Associating with whiteness, then, can both enhance black East African men's wealth and privilege as well as threaten their masculinity, which remains rooted in conventions of dominance, control and provision.

In urban settings such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, it is much more common for gender relations to be flexible, especially among young people (Spronk, 2012, p. 179). This flexibility provides both women and men the opportunity to work together as a couple to provide for themselves financially and for decisions to be made more equally. Within the presumption that white Western women expect more egalitarian relationships, transnational interracial relationships can be somewhat liberating for East African men because it allows them to explore their identities beyond the confines of traditional expectations. For example, Peter (Tanzania) felt that it was with his white Danish

girlfriend that he was really able to express himself, to take critical feedback about his life, and to collaborate on an intimate level. He states:

...sometimes she advised me a positive thing, that I'm thinking, 'Ah what she is saying is true.' And sometimes even if I have something when I tell her, she says, "Yes, that is good." And that's the one I need in my life ... when [I receive] advice from her [she says] 'When you are doing this, *hapana* [No, don't.], that is not good way. In your study, do this and do this. Do this and do this.' When you accept my advice, even me also I feel, I feel good. I say that, 'I have someone I need in my life.'

Kim (Canada) agrees, contending that white Western women are perceived to offer black East African men new and exciting life experiences:

They also perceive us as ... we might have the opportunities to try new things because we do have the experiences to explore and try things ... they [local black East Africans] don't think to say, "Hey, let's go to the beach and do something," or "Let's go on a hike," "Let's go get some bikes," they just don't think that way the way we do. That's the perception that they like about us ... we're adventurous and more creative, we like to do things and try things and ... it's always giving them new and different opportunities.

Both disrupting traditional gender roles and facilitating men's explorations of alternative gender identities, white Western women who, as evidenced by this study, tend to be well-educated, ambitious, and adventurous, make ideal companions for local men.

Mark (Kenya) relates that black East African men who are in transnational interracial relationships are more motivated to work hard and achieve because they follow the example of their white partner and want to 'prove' that they are able to live in an equal partnership. In doing so he contradicts previous statements made by participants that being in a relationship with a white Western woman is inherently difficult and unequal. He states:

Most African men love white ladies ... because they are allowed to be who they are ... they can live for quite a long time with less arguments in marriage, with less problems of divorce or money, because for some African men, once they get a white woman ... they will work their ass off not to be poor. Because ... [of]

perceptions they have of themselves that 'I don't want her to be with a poor person, so let me work myself up. That's why most couples that are interracial, most of them live in wealthy suburbs, yeah, because the guy worked hard so much and decided, 'This is what I'm going to give my wife.'

Within these comments, Mark, who had never been in an intimate relationship with a white Western woman, illustrates his belief that, in entering into a relationship with a white Western woman, Kenyan men are able to be themselves and to live up to their full potential. This understanding further positions access to white Western women as a goal to which African men aspire. Mark's perception that these relationships offer more to Kenyan men, and are therefore actually *more* successful and fulfilling, is interesting, given that most of the research participants were either not yet married or divorced. Thus, Mark's understanding of transnational interracial relationships furthers the romanticization of white Western women as ideal partners, obscuring the difficult realities faced by many couples.

Many white Western women challenge local gender expectations of femininity. Indeed, Miriam (Britain) relishes her 'honourary' (read: white) social position in Nairobi, wherein she is released from prescribed 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, maybe like a group of eight, there'd be me, his brother's girlfriend and then men. 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], so again I was seen, you're almost I think given like 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 she feels that she 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, and be seemingly accepted as a woman, even though she expresses masculine characteristics and

engages in masculine behaviours. In this case, Miriam's race privilege supersedes her gender subordination. Miriam locates herself outside of normative Kenyan gender roles and expectations and, at least temporarily, embodies the status of 'honourary man' within a complex and intersectional gendered hierarchy (Edmondson, 1999, p. 37; Jacobs, 2009, p. 55). Other women in this study expressed similar experiences, stating that, since they were already viewed as inherently foreign to local people and social attitudes, performing 'masculine' behaviour seemed to be more accepted by local men than if it were enacted by black East African women.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the privileged positioning that locates white Western women differently from black East African women within localized social and cultural expectations. A significant weakness in this examination of masculinity is the lack of academic literature available focusing on the specific experiences of black East African men of various ethnicities, religious affiliations, and in both urban and rural settings. Furthermore, research that focuses on the differing class status and educational backgrounds of local men in East Africa would also better reflect the diversity of the social construction of masculine identity in the region. Given the research available today, understandings of black East African masculinity are incomplete and often rely on the appropriation of black or African-American masculinities. As a result, academic texts tend to produce problematic representations of African masculinity through static binaries. As such, this chapter reflects the 'work in progress' that is scholarly conceptions of masculinity emerging in Kenya and Tanzania.

Ultimately, with the research available and the narratives of participants, the power, privilege, and essential difference of whiteness is reaffirmed through both white Western women's desirability and undesirability. For some black East African men, white women are considered to be inherently incompatible because they are presumed to be too independent and controlling, taking on conventionally 'masculine' qualities. Alternatively, the idea that white Western women are *more* compatible with black East African men because they offer them the possibility of status, wealth and a changed life where they can fully realize their power reiterates whiteness as essentially powerful. In essence, the privilege and status as 'Others' with access of white Western women remains unchallenged and black East African men are privileged only through their association with these women.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Key Conclusions

In East Africa it is the hypervisibility of white Western women that asserts their (symbolic and real) authority, power, and privilege. Skin colour in particular acts as a key marker of racial difference, visually asserting white Western women as the physical embodiment of mobility and prosperity. Despite the popularized assumption that racial identification can be 'seen' through skin colour, particularly in a context where minority whiteness is set against majority blackness, the construction of race and ethnicity emerges as an intersectional concept of class, gender, and nationality. Indeed, racial and ethnic (self)identification is multi-faceted, but often simplified within transnational interracial interactions. In bringing together the narratives of research participants and academic theory, this thesis argued that, in an East African context, white Western women are understood to be homogenized racialized 'Others' with access to wealth, resources and mobility. In associating with and 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.

The concept of 'access' is bound up with the African 'rags to riches' dream of financial security and travelling or migrating with their partner to the West and embodying an idealized Western lifestyle. Even for those research participants who would prefer to stay in East Africa, the perks of being with, and being seen with, a white Western woman enhances daily life in their home region. Indeed, black East African men do not necessarily want to 'become' white or Western. What they do desire is to be able

to embody and live out an idealized Western lifestyle of comfort and security and to garner the respect of the local community. Thus, it is not necessarily the white Western woman herself that is the end goal of the relationship, but instead it is her (perceived) financial security and the heightened status she represents. Through intimacy with white Western women, cast as the personification of access to wealth, status, and mobility, black East African men are provided entry into the world of whiteness and the '*mzungu* lifestyle.'

However, the process of shifting from the dream of 'marrying white' to the reality of being in a 'real' relationship is often difficult and fraught with contradictions. In taking part in a more globally defined and racially diverse 'marriage/dating market,' white Western women development workers and black East African men are part of a bringing together of social, racial, and economic worlds (Constable, 2009, p. 53). These relationships are particularly complicated by negative stereotypes, external perceptions of transnational interracial relationships being inherently exploitative, profound economic disparities, and differing expectations of gender roles. In this research, it was clear that participants recognized such complications and were often forced to confront both internal and external fears and suspicions of insincerity and hidden agendas in their relationships. Transnational interracial relationships, they noted, are often constituted through, and/or troubled by, disparities in social and economic mobility.

The popularized and homogenizing perceptions of these relationships were both ascribed to and resisted by research participants, who expressed conflicted and unresolved feelings about transnational interracial interactions in the region. Although participants located themselves within 'genuine' relationships and outside of the realm of

sex tourism, they were also acutely aware of the operation of such practices and the stigmas attached to the industry. They recognized that many of the social, racial, and economic hierarchies and disparities in their own relationships mirrored those of sex tourism. At the same time, the male participants wanted to believe in ‘true love’ across racial borders. Participants articulated clear understandings of both the possibilities and the difficulties that would arise from dating and marrying a white Western woman. Most of the female participants were open to engaging in intimate relationships with local men. However, they were also often cautious in their behaviour within these interactions because they wanted to be respected as women, foreigners, and development workers. All of the participants in this study noted their concern that others may understand them in binary terms as either the exploiter or the exploited vis-à-vis their intimate partners. They also acknowledged that such dichotomous thinking rendered their genuine feelings of love suspect.

Evidence from this study suggested that black East African men who are in intimate relationships with white Western women are able to embody a higher class and social status locally. It is the positive responses of admiration locally – from strangers, colleagues, friends, family, and the community-at-large – that affirms the new location of prestige that these men experience. In this context being racialized and ‘seen’ as white, or being seen to associate with white people, is an advantage and a badge of honour and superiority. However, though Black East African men are able to claim and participate in the privileges and enhanced status of whiteness, ultimately they are *not*, and may not actually desire to be, white. Indeed, many of the men in this study expressed a strong sense of pride in their national, racial, and ethnic identification. Within an East African

context, the heightened social and economic status may be tied to the sustainability of their intimate partnership with a white Western woman. If these men do migrate to a Western country, however, the opportunity to stand on their own through educational and career advancement and ability to obtain citizenship may provide them with status both 'at home' and in the new Western context.

A Multi-Racial Future?

Popular discourses of 'genuine' love across racial borders often construct transnational interracial relationships as *more* romantic or authentic because partners are able to overcome such challenging obstacles. Indeed, many participants employed narratives of multi-racialism in an effort to resist assumptions of insincere intentions and exploitation within these relationships (Childs, 2005; Telles and Sue, 2009; Vincent, 2008). Mark (Kenya) expressed hope for a multi-racial future which, according to him, was full of "bouncing bi-racial babies." Marrying across racial lines was *more* desirable, according to participants, because interracial marriage and bi-racial children could operate to break down cultural stereotypes about race and racist ideologies. Current United States President Barack Obama is frequently used as a signifier of hope and pride in a future world of multi-racialism. Nearly every research participant noted, without prompting from the researcher, President Obama's transnational interracial heritage as the product of the marriage between a black Kenyan man and white American woman. In their narratives, the participants offered Obama as proof that, regardless of whether such relationships themselves are long-lasting, transnational interracial relationships have the potential to bring about enduring change. Indeed, Obama's legacy now serves as a familiar pick-up line aimed at white Western women on the streets of Nairobi. Lauren

(United States) recalled with a laugh an encounter she had with a young black Kenyan man: “The other day in a *matatu* [bus] a guy told me we should make another Obama because he’s a Kenya man and I’m an American woman. I was just like, ‘Oh that’s a really great offer, thanks. Okay bye!’ [laughs].” The story of Barack Obama and his family represents the ultimate African ‘rags to riches’ fantasy and the future of a multi-racial society of equal opportunity.

These narratives promote transnational interracial relationships and offer participants the opportunity to resist conventional codes of desirability that require them to marry within their ethnic or racial group. This way of looking at the world may assist individual transnational interracial couples to resist negative stereotypes of their relationship, and therefore to feel more secure in their partnership. This understanding of multi-racialism, primarily ascribed to by the men in this study, can be understood to be a positive move towards breaking down racial binaries. Despite this potential resistance, these understandings of multi-racialism actually continue to naturalize the heightened desirability of whiteness because it operates to inaccurately assert that all racial groups are valued equally. In the context of the United States, argues Nagel (2010) the normalization of interracial relationships within racialized power structures that are believed to no longer have a tangible effect, make “the uneven distribution of respectability, resources and power along ethnic lines seem natural, just and deserved by those who win and by those who lose” (198). In the context of East Africa, white Western women working in international development are not viewed as a ‘neutral’ or apolitical social group, though often their wealth and mobility is naturalized as part of their character. Ultimately, these women are highly valued for their wealth and prestige and

clearly demarcated from and elusive to local populations. In this context, then, individuals are certainly not 'blind' to the values attached to racial difference. As I have argued throughout this thesis, relationships with and marriages to white Western women may be encouraged because local populations stand to benefit from the wealth and status provided by and through these women. Indeed, especially in an East African context, the construction of white Western women as 'Others' with access is a compelling argument for transnational interracial relationships and marriages.

Contributions and Future Research

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the ways in which popularized understandings of race and whiteness intersect with lived experiences of gender, sexuality, and class. The construction of white Western women as hypervisible and often desirable 'Others' with access is embodied through sexualized interactions and intimate relations between black East African men and white Western women working in the field of international development. Aiming to make visible and examine individual experiences within a localized context that reflects global power dynamics and racial hierarchies, I unpacked the racialized binaries within which research participants were entangled. Leonardo (2010) argues that critical whiteness studies is a "point of departure in a pedagogy of demystification" (p. 30-31). While many of the participants in this study felt that the more 'innocent' idealization of white people and their whiteness had been diminished over time and with increased exposure, still whiteness retains a numinous quality in popularized East African cultural contexts. Indeed, participants often struggled between ascribing to and resisting hegemonic understandings of the heightened value of whiteness. Demystification, then, does not neutralize or erase the wealth, prosperity, and

privilege held by whites in East Africa, though it may provide an opening in which to challenge the homogenization and the symbolism associated with whiteness and an idealized Western lifestyle.

This discussion contributes to research emerging within whiteness and critical race studies, studies of transnational interracial intimacies and sexualities, as well as critical studies of development. In particular, this thesis troubles continuing resistance to the inclusion of more politicized 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 (White, 2002, p. 416). Development models seem eager to emphasize the abandonment of African ‘cultural traditions’ such as female circumcision, or to promote monogamy and safer-sex through condom use to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS. I contend that it is crucial to turn our attention to the patterns emerging within the personal lives and realities of Western development workers as they engage with local populations while living and working overseas. The lives of individual development workers inform, and are informed by, broader discourses and practices of racialized power and privilege emerging in a transnational context.

Several key questions emerge from this thesis to inform future research contributions. First, the limitations of racial terminology and language surrounding this subject area obscures the diversity of experiences and (self)identification of individuals living and working in East Africa. The different histories between specific Kenyan and

Tanzanian ethnic groups and whites often encourage or discourage continuing transnational interracial interaction, which may change understandings of the desirability of whiteness. Furthermore, religion is also a key issue, both in the lives of individuals and within larger community and cultural formations. Given the organization of regional communities, with large Muslim populations on East Africa's coast, Catholicism dominating in the cities, and the enduring presence of Seventh Day Adventists in rural areas, religious experience and ideology are configured based on ethnicity and location.

Further research is also needed that examines these transnational interracial relationships once they enter a Western context and the fantasy of an idealized Western lifestyle is challenged through first-hand experience. For those male participants who had travelled to a Western country, either with or independent of their white partner, the unfulfilled African 'rags to riches' dream was both a sad and potentially empowering realization. Their idealized view of the West shattered, some felt they were able to return to East Africa with renewed vigor and hope for the opportunities at 'home.' Research that parallels this study, emphasizing instead the desirability of white Western men in development work as they engage in transnational interracial relationships with black East African women, is crucial to highlighting the politicized personal lives of individuals working overseas. The exceptionally negative perceptions that both local and foreign populations hold of these intimate relationships discourage local women from pursuing a better future outside of the borders of their racial grouping and also constrain the intimate possibilities for white Western women in the region. Finally, a more concerted effort is needed to examine the lives of development workers who desire same-sex relationships while in the region. Significantly, conducting such studies may be

difficult, and even dangerous in some cases, given laws against 'homosexual acts' in many regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. These difficulties place significant constraints on future research in this area, and put both researcher and participants in positions of potential danger. Still, it is crucial to forward scholarly work on this subject area, including studies that examine understandings of power and desirability with same-sex transnational interracial intimacies. Such work will contribute to a more full and diverse understanding of the gendered dimensions of sexuality and racial difference in the region.

In conclusion, while they may enjoy the '*mzungu* lifestyle,' these men are still visually identifiable as black, in its multiple configurations of identity, ethnicity, language, location, and religiosity. The status of these men, then, elevates them to a higher position with the local racial and ethnic hierarchies, but they may not be located differently within transnational systems that privileges whiteness across national and cultural borders. Furthermore, black East African men may not be accepted into white Western communities because, as illustrated through the narratives of research participants, negative stereotypes of black African men mean that their motives towards white women are suspect and commonly defined as insincere. Despite being 'whitened' through their relationships and access to wealth, travel, and opportunity, a boundary of difference endures between black East African men and white Western women.

Appendices

Appendix A Interview Questions for Black East African Men

Demographics

What is your age? Where were you born? Where do you live now? What sort of schooling have you had?

Do you have children? What is your marital status?

What kind of work are you doing right now?

Experience with international development

What kind of experience or exposure have you had with development workers and development work? What organizations, if any, have you been affiliated with? What countries have they been based out of?

Have you mostly encountered white people or Kenyans/Tanzanians working in development? What would be the ratio?

How are development workers perceived in Kenya/Tanzania?

When and where do you usually encounter white people? For example, in the market, on the street, at work, in your home neighbourhood, among your social circle? Is it an usual or unusual experience for you?

Experience with white women

Do you encounter more white men or women? Are they usually white Kenyans/Tanzanians, development workers, tourists, etc.?

Is there a difference between white women recently arrived in Kenya/Tanzania and white women born in Kenya/Tanzania?

When you encounter white women, what are you doing? What are the white women doing? (shopping, on the bus, working?)

Would you feel comfortable engaging in a conversation with a white woman whom you did not know if she initiated it? Under what circumstances – on the bus, in a restaurant, at work, at a party or a bar? Or, alternatively, would you feel comfortable initiating a conversation with a white woman – and under what circumstances? What have your interactions with white women been like?

Do you see a difference between white women and black Kenyan/Tanzanian women? Describe these differences.

General interactions

In what ways do you see Kenyan/Tanzanian people and white people interacting? For example, how do Kenyans/Tanzanians and whites interact on the street, in the market; at work; in social spaces like restaurants and bars; in people's homes? Are they usually interacting as employer-employee, co-workers, friends, intimate partners?

How do Kenyan/Tanzanian men and white women in particular interact in these spaces? In what way and in what roles do they relate to each other?

Personal understandings and interactions

What is a *mzungu*? What does that word mean to you?

Are there stereotypes about white people? About white women/white men in particular? Where do you think these understandings come from? Why do people think this?

Has your understanding of white people and white women in particular changed over time (ex. from childhood to adulthood)?

How do Kenyans/Tanzanians generally see interactions or relationships between Kenyan/Tanzanian men and white women? How do you see these relationships? If you see a Kenyan/Tanzanian man and a white woman together, what do you think?

What about relationships between black Kenyan/Tanzanian women and white men? How are these types of relationships generally viewed? Do you see a difference between relationships of black Kenyan/Tanzanian men-white women and white men-Kenyan/Tanzanian women? Is one more common than the other? Is one considered to be more acceptable than the other?

Why is this? What is difference? Are there unwritten social rules about such relationships?

Relationships, dating, and marriage

Who is your ideal marital partner? What qualities do they have?

Are your ideal qualitative attached to a particular race, ethnicity, religion class, education level, career, or social status, etc.? Why?

How do black Kenyan/Tanzanian women meet these ideals?

How do white women meet these ideals, if at all?

Would you ever consider dating or marrying a white (Kenyan/Tanzanian or foreign born?) woman? Why or why not?

Is dating a white woman different from dating a black Kenyan/Tanzanian woman?

Do you think dating and marriage are different here than in the West? Why? Have they affected you?

Do you know anyone who has been or is currently in this form of (interracial) relationship? What response have they received from family and friends?

Are the responses to these relationships different within the development community? How? Why?

How did the relationship go? Is the couple still together? If so (or not) what do you think have been the factors that have kept them together (or caused the breakup)?

If participant HAS been in a transnational interracial relationship...

How long were/have you been together? Where did you meet/how did you get to know each other? Is/was the relationship serious?

How would you describe the relationship? What was at the core of the relationship?

How was the relationship received by family and friends? Or received within the development or expatriate community? In everyday life on the street?

What were the factors that you think caused you to be received well or not?

What were your expectations of the relationship? Were they the same or different as your partner? How so? How did this affect the relationship? How have you negotiated different expectations?

How did the relationship go/how has it gone so far? What do you think were the factors in a break up? OR What do you think has enabled you to stay together long-term?

Did your/has your partner considered moving here permanently? How was/has that been received by your partner/family/friends/development community? Have you/did you considered moving to your partner's country of origin permanently? How has that been/was that received?

What was one of the best, most exciting moments of your relationship? When were you happiest? What made you feel so satisfied and excited about the relationship at that time?

What was the worst, or most disappointing moment of your relationship? What made this time so difficult?

Were these moments of excitement and disappointment based on factors of race and class, or differences between your experiences and expectations?

Do you know anyone else who has been or is currently in this form of (interracial) relationship?

What response have they received from family and friends?

How do you feel about the relationship now that it has ended?

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

Appendix B Interview Questions: White Western Women (various countries)

Demographics

Tell me a bit about yourself:

What is your age? Where were you born? Where do you live now? What sort of schooling have you had?

Do you have children? What is your current marital status?

What kind of work are you doing right now?

Experience with development

What experience or exposure have you had with international development in your life?

What led you to work in international development?

Is this your first time working overseas? What other work have you done? [If yes: Did you find your work/social experience similar or different? How?]

How long have you been in Kenya/Tanzania? What made you decide to live and work in Kenya/Tanzania?

Describe the work you do on a daily basis. Are you primarily working in a rural or urban setting?

Who are the target beneficiaries in your work (ex. women/youth/those living with HIV/AIDS/microfinance/rural development)?

Do you primarily socialize with Kenyans or other foreign development workers? Which Kenyans do you interact with most on a daily basis? Colleagues, project participants/beneficiaries, friends, people on the street?

Experiencing womanhood and whiteness in East Africa

What is it like being white in Kenya/Tanzania? Being a white woman? Being [British/Canada/American]?

Has your experience of 'being white' changed from first arriving to now?

How do you think you are perceived by Kenyans/Tanzanians [when they see you/meet you on the street or at work]? Are there stereotypes held by Kenyans/Tanzanians about white women/white men?

How do daily interactions with Kenyans/Tanzanians – on the street, while shopping, during work, etc. – shape your identity as a white woman?

Has your sense of self and identity changed from being ‘at home’ to being in Kenya/Tanzania?

How have the history of colonialism and racial power structures affected your understanding of yourself as a white woman in Kenya/Tanzania?

Do you think other white women that you know in Kenya/Tanzania have had similar experiences?

Interactions with Kenyan/Tanzanian men and Understandings of Relationships

What kind of interactions do you have with Kenyan/Tanzanian men (especially those between the ages of 18-35) on a daily basis?

How are you treated by Kenyan/Tanzanian men when you are working? What about during your social time, when you are travelling, shopping, at restaurants or bars?

Are there stereotypes about black Kenyan/Tanzanian men? What are they? Where do you think these come from?

Are these understandings similar or different from your understandings of black men “back home”?

How are relationships between black Kenyan/Tanzanian men and white women viewed in Kenya/Tanzania? How do others perceive these forms of relationships?

How are relationships between black Kenyan/Tanzanian women and white men viewed? Is there a difference in how these are viewed?

Is this the same or different from relationships between black men and white women, black women and white men, ‘at home’?

Relationships, dating, and marriage

Who is your ideal marital partner? What qualities do they have?

Are your ideal qualities attached to a particular ethnicity, class, education level, career, or social status, etc.? Why?

How do white men from your country of origin fit these ideals? How do black Kenyan/Tanzanian men meet these ideals?

Do you think dating and marriage are different here than in the West? Why? Have these differences affected you in your relationship?

If participant HAS been in a transnational interracial relationship...

How long were/have you been together? Where did you meet/how did you know each other?

How serious was/is the relationship?

Tell me about the relationship – how would you describe the relationship? How is/did the relationship going/go?

Were your expectations of each other and of the relationship the same or different? How so?

How does/did this affect the relationship?

How was the relationship received by family and friends? Within the development and expatriate community? In public or on the street? What were the factors that you think caused you to be received well or not? Have others that you know received similar responses?

What was one of the best, most exciting moments of your relationship? When were you happiest? What made you feel so satisfied and excited about the relationship at that time?

What was the worst, or most disappointing moment of your relationship? What made this time so difficult?

Were these moments of excitement and disappointment based on factors of race and class, or differences between your experiences and expectations?

What do you think were the factors in a break up? OR What do you think has enabled you to stay together long-term?

Have you considered moving to your country of origin with your partner? How has that been received by your partner/family/friends/development community? Have you considered living here permanently to be with your partner? How has that been received?

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

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