

KNOWLEDGE IS MADE FOR CUTTING:
GENEALOGIES OF RACE AND GENDER IN FEMALE CIRCUMCISION
DISCOURSE

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Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes examples of current female circumcision discourse within U.S. feminist contexts and western-based anti-circumcision projects operating in Kenya. This analysis reveals that, despite recent critiques from postcolonial scholars and activists, this knowledge produced around female circumcision perpetuates discursive and material violence against Kenyan Maasai communities. I explore how this violence has persisted in neo/colonial eras as part of the white western feminist ‘care of self’ technique of displacing female abjection through the pleasure of whiteness. I trace how these formations of race and gender have become attached to understandings of genitalia through colonial-era race science, Freudian psychoanalysis and some feminist texts from 1949-1970. I suggest that these western feminist constructions of sexual liberation rely on depicting racialized women as primitive and degenerate. Finally, I argue that these racial and gendered constructions now inform concepts of ‘developed’ versus ‘underdeveloped’ bodies and nations in contemporary international development work.

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Introduction

Female circumcision has become a curious provocation in U.S. feminist circles. The mere mention of this phrase—a phrase that problematically condenses a wide range of practices from disparate geographic, cultural and historical locales—seems to incite rage, disgust and emphatic disavowal of either the practices or the feminists who oppose them. Bolstering these affective responses is yet another layer of feeling: a kind of titillation, a pleasure proliferated when thinking about certain parts of certain bodies. This thesis is an exploration into the strata of these responses and the way female circumcision discourse has emerged in its present forms in U.S. feminist contexts. I explore how this issue has come to be talked about so often and with such fervor and more specifically how this discourse has become bound up with feminist identity in a way that relies on the reproduction of race and gender and ensuing inequalities. It is also an exploration of how this discourse, and the material structures and feminist projects involved, lands in communities outside the U.S.—specifically in the Maasai community of southern Kenya. The specificity of this inquiry, as well as my pursuit of this perhaps overly discussed subject matter, is of a both personal and political nature.

In the spring of 2006 a group of young Maasai women reported to a community elder that they had been sexually assaulted while staying at a ‘safe house’ center in southern Kenya. The center had been established several years earlier by a U.S.-based feminist organization with the mission of providing housing for Maasai girls who did not want to undergo circumcision rites or get married before finishing school. The report of sexual abuse was the latest of several problems that local residents had identified with the center. Through a network of careful communication the utterances of these Maasai

women were eventually translated to me while I was working as an assistant for a Maasai community activist from the same region who was temporarily teaching at a college in the United States. No doubt transfigured and recoded through its transatlantic journey, this report of violence emerged in my cultural context as an event of anti-colonial feminist discourse. What I was able to hear about this incident was largely shaped by my limited experience working on Maasai land-rights claims, my personal sense-making around the experience of sexual assault and my growing concern about the imperialist dimensions of international development work. A brief auto-ethnographic analysis of my relationship to this speech act coming from several young women in Kenya provides an introduction for the analysis of power relations that I hope to explore in this thesis.

At the time the women reported their abuse at the anti-circumcision shelter, I had been working in Kenya as a research and teaching assistant for several summers and had only encountered conversations about female circumcision in the U.S., usually as part of a classroom discussion or in the commentary of a westerner who discovered I had travelled to Maasailand. I considered the practices to be off-limits to my outside critique or curiosity—certain aspects of my queer life were often grossly misunderstood or deemed morally reprehensible by much of my own society and I was skeptical of the dramatic interpretations of female circumcision written by outsiders. Learning about the report of abuse at a center intended to prevent violence against girls complicated my perspective. Clearly a hands-off stance on the issue was not adequate considering my proximity to the position of the well-intentioned white feminists intervening in complicated cultural issues and now implicated in severe exploitation. To explore the complexity of this issue, the Maasai activist I was working with and I decided to bring a

fictionalized version of the scenario into our classroom as an object of discussion. We planned a student debate on the ethics and politics of outside intervention on the practice of female circumcision in Kenya drawing on international law, Kenyan scholars and profiles of western non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The emotional volatility of the ensuing conversations again forced deeper reflection—how did a classroom full of mostly white U.S. college students come to take the issue of female circumcision so personally?

I began reading more on the debates around female circumcision and talking at length with my mentors from both Kenya and the U.S. and started to see how the issue of genital surgeries was caught up—indeed brought into being as an object of analysis—through the power relations of race, colonialism and gender. When members of the Maasai community living near the ‘safe house’ asked my colleague to arrange a formal investigation into the abuse allegations, he invited a student from the class and me to assist in undertaking said research that summer. For several months we interviewed community leaders, church pastors, county council members, parents, students and the young women who had escaped the safe house and made the initial report. Our culminating report was turned over to the United Nations, the Narok County Council, the Anti-corruption Commission of Kenya and the Pastor of the church where the young women were living. The findings included sexual abuse allegations; fabricated names of Maasai girls reportedly receiving scholarships; reports of girls being “rounded up” from town to act the part of asylum-seekers when U.S. donors were visiting; reports that girls were physically neglected and denied access to schooling; and reports that at least one rape kit performed by police after an incident of sexual assault had been tampered with

and that the girl in question was now missing (Noss and Cabot, 2006). The evidence of abuse and the implication of the U.S. organization seemed overwhelming to us, however, the process of ‘doing something’ with that information proved to be difficult on many levels.

When the U.S. organization was made aware of the report, we began a lengthy conversation with the organization over email. Our request, via the interviews with the young women who initiated the investigation, was for a financial audit from an external reviewer, a thorough investigation into the safety of the center and that the directors of the NGO visit the young women to discuss the events in person. After months of correspondence, our research team sat at a table engaged in a heated phone conference with the managing director and a U.S. woman who had volunteered at the center. At a certain point in the call, I recognized my own naïvete in assuming that the presentation of this information would result in any semblance of justice. When the director dismissed our findings—claiming that the acting director was a Kenyan woman and the U.S. NGO did not want to overstep her bounds—I began to realize what the young Maasai women had undoubtedly been aware of throughout the entire process: some forms of violence against women matter to western feminists while others, perhaps deemed less profitable, are ignored. Nearly four years later, at the time of this writing, we are still pursuing the investigation having just now received word that members of the United Nations want to speak with our research team about the adverse effects of NGOs in the region. I remain immersed in an examination of the historical and racialized parameters of my relationship to this event and my desire to stay involved in the proceedings. As part of this very personal and political learning, this thesis is an in depth exploration of the power

relations of knowledge production and the particular history of the white feminist subject working in Maasailand, Kenya.

Investigating female circumcision discourse gives way to broader questions about what Sherene Razack (2008) calls “racism in the name of feminism” (p. 207). It becomes necessary to ask how within the discourse of western feminism, one particular utterance of violence against Maasai girls came to be refused while another was simultaneously proliferated. It appears that not all violence against women is taken up equally within western feminist discourse—in this example, accounts of rape and neglect became unhearable while the violence of female circumcision was arguably concocted in some instances for the benefit of a western feminist project. I draw on this incident not to address the veracity of the reports or the political decisions of an organization—these things are momentarily irrelevant. Nor do I seek to single out one organization as particularly problematic—there is a disconcerting plethora of similar instances from recent news headlines ranging from abuse allegations at Oprah’s school for girls in South Africa to recent reports of children being kidnapped in Sudan and Haiti by western charity volunteers. In the pages that follow I focus on an exploration of the discourse of female circumcision within which the events of our report were engendered to emerge—tracing through a variety of events and texts how it is that the U.S. organization in our report was so easily able to dismiss testimonies of serious abuse while maintaining a claim to innocence.

This incident involving the U.S. anti-circumcision NGO and other genitally-focused feminist interventions over the past several decades appear to be predicated on certain understandings of violence in relation to certain kinds of women—a relationship

that discursively constructs different bodies. In the chapters that follow, I trace how race, gender and colonial dynamics operate in the making of bodies and the framing of their lived experiences, particularly within the historical relationship between the geopolitical West—including here the dominant cultural and political forces and communities in the U.S., Canada and western Europe and other colonial metropolises—and Maasailand, a legally undetermined swath of land covering nearly 700 square miles and home to roughly 500,000 Maasai people in eastern Africa. I work here to question the ‘common senseness’ within western feminist discourse that positions female circumcision as the trump card amongst all other conditions affecting Maasai women’s lives—most notably obscuring those conditions which might implicate western feminists themselves in facilitating violence against women. In many ways this inquiry is shaped by Donna Haraway’s (1998/2003) question, “With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (p. 31). I ask, how do we in the West know what we think we know about female circumcision? And what violence against Maasai people has occurred in order to produce that knowledge?

I situate this thesis within a feminist tradition that critiques western feminist discourse around female circumcision as inextricable from the power relations operating through and comprising formal and post-colonialism. It is precisely through the preoccupation with genitalia and the ‘primitive’ practice of female circumcision that the ‘sexually liberated’ western feminist comes to know herself as a ‘civilized’ and viable subject. This embodiment of civility is racially coded and relies on the construction of other bodies made to incarnate difference—specifically the figurative body of the sexually mutilated, undeveloped, African woman. Further, I argue that the production of

racialized subjects through female circumcision discourse follows the biopolitical rules of race, which Foucault outlined as a mechanism for disciplining bodies and regulating populations along lines of life and death (Foucault, 1976/2003, p. 254). I explore these analyses through three interrelated inquiries: First, how has the clitoris become a salient object of western feminist discourse? Second, how has genitalia emerged as a site of knowledge production determining notions of race, gender and colonization? Third, what kinds of subjects are produced through this discourse and how are they interpellated through the biopolitical relations of international development? The issue of female circumcision and how it has been represented has been complicated by the critiques of African and critical western feminists in recent years, and yet instances of violence in knowledge production against these practices persist. In pursuing these questions, I hope to join the tradition of postcolonial feminist scholars who are troubling this racism that operates in the name of feminism and to begin to imagine other possibilities.

Chapter 1: A Review of Literature and Dangerous Analytics

There is a theoretical glut surrounding the issue of female genital surgeries practiced by communities marked as ‘non-western.’ Western feminists have been particularly preoccupied with the practice since the 1970s, though in the case of Kenya—where I focus my inquiries—western women have been involved in debating female circumcision since the early 1900s (Boyle, 2002; Thomas, 2003). Feminist scholarship on the issue has ranged from moralistic and militaristic cries for eradication of the practices—often couched in a language of ‘universal sisterhood’ and a shared vulnerability among women—to crucial rebuttals of these “imperialist discourses” by African and Islamic scholars, as well as feminists of color and critical white feminists in the west (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 5; Boyle, 2002; Walley, 2002). Feminists’ positions on the different practices of female circumcision have varied widely within these debates, yet relatively few texts have questioned the scholarship’s reliance on “a genital definition of women” (Hale, 2005, p. 212). My aim is to question how, in the face of decades of critique, this preoccupation with female circumcision endures. Rather than outline a chronology of writings on female genital surgeries, I want to review the literature by tracing how the idea of the body has emerged in three interconnected forms within some of the major texts in the debates over the last 40 years. I will sometimes take up these three embodied themes directly in the chapters to come, but more often they will be integrated into explorations of more detailed histories.

The universal feminist body

In 1973, U.S. journalist Fran Hosken embarked on a fifteen-country tour of Africa in order to document what she termed the “public health concern” of “female genital mutilation [FGM]” (Hosken, 1977/1982, p. iii). Her culminating report *The Hosken report: Genital and sexual mutilation of females* (spanning three editions published in 1977, 1979, 1982), what has been described as “the single most influential document responsible for raising western consciousness of FGC [female genital cutting],” was predicated on the notion of a universal bodily experience amongst women (Robertson, 2002, p. 60). Presenting arguably pornographic descriptions of various procedures practiced in several different African communities, Hosken’s (1982) report conflates a wide-range of genital surgeries under the term ‘female genital and sexual mutilation,’ which she attributes to a single “universal, hierarchical structure...used worldwide to socialize all female children into a submissive, inferior position” (p. 4). In Hosken’s reports the body marked ‘female’ becomes an ahistorical plane for plotting patriarchal violence. This same timeless body agonized during the “witch burnings” in the Medieval Europe, endured the “torture” of scientific sexual control during Victorian times and continues to suffer from “[d]ark fears and myths about female sexuality, segregation of the sexes, and female sexual castration” in Africa and the Middle East (p. 4). The universal feminist body as invoked by Hosken is defined by its singular physicality and yet becomes the imagined connective tissue linking infinite individual women throughout geographic locations and historical eras.

Like many other texts predicated on the biological determinism of gender, Hosken relies on the universality of this imagined body in order to establish a hierarchy among the ‘real’ women she encounters in her work on female circumcision. Her position as a

white western woman is mobilized as a claim to authority over all ‘othered’ bodies. Describing the capacity of African women to address the issue of genital surgeries without outside intervention, Hosken states “it is clear that none of the people involved in these practices have adequate knowledge about their own bodies or about biological facts” (p. 301). Throughout the report Hosken establishes a hierarchy of bodily knowledge along the weary racialized lines of the primitive/civilized binary. She relies on western science to establish her authority and insist that western feminists are obligated to “introduce modernization” to African women in order to counter “traditional beliefs in spirits, witchcraft, and myths” (p. 300). This obligation to intervene—what we might consider via Rudyard Kipling to be the ‘white woman’s burden’—was for Hosken grounded in a shared embodiment. As she wrote in the preface to the third edition of her report, “We need to recognize that we are women first, before we are white or black; we need to understand that we are female first, before we are African, Asian, European or American” (p. 15).

Not surprisingly, Hosken drew almost exclusively from white western feminists (i.e. Susan Brownmiller and Kathleen Barry) to present the ‘female’ body as a universal reality amongst women and eschew dimensions of race, homosexuality and class. She argues for example, that “[t]oo much has been said about imperialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all other ‘isms’ bandied about in our patriarchal societies” (Hosken, 1982, p. 15). For Hosken, and feminists such as Mary Daly (1978/1990) and Hanny Lightfoot-Klein (1989) who took up her research without pause, the issue of female circumcision permitted a sense of urgency to intervene on issues considered violence against women while dodging any dialogue around difference (Daly, 1978/1990, p. 156; Lightfoot-Klein,

1989, p. xi). Despite decades of critique this reductive trope continues: In Lightfoot-Klein's (2008) most recent text, *Children's genitals under the knife: Social imperatives, secrecy and shame*, she opens with the inscription from Carl Sandburg, "There is only one child in the world and the child's name is 'All Children'" (p. 3). Here Lightfoot-Klein relies on the singular feminist body to conflate experiences of genital surgery across culture, history and context in order to "give voice to the multitudes of human beings who exist behind the statistics..." (ibid). Crucially, however, the power relations circulating in this text position only the white feminist author as capable of 'giving' voice.

The primacy of gender oppression resulting in the elision of difference amongst the bodies and lives of women has been at the heart of feminist debate for many decades. Within second-wave scholarship—the era of feminism in which Hosken was undertaking her research in Africa—critiques by Black feminists such as members of the Combahee River Collective were already advocating for an "interlocking" approach to identity that considered the relationships between class, race and sexuality among women (Combahee River Collective, 1979, para. 2). Whether welcome or not, African and Black feminist resistances to the reductive and racist claims within Hosken's reports are present throughout the various editions. An example of Hosken's (1982) dismissal of these resistances as 'false ideologies' is worth quoting at length, as it reflects the broader tensions of difference erupting within feminist communities throughout the 1970s and '80s:

The other claim, made by misguided African women, that female genital mutilation is a local concern that is up to African women to settle, is equally damaging and false...The AAWORD (Association of African Women for Research and Development) women's organization from

Dakar, led by Marie-Angelique Savane, protested the discussion of genital mutilation and even disrupted one of my meetings at the Copenhagen U. N. Mid-Decade Conference 'Forum'. They even attacked UNICEF for offering assistance to children injured by the mutilations! (p. 23)

According to Hosken, the critiques against European ethnocentrism made by African women are the “misguided” results of patriarchal oppression—even further, they are audacious interruptions of her feminist activism. Though from Hosken’s perspective only African and Middle Eastern women are vulnerable to circumcision, her premise of a universal feminist body granted her ownership over the issue. Her investment was deeply personal and quite central to the very notion of her personhood; this is apparent when she declares that she would not cease her media campaign until circumcision was eradicated or, “I would not be able to live with myself” (ibid). Though Hosken’s work is perennially cited—and nearly as often critiqued—in more recent scholarship, the universal feminist body remains a ghostly presence in the literature as I will explore below.

The underdeveloped body

As a white woman claiming authoritative perspective on the happenings throughout the continent of Africa and at the bodily level of African women, Hosken garnered well-deserved critique from feminist scholars of color in the West. Problematically, however, female circumcision was simply re-appropriated as a cause celebre by many African American feminists without much challenge to the imperialist dimensions of claiming a naturalized authority on the issue (Nnaemeka, 2005a, p. 4). Perhaps the most well known example is Alice Walker’s (1992) novel *Possessing the secret of joy* that depicts an African woman named Tashi from the fictional country of

Olinka who has nearly every aspect of her life destroyed because of her childhood circumcision. A *New York Times*' bestseller, with a run of 17 weeks on the *Publisher's Weekly* bestseller list, Walker's novel was popular enough to inspire a collaborative film with Pratibha Parmar entitled *Warrior Marks*. Released in 1992, the film depicts Walker and Parmar on a multi-country tour of Africa interviewing circumcised women, women who work as circumcisers, and anti-circumcision activists from Senegal and Gambia. The companion text of 1993, *Warrior Marks: Female genital mutilation and the sexual blinding of women*, published the following year is a collection of letters between the two producers and Walker's reflections during the filmmaking process. Walker and Parmar's work has been thoroughly critiqued by African and other feminists questioning the reliability and ethics of their undertaking (see Obiora, 2005 and Nwankwo, 2005 for two recent examples). I won't repeat those analyses here, however I do want to draw attention to Walker and Parmar's particular use of 'disability' to frame circumcision.

In *Possessing the secret of joy*, for example, Tashi gives birth to a son, Benny, who is brain-damaged due to birthing complications as a result of her circumcision (Walker, 1992). This event is depicted as utterly tragic and as Tashi—still unenlightened as to the political implications of her surgery—struggles with Benny, her husband has an affair with an (uncircumcised) French woman who then gives birth to a 'healthy' baby. This trope of disability joins a history of circumcision discourse linked to the racialized notions of bodily integrity and reproduction, wherein Chima Korieh (2005) asserts, "African women are presented as mutilated, abject bodies" (p. 122). In *Possessing*, the possibility for political liberation is inextricable from the condition of one's genitalia, for example, the uncircumcised French mistress is the only woman in the text who has a

sense of autonomy and self-actualization. Tashi remains an ignorant child-like figure until the end of the novel when she grasps the only vestige of humanity left to her as a circumcised woman; sentenced to death for murdering her circumciser, Tashi finally realizes that the secret of joy is resistance to the ultimate evil of circumcision. The trope of modernization in the construction of abject African bodies is further facilitated by the use of illustrated diagrams in Walker's (1993) *Warrior marks* text—side-by-side depictions of normalized uncircumcised genital areas and abject 'mutilated' genital areas with haphazard stitching.

Perhaps an even more telling example of the disability construct is Walker's profession during the *Warrior marks* film of an incident in her own childhood when she was shot in the eye by her brother with a BB gun given to him by their parents. Due to her resulting blindness in one eye, Walker states that she is able to physically and emotionally relate to women in Africa who are similarly de-sensitized ("sexually blinded") during a patriarchal ritual upheld by family elders (Walker and Parmar, 1992). Consistent with reports from Hosken (1982) and Lightfoot-Klein (1989), female circumcision in Walker's example is depicted as a disabling procedure invariably marked by pain, physical impairment and sexual anesthesia. In a section entitled, "Like the pupil of an eye" in the film's companion text, Walker (1993) further invokes the disabled body, writing that "[w]ithout the clitoris and other sexual organs, a woman can never see herself reflected in the healthy intact body of another. Her sexual vision is impaired, and only the most devoted lover will be sexually seen" (p. 19). Thus the circumcised body is rendered sexually impaired and, significantly for the discussion at hand, unlovable. I will explore in depth in the coming chapters some of the implications of this healthy/impaired

binary, but for now I want to highlight the way in which female circumcision debates have relied on the construction of normal bodies—a notion I hope to deconstruct along the lines of Lennard J. Davis' (2006) point that, “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (p. 3).

The discursive paradigm established through these texts on female genital surgeries is that the circumcised body is a disabled body, which is a body that fails to develop along normalized standards—in this instance, a doubly disabled body that refuses to develop according to the western feminist expectations for the ‘Third World.’ As Korieh (2005) points out, “[i]n the late twentieth century the postcolonial woman has become the subject of *planned* ‘liberation’ called development” (p. 117). This is evident in Hosken’s (1982) lament that “despite many years and millions spent on ‘development,’” African communities still fail to accept modern notions of women’s health (p. 301). While the teleology of development and its racialized dimensions did not originate in these feminist debates, its presence in formative texts such as those by Hosken and Walker is significant considering the way they influenced policy change at the international level. Prior to 1990, there was no multi-nation organizational stipulation against female genital surgeries and the World Health Organization (WHO) had refused at least two formal requests to study the practices in 1959 and 1962 (Boyle, 2002, p. 41). By 1995, largely due to the pressure from western feminists, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP were issuing joint statements condemning the practice on the basis that it violated women’s rights to healthy development (ibid, p. 55). The terms of this development, however, were contested from the start.

The differentiated body

In 1983, a year after the third edition of Hosken's report, the Women's Caucus of the African Studies Association issued a position paper problematizing outside western intervention in female genital surgeries. The paper closed with a bibliography of recommended literature largely drawing from African and Arab authors. One of the authors, Nawal El Saadawi, is a well-known critic of western intervention; a medical doctor by training, El Saadawi (2005) follows suit with health concerns as her rationale for opposing all forms of female circumcision. Her argument parts ways, however, when she criticizes U.S. international policy for its role in increasing the frequency of the practices by "encourag[ing] religious fundamentalist groups internationally and inside the United States..." (p. 22). While focusing on political and economic circumstances surrounding the practices, El Saadawi and other prominent African and Arab feminists working within and outside the West have criticized the representation of racialized bodies and cultures in female circumcision debates. Obioma Nnaemeka (2005) argues for example, that "the ultimate violence done to African women is the exhibition of their body parts—in this instance, the vagina—in various stages of 'unbecoming'" (p. 30). Here Nnaemeka describes what might be thought of as the 'discursive mutilation' of racialized bodies—which includes the violence of research practices and knowledge production. Describing an extreme aspect of this exploitation, Nnaemeka writes, "[i]t is no secret that westerners and western media organizations have offered money and used all sorts of coercion to have girls circumcised so that westerners could shoot pictures for their magazines, newspapers, books and documentaries" (p. 32).

An early critique of western-centric perspectives and research practices was Isabelle Gunning's (1991) influential article in the *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*. Using the language of feminist Marilyn Frye, Gunning categorizes much of the western scholarship as "arrogant perception" (p. 189). The article delineates Gunning's own assumptions, saying that while she felt concern about the practices she was wary of her "own desires to fit the practice neatly into a feminist version of the category 'human rights violation,'" which seemed to rely on rendering African feminists non-existent (p. 197). Gunning's article brought into conversation the fraught relationship between the categories western and non-western women, as well as a detailed analysis of female genital surgeries performed on white women in the West (p. 209). Unlike Hosken's report that advocated for an erasure of difference among women, Gunning located her optimism for legal action to stop female circumcision precisely in the potential for embracing differences among women. At this point in the article Gunning draws on Maria Lugones' notion of "world-travelling" in order to establish a methodology for navigating difference. Interestingly, Lugones' (1987) description of this process identifies the problem of exploitation between women, not as a "parasitism" of white women among women of color, but as "a complex failure of love in the failure to identify with another woman;" love and thus common identity is possible by visiting (metaphorically and physically) the contexts of 'other' women (p. 7). When discussing female circumcision then, Gunning via Lugones argues the premise should be that as women "we are different but not entirely dissimilar; we are independent beings but not without interconnectedness and overlaps" (Gunning, 1991, p. 202).

Gunning's work was just one of many interventions from feminists of color that troubled the idea of the universal feminist body by foregrounding differences among women and the power relations of knowledge production. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1996) levied a brilliant critique against *Warrior Marks* and the general trends of Euro-US cultural feminism as neocolonial and imperialist; they argued that "US multiculturalists cannot address issues of inequalities and differences if they presume the goal of progressive politics is to construct subjects, feminist or womanist, that are just like themselves" (p. 7). Grewal, Kaplan and other postcolonial feminists critiqued the images of the female body within multicultural texts as one rhetorically differentiated by race, ethnicity, ability or geography, but nevertheless singular in its feminine gender oppression as determined by European and US terms. These feminists did not call for abandoning work against gender oppression; they worked toward equality by revealing how the idea of the western feminist subject was founded precisely on the production of inequalities amongst women. Sherene Razack's (1998) exploration of the construction of racialized women in legal contexts revealed the complexity of "talk[ing] about women and the violence they experience in their states, families and communities, about interlocking systems of oppression, and specifically, about the ways in which there is First World complicity in both the sexual and racial persecution of Third World women" (p. 90-91). These theorists insisted that any instance of gender-related violence must also be considered in terms of race, geography and class—including the issue of genital surgeries.

Scholars such as Ylva Herlund and Bettina Shell-Duncan (2007) have approached the issue of female circumcision through a postcolonial feminist critique by compiling an

intriguing volume of essays on the dynamics, policies and identities of women in immigrant communities that practice or oppose female circumcision within countries such as Norway, Sweden, Germany and the United States. While their text works against the imperialist dimensions of Euro-US feminisms, even contributors to their volume retain the racist terms of multiculturalism wherein graphic descriptions of various circumcision procedures and detailed accounts of genital formations are presented in order to establish the nuances of difference and confirm the barbarity of the practices (for example see Boddy, 2007, p. 50). This imagining of a differentiated body as a mutilated version of the ideal feminist body leaves plenty of room for paternalistic and exploitative relationships amongst women; as will be explored in the next chapter, such decorative descriptions of body formations or accounts of pain can belie consumptive forms of empathy. The increasing plurality in the debates on female circumcision has certainly garnered more validity for the writings of African women and others who have personally experienced genital surgeries, however there remain limitations on the representation of the differentiated body. It is difficult to find scholarship, for example, depicting any positive importance of these practices, even though some qualitative surveys include large percentages of African and Arab women who stress the celebratory aspects of genital surgeries including the “emphasis on fertility,” “socialization of selfhood,” and “pride” (Hale, 2005, p. 216).

Even within otherwise critical compilations, there remain obligatory disclaimers among “those of us committed to eradicating FGC [female genital cutting]” (James & Robertson, 2002, p. 7) such as, “All the contributors condemn the practice...” (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 3)” or the more coercive, “I think I am safe in saying that none of us

who has studied the practice in its context are so theoretically myopic or inhumane as to advocate its continuance” (Boddy, 1991, quoted in Boyle, 2002, p. 24). In other instances there is a quiet assumption that anyone reading, writing or discussing the practices is working to end them. Exploring what has been foregrounded and what has been obscured in female circumcision discourse requires a genealogical analysis to trace the historical conditions of this current conversation. This thesis hopes to continue in the tradition of postcolonial feminist critiques of insidious forms of racism that fuel many western feminist projects and theories by interrogating the fixation on female circumcision.

Methodology and Dangerous Analytics

According to Foucault (1971/1998), “Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (p. 375-6). Judith Butler (1993) goes further, saying: “The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified as prior*. This signification produces an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action” (p. 30) I read these statements as methodological directives to trace the ways that history has marked the body—to reveal how the body is not a given object waiting to be described, but a material reality brought into being through its discursive construction. Foucault asks that one pay close attention to descent, which Alys Eve Weinbaum (2004) argues is an indication that genealogy, in both the sense of bloodline and methodology, is rooted in the “race/reproduction bind” (p. 5). For Weinbaum “this conceptual unit, rather than either of its parts alone, organizes the

modern episteme,” meaning that race and bodily reproduction are inextricable from one another and also that scholars are ‘bound’ to perpetuate (even if unintentionally) that relationship (ibid). While this thesis does not focus on sexual reproduction, I acknowledge that any attempt to exclude the concept within an analysis of race and sexuality is unsound. As I undertake a genealogy of genitalia and trace the emergence of subjects within female circumcision discourse I am participating in the discursive reproduction of certain bodies, even as I work to deconstruct their inception.

The bind between race and genealogy is further present in my analysis as I draw from Nietzsche, Freud and Foucault in order to unearth some of the racialized dimensions of their very scholarship. I follow Weinbaum’s (2004) call for “a deeper, more palimpsestic understanding of the overdetermined connection between the development of a critical genealogical methodology and nineteenth-century transatlantic discourses on race” (p. 48). For instance, in Foucault’s (1971/1998) essay *Nietzsche, genealogy, history*, he argues that Nietzsche’s notion of descent (*Herkunft*) should be understood as the uncovering of the Self as a collection of random, non-essential “lost events” in history (p. 374). The arbitrariness of these historical events does not diminish their significance, particularly in relation to power and race, in that they are bound up in an “endlessly repeated play of dominations” between ‘different’ bodies (p. 378). Weinbaum points out that within Foucault’s outlining of genealogy,

a popular understanding of race as a body script pervades the language, adopted from Nietzsche, in which Foucault discusses the genealogist’s findings as bearing ‘faint traces of color’ that are manifest as epidermal alterations of the palimpsest that is the human body (p. 48).

When looking at Nietzsche’s work, she continues, “[n]ot surprisingly, figurations of race, racial mixture and genealogical corruption become that much more unavoidable...”

(ibid). A methodology that primarily searches for fissures and deviations in a supposedly ‘pure’ historical lineage takes on a new meaning when read through Weinbaum’s focus on “wayward reproduction” and the racial miscegenation that has haunted western modernity (p. 4). Given that notions of race, normalcy and the modern Self came into being during Nietzsche’s nineteenth century, the very methodology of genealogy “can be read as racist, but might at the same time be mined for its critical potential” (Weinbaum, 2004, p. 59). While neither Nietzsche nor Foucault invented this racialized discourse, its percolation through their analyses requires a careful use of a genealogical method. In this thesis I undertake a critical genealogy to examine not only the discursive events present in texts on female genital surgeries, but also ‘lost events’ of history—such as imperialism and colonialism—that together make viable subjects out of certain bodies, and disposable objects out of others.

In such a genealogical undertaking one must look at how the emergence of events and subjects is regulated by relations of power and how this process is contradictory and fragile and thus constantly being re-established with violence if necessary (Razack, 2008, p. 9). Following this directive, I analyze a broad selection of texts in order to, in the words of Elizabeth St. Pierre (2000), “make visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world” (p. 481). As my questions arise from social problems as a result of this discursive violence, I follow Derek Hook’s (2001) suggestion to analyze “*the material conditions of possibility*...the multiple institutional supports and various social structures and practices underlying the production of truth” (p. 525-526, emphasis in the original). In the chapters that follow, I examine the script of a feminist play as well as an autoethnographic reflection of

participating in the play as an actress and audience member; articles and studies published on African/female sexuality ranging from the early nineteenth-century to present; literary texts produced by western women living in Maasailand since the onset of colonialism; a case-study example of a western feminist intervention in a circumcision case in Narok, Kenya in 2008; and three open-ended interviews that I conducted with Maasai leadership in the Narok area.

While each of these objects of analysis is marked by particular constraints that I explore in detail at the start of each chapter, I follow a fairly consistent methodological frame throughout. Specifically I follow Hook's (2005) interpretation of Foucault's "eventualization" described as approaching "the object of analysis [as] far more *a complex of events*, a poised moment of various intersections of force rather than a self-sustained, autonomous entity" (p. 13). I am therefore interested in the 'extra-textual' dimensions of these objects—the events that allowed the text to be written/performed—as much as I consider the words and images produced. As outlined in my literature review above, I am particularly concerned with the way that female circumcision discourse produces certain bodies—as Foucault (1976/2003) notes, "[w]e believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology, and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false" (p. 380). Rather, he avers that the body is shaped by regimes of discourse, that "it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws" (ibid). To deconstruct these historical forces and bring the very body into question is not to minimize the significance of the body, as Butler (1993) posits "To problematize the matter of bodies may entail a loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is

not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking” (p. 30).

Feminist theory has done much to establish the body as a privileged site of analysis. Particularly in the poststructuralist feminisms of late there has been a focus on the inextricable relationship between identity and various embodiments leading to an acknowledgement of the political dimensions of difference. There remain significant limitations within this theorizing, however, as Sara Ahmed (2000) astutely notes,

...despite many appeals to the differentiated body within feminist philosophy, I think there has been less substantive analysis of *how ‘bodies’ come to be lived through being differentiated from other bodies*, whereby differences in ‘other bodies’ already mark ‘the body’ as such (emphasis added, p. 41).

In other words, even within feminist theory that privileges the idea of difference among bodies, that difference is often de-historicized and essentialized *onto* ‘other’ bodies. In these analyses, the universality of the white body persists and the caveat of ‘race, class, disability, etc.’ becomes a rhetorical maneuver that leaves the structural processes and effects of different embodiments unexamined. The white subject prevails in these additive analyses as the central figure that simply “reincorporates difference as a sign of its own fractured and multiple coming-into-being” (p. 42). Ahmed avers that if difference is to be understood as more than the augmentation of a white body, we have to have to inquire into the actual processes of differentiation and ask how bodies *become* different. Within my analysis, I attempt to recognize and *destabilize* familiar figures in female circumcision discourse, such as the ‘genitally mutilated Maasai girl’ or the ‘sexually liberated white feminist’. Heeding Ahmed’s critique, I work to uncover the violence of these differentiations and account for how they have come to be. My aim is

not to render ‘other’ bodies into figures juxtaposed against the legitimate subject of the white western feminist, but to expose the very *process* of making this particular subject as tenuous and incomplete. Further, I locate this process of race-making within the broader industry of international development work as a mechanism of biopower that regulates populations along lines of viability—through which the ‘less developed’ populations are both constructed and made more vulnerable to premature death.

The constraint of discourse far exceeds the mere naming of objects, as Foucault (1970/2002) argued, analogies and metaphors fashion the very terms of mobility, legitimacy, and livability of subjects (p. 155). For example, in the discourse of female circumcision the selected use of ‘genital surgeries’ or ‘genital mutilation’ to describe the same practices reflects a social, historical and political regulation of bodies; the medicalized term ‘surgeries’ implies modernity, sanitation, plurality of practices, while ‘mutilation’ conjures primitivity, violence, irrationality. The fetishized term ‘mutilation’—the particular history of which will be explored below—produces an enduring victim, a ‘docile body’ bound to the static realm of tradition. Further still, the genital referent occurs within its own history of meaning, as not all genitalia are deemed equal within the colonizing gaze. Questioning these linguistic variables is not so much a move toward political correctness as an exploration of how the way “we word the world” affects conditions of precariousness and disposability for certain individuals and communities (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 438). This becomes particularly poignant when examining discourse on female circumcision considering Foucault’s axiom that “knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (ibid). I take this up as a double entendre; meaning first, that ‘mutilated’ genitalia is the result of a discursive

surgery performed through the barbarism of words that construct and then dissect racialized and gendered bodies, and second, that in order to effectively analyze this discourse and encourage a shift in the political thinking around circumcision and its broader context of ‘development’ one must employ knowledge as a search for breaks and discontinuities in the discursive body so as to imagine what else might be possible.

This project requires geographic parameters. The original spatial configuration of the metropole and the colony has shifted significantly since formal colonialism because of increased transnational migration, and this undoubtedly effects the conversation around female genital surgeries (Pratt, 2005; Hernlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007). Because I am interested in the biopolitical relations of international feminist projects, I address the continued flow of western bodies to Africa under the banner of development work. I examine particularly the encounter between western feminists and members of Maasai communities in southern Kenya. The specificity of this encounter is related to my experiences in the region and reflects an effort to avoid the elision of difference amongst communities within Africa—a distortion of plurality that has been described by Cheryl McEwan (2000) as, “creating myths about the myths of the so-called ‘dark continent’” (p. 10). In a process as old as the colonial ‘scramble for Africa’, the continent is frequently reduced to a handful of images; subjugated are the sky-scrapers, diverse systems of governance, and feminist movements that would disrupt the perception of “Africa as the modern-day trope for all that is not ‘developed’” (Heron, 2007, p. 16; Arnfred, 2004). I attempt to theorize around the distinct figures that emerge in western feminist perceptions of this imaginative geography and thus reveal nuances in the building of certain bourgeois identities. I posit that female circumcision discourse is shaped by the

specificity of these figures;¹ as I explore in chapter 4 the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ *as a figure* cannot exist outside the particular colonial legacy that imagined the “arrogant...chic [and] ill-fated” “Maasai warriors” or the billion-dollar tourism industry in Kenya that makes a special fetish commodity out of Maasai people and culture (Blixen, 1937, 145-6).²

This analysis, and indeed my entire theoretical project, has required what Kamala Visweswaran (1994) calls a “practice of failure” (p. 98). Research has long been a tactic that operates to exploit Indigenous people—and Maasai communities are no exception (Smith, 1999; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). As Maori scholar and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) reminds me, the work of articulating power relations in the western feminist-Maasai encounter and “giving voice to things that are often known intuitively” is a limited form of activism that “provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences—but it does not prevent someone from dying” (p. xii). Simply put, though challenging the undergirding structures of current socio-economic configurations in Maasailand, this research cannot hope to change material conditions for Maasai people. Many of the consequences of past and present colonialisms, including loss of land rights, denial of access to clean water, exploitation by the tourism industry and state violence require a significant reallocation of resources and political representation. This

¹ For example, the coastal region of Kenya has a large Muslim and Somali population reported to practice female circumcision (infibulation) and feminist critiques of this particular version of the practice are often conflated with the figure of the veiled Muslim woman that shapes and is shaped by the discourse of the War on Terror and other anti-Muslim rhetoric in the west (Razack, 2008; Puar, 2007).

² Here I am referring not only to the proliferation of Maasai-like jewelry and the practice of individuals from various ethnic groups dressing in “traditional” Maasai attire when encountering tourists, but also, using the Kenya National Museum in Nairobi gift shop as an example, the sale of postcards depicting Maasai people, often women with bare breasts, or carved wooden statues of “Maasai warriors” with oversized features wearing only beaded loincloths.

exploration is a modest attempt to understand how western feminist rhetoric and development work is implicated in forming these structural inequalities.

I also remain wary of contributing to the reduction of an entire community to the issue of female circumcision, particularly given the stigma and controversy of the practices. Though I write about the specific ‘othering’ of Maasai people, this analysis is in no way meant to speak to the actual lives, conditions, or political positions of any members of the Maasai community in southern Kenya with the exception of individual perspectives from personal interviews that are cited. In navigating this selection of what to say and not to say, I am guided by the warning that,

[f]or those imbued in privilege, to know someone is to expect them to reveal themselves, to tell themselves, to give up their sovereignty, while at the same time shielded by their privilege, never having to show their bloodstains...As researchers of people’s lives, there are often secrets, silences that, if revealed, make the lives of those vulnerable to institutions and governments more vulnerable (Fine, Tuck, and Zeller-Berkman, 2008, 169)

Further, discussing the issue of female circumcision even to critique the processes of knowledge production risks what Stoler (1995) warns against as a “double exposure” of women’s bodies, namely the danger of re-making a visual spectacle out of violence against the colonized by performing yet another discursive dissection (p. 184). I slip along these edges as I inevitably invoke the very figures that I work to deconstruct in this analysis, navigating with each sentence the difficulties of “‘doing it’ and ‘troubling it’ simultaneously” as Patti Lather (2001, p. 204) suggests.

I attempt to remain critical of my own desires to investigate this issue and the potential formation of myself as another ‘knowing’ white western feminist. This work is not a commentary on the practices or politics of female circumcision procedures, nor

does it intend to posit a more ‘authentic’ look at the significance of such practices within Maasai communities. Rather, I focus here on female circumcision as it emerges within the imaginations, affective experiences and texts of uncircumcised western feminists—and as such, these racialized and gendered subjects, myself included, are at the center of this study. This is a continuation of work I do within and beyond this writing process—I have worked for and with a Maasai organization based in Narok, Kenya and Prescott, Arizona since 2005³ and have been involved in investigating the impact of feminist projects in Kenya since 2006. This work frames my questions of inquiry and analysis, and my access to investigating the effects of the presence of western feminist projects in the Narok area has been entirely facilitated by my Maasai colleagues. My position is neither innocent, nor neutral, and it is most certainly constrained by the history of western women working in Kenya that I will be critiquing.

As Spivak (1990) suggested to those western feminists who do not speak for fear of being ensnared in our privilege, “Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?” (p. 62). This thesis is, in large part, an examination of precisely how white western feminists such as myself become interpellated through that script which so often includes discursive and material violence against ‘other’ women. This is a modest, at times enraged, effort toward imagining the possibilities of different encounters in transnational feminisms. Like the postcolonial feminists whose model I follow, I work to expose relations of racialized power embedded in some of the most basic tenants of western feminism, I do not

³ The Maasai Community Partnership Program is a small collaborative volunteer-based project between Maasai and U.S. activists and scholars. Our work includes running a research/study program with U.S. students, water piping and well support, as well as research and activism on land rights cases, access to and the effects of formal education, and the impact of western NGOs operating in the region. See maasaicpp.org for more information.

abandon the project all together. Rather, I struggle through a kind of affirmative deconstruction inspired by Patti Lather's (1991) take on Foucault wherein she states,

[s]alvaging the emancipatory project by displacing the universal, the necessary, the obligatory with the singular, the contingent, and the strategic, Foucault argues for 'an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (p. 38; quoting Foucault, 1980).

I undertake an analysis of the historical limits of female circumcision discourse in the following chapters by exploring: present permutations of genitalia, pleasure and empathy in popular culture through an analysis of the script and my own participation in Eve Ensler's (2004) play *The Vagina Monologues*; a genealogy of the emergence of the clitoris as a salient and racialized feminist concern through an analysis of studies on sexology, psychoanalysis and feminist pamphlets from 1815-1980; the production of the white feminist subject in Maasailand and the figure of the 'circumcised Maasai girl' through a case-study involving a U.S. feminist intervention into a circumcision event in Narok, Kenya and the biopolitical dimensions of this type of development work. It is my hope that this analysis can contribute in some small way to experimental imaginings of what else might be possible within transnational and transcultural feminist projects.

Chapter 2: The Sexual Pleasure of Race and the Whitening of the Clitoris

When development organizations intervene in female circumcision rites across the world, when a classroom debate becomes an emotional battleground although none of the students have any experience with female circumcision procedures, when allegations of sexual assault are dismissed because an investigation might interfere with a program's work against circumcision: in each of these instances, genitalia emerge as particularly significant to the relationship between affect and identity. How did this come to be? A simple anatomical answer leaves us in the lurch of the very same essentialist notions of gender that so many critical and poststructural feminist theorists have labored to deconstruct (for example, Riley, 1987; Butler, 1990, 2004; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). To begin a genealogical exploration of this question, I want to unpack a contemporary cultural event wherein genitalia have emerged as particularly salient in determining feminist identity and framing feminist projects. I focus this chapter on Eve Ensler's (1998/2004) play *The Vagina Monologues* because it presents both explicit and obscured preoccupations with genitalia—discursively *making* female genitals into biological and political truths.

Writing on an event hosted by V-Day—the feminist organization behind the *Monologues*—Jasbir Puar (2007) asserts that although “these forms of celebrity feminism might provide us with momentary sardonic amusement, they are an integral part of U.S. feminist public cultures and should not be mistaken as trivial” (p. 67). Since opening in 1998 *The Vagina Monologues* has been translated into 45 different languages and now boasts over 4,000 annual productions held in 120 nations; in 2008 alone the play garnered over 400 million media impressions in print, broadcast outlets and on websites and blogs

(“V-Day Annual Report,” 2008).⁴ As Catherine Cooper (2007) notes, “[b]y now *The Vagina Monologues* have become a global phenomenon” (p. 727). I do not approach the *Monologues* as representative of U.S. feminism, especially as the play arises both without reference to or apparent engagement with the history of feminist activism or theory. Rather I situate the play as an event that is comprised of the broader relations of race, colonialisms, and sexualities circulating throughout dominant western cultures in this historical moment of which western feminism is certainly a part. My interest is not to critique the general problem of the *Monologues*’ reduction of women’s lives to anatomy—though this will be addressed—rather, I aim to explore the less apparent ways in which the ‘truth’ of genitalia is reproduced in terms of race and the civilized/primitive binary. I highlight how race, while certainly a social construct rooted in economics and politics, continues to operate in female circumcision discourse through affect—particularly through experiences of pleasure and empathy. Specifically, I explore how the clitoris has become an embodied site for these affective experiences.

The *Monologues* and its diaspora of performances are considered in this analysis to be a model of ‘western feminist culture’—an example of popular knowledge that serves to “support the care of the self” (Foucault, 1997, p. 294). In Foucault’s concept of ‘subjectivization,’ the self is brought into being through discursive regimes and regulations. While Foucault perennially resists any notion of conscious intent, he nevertheless outlines processes through which a subject constructs itself by engaging in “an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being” (p. 282). Foucault insists that an individual

⁴ Media outlets that have covered the *Vagina Monologues* and related V-Day events in 2008 include: USA Today, The Associated Press, Reuters, CNN, Al Jazeera, BBC, NPR Huffington Post, Alnet, and Feministing.

does not invent the parameters of self-transformation, rather that these practices of making, or ‘caring,’ for oneself are based on popular models, “models that [the self] finds in his [sic] culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him, his society, and his social group” (p. 291). I propose here that *The Vagina Monologues* are one such cultural model through which western feminists construct themselves as legitimate civilized subjects through a literal and metaphorical scripting of sexual liberation, pleasure-seeking and multicultural empathy.

There are significant risks in my reliance on Foucault’s theoretical devices to explore the western feminist subject. Two dangers loom large: 1) Foucault’s (1978) theories of sexuality as outlined in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* all but ignore the position and particularities of ‘women,’ and 2) in this same text, his explorations of European bourgeois identity within the 19th century take place with no direct engagement with European imperial and colonial expansion (Stoler, 1995). Jana Sawicki (1991) is instructive in her ability to make use of Foucault’s ideas in a feminist frame while remaining critical of his limitations. She maintains that Foucault is useful for feminist analyses precisely because “[h]e recognizes that difference can be the source of fragmentation and disunity as well as a creative source of resistance and change” (p. 18). A feminism working to dismantle existing structures of domination, including the dimensions of gender and colonialism that Foucault neglected, can find affinity for his search for the breaks and fissures of history. For Sawicki, such a feminism represents a form of what Foucault calls ‘subjugated knowledge,’ or “a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity,” which is the source of its effectiveness for political change (p. 26).

Foucault (1997) acknowledges the particular suppression of gender and sexuality in a 1984 interview titled, *The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom*, saying, “it is clear that a number of liberations were required vis-a-vis male power, that liberation was necessary from an oppressive morality...” (p. 283). But what of the feminism that proliferates an oppressive morality by insisting on the idea of a universal white female body predicated on the eschewal of difference? Significant for this discussion is an acknowledgement of how feminism has become a vehicle for obscuring other subjugated knowledges and proliferating western cultural hegemony. Foucault continues,

...this liberation does not give rise to the happy human being imbued with a sexuality to which the subject could achieve a complete and satisfying relationship. Liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom (p. 283).

In other words, the position of the sexually liberated feminist subject that I will be exploring cannot remain at ease in this newly won relationship with sexuality, as it is also bound up in relations of domination which must be mediated by a careful study of the ethics of freedom. This is especially important considering the ways in which language, such as the discourse of multiculturalism in transnational feminism, is put to use in neoliberal political projects that accrue freedoms for some at the expense of others (Razack, 2008).

While there are large social structures such as nation-states, international organizations and economic policies that entrench the regulating processes of sexual and racial identity formation, in this chapter I follow Sawicki’s (1991) use of Foucault to explore how disciplinary power operates at the level of the interpersonal and the individual (p. 23). I am interested in asking, for example, what is occurring at the bodily

level when a white university student such as myself memorizes a script and, fleshing it out with gesture and emotional cadence, narrates the sexual assault of an African-American woman living in a homeless shelter? What social orders are reified when a performance of the rape or abuse of women of color elicits knowing nods and quickened hearts amongst a mostly white audience? What if the performance of such a script, in front of an audience praised for their support of feminist activism, is meant to ‘empower’ both the patrons and the actresses? Can this experience of ‘empowerment’—itself laden with the work of caring for the self—occur without the interlocking forces of race and gender?

My focus risks privileging the idea of the western white individual self as the central unit of theorizing and perhaps reifies the universality of this figure. I concede that this analysis continues a focus on bourgeois identity formation, but it does so while attempting to follow Robyn Wiegman’s (1999) critique against studying white identity in a way that leaves unexamined “whiteness as the implicit framework for the organization of what we know as the human sciences” (p. 149). By asking the questions above I hope to expose the fragility of whiteness and reveal how the formation of its particular genders and sexualities exist in relation to white supremacy at large. Producing racialized subjects at the very level of the individual self, particularly when that self comes into being as a ‘white liberal,’ is inextricable from broader societal inequities that are constantly reasserted along the color line. The new relationships of domination within the liberated feminist position are revealed in this process as the very personal and political experiences of racialized desire, pleasure and empathy. In order to trace these affective experiences I draw on Foucault’s (1978) notion of the confession (p. 58), Anthony Paul

Farley's (1997) idea of "race as pleasure" (p. 464) and Sherene Razack's (2007) empathy as "stealing the pain of others" (p. 375).

Eve Ensler interviewed roughly 200 women in the U.S. and *The Vagina Monologues* script splices and condenses these testimonies into a series of a dozen first person narratives. In this analysis I hone in on a moment in the *Monologues* when, between two pieces, a brief "not-so-happy vagina fact" regarding "female genital mutilation" is read aloud (Ensler, 2004, p. 32). I narrow my focus here for the sake of space and because this moment in the play reflects the general conflation of identity with anatomy as well as a particular discursive maneuver that produces the liberated feminist subject through the construct of civilized vs. primitive genitalia. My analysis of the script and aspects of several performances includes my participant observations as a one-time actress in a college production of the play and later as an audience member. *The Vagina Monologues* performances most frequently occur on university campuses in North America and each production donates the ticket sales to both a local organization working with women and to the annual international cause selected by V-Day. There is a special moment reserved in the script for the introduction of both these 'causes' to the audience, and as such I want to situate this making of feminist subjects within the broader discourse of international development that will be explored throughout this thesis.

Confessing the truth of genitalia

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* Foucault (1978) states that, "Since the Middle Ages at least, western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" (p. 58). In his deconstruction of the

‘repressive hypothesis’ Foucault argues that, far from the common perception that mid 17th-19th century sexuality was “condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence,” all of the ‘talk’ about the repression of sex actually gave way to the very proliferation of the notion of sexuality (p. 6). Sexuality was thus produced through the affectively charged telling of sexual truths such as desires, perversities, and specific practices. The confession was chief among the modes of proliferating sexual discourse and served not only as a way for the listener—traditionally an authority of the Christian church—to interpret and monitor the speaking subjects, but as a way for subjects to come to know themselves. Intrinsic to the procedure of the confession, no matter its transformations throughout the centuries, is the ‘truthfulness’ of the divulgence, or the way the confession is performed to reveal some notion of authenticity. Foucault notes, “one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell” (p. 59). This practice has become so entrenched in our understanding of ourselves, in the very production of the truth about ourselves, that we no longer experience it as forced. Yet, Foucault maintains, we are *obligated* to perform these confessions, publicly, in private, and even to ourselves (p. 60). While originally discussing the production of sexuality, Foucault’s confession remains a consummate procedure for understanding the proliferation of the truth of genitalia.

It would be difficult to find a more apt example of this kind of confession in contemporary western culture than *The Vagina Monologues*. The play is structured as a tell-all extravaganza, a celebration of saying the so-called ‘unsayable,’ e.g. listing different names women call their genitalia and encouraging audience members to chant “cunt” at the top of their lungs (Ensler, 2004, p. 60). As Ensler (2006) reflected on the V-Day web site,

Think about the word vagina. I believe that by saying it 128 times each show, night after night...By saying it often enough and loud enough in places where it was not supposed to be said, the saying of it became both political and mystical and gave birth to a worldwide movement to end violence against women (para. 2).

Here the speaking of the unspeakable is claimed as the path toward liberation; the idea behind the play is that we—in this instance, the global community—do not talk *enough* about vaginas and that public declarations about so-called female genitalia will liberate women. Christine Cooper (2007), in one of few scholarly sources located that critically examine the *Monologues*, states, “the monologues convert conversations—questions and answers between two women—into the personal, at times confessional, speech of a solitary female subject who sees herself through, if not as, her vagina” (p. 729). In general we can draw a parallel with the pastoral confession wherein one is always already confessing a sin and so becomes interpellated as a sinner; *The Vagina Monologues* serve as a procedure wherein one is always already revealing particular genitalia and so is confirmed to be a woman. What lies on the other side of this liberation through confession is an established truth about the meaning, structure and significance of female genitalia.

Setting aside for a moment the vexing conflation of clitoris, vulva, and mons pubis into the singular vagina, a more insidious erasure occurs through the confessional process of the *Monologues* by establishing identity based on genital form. As any reader of the iconic photo-book *Femalia* can attest, the external genitalia of those marked ‘female’ is remarkably diverse—yet many important differences remain obscured through the rather arbitrary category of the female sex (Blank, 1993). Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) has worked through both social theory and scientific critique to

reveal how the notions of ‘female’ and ‘male’ are defined based on our social ideas of ‘girl’ and ‘boy,’ leaving both gender and sex—like the sciences that determine them—unstable. From the aggregation of proteins to the phenotypic presentation of erectile shafts, Fausto-Sterling shows how each level of the sexing process is shaped by cultural and historical parameters of gender—for example, should the external phallus of a child born with testes measure under 2.8 centimeters, doctors deem the configuration of flesh and fluids ‘ambiguous’ and assign the child the default sex female, gender girl (p. 279). In most cases of genital ambiguity, as various scholars and activists have documented, doctors generally advise parent(s) that the child should undergo corrective surgery or in many instances doctors simply operate without parental consent and physically construct a more socially acceptable body (Feder, 2007; Chase, 2002).

Problematically the genital surgeries performed on intersex children have been equated with female circumcision procedures, the generalized critique of both relying on the figure of an un-consenting mutilated child (for example, Boddy, 2007). An examination of the particularities of these cultural and historical surgical practices exceeds the scope of this analysis. However, I want to highlight how the focus on ‘othered’ genitalia in both instances operates to obscure the unnatural construction of all sexed bodies. Figures such as the intersex child, the transsexual, the circumcised Jew, the genitally mutilated Maasai girl—arguably ‘females’ writ large—are produced to trace the limits of what is deemed normal. Normalcy, therefore, does not work to signify a majority of anatomical formations, but reflects a highly regulated process of exclusion shaped by historical and social relations of power. Though *The Vagina Monologues* appears to portray a diverse palette of genital experiences, the bodies confessed into

being are homogenous in their assertion of a natural female form that gives way to a shared reality as women. At various points in the play deviant bodies are invoked to remind the reader of the parameters of normal and natural genitalia—not surprisingly these ‘other’ bodies are also made to embody racial difference and are anchored to racialized geopolitical spaces such as Iraq, Pine Ridge Reservation and the catch-all of Africa (Enslar, 2006, p. 3).

While many of the qualities of these liminal figures come into being through obscured and indirect disciplinary forces, others are outlined in texts written with the express function of making rules for subjects. Functioning as what Foucault (1984/1990) might consider a “‘prescriptive’ text,” the guidelines accompanying the College Campaign *Vagina Monologues* script is an example of a text “whose main object, whatever [its] form (speech, dialogue, treatise, collection of precepts, etc.) is to suggest rules of conduct” (p. 12). The script and an instructive paragraph describing the correct tenor and voice for each of the monologues, which must be performed in the given order, serve to regulate the confession of genitalia. When putting on a production of *The Vagina Monologues*, college directors are warned that, “No edits are allowed to monologues or introductions AT ALL!” (“How do I register to organize a V-Day event?” para. 8, caps in original). Paradoxically, the script notes that there is “no ‘correct’ or ‘prescribed’” way to perform the monologues (Enslar, 2004, p. 3). Performers are advised not to over-act, as the pieces are “very *real*, and very *human*” and performers should “tap into the truth of her [own] experience” (emphasis in the original, *ibid*). The reality of a shared experience of female genitalia is thus reinscribed as natural and indeed the main determinant for participants. These prescriptions serve to naturalize the truth of genitalia,

and as Cooper (2007) notes, by “[c]ollapsing vagina and self, the monologues reify a universal ontology of womanhood, a newly normative, potentially disciplinary version of ‘the sex’” (p. 738). She draws on Judith Butler’s (1990) well-known deconstruction of the performance of gender, which here can be mobilized to examine how genitalia too “is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic of the overwhelming history of patriarchy...it is what’s put on, invariably, under constraint” (p. 282). This performance of genitalia appears to be homogenizing—ostensibly the choral effect of women speaking against a common experience of embodied repression—but like much western feminist discourse, its claim to universality serves to assert a hierarchy of difference as I explore further below.

The Pleasure of Race

Within the prescriptive script and performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, unmarked (white/heterosexual/cisgendered) vaginas do the talking on ‘light’ issues such as pubic hair, masturbation and body image, while racialized/queer/transsexual genitalia are made to speak about rape, incest, and abuse (Enslar, 2004). In the moment where “female genital mutilation” is uttered, this ghettoization of genitals becomes particularly clear: Africanized vaginas do not speak at all, but are graphically spoken about.

Following a monologue during which multiple women recall memories of their first experience of menstruation, a “heartbreaking” “fact” is “read slowly” to the audience:

Female genital mutilation has been inflicted on approximately 130 million girls and young women. In countries where it is practiced, mostly in Africa, about two million youngsters a year can expect the knife — or the razor or a glass shard — to cut their clitoris or remove it altogether... Short term results include: tetanus, hemorrhages, cuts in the urethra,

bladder and vaginal walls. Long term: chronic uterine infection, increased agony and danger during childbirths, and early deaths.
(Enslar, 2004, p. 32)

Sitting in the audience of a U.S. university production, the effect of this utterance is visceral—stiff silence peppered with gasps and the subtle tremor of slowly shaking heads, ‘no, no, no, that is not right.’ Audience members—myself once included—shift in what appears to be discomfort or disgust, but upon closer observation and through a historicized reading of this reaction, the stiffening backs look more like puffed up chests and discomfort blurs into a kind of pride. The audience response to this skewed description is an example of what Derek Hook (2006) calls “pre-discursive racism” or “a bodily, affective, pre-symbolic...racism, a form of racism that ‘comes before words,’ and that is routed through the logics of the body and its anxieties of distinction, separation and survival” (p. 207). Hook draws on Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection to show how racism persists through the interconnected levels of individual bodies and psyches and the greater social order. I draw on Hook here to explore both the construction of race along the civilized/primitive binary written out in the script of the *Monologues*, as well as the racism before and beyond words, “realized in impulses, played out in aversions and reactions of the body” (ibid, p. 209).

Hook (2006) builds on the arguments of scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Christopher Lane to assert that racism cannot be explained simply through structural and ideological terms, but occurs also at the very level of self-making. Abjection, he argues via Kristeva, plays a central role in the formation of subjects; it means literally in Latin “to cast off, or out” and so arises in self-making as “a constitutive kind of fear” through which the self rejects the abhorrent and the vile in order to establish a sense of ‘me’ from

‘not me’ (Hook, 2006, p. 216-217). The reflex actions of an audience member who has no other relationship to female circumcision practices are an example of the distinguishing of self through the process of dividing from the other—in this instance, though happening under the banner of the universal vagina, differentiated genitalia are made during this affective bodily response. Hook draws on Elizabeth Grosz to argue that abjection is strongest when relating to “those items that challenge the integrity of one’s own bodily parameters—blood, urine, faeces, etc.—those bodily products once undeniably a part of me that have become separate, loathsome” (p. 217). The passage in *The Vagina Monologues* presents the audience with yet another expelled body part—the African clitoris, which is marked with a particular disdain and imbued with a correlating power for constructing an integral uncircumcised self. In her own work Grosz (1994) states, “Clitoridectomy implies the entire subordination or, ultimately, the annihilation of the bodily sources of women’s genital pleasure, in the interests of men” (p. 157). While her analysis may hold in certain contexts, I argue that in the particular process of Africanizing the removal of the clitoris (and the litany of physical consequences affecting processes of excrement), the clitoridectomy is often invoked to *produce* pleasure among women—namely the pleasure of imagining oneself as genitally intact via the discursive mutilation of the other.

In the passage at hand the circumcised genitalia are marked as Black, and particularly as Africanized genitals “mutilated” with crude tools, razor blades and glass, during an irrational practice displaced from all historical and social relations. An examination of this fetishization of circumcised genitalia reveals that the pleasure produced through this particular confession (recall also that the actress reading the

passage on female circumcision is in all likelihood an uncircumcised western woman) is the pleasure of race. Foucault (1978) wrote that far from repressing certain sexualities, 19th century western cultures “forc[ed] them into hiding so as to make possible their discovery” (p. 42). These discoveries, through confession or other proliferations, are propelled by the “sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure” (p. 44). Anthony Paul Farley (1997) draws on Foucault to describe how desire works to produce race in the 21st century through the “will-to-whiteness”—what he defines as “a form of pleasure in and about one’s body” (p. 463). For Farley, the pleasure of race is a sado-masochistic dynamic through which the racial humiliation of the fetishized black body elicits delight and self-satisfaction for the white body. More than the pleasure *of* whiteness, this pleasure *is* whiteness—the visceral experience of being attractive, healthy, and whole in relation to the degeneracy of the black body. The titillation expressed by the audience when ‘discovering’ the horror of female circumcision in Africa is the sensualization of power; it is whiteness in the making.

Circumcision then provides a particular fetish for racial denigration; the graphic language of ‘short term’ and ‘long term’ effects of female genital cutting in Africa effectively “decorat[es] black bodies with disdain, over and over again” (Farley, 1997, p. 463). This is contrasted against normalized white genitalia that relish in an abundance of virility. African genitals have been silenced, cut off, killed—ideally subaltern, as Spivak (1988) reminds us, these genitals cannot speak. This distinction is perhaps best illustrated by the juxtaposition of this “fact” about circumcision and the following monologue.⁵

⁵ As of 2004, campus directors have the option to perform ‘The Crooked Braid’ only during this slot between the ‘not-so-happy’ fact and ‘My Angry Vagina.’ This monologue depicts a woman from the Oglala Lakota Nation on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota suffering from domestic abuse. While this monologue mentions at the end a brief link between violence on the reservation and

Immediately following this statement on genital mutilation the audience hears a loud clear voice break the silence, opening in a sequence unlike any of the other monologues in the production, which are preceded by a contextual introduction. This new voice emerges in stark contrast to the trembling recitation of circumcision side effects, declaring boldly, “My vagina’s angry! It is. It’s pissed off!” (Enslar, 2004, p. 41). This new speaking, racially unmarked (white) genitalia then embarks on a rant about the many “tortures” endured by a “gentle, loving vagina” presumably of the ‘first world’ (Enslar, 2004, p. 41). Throughout this anthem-like narrative entitled ‘The Angry Vagina’ we in the audience are brought straight from savagery—from disfigured, diseased, leaking genitalia—to the sterility of modern accoutrements like tampons, speculums, and douche sprays.

The making of the white western feminist subject and the figure of the ‘mutilated African woman’ is duly rehearsed in the juxtaposition of these two narratives: African genitals are passive, while western genitals are assertive; oppressed African genitals are in “agony,” while liberated white genitals “want sex;” those ‘other’ genitals experience “danger during child births,” while mine “helped release a giant baby” (Enslar, 2004, p. 42). The audience, first repulsed by the ‘violence’ of circumcision, is now nodding knowingly, laughing, cheering, *enjoying themselves*. This self/other performance is furthered during the reading of the “happy vagina fact” emerging several monologues ahead of the female circumcision statistic stating: “The clitoris is pure in purpose. It is the only organ in the body designed purely for pleasure. The clitoris is simply a bundle of

social/historical events: “They took our land; they took our ways; they took our men; we want them back,” it also naturalizes this violence, stating that incidents of rape and sexual assault amongst American Indian women is 3.5 times higher “than all other races” (Enslar, 2004, 40, 33). Further, the pairing of these two indigenized issues (female circumcision and reservation violence) serves to essentialize sexual violence as a cultural issue.

nerves: 8,000 nerve fibers, to be precise” (Enslar, 2004, p. 23). Circumcised African genitalia have reportedly had the “clitoris...removed” and are thus discursively rendered numb and effectively lifeless. To be circumcised is to be non-white, thus sexual pleasure, and tellingly viability itself, becomes the naturalized experience of whiteness; an experience of comparison, as the Marquis De Sade noted in 1785, that is “a pleasure which can only be born of the sight of wretched persons” (quoted in Farley, 1997, p. 464). In his outlining of pre-discursive racism Hook (2006) clarifies that the flipside of such abjection is always desire, which I take up below (p. 217).

The Empathetic Clitoris

Above I have explored how the rejection of the other is central to the self-making process—we come to know the edges of ourselves through what we recognize as separate from us—but this process also relies on the tandem force of desire, of pulling the other close enough to discern. As Hook (2006) notes, “the experience of abjection is never complete,” and so the self is constantly feeling for its limits and thus in constant need of proximity to the other in order to establish parameters. As Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) articulates in her brilliant take on Edward Said’s work, “desire, as the moving motor of the subject, posits its own object in an effort to constitute its own identity” (p. 61). In other words, a self actively determines (as opposed to recognizes) an object to be wretched—an example of what Sara Ahmed (2000) outlines as the way difference becomes located *on the bodies of others* rather than being situated as a process occurring between bodies (p. 9). One way of establishing proximity with the other is to assert oneself as representative of a universal category within which difference can be

established along a hierarchy of abjection and desirability, as was discussed earlier in the construction of the universal feminist body in female circumcision discourse. The trope of shared female genitalia becomes a mode of what Yegenoglu calls the “imperial feminist desire” to know the other and control the terms of difference (p. 111). This desire, especially when bound up within feminist development projects that bring Euro-American women into contact with ‘other’ women in the world, frequently operates through the idea of encountering and knowing the other empathetically. Yet, as Megan Boler (1999) outlines, “In the cases of sympathy and empathy, the identification between self and other...contains an irreducible difference—a recognition that I am not you, and that empathy is possible only by virtue of this distinction” (p.157).

The clitoris plays a particular empathic role in the discourse of female circumcision; demarcated as simply a “bundle of nerves,” it arises as the pinnacle embodiment of feeling. Through the clitoris, perhaps more so than the idea of shared wombs and birth canals—body parts similarly marked by sensation—the western feminist is established as *especially sensitive* and able to *feel* other women’s experiences; the other’s pain becomes hers, the other’s supposed lack of pleasure the source of her own. The clitoris emerges throughout *The Vagina Monologues* as the locus of sexual sensation, access to which is equated with self-actualization (as in the instance of the 72-year old woman who “finally found her clitoris”) and with legitimate existence (as in the narrative of the woman in a sex workshop who realized she had to “Be it. Be my clitoris”) (Ensler, 2004, p. 10, p. 15). The capacity for clitoral sensation further facilitates the construction of gender, expressed in the comparative fact read between monologues that the 8,000 nerve fibers comprising the clitoris is “a higher concentration of nerve

fibers than is found anywhere else in the male or female body, including the fingertips, lips, tongue, and it is twice, twice, twice the number in the penis” (ibid, p. 17). In the text of the *Monologues* to be circumcised is to be not-white, thus this superpower of clitoral sensation is reserved for only the white body—the body liberated from primitive culture and one organ closer to the illusory position of the bourgeois heterosexual male. The ability to feel through the clitoris becomes paramount to the western feminist semblance of self; it is literally the climax of subjecthood.

Echoing tired tropes of woman’s natural inclination toward the emotional, this recoded argument about the clitoris produces a gendered and racialized (all white women are assumed to have clitorises) body constituted as biologically more capable of feeling. Women are dubbed the more sensitive of the sexes and their clitoral sensitivity is called upon to naturalize critiques of female genital surgeries as agonizing and inhumane. Scratching beneath the surface of this ‘biological truth’ about the clitoris, it becomes apparent that the pleasure presented in the *Monologues* is a knot of power relations bound up with the western feminist idea of self. Western scholar Christine J. Walley (2002) writes that even after being invited to a clitoridectomy celebration by several enthusiastic students in Kenya who repeatedly assured her that they wanted to be circumcised, she was unable to “come any closer to relieving [her] inner distress about excision” (p. 23). In a vain search for the “authentic” voices of the young women, Walley eventually recognized that her insistence to the trauma of circumcision was based on her own buy-in to Freud’s universalist notion of “a layered self that possesses an inner core” that can be successfully uncovered by the feminist ethnographer (ibid). Further, after conducting research on the loss of sexual sensation post-excision, Walley found that “the assumption

that all circumcised women have sexual problems or are unable to achieve orgasm is not substantiated by research or anecdotal evidence” (Nahid Toubia, quoted in footnote 14, p. 49). A genealogy of how female genitalia, the clitoris in particular, has come to occupy the political and identificatory space that it does in the female circumcision debates will be the focus of the next chapter, however, I raise this point here to show how the present idea of the clitoris is symbolic of an ‘authentic’ and liberated self able to feel the true feelings of other women.

Empathy, popularly considered the ability to feel for and with another, is framed as a noble affective trait. In contemporary feminist discourse against female circumcision, the clitoris becomes its embodied portal. Often the discourse of trauma around female genital surgeries remains unexamined, relegated to the obvious within western “politics of pain” (Berlant, 2000, p. 33). I suggest that the discourse of pain proliferated around clitoridectomy procedures should be interrogated because it is largely constructed through “the slipperiness of empathy” (Hartman, 1997, p. 18). I do not mean to posit a kind of cultural relativism amongst bodies so great as to produce nerves and tissues with untranslatable sensory responses, rather I am concerned here with how the western subject’s identification with another’s pain is fraught with power relations that often circulate to affirm subject status for the western self based on the denigration of the other. In the excerpt from *The Vagina Monologues* addressing “female genital mutilation,” graphic imagery is ostensibly deployed to elicit an empathetic response among audience members and to raise awareness about a feminist issue. Boler (1999) explains that this version of empathy reflects the endurance of the idea that “if our imaginations functioned actively, nowhere in the world would there be a child who was

starving. Our vicarious suffering would force us to do something to alleviate it” (Rosenblatt, 1938 quoted in Boler, 1999, p. 157). The resulting dictum upon which much transnational feminist work on circumcision operates is that if only we could *feel the other more*, then we would never allow these procedures to continue.

By proliferating images of suffering, Sherene Razack (2008) avers that rather than cultivating a platform for any kind of political solidarity, “we have engaged in a peculiar *process* of consumption, one that is the antithesis to genuine outrage and which amounts to what [she calls] ‘stealing the pain of others’” (p. 375-6). The trend of aid organizations reproducing images of starving, war-torn bodies has resulted in a kind of ‘poverty pornography,’ and in photographic and textual renditions of circumcisions the sexualization of racialized degeneracy is all the more apparent. Though ostensibly intended to bring the witness emotionally closer to the suffering body, this encounter is mediated by the self/other distinction. Saidiya Hartman (1997) notes that, “the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that *the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and tangible*” (quoted in Razack, emphasis added, p. 376). The effect of this re-positioning is that quotidian dimensions of suffering—such as lack of access to potable water which western viewers may well be implicated in perpetuating—are obscured in favor of accounts of extreme pain because, Razack explains, “the nearer you bring the pain, the more the pain and the subject who is experiencing it disappears, leaving the witness in its place” (ibid). This subsuming of the other is paralleled in the *Monologues* script when the list of painful conditions reportedly experienced by the Black African body is read by a western woman and then immediately followed by the emergence of an ‘outraged’ first

world feminist—effectively disappearing the other and leaving the white witness in her place.

Lauren Berlant (2000) asserts, that “Feminism, in particular, [has] participated in establishing the trumping power of suffering stories...[that] worked to establish the enslaved Other as someone with subjectivity, defined not as someone who thinks or works, but as someone who has endured violence intimately” (p. 34). This overvaluation of the subaltern as injured therefore occludes political agency for the perennially wounded body. Berlant, who focuses her argument on a U.S. context, notes that this privileging of pain has indeed contributed in some cases to successfully extending citizenship to ‘subaltern’ subjects, but that this occurs through a production of “national sentimentality” which often does more politically to bolster the legitimacy of those already in power (p. 35). Like Razack (2008) who explores the stealing of others pain in relation to forming Canadian national identity, Berlant links the feminist focus on gendered and racialized pain with the formation of state law. My concern with the production of the empathetic clitoris is not the privileging of affect in feminist organizing, but rather the way that affective experiences through consumptive empathy become the biological domain of those bodies marked ‘woman,’ and designate affective authority for those women marked white.

Many feminists have critiqued the essentialization of women as especially emotional, while also critiquing the problematic marginalization of women *and* affect as illegitimate and oppositional to political logic (Campbell, 1994; Frye, 1989). Sue Campbell (1994) points out that women are frequently trivialized for feeling too much and are regulated by dismissals that “characteriz[e] our emotional lives as unhealthy,

attempting to limit our ways of acting in the world, and, consequently, our effects on the world” (p. 49). While this analysis is important and well-taken, the resulting paradigm has established a kind of emotional authority amongst western feminists to speak for other women. In the wake of this shift, the politics of voice and knowledge production have been widely debated amongst feminists for several decades (for examples with a transnational focus see, Mohanty, 2003; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Despite these scholastic conversations, *The Vagina Monologues* provides an example of an on-going popular feminist project that encourages ‘acting in’ and ‘effecting’ the world based on the problematic notion of embodied empathy.

Among feminist critiques against the essentializing and racist configuration of gender—many of which call for careful deliberation and dialogue between women—*The Vagina Monologues* emerges as a recoded version of a very old discursive regime. The empathy promoted through the multicultural *Monologues* relies on a kind of “wry civility”—the acceptance that something like ‘racism’ exists among women, but that subjects are absolved through civil self-awareness (Coleman, 2006, p. 43). Wry civility facilitates the pleasurable will-to-whiteness—toward a new multicultural and liberal bourgeois subject who feels the pain of the other and wants to ‘do good’ in the world. The affective responses among western audiences when presented with graphic depictions of female circumcision have far reaching consequences, particularly into the quite irrational domain of law and politics. After CNN famously broadcast a live genital surgery performed on an Egyptian girl, the legal battle to ban female circumcisions in the U.S. (but significantly not vaginoplasty, labiaplasty or other ‘domestic’ genital surgeries) was championed with a 1996 federal law (Robertson, 2002, p. 58). Isabel Gunning’s

(2002) later work on the legal realm of female circumcision practices reveals that in both state and federal legislatures, many of the ‘focus groups’ drafting laws against the practices relied on sensational western feminist and media reports rather than any consultation with immigrant women familiar with the procedures (p. 117). The link between pre-discursive racism and the structural entrenchment of racist policies has made strange bedfellows out of anti-female circumcision feminists and politicians “who would not vote for an equal rights amendment or international conventions against gender discrimination” (Robertson, 2002, p. 58). This trend illuminates not that emotions should be kept out of politics, but that the affective dimension of political and legal decisions receives less critical attention than it ought to—particularly in instances where feelings of disgust or abjection shape policies that regulate the lives and bodies of those ‘less desirable’ in order to inversely produce ‘good’ (feminist) subjects.⁶

Conclusion

The truth of genitalia, and its production through the pleasure of race and the consumptive dimension of empathy emerges within *The Vagina Monologues* through a particular history. The significance of genitalia in the formation of the western feminist subject arises through broader social and historical relations that criss-cross and overlap through time and geographic spaces. This chapter has explored some of the parameters of a present-day western feminist performance of genitalia as it is linked to personal and

⁶ Exemplifying this link between affect and policy, David Pizarro (2009) has published several studies from his ‘emotion laboratory’ at Cornell on the relationship between “disgust sensitivity” and political conservatism, showing that among participants who were easily ‘disgusted’ one could predict a likely “intuitive disapproval of gays.” For more information see: Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D.A., Knobe, J., & Bloom, P. (2009) Disgust sensitivity predicts intuitive disapproval of gays. *Emotion*, 9, 435-439; Inbar, Y., Pizarro, D.A., & Bloom, P. (2009) Conservatives are more easily disgusted than liberals. *Cognition and Emotion*, 23, 714-725.

political liberation, heightened sensitivity and empathic capabilities and a continuation of the universal female body trope. In the next chapter I turn to a genealogical exploration of how this present performance of genitalia has come to be, in the hopes of denaturalizing current configurations of genitalia and imagining other possibilities for the material/discursive body and its political meanings in feminist work.

Chapter 3: A Genealogy of Genitalia

Western women listening to a description of female circumcision often exhibit affective responses; a cringe, a flinch, shivers of titillation—these bodily reactions have genealogies. These reactions have been attributed to ‘common sense’ and to what it means to be a modern woman—one who intuitively and physically rejects the experience of genital cutting. These physical and discursive responses and the very western attachment to the clitoris has a particular social and political lineage. To ask, ‘How did Euro-American women come to be so affected by female circumcisions in Africa?’ is to inquire into the very formation of western feminist subjects and the historical forces of race and gender. As explored in the previous chapter, the present constructions of genitalia within popular feminist discourse are bound up with ‘caring for’ or making the self, a process facilitated by the pleasure of race and an empathy based on consuming the ‘other’s’ pain. These processes occur through both broad regulating power relations circulating at the level of *structural* dynamics such as imperialism, and simultaneously at the level of the *individual and the interpersonal* wherein subjects are disciplined to conform to these structures. The subject positions drawn in one historical context are redrawn in another, and like a palimpsest, the previous figure remains partially visible in the new image. The continuities of gender and race that now emerge in the subjectivity of the western feminist reveal the overlap between performances of *The Vagina Monologues* in 2010 and British society in 1810, the gynecological invasions of Georges Cuvier and present-day interventions into female circumcision rites. This chapter traces those linkages through a genealogical reading of knowledge produced on female genitalia in western modernity.

A genealogical analysis does not work to establish causal relationships or to map a chronology of events, but rather undertakes a lateral investigation of the “conditions of possibility” through which disparate events emerge and shape one another (Hook, 2005, p. 6). In *The Use of Pleasure, Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1984) states that his original interest in studying sexuality was not to take up a history of the object of sexuality, but rather to explore how sexuality came to be through its establishment among other phenomena, including “changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their feelings and sensations, their dreams” (p. 3-4). “In short,” Foucault wrote, “it was a matter of seeing how an ‘experience’ of sexuality came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a ‘sexuality’” (ibid). Here I embark on a similar, albeit quite limited, excavation of the experience of genitalia, particularly tracing what changes have occurred in the way western women give meaning and build identity around the sensations and structures of their genitalia.

As discussed in the Introduction, my undertaking is mediated by Alys Eve Weinbaum’s (2004) excavation of Nietzsche and Foucault’s notions of ‘genealogy’ as methodologies particularly bound by the “ideological constellation” of race/reproduction (p. 5). In the analysis at hand, I do not dwell on the literal manifestations of race/reproduction in female circumcision discourse, i.e. the ‘high risk’ African childbirths or the colonial policies aimed at population control in Kenya. These issues will be more directly addressed in the next chapter and in order to support that discussion the genealogical exploration of this chapter focuses on how the mechanisms of race and

gender operate in the *discursive reproduction* of bodies and how they are given or denied a status of viability. Specifically, I trace how female genitalia as a discursive manifestation with very material dimensions has emerged as a favorite site of knowledge and identity production amongst western thinkers. I explore this by honing in on three major turns in the meaning given to female genitalia: first, as a metonym for sexual excess through the Hottentot Venus and the construction of African women's bodies in the European colonial imagination; second, as a site of sexual dysfunction in the psychoanalysis of anatomy and the production of the frigid white woman in the work of Sigmund Freud and Marie Bonaparte; and third, as the location for sexual liberation in the making of the western feminist identity and the 'discovery' of the clitoris in sexology reports and texts by Simone de Beauvoir and Anne Koedt. I explore the various meanings ascribed to female genitalia as threads of subjectivization, lines that, however incomplete in my handling, begin to trace the faint form of the modern western feminist subject as she emerges in the present moment amidst these historical processes and in the biopolitical relations of development work explored in the next chapter.

Sexual Excess: Making Monstrous and Moral Genitalia

By the end of the 18th century a representational shift occurred in Europe: imagery of regal African Madonnas were replaced with lascivious serving girls, rendering the 'black' body emblematic of deviant and excessive sexuality (Pieterse, 1995). This hypersexuality of bodies and communities marked 'black' and 'primitive' was established against the notion of 'white' civility and morality through the encounters of imperial expansion. Whatever the far reaching impact of these stereotypes, the "colonial

order of things,” to borrow a phrase from Ann Laura Stoler (1995), constituted the civility of the bourgeois body in a process that was more tenuous than affirmative, and more vulnerable than it was secure (p. 97). In her important extension of Foucault’s work in the *History of Sexuality*, Stoler examines 18th and 19th century European colonialism as “not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the *making* of them” (p. 99). She argues that the bourgeois body and racialized selves were made through the *anxieties* of the colonizers, through fears of racial denigration and through scrambling attempts to vaunt an imperial project floundering amidst administrative logjams and political follies. Genitalia became a location of importance in this process amidst the colonial focus on hygiene, the sexual lives of children and the proclivities of officers and their wives—the very intimate and quotidian locales of subject formation.

The laws and logic of the metropole operated to incite desire and, in fact, created spaces for the perversities of colonists. The bourgeois body was depicted as perpetually vulnerable to debasement through the heat of tropical climates and the unbridled sexuality of the natives. The very policies drafted to preserve the purportedly restrained sexual life of the European were sites of proliferation for homoeroticism, racial fantasy and the titillation of the exotic. Within this episteme, the distinct and interlocking forces of race and gender operated together to produce the “special status of female sexuality” (Gilman, 1985, p. 83). Many colonial regulations were drafted in the name of protecting the sexuality of upper-middle class white women—their wombs became the supposed chalice of the race. As Weinbaum (2004) keenly notes, Charles Darwin’s 1871 “theory of sexual selection render[ed] human females responsible for human racial diversity,” and

so it was that the Victorian lady became perpetually at risk of allowing miscegenation if seduced by the ‘novelty’ of dark skinned lovers (p. 156). At one time thought to be too delicate for life in the colonies, these women were soon encouraged to accompany their husbands to outposts in order to prevent sexual relations between white men and native women. Concubinage, previously thought to be a necessary part of colonial life, suddenly became a punishable offense; poor whites, apparently more susceptible to fornication with locals, were in some instances evicted from the colonies; and the sexual selections of white women were rigidly regulated through social and legal boundaries. As Stoler notes, “[t]hese were discourses that secured the distinctions of individual white bodies and the privileges of a white body politic at the same time” (p. 190).

African women became liminal figures in the production of these racial distinctions. Sander Gilman (1985), who has written extensively on the medicalization of African women’s bodies and sexuality in the 19th century, avers that “[t]he relationship between the sexuality of the black woman and that of the sexualized white woman enters a new dimension when the scientific discourse concerning the nature of black female sexuality is examined” (p. 81). African women, as constructed by European knowledge-producers during the colonial era, became iconic of black sexuality at large and the antithesis of the delicate sexuality of white women. The physical and moral differences between white and black women were proven (read: constructed) through scientific observation within the empirical domain of the Enlightenment. Scientific discourse, like colonial law, proliferated desire and facilitated an insatiable and uneven gaze toward the bodies of European and colonized women. Gynecological studies of colonized women were especially common; European scientists widely circulated sketches and photographs

of African women's genitals, and tissue samples and excavated corpses were coveted. As one Belgian doctor working in colonial Congo lamented, "I know how difficult it is to get hold of native bones, let alone female pelves" (quoted in Hunt, 1999, p. 1). The zealotry of this particular doctor was dissuaded at least once by a 'native boy' working as his assistant who feigned illness and lobbed insults to avoid further grave-robbing—exemplifying how the colonial encounter was a space of both tremendous violence *and* continuous resistance.

The imperial logic of knowledge production was that to be able to "know what properly appertains to one individual is to have before one the classification—or the possibility of classifying—all others. Identity and what marks it are defined by the differences that remain" (Foucault, 1970, p. 158). According to Foucault, the enthusiasm for classification amongst 18th century Europeans reflected not so much a growing curiosity about the world, but the overvaluation of the visible as the ultimate source of knowledge. As vision became the favored conduit for knowledge production, dissections increased—scientists eagerly dug beneath the surface of organisms to establish essential differences and relegate everything to its proper place within the taxonomy of life. To see what was most unavailable—including elusive genitalia—became an act of domination and desire. The influence of this mode of discovery is exemplified in Denis Diderot's 1748 novel *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (The Indiscrete Jewels), fascinatingly evocative of *The Vagina Monologues*, wherein "women's genitalia literally speak the secrets and truth of society and society reveals itself in the voice of women's jewels, their sex" (Stoler, 1995, p. 203). Tellingly, in Diderot's text it was specifically the talking of *exoticized* and *racialized* female genitals that allowed the truth of society and self to be

known. Genitalia thus became a notable object of interest in the European classifications of race and gender, both scientifically and in the broader cultural imagination of the metropole.

Though Diderot was sent to prison in 1749 for the loquacious content of *Les Bijoux*, a little over a half-century later the allure of glimpsing one particular woman's 'exotic' genitalia would draw crowds from all classes and ranks across Europe eager to establish the racial truths of society. I turn now to perhaps the most well known representative of Victorian Africanized sexuality—the Hottentot Venus. Invoking this figure is to signify the exploitation of Sara Baartman, whose visual image as the Hottentot Venus was consumed by 19th century Europe and has remained salient in many analyses of race and gender. I draw on the example of the Hottentot Venus—wary of contributing to the legacy of discursive violence enacted against a woman who, as her recent biographers state, “loved, and was loved” in her life—in order to show the process of how genital difference has been put onto African women's bodies, in part by including examples of Sara Baartman's resistance to this figuration (Crais & Scully, 2009, p. 1).

Surrounded by the scrutinizing glare of the Enlightenment, Sara Baartman—also known as Saartjie and Sarah Bartmann—is estimated to have lived the 40-some years of her life, from the mid 1770s to 1815, between South Africa, England and France. She was born a member of the Gonaqua community, a sub-group of the Khoikhoi, in the Camdeboo valley in the South African frontier and raised on the farm of a Dutch colonist. An indentured domestic servant by her adolescence, Sara gave birth to several children (who did not survive their first years), sustained a long-term romantic relationship with a European soldier and worked in the bustling metropolis of Cape Town in the three

decades before she travelled to Europe as the Venus (Crais & Scully, 2009). The terms of this unlikely voyage are by most accounts unclear, but Crais and Scully's unprecedented collection of archival documents and interviews suggests that it was a ploy orchestrated to pay off the debts of Sara's owner, a Free Black named Hendrik Cesar, and a European army doctor specializing in venereal disease, Alexander Dunlop. For several years before traveling to England with these two men, Baartman had been working as an erotic showgirl in a soldiers' hospital on the Cape. Baartman's work was part of a new racialized economic niche; at this time local theaters began incorporating African people into their exhibits, fleshing out the European fantasy of the Hottentot race as unusually debased and animalistic (Strother, 1998, p. 13). The European fascination with Khoikhoi people was likely based on this community's successful resistance to slavery in the Cape region, earning them a reputation of being indolent (ibid, p. 12). Cesar and Dunlop sought to capitalize on the growing demand for all things Hottentot and arranged to bring Baartman as a performer/exhibit to the London arena in 1810.

The last 5 years of Baartman's life were spent touring, with varying degrees of success, in England and eventually Paris as the Hottentot Venus—marketed as a prime specimen of the Hottentot race because of her reportedly large buttocks and elongated labia. It is difficult to speculate how much agency Baartman had in her career as the Venus—she landed in Europe a woman in her thirties, multilingual, and familiar with the customs of the British men who were her predominant audience. Additionally, she retained sole legal rights—though likely never saw direct profits—to the aquatints displaying her semi-nude form (Crais & Scully, 2009, p. 75). The European grid of intelligibility into which her image and the live spectacle of the Hottentot Venus

emerged, however, was established well before Baartman's arrival and was beyond her control. Baartman's first performance run as the Venus, during which she would stand for nearly 10 hours a day in front of gawking, poking, tantalized audiences, was held in the cultural hub of Piccadilly Circle at the same time that Jane Austen and Mary Shelley were strolling that street. Whether these British authors actually paid their pence to sit and see Sara Baartman is unknown, but the sexualized image of the Hottentot Venus was undoubtedly proliferated in the news articles, political cartoons and high-society conversations at the same time these authors penned their tales of aristocratic sensibility and monstrosity.

Baartman and the Hottentot Venus were taken up simulatenously as both wretched savage and scientific specimen in the colonial order of things. Because she landed in an England just establishing its identity as a noble refuge of abolition, Sara was quickly made into a martyr by fervent humanitarians who contested her public viewings as immoral in court (Strother, 1998, p. 45). Abolitionists argued that she was a captive of Dunlop and Cesar—that her very presence corrupted the freedom of England. In a move all too reminiscent of present-day development projects, the conditions of Baartman's performances became fodder for producing the position of the respectable and compassionate Englishman, rather than providing any space for Baartman's own perspective and without ultimately alleviating any of her potential suffering. On the flip side of this colonial coin, the Hottentot Venus became an object of curiosity amongst the race scientists of the day. In 1815 Sara was brought by her final owner to visit George Cuvier—professor of comparative anatomy at the Museum of Natural History and vice rector of the Faculty of Sciences at the University of Paris. Convinced that the secret to

the progression from ape to human resided in Baartman's genitalia, Cuvier had several artists sketch Sara over the course of 3 days. "Showing little empathy for the woman they wanted to study, the scientists wanted Sara to disrobe completely. Sara, however, refused to allow Cuvier to examine her" (ibid, p. 135). This refusal—like that of the Congolese assistant who would not collect women's pelvises from their graves—reveals both the profound and ever-present resistance of the colonized against their aggressors as well as (and in response to) the violence of knowledge production.

Baartman succeeded in resisting Cuvier's gaze for the duration of her life—an extraordinary feat considering the power relationship between them. But because the scientific gaze must constantly work to establish its authority, and because Sara had been removed from her Gonaqua community with its history of successful rebellion, Cuvier was undeterred when he went to acquire Sara Baartman's body from the police morgue after her death later that year. The details of her dissection have been well-recorded elsewhere—suffice to say that Cuvier produced what he was looking for by focusing on Baartman's genitalia and preserving them in a jar for nearly two centuries after her death (see Gould, 1985, p. 297; Washington, 2006, p. 85). Cuvier and his colleagues published several papers on the discovery of Baartman's genital difference, confirming in a single gesture the primitivity of the Hottentot race and the superiority of the European. A cast of her body, her brain and skeleton were on display at the Jardin des Plantes—the world's most renowned museum of natural history—until 1982, viewed by thousands of people across two centuries. When activists won the end of her exhibition, historians and anthropologists engaged in a further battle over her DNA and remains until she was finally buried—with much post-Apartheid fanfare—in South Africa in 2002. Because of

the sheer duration of Baartman's body under the European gaze, the image of the Hottentot Venus influenced the science and fantasy of race (if one can even separate these realms) for generations—particularly perpetuating the notion of genitalia as a site of racial difference.

Sexual Dysfunction: The Displacement of Genital Mutilation

The discourses of race and sexuality in the late 18th to 19th century produced the figure of the Hottentot Venus, and particularly her genitalia, as both oversexed and underdeveloped. This figure continued to shape science in the late 19th century and beyond: Cuvier's writings were taken up by Darwin in his theory of sexually selected evolution; theories on the sexual-racial degeneracy of the Hottentot informed the eugenic science of European fascism and Nazism; and Sigmund Freud's mentors—Paul Broca and Jean-Martin Charcot—specifically drew on the data from the Hottentot Venus in their work on female sexuality. In the latter instance, the racialized regulation of genitalia played out in the inverse construction of white women through the notion of frigidity, and always with the African 'other' haunting the analysts' couch. I turn now to an exploration of genitalia as they emerged largely within psychoanalytic discourse as dysfunctional—an anatomical and psychological hurdle in woman's quest for subjecthood—through the work of Freud and Marie Bonaparte.

Widely regarded as the 'father of psychoanalysis,' Sigmund Freud began publishing in 1890 and remains an influential authority on the human mind long past his death in 1939. In his well-known work on sexual development, Freud asserted that young girls lacked a full phallus and so their sexuality centered on the female version of the

penis: the clitoris. As women matured they appropriately relocated the site of sexual pleasure and desire away from the clitoris and onto the (reproductive) vagina. This process of maturation was expected to occur when the young girl, recognizing that she lacked a penis, rejected this state of castration by desiring the form of her father rather than desiring to emulate her ‘mutilated’ mother. This ‘penis envy’ eventually gave way to normal heterosexual desire for a child, through which the daughter learned to accept her anatomical lot and fulfill the role of a reproductive mother (Gay, 1998, p. 515). Failure to stay on this gendered course resulted in the pathologies of hysteria, frigidity and lesbianism—the feminist interventions into which will be explored in the next section of this chapter. The profound racialization of this process, which Sander Gilman (1993) has most comprehensively outlined in *Freud, Race, and Gender*, is less widely discussed. Freud’s theorizing of gender and sexuality were inextricable from his experience of being a Jew in Vienna from 1870-1930; as Gilman notes, “Freud’s life spanned the rise of the most intense period of anti-Semitic activity in Europe, culminating in the Shoah” (p. 12). To be Jewish in Freud’s time was to be marked with intense racial difference constructed through the discourses of nationhood and the biological and psychological sciences of race. Gilman’s central thesis is that Freud displaced the racial difference that marked the male Jew as effeminate, diseased and hysterical onto his construction of the female sex—thus rendering women (of all races) the deviant other and securing a place for Jewish men in the position of the neutral male scientific observer (p. 37).

Freud’s theorizing of the clitoris provides a poignant example of this transmutation of race into gender: In contemporary Viennese slang the clitoris was known as the “Jew” and imbued with the pejorative perspective that the ‘female’ organ

was merely a “truncated” penis, like that of the feminized and ‘defective’ circumcised penis of the Jewish male (p. 39). Over the centuries, male circumcision had been linked to notions of health, aesthetics, increased or decreased sexual desire, increased or decreased fertility, spiritual purity, envy of female menstruation, and human sacrifice; but by the mid-19th century in Western Europe it was predominantly conceived of as the marker of the Jewish race. Scientific theories on male circumcision abounded, including those of Charles Darwin, proclaiming that the practice had been going on for so long that it was in fact *hereditary*, i.e. that male Jews were frequently born without foreskin (p. 51). Freud worked to establish the field of psychoanalysis as a legitimate universal science that would alleviate the genital stigma of Jewishness (for men) by shifting sexual mutilation into the realm of the human psyche and the female body and away from the racial differentiation of Jewish men.

Alys Eve Weinbaum (2004) offers an important corrective to Gilman’s theory, which, she avers, not only perpetuates an erasure of Jewish women, but also misses the ways in which “rather than purging the new science of Jewishness, Freud’s texts actually bring the anti-Semitic milieu in which he worked *into view*” (p. 168). Weinbaum argues that through Freud’s use of a genealogical metaphor based on reading back through a patient’s familial history in search of incestuous or perverse traumas, “Freud incorporated racialized discourse to new ends and built universal claims out of Jewish particularities,” namely the stereotype of the endogamous Jew (*ibid*). In Freud’s work on female sexuality, the transmutation of racial rhetoric into gendered distinctions do not occur because race is made *absent*, but because particular racial fantasies are expanded to mark female bodies, in some instances now also Africanized, as deviant. The symptoms of

Freud's hysteria and frigidity were disparate and unpredictable and so it was only through confessional discussions with an analyst that one could locate the sexual origins of the problem—women were delineated as the most hysterical population and both their psyches and anatomy were to blame. The blurring of Jewish and black racial transference onto women's sexuality can be seen in an oft-quoted 1926 essay in which Freud notes, "The sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology," which Gilman (1993) points out exemplifies the "translation of the degraded status of the 'dark' Jew into the 'blackness' of women" (p. 38).

In Freud's time, Jews were sometimes depicted as Africans and when Freud sought to shake loose the anti-Semitic tropes of Jewishness onto women, he also displaced the Africanized tropes as well. In analyzing present-day discourse on female circumcision, Weinbaum's inverse reading proves especially helpful; the recodings of race and gender—in psychoanalysis as in feminist discourses—never fully abandon the other, but resurface in ways that create refuge for *some* subjects by universalizing certain conditions of their marginality and asserting a hierarchy within that structure. Put less cryptically, I am highlighting that while Freud displaced the Jewish particularities onto the universal human psyche in such a way that left women stigmatized with both the hypersexuality of blackness and the genital mutilation of Jewishness. I will show in the following section that certain western feminist theories have accomplished a similar move by displacing these pejorative particularities in a way that leaves African women stigmatized because of their (real or imagined) circumcisions.

A generation before Freud, the English gynecologist Isaac Baker Brown became notorious for drawing similar conclusions on women's inherent malformation and

performing his own version of clitoridectomies on perhaps thousands of European female patients as a cure for everything from masturbation and nymphomania to depression and anxiety (Gunning, 1991, p. 206). Though Brown's career ended in 1867 due to complaints that his clitoral cure was quackery, the practice was enthusiastically taken up in the United States and continued there and in various locations in Europe until 1937, with some reports indicating that it persisted through the 1950s—though vagino- and labiaplasties, as well as intersex reassignment surgeries, can be arguably considered as present-day extensions of the practice (Chase, 2002). Freud clearly did not invent western female excision, though paradoxically, through his efforts to universalize racist tropes and distinguish sexuality from genitalia, he proliferated the idea of the clitoris as the locus of woman's ailments. In doing so, he imparted this creed to Marie Bonaparte who became his patient and assistant in the 1920s and who would later become, for a short time, the predominant psychoanalyst in France primarily because of her work around female excision (Walton, 2001).

The work of Marie Bonaparte, princess of Greece and Freud's close friend in the last decades of his life, offers a fascinating example of how race—here taken up through the fantasy of the Black rather than Jewish body—was recoded as an interlocking force with female sexuality particularly in the discourse of circumcision. To explore Bonaparte's theories on genitalia I draw on Jean Walton's (2001) compelling look at racial signifiers and the "unacknowledged whiteness" of psychoanalysis, entitled *Fair Sex, Savage Dreams: Race, Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference* (p. 12). Significantly, Walton situates her semi-biographic reading of Bonaparte amongst critical feminist and queer scholarship addressing "the current preoccupations of Western feminism with the

practice of female genital surgeries in African cultures [that] can tell us something about what the clitoris has come to signify for (white) Western lesbian/feminist identity” (p. 82). Though she stops short of pursuing these contemporary significations of the clitoris, Walton offers an in-depth look at the role of race in psychoanalysis that has produced the metonymic function of what Bonaparte came to call “the executive organ” (p. 80).

Early in their relationship, Freud diagnosed Marie Bonaparte as frigid—that is, she was unable to achieve vaginal orgasm and thus prevented from transcending a state of gendered bisexuality and fully maturing as a healthy woman. The diagnosis greatly troubled Bonaparte, who published a 1924 paper (under a pseudonym) and a 1953 book called *Female Sexuality* on her condition. In both texts Bonaparte outlined what she believed to be three genital manifestations along the spectrum of frigidity: 1) *acceptives*, “paraclitoridal” women who are able to achieve vaginal orgasm because their clitorises are near the opening of their vaginas; 2) *renouncers*, “mesoclitoridal” women who, though able to orgasm vaginally because their clitorises are close enough to their vagina, remain fixated on clitoral pleasure; 3) *claimers*, “teleclitoridal” women who never achieve vaginal orgasm because their clitorises are too far from their vagina (Walton, 2001, p. 89). Bonaparte’s (1953) analysis of the social effects of these different clitoral-vaginal configurations reveals the extent to which genitalia had become paramount to identity within psychoanalysis:

The first type soon succeed in substituting the desire for the penis for that of a child, and become true women: normal vaginal maternal. The next abandon all competition with men as feeling themselves too unequal, renounce all hope of obtaining an external love object and, socially and psychically, achieve a status among humans like that of the workers we see in the anthill or hive. Lastly, there are those who deny reality and never accept it; these cling desperately to the psychical and organic male

elements innate in all women: the masculinity complex and the clitoris (p. 1).

Bonaparte argues that though the process of maturation among women was a social and psychological one, it was nevertheless constrained by the hard reality of biology.

Drawing on several case studies, Bonaparte contends that the clitoris is the uncontested site of sexual pleasure for women and states in the concluding sentence of her book, “Here, Nature holds the last word” (Bonaparte, 1953, p. 208). According to Bonaparte, the *placement* of the clitoris is clearly a biological mistake, a dysfunctional reality that should be set right through psychoanalysis, hormone therapy and surgery.

Bonaparte became fixated on the idea of clitoral surgery as a treatment for frigidity, enough so to undergo the procedure herself no less than three times in an unsuccessful attempt to move her clitoris closer to the opening of her vagina and increase her chances of orgasm during vaginal intercourse. Though Bonaparte (1953) writes ambivalently as to the outcome of excision amongst frigid women, she devotes several chapters to the procedure in her book, one of which is titled, “Female Mutilation among Primitive Peoples and their Psychological Parallels in Civilization” (p. 153). According to Bonaparte, it was the book *Neger Eros*, given to her by Freud, about the sexual customs of an East African community which sparked her interest in female excision as it related to sexual differentiation. “Are African women more frequently, and better, ‘vaginalized’ than their European sisters...?” she asks (p. 155). Bonaparte inquires whether African communities practicing the surgery have succeeded in reconciling women with their true physical and psychological position and wonders if there could be parallel results for European women. Her inquiry, the central theme of the chapter, is a curious extension of

the hypersexualized Hottentot figure and perhaps a ‘proto-feminist’ gesture signaling western women’s growing preoccupation with Africanized genitalia.

Bonaparte writes in unabashedly racist terms to clearly differentiate the “ritual mutilations” of ‘them’ from the “operations” performed on “our own little girls,” and it is difficult to miss her projection of sexual harmony and simplicity onto African societies (p. 159). The racialized terms of self vs. other are also established in her assertion of a shared oppression amongst women across Europe and Africa. She argues, for example, that with the exception of Jewish male circumcisions and the clitoridectomies of Baker Brown, the genitalia of “our society” remain unaltered. She continues to say that, “This integrity vanishes, however, if we pass to the psychical domain, for it is here that our civilizations practise their ‘mutilations’ . . . of which the primitive child knows nothing” (p. 160). European women are subjected to the psychic mutilation of sexual prohibition, she argues, which leads to the neuroses of frigidity that are reflected by clitoral location. Though couched in the racist discourse of human evolution, Bonaparte offers a comparison between African and European societies that, as Walton (2001) notes, momentarily “displaces the civilized/primitive binary” (p. 100). “Thus,” Bonaparte concludes,

from the primitive to ourselves or, rather, from our ancestors to ourselves (for contemporary primitives, with as long, though a different chain of development, are but our cousins), we see the evolutionary path along which morality has travelled for, originating first in the external repression imposed by the fierce hands of the father and the strong, it has gradually become, by internalization, our moral conscience. It is no longer externally clamorous and brutal but is just as fierce and inescapable, for we carry it everywhere with us (p. 161).

Though not as ‘clamorous’ as the female excisions performed in Africa, Bonaparte asserts that European devices for sexually repressing women are just as entrenched. The

common sufferance among women is later deemed a consequence of Nature, which has cruelly ignored the erotic experiences of women. Yet, in a text that elsewhere appears to fully swallow the dogma of gender science, this lament also indicates an early attempt by a European woman to link sexual freedom with full subject status and to critique the “external” “hands of the father” representing the social patriarchy internalized by all women.

Racial lines are quickly redrawn in Bonaparte’s notion of sexual oppression and sexual freedom among women. The sexual progress of African women due to their clitoridectomies is linked to their extreme oppression, Bonaparte writing that, “primitive woman would owe her greater normality less to the fact that more freedom is allowed... than to the fact that, far earlier than with us, where girls are better protected, she becomes prey to ‘seduction’, i.e. to the normal, vaginal enterprise of the boys and men” (p. 162-3). Bonaparte suddenly flips her analysis in this late chapter to imply that though circumcised African women may have attained the coveted role of a normal vaginal *acceptive*, this is problematically accomplished through the barbarism of their culture. The sexual normalcy of the circumcised African woman is then *not* a result of more freedom among primitive women, for despite (perhaps because of) their hypersexuality Bonaparte contends that African women live in fear of “the male, whose slave she has more or less been throughout the ages” (p. 156).

The ambivalence of Bonaparte’s position on circumcision is more stark considering she underwent three genital surgeries herself. Though a crucial distinction is now made: Bonaparte intended to *keep* her clitoris and only relocate it in an attempt to *increase* sexual pleasure and achieve full maturation as a ‘vaginal’ woman. Her fantasy

of excised African women is that they must be *less* orgiastic, as sexual pleasure has become bound up with her notion of civilized subjects. Through her analysis comes the skeletal formation of the familiar paradox wherein African women are representative of both excessive sexuality *and* the most extreme forms of sexual oppression. This paradigm establishes two truths in one move: First, European women are granted authority to speak as experts about all female genitalia because all women share the experience of either psychic or genital mutilation and second, the experience of psychic mutilation experienced by white women is deemed more civilized because it allows sexual pleasure, thus African women's mutilation is more primitive.

Bonaparte (1953) derives her anthropological information about African women from colonial travellers' tales and interviews with many of the "numberless whites who have had sexual relations with excised women" and claim that such women still achieve orgasm (p. 155). This data is suspect, Bonaparte insists, as due to the nature of her orgasm, "woman, always and everywhere, is the great Dissembler, the supreme Liar" about her sexual experiences with men who "demand its simulacrum." To determine whether excised African women are 'faking it'—to establish the universality of women's sexual repression by both Nature and man, *as well as* a hierarchy of pleasure that places white women at the top—Bonaparte insists that African women "must be persuaded to talk and to talk truly" (p. 156). To gain their trust, Bonaparte suggests that European women—rather than men—be deployed in teams of two to undertake extensive exams of African women's genitalia and to conduct ethnographic interviews with as many African women as possible. In a statement telling of the racial classification she encouraged, Bonaparte notes that, "Such examples might give us a closer insight into instinctual

human development than those taken from nearer home” (p. 160). Bonaparte’s text is riddled with paradoxes, but an important thread winds through her assertions, reflected particularly in her suggestion that European women should travel to Africa in order to view, palpate and record the genital experiences of circumcised women: Bonaparte’s quest, however contradictory, for the truth about the dysfunction of African women’s genitalia is ultimately a quest for establishing a sense of herself.

Walton (2001) takes up several examples of race fantasy in Bonaparte’s notes on her own psychoanalysis and one such example will suffice here to show the racial terms of her ‘care of self’ in process. After the death of her mother when she was an infant, Bonaparte was raised by her physician father and, by her late teens, planned on becoming a doctor. Her father refused to allow her to pursue this course, certain that it would destroy her chances of being married off—a prohibition which Bonaparte railed against by studying fiercely in her private office, reading for hours each day before the sun rose. Books were not her only tools for rebellion, however. She writes,

I had a predilection for anatomy, and I wanted to study it from its foundation: the skeleton. Now my father possessed, in his huge library, a little skeleton that had been given to him: it belonged to a young Hindu woman, dead, at around twenty years, of tuberculosis. There was even, under glass, next to it, its fleshless death mask. I begged my father to let me bring the little skeleton into my study, so that I could study it at my leisure. But there was, in my request, another cause: I was, at bottom, fearful of the little skeleton, and I wanted to force myself to become accustomed to it (quoted in Walton, 2001, p. 125).

Like in other instances from her childhood reflecting the dialectic of abjection and desire, Bonaparte is tantalized by the body of an ‘other’ woman whose racial difference facilitates her sense of self. In this instance she acknowledges the dual nature of her interest: to produce knowledge that will secure her entry into the position of the neutral

scientific observer and to trace the edges of herself in relation to that of an abject other. The example is made all the more uncanny when considering that Bonaparte's own mother died of tuberculosis at a similar age as the 'young Hindu woman,' yet as Walton points out, Dr. Bonaparte "cannot, of course, keep *her* skeleton in his study" (p. 126). It is only through the profound dehumanization of this racialized woman—whose fate was no doubt determined by the same colonial logic that kept Sara Baartman's bones on display—that Bonaparte is able to establish her relative independence; only by knowing the body of this other woman intimately and establishing her relative supremacy can Bonaparte become free of the social restrictions of her own gendered position and become a doctor rather than a wife. It is the residue of this dynamic that makes Bonaparte, as Walton notes, a "singular predecessor to current Western-based transnational feminists or Western-based human rights activists and their preoccupations with female genital surgical practices in African cultures" (p. 86).

Sexual Liberation: Constructing the Hierarchy of Clitoral Pleasure

Based on Marie Bonaparte's work, Freud argued that, "regardless of the neurological propensity of the body to locate pleasure in the clitoris, 'the continuity of the species and the development of civilization depend upon the adoption by women of their correct, that is nonphallic, vaginal, sexuality'" (quoted in Walton, 2001, p. 95). The eugenic subtext of this statement—that women's sexual selection determines the progress of civilization—reflects the bind between race and reproduction that kept genitalia in the foreground of psychoanalytic thought. Bonaparte's theories on female genitalia and sexuality resisted some of Freud's thinking, namely by asserting that women's adoption

of their ‘vaginal sexuality’ was at a great cost to their erotic life and resulted in a kind of psychic mutilation. Yet she did not engage in any direct critique of the resulting gendered positions. She did not, for example, deconstruct compulsory heterosexuality, the biological determinism of women’s reproductive capacity or the valorization of penetrative sex between bodies rigidly defined as male and female. Nor, as Walton (2001) points out, did Bonaparte ever consider lesbianism as a response to her inability to find sexual pleasure during intercourse with men, though Bonaparte apparently regretted never exploring her own potential homosexuality (p. 130). The social construction of gender—and specifically the idea that privileging clitoral pleasure would lead to social independence from men—certainly did not escape the critiques of lesbian and western feminists in the 1970s. As is widely acknowledged, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* written in 1949 and translated to English in 1953 laid the foundation for much second wave (and beyond) feminist scholarship. In this next section I trace the links between Bonaparte, de Beauvoir and Anne Koedt’s 1970 text *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* to lay bare how female genitalia has persisted as a site of identity formation through the interlocking forces of race and gender.

Simone de Beauvoir’s (1953) pioneering analysis of the ‘facts and myths’ of women’s lives argues persuasively that the science from the late 18th through the 19th centuries and the social mores of the 20th century not only invented the hierarchy of races, but with similar injury “prove[d] women’s inferiority” as well (p. xx). She contends that the construction of gender (though crucially *not* sex) leaves women economically, legally and socially oppressed in ways analogous to the insidious and brutal oppression of African Americans and Jews. “‘The eternal feminine’ corresponds to

‘the black soul’ and to ‘the Jewish character,’” she writes, noting frequently that (white) women have also been despised and enslaved and now seek emancipation. Women’s special oppression comes from their isolation from other women, from the fact that unlike the proletariat, the Black in the U.S. South and the persecuted Jew, “Women do not say ‘We’” (p. xix). Beauvoir rarely alludes to the class and race divisions among women that trouble this desired ‘we,’ ceding once that “[i]f [women] belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women” (ibid). Similar to much of the feminist scholarship that would follow, Beauvoir’s momentary acknowledgement of power differences amongst women is eclipsed by her repeated conflation of race, class and gender oppression through analogy, wherein gender trumps all other conditions of women’s lived identities. Considering this, I take up Beauvoir’s descriptions of women’s lives to be descriptions of *white bourgeois* women’s lives, that may call on the oppressions of African Americans or Jews as metaphor, but ultimately lead to a displacement of these racializations in order to define white women’s sexuality.

In her chapter on the psychoanalytical view on women’s bodies, Beauvoir levies a critique against Freud that Marie Bonaparte hinted toward at best: “Freud never showed much concern for the destiny of woman; it is clear that he simply adapted his account from that of the destiny of man, with slight modifications” (p. 39). The notion of ‘penis envy’ is laughable to Beauvoir, who argues that the only thing women might envy is the extraordinary social privilege afforded to “this weak little rod” (p. 41). Likewise, for Beauvoir, frigidity has been misinterpreted as a problem of women’s maturation when in reality “resentment is the most common source of feminine frigidity; in bed the woman

punishes the male for all the wrongs she feels she has endured, by offering him an insulting coldness” (p. 389). These and other controversial analyses in *The Second Sex* startled the French audience in 1949 and left American readers “exhausted by the originality of its thesis and the intensity of its argument” (Bair, forward to 1989 edition, p. vii). By 1960 its impact on both Franco- and Anglophone communities was clear: Beauvoir had helped to usher in a new feminist era. Of the myriad points of critique that Beauvoir braids together, I focus below on two that continue to shape contemporary discourses of race and gender in female circumcision: the intertwined tropes of mutilation and development.

Like Bonaparte, though in a different fashion, Beauvoir took issue with Freud’s notion of mutilation. *The Second Sex* was published three years prior to *Female Sexuality* but it does not receive mention in Bonaparte’s text and, similarly, Beauvoir does not take up Bonaparte’s 1924 article on female sexuality and only mentions female circumcision in a footnote (p. 372). While later feminist texts would perhaps accurately position their ideas as opposites, in the case of female mutilation Bonaparte and Beauvoir show important similarities. As mentioned, Bonaparte argued that European and African women shared an experience of mutilation; while excised African women were mutilated through genital cutting, European women were psychically mutilated by social prohibitions. Beauvoir quite plainly rejects the constraints of psychoanalysis even when relying on many of its tenants in her analyses, particularly in her objection to a sexual homology wherein “man represents both the positive and the neutral” (p. xv). She writes, “[Freud] assumes that woman feels that she is a mutilated man. But the idea of mutilation implies comparison and evaluation” (p. 41). Freud’s comparisons are based on willful

analysis—he finds what he is looking for—says Beauvoir, and in the case of woman as mutilated she argues that his criteria are more often indicative of woman’s resistance to her oppression.

Bonaparte perpetuated the centrality of the clitoris in woman’s erotic life and subjecthood but where she suggests a surgical reconciliation to amend the psychic mutilation of frigidity, Beauvoir recommends a rejection of the notion of being mutilated. Exactly what happens to the stigma of mutilation will be discussed a bit later, but suffice to say here that the idea of bodily integrity becomes central to the independent white/bourgeois woman Beauvoir envisions. Though women’s eroticism is linked to the very perpetuation of humanity, Beauvoir notes that her social position is one of sexual “prey,” and she avers “[t]his antinomy...is manifested, for one thing, in the opposition of the two organs: the clitoris and the vagina” (p. 372). While she concedes, citing the Kinsey Report, that there is no anatomical proof of women’s vaginal sensitivity, she also offers examples of home-made dildos throughout the ages in order to disrupt the split between vaginal and clitoridal pleasure (p. 373, footnote 3). The aim for Beauvoir is not to prove whether women can achieve real or imagined vaginal orgasms, but to disrupt the image of woman as perpetually at risk of failing in her sexual development. “It is striking that in woman there is a choice of two systems” for development, either vaginal or clitoridal, while for men there is only one normalized track; thus women are made more vulnerable to underdevelopment (p. 373).

Beauvoir particularly laments psychoanalysis’ “concept of normality,” explaining:

If a subject does not show in his totality the development considered normal, it will be said that his development has been arrested, and this arrest will be interpreted as a lack, a negation, but never as a positive decision (p. 50)

I read Beauvoir as implying that the *choice* between clitoral and vaginal pleasure could be framed not only as positive, but as a primary strategy for women to achieve independence by changing the terms of normative development. For instance, Beauvoir describes the lesbian as a woman who “deliberately rejects her mutilation” (p. 406). The lesbian in Beauvoir’s text is a figure of disruption and possibility—her existence in psychoanalytic thought was the result of improper development, but Beauvoir imbues this figure with the ability to not only *reject* mutilation but to *transcend* it in a move toward sexual freedom and independence. Beauvoir elaborates, (in butch-phobic terms) that the lesbian can maintain her femininity, even *choose* to be submissive, and still achieve social independence: “Even when she has a good figure and a pretty face, a woman who is absorbed in ambitious projects of her own or one who simply wants liberty in general will decline to abdicate in favor of another human being” (p. 410). Lesbianism then offers women a chance to step outside of a mutilated space, to challenge concepts of normality and even gain access to the joys and pains of independence. Homosexuality provides an extreme figure of potential liberation for Beauvoir, perhaps still too dangerous to encourage, but she maintains that privileging erotic (particularly clitoral) experience is necessary for all women. She argues that in most cases woman “feels herself to be an object and does not at once realize *a sure independence in sex enjoyment*; she must regain her dignity as a transcendent and free subject while assuming her carnal condition...” (emphasis added, p. 402).

How did increased sexual pleasure—particularly clitoral pleasure—come to be a salient strategy for bourgeois women’s freedom? As Beauvoir avers, “Woman is the victim of no mysterious fatality; the peculiarities that identify her as specifically a woman

get their importance from the significance placed upon them” (p. 727). In a move parallel to Freud’s displacement of the particular anti-Semitic notion of the male Jew being genitally mutilated onto the female body, Beauvoir—in step with Bonaparte—calls for a displacement of the peculiar mutilation of women and her improper genital development. Bonaparte’s preoccupation with the mutilation of African women’s genitalia anticipates precisely where this displaced stigmatization would come to land in racialized terms. As sexual pleasure and independence increasingly became conditions of the modern civilized woman, they were gradually whitened. Bourgeois women could find ‘a sure independence in sex enjoyment’, which meant rather than struggling toward vaginal maturation women should reject the notion of genital mutilation and embrace the clitoral sensation readily available to them. Where Beauvoir stops just short of drawing a political line between the sexual pleasure of the clitoris and the vagina, Anne Koedt’s (1970) popular feminist essay *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* directly equates clitoral sensation with the proper development of modernization and feminist liberation.

From the storehouse of statistics in Alfred C. Kinsey and Wardell B. Pomeroy’s (1953) report on human sexuality through the University of Indiana, western feminists added scientific ammunition to the ideas in Beauvoir’s text. Directly challenging Freud’s findings, Kinsey and Pomeroy contend that “It is difficult...in light of our present understanding of the anatomy and physiology of sexual response, to understand what can be meant by a ‘vaginal orgasm,’” and further that, “there are no anatomic data that indicate such a [clitoridal to vaginal] physical transformation has ever been observed or is possible” (p. 582). Koedt’s (1970) essay, appearing in 1969 in “Notes from the first year” and later as its own pamphlet, makes use of this information declaring that, “there is only

one area for sexual climax; that area is the clitoris” (para. 3). Her critique of Freud includes mention of Marie Bonaparte’s *Female Sexuality* and the “elaborate mental gymnastics” Bonaparte performed when suggesting that women undergo genital surgery to reconcile clitoral and vaginal pleasure (para. 11). Koedt’s critique, bolstered by the exciting wave of feminist activism both in and beyond the academy, situated Bonaparte’s work in the realm of false consciousness and Freud at the helm of patriarchal oppression. Bonaparte’s influence would not remain by the wayside for long, however.

Koedt details the structure and function of female genitalia following Kinsey’s descriptions, which show that all genital pleasure occurs either from direct stimulation of the external head of the clitoris or by indirect stimulation of the internal clitoral shaft. Considering these ‘facts,’ Koedt maintains that any woman who claims to have experienced a vaginal orgasm suffers from the “confusion” and “deception” of her oppressed condition, encouraging her feminist readers, that, “What we must do is redefine our sexuality” (para. 21). In this redefinition, Koedt traces the figure of the liberated western feminist on top of Bonaparte’s psychically mutilated European woman who, in turn, was a figure invented through the fantasy of the hypersexualized and underdeveloped African woman. This new ‘sensational’ feminist subject emerged as historically unique, yet there remain crucial continuities. Though Koedt rejects Bonaparte’s idea of surgery, she continues to locate woman’s proper emotional and mental development in her relationship in her clitoris and she continues to define western clitorises in relation to the excised genitalia of women in Africa and the ‘Middle East.’ Koedt (1970) elaborates, writing:

One reason given to explain the Mid-eastern practice of clitoridectomy is that it will keep the women from straying. By removing the sexual organ

capable of orgasm, it must be assumed that her sexual drive will diminish. Considering how men look upon their women as property, particularly in very backward nations, we should begin to consider a great deal more why it is not in men's interest to have women totally free sexually (para. 23).

As in Beauvoir, sexual pleasure is equated with freedom from men's oppression, and as in Bonaparte, women in 'backward' nations are the farthest away from experiencing normal sex drive and its accompanying freedom. The equation of sexual liberation with political and social independence fueled feminist consciousness-raising groups particularly in the U.S., during which women engaged in "practices ranging from self-exams (breast, cervical, vaginal, and vulvar) to alternative therapies (home treatments for vaginal infections, nutritional changes, herbal remedies, and menstrual extractions)" (Davis, 2007, p. 122). Often using a mirror and a flashlight, women helped one another 'discover' their clitorises, which became a symbol of personal and political liberation. The discovery of the clitoris and its orgasmic potential dominated Shere Hite's (1976/2004) survey of hundreds of U.S. women; techniques for maximizing self-pleasure were distributed during Betty Dodson's masturbation workshops; and as recently as 2000 in *The Clitoral Truth: The Secret World at Your Fingertips*, Rebecca Chalker uses the same Kinsey diagrams and statistics to guide women toward personal liberation. Additionally, the figure of the lesbian was (problematically) rejuvenated as the ultimate expression of claiming clitoral pleasure in an effort toward undermining the heterosexual institution (Koedt, 1970).

In this critique I do not mean to deny any experiential realities of clitoral pleasure, nor do I mean to diminish the political and emotional significance of sexual pleasure or the work of second-wave feminists who carved out space for sexual identities from which

I personally continue to benefit. My critique of the sexually liberated lesbian/feminist figure is that her/our position continues to be marked by profound exclusions and that the meaning ascribed to this figure—and importantly to its genital experience—remains bound up with the violence of race science and colonialism. As was discussed in the Introduction, the idea of the circumcised body as ‘mutilated’ is also profoundly bound up with tropes of disability through which a ‘normal’ body is constructed as the pinnacle of health. Though Kathy Davis (2007) has argued accurately that important subversions of the medical establishment occurred because of the interventions of feminist health groups, there have also been important critiques of this body-based movement. Donna Haraway’s (1997) article *The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order* offers a brilliant critique of the dangers involved in how these “visually self-possessed sexual and generative organs made potent tropes for the reclaimed feminist self” (p. 67) Haraway contends that the trouble with locating liberation in our genitalia is that, while ‘liberating’ in some senses, it perpetuates the same medicalized gaze toward female bodies as performed by colonial conquerors. In both epochs the genitalia of the colonized—in formal and neocolonial encounters—is inversely made into the comparative other. While seeking relief from gendered constraints, the western feminist made her sexual oppression into a universal condition for all women and gained a bit of ground by redirecting scrutiny toward the bodies of circumcised women deemed *more* sexually oppressed. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) unwittingly offered an early insight into this process: “No subject will readily volunteer to become the object, the inessential; it is not the Other, who in defining himself [sic] as the Other, establishes the One. The Other is posed as such by the One in defining himself as the One” (p. xviii). A Foucauldian

reading of her statement highlights how it is actually *less* through the abjection of the other, than through the assertion of the self that difference is constructed and by which populations are divided. This calls attention to how female circumcision discourse has been a vehicle through which racism is mobilized and obscured in the name of feminist political liberation.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a skeletal genealogy of female genitalia and how it has emerged as a point of focus within feminist scholarship. As was outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, the significance placed on the clitoris by western science and feminism fueled a glut of scholarship within Europe, Canada and the United States on female circumcision, particularly through the 1980s and 1990s. Even the ghost of Sara Baartman reemerged in these debates: “Feminism helped her resurrection. In the late 1980s the Hottentot Venus returned, as a symbol not of sexual excess and racial inferiority but of all the terrible things the West has done to others” (Casier & Scully, 2009, p. 3). This reemergence, however, perhaps foreshadowed by the zealotry of the abolitionists who self-servingly fought against Sara Baartman’s exhibition, might have done more for well-intentioned westerners than the bodies still made to bear the racial legacy of the Hottentot Venus.

Knowledge about one’s body and particularly about female genital difference through ‘mutilation’ quickly became social capital for western women to be lauded over the heads of ‘uneducated’ women from ‘undeveloped countries,’ as is apparent in Fran Hosken’s reports or the disability tropes in Alice Walker’s texts on female circumcision.

This dynamic, articulated in terms crass or patronizing, helped facilitate the realization of Marie Bonaparte's dream for western women to travel to Africa as knowledge producers about excised genitalia in order to establish a trajectory of proper sexual development. Twice displaced, the stigma of mutilated and improperly developed genitalia continues to be reasserted in the texts of many western feminists' writing and through aid projects around female circumcision in Africa. In the next chapter I turn toward the intervention of one western feminist organization into a matter of female circumcision in Narok, Kenya and an exploration of the geographic and biopolitical specifics of how this western preoccupation has unfolded in Maasailand through colonialism and into contemporary development work.

Chapter 4: Colonial Ghosts in Current Feminist Projects

On August 18, 2008 Kim Rosen, a white woman from the United States, paid a taxi driver and several policemen to drive with her into the Maasai community of Narosura outside of Narok, Kenya. Upon arrival the police were directed to the recent gravesite of a 10-year old Maasai girl who had reportedly died from circumcision related complications. The girl's body was exhumed and photographed while a squad car was positioned between the grave and the girl's family. The "circumciser" was arrested and driven back into town by the police—the charges were later dropped. The U.S. woman returned to the States and published an article describing her experience on the web site of a feminist organization, V-day of *The Vagina Monologues*, remarking that "justice prevailed" (Rosen, 2008, para. 13). A review of her text gives way to important questions: How did a woman from the U.S. come to orchestrate the exhumation of a child's grave some 12,000 kilometers from her own home? What specific social and historical conditions allow this action to be considered feminist justice? How is racial difference created in this encounter and how does such difference relate to broader mechanisms of racism at the state and transnational level?

In the previous chapter's genealogy I explored how the notions of 'mutilation' and 'underdevelopment' have been displaced onto the bodies of African women—particularly those who have undergone circumcision rites—in order to establish a sense of self among Euro-American women. In this chapter I work to situate this dynamic, exemplified by the incident of Rosen's gross intrusion into a Maasai community, amidst the history of British colonialism and the current industry of development work in

Maasailand. I aim to show that the regulation of race/reproduction implicit in western feminism's preoccupation with African women's genitalia operates not only at the level of the individual in self-making, but in ways that attempt to 'manage' whole populations. In his lectures on biopower, Foucault (1976/2003) states that "sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet," and he goes on to explain that sexuality became important in nineteenth century western contexts precisely because it encompassed 1) the individual body subjected to disciplinary controls and surveillance, and 2) bodies en masse, in the broader sense of 'the population' via biological reproduction (p. 251-2). Importantly, Foucault insists that the forms of power operating at the individual level (disciplinary) and at the level of the population (regulatory/biopower) are not mutually exclusive. Rather he states that biopower "use[s] [disciplinary power] by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques" (p. 242). The western discourse on female circumcision reflects this very process: The focus on monitoring individual bodies (e.g. working to ensure that female circumcision is prevented based on the idea that the clitoris is necessary for each individual woman to develop as a liberated subject) is bound up with regulating populations at large (e.g. working to eradicate female circumcision in order to increase the general sexual health proper 'family planning' and development of a society).

Populations are regulated in order to maximize life or "make live" a given society—to increase the chances of survival, to ensure conditions favorable to growth and security and to defend society from ills and degradation. To the question 'Which societies are made to live?' Foucault responds, "It is, I think, at this point that racism intervenes" (p. 254). Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002) has followed this thinking, defining racism as "the

state-sanctioned...production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death” (p. 261). Here we can see the impact of establishing a *hierarchy* of difference between bodies at both the level of the individual encounter and between populations at large. David Theo Goldberg (2004) elaborates on her interpretation, explaining that “racism, then, produces the conditions, directly or indirectly, that serve to foreshorten life directly but also foreshorten life’s opportunities” (p. 229). This includes direct state-violence and ‘states of exception,’ such as certain post/colonies that produce what Achille Mbembe (2003) calls “*death worlds*” in his expansion of Foucault through the concept of “necropolitics” (p. 23). The foreshortening of life also includes ‘everyday’ expressions of racism that accumulate to make certain populations more abject, and thus more vulnerable to state violence and neglect (Goldberg, *ibid*).

I approach Rosen’s intrusion in Narosura therefore as much more than an isolated or particularly grotesque display of racism by an individual woman in her quest for selfhood (though this will be discussed), but as an event that follows perfectly the rules of race that operate to maximize the viability of one group of people at the expense of another (Foucault, 1976/2003, p. 254). This event occurs within the specific historical relationship between the geopolitical West and East Africa, and is facilitated through the particular history of British colonialism in Kenya and the current trend of white women travelling to Maasailand to undertake development work. I read Rosen’s text for signs of these various dynamics and as an example of the endurance of the western preoccupation with female circumcision and the accompanying exploitative research practices that persist despite decades of anti-colonial critique from feminists within and outside of Africa. A critique of Rosen’s text as ethnocentric is therefore useful to a certain extent; it

remains necessary to challenge the representations of Africa as dark and dysfunctional that serve to inversely construct the white global north as morally superior and developed. But this analysis continues to mobilize race as an essential difference “to be found *on the bodies*” of African women (Ahmed, 2000, p. 9, emphasis in the original). I include but attempt to move beyond these critiques by drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2000) concept of the “strange encounter” within which the differences circulating in the self-other dialectic are “determined through encounters *between others*” (p. 9, emphasis mine). Within these encounters ‘the stranger’ exists as a figure that is always already recognized as strange, already known because of its strangeness—a method of consistently re-establishing a hierarchy of racial difference. The body recognized as strange is fetishized, that is, cut off from the social and material relations that determined its existence and is then made into a figure that is given a life of its own. I explore the production the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ as one such figure always already recognized by western feminists as ‘the other’ because of her ‘strange’ genitalia.

I then work to *de-fetishize* this figure by identifying the ways that race and gender have operated historically to structure the strange encounters between western feminists and Maasai people. In the latter section of this chapter I turn toward the ways in which this interpersonal establishment of racial difference builds upon and integrates colonial racisms. This leads toward the concluding chapter of this thesis, which further explores the mechanism of racism that regulates populations through reproductive control within current western development projects in Maasailand. In the course of my research I interviewed three Maasai community leaders (a land rights activist, a pastor and a program coordinator at a local community center) who live and work in the Narosura and

Narok area where the child's grave was desecrated—I cite them in text as 'Interview A,' etc. and provide more details on these conversations in my reference pages. I draw from these open-ended interviews in order to sketch out the impact of this incident on the local community and to situate this particular event within the broader context of western NGOs working on female circumcision in the region. Rather than attempting to provide a more 'authentic' account of Maasai perspectives on circumcision, I bring these interviews into conversation with scholarship that troubles the western desire to access information on Maasai circumcision practices in general. Outlining some of the more material impacts of knowledge production, I work to show how Maasai society is degraded through western texts and policies on female circumcision and how this results in increased vulnerability—specifically to the loss of community land and water—to westerners and elite Kenyans.

I explore these operations of power using an assemblage of hermeneutics—the notion of haunting, the 'bio-necro collaboration' and the 'desire for development.' In Jaspir Puar's (2007) sense an assemblage is a collection of elements that determine and influence one another without necessarily corresponding to regular intervals of time and space (p. xxii). For example, the chronology of western women travelling to and working in Maasailand through formal and postcolonial eras does matter, but these events do not unfold neatly along a linear timeline mapped from a certain location during which the past is eroded or replaced by what is new. From this perspective, I first read Rosen's text by looking for what is not immediately present yet nevertheless continues to haunt her narrative. This reading traces the historical dynamics that are displaced when Rosen fetishizes the 'circumcised Maasai girl' figure and reveals the connection between the

individual self-making of western feminists and the regulation of African populations at large. Next I explore the history of British interventions into female circumcision and other local cultural practices during formal colonialism in Kenya by drawing on what Jaspir Puar (2007) calls the “bio-necro collaboration.” This concept brings together Foucault’s (1976/2003) biopolitics and Mbembe’s (2003) idea of necropolitics to show how power circulates in ways that both maximize the chances of life for colonists, westerners and elite Kenyans, and that explicitly deny and regulate life for Maasai people. Puar explains that bio-necropolitics “conceptually acknowledges biopower’s direct activity in death, while remaining bound to the optimization of life, and necropolitics’ nonchalance toward death even as it seeks out killing as a primary aim” (p. 35). Though I do not claim that the conditions in Maasailand today or during formal colonialism constitute a ‘death world’ in Mbembe’s sense, the regulation of reproduction and populations in the Kenyan colony and postcolony includes eugenic undertones and even fantasies of genocide against Maasai communities. In the final chapter I examine how this regulation of populations has endured and been modified through the western “desire for development”—a phrase borrowed from Barbara Heron’s (2007) work on white women aid workers in sub-Saharan Africa—which links ‘care of self’ among western feminists to current trends in development work in Maasailand that bind concerns about gender to land and wealth control.

Ultimately, I argue that mainstream western feminist development projects have become a potential vehicle for the deployment of racism in the sense of producing subjects and managing populations one, for the benefit of those deemed ‘white’ and/or ‘western’ and two, to the detriment of Maasai people. Specifically, I show how this

process occurs through the perpetuation of neo-colonial encounters during which racialized difference establishes lines of life and death between distinct bodies and populations—wherein a hierarchy of difference among bodies is brought to life through violent acts and is sustained by a continued denial of resources and rights to Maasai people. Through this feminist excavation of the colonial lineage of current western development projects, I hope to continue exploring both how western feminism perpetuates violence against women and men in vulnerable indigenous communities, and where it might also continue to be a source of creative approaches to lessen harm and increase equality in transnational relationships.

Haunting: Colonial ghosts and fragile civility

The fetish of the 'circumcised Maasai girl'

Kim Rosen's (2008) account of her trip to Maasailand is a ghost story; as Renee Bergland (2000) explains, "All stories are ghost stories, if only because each word...is intended...to embody and to animate a strange imaginary entity that is both there and not there" (p. 5-6). Rosen's text makes ghosts; it "snares them in print so as to release them into readers' minds, or better yet, into the dark corners of readers' bedrooms" (ibid). In this analytical frame, haunting can be thought of as "unsuccessful repression": an attempt to deny the fragility of constructed white civility by burying those 'other' bodies, which nevertheless continue to sustain the ambivalent operation of bourgeois society (p. 5). Such repression is unsuccessful insofar as white civility cannot exist without the figure of the racialized other, "the ghost in the machine" (Morrison, 1992, p. 11). Rosen's attempts to bury the colonial dynamics that undergird her intrusion into a Maasai community

ultimately *produces* certain figures; just as early U.S. expansionists frequently invoked the figure of the ‘vanishing’ Native American to simultaneously establish notions of civility and in order to mask their active participation in genocide. Rosen’s ghosts are formed through her radical, and ultimately failed, forgetting of past colonial relations between Africa and the West and the neo-colonial relations of the “becoming-future,” which continue to shape her privileged position (Puar, 2007, p. xx). Amongst western feminists working internationally like Rosen, certain “neo-colonial preoccupations continue to haunt Western perceptions of ex-colonial societies” (Ong, 1988, p. 3). Teasing apart the details of Rosen’s particular hauntings will reveal how western feminist projects in Maasailand remain bound up with colonial and neocolonial dynamics.

Rosen’s (2008) text opens with the description of an unnatural death, a body “secretly buried” in an “unmarked grave” (para. 1). Digging up the body is depicted as inevitable: “There was no way to avoid the exhumation” (para. 21). It is depicted as a moral imperative: if not for the exhumation “this girl would have died in vain” (p. 13). Although the death is marked as shocking and Rosen appears to be uncovering some hidden truth through the exhumation, it is apparent that Rosen already recognizes Maasai culture as strange and she is already familiar with the specific figure of the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’—in short, she knows what she is looking for before she approaches the grave. Pre-existing western narratives about Maasai culture, Maasai bodies, and Maasai land shore up this configuration of difference between western women and Maasai people. Stretching from Joseph Thomson’s (1885) *Through Masai Land: A Journey of Exploration Along the Snowclad Volcanic Mountains and Strange Tribes of Eastern Equatorial Africa* into the current tourism industry operating in Maasailand, the

community has faced exceptionally derogatory representation.⁷ Rosen's text arises within these longstanding western fantasies that in part construct Maasai people as especially patriarchal.

A cursory review of literature written by white Euro-American women living in Kenya over the past 70 years shows a remarkably consistent fantasy of Maasai men as sexually excessive and aggressive. A comparative reading of Karen Blixen's (1937) *Out of Africa* and Corinne Hofmann's (2005) *The White Masai*⁸ [sic] offers a brief example of the endurance of this specific myth and insight into the desire for such stereotype. Blixen's text, first written under the pen name Isak Dinesen in the inter war era of Britain's occupation of Kenya, has remained an iconic narrative for white women venturing into the 'dark continent.' Hofmann's text, while perhaps of a different literary genre than Blixen's magnum opus, nevertheless has sold over 4 million copies in its first printing out of Germany and is widely distributed throughout Europe, North America and Australia and at the time of this writing can be found on the bookshelves of every major shopping mall in downtown Nairobi. Despite the years between these two texts, Blixen

⁷ British historian Lotte Hughes (2006) has complained that many Maasai people invoke negative stereotypes themselves when participating in the tourism industry or in arguments toward cultural sovereignty, but her critique fails to address dynamics of power in knowledge production and the potential for resistance in 'playing' with such stereotypes. Though she criticizes Maasai men who appoint themselves as "cultural ambassadors" for their community, Hughes is plainly satisfied to proclaim *herself* both ambassador and expert critic of Indigenous peoples' strategies for cultural and physical survival—a fine example of what Sarah Ahmed (2000) calls "becoming without becoming," wherein a person with social privilege appropriates an 'other's' identity and culture without actually sharing in the vulnerability and challenges facing that community (Hughes, 2006, p. 288, see also Hughes, 2003; Ahmed, 2000, p. 132). In contrast, historian Dorothy Hodgson (2001) has shown how the particular idea of the 'patriarchal Maasai pastoralist' arises from both colonial fantasy and gender inequalities perceived and *created* within the processes of colonialism (p. 16). Hughes came up in one of my interviews during which the participant remarked, "Lotte Hughes writes about Maasai people that we are profiting from being Maasai, but she's taking advantage of Maasai identity because it's marketable in the academy, she's taking advantage of this herself. This is very ironic" (Interview A).

⁸ Hofmann also authored two sequels to this text: *Back from Africa* (2007) (indeed a reference to Blixen's classic) and *Reunion at Barsaloi* (2006). *The White Masai* became a major motion picture in 2006.

and Hofmann share literary tropes about Africa as an exotic and underdeveloped land, and African people as the very personification of difference.

The popularity of each of these texts in their respective eras, including the success of the 1985 film version of *Out of Africa* directed by Sydney Pollack, indicates that western audiences continue to eagerly consume notions of white adventurers amidst African savagery despite decades of decolonization movements in Africa and the many critiques and counter narratives offered by postcolonial scholarship (Arnfred, 2004). The representations of Maasai communities within these texts appear especially static. Blixen (1937) first describes Maasai people, many of whom she displaced when settling her 6,000-acre farm, in a several page portrait of a Maasai man, which immediately becomes the description of “young Masai Morani,” pluralized:

He had also the general rigid, passive, and insolent bearing of the Moran, that makes of him an object for contemplation, such as a statue is, a figure which is to be seen, but which itself does not see...Their faces, with the high cheek-bones and boldly swung jaw-bones, are sleek, without a line or groove in them, swollen; the dim unseeing eyes lie therein like two dark stones tightly fitted into a mosaic (p. 146).

Nearly seven decades later—spanning Kenya’s legal independence from Britain in 1963—Hoffmann (2005) recounts her autobiographical encounter with a Maasai man during a safari trip to Kenya, echoing Blixen’s description:

That’s a Masai!...And then it’s as if I’ve been struck by lightning. A tall, dark brown, beautiful exotic man lounging in the quayside looking at us, the only white people in this throng, with dark eyes. My God, he's beautiful; more beautiful than anyone I've ever seen... His face is so elegantly proportioned that it could almost be that of a woman. But the way he holds himself, the proud look and wired muscular build betray his undoubted masculinity. I can't take my eyes off him (p. 2).

One notable difference between these passages—that the Maasai man in Hofmann’s narrative, while clearly objectified, *can* see, and indeed is reported to be staring at her—

reveals less a move toward depicting Maasai people as equal human beings and more a subtle shift in the fantasies of western women. Maasai men are frequently portrayed in contemporary literature and tourism brochures as hypersexual and masculine, and therefore a more available commodity for white women to consume. Hofmann's titillation at the thought of a Maasai man lusting after her extends the possibilities for sexual consumption from Blixen's (1937) own sexualized description of Maasai men:

The muscles of their necks swell in a particular sinister fashion, like the neck of the angry cobra, the male leopard or the fighting bull, and the thickness is so plainly an indication of virility that it stands for a declaration of war to all the world with the exception of the woman (p. 142).

Rosen's portrayal of Maasai culture retains this same fantasy of Maasai men as sexually excessive and aggressive, imagining that their unbridled sexuality leads to perverse violence against women. This trope enables Rosen to ignore the reality that female circumcision practices in Maasai culture are considered (in belief and practice) to be a women's only affair (Hodgson, 2001; Interview A; Interview B). Rosen's denial is apparent in her omission of the gender of the arrested circumciser, who was in fact an elder woman. Any such surprises or resistances from Maasai people that Rosen might come across in her encounter are simply usurped into the legacy of racialized difference that operates to construct her as the neutral white observer able to understand and definitively know the Maasai other.

Rosen's gender is then mobilized to secure racial supremacy—she asserts indirectly that because she is a woman she knows more about the experiences of Maasai women than a Maasai man ever could. Rosen's appearance as a knowing subject works to naturalize both her presence on Maasai land and the unsettling events she facilitates. Her

morbid impulse to exhume a child's body is made less strange, for example, by dismissing the community's resistance to the intrusion—for example, a conflict between the girl's uncle and the police—as due to Maasai people's "religious beliefs and fears of black magic or other superstitions" (para. 23). This dismissal discursively reduces an outraged family to irrational pre-modern beings that will "burn their dung huts" and abandon the grave so it will "disappear, anonymous" (para. 23). Rosen's text echoes these tired tropes and much like her colonial predecessors, her intervention is put forth as a lone act of human reason and a move toward civility. Her whiteness is again mobilized to assert a hierarchy of difference through this construction of a civilized/primitive paradigm: Rosen approaches the grave out of moral duty, Maasai people don't have morals only superstitions; Rosen values the life of a child, Maasai people are apathetic; Rosen cares about the status of women, Maasai culture is inherently patriarchal.

Rosen (2008) accomplishes the contrast of civil white feminist vs. primitive Maasai community in part through her representation of the landscape itself as wild and savage. She writes that when she began her excursion from Narok town to Narosura she "had no idea of the danger involved" (Rosen, 2008, para.15). Her tone is both anxious and excited as she describes being "unaware that the villagers, intent on preventing the exhumation from happening, had already planned to track our vehicle and set up an ambush" (para. 15). She depicts the journey through Narok district as a wild tour on "treacherous roads" running through "rough terrain" and "barren savannah" (para. 18-19). The very land lacks viability: "everything looked thirsty" and "the swirling clouds of dust were so thick that at times we were literally blinded and had to stop until visibility returned" (para. 18). Such discursive strategies serve to naturalize both Rosen's

presence—a refusal to acknowledge that *she* is the ambusher in this scene—and the drought conditions, which she attributes simply to a late short-rain season. These elements are construed as separate, ahistorical and mundane. But while the absence of water and Rosen’s presence are discursively divorced in this narrative, they are in fact intertwined.

Narosura is located roughly 260 kilometers outside of Nairobi in a semi-arid grassland ecosystem where droughts are cyclical. From Blixen to more recent western conservationists, the droughts in Maasailand have been erroneously attributed to Maasai over-stocking and over-grazing (Blixen, 1937, p. 107). Recent western scholarship, in conversation with indigenous science, has shown that Maasai communities employ highly specialized systems of grazing and water conservation in their transhumant migrations, which depend on the ability to move throughout large areas of land and retain access to perennial headwaters (Igoe, 2004, p. 52; Homewood and Rodgers, 1991, p. 103). While rainfall may be an expected inconsistency, thirst in Maasailand is a consequence of the very ‘unnatural’ denial of land rights and discrimination against pastoralists. Maasai people in the Narok area lost access to most of their drought reserves during colonialism and the subsequent independent governments have failed to establish any reliable source of water in the region—the situation is exacerbated by global climate change which has increased the frequency and severity of droughts.

Rosen literally drives right past this issue of injustice in her quest to confirm the patriarchy of Maasai culture exemplified through female circumcision. She describes all circumcisions as “a kind of death” for Maasai women, but neglects to consider the many deaths of Maasai women and men because of the political denial of potable water—a

gendered violence that Nandita Ghosh (2007) terms “the biopolitics of water” (p. 450). These deaths remain invisible in Rosen’s account even as she describes “herds of wandering cows with their protruding ribs casting shadows on their skin,” and “several groups of women carrying 20 liter plastic water kegs on their backs” (para. 18, 23). Rural Maasai women’s lives are arguably structured in large part by the work of collecting water throughout Southern Kenya and/or caring for their family members and cattle facing serious illnesses because of a lack of safe drinking water; this in a region where power relations keep plenty of water flowing through pipelines, quite literally under the feet of Maasai women, toward multi-million dollar tourist lodges catering to the international non-governmental development sector, including V-Day (Interview A; Interview B; Interview C). Why has access to clean water not become a salient transnational feminist issue? It may be that the appropriation of this condition is less strategic in the constitution of the white western feminist position. I am definitively not suggesting that feminist scholars begin to fetishize the ‘water-carrying Maasai woman.’ I raise this point hesitantly in order to show how the deep inequalities caused by colonialism and continued land loss continue to haunt the western feminist perception of Maasailand. By naturalizing these conditions Rosen is able to present the civilized/primitive binary without further explanation and continues builds her case against female circumcision on this tenuous platform.

Rosen assumes her abhorrence of female circumcision to be a shared conviction amongst the ‘sexually liberated’ women in the west who make up her readership. This common sentiment circles around the production of the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ figure made to embody victimization, barbaric oppression, and sexualized violence. Most of

Rosen's readers have, in all likelihood, never met a Maasai girl or woman who might counter this dominant narrative about their lives, and given that there is no published account by a Maasai woman and only brief mentions of the subject by the few Maasai men who have published written work, it is equally unlikely that western feminists have read these perspectives (e.g. Ole Saitoti, 1988). This process is all the more facilitated by the fact that the fetishized body in this instance is a dead body made into the quintessential subaltern woman that cannot speak and therefore cannot challenge this account of her life and death (Spivak, 1988). It is also unlikely that the girl's family or community would have an opportunity for redress against this account, considering that Rosen's article can only be accessed if one has sufficient literacy in English, use of a computer and familiarity with the internet, and enough experience with U.S. culture to initiate such a search. During my interviews with several Maasai leaders in the area who are troubled by this event, no one was aware that Rosen had written an article (Interview A; Interview B; Interview C). One elder who had visited the girl's family after the exhumation responded to the article saying, "That is wrong, wrong. Although we have our culture that is harmful in some parts, our culture is good... We don't always like to let white people come into this issue, but they come and they write whatever they write according to themselves" (Interview C). Another noted, "We will bring this paper [a copy of Rosen's article] to that family because the people of this area do not know this was even written, and that was their child! Can you imagine?" (Interview A). Rosen's tale capitalizes on the lack of an available counter-narrative and the communities' unequal access to information. This imbalance of information successfully bolsters the western

feminist fantasy of being able to intimately understand the lives and bodies of Maasai women and their relationships with Maasai men.

Like trying to take photographs of ghosts, however, the figure of the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ is most dramatically created in Rosen’s texts by what we do *not* see—a blurry, almost-thereness is forced into the vague shape of a certain body in order to confirm our fears. Rosen does not actually show the photographs of the young child that she describes in shocking detail, nor does she show images of the outraged and grieving family. While there is thin relief in her omission of the photographs, the violence of reproducing the image of the circumcised girl-child occurs adequately enough through her description. This is similar to much knowledge production on the bodies of women in colonized geographies who were ‘colonized’ themselves in part through photographic documentation and textual description that claimed to clearly show racial differences. Commenting on this type of photography, Ann Laura Stoler (1995) remarks, “there is nothing clear in the figure at all. And this is just the point...Our gaze is pointed inward, to that which is not visible but...easily imagined” (p. 187). We as readers are expected to already recognize the figure of the circumcised Maasai girl. Just as now, despite my omission of Rosen’s graphic descriptions, the reader is still able to imagine the figure Rosen invokes—not because of the essential truth of this body, but because it is a long-established figment of the western imagination.

What becomes clear in this process is that the primitiveness, the underdevelopment and mutilation of the circumcised Maasai girl *does not exist* beyond the fetishized ghost figure that Rosen constructs. The text invests this figure “*with a life of its own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from histories of its determination*” (Ahmed,

2000, p. 5, emphasis in the original). For audiences outside of Narosura and Narok, Rosen's text effectively buries an actual Maasai child and her lived history; it conceals a community's experience of harassment, the grief of a family, the complexity of an always-changing practice and the humanity of Maasai people. This concealment, while enraging, is not surprising. Drawing on Derrida, Bergland (2000) remarks that, "the hierarchies of power that structure our lives are themselves ghostly" (p. 6). Foucault (1978) further explains that, "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself" (p. 86). The power that circulates to grant Rosen humanity while denying it to Maasai people operates through its very dissimulation, obscuring the past and present violences that have enabled her encounter.

The fetish of the 'native friend'

It is especially crucial to try to reveal the operation of power when analyzing the discourse of international western feminist projects that deploy the notion of 'universal womanhood'—where entitlement to an encounter, even through violence, is established through the language of shared experience among women and normalizing values. Rosen's (2008) intrusion, for example, is cloaked in her appeal to help Maasai girls refuse circumcisions as she (problematically) imagines this is the only way they will be able to get an "education" and lead lives "akin to teenagers all over the world...sharing jewelry, or watching the Olympics...as they braid each other's hair" (para. 9). Rosen's assumption that she can readily understand the conditions of Maasai women's lives might be dismissed as merely misguided and paternalistic, but this dynamic is also facilitated by a much more insidious racism that operates to construct a "normalizing society" from

which certain peoples and cultures are excluded (Foucault, 1976/2003, p. 253). This dynamic can be seen in the fetishization of another figure in Rosen's text: The stranger known as the 'native friend,' in this instance personified by Agnes Pareyio, the Kenyan woman appointed as director of V-Day's safe house project in Maasailand.

Pareyio is introduced in Rosen's text as the embodiment of a "network of conscience...woven into the Maasai community," an exceptional voice of human reason within a supposedly blighted pre-modern culture (para. 3). V-Day's image as a benevolent presence within Maasai communities hinges on this 'collaboration' with an inside/outsider—a colleague claiming the position of a circumcised Maasai woman who reportedly shares their political perspective and strategy for "stopping FGM through education and sensitization" (para. 7). This figure of the 'native friend,' again cut off from any historical and social relations, is imbued with all the necessary multiculturalism and liberal hybridity that justifies western intervention in "clandestine cutting ceremonies" (para. 7). V-Day's work is positioned as an amiable and natural extension of Pareyio's previous activism of "traveling on foot from village to village, speaking out against her people's practices" (para. 4). Rather than explicitly working to 'modernize' Maasai people, V-Day's agenda is recoded through Pareyio's presence as a harmonious blending of traditional and civilized values. This is exemplified in the creation of a five-day "alternative rite of passage" organized to teach Maasai girls "about such things as sexuality, the dangers of FGM, and how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, rape, and early pregnancy" as well as to participate in cultural discussions with "older women from the Maasai community" (para. 10). V-Day is not the only western organization in Maasailand that runs these 'alternative rites of passage' programs, which often become

pre-requisites for young Maasai participants if they want to access formal schooling. While conducting previous research, I spoke with three Maasai women who, in order to receive scholarships for post-secondary education, were required by a different U.S. NGO to live and teach in a rural village (they were from urban areas) and to hold seminars on sexual health including lecturing against the practice of female circumcision. In our conversations these women each expressed differing opinions and personal experiences with circumcision, however, *all* felt extremely “uncomfortable” and “distressed” at having to present on this private and usually women’s-based issue in front of a group of mixed genders and ages (Olol Dapash, Poole & Noss, 2006, p. 40). Two of these women felt particularly distressed because the information they were expected to present felt “dishonest” in light of their own positive relationship with their circumcision rites (*ibid*). At first blush these programs can read like a cross-cultural compromise, however, in the V-Day case study the program is based entirely on the western fantasy of Maasai culture as exceptionally patriarchal and appears to be grasping at ‘authenticity’ by positioning Pareyio as the local expert.

Using the trope of the ‘native friend’—a stranger that is not *too* strange—Rosen’s text though littered with racist epithets manages to recuperate a degree of innocence and conceal ghostly power relations. Critical feminists have long worked to navigate issues of difference among women and explore how to ethically and accurately represent women’s experiences within scholarship and activism (Davis, 1984; Haraway, 1997; Mohanty, 2003). Rather than summarizing that wide conversation here, I wish to draw attention specifically to some of the nuanced ways that a hierarchy of difference is established in the process of ‘giving voice’ to ‘other’ women. In the Rosen article,

Pareyio is authorized as the local expert—Rosen learns about the child’s death from Pareyio, V-Day’s intervention is positioned as a natural extension of Pareyio’s own work in the community, etc. Subsequently Rosen’s involvement in the exhumation is granted a kind of immunity from outside critique because she appears to defer to Pareyio who has been granted leadership over the center by V-Day. Kamala Visweswaran (1994) asserts that, “dispensing authority represents anthropology’s last grasp of the ‘other’” (p. 32, quoted in Ahmed, 2000, 64). The notion of *dispensing* authority discloses the power relations involved in a collaboration in which the outside/western woman is the sole author and determiner of space and ‘voice’ within a project or text.⁹ We need to ask, as Ahmed (2000) directs us, how it is that Kim Rosen “came close enough” to Agnes Pareyio to be ‘invited’ to unearth a child’s grave and then publish her account in the U.S. (p. 63).

Ahmed (2000) explains that any attempt to make informants into co-authors, “is to presuppose the possibility of overcoming the relations of force and authorization that are already implicated in the ethnographic desire to document the lives of strangers” (p. 63). Although the relationship between Rosen and Pareyio is not specifically one of ethnographer and informant, their relationship *is* one structured by relations of force and authorization present in many international development projects. Certainly in both formal and postcolonial encounters, the “contact zone,” as described by Mary Louise Pratt (1992/2005), is one of mutual influence and exchange and far more a complicated relationship than the west wielding force against the rest of the world. Within

⁹ A critique of power relations does not eclipse the possibility for collaboration across lines of difference, nor is this critique meant to establish that Pareyio is not capable of co-authoring a text or being implicated in power relations in which she is privileged. My concern here is to reveal hidden lines of power within Rosen’s text and to ask whether Pareyio could ever be seen or heard by the particular feminist audience reading her article.

development projects, particularly those that adopt the language of ‘partnership’ or ‘community-based’ initiatives, power can operate in ways that mask some of its profound effects. What we do not read explicitly in this text, for example, is that Rosen is a high-profile donor to the V-Day safe house that Pareyio directs, which in the realm of international development is tantamount to Rosen being Pareyio’s employer. In the case of female circumcision, development projects center on the figure of the circumcised or at-risk of being circumcised Maasai girl. Whether or not Pareyio and Rosen share an authentic friendship to any degree is irrelevant when considering this broader dynamic, one in which Pareyio’s job—and so we may assume her socio-economic security—hinges on producing the fantasy of the ‘circumcised Maasai girl.’ This pre-arrangement betrays the shock that Rosen expresses when she encounters the child’s body in the grave; her very interest in the practice of female circumcision, which brought her 12,000 kilometers to Kenya, was a desire to encounter that very body and Pareyio ostensibly ‘did her job’ by facilitating such an encounter.

Unfortunately this scenario is not unique to the case study at hand. As was mentioned in the Introduction, knowledge production on the ‘violence’ of female circumcision—ranging from international news reports to youtube videos—has often involved arranging actual circumcisions specifically for western journalists, researchers and activists willing to pay to watch (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 32). As Lynn Thomas (2003) explains, “The opposition of Kenyan activists and politicians to FGM cannot be disentangled from the preoccupations of their funders; female genital cutting and other local reproductive practices have become enmeshed in a global web of political hierarchies and economic inequalities” (p. 185). In this instance, the Maasai practice of

female circumcision is being drawn into the broader relations of inequality that encompass the international aid industry.¹⁰ As will be discussed later, programs for girls' education and specifically anti-circumcision projects have become not only good business for many Kenyans (mostly non-Maasai), but for various U.S. NGOs and larger international organizations as well. So while it is tempting to blame Rosen the woman for the horrific nature of her encounter with the Maasai community and for the production of the figures in her text—and while I will further examine the details of her specific fantasies of Maasai people—such an analysis would leave racism unexamined in western feminist projects at large. A conception of power as something that circulates and which cannot be possessed directs us away from individual intentionality and instead toward examining the historical position that Rosen has come to occupy in mainstream transnational feminism (Foucault, 1978; Feder, 2007).¹¹

Bio-necro collaboration: 'Making live' by taking land in colonial Kenya

British interventions in female circumcision practices, Meru¹² 1928-30s

While it is generally acknowledged that women were not at the helm of Europe's enterprise in formal colonialism, this does not mitigate white women's role in the expansion of empire; rather, it calls for "a nuanced reading of gendered imperial knowledges" (McEwan, 2000, p. 9). Often women involved in the colonial project are

¹⁰ While I do not dispute that there is a dimension of financial elitism and fraud involved with the international development industry, such dynamics must be read as mutually constructed between western and African governments and considered within their broader social and historical contexts of colonial exploitation and aid debt. Recent scholarship suggests that aid is a western force leading to the *under-*development of sub-Saharan Africa (Moyo, 2009, p. 35).

¹¹ Ellen K. Feder (2007, p. 30) writes similarly about examining the position occupied by William Levitt who designed red-lining policies in post-WWII housing developments in New York.

¹² Meru refers to a distinct ethnic community in East Africa and to the region they came to occupy in central Kenya, as well as the colonial district of Meru.

granted historical immunity, as if the worldviews expressed in their writings, their political projects and the women themselves had nothing to do with spatial, bodily and environmental colonization spanning the African continent. One way to assess the impact of women who worked as colonial era British parliamentarians, missionary nurses and wives of officials in Kenya is to explore what appear to be the peculiarities of their historical relationship to local Africans. As Foucault notes, “it is the very strangeness of the past which makes us able to clearly see the strangeness of the present” (quoted in Mills, 2003, p. 24). An analysis of the history of western women in Kenya on these grounds resists the temptation to think that “a sensible or desirable present has emerged...or might emerge” and thus enables a more critical look at current relationships between western development projects and Maasai communities (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 24, quoted in Mills, *ibid*).

I now turn to a historical look at a rather exceptional aspect of British involvement in circumcision practices in Africa and how it related to land acquisition during colonial-era Kenya—a history that further illuminates the uncanny nature of Kim Rosen’s intrusion into Narosura in 2008. Lynn Thomas (2003) provides a compelling and critical history of this issue in *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* and I draw largely from her work here. Though Thomas recounts the specific historical relationship between British administrators and various members of the Meru community, yet her outlining of British policies and attitudes sheds light on colonial understandings of female circumcision practices in general. These attitudes and policies not only constructed new meanings of gender and sexuality in what would become the nation of Kenya, but influenced the more particular roles of gender and sexuality in

Maasailand *as they are understood* by westerners today and indeed *created* many aspects of the ‘gender inequality’ in Maasai communities currently highlighted by western feminists and development workers (Hodgson, 2000, 2001).

The earliest documented case of British opposition to female circumcision in Kenya occurred in 1906 when Presbyterian missionaries deemed the practice “barbaric” and began to advocate for its cessation (Thomas, 2003, p. 24). The missionaries saw no purpose in the practice, but for both British colonial officials and local Meru people female circumcision played a pivotal role in both human reproduction and land use. Within Meru communities female initiation ensured that women were able to procreate—an uncircumcised woman could not bear a healthy child and any such births were believed to upset the balance of the wider community. Further, land tenure and use within Meru communities was enmeshed with family structure—initiation rites such as circumcision were a pillar of these structures, which helped support the transfer of land and land knowledge through generations. British officials also recognized the link between female circumcision and land. Their primary concern was that Meru women bear as many children as possible in order to ensure a large labor pool for developing British farms and industries in the new colony—they believed that female circumcision complicated delivery and *caused* rather than prevented infant mortality. Thomas (2003) elaborates on the extent of these relationships between reproduction and development:

Few participants in twentieth-century Kenyan politics were ever able to neatly separate issues of land, labor, and political control from those of gender, sexuality, and reproduction. For colonial rulers and subjects as well as their postcolonial successors, managing the politics of the womb has been crucial to ensuring material prosperity and constructing moral persons and communities (p. 6).

The moral and material politics surrounding African women's wombs soon extended to the metropole, as British men and women began to weigh in on the debate about female circumcision and its consequences for the health of the colonies. Echoing the era of the Hottentot Venus, African women's genitalia once again became a topic of discussion on the streets of London in the early 20th century. British women parliamentarians, such as the rather conservative Duchess of Atholl and the liberal Eleanor Rathbone, set aside their political differences on the status of women in Britain in order to lobby for a colony-wide ban on the "major" form of female circumcision (anything beyond the removal of the clitoris) (Thomas, 2003, p. 26). Sexual pleasure was all but ignored in this early feminist argument against circumcision—the clitoris had yet to emerge as a popular site of women's liberation—and so the parliamentarians lobbied primarily for protecting maternal and infant health. In 1927 missionary pressure, colonial administrative interests and the political ideologies of the metropole came to a head and a formal ban against female circumcision was enacted within central Kenya.

Following this initial ban, what is now known among historians as the "female circumcision controversy" of 1928-31 quickly erupted, marking perhaps "the most significant period of political resistance in central Kenya prior to the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s" (Thomas, 2003, p. 1-2). Almost overnight, thousands of central Kenyans—including many young women eager to be circumcised—engaged in impassioned protests through song and dance on public grounds and by abandoning their memberships in missionary-based churches. Groups of outraged protestors formed in front of Meru missions and schools and in large public meetings opposing the ban not only because of its disregard for local customs on gender and reproduction, but also in protest of the

policy's relationship to colonial land theft (p. 25). For Meru communities, the colonial officials' intervention on the issue of female circumcision was unacceptable both because it brought women's issues into the sphere of men, and because there was fear that the British were attempting to *depopulate* the land (by preventing healthy births linked to circumcision) in order to take Meru land more easily.

Central Kenyan communities were right to assume that the British concern with female circumcision was much broader than the configuration of genitalia or the well-being of Meru women—in 1930 the London Colonial Office sent a dispatch to all colonial governors working in Africa for information on these initiation practices and their relationship to infant and maternal deaths. The memo specifically asked the governors about the “slow increase of population” and any “recommendations on how to make African women ‘better mothers,’ so as to ensure ‘not only an increased birth-rate, but also, what is no less important, the creation of a healthier and better-developed stock’” (Thomas, 2003, p. 53). Though the responses from colonial governors indicated there should *not* be a concern with the link between female initiation and decreased birth rates, the continued pressure from missionaries and British feminists encouraged the wider development of maternity wards and health centers catering to African women and with the specific agenda of eradicating female circumcision. Thomas notes that this education-based approach was favored because colonial officials believed it would “demonstrate Britain's commitment to the moral obligations of imperialism and to improving the plight of African women” (ibid). When the 1928-31 controversy erupted, British feminists in London continued to lobby fervently in support of the ban as a

measure to secure the health of the colonized subjects, but their concerns were to take a backseat to the broader goal of increasing the population in Meru.

By 1930 colonial officials realized the risks of the backlash and for the next several decades—into the 1950s—they took a bizarre stance toward female circumcision. Though London and Nairobi offices retained a staunch moral opposition to the practices, in Meru local colonial officers and hired community leaders began *enforcing* female circumcision on girls at an even younger age. In many instances police arrived unannounced at a village and rounded up adolescent girls, putting them in lines to establish their sexual development by checking the size of their breasts, and then performed mass circumcisions without any accompanying festivities and usually without the support of elder women (Thomas, 2003, p. 45). White women, including wives of colonial officials and the local missionaries—the position of the missionary being one that by 1899 was dominated by white women (Heron, 2007, p. 32)—were enlisted in examining any Meru woman who sought medical care to physically verify that she had only undergone the “minor” surgery imposed during these mass excisions (Thomas, 2003, p. 39). The young women of this generation were sometimes called *Kigwarie* or ‘the one which was unexpected’ because of the surprise attack by which they were initiated (p. 45). These mass *kigwarie* excisions were performed by British officials and their central Kenyan counterparts because they hoped that by initiating girls at a younger age they might curb the imagined prevalence of another moral ill: abortion. British colonial authorities feared that if Meru women became pregnant before being initiated they would terminate the pregnancies, which could curb population growth at a rate beyond the potential problems during childbirth associated with “major” circumcision.

Colonial authorities did not consider the immorality of these abortions in terms of “intrinsic value” of human life familiar to the contemporary debates in England—abortion in this context was immoral because it “posed a demographic threat to ‘the nation’ as embodied in the Meru ‘tribe’ and Kenya colony” (p. 28).

Thomas (2003) notes that this rather exceptional colonial intervention into female circumcision should not be read as a simple equation of colonial force coming down upon passive Meru communities. Frequently local Meru leaders volunteered or were coerced into facilitating the mass excisions and providing information about the sexual and reproductive lives of Meru women. Equally complex, the resulting protests reflected a combination of intergenerational and anti-colonial resistances. For example, in the mid-1950s amidst the push toward Independence young Meru women began defiantly circumcising themselves and each other in order to protest both generational changes and colonial rule—a movement nicknamed *Ngaitana* (“I will circumcise myself”)—which led to another legal ban in 1956 (p. 79). These protest circumcisions resulted in the arrest of at least 2,400 girls, women and men—a harrowing consequence considering that nearly 20,000 Mau Mau fighters were being imprisoned and subjected to hard labor, torture and execution by these same forces (p. 80; Anderson, 2005). The circumstances of this protest cannot be accounted for solely as anti-colonial sentiment—as Thomas asserts, “[central Kenyan women’s] faith in the ability of excision to transform girls into women and ensure proper reproduction was something that both preceded and exceeded anticolonial resistance” (p. 81).

Though seemingly paradoxical, the British stance on female circumcision reveals a consistent focus on the reproductive capacity of African women. The colonial objective

to ensure an increasing population of African workers put the issue of reproduction at the top of the agenda within the first colonial memos from Meru. Though it sought to increase the literal population of Meru people, the colonial administration was not interested in the cultural survival of Meru communities or in the quality of life for a growing population without land security. The responses from the central Kenyans, particularly the long-term protests from Meru women, indicate the significance of reproductive control within both British and Meru communities and the differences between them. Read in light of this history, current western feminist discourse on female circumcision practices, maternal health, and over-population takes on new biopolitical meanings. This will be the focus of the next chapter, here I want to touch on the specific colonial relationship between Maasai people and the British in this regard.

British attempts to control Maasai sexuality, Southern Reserve 1930-59

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to comprehensively examine the way female initiation practices in Maasai communities were understood or affected under formal colonialism. Among the Maasai leadership I spoke with, initiation rites amongst Maasai women are currently widely considered to be important for healthy reproduction, though the practices and social meanings are of course constantly evolving through intergenerational and intercommunity debates over time (Interview A; Interview C). A cursory search in the Kenyan National Archives indicates that there was never a ban against female circumcision in Maasailand comparable to that of Meru District, but archival records do reveal instances of British intervention into Maasai cultural practices—particularly male circumcision—that show a similar relationship between

cultural control around reproduction and securing access to land. By 1913, after two highly contested Treaties or Agreements in 1904 and 1911, most Kenyan Maasai people had been forcibly moved off their lands in the central Rift Valley in order to make room for British settlers and their Kikuyu and Meru laborers (Hughes, 2006a). Maasai people never became laborers for the British in any significant number. Though sometimes revered for their reportedly war-like attributes, the Maasai were largely considered by the British to be a “decaying and decadent race” who were failing to properly develop their land through their traditional pastoralism (Kenya Land Commission Report, 1934, p. 191).

The border of the southern Maasai reserve was vaguely demarcated through the 1911 Treaty or Agreement in order to allow further land annexation for settlers without Maasai consent. Mau Narok—a 30,000 acre ancestral drought reserve encompassing the headwaters of several rivers and dense forest—was promised to Maasai people in the second move but was illegally annexed to a British settler who occupied a small portion of the land in 1922. The history of the theft of Mau Narok warrants more detail than I have space to provide here; what is pertinent at present is that the British sought to control this valuable piece of land in part through the cultural degradation of Maasai people (Olol Dapash, Poole & Noss, 2008). Relegating Maasai people into the southern reserve was part of a larger plan to secure British settlement on the water-rich pastures of the Maasai and to establish political control of the colony at large. Maasai were moved into the region at gunpoint, suffering the deaths of many cattle and people en route (Hughes, 2006a, p. 51). Maasai resistance to this move was largely non-violent—likely because of incidents of earlier violence from the British—though several community

leaders rejected the plan and later attempted to sue the British government in 1913, yet lost the case on a technicality (ibid, p. 93). The British were eager to undermine any potential backlash from the community and to begin incorporating the Maasai community into the colonial labor pool. The colonial administration specifically sought to secure their tenuous hold on this strategic piece of Maasai land at Mau Narok in part by eradicating the age stage of *ilmurran*, or warriors, who they believed posed the greatest threat of resistance.

The crux of the plan was to implement a “policy to hasten the Eunoto ceremony,” during which *ilmurran*—men who had been circumcised and undergone warrior education—transition into Junior Elderhood (Provincial Commissioner Narok, 1959, np). By shortening the length of warriorhood, the administration reasoned it could prevent years of “idleness” and “free love” before marriage that reportedly contributed to aggressive trespassing and cattle raiding conflicts with settlers at the border—a piece of the persistent notion of Maasai men’s excessive sexuality (Sandford, 1919, p. 3). To secure the eventual eradication of the *ilmurran*, the administration developed plans to replace warriorhood with agricultural labor training. Narok District Commissioner (DC) E. H. Windley (1943) explained,

The proposed Moran [sic] training camp is intended to supplement the indigenous system with more direct educative purpose introducing some of our ideas on personal training and discipline to ensure bringing the young men of the tribe to hand under our guidance in the early stage of their Moranhood [sic] (p. 6-7).

Windley continued to write on the importance of strategically and subtly introducing the training camps to the Maasai as educational institutions, and to carefully “avoid any suspicion of it being a labour camp” (p. 8). Details of the proposed daily schedule reveal

the reason for this anticipated suspicion: Early morning drills, physical training, manual labor, athletic activities, and plans to eventually introduce limited reading and writing (p.7). A later Narok DC continued this plan to both speed up the Eunoto ceremony and eventually eradicate the entire stage of warriorhood, “thereafter [Maasai] will become men of property and responsibility; thus falling into a class more easy to control and sanction” (Miller, 1958, np).

The general colonial perspective that *ilmurran* “fulfil [sic] no useful purpose” in society, is countered by the Maasai perspective on warriorhood as a central component of local education and a division of age sets that, like circumcision rites for both men and women, helps to secure family structures and a communal use of land (District Commissioner Narok, 1949, p.45; Interview A, Interview C). Communal land tenure among the Maasai made it more difficult for the British to pick off individual land-owners and acquire land—degrading the cultural practice of warriorhood by treating it as a period of idleness and sexual depravity provided ideological fuel for policies that would deem communal land tenure a primitive and wasteful practice. The DC of Narok hoped that by regulating this cornerstone of Maasai culture he would be able to secure “[*ilmurran*’s] employment on suitable tasks such as dam and road making” noting that “they should be fitted to play a more active part in the development of their country” (District Commissioner Narok, 1949, p.45). The administration’s attitude was particularly rooted in their interest to ensure the success of the fledgling post-World War II farming economy in the colony and to squelch the increasing unrest among African Kenyans as the possibility of Independence loomed. Though the ban on female circumcision in Meru and the plans for *ilmurran* training camps in Narok differ in their rhetorical maneuvers

and specific targets, they reflect an important trend in the bio-necropower circulating in colonial Kenya: where the colonial administration sought to maximize their productivity through land acquisition and development they also attempted to control the reproductive lives and community structures of local people.

This is perhaps an obvious account of colonial practices—certainly recognizable amongst those communities who have struggled against cultural assimilation as an arm of the colonial machine. It is worth highlighting, however, the way in which racial differences were established in these particular encounters, how lines of ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’ were drawn in terms of ensuring the health and survival of the metropole and by creating unlivable conditions for those colonized. These tactics were successful in establishing British control of the best parts of Maasailand and they continue to shape present-day socio-economic conditions. Most Maasai people in Kenya now live within the arid southern reserve whittled into a series of ever-subdividing group ranches after decades of British encroachment and postcolonial land grabbing. The most popular and lucrative tourist sites in the country—Amboseli National Park and Masai [sic] Mara Game Reserve—are carved out of this reserve, owing to the long-term co-existence between Maasai pastoralism and local wildlife and Maasai people’s continued cultural stewardship of this land (Igoe, 2004; Homewood and Rogers, 1991). The enduring colonial fantasies of Maasai culture are perhaps the second largest draw for international tourists to Kenya, as one Maasai activist put it:

Maasai culture has become so profitable. You know it is a way for this government of Kenya to make so much money. The only people who don’t benefit are the Maasais themselves. Only very few even get basic jobs singing or chasing monkeys, even though you see our people on those postcards (Interview C).

Maasai people not only rarely benefit from the trickle-down of tourism revenue, they are denied access to the precious water sources within the game areas that are now designated for wildlife-viewing safari trips. The community continues to organize within and beyond the judicial system to contest the legitimacy and boundaries of the original treaties and to navigate the influx of tourists, researchers and development workers drawn to their reserve.

The fallout of the female circumcision controversy in Meru and the paradox of colonial stances on the practices have come to shape the political landscape of the entire postcolony of Kenya. Many of the NGOs based in Maasailand today are working to eradicate female circumcision, and sometimes—as in the case of Rosen and V-Day—using strategies eerily reminiscent of the British officials in Meru. The western preoccupation with female circumcision has continued, recoded through a language of feminist development yet tangled up as ever with the bio-necropolitical forces that secure access to wealth and resources for the west and Kenyan elites.

Conclusion

White women have been instrumental, from colonial missionary posts to contemporary development organizations, in forming the discourse of female circumcision and the policies and projects born from this western preoccupation. This discourse—though bound up with race, land and imperial processes—has centered on biological reproduction and especially women’s bodies. I have attempted to show through a limited analysis that the disciplinary measures involved in establishing a normal ‘developed’ woman’s body are tied to the bio-necropolitical powers circulating at a much

broader level—such as the colonial metropole and administrative offices—and that determine which societies live and die, or in this case which societies are on the losing end of colonial and development processes. In colonial-era Kenya, the British attempted to manage Indigenous populations in part through the regulation of sexual practices at the individual level by enacting policies that sought to increase Meru populations by manipulating female circumcision practices and curbing abortion, while at the same time attempting to constrain Maasai population growth by discouraging the “free love” of young men during warriorhood. In both instances the logic of these policies was increase the colony’s prosperity for the Crown.

Considering this historical structure the role of western feminists currently working in Maasailand requires scrutiny. Indeed, in the case of Rosen’s intrusion into Narosura the ghosts of these colonial dynamics can still be traced through her fetishization of the figures of the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ and the ‘native friend,’ which obscures these historical relations. In the next and final chapter I explore the new codings of bio-necropolitics, the residual and mutated legacy of colonial dynamics in Maasailand, as they appear in present day western development initiatives. I approach this in part by examining the ‘desire for development’ amongst present-day western feminists who in many ways are undertaking the same work of those early 20th century British parliamentarians that lobbied for the first ban on female circumcision in Kenya. This exploration leads to questions for further research on the genealogy of ‘development’ and its racialised and gendered dimensions, as well as questions for how feminist critiques of transnational projects undertaken in the name of feminism might give way to new strategies for cross-cultural collaborations.

Conclusion

The idea of development as it emerges in this historical moment is inextricable from contemporary ideas of the body—from road infrastructure to education goals, the discourse and practices of international aid originating from multinational organizations and small NGOs alike predominantly center around western understandings of the proper care for and development of the human body as the primary unit of civilization itself. The specific genealogical exploration of female circumcision discourse that I have endeavored to outline is only one entry point into this paradigm. It is particularly provocative to explore this western preoccupation because it occurs just at the juncture of individual and societal regulation, wherein surveillance at the bodily level is bound to the control of populations at large. Excavating the historical forces that perpetuate this preoccupation among western feminists leads those of us still hopeful about feminist activism away from blaming individuals and toward a deeper awareness of how race, gender and neocolonialism operate to entrench global inequality—and toward understanding how this occurs at the level of our very self-identities. Thinking through this dynamic can be an incredibly sobering and encouraging undertaking—one that demands rigorous and focused historical and sociological explorations into the relationship between development and the body and the feminist potentials therein. I now turn toward the beginnings of that exploration in a brief look at how current trends in international development work in Kenya and Maasailand relate to the bio-necropolitical processes that operated during formal colonialism.

In her work on the history of development within Tanzanian Maasai communities, Dorothy Hodgson (2001) has shown that though the term ‘development’ as it is popularly used today originated in the post-World War II reconstruction era, the actual processes encompassed by this notion had already been central to the expansion of formal colonialism in Maasailand for decades before then (p. 10). Kenya achieved legal independence from Britain in December of 1963, though in many ways this amounted to little more than a changing of the guard and a continuation of colonial policies in the name of ‘development,’ right down to the World Bank loans brokered and administered by British officials employed in both the colonial and Kenyatta governments.¹³ These financial ties between Kenya and Britain have kept the door open for a continued flow of international development workers to East Africa. Kenya has been disproportionately populated by aid workers most likely because of the prevalence of English, the relatively reliable infrastructure and political stability, and as Thomas (2003) notes, “the chance to go on ‘safari’ while working in the country” (p. 10). This flood of aid workers reflects a much broader trend, however: in 1991 there were more western aid workers in Africa than at any point during formal colonialism, and between the early 1990s and 2003 the increase in international anti-female circumcision organizations in Kenya jumped from only a few to over a dozen (Heron, 2007, p. 14; Thomas, 2003, p. 182). The 1990s saw a mushrooming of NGOs in Kenya in general—likely due to a combination of increased local political stability, liberalization of transnational trade through the World Trade

¹³ For example, Bruce McKenzie the Minister of Agriculture from 1919-1978 negotiated loans from the World Bank and Her Majesty’s Government before and after legal Independence to be repaid by the incoming Kenyan government, but to be designed by the British desire for industrial agriculture in the postcolony. He maintained management of the loan and oversaw the agricultural development proceedings that explicitly excluded Maasai people from being able to even buy back their own land (Olol Dapash, Poole & Noss, 2008, p. 23).

Organization in 1995 and a growing funding stream particularly for health and education related development programs (Roy, 2004; Collier, 2007). White western women have become the dominant demographic in this growing international aid industry, a trend that gives way to further questions as to how gender interlocks with race in the new development discourse (Heron, 2007, p. 6). Barbara Heron offers profound insight on these questions through her work on the western desire for development.

Throughout 28 interviews with white women who had undertaken at least a year of development work in sub-Saharan Africa, Heron's (2007) participants repeatedly describe feeling "important," "known," and that they gained a stronger "sense of self-worth" while working in Africa—several cite that they felt like "honorary men" (p. 113). Heron situates her participants' narratives within the history of Euro-American women travelling to the colonies in the late 19th and early 20th century in order to widen their domestic sphere—a move that has led some scholars to deem these women "proto-feminists" celebrated for their daring rejection of contemporary rules of gender (Stevenson, 1982, p. 3). Heron reveals, however, that the appeal of escaping the constraints of one's gendered position was contingent on capitalizing on racial, ethnic and class privileges. She argues convincingly that this dynamic persists amongst current aid workers in Africa, albeit recoded in contemporary sensibilities. Further she attributes the surge of personal empowerment among western women development workers today to an intensification of experiencing white supremacy while in African contexts. Paradoxically, the present-day white woman who identifies as a transnational 'helper' reflects "a subjectivity that now views racism with a normative disapprobation bordering on repugnance" (p. 7). But underlying this wry civility, Heron continues, "deeply

racialized, interrelated constructs of thought have circulated from the era of empire, and today remain integral to the discursive production of bourgeois identity” (ibid). In other words, a rhetorical rejection of racism and the pleasure of benefiting from white supremacy are not mutually exclusive.

Heron’s (2007) metaphor of the palimpsest to describe these “colonial continuities” rings true: for over a century white women have been traveling to and from sub-Saharan Africa under the pretense of philanthropy in order to encounter strange black bodies in a quest for self-formation (p. 7). The history of white western women working in Maasailand should be read then as a history of desire—less for the development of Maasai people than for the development of bourgeois selves. Development operates as the “mechanism of desire” in this dynamic, which helps to clarify the ambivalence and contradictions within western feminists’ relationship to those they are trying to help (Yeegenoglu, 1988, p. 59). Importantly, the continuity of this dynamic over the last century does not reflect a stability or unification across colonial and postcolonial projects. Rather the recoding of these tropes shows a continued desire to hold in place the ‘unnatural’ assertion of white supremacy. As Goldberg (2009) cautions, “This is not to say that contemporary racisms are colonial; it is to point by contrast to their constitutive connection even as racisms’ immediate prompts and expressions may have morphed over time” (p. 1280). While British colonial era interventions in Kenya sought to increase the population of potential laborers, or to curb the sexual activity of Maasai *ilmurran*, the present “politics of the womb” are playing out in the discourse of over-population and the importance of family planning and reproductive choice within ‘developing’ nations—the

focus on anti-female circumcision and prevention of early marriage campaigns in Maasailand represents one branch of this discourse.

Even in Rosen's (2008) text this new current focus on female circumcision as an extension of reproduction and race is evident. Throughout the article, Rosen's readers are shown the supposed sexual impossibility of the Maasai figure as a way to experience their own acutely heterosexual abundance and virility. As was explored in the second chapter, this discourse equates sexual pleasure with proper development and grants this potential only to uncircumcised (white) women. Sexual pleasure thus belongs to the liberated feminist subject, as does reproductive freedom. In Rosen's (2008) text, the young body she encounters is reportedly pregnant, which ushers the scenario from "a simple case of FGM" into the "more complex" realm of reproduction within Maasai communities at large (para. 24). Rosen dismisses Maasai associations of healthy reproduction with circumcision in favor of her own cultural prescriptions. She imagines that "the girl had already been promised to a very old man in marriage" and that "once the baby was born and out of the way" the girl would have been sentenced to an unlivable life as wife and mother (para. 25). Here the figure of the 'circumcised Maasai girl' is imbued with further racial fantasies of unrestrained sexuality and dysfunctional reproduction and Maasai culture is portrayed as degenerate because it both stunts the sexual development of individual young women and because it fails to manage healthy processes of reproduction. Healthy reproduction, we may infer, includes appropriate sexual freedom for women (liberal, but restrained) that centers around clitoral pleasure and leads to choosing a mate for marriage and bearing a limited number of children. Maasai deviations from this prescription are not only deemed dangerous for Maasai

women, but for the global population at risk of degradation through both disability and race.

As during formal colonialism, the management of African women's bodies and reproductive lives is bound up with the control of resources—such as access to Maasai land. Anti-female circumcision discourse—particularly its reliance on constructing Maasai people as primitive and underdeveloped—facilitates the continued political and economic marginalization of Maasai communities within Kenya. The endurance of the western fantasies of Maasai men as particularly sexually aggressive and Maasai women as perpetual victims of sexual violence through circumcision undermines this community's ability to advocate for land rights and to be seen as equals in conversations that form policies and development agendas affecting their lives. This obstruction of participation occurs at both a state and international level, and increasingly through the informal processes and relationships established by small NGOs working in Maasailand. It is at the level of these very interpersonal encounters—where western feminists drive into Maasai communities to intervene in female circumcision rites—that racial inequality becomes entrenched in ways that limit Maasai people's opportunities to ensure their own cultural and physical survival. Institutional discrimination against pastoralism and Maasai people has enabled the theft of resources, by both elite Kenyans and outside entrepreneurs, from this Indigenous community. Currently Kenya's major industries—agriculture, tourism, wildlife conservation and soda ash¹⁴--are derived largely from Maasailand yet the jobs and economic benefits almost entirely exclude Maasai people.

¹⁴ Another contested area of Maasailand dating to the 1904 Treaty or Agreement is Lake Magadi, which under the management of Magadi Soda Company of TaTa India is the world's largest producer of soda ash (used to make glass, plastic and explosives) bringing in an annual amount of \$17 billion.

Anti-female circumcision work in Maasailand helps keep these industries out of Maasai hands by perpetuating the idea that Maasai culture is antithetical to modernity, and this ‘feminist’ work has arguably become a promising industry of its own. Thomas (2003) points out that while the bans against female circumcision in colonial Kenya ultimately failed because they jeopardized “political stability and imperial prosperity...By contrast, postcolonial anti-FGM initiatives have been tied to the influx rather than the outflow of material resources” (p. 185). After criminalizing female circumcision practices in 2001, through a law based on the United Nations “Rights of the Child” initiative, Kenya has seen an influx of aid money and outside organizations. During my conversations with Maasai activists in the Narok area, they described the local vernacular of “circumcision money” which refers to the profit involved for those who work with or for western NGOs—usually non-Maasai people—attempting to eradicate the practice (Interview A; Interview B; Interview C). The benefits of this new industry are not in the hands of Kenyan elites alone, they extend to include the many westerners—mostly white women—working on the issue of female circumcision in Kenya, and men and women in the neo-metropolises building careers as academic researchers or staff for multi-national groups such as the World Health Organization. In the case of Kim Rosen, at the time of this writing she is on a book tour for her 2009 publication of *Saved by a poem: The transformative power of words*, in which she chronicles her involvement with the V-Day safe house.

Beyond circumcision: Gender and development

Thus far I have attempted to show how the very fantasy of circumcised Maasai women as particularly oppressed has been constructed through the self-making processes of western women deploying racism in the name of feminism. Genitalia has become the site for much of this knowledge production—for the very making of race and gender in formal and postcolonial processes—yet it is important to situate an analysis of this preoccupation within a broader critique of development discourse in general. Ann Laura Stoler (1995) has deftly argued that the formation of bourgeois subjectivities in the era of empire occurred, not simply within western societies, but through interactions between the metropole and the colonies largely through imperial knowledge production such as gynecology. She makes an important caveat to this work, however, warning that solely focusing on such texts,

demands that readers rivet their attention on genitalia in the making of race, confirming the story that colonialism was that quintessential project in which desire was always about sex, that sex was always about racial power, and that both were contingent upon a particular representation of non-white women's bodies (p. 189).

In fact, colonial desire was not always or perhaps even usually about sex, just as the desire mobilizing western feminist texts and projects on female circumcision in Maasailand today is largely not about sexual liberation. A survey of recent 'development' and 'globalization' texts sheds light on how the prescriptions of appropriate sexuality and family planning coming from multi-national organizations *and* many 'grassroots' feminist projects from the west (or catering to western donors) operate to secure western control over how local resources are managed. While much work on this area remains to be done—which I hope to pursue—a sampling of these texts reveals the bio-necropolitics shaping many 'feminist' development projects.

Since the 1970s the status of women in development has seen several discursive shifts. Questions about the value of women's work in the global economy, the international division of labor, and the importance of reproductive options and health care have become central to this field of study and policy, which reflects a trend largely—and perhaps problematically—attributed to the efforts of feminists in northern/western 'developed' nations (Martinez, 2009, p. 88). Contemporary western feminists have critiqued the previous welfare-based efforts as having a "Malthusian" approach to development wherein "women were closely monitored. Their bodies became the focus of social control of fertility, while their thoughts, experiences, and sexual and reproductive health needs were marginalized" (ibid). Subsequent waves of critique have led to overlapping and progressing theories including "women in development," "women and development," "gender and development," and "mainstreaming gender equality" that *modify* development discourses that blame African women for over-population, for example, yet which *retain* significant structural similarities.

In a recent Oxford Press textbook on international development edited by scholars at the University of Ottawa, the 'cutting-edge' of gender and development encourages critiquing the "clichés of the 'underdeveloped' woman" and yet *reifies* this figure by providing a singular western-based concept of development that puts circumcised women on the bottom rungs of the ladder toward modernization (Martinez, 2009, p. 85). The text encourages the implementation of more recent theory on 'gender and development' precisely because it ostensibly "fills the gaps left by earlier theoretical perspectives by *linking relations of production with relations of reproduction*" (p. 93, emphasis mine). This linking of production and reproduction appears to encourage applying a reductive

and standardized assessment of women's lives in order to establish their station in the hierarchy of 'development.' Women's progress is thus frequently measured through a World Bank formula that calculates literacy rates against the number of children born per woman and which assumes 'traditional' family structures to be cultural obstacles. For example, a text box in the chapter on gender highlights "Examples of Unjustifiable Repressive Practices," which include only the 'developing' world problems of female infanticide, sex-trafficking, veiling and female circumcision (p. 86). In general, women of the global South are presented as a homogenous block now suddenly (at last) attending United Nations' forums and conferences to voice their opposition to these cultural practices because they impede proper development. This coming to consciousness has ostensibly occurred through sufficient contact with enlightened feminists from the west.

This perspective is mirrored in other recent popular texts on global inequality and development, where the language of women's rights is being mobilized to justify monitoring and controlling the reproductive and sexual lives of 'developing' peoples. Whereas they were formerly the site of debates and policies on how to increase the population for proper colonial development, women's wombs and genitals have now become situated as the primary location for curbing population growth for the sustained development of our globalizing planet. In his bestseller *The End of Poverty*, Jeffrey Sachs (2005) highlights what he calls the "demographic trap" wherein women in the developing world are kept in extreme poverty because of their problematic desire to have too many children (p. 324). Sachs couches his critique of "the poorest of the poor" women by appealing to the feminist sensibility that these women are being denied freedom to choose another way of life, as well as contributing to a planet-wide crisis of over-

population (p. 323). Offering largely superficial challenges to Sach's biopolitical assessment, Paul Collier (2007) similarly laments population growth amongst the "bottom billion" people living in poverty, adding without citation that "AIDS probably spread through an African civil war: the combination of mass rape and mass migration produces ideal conditions for spreading sexually transmitted disease. Consequently wars in the bottom billion are our problem as well" (p. 31). The recoding of old colonial tropes for intervening in the sexual lives of local Africans for the betterment of the world population at large can hardly be missed in these current texts.

The issue at hand is not whether reproduction or sexuality can or even should be an aspect of the conversations around gender and development. My point is that—given the historical conditions under which these conversations (or more accurately, unilateral declarations) usually take place—the structural and interpersonal racisms that shape these areas of discussion and related policies and projects must be examined. In short, we must lay bare the specific histories of the western desire for this form of development and of what it means to be 'developed.' Tracing these histories—fragmented and complicated as they may be—is especially important in attempting to address current postcolonial conditions for Indigenous communities such as the Maasai, for whom rights to land and water remain tenuous and who are particularly vulnerable to state or NGO intervention into their lives.

Re-writing the script for western feminists

Given these historical conditions, what role—if any—might western feminists play in disrupting the forces of global inequality? I close by offering that it may indeed be

possible to interrupt certain aspects of the racialized self-other dialectic and shift the terms of what it means to be developed. The subject of the ‘white western feminist’ and figures such as the ‘circumcised Maasai girl’ or the ‘native friend’ are produced through encounters. These positions are established through the telling and re-telling of stories about such encounters and the pre-discursive reactions inculcated in listeners—and all these occurrences contain the potential for resistance as much as the presence of disciplinary and regulatory powers. As a western feminist interpellated through this script offered by history—written through the discourses of female circumcision, proper development, sexual liberation—one has the agency to refuse these techniques of self-making and to examine her deep attachment to moral positions and knowledge about other women’s bodies. This is the agency granted to a Foucaultian subject—to be able to select the techniques of the ‘care of self’ and loosen one’s grip on the terms of identity and truth.

In an interview on the “Ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom” Foucault (1984/1997) troubles the western preoccupation with ‘the truth,’ remarking that modernist political critiques often reify existing structures of domination in part by attempting to “[teach] people what they don’t know about their own situation” (p. 296). As many feminists of color have argued, this is the very trouble with western feminists declaring a monopoly on knowing what is best for women worldwide and achieving their sense of freedom through telling ‘other’ women how they are oppressed (i.e. Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). In his efforts to expose these “games of truth” and their relations to power, Foucault was careful to note that he is not calling for a rejection of politics—just as troubling the relations of domination in feminist projects does not require

abandoning feminism. The task instead, if I may boldly paraphrase, is to make explicit the ways in which one constructs one's own freedom in order to ensure it does not rest on the domination of others. I read this as a directive for radicalizing the practice of freedom amongst western feminists, who—given the historical processes of 'liberating' our sexuality—are at risk of contributing to gross and exploitative relations of domination, such as controlling the reproductive and sexual practices of majority world communities. While white western feminists cannot and should not be able to will our way toward innocence or control these historical forces, there is tremendous potential for resistance in this space of making ourselves and working toward freedom.

When we explore how precisely this script for western feminism has been formed—and specifically reckon with the violence enacted to maintain it—we can begin to imagine how it may be re-written. If hierarchies of difference between bodies and groups are created through the relatively mundane events I have traced in this genealogy, then perhaps effective feminist activism might begin with learning to recognize this kind of interpersonal and state racism in process. For those of us who are more privileged in these encounters, we can begin to question and refuse the pleasure of decorating another woman's body with disdain—for her genital formation, for her reproductive choices—and interrupt the process of constructing white supremacy. This unending work, this 'practice of failure,' does not necessitate abandoning feminist theories or even the work of transnational collaborations based on redistributing wealth or ensuring legal rights to land and communal and personal security. Rather, challenging the white supremacy in development work is deeply feminist work—especially when such critiques are levied

against projects and policies that are done in the name of feminism and occurring both within and beyond the academy.

Writing on the complexity of “indigeneity” and its meaning in present academic and activist contexts, Mary Louise Pratt (2007) notes in an afterward,

We performed the always legitimating scholarly gesture of presenting complicated truth against ignorance and reductive ideology. This gesture informs, often enchants, but it also leaves things pretty much in their place. Demonstrating complexity does not require or demand new ways of thinking. It seems unbearable that this should be the most scholars are able to do. Where else might we end up? (p. 400)

After we have complicated the ‘common sense’ understandings of the world around us, what do we do with this awareness? How do we ensure, as the poet Ariana Reines wrote, “that the order of things as soon as it is uncovered should begin to budge” (p. 38)? Pratt’s inquiries are reminiscent of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) insistence that research does not have to remain a dirty word amongst Indigenous communities, and that the potential for academic work lies in the practice of truly challenging the archive of western knowledge (p. xiii). It is not enough to critique or complicate western feminist theories and projects, nor is it enough to rhetorically address the gaps in representation and perspectives in present-day attempts to address global inequality. I read Smith to be asking for a much deeper commitment: if I am to take seriously Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge, then I must find a way to make my scholarship count as work in the world beyond my own advancement or personal interest. This thesis is a humble gesture toward such a commitment, a piece of work that has been shaped by my unlearning of what it is supposed to mean to be a feminist from the west working with Maasai communities in Kenya, and that continues to be grounded in that daily work for which I am exceedingly grateful.

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