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UNCONTROLLED WOMEN:
COLONIALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ERADICATION OF
FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The elimination of the cultural practice of FGM has been a priority for governments and the 'international community' from colonial times. A number of approaches have been employed including; community activism, rehabilitation support, education and awareness raising and criminalization. All these approaches are rooted, in strategy or in rationale, in colonial conceptions of personhood, modernity and civilization. A close reading of the intra-Agency statement reveals that harm is mainly conceived by consensus; the question remains whose consensus and the frame within which the consensus is reached. Because Black African Women, African Muslim Women and Black African Muslim Women stand at the intersection of race, gender and sexuality special attention must be paid to the nuances of the effects of coloniality on the various forms of protection. My thesis explores colonial interventions in Kenya in native reproduction and parallels them with modern human rights inflected interventions.

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Uncontrolled Women- Coloniality, Human Rights and the Eradication of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya

“Recalling that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity” Preamble, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

Introduction

Although intended as an exploration of the thematic, historical and narrative threads that inform the moral crusade against Female Genital Mutilation and its positioning within Human Rights discourse as the limit of ‘cultural relativity’; my work kept circling back to my Grandmother- how she became a woman and the legal and cultural environment that shaped her entry into adulthood. Inevitably, I had to consider my own adulthood and womanhood and entertain the notion that I might not be, as I had previously considered myself, the natural and empowered offspring of my Grandmother’s brand of feminism. That I am not the embodiment of the freedom I imagined she longed for. That freedom is infinitely more complicated and elusive (and impossible) than I thought. That the illusion of generational ‘progress’ is central to the lure of universality. Halberstam sets out her examination of the otherwise as- “different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and

consumer subject¹” (to which I would add- rights-bearing subject). Inasmuch as the realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights always seems to stop just short of those over-determined as lacking (lacking civilization, lacking freedom, lacking education, lacking agency) many of us already live in the otherwise of the human rights project. So this is an attempt to examine the ‘otherwise’ of progress and the ‘otherwise-s’ that have come before. The allowances that progressive human rights activists and practitioners and activists make for ‘cultural differences’ assume that underneath them are universal aspirations that all human beings have (conveniently set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and that the realization of these rights can be slightly customized but must, for the most part, be uniform. I was, all the while wary of producing work that was un-academic and hyper situated, understanding that work of this nature is easily dismissed. I am painfully aware of the glaring silence of the queer women, disabled women and the neuro-atypical women whose stories were so hard to isolate and who are unsatisfyingly subsumed into the general category in this work. The story of womanhood as evolving construction is not neat, linear or easily told- even within the two generations I tried to focus on. This has produced the unruly, situated, and personal thinking that follows.

¹ Halberstam, J. (2011). Introduction. In *The queer art of failure*. Durham: Duke University Press

History

“At present no native woman attains her majority; she is held to be under guardianship all her life.”

and

“A native woman cannot be subjected against her will to remain forever a suppressed being tied to the retrogressive customs operative amongst the tribes; she must be allowed to come of age and have an individual existence.”

John Ainsworth, Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) to I.L.O. Gower, Solicitor General, “Legislation Re: The Status of Native Women”, KNA: AG 4/2791, 12th April 1919

The first recorded ‘controversy’ related to female circumcision is usually identified as crucial in the development of nationalist politics and the catalyst for the ‘most significant period of anticolonial resistance in central Kenya prior to the Mau Mau rebellion²’. In 1929, John Arthur of the Church of Scotland Mission demanded that his parishioners and employees pledge not to circumcise their daughters. As a result the mission was abandoned by Kikuyu staff and parishioners, and thousands of young men and women gathered on mission

² Thomas, L. (2003). *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya*. Berkeley: University of California Press

stations and school grounds in colonial central Kenyan to perform a song-dance called the *Muthirigu* to protest colonial interference in female circumcision as part of adolescent initiation. Organized by the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) the song chastised white Protestant missionaries, British Colonial officers and local leaders who supported efforts to eradicate the practice. In their telling, efforts to eradicate the practice lead to production of aberrations; girls who were physically able but not socially consecrated to conceive and give birth. *Muthirigu* was an attempt to defend excision as a reproductive necessity but it was an explicitly political act. Verses of *Muthirigu* were devoted to praising KCA leaders including Jomo Kenyatta and prompted teachers, parents and students in central Kenya to leave Protestant mission stations and found their own churches and schools. At the height of the controversy Kikuyu, Embu and Meru men and women who supported the missionary campaign against clitorodectomy risked social death. They would become 'Kavorindo', the other. Kavorindo also refers to the Luo, a Nilotic population in the Lake Victoria region. Rituals surrounding the affirmation of ethnicity would be more and more important with the emergence of nationalist politics from ethnically centered organizations like the KCA. On December 11, 1929, the Duchess of Atholl and Rathbone raised the issue in Parliament. Over the next several months the Committee for the Protection of Coloured Women in the Crown Colonies (an unofficial group of MPs that included Rathbone) focused itself almost solely to the crisis of female genital mutilation and pressed the Secretary of State for the Colonies for action³. On February 12, 1930, representatives of forty organizations gathered at Caxton Hall to discuss the status of African women. A

³ Pederson, Susan, "*National Bodies, Unspeakable Acts: The Sexual Politics of Colonial Policy-making*", *Journal of Modern History* 63 (1991), 656-659

series of speakers, including Rathbone, Boyle, the Duchess of Atholl and a representative of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, took the podium. The consensus of the meeting was that African women were little more than slaves. The Women's Freedom League adopted a resolution calling for 'the improvement of (African women's) present enslaved status⁴' and the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship protesting the 'wide-spread existence of cruel and degrading conditions of slavery among native women.. being tolerated under the British flag⁵.' In the 1930s the KCA began to press for constitutional reform that would allow for African participation in the political system. Within national mythology this moment of resistance in central Kenya is often extrapolated to encompass the entirety of the beginning of the independence movement in Kenya. It is important to note that central Kenya is not the entirety of Kenya, and that the Kikuyu Central Association's political demands were originally specifically related to the return of Kikuyu land stolen by white settlers. That the intention of early liberation movements in central Kenya was nationalist is often taken for granted. Colonialism was not a uniform process across the country. Resistance happened, to varying success, from the coastal city-states that were never officially colonised, to the internment of Nandi and Kikuyu communities in concentration camps, to the Somali resistance in the Northern Frontier District. Given the conflation of central Kenyan identity and interests with Kenyan identity and interests under Jomo Kenyatta's regime, this is an important

⁴ Florence Underwood, WFL, to SS, Feb 6, 1930, PRO: CO 323/1067/1; Gertrude Horton, Gen. Secretary, National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, to SS, March 26, 1930, PRO: CO 533/394/10.

⁵ report on the meeting, Feb. 14, 1930, PRO: CO 1018/25. See also clipping from Christian Science Monitor, March 10 1930 in the same file.

distinction to make. As Odinga (1967: 107-12) points out, there were other political movements operating at this time most notably, an active trade union movement. Thomas analyzes Muthirigu as a critical event in Kenyan history as defined by Veena Das as events that rework 'traditional categories and prompt new modes of action into being' leaving a mark on institutions. While it is possible to read Muthirigu as a critical event in the Kikuyu and central Kenyan liberation movement, its impact on other Kenyan communities is more difficult to map. Nevertheless, it is worth recounting as a seminal moment in Kenyan (as overdetermined by Kikuyu) history. If we are to read Muthirigu as a critical event, we must pay similar respect and attention to the act of international proto-human rights/ feminist advocacy it inspired. In April, having received the resolutions of the Women's Freedom League and the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, the Secretary of State for the Colonies Passfield granted an audience to a deputation from the Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations. Rathbone charged that in many parts of British Africa 'women are in fact treated as the property of their fathers and husbands', and that bridewealth (it is important to note the very early conflation or muddling of circumcision and marriage/bridewealth) "leads to abuses of the most revolting character." Passfield made no promises but he had already issued a dispatch to Britain's African dependencies requesting information on the prevalence, consequence and possibility of ending female circumcision.

One of the challenges with any examination into social life or ethnography of an ethnic group not often examined, like the Abagusii, is the tendency to write pre-colonial life as if it was static and either objectively 'better' or 'worse' than colonial and post-colonial life. The objective of the work I read tended to be comparison

rather than examination. In her work on accounting for the persistence of Female Genital Mutilation in the Kisii region Mose writes about pre-colonial Abagusii community with a combination of disdain and nostalgia;

“In general, pre-colonial Abagusii community was a society in which everyone was subjected to a large number of prescriptions, social norms and taboos. I. Mayer in the Patriarchal Image elaborates:

Daily life was like a theatre in which actors performed their parts and established identities. Each had his place and his role and all were expected to live up to the prescribed rules. In terms of a structural functionalist model of analysis, punishments were far more important than the established system of norms. The rules of behavior were largely kept, and deviations were rare. The clear and well established systems of norms helped preserve the social order and promote unquestioned obedience; the more the system of prescribed rules and norms were adhered to, the less the problem of identity⁶ (p. 54).”

This partly explains why contemporary Abagusii elderly people paint a nostalgic picture of their pre-colonial social and economic culture, which they considered to be more stable. In this community everyone was expected to strictly play their socially established roles, sufficiently respect each other’s boundaries, and responsibly keep each other accountable to one another according to the established rules. Although I doubt that this was the case- more likely the

⁶ Mose, G. B. (2005). *Accounting for the persistence of female genital mutilation (FGM): A case study of the abagusii community, kenya* (Order No. 3196119). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305363395). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/305363395?accountid=10226>

'deviations' and navigation of social norms are no longer legible from our position- the shocks and aftershocks of the social disruption of colonialism must be kept in view to sympathize with the nostalgia for pre-colonial 'stability'. We muddle along, unsure of how to write about a period of instability without a clear marker of the nature of stability.

In reading the archive related to colonial interventions; I am consistently challenged by how to do violence to the archive of colonizers. Meaning, how to use as evidence of the ongoing what is presented as evidence of history (the colonial, with end and without resonance). The knowing tone adopted by these records reinforces the idea that the 'knowledge' of the 'natives' can be used to justify and advance practices and policies at odds with the presumed benevolence at the heart of the colonial project. Colonial logic sets out the European, by nature, as not harsh but forced to be so as a result of the fact that non-European races regard generosity and justice as signs of weaknesses. Thus, the forced circumissions and interventions into bride price were not related strictly to anxieties about labour and reproductivity but were ostensibly linked to the need for paternalistic governmentality. Todorov (1948:42) describes the process of 'othering' in relation to Columbus' encounter with the inhabitants of the "New World". In one instance the 'other' is represented as a human being potentially identical to one self. This is reflected in policies of conversion and assimilation. However, this 'other' is always fixed as a partial presence of the self. Bhabha (1984) refers to this as 'colonial mimicry', the desire for a reformed and recognizable other as a subject of difference that is almost but not quite the same. In another instance the 'other' is seen as different from the self, and this difference is translated into terms of

permanent superiority and inferiority. It is crucial that the 'other' might be regarded as holding some promise of improving its position in the hierarchy of race; subhuman yet capable of great conquests.

In the note on terminology included in the Joint Intra-agency Statement on "Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation" issued by ten United Nations Agencies the preference for the term 'mutilation' is explained;

"The term 'female genital mutilation' is used in this statement as it was in the 1997 joint statement. The word mutilation emphasizes the gravity of the act. Some United Nations agencies use the term 'female genital mutilation/ cutting' wherein the additional term 'cutting' is intended to reflect the importance of using non-judgmental terminology with practicing communities. Both terms emphasize the fact that the practice is a violation of girls' and women's human rights⁷."

The attempt to adopt a non-judgmental posture to something explicitly condemned as a violation is laughable but typical of international human rights discourse.

My preference for the term 'female genital mutilation' is a nod to the logic that governs the body of the 'other' which exists, already mutilated, but calling into existence justifiable violence to protect it from further mutilation. While recognizing that concern for female native bodies is couched in newer terms- 'harmful cultural practices' or 'female cutting', it is important for me to hold the mutilated and the site of mutilation in mind because doing so allows me to hold the universalized un-mutilated, un-grotesque in mind. Doty notes that 'such representations are made unremarkable, defensible, and even necessary

⁷ Intra Agency Statement p. 3

otherwise reprehensible practices while at the same time constructing the identities of the subjects who engaged in these practices as well as those who were subjected to them. Sara Ahmed shows us that words sweat. I hope the term leaves the stink of the brutality of the way bodies are conceived as whole and proper. I do not take as my starting point that civilization and modernization are uncontested goods not weighted down by their own racialized, sexualized and imperial logic. No distinction will be drawn between the violence of education, the violence of eradication, the violence of legislation and the violence of the economy. All will be filed under colonial violence. I will not relegate coloniality to the past and independence will not serve as a convenient lacuna between the colonial and the post-colonial. My focus and interest is on examining the spaces for navigation used by natives to exercise agency, refusal, opportunism, manipulation, and/or resistance in the wake of coloniality. Resistance, and the responses it elicits form a long chain of 'imperial encounters'⁸ and power structures that are concerned not only with stopping circumcision but with shaping the emerging alternative possibilities for African womanhood. Discursive and disciplinary mechanisms around FGM were (and are) designed to master and control rebellion, to isolate the kind of rebellion that is not acceptable and to make this kind of rebellion deviant, abnormal, and incomprehensible to the rational mind.

I am Abagusii, kind of. I was born and raised in Nairobi to a Kikuyu mother and a Kisii father. The 'kind of' is unnecessary; tribe is patrilineal and, by marrying

⁸ Doty- Imperial Encounters

my Father my mother became Abagusii as well. The 'kind of' is more about Nairobi and being born into a class and time when the role of tribe was minimized to emphasize the role of the state- of building Kenya, buying Kenyan and being Kenyan. This was, of course, always a lie. Tribe is central to unpacking the way power operates in Kenya.

I do not know if my Grandmother is circumcised. I come close to asking her many times as we discuss her work to stop Female Genital Mutilation among the Abagusii, with Maendeleo ya Wanawake⁹ in the 1970s and 1980s and after her retirement, on her own. She does seem certain that the only reason I can debate whether or not circumcision is right or wrong is because I am not circumcised. She interrupts me when I try to explain that I think circumcision is tied up in more complicated question, "Women do not need correction" She insists. I agree. Women do not need correction and, at its core Female Genital Mutilation is an attempt to 'correct' or 'preserve' future wives for their future husbands, as set out in Boddy's account of prepubescent infibulation among the Hofriyat people in Sudan-

"What prepubescent infibulation does- though this does not need to be its original purpose nor, perhaps, what it is intended to do in Hofriyat today- is ensure that a girl is a virgin when she marries for the first time. It does control her sexuality and makes it less likely that she will engage in extramarital affairs. A young girl both dreads and eagerly anticipates her wedding day: she welcomes the elevation in status while fearing what it implies, having to endure sexual relations with her

⁹ Maendeleo ya Wanawake is a women's NGO, founded in the 1950s to address women's rights and gender equity in Kenya. My Grandmother- Wilkista Onsando, worked for them her whole career and was the Director from 1985-1997.

husband¹⁰” At it’s most extreme- as in the case of prepubescent infibulation it is the radical correction of the possibility of sexual pleasure. The ‘correction’ (more correctly- attempt to eradicate) of what Nkiru Nzewegwu terms ‘osunality’ (African eroticism).

However, the fervor with which evangelists of empire and modernity have singled out and attacked the practice of Female Circumcision is also an attempt to ‘correct’ and ‘preserve’. This is my attempt to unpack these attempts of corrections to be able to better think through the positioning of the object of correction- a young girl, 13 or 14, typically rural, typically from a marginalized ethnic group, sometimes Muslim, sometimes on break from school who, in our collective imaginary, is destined for early marriage, servitude to her husband and death in childbirth. In this cursory narrative she is written off because ‘we’ (usually an audience of rational universalized enlightened European Man and His allies) failed to save her. My Grandmother uses the word ‘save’ a lot when discussing her work within the Abagusii community advocating for alternative rites of passage and education for girls. “They need to be girls as long as they can.” She insists. I agree, but I also know that she had her first child at sixteen.

“Did you get to be a girl?” I ask her.

“I went to school.” We both understand that this means yes.

Education as a bastion of girlhood and as the conservation of a feminized childhood is recurrent through my exploration. The ultimate goal of a girl is to be a woman. The ultimate social goal of a woman is to become, with her husband, the

¹⁰ Boddy, J. (1989). Enclosures. In *Wombs and alien spirits women, men, and the Zār cult in northern Sudan*. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press. Pp. 53

cofounder of a lineage. The protection of girlhood holds the potential for more than 'just' motherhood.

"Village women do not achieve social recognition by behaving or becoming less like men, but by becoming less like men, physically, sexually and socially (see also Assaad 1980:6). Male as well as female rites stress this complementarity: while the salient female reproductive organ is enclosed by infibulation, that of the male is exposed or, as one Sudanese author states, 'unveiled' (Al- Safi 1970: 65) through circumcision. Only after genital surgery are people eligible to become social persons, to assume the responsibilities of life as (Horfriyati) women and (Horfriyati) men.)¹¹"

Contrastingly, writing specifically about the experience of circumcision within the Abagusii community, Grace Bonareri Mose argues that circumcision is a form of socialization that relegates women to domestic spheres by obscuring the possibility of women recognizing and questioning their subordination. She writes;

"An analysis of women's occupations in the formal sector reveal that women take up opportunities that are considered ideal for the well-being of the family such as lower level teaching. Individual uniqueness and characteristics such as talent, interests, motivation, ability and curiosity are irrelevant.¹²"

¹¹ *ibid* (Boddy) p. 56

¹² Mose, G. B. (2005). *Accounting for the persistence of female genital mutilation (FGM): A case study of the abagusii community, kenya* (Order No. 3196119). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305363395). Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/305363395?accountid=10226>

The formal sphere she refers to consists of the economic, political and social spheres created through the interaction of traditional Abagusii life with the demands of nation building. The 'formal' sector is the stage on which to BE Kenyan. By taking the capitalist, modernist, eradivative, agenda of the state for granted as good, Mose demonstrates the logic underpinning the Human Rights project- one that encourages challenging the 'native' through the 'formal' but does not allow for similar contestation within the 'formal'. If it is not good, then it is at least better than the 'native'.

I do not know whether my Grandmother is circumcised, which means I do not know when and how she became a woman. I do know she is a respected woman, and a respected elder within our community. She is not treated as either an aberration or an exception; which the arguments of both Mose and Boddy would suggest she must be. Here is the story I take as the story of my Grandmother becoming a woman- a story told often by my Grandfather about the day he chose her. The local school was having a football competition and only the boys were allowed to play. My Grandmother organized her friends to play a match with the boys- excited at the prospect of playing with a real ball and a real net. All her teammates wore skirts to play but my Grandmother, never one to make half a statement, wore trousers. They lost the game but watching my Grandmother running around the makeshift football pitch in her trousers, enraged that they were losing was when my Grandfather noticed her. He would usually end the story with a chuckle. My Grandmother was sixteen (in the official telling), unmarried, childless in school and in that moment of wild rebellion she was unwittingly announced as a woman. Two months later she was married and pregnant and my Grandfather had left the boma (homestead) of his first wife and was living

exclusively with my Grandmother (in a society where polygamy was expected and the primacy of the first wife as the leader of the wives was unquestioned, this was a scandal). In a few years, when independence came and my Grandfather was one of the many educated young teachers, clerks and native professionals who moved to Nairobi to work for the government and 'build the nation', my Grandmother and their two young sons moved with him. My Grandmother does not remember anything about meeting my Grandfather the first time; she remembers having to force the local tailor to make her that pair of trousers and how much faster she felt she could run wearing them. My Grandfather was an unusual choice for a chief's daughter. "He was not rich and the way things were it wasn't clear how he was going to establish himself. But at the time you could see that things were going to change and there would be room for men like him to progress. I wanted more and he... so did he. So I picked the unexpected. There wasn't really a clear plan for a girl like me, anyway", she recounts with a laugh. Gusii marriage had already changed so much. Fathers demanded so high a bridewealth from suitors that many youth simply did not have the cattle necessary to procure a wife. Young men abducted (with the intent to force a 'marriage') or ran off with women because they could not afford to marry. This trend had forced an intervention by the colonial government in 1937 when K.L Hunter, the top British official in the South Kavirondo district of Kenya, called a public meeting attended by several thousand Gusii men to discuss 'girl cases' (the abducted women). Gusii elders convinced Hunter that gender and generational relations threatened to come unhinged. As a district chief, my great grandfather was most likely in attendance although there is, unsurprisingly, no record kept of the natives in attendance. New colonial wealth circulating in Gusiiland was unevenly distributed and forced the

bridewealth rate up. The colonial economy was a cash economy. For a while selling agricultural produce fulfilled these needs but the crisis of labor created by the Colonial Office's decision in 1902 to encourage white immigration to the East African Protectorate. Recouping the costs of building the railway from the coast of Uganda demanded the development of commercial agriculture- which would require cheap, exploitable native labour. Once colonial medical officer declared in 1925, "The man-power available for the development of the country is inadequate." Labour concerns began to dominate colonial discussions and cast colonial reproductive concerns in a new light. Coercive state policies to aimed at compelling native workers to sell their labour were introduced. Primary among them was the increase of taxes- which, in his role as Chief, my Great-grandfather would collect on behalf of the colonial government. By the 1930s a new class of men was emerging. Chiefs and other state employees, the educated and literate, the skilled or semiskilled- all could exploit the new economy. These men plowed their pay into cash crops like coffee or in business ventures. During the war polygamists with plentiful land sold off maize and other crops in high demand by the army. Youth conscripted into the army who made it back returned with relatively fay pay packets. A wealth gap emerged among natives. As bridewealth climbed and wages stagnated many young men did not have enough cattle to marry. By the early 1950s there were more single women of marriageable age than at any time in living memory and Chief Kiera introduced a bridewealth limit intended to encourage young people to marry¹³. My Great-grandfather was aware

¹³ Shadle, B. (2006). *"Girl cases" Marriage and Colonialism in Gusiiland, Kenya, 1890-1970*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

of this when his daughter approached him with a man beneath her station who proposed marriage. He gave his blessing and demanded a reasonable bridewealth. The people who could not come to resolution usually went to the African courts, in Gusiiland known as ritongo. Ritongo were staffed by Gusii men and empowered by the state to hear a wide range of cases- everything other than dissolving Christian marriages, claims stemming from financial disputes. In his reading of ritongo transcripts Shadle observes that both men and women articulated the centrality of bridewealth and women's consent as essential to Gusii marriage. Disputes were usually ones of fact. Senior men understood that women had the capacity to consent. Between initiation (circumcision) and marriage women enjoyed rights to their own bodies. They often took lovers freely as long as they did not question a fathers right to make marriage- so long as they did not elope with their lovers- they would by and large be left alone. Women brought charges against their abductors for their violation of her rights. Fathers and husbands could use force to make and preserve marriage.

Ritongo elders were dedicated to norms that gave senior men authority over women and juniors. They were also worldly, they had stakes in businesses or cash crops, some were educated and Christian, and had regular interaction with British administrators. Shadle presents these two facts as a contradiction; as though colonial modernity is the antithesis of patriarchy, which I disagree with. I think the position of Ritongo elders as both enforcers, interpreters and vernacularizers of Gusii and colonial norms, with their own set of complicities and interests. In elopement cases, Shandle observes, elders encouraged fathers to accept the union, drop the charge, and bring a suit for bridewealth. In a time of a

crisis of both capital and societal stability, Ritongo elders made marriages where they could. They incapacitated women where they could.

During the interwar period the prevailing logic of colonial rule was that it functioned only with the support and cooperation of tribal leaders who they assumed to be senior men. Colonial patriarchy and gusii patriarchy were not seamlessly compatible- at his baraza on bridewealth Hunter also chastised senior men for escalating bridewealth and triggering antisocial acts. The nature of colonial rule changed in the 1940s and 1950s. Strikes in British colonies, the need to re-establish the British economy and to justify the British empire, all helped produce a dedication to 'development'. Rather than 'preserving' the old using tribal 'leaders' there was a renewed zeal for modernizing and developing Africa.

Mamdani writes about the intention behind the evolution from direct to indirect rule; "Unlike the preceding era of direct rule, its ambitions were vast: to shape the subjectivities of the colonized population and not simply of their elites¹⁴." As early as 1937, and with more ardour after the war, colonial officials undertook to revamp the African courts. While formerly quite happy with tribunals or willing to expend minimal energy in overseeing them, the constructed preservation was abandoned in favour of new rules and legal bureaucracies established to guide the courts toward a 'modern' legal system. Colonial officials renewed their commitment to enforcing these laws. New and more formally educated elders would be appointed who could better follow new and more

¹⁴ Mamdani, M. (2012). Nativism: The Theory. In *Define and Rule Native as Political Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. P. 9

complex administrative regulations. This shift was where new administrative thoughts on women and marriage would have their deepest impact. Ostensibly, courts would no longer be able to physically force women back to their husbands or fathers, and fathers and husbands themselves had to track down their challengers and the number of women and men creating illicit unions forced administrators into inaction- senior men were now actively competing with colonial officials to uphold their vision of Gusii society.

Through the duration of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, Euro-Americans constructed an image of African men as sexual predators and a paradoxical set of images of African women as licentious and reproductively able, as well vulnerable and sexually oppressed. Sexualized stereotypes about Africans shaped European strategies for ruling and reforming African societies.

Ifi Amadiume ¹⁵ traces the narrowing of spaces for the exercise of female autonomy from the 'dual sex' system which includes representation of women's interests at all levels and allows women to participate in public life without masculinization to a 'single sex' European model where the 'distinction and recognition' of women is predicated on the performance of 'masculine roles'. The beginning of this narrowing is identified as the introduction of Islam and is perfected and entrenched through colonialism and the 'construction of a new monolithic masculinization of power'. The subordination of women was achieved through the colonial emphasis on acquisition and control of weapons and through violence. She raises the concept of an 'anti-power' social movement where the

¹⁵*Gender and Social Movements In Africa: A West African Experience*, by Ifi Amadiume. In [*Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*](#), by Ifi Amadiume. (London: Zed Books, 1997). pp. 109-143

goal isn't to gain power but to stave off dominating forces, it isn't explored further but evokes the waithood generation¹⁶ and their emphasis on self-expression, turning away from state power and rejecting 'formal' politics.

Harm, Pain and Joy

"If we do not initiate the young, they will burn down the village to feel the heat."

"African" Proverb of undetermined origin

While talking to women in my Grandmother's age group who were not circumcised about the experience of being in between girl and woman, every woman recounted the loneliness.

"You don't understand. That thing (circumcision) brainwashes people. My best friend came back to school after the holidays and stopped speaking to me because I was not a woman. When we would return from school for holidays I could only socialize with my sisters. We had no friends. It was so painful. So lonely¹⁷." Writing in the context of rethinking efforts geared toward juridical reconciliation, Jill Stauffer describes ethical loneliness as;

"Ethical loneliness is the experience of being abandoned by humanity compounded by the experience of not being heard¹⁸." The loneliness highlights the important social function that FGM served (and still serves for many communities) as a concrete marker of womanhood and initiation into the social life of women. Women cautiously express their wariness at considering its eradication as a wholesale victory- "About FGM? This is a very sensitive issue. I'm

¹⁶ Honwanda, Alcinda. *Time of Youth, Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa*. Kumarian Press, 2012. Chapt. 6

¹⁷ Interview with Jane Wairimu- Peters, 30th November 2014, Baltimore MD

¹⁸ Stauffer, Jill Ethical Loneliness Introduction

close to 90 years old. It's been in my culture as long as I remember. I went through it, my mother before me went through it, my children have gone through it... I have seen it and been a part of the practice literally all my life. Now you guys are saying no... I have no choice but to support your decision but just remember its my culture. I will support you nonetheless¹⁹."

Linah, from Marigat in Baringo County in the Rift Valley of Kenya, practiced circumcision and recalls that fathers would bring their daughters to her when they wanted their girls 'sold off' (translators best approximation) for marriage. She quit because of the sensitization efforts of World Vision and the local government criminalization of practitioners. She also 'did not see the value' of FGM in her own life. When pressed on the nature of value she said that she was convinced when sensitization efforts stressed that FGM had no health benefits and, in fact, women who had undergone FGM faced additional reproductive health challenges. Ayan Hirsi Ali recounts the tenderness with which her Grandmother took care of her following her excision-

"It took two weeks for us to recover. Grandma tended to us constantly, suddenly gentle and affectionate. She responded to each anguished howl or whimper, even in the night."

Attempts to introduce alternative rites of passage for Abagusii women with the support of Maendeleo ya Wanawake often stalled for want of what my Grandmother described as 'kufurahisha'. We both puzzled over the best translation of this Swahili word; trying out celebration and fanfare before settling on 'joy'. What cannot be accounted for in the many reports published attempting

¹⁹ Interview with female subject identified as "Chemakew (mother of seven)" in West Pokot conducted by Joe Were on behalf of World Vision

to reckon with the continued prevalence of FGM is the joy of womanhood. Relationships among women were shaped by the process of initiation and without it many women existed within but outside community life. Fadumo Dayib, who is running for the President of Somalia in 2016, is a formidable woman and unflinching in describing the horrors of her 'mutilation';

"What can Alshabbab do to a woman who has died 4 times? I died when I was born, I died when I was mutilated, I died on my wedding night and I died when I gave birth to my first child... I am not afraid of death. What can Alshabbab do to woman who had died 4 times? I'd rather die for something I believe in, than live and be dead inside, because I do not believe that a woman belongs either in a house or in a grave."

The deaths she recounts as evidence of her lack of fear were always followed by a new life. She seems to condemn not the dying but not being able to choose what she dies for. Boddy takes it even further suggesting that an important part of womanhood is learning how to die; "Through this operation and other procedures involving pain or trauma, appropriate feminine dispositions are being inculcated in young girls, dispositions which are inscribed in their bodies not only physically but also cognitively and emotionally, in the forms of mental inclinations, schemes of perception and thought. But alone the trauma of pharaonic circumcision is insufficient to shape the feminine self, to propel it in culturally proscribed directions: such acts must also be meaningful to those who undergo and reproduce them²⁰." Thus a young girl's gender identity is formed through a repudiation of her sexuality.

²⁰ Boddy p. 57

“Genital surgery accomplishes the social definition of a child’s sex; it completes and purifies a child’s natural sexual identity by removing physical traits deemed appropriate to his or her opposite: the clitoris and other external genitalia in the case of females, the prepuce of covering of the penis in the case of males. So doing, the operations implicitly identify neophytes with their gender appropriating spheres of interaction as adults: the interiors of house yards enclosed by high mud walls in the case of females; the outside world of farmlands, markets, other villages and cities in the case of males. Females are associated with enclosure and enclosure ultimately with fertility²¹.” The contestation over the agency of women being fought by African Elders, Elites and revolutionaries and the colonial government is clear through all the texts on the unique blend of direct and indirect rule being pursued by the British Government. What isn’t so clear is where the women are and what they were doing. The assumptions that are tempting to make are those that subsume the will of ‘woman’ into the will of the colonial project or that of the patriarchal national project (I include the Kikuyu ethno-nationalist project here).

Runaway women.

Schmidt, in reference to the Shona, observed that during the interwar years women were ‘beholden to two patriarchies²²’. Colonial officials deplored the actions of runaway women, who left their rural homes for cities or camps mushrooming around industrial centres. These women brewed beer, sold sex and some entered into a series of informal marriages with laborers. Other women

²¹ Boddy p. 58

²² Schmidt, E. (1992). Chapter 1. In *Peasants, traders, and wives: Shona women in the history of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; 1992, chap. 1.

converted to Christianity. The sheer amount of scholarship on runaway women reimagines the rural woman as less brave, less desperate or simply unable to extricate themselves from powerful malevolent male forces. Women in Asante rejected marriage, leading chiefs to round up spinsters and try to force them into their proper roles as wives and mothers

The crisis of bride wealth, interventions to educate women, and the potential criminalization of Female Genital Mutilation all lead to a radical destabilization of the operations of gender. These lonely, un-womaned, women were also incredibly mobile.

The UN's account of why the practice continues

Silva²³ argues that the racial organizes the present discourse of human rights by enabling the writing of certain social spaces as resisting the incorporation of those principles that govern the global polity, in this case gender equity.

Doty stresses the importance of grasping the productive aspect of the practices that have gone into the promotion of human rights. Human Rights, as a set of productive representational practices, made possible new techniques within an overall economy of power in North- South relations. It put in place permanent mechanisms by which the third world could be monitored, classified and placed under continual surveillance.

²³ Silva, Denise Ferreira Da. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007. Print.

“... one can no more unproblematically point to what democracy and human rights signify than one could, at the turn of the century, unproblematically point to what ‘civilized’ signified. Rather, these signifiers have always pointed to other signifiers, continually deferring encounter with the things themselves, that is, with the presence of democracy and human rights. The signifying chains, the deferrals, the nodal points that attempt to fix meaning and the practices they make possible are the focus of this chapter²⁴.”

Christina Sharpe, commenting on the drowning of 360 migrants off the coast of Lampedusa in 2013, noted the ‘stackable’ nature of African bodies both in life and in death and their utility as platforms for messaging. The inter-agency statement on the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation notes solemnly;

“In every society in which it is practiced, female genital mutilation is a manifestation of gender inequality that is deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures. Like the now abandoned foot-binding in China and the practice of dowry and marriage, female genital mutilation represents society’s control over women. Such practices have the effect of perpetuating normative gender roles that are unequal and harm women²⁵”

Describing the ideal form of the decision to repudiate harmful cultural practices the Joint Statement prescribes;

“The decision to abandon must be collective and explicit so that each family will have the confidence that others are also abandoning the practice. The decision must be widespread within the practicing community in order to be sustained.”

²⁴ Doty p. 158

²⁵ Joint Statement p. 5

The abandonment would ideally be encouraged by education and be multisectoral, sustained and community lead in nature.

“Empowering education helps people to examine their own beliefs and values related to the practice in a dynamic and open way, that is not experienced or seen as threatening²⁶.”

Here we see a clear mirroring of the logic of indirect rule.

“However, educational activities must reach all groups in the community with the same basic information to avoid misunderstandings and to inspire inter-group dialogue. The format must be adapted so as to suit the realities of each specific group.” (p. 14 inter-agency statement)

Emphasis is placed on the importance of school as a forum that protects girlhood; “Schools can offer a forum for learning and discussion about female genital mutilation if they can create an environment of confidence, trust and openness. “ (p. 14 inter-agency statement)

The View from Nowhere: Detachment, Becoming and Womanhood in Literature

“Artists and others who provide positive role models can be brought into schools and materials can be developed for teachers and integrated into school curricula²⁷.”

²⁶ Joint Statement p. 8

²⁷ Joint Statement on the Eradication of FGM

Andrade²⁸ draws a distinction between the national bourgeoisie and plebian women and compares their chosen modes of participating in public spheres. The writing women angled for position in the male dominated public literary field while plebian women rebelled against the entirety of the system. She cautions against “reading women’s traditions as entirely separately from those of men instead of seeing them as overlapping with or informing an understanding of men’s traditions.” African women have been frequently written out of or had their role in liberation movements minimized both by African men perpetuation patriarchal colonial structures and western feminists investment in viewing third world women as passive victims of native male and colonial oppression.

I begin my examination of literary portrayals of Female Genital Mutilation with *The River Between*, Ngugi wa Thiongo’s seminal novel set in the Kikuyu community in the early 20th Century that is considered a central text in discussions on gendering configurations and gendering practices in Kenyan colonial modernity. Keguro Macharia reads the character Muthoni’s life (and eventual death following her clitorodectomy) to represent a crisis over womanhood, taking irua (circumcision ceremony) as a ceremony that distinguishes between girls and women and therefore Muthoni as representative of a crisis in conceptions of girlhood. Attention must be paid to girlhood’s specificity to explore its peculiar emergence and transformation within colonial modernity. When we first encounter Muthoni in *The River Between*, she makes two important statements to

²⁸Cole, Catherine M., Manuh, Takyiwaa, and Miescher, Stephan F., eds. *Africa after Gender?*. Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press, 2007. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 8 January 2016.

her sister Nyambura. The first is “I want to be circumcised.” The second is “I-I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges” (26). The stuttered “I” reminds us that Muthoni is speaking at the river Honia, which flows in the valley that cleaves the Kameno traditionalists and the Makuyu Christians. Muthoni’s “I,” an echo effect, enhanced by the visual dash that also separates and joins the two “I”s, suggests the opposing forces that shape her existence: her allegiance to her father’s brand of Christianity and her desire to be part of the ritually recognized Gikuyu. Simultaneously, this split, echo “I” registers the implicit distinction Muthoni draws between “real” and unreal girls and women. Whereas scholars have focused on *irua* and Muthoni’s desire to be a “real woman,” none have paid attention to her desire to be a “real girl.” Macharia poses the question- “What does it mean to desire girlhood? and what does this desire tell us about the effects of colonial modernity on conceptions of girlhood?²⁹”

Most starkly, Ifi Amadiume and Oyeronke Oyewumi have argued that “Western” conceptions of gendering apply poorly, if at all, to some African societies. Drawing on ethnographic and historical researches into the Nnobi and the Yoruba, respectively, Amadiume and Oyewumi contest the notion that gender is a fundamentally asymmetrical system of power based on women’s subordination. They argue, rather, that Western (especially colonial) practices of gendering effaced the complex dialectic between material embodiment and cultural and ideological conceptions of selfhood in pre-colonial Africa. Oyewumi rightly notes that colonial modernity introduced new gender categories in Africa that, in turn,

²⁹ Macharia, Keguro, *How Does a Girl grow into a Woman?*

created epistemological shifts in how social categories were organized among the pre-colonial Yoruba, she argues, social identities were based on relations of seniority, not sex-gender difference, and thus the introduction of the distinction between men and women during colonial modernity reshaped social relations in fundamental ways. For instance, the introduction of gendered categories, and the hierarchies implicit in those categories, meant that colonial authorities did not acknowledge women who had formerly held important positions as leaders (123–24). In imposing Western conceptions of gender relations, these critics argue, colonial discourses reduced the complex ways social ideologies and practices circulated.

As a counterpoint to such arguments, it might be worth considering that while colonial discourses ignored indigenous categories of selfhood, they also multiplied, fractured, and otherwise modified existing frameworks. We need only think, for example, of how the designation “boy,” when applied to African men, subordinated age and morphology to race and labor. Far from stabilizing gendered and sexual categories, colonial discourses and practices multiplied and abstracted them, taking away gendered certainty, leaving subjects unsure of their status. By undergoing gendering rituals and practices assured girls and boys, women and men, that they were full members in the community. This assurance was both material and affective. Community members *felt* their gendering, felt “real,” to use Muthoni’s word.

At the root of Muthoni’s quest to acquire gender through *irua* is the sense that her parents’ religion offers no way for “unreal” girls to become adults. As she explains to Nyambura:

“Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not prevent them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man’s faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. The white man’s God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know . . . Father said that at the Mission there is that man—Livingstone and many women. Those are his wives. and do you think that he, a man, would marry a woman not circumcised? Surely there is no tribe that does not circumcise. or how does a girl grow into a woman? (26) “

Muthoni tries to exist in between Christianity and womanhood despite the topographical impossibility of this position and she dies. Nyambura chooses a side and survives.

The bildungsroman tells the story of an individual with a partial claim to the society they are born into undergoing a process of education that reveals to them their place in society and blossoms innate qualities. The canon and textuality play a crucial role in the story of coming of age. I read Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* for the first time when I was seventeen years old. Her work and the steady trickle of work by African women writing, what seemed to me at the time, refreshingly modern narratives of African and Black womanhood generated an archive that I gratefully received as a script for survival. What were the limitations of this survival? What un-presented ‘third’ way eluded me? Is that third way coded in these texts? I am aware that when I write about an African Womanhood or an African woman, I am addressing a fiction. That is my intention. The construction of the African Woman in literature as an outside-insider is deliberate and politically valuable. I am not asking if identity is static or

trite dismissing identity politics as shallow. I am accepting that identity politics are a necessary function of liberal subject formation and assessing the value of different identities. Nyambura survives where her sister does not. What did her continued survival entail? What other choices did she have to make? What has changed? What remains the same? Engaging with the feminist empowerment/self-actualization narrative structure of these novels reveals their seductive value but when placed in a larger schema of the formation of African identity and African values it becomes clear that women are intentionally positioned as recruits in larger cultural domination projects. Positioned in between the Western and African world, the figure of the African Woman acts as a perversion of the orature artist described by Mugo;

“ The Orature artist conceived himself or herself as an integral part of the community. The idea of an artist who stands above the community, alienated from the mundane world, looking down at it from some elevated height way ‘up there’ was alien in the world of pre-colonial Gikuyu Orature. The artist belonged to the people and was not above criticism or reproach. His or her task was to articulate the aspirations of the people, drawing themes from them and keeping constant touch with them for inspiration. The pieces that he or she composed were not personal property but were part of the communal heritage.³⁰”

Adagala and Mukabi draw explicit connections between social justice/ human rights and the role of the orature artist. “The thematic concern around social justice is perhaps one of the strongest in narratives. It is one of the most artistically

³⁰ “African Orature and Human Rights” M.M.G. Mugo Human and People’s Rights Monograph Series No. 13 p. 21

depicted and one in which the narrator takes a stand on the side of those who are victims of miscarried justice, women, disabled people, orphans, the weak and impoverished slaves, and outcasts, are of deep concern to the narrator and the narrative is woven around them with sympathy³¹."This orientation towards the 'victims' and the 'impoverished' may point to the main difference between the orientation of the narratives of the afropolitan and the orature artist. Where the orature artist uses their talent to highlight the plight of the marginalized the Afropolitan novel is claustrophobically focused on the plight of those positioned in-between. The Afropolitan is in constant conversation with the imagined static identities of the modern Westerner and the traditional African. The orature artist is in conversation with his/ her community working for the formation of a localized stability. Adagala and Mukabi attempt to build a case for the indigenized placing and understanding of universalized ideals in an attempt to identify a satisfactory response to accusations about the 'western' nature of Human Rights. It is laudable but unsatisfactory because of the necessary reinvestment in the binaries of the Enlightenment. This "African" conception of the role of the artist does not differ materially from Cocalis' elaboration on the role of the artist in Bildung. "Finally, the metaphorical role of the artist has become a real social function: the moral artist must assume responsibility for enlightening humanity through aesthetic education³²"

Perhaps the difference is that the tradition of bildung stresses the primacy of the individual. The path of development conceived was explicitly individuated and the

³¹ Kabira, Wanjiku Mukabi. *The Oral Artist*. Nairobi: East African Educational, 1983. Print.

³² Cocalis, Susan "The Transformation of "Bildung" from an Image to an Ideal" *Monatshefte*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Winter, 1978) pp. 401

'universal and eternal' human aspirations are realized within the individual rather than within the community. And while this may be so, it is uninteresting and dangerously reductionist to insist that the values of the international human rights movement are compatible with pre-colonial moral governance structures. To concede the redeeming potential of a localized collective conception of Human Rights the problem of the individual as rights bearer must be specifically located. Enduring efforts to set up a 'right path' continue to acknowledge and shape collective understandings of wrongness and (re)generate the politics of exclusion through the novel.

Victimhood and Human Rights

Ayah Hirsi Ali's memoir "Infidel" constructs an even cruder, narrower navigable space for the inside-outsider. She recounts her sexuality awakened by Harlequin romances, and contrasts it with the experience of having sex for the first time with her husband (a distant cousin) who had to tear through the scar tissue left as a result of her mutilation. The scene is suggestive without being pornographic and richly detailed- both what she received and understood as 'normal' romance through Harlequin romance novels and the bitter disappointment of the reality of sexual intercourse.

"....kept us supplied with cheap Harlequins. These were trashy soap-opera like novels, but they were exciting- sexually exciting. And buried in all of these books was a message: women had a choice. Heroines fell in love, they fought off family obstacles and questions of wealth and status, and they married the man they chose³³."

³³ Ali, Ayaan. *Infidel*. New York: Free, 2007. Print.

Spillers coined the term 'pornotroping' for the 'enactment of black suffering for a shocked and titillated audience'. Human rights advocacy and the positions black and othered bodies and their stories of suffering and individual triumph deliberately to trigger a response from the "International Community". Weheliye posits that black bodies exist in a 'state of exception'

"W.E.B Du Bois asked in 1944 if the Universal Declaration of Human Rights did not offer provisions for ending colonialism or legal segregation why call it the declaration of Human Rights"

Weheliye observes that in "Western Human Rights discourse, for instance, the physical and psychic residues of political violence enable victims to be recognized as belonging to the brotherhood of Man³⁴." Western judicial systems and, by extension, the international human rights protection framework privilege the victim by forcing an individual to first position themselves as a victim to access 'justice'. A victim is a proto- person (inasmuch as they are acknowledged only in their role as 'victim') and beyond that, victimhood exists on an external timeframe- someone other than the victim is positioned to determine when they should get over it. African women exist within the frame of Human Rights discourse as problems and possibilities. UN systems for the protection and the promotion of Human Rights operate as confessionals with reports being presented by Nations, by UN observers and by NGOs (who often claim a role as a 'voice for the voiceless'). These competing narratives are then considered before issuing a decision.

³⁴ Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print. P. 75

What does this privileging of victimhood or victimhood as access mean for the category of 'human' that one must access in order to have your 'human rights' protected and affirmed? Clearly the categories of "Man" and "human" are almost automatically conflated on an institutional level unless intentionally extricated from each other.

The Invention of the Native- the African and African values

"But there can be no doubt of the immense progress made in rendering the civilization of the African at least possible, and it is a progress which need occasion no regrets, for we are not destroying any old or interesting system, but simply introducing order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism."

Charles Elliot (former governor of East Africa)³⁵

Said³⁶ suggested that for imperialists and anti-imperialists alike, the Oriental, like the African, is a member of a subject race and not exclusively an inhabitant of geographical area. The term 'native' almost always "signified some kind of inferiority that coincided with an implicit racial hierarchy³⁷."

Foucault³⁸ draws upon the images of the leper and the plague in his discussion of discipline. The image of the leper gave rise to rituals of rejection, exclusion and enclosure. The political dream underlying this image was that of a pure community, the dangerous and contaminated separated from the 'real' population. The image of the plague, in contrast, gave rise to practices of

³⁵ As quoted in Cell, John W., ed. 1976. *By Kenya Possessed: The correspondence of Norman Leys and J.H. Oldham 1918-1926*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

³⁶ Said, Edward, "Orientalism", Pantheon books, 1978

³⁷ Doty, Roxanne, "Imperial Encounters", University of Minnesota Press, 1996 p. 55

³⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Discipline and Punish", Vintage Books, 1979 p. 198-203

observation, surveillance, correct training and order. The political dream underlying the image of the plague was a disciplined society. The leper requires exclusion while the plague triggers projects of discipline. The two are not mutually exclusive:

“On the one hand, the lepers are treated as plague victims; the tactics of individualizing disciplines are imposed on the excluded; and, on the other hand, the universality of disciplinary control makes it possible to brand the ‘leper’ and to bring into play against him the dualistic mechanisms of exclusion³⁹”

The ‘native’ body was needed to supply the labour, without which the dream of a white community could never be realized. The spatial and legal separation of Africans and white settlers was important in producing and maintaining the respective identities of these subjects.

Doty studies the production of a Native identity in relation to labour highlighting:

“Acts such as Masters and Servants Ordinance of 1910, while regulating relations between employers and servants, was also at pains to define the identities of the subjects who could occupy these hierarchical positions: “The word ‘servant’ means any Arab or Native employed for hire... The word “Native” means a native of Africa not being European of Asiatic race or origin⁴⁰.” She goes on:

“The fragility of these identities is revealed by the fact that these practices of naming were given such importance officially and unofficially.” Doty examines the communication around the practice of forced labour concluding, “The effect of these representational practices was to naturalize a structure of authority

³⁹ *ibid* p. 199

⁴⁰ *ibid* Doty p. 59

centered on the ability, or lack of ability to handle power and authority without abusing it. The African 'native' was constructed as a subject who was incapable of handling power and authority without abuse. In contrast, British officials were unlikely to do harm." This is easily contrasted with working class 'white' representations of the black slave as lacking in autonomy, incapable of exercising autonomy, and too irresponsible to be trusted with autonomy. The white working class existed only through the cultural and legal articulation of their difference from the pornotrope of the black slave. The construction of the African 'native' was simultaneously an assertion or reaffirmation of British identity and the creation of a collective native or African identity.

The first Independent governments in sub-Saharan Africa had the considerable task of creating a unified state out of a constructed dominion. In Kenya and Tanzania this was achieved by the autocratic, one party State with the charismatic baba (father) at the head and the center. Nyerere experimented with socialism, Kenyatta transferred 60 percent of Kenya's farmable land to himself and his cronies (a conservative estimate, because records of the transactions were eliminated and the land is held by proxies it is impossible to know for sure.) Uganda's first government was lead by an alliance between two parties with Milton Obote as Prime Minister and the King of the Baganda people, Edward Muteesa II holding the ceremonial position of President. All three governments adopted masculinist approaches to national identity building- emphasizing the status of African men as 'sons of the soil', their right to build the nation and take care of their families. The role of the East African woman was as a homemaker and mother. The first International Day of the African Woman was declared by the

African Union in 1962 and was celebrated across Africa with a 'beautiful baby' competition. The reality was more complicated. Independence triggered urban migration for men and women. There were jobs available for women in city centers (as bar maids, teachers, nurses, domestic workers, as waitresses and as receptionists) which created a 'miniskirted' class of women who threatened African domesticity by having access to their own money, spending it in ways that read as indulgent to the male gaze and generally not waiting for men to take the first stab at independence. Meanwhile the reality of independence could be frustrating for men who had envisioned it in terms of dominion. The rapid emergence of a ruling or political class meant that access to material wealth was dictated by proximity to the centralized government. Ophelie Rillon⁴¹ theorizes (in the context of Mali) that the 'female body came to embody the site of production and reproduction of the state through the birth of new male citizens at the front of emergent society.⁴²' The numerous debates around the miniskirt in East Africa were about anxiety over women's mobility, purity and the state's anxiety to retain a monopoly on 'national culture'. British colonial officials across Africa were wary of the dangers of detribalization of Africans in urban spaces and independent governments engaged in the same rhetoric. On the one hand there were deliberate attempts to create a 'stable' and 'respectable' urban class of Africans and on the other there were a variety of forceful methods to 'repatriate' jobless 'undesirables'. The narrative of the Native is reworked into the narrative of "African values" which are used, exactly like nativist policies, to mobilize labour

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⁴² Rillon, Ophelie. *Rebel Bodies: urban youth fashion in the 1960s in Mali*. Unpublished. Presented during Social Movements and Citizenship in Africa at Columbia University.

and discipline unproductivity (this will re-emerge around the 'repugnancy' of unproductive copulation). The language of repugnance (used to justify the policing of queer domesticity in the colonial context) re-emerges and is used by the culture brokers of these new countries to 'sift and purify (traditions) in order to remove or lessen elements that are inappropriate, in that they are shameful or disgusting for a condition of civility and modern development in general⁴³."

Traditional vs. Modern

"If you went to school, what home would you return to? Or if you went to church, what home would you go back to?⁴⁴"

Mary Wanjiru, Limuru 2001

The frontline of the battle between 'traditional' and 'modern' is typified in colonized discourses on education. Leela Gandhi⁴⁵ considers the emergence of Bildung as a symptomatic produce of the Enlightenment's cultural politics of European imperialism and its ambitions to civilize non- Europeans. Through the reformation of education and pedagogy⁴⁶ Enlightenment philosophers originally intended to instill Bildung as a 'program of self development or auto didacticism within its hosts in order to achieve the contradictory foals of creating a self-regulating society which has already been trained to internalize external laws of

⁴³ Ivaska, Andrew. "Anti Mini Militant meets Modern Misses: Urban Style, gender and the Politics of National Culture in 1960s Tanzania." *Gender & History* Vol. 14 No. 3 November 2002 pp. 591

⁴⁴ Kanogo, Tabitha "African Womanhood in Colonial Kenya 1900-50" Ohio University Press 2005 pp. 197

⁴⁵ Blake, Ann, and Leela Gandhi. *England through Colonial Eyes in Twentieth-century Fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.

⁴⁶ Gandhi, Leela "Learning me your Language pp. 58

citizenship. Colonizers ultimately justify their imperialist ambitions on the basis of ethics and pedagogy and by doing so, manage to “secure the hegemony of empire⁴⁷”. Bildung in the colonial world produces subjects and not citizens.

Writing about the education of Kenyan women Tabitha Kanogo observes;

“In its Western form, and as introduced to Kenya, education called for the suspension of all other social, cultural, and economic activities. It removed a woman from society and strained society’s efforts to accommodate, or reintegrate that woman once she had completed her studies.”

And

“Entry into mission schools called for extensive ingenuity and resilience on the part of female students. As sites for the negotiation of diverse cultural practices, missions and mission schools antagonized local populations at the same time as they entrenched their wards into new ways of being.” (202) What do the Kavoringo (the ‘other’ or un-initiated) grow into? What forms of womanhood, adulthood and personhood are promised by modernity and the colonial project? What does a girl grow into? Part of the answer is in the literary heroine who is spoiled with choices similar to the Harlequin romance heroine. The contemporary African woman in literature is plagued by ‘choices’- most centred around whether to stay (in the city, in the country, in the marriage) or leave. Once she has chosen and ‘made it’, the nameless nature of her limitations are coded as freedom. Enter the Afropolitan. Mbembe describes Afropolitanism as “an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on

⁴⁷ ibid

principle any form of victim identity—which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world.⁴⁸ Afropolitanism generates a ‘new’ African narrative by responding directly to the myth of Africa as dark and static in ways that do not challenge the deliberate positioning of Africa as dark and static for fear of self victimization. Operating under different spatial and aesthetic boundaries than ‘other Africans’, they do not see themselves as subject in the same way their parents were (are?). The Afropolitan defines a space for themselves between the citizen and the subject (“not citizens but Africans of the world”).

Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – ‘where are you from?’ – you’d get no single answer from a single smiling dancer. This one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas. ‘Home’ for this lot is many things: where their parents are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live this year). Like so many African young people working and living in cities around the globe, they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many.

They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You’ll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian,

⁴⁸ Achille Mbembe, “Afropolitanism.” *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Eds. Njami Simon and Lucy Durán. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2007. 26 – 30

Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world⁴⁹.

Although Afropolitanism is most easily identified in the diaspora experience; you can be an African, in Africa and retain an Afropolitan identity. The Afropolitan is removed, familiar and exceptional. Afropolitanism is a label used to connote hybridity and a type of sophistication or urbanity that is “not usually dwelt upon in research and public discourse, that de-familiarize common place readings of Africa⁵⁰.” Afropolitanism exists to demonstrate that Africa is not what you think it is. The ‘you’ that is being addressed remains unmarked, unidentified and unidentified, in line with the universalizing impulse of the Enlightenment. Afropolitanism is a stylish response to the idea that African subjectivity is constituted by “a perennial lack; lacking souls, lacking civilization, lacking writing, lacking responsibility, lacking human rights, lacking development and lacking democracy. It is an un-ending discourse that invents particular ‘lacks’ suitable for particular historical epochs so as to justify perpetuation of asymmetrical power

⁴⁹ Selasi, Taiye. "BYE-BYE BARBAR*." *Callaloo* 36.3 (2013): 528,530,838. *ProQuest*. 8 Jan. 2016 .

⁵⁰ Mbebe, Nuttall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004) 347-372

relations and to authorize various forms of external interventions into Africa⁵¹.”

As a discourse oriented toward the universalized and universalizing, the afropolitan is the black friend of the world- providing a handy example of ‘not like the others’-ness which can constitute a bizzarely burdened privilege. The promise of the afropolitan is the permeable impermeability promised by bildung;

“In this manner, any youth, regardless of his social origin, could be exposed to the various histories, languages, arts, and cultures of the European nations, as was dictated by the original concept of Bildung, without having to leave the German states. Thus members of the middle class could participate in the same formative development once reserved for aristocracy and they, as well- bred individuals, could become posts in a reformed, meritocratic civil service within the existing structure of an absolute monarchy..... by involving the middle class in the government, one would insure the stability of the existing political system⁵².”

The Afropolitan narrative produces a different kind of subject; a consumer who performs a consumable type of otherness. Worn lightly and easily subsumed into liberal multiculturalism.

“Brown-skinned without a bedrock sense of ‘blackness,’ on the one hand; and often teased by African family members for ‘acting white’ on the other – the baby-Afropolitan can get what I call ‘lost in translation’⁵³.”

The scripts for survival generated by these novels could, of course, be read under other lenses. Donna Haraway reads radically hybridized self construction by

⁵¹ Ndlovu- Gatsheni, Sabelo J, “Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity” p. 33 Berghahn Books (June 15, 2013)

⁵² Cocalis *ibid* pp. 407

⁵³ Selasi, Taiye. "BYE-BYE BARBAR*." *Callaloo* 36.3 (2013): 528,530,838. [ProQuest](#). 8 Jan. 2016

women of colour as an inherently destabilizing act. "Cyborg writing," Donna Haraway tells us, "is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other."

Donna Haraway wrote in her "Cyborg Manifesto" that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. Putting forward that "women of colour might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities. If Beyoncé, who wears her engagement ring over a robotic glove in her "Single Ladies" video, doesn't embody this sort of fusion, I don't know who does. Women like her, Tina Turner and Josephine Baker show us the necessity of constantly remastering how you are seen by others, how you are understood, and, in the choreography of that dance of dominance and submission, they show us that the performance of a lifetime is one that you must do in the world, in practice and not just in theory, with all eyes on you. Ghana Must Go simultaneously evades and directly addresses the spectacular beauty of the Sai family by acknowledging the performativity of beauty and its deployment by those who possess it in a way that suggests, potentially, a 'potent subjectivity'.

But this construction, however generously conceptualized, continues to put the liberal binaries of contempt and pity in conversation with each other. To the extent that the Afropolitan creates space for multiple/ more nuanced essentialized African identities or challenges the neatness of the 'dark continent' narrative, it is a positive. To the extent that these books made their way into my hands and shaped me, it is worthy. The power of afropolitan bildung is in its ability to expand the development mission without destabilizing it.

Black, Muslim, African, Woman

In the 1960s Black Identity, as formulated by Cynthia Young- 'was not forged in isolation; it did not emerge solely from within the US political context. Rather, it resulted from a transnational consciousness, one that drew on anticolonial critiques for its political analysis and international legitimacy⁵⁴." The third world serves primarily as an inspiration for Blackness but the nativised colonial subject (whose national identity projects were emerging or 'resolved') was not central to Blackness. The belief that a national identity or project would neutralize or resolve the issue of race (and of racialization) and therefore the political usefulness of blackness was understandable but wrong. Religion played an important role in defining a nationally untethered identity. In "Down at the Cross" from "The Fire Next Time" James Baldwin writes about Islam became Black-

"The Christian church itself- again, as distinguished from some of its ministers- sanctified and rejoiced in the conquests of the flag, and encouraged, if it did not formulate, the belief that conquest, and the resulting relative well-being of the Western Population, was proof of the favour of God. God had come a long way from the desert- but then so had Allah, though in a very different direction. God, going north and rising on the wings of power, had become white, and Allah, out of power, and on the dark side of Heaven, had become- for all practical purposes anyway- black⁵⁵."

Thus the 'Muslim Third World' named by the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam was an attempt to expand the geographic referents of Black identity beyond the

⁵⁴ Young, Cynthia *Soul Power*, Duke University Press 2006 p. 50

⁵⁵ Baldwin, James, *The Fire Next Time*, New York: Dell Press 1963

exclusivity of the continent of Africa to include much of the nonwhite world, making Blacks “aware of their cultural and historical connections to Africa and the effects of Western imperialism and colonialism on all the areas of the world where people of color lived⁵⁶.” As part of this imaginative geography the Nation of Islam employed numerous rhetorical strategies to define Black identity within and against the United States. The positioning of Blacks as inside-outsiders within the United States allowed for calls of unity centered on experiences of alienation and discrimination but also not to examine whether their proximity to American imperial power amplified these calls.

Malcolm X was deeply invested in connecting Harlem to Mecca, Cairo to Bandung, Algiers to Palestine, and every place in between. The Bandung Conference is stressed as a landmark in his international vision. The Bandung Conference was framed explicitly as an antiracist and anticolonial gathering that was a symbol of defiance against the colonial and imperial powers. As a result of the conference Malcolm X spoke with an Indonesian delegation in Harlem in 1957 and spoke directly to the Muslim international:

“The 90 million Moslems in Indonesia are only a small part of the 600 million more in other parts of the Dark World, Asia and Africa. We here in America were of the Moslem world before being brought into slavery and today with the entire dark world awakening, our Moslem brothers in the East have a great interest in our welfare⁵⁷.”

⁵⁶ Daulatzai, Sohail *Black Star, Crescent Moon* University of Minnesota Press, 2012 p. 40

⁵⁷ Quoted in Louis, DeCaro, *On the side of my people*, NYU Press 1997 p. 124

In an unsubtle rhetorical move Malcolm X expands the geographies of the Muslim Third World and places the welfare of African Americans (potentially Muslim or not) at the very center of this new space.

Richard Wright wrote that Bandung was a ‘judgment on the Western world’. He went on to say, “I am an American Negro; as such, I’ve had a burden of race consciousness. So have these people,” adding that as a Black person, he could further identify with “the despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed- in short, the underdogs of the human race who were meeting⁵⁸.” Writing 70 years later but equally breathlessly Daulatzai describes the Bandung Conference as ‘more than a shot across the bow at the powerful; it was a gathering that held the promise of a radically different world order from centuries of white power, colonialism, and capitalist control of almost the entire globe⁵⁹.’ The conference centered challenges to white supremacy and foregrounded the role of race in domestic and international affairs.

Following France’s ban on face covering in 2010, anonymous Parisian street artist Princess Hijabi began to ‘hijabize’ the faces of men and women in fashion advertisements in public faces. In their manifesto “My Anti Day Glo Fatwa⁶⁰” the artist declared that the defacement was a response to the terrorism of advertising by restoring the images to their “physical and mental integrity”. Their work is a fascinating reclamation of the idea of enclosure as an explicit rejoinder to the neoliberal citizen as consumer. As noted by Mariam Monalisa Gharavi in their interview with the artist “integrity” has multiple etymological and legal

⁵⁸ Wright, Richard, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1994 p.12

⁵⁹ Daulatzai p. 26

⁶⁰ “My Anti- DAYGLO fatwa” Princess Hijab- <https://vimeo.com/6308969>

connections to “privacy.” “If your technique of blackening images restores their bodily integrity or autonomy, does it reflect also on privacy?⁶¹” Privacy, at its most essentialized, delineates the things that belong only to you from the things that are public. Their manifesto (and the still circulating images of the hijabized advertisement series which ceased in 2011) encouraged me to challenge the dominant questioning around the veil. The question wasn’t- why were Muslim women veiled? The question was- what was achieved through unveiling? A question that reveals the work that a woman’s face and body perform in public- the links between sex, gender and labour but also between capitalism and the face. Princess Hijabi noted in an interview with the New Inquiry that the face was on ‘permanent display’ and charts the orientation of her work as an attempt to “introduce a questioning into public space.... It was a way of reclaiming the self and the space for a specific (ephemeral) time.” Qasim Amin took an instrumental approach in weighing the merits of the veil. Isolation is constructed as the enemy of freedom. Freedom is weighty with expectations of education, reproduction, limited legal participation, limited civic participation and limited economic participation. Above all, freedom is achieved and enjoyed relationally with men. An articulation of the contents of ‘freedom’ reveals the limits of instrumentalism – “Women are released from their shackles to enjoy their new freedom and walk with their men helping, supporting, and contributing their opinions on every facet of life. I do not believe it is an exaggeration to claim that women are the foundation of the towering constructs of modern civilization.” Women are being recruited as the foundation of a modern civilization. This formulation sets up a dichotomy

⁶¹ “Permanent Display” Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, The New Inquiry, 6th September 2013- <http://thenewinquiry.com/features/permanent-display/>

where it is impossible to appreciate the ways women navigated or related to their 'shackles' prior to the introduction of a plan for liberation. This reinscribes the category of 'woman' as stable and unquestionable. Bahithat al-Badiya takes pains to extricate the role of womanhood from the biology of womanhood- "The division of labour is merely a human creation⁶²" Liberation, in these inter-Islam debates, is presented as a negotiated compromise- between the instrumental value of women (as an 'educated' wife and mother) and the intrinsic value of a human being ("Is it appropriate to treat a fellow human being in this way?" p. 53) One that requires forward thinking men to set out the 'right way'. The silence around the instrumental value of a man codes this value as obvious and universal. The value of women is then weighted against this silence. Setting out the instrumentalism is a direct engagement with masculinity, which is coded as invisible. Similarly Bahithat al-Badiya constructs herself as the appropriate mediator between anything that would 'prevent us from breathing fresh air' and 'a detestable crossing of boundaries and a blind imitation of Europeans'. A balance she finds in "today's Turkish woman. She falls between the two extremes and does not violate what Islam prescribes." Bahithat al-Badiya does not throw around terms like 'freedom' and 'liberation' as freely as Amin and views her project as one of balance and reason. These, ostensibly contrasting, approaches to making power centers more accessible have been the two main approaches to liberation read in our class. The marginalized group is either instrumentally different (in a way that 'earns' access) or the marginalization is the result of a cognitive mistake- a misreading of the 'obvious' and correct form of inclusion. Both approaches are oriented in a way

⁶² "A Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party" Bahithat al-Badiya, *Modernist Islam* p. 71

that creates blind spots. Al-Badiya speaks not just to women but to a specific class of women- “the upper-class Egyptian wife” who is threatened not just by male domination but by double domination by men and western women. “The second will be worse than the first, because the first occurred against our will, but we shall have invited the second by our own actions⁶³” which reminds me of Sartre’s confounding construction of domination by consent in his preface to the “Wretched of the Earth” but also every single claim that there is a ‘correct’ way for subjugated people to respond to subjugation and the ways in which this ‘correct’ way mirrors the priorities of a colonial project (education, modesty, reason, patience and propriety). For al-Badiya, servants are not women but ‘female⁶⁴’ they exist outside civilization, and are necessary for civilization. Al-Badiya notes that- “No woman can do all this work now, except women in the villages where civilization has not arrived”. We are not invited to question why civilization must unfold like this. Instead, to al- Badiya’s negotiable space of male and female labour we add a discrete and static category of uncivilized labour (or the labour of the uncivilized). It is unclear who will chart their path to liberation and what form their instrumental and intrinsic value will take but the construction of an ‘other’ (deliberate or not) will undoubtedly be a consequence.

Civilization, Virtue and Reproductive Labour

“I have demonstrated in our discussion that improved upbringing and education of women have significant advantages and positive consequences for a woman, for her household, and for the society in which she lives. We have also mentioned that

⁶³ “A Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party” Bahithat al-Badiya, Modernist Islam p. 74

⁶⁴ “A Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party” Bahithat al-Badiya, Modernist Islam p.73

depriving our society of the contribution of women is major cause of its weakness⁶⁵". Amin constructs motherhood as labour and al-Badiya constructs pregnancy as sickness or temporary disability (she contrasts the effects of pregnancy on the ability to work to the effect of sickness on an able-bodied man⁶⁶). One reading is that these are outlooks that predate the mainstream feminist movements approach to issues like paid maternity leave and feminist economies. Another is why stop at viewing the work of raising a child as labour (necessitating education) why not view the work of gestating and birthing a child as labour? I don't have an answer but I think it has something to do with sex. Sex is the great unnamed thing in relation to women with these writers. It is why women need to be protected. It is why they need to be free. It is why that freedom must be specific. It is why they must be trusted and it is why they cannot be trusted. Amin observes; "Temptation is not provoked by exposing some parts of a woman's body. In fact, the main causes of temptation are the revealing movement of a woman's body as she walks, and *the actions that reflect what is in her mind.*"

Women are constructed as inherently sensual and that sensuality is read into the very movements of her body. This moves the site of her sensuality away from her face- which must be exposed in order for her to face the world. He names specific arenas- getting acquainted for marriage, testifying in court and concluding legal transactions. All part and parcel of the labour of freedom that Amin identifies as appropriate for a woman. Still, sensuality coexists uneasily with notions of labour.

He continues;

⁶⁵ "The Liberation of Women and The New Woman" Qasim Amin in Kurzman, Charles. *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940 a Sourcebook*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002 p. 47

⁶⁶ *ibid* p. 71

“My observations on this topic also indicate that Westerners have gone too far in the exposure of their women so that it is difficult for a Western woman to guard herself from sensuous desires and *unacceptable shameful feelings*. We, on the other hand, have gone to extremes in veiling our women and prohibiting them from appearing unveiled before men, to such an extent that we turn women into objects or goods we own. We have deprived them of the mental and cultural advantages that are their natural due as human beings.⁶⁷” (p. 35) Sensuous desires exist outside of their ‘natural’ due as human beings. He raises the figure of the American woman whose “high morality is attributed to the constant interaction between men and woman in all walks of life” - which raises the spectre of the slave and whether or not she gets to be a woman and whether the monstrous intimacies⁶⁸ between her and her master would count as sensuality or labour. Are they moral or immoral? Does al-Badiya construct female servants as sexed but not womanly because their bodies are over determined by work and not lust/lustiness? The role of a wife, contrastingly, is one where sensuality and labour collide explicitly which requires both al-Badiya and Amin to pick and choose ‘freedoms’ that encourage civilized labour but preserve ‘modesty’.

When asked which gender pronouns to use to identify her/his/their persona Princess Hijabi responds, “I am a fiction in all this.” Gender is a performed identity and a highly mobilize-able fiction to shape arguments for and against modernity. The language surrounding the feminine Muslim body insists on absolute

⁶⁷ The Liberation of Women and The New Woman Qasim Amin

⁶⁸ Sharpe, Christina Elizabeth. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-slavery Subjects*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.

voicelessness to justify speaking over. This language insists that people around the world must learn how to be just and to measure up in a universal metric of humanity that is defined, in part, by aspirations for gender equality and women's freedom. If the authority for this moral crusade to rescue women in other parts of the world, and usually from their cultures or traditions, depends on associating itself with the high ground of universal rights talk that has been forged in a range of international institutions, its emotional persuasiveness derives from the bedrock on which such advocates build. This is best expressed in a massively popular genre of writing about the wrongs other women suffer—particularly Muslim women. Arguing persuasively Abu-Lughod⁶⁹ stresses the importance of examining the narrative positioning of Muslim women. The genre is graphic, even pornographic. The two languages, one abstract and disinterested, the other affective, bleed into each other in the new common sense about rescuing women. Key to the vocabularies of both are consent, choice, and freedom. The central drama is the difference between those who choose and those who do not, between those who are free and those who live in bondage. The way this drama unfolds has consequences for the crusade.

Writing about Victorian writers and their complex ambivalence toward the powers of modern distance Anderson⁷⁰ highlights the opposing symbolism attached to representative figures across the literatures of the period. She uses the dandy, the Jew and the fallen woman as focused anxieties about ironic distance,

⁶⁹ Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2013. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 8 January 2016.

⁷⁰ Anderson, A. (2001). Forms of Detachment. In *The powers of distance: Cosmopolitanism and the cultivation of detachment*. Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press.

rootlessness and heightened exile (respectively) while the doctor, the writer, and the professional tended to represent the distinct promises of modernity: progressive knowledge, full comprehension of the social totality, and the possibilities of transformative self- understanding. “The phrase ‘the powers of distance’ is therefore meant to register not only and not even predominantly those forms of domination, control, or management that we associate with specific modern forces such as instrumental reason or institutional surveillance: it is also meant to acknowledge the considerable gains achieved by the denaturalizing attitude toward norms and conventions that marks the project of the Enlightenment and its legacy⁷¹.”

Thinking generally about systems of governance as subject producing the Editors’ note to *The New Inquiry*’s trash issue observes;

“As automation and waste increases, so too do “surplus populations,” those outside or on the margins of production circuits who so often populate and pick through the sites of literal and figurative waste disposal. The regimes of gender and race, too, increasingly function to decide who is trash, throwing entire groups of people away—into prisons, refugee camps, shanty towns, marriages, or more invisible and dispersed forms of social isolation.

One condition of trash is that its perspective is illegible, its “speech” at best involuntary, merely a history of its being used and discarded⁷².”

When faced with the problem of trash or ‘surplus populations’ the universalized and universalizing gaze of Western liberal Man responds with contempt, pity or a

⁷¹ Anderson, A. (2001). Forms of Detachment. In *The powers of distance: Cosmopolitanism and the cultivation of detachment*. Princeton [N.].: Princeton University Press. p 5

⁷² Editors’ Note, Trash, *The New Inquiry* Vol. 40

combination of both. The impulse is to erase or correct. Erasure is achieved through genocide, more mundanely, by a constructed voicelessness that encourages power to 'speak for' or, as is the case frequently with women, by constructing an impermeable silence around the specificity of a experience. Correction is achieved through education, civilization, policing of methods and performances that deviate from the normative. These impulses are not absent from colonized thinkers. Blackness, specifically, is not a sufficient antidote. What 'surplus populations' does the Fanonian impulse to articulate a 'new man' in relation to blackness and whiteness, create? This opens up the question of how Black colonized thinkers addressed the problem of surplus populations. What do you do about the lumpen blacks? The blacker blacks? The wretched of the earth? The voiceless women? The ones who do not, cannot and/ or will not legibly perform the full agency of claimed personhood. This 'trash' continues to be read as a justification for the project of the Universalizing (in its latest iteration as the Human Rights Project) and not as a by-product (or even as constitutive) of universalizing efforts. Nevertheless surplus populations continue to embody the 'otherwise' of subject forming systems.

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