

7-1-2012

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Recommended Citation

Fox, Graham R. (2012) "Race, Power and Polemic: Whiteness in the Anthropology of Africa," *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*: Vol. 20: Iss. 1, Article 10.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol20/iss1/10>

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Abstract

Anthropological writing both *by* whites *on* Africa and *on* whites *in* Africa demonstrates an ongoing regeneration of the other, not only through political or historical discourse but also through face-to-face encounters on Africa's streets, in its workplaces, and elsewhere. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to many whites, many of whom struggle to 'belong' in places where their skin color carries significant symbolism and connotation. 'Being' white in Africa – whether as settler, expatriate, anthropologist etc. - involves the on-going challenge of negotiating one's identity against a complex landscape of race and power. The purpose of this essay is to examine representations of 'whiteness' against that landscape. Contrasting connotations of whiteness in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, I demonstrate how whiteness is problematized by a significant dissonance in its meaning.

Keywords

Whiteness, Race, Anthropology, African Studies, Settlers, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa

Acknowledgements

Graham Fox holds an M.A. in Anthropology from Carleton University. His thesis was an ethnography of security, citizenship and belonging amongst white Kenyans in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Race, Power, and Polemic: Whiteness in the Anthropology of Africa

Graham R Fox

Introduction

In her 2007 ethnography *Pillars of the Nation*, American anthropologist Kristen Cheney recounts the first-hand experience of living and working in an urban housing development in Kampala, Uganda. Conspicuous amongst her black neighbors, she describes the attention she received, especially in the early days of her research.

My presence in the barracks always elicited excited cries of “Mzungu” (white person) from the children, most of whom were not yet old enough for school. They rarely left the barracks and so rarely saw white people. Their mothers would often point me out to them when they saw me coming, so that by the time I reached them, the children were lined up along the rutted dirt road as if for a parade (2007:26).

In the course of her fieldwork in Uganda, Cheney found herself in many situations in which her status as Mzungu was challenging and disruptive. Children gawked at the novelty of a white woman playing baseball. Classrooms were captivated as she sat in quietly on lessons. With the limited exposure the local children had to the world outside the barracks, it is conceivable that Cheney was the first white person they’d ever interacted with. With the children’s parents however, the significance of Cheney’s whiteness is more subtle and complex. Though “gracious and welcoming” (Cheney 2007:33), Ugandans altered their behavior when Cheney was present - cooperative and friendly, though with evident suspicion (“stranger danger”).

Regardless of her respectful demeanor, Cheney professes that her presence “disrupted the regular flow of daily household life,” altering “the social dynamics” of houses and schools she visited (Cheney 2007:33). Cheney’s experiences in Uganda are likely relatable for many white anthropologists in Africa and elsewhere. In innumerable communities throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa, the presence of a white Westerner can conjure both positive and negative sentiments. In some regions, the interaction between Africans and non-Africans is complicated by over a hundred years of tumultuous history. In Southern, Eastern and other pockets of Africa, white-skinned Europeans have not only dominated and uprooted Africans, but exploited, marginalized and in some cases, killed. Different historical waves have sought to reposition non-white Africans in positions of self-determination, beginning in the 1960s through to the end of apartheid in South Africa in the early 1990s. Despite these reconfigurations, Sub-Saharan Africa remains home to many whites, many of whom struggle to belong in places where their skin color carries significant symbolism and connotation. As Cheney’s experiences in Uganda demonstrate, being white in Africa involves an on-going challenge of negotiating one’s identity against a complex landscape of race and power. The purpose of this essay is to examine representations of whiteness against that landscape.

In the first section, I will establish a historical background in how basic understandings of whiteness have been forged in Africa and elsewhere in the colonial world. By presenting the experiences of early European mission-aries, I will discuss factors that established white identity as both powerful and domineering. In the second section, I will focus discussion on South Africa, where the question of white

status in Africa has been most aggressively debated. Beginning with perspectives from the later years of apartheid, I will discuss how conceptions of whiteness (by both whites and non-whites) have been rigorously challenged while simultaneously being reified. In a subsequent section on Zimbabwe, I will discuss the problem of belonging whites now face, stemming from the political power their whiteness represents. The last section will focus on Kenya, where the topic of whiteness has yet to receive significant ethnographic attention. In examining a 1999 article by Kajta Uusihakala, I will demonstrate how ideas from other ethnographies can be justly applied to her perspective on white Kenyans. My closing section will discuss the implications of current understandings of whiteness in Africa, specifically its usefulness in understanding Africa's place in the world and how best to engage a topic of such importance and controversy. I acknowledge that addressing whiteness in the anthropology of Africa reifies ideas of Africa as the *other*. Studying whites, many would argue, is not a study of Africa as it examines Africans only in *relation* to whites. Regardless, anthropological writing both *by* whites *on* Africa and *on* whites *in* Africa demonstrates an ongoing regeneration of the other, not only through political or historical discourse but also through face-to-face encounters on Africa's streets, in its workplaces, and elsewhere. Thinking about Africa (or thinking about the West) is marginal to the act of seeing it and experiencing it. The visceral nature of these experiences is in question.

Origins of Whiteness

The orientalist mentality that shaped colonial European thinking was in place long before whites arrived in Africa. The image of Europe as the center of world, says Steyn (2001:3), celebrated Europe as the

unequivocal center of global commerce and Christian morality. With that history in mind, I aim to understand how whites and their whiteness have come to be represented in the African imagination. According to Magubane (2004:130), early European scholarship of Africa explored white conceptions of blacks while neglecting the importance of how blacks understood whites. In spite of the one-sidedness of colonial scholarship, the lived experiences of colonized Africans led many to develop a keen intellectual critique. "Africans had to at least try to penetrate the psychology of their oppressors," says Magubane (2004), part of a long-standing anti-colonial ambition to "unmask, unveil, and expose its pretensions... its hypocrisies" (130). As many scholars know, the absence of written histories in Africa prevented many of these perspectives from being shared, disseminated or preserved. Recognizing these critical perspectives, I argue, is a recognition of the agency colonized Africans possessed.

Aside from earlier waves of Portuguese slave traders, the first whites to make a significant appearance in Africa were missionaries. In keeping with aforementioned ideas of European economic and religious superiority, missionaries preached the value of commerce and Christianity, receptiveness to which was not universally positive. British missionary David Livingstone, as a prime example, was greeted with extreme skepticism by would-be converts and is thought to have successfully converted only two or three Africans by the time of his death in 1873 (Pettitt 2007:124). Examining the earliest wave of missionary activities in Southern Africa, Magubane (2004:132) argues "it was precisely because of the English Missionaries willingness to dispense the gospel so freely that many Africans surmised that evangelism was a cover for

more crass material motives". The melding of commerce and Christianity was also obstructive in presenting Africans with an objective image of white Europeans. The notion of faith and commerce as two different but complementary enterprises, she claims, served to conflate the identity of whites with hypocrisy, mystery and skepticism (Magubane 2004:131).

Comparing these experiences with elsewhere in the colonial world, Bashkow's 2006 ethnography from Papua New Guinea illustrates how perceived hypocrisies in white wealth accumulation caused widespread bemusement among the Orokaiva people. He claims that the physical characteristics of whites gave the Orokaiva the impression that whites were "soft", unblemished by the hardship of working in the fields - the only form of wealth accumulation the Orokaiva knew of. Presuming that a soft person could not accumulate wealth, the Orokaiva were mystified by the material objects white visitors possessed. The ambiguous nature of white wealth accumulation, says Bashkow (2006:21), made whites inextricably associated with hypocrisy and/or deviant accumulations of wealth. These ideas also corroborated Orokaiva beliefs in a "white world", a far-off location operating on foreign conventions of morality and political economy. Similar understandings are illustrated in Brad Weiss's (1996) *Making and Unmaking of the Haya Lived World* (in the political economy of blood-stealing) and in Rosalind Shaw's (1997) ethnography of witchcraft in Sierra Leone (pseudo-modern witch-cities), both demonstrating perceptions of Western worlds as places where deviance, immorality and material wealth intermix.

These early instances of interaction give other hints as to how whiteness became represented in colonial Africa. As missionaries preached ideas about soul, possession

and theologies anthropomorphizing the "seeing" of another's inside, Magubane (2004:132) says "it was not uncommon for settlers, especially if they were English, to declare themselves as having superior abilities to see through the innocuous performances of Africans to the depraved cores lurking inside". The consequence of these claims was the development of beliefs about the penetrability and impenetrability of black and white skin, respectively, serving the rhetoric that whites were physically/biologically superior (Magubane 2004:132). This can be considered an early incarnation of colonial bio-power, initiatives enforcing the supremacy of whites through physiological contrast. From a functional standpoint, the idea of power in *visual* representation enabled whites to conceive themselves as representing mystery in eyes of blacks. According to Afro-American feminist Bell Hooks (1992:168), white superiority is pre-dicated on the philosophy that non-whites are unable to comprehend or outwit the mastery of the colonizer. "In white supremacist society," she says, "white people can safely imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted accorded them the right to control the black gaze" (Hooks 1992:168).

As a pillar of the white superiority complex, ideas of visual impenetrability eventually became tools of resistance for colonized populations. Pan-Africanist Franz Fanon (1967:212) addressed understandings of white representation by emphasizing the resistive power in how black people *looked* upon whites. As the maintenance of the colonial project required Africans to "corroborate" or "validate" their reverence with restrained and respectful eyes, gazing upon whites "became oppositional, a means of contestation and confrontation, and a critical part of the politics of refusal" (Magubane 2004:113). Ideas of black/white

visibility are recurrent in many ethnographies of whiteness in Africa, as excluding and/or controlling blacks in the purview of whites remains a significant practice in neo-colonial projects of belonging. How these politics of refusal are practiced in contemporary Africa is one of many fascinating practices of post-colonial life and will be explained further in subsequent sections.

Once experienced by Westerners through the writings of Conrad or Hemingway, Africa now has the freedom to represent itself. Despite the rise of Africa's own league of thinkers, colonial ideas about whiteness are not entirely displaced, as demonstrated in discussions of the "shadows" the neoliberal world continues to cast over the dark continent (Ferguson 2006). Understanding Africa in its most contemporary reality involves examining the power relations that continue to situate it in the darkest corner of our imaginations. The idea of the global, says Ferguson (2006), "often evokes an image of a planetary network of connected points, and that [Africa] is marginal to, and often completely absent from, such dominant imaginations"(6). Understanding whiteness is therefore critical in understanding local and global configurations of power in post-colonial Africa. Though a focus on whiteness reifies its hegemonic symbolism, everyday experiences of race are a major arena in which global power relations play out.

In his seminal work *The Social Skin*, Terrence Turner (1980:112) argues, "the surface of the body seems everywhere to be treated, not only as the boundary of the individual as a biological and psychological entity but as the frontier of the social self as well." As a primary interface of the human social experience, skin and skin color are significant factors in all social life. The significance of the racial experience

therefore deserves continued ethno-graphic attention, especially in a context where physical appearances are so powerfully juxtaposed.

Moreover, ignoring the topic of whiteness in the anthropology of Africa would compromise our appreciation of the social memory, hidden histories, and hybridized cultural practices through which power relations are regenerated, what Andrew Apter (2007:22) describes as "African gnosis." Much how Africa, in the purview of the Western world, has served as a "polemical argument" for the West's superior global position (Ferguson 2006:2), whiteness, I argue, is a polemical discourse in which Africans may pro-actively confront their historically marginal position. As Mbembe (2001:241) reminds us, "the oscillation between the real and the imaginary does not take place solely in writing. This interweaving also takes place in life."

Whiteness and Change in South Africa

Nowhere in Africa has whiteness been examined so critically as in South Africa. Between 1948, when the Nationalist Party came to power, and the end of apartheid in 1993, South Africa was the most overtly racial society anywhere in the world (Steyn 2001:23). The making of South African whiteness, says Steyn (2001), has been both an "ugly and fascinating" process (43). In this section, I demonstrate how conflicts *between* white South-Africans served to complicate the already vast South African racial landscape. As the later years of apartheid placed whites in an anxious position of uncertainty, the struggle to belong fed problematic discourses in which negative representations of all racial groups were reified. The product of these struggles was a fragmented understanding of what whiteness should represent. As the post-apartheid era finds white South Africans

struggling to reconstitute their identities, incongruity of experience (of both whites and non-whites) makes understanding whiteness a daunting and complicated project. If the meaning of whiteness has distinct, incongruous forms, how are non-white South Africans to differentiate between positive and negative representations? The problem with whiteness in post apartheid South Africa, I argue, is a lack of coherence or unity in what exactly it should signify.

Though mainly of Dutch origin, early generations of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans sought to reconstitute themselves as a sovereign group without meaningful heritage in any European nation. As Afrikaans-speaking South Africans were themselves marginalized by the English in the earlier years of colonialism, alienation pressed them to differentiate from English-speaking whites while *also* segregating themselves from non-whites (Steyn 2001: 24). In rural farming areas, these struggles and segregations often took shape around discourses of which whites were the more desirable employers for the non-white workers. Vincent Crapanzano's ethnography (1985:245) depicts Afrikaners speaking negatively of English South Africans in the presence of colored workers in order to cast them as hypocritical or immoral. Though English South Africans offered workers better wage compensation, Crapanzano claims they treated workers less humanely. "The English are particularly prone to treat [non-whites] paternalistically," he said. "The Afrikaners are harder on them but more respectful of them as men and women" (Crapanzano 1985:245). Afrikaners encouraged colored workers to view these different management styles as expressions of the English superiority complex, reifying negative attributes of English South Africans that may not have been uniformly accurate. There is an also evident inclination

amongst Afrikaners to perceive their status as a marginal group as qualifying them to protect the interests of other non-English South Africans. Crapanzano (1985:245) describes some Afrikaners as allowing non-whites into their churches, while describing others as exhibiting intensely racist attitudes, especially towards black or Bantu South Africans to whom Afrikaners had less exposure.

In the climate of political uncertainty that climaxed in the 1980s, authors describe the intense feelings of anxiety that consumed white South Africans. Compared to other settler colonies like Canada or Australia, the ability of Africans to maintain cultural and linguistic tradition was a threatening expression of resistance against whites. Though non-white South Africans were marginalized through a multitude of means, Steyn (2001:25) says "white people in South Africa never achieved the comfortable assurance of their political, cultural and even physical survival in the land they colonized". In an earlier ethnography of white South Africans in the final years of apartheid, Thornton (1990:57) remarks that the result of these anxieties, was "the sense of the end of history, the coming of bloody and final conflict." As these anxieties grew central in the everyday white experience, Steyn (2001) claims that white South African life became "constellated around discourses of resistance against a constant threat" (25). This idea of threat or uncertainty is recurrent in most ethnographies of whiteness in Africa, especially in instances where physical survival is at stake (Hughes 2010; Kalaora 2011).

Though a peaceful political transition was favorable for all South Africans, the pervasive connotation of race in South African social life led many to fear that violence was imminent. In his depiction of urban South Africa in the 1980s,

Crapanzano (1985:275) demonstrates concern with the “schizophrenic” discursion in how whites and non-whites interacted. In one conversation with a colored South African in Cape Town, Crapanzano is taken aback by the informant’s “verbal raping” of an accompanying white women, aimed at symbolically destroying the anthropologist’s sexual privilege (Crapanzano 1985:275). Meanwhile in South Africa, government-backed newspapers published frequent stories about scientific findings on the biological superiority of whites. “By accounting for the differences in terms of race and genetics,” says Steyn (2001:35), “[whites] freed themselves of any responsibility for the differences”. White superiority was to be seen as something *natural* and futile in confronting. Though Crapanzano’s Cape Town vignette is only one in a massive range of everyday experiences, the way in which resentment of whites was enacted had dangerously racial and violent connotations. As these racial connotations reified negative representations of both whites and non-whites (whites as privileged and black as sexually aggressive) the prospects of a peaceful transition out of apartheid seemed less likely. According to Steyn (2001:109), anxiety amongst white South Africans led many to demonize each other on the grounds of racial betrayal - assisting and abiding non-whites at the peril of the white community. We can retrospectively say that power struggles between competing white groups placed non-white South Africans in the crossfire, forcing many to make difficult decisions about who could be trusted and who was most threatening to the prospect of a democratic South Africa.

When the apartheid regime finally dissolved, all South Africans faced an uphill battle in re-imagining ideas of race and representation. In her 2001 ethnography *Whiteness Just Isn’t What It Used To Be*,

Steyn surveys a range of life histories in which white South Africans of different class and origin seek to reconstitute their identities in the post-apartheid era. Similar to Crapanzano, Steyn illustrates the most important sites of racial (de)construction as the workplaces and urban centers in which whites and non-whites live and interact face-to-face. In contrast to the language of sexual resistance exhibited by Crapanzano’s informant in the 1980s, Steyn’s descriptions are more neutral and de-racialized, imperfect indications of co-existence and nation building in everyday South African life.

In spite of white and non-white citizens coming together in South Africa’s workplaces, Steyn (2001:109) also demonstrates how whiteness remains complicated by how individual whites wish to be represented. Whereas whiteness in South Africa was once a marker of both inter and intra-racial identity, many whites now seek to belittle whiteness as insignificant in public life. This strategy, says Steyn, is an attempt by whites to “establish innocence” (109). Ignoring the realities of South Africa’s racialized history, she says, “scores out the effects of systemic advantage and disadvantage” (109). Furthermore, she argues that a discourse of white insignificance invokes the same ideas of non-responsibility that many non-whites found offensive in the Truth and Reconciliation process. Anthropologists have criticized the “repressive tolerance” of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), creating an atmosphere that “recognizes cultural difference only insofar as the cultural difference proves profitable and, hence, amenable to popular stereotypes” (Meskell and Weiss 2006:94). Amidst an ongoing struggle to define and understand post-apartheid whiteness, these comments suggests that non-white South Africans are being subject to neutral representations of whiteness they aren’t

eager to accept. Like in many instances of racism, Steyn (2001) demonstrates the difference in attitudes between public and private spheres. While employment or civic responsibility may thrust whites and non-whites into mutual obligation, personal resentments make reconstituting the values of one's racial identity more challenging. The depth and scale of the TRC demonstrated that the experience of apartheid oppression differed across regions, peoples, and periods in time. In a context where whiteness has different and ephemeral meanings, the measures through which non-white South Africans understand whiteness remain complex and elusive.

Political Whiteness in Zimbabwe

The country to experience the most recent crisis of white representation is Zimbabwe. With its own unique history of colonial rule and liberation, whiteness has emerged as a particularly challenging and ferocious issue. Though violence depicted in Western media has slanted international favor against Robert Mugabe's regime, scholars recognize these events as products of a long history of power and patrimony. As David Hughes's 2010 ethnography demonstrates, problems arose when white Zimbabweans attempted to re-enter politics following large-scale losses of land in the 1990s. Hughes argues that, even with the utmost caution, whites were incapable of being welcomed into politics as legitimate actors. Why, many ask, did white Zimbabweans pose such a tremendous threat to Zimbabwe's government at a time when whites were otherwise economically and socially disenfranchised? The problem, according to Hughes (2010:107), lay within the nature of simply *being* white.

As a nation heavily dependent economically on domestic commercial agriculture, white Zimbabweans owning and operating the country's commercial farms

were in tremendous positions of privilege over many black Zimbabweans staffing them. The structure of life on the white-owned farms was characterized by highly paternalistic relationships (Rutherford 2001) that, despite the marginality of whites in politics, effectively made them a powerful and self-determining force (Hughes 2010: 107). In spite of the structural racism of Zimbabwe's farming economy, white farmers had supported the fundamental well-being of black workers. Hughes claims that, as the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) sought to humiliate and intimidate white farm owners, some workers came to sympathize with their beleaguered bosses and accepted their initiative to support the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Hughes 2010: 107). As the political climate intensified, this provided deadly ammunition for ZANU-PF. Seen as utilizing the structures of the commercial farming economy to solidify support for the MDC, ZANU-PF argued whites were "exploiting unfair, undeserved opportunities" (Hughes 2010:107) derived from years of economic gain in white-ruled Rhodesia. The economic power of white farmers and the political capacities stemming from that power effectively cast whites as an "exclusive ethnic elite" (Hughes 2010:109), the result of which, Hughes describes, was the politicization of whiteness. In the subsequent surge of occupations that flooded white-owned commercial farms, actions otherwise deemed criminal became simple political matters (Hughes 2010:108). Whiteness in Zimbabwe grew to become more than a symbol of privilege, it grew into a symbol of patrimony and inequitable political power.

Understanding the politicization of whiteness in Zimbabwe requires a more detailed understanding of how the white-dominated farming economy constituted power and privilege. In many studies of

(neo)colonial administration, anthropologists implement the Foucauldian theory that space is fundamental in exercising power. In his description of the European liberal state, Foucault (1977, in Razack 2002:11) says that “the bourgeois citizen of the state, the figure who replaced earlier [pre-colonial] orders, distanced himself from the aristocracy and the lower orders of this earlier hierarchy by developing an identity premised on close control over the manner of living.” Realizing this effort, explains Razack (2002:11) involves spatial separation. Individuals beyond “the frontier of Bourgeois order” (Razack 2002:11) had to be morally regulated. Several anthropologists of Africa elaborate on these theories: Nguyen (2010) on practices of triage and racial sorting in Cote D’Ivoire; Rutherford (2001) on domestic government structures on Zimbabwe’s commercial farms; and Hughes (2010) on white Zimbabwean hydrological projects.

According to Schick (2002:117), the spatialization of power through the transformation and stewardship of landscapes are fundamental to the European bourgeois identity. During the period when white Zimbabwean farm owners suffered intense violence and aggression, whiteness was threatening to ZANU-PF in that “whites represented power in everything they did” (Hughes 2010:107). Their land, paternal practices, and historical discourse amounted to a form of white-Zimbabwean sovereignty that could not co-exist with the sovereignty of a nationalist government. So long as whites participated in politics, the playing field of Zimbabwe’s future would be uneven. Despite the corruption and radicalism of ZANU-PF, their responsibility as guardians of Zimbabwean sovereignty allowed them to cast whites as an “enemy of Zimbabwe” (Hughes 2010:109), incapable of participating in a free and fair political

system and consequently subject to reprisal and/or expulsion.

Kenya

The white community in Kenya, though in numbers now exceeding the domestic white population of Zimbabwe, has yet to receive significant ethnographic attention. The exception is a brief ethnography by Katja Uusihakala (1999), the product of fieldwork in 1992-93. The white Kenyan experience, she says, is “about a constant negotiation and struggle for the making of identity and making of difference, about an everyday construction of boundaries on different levels and scopes” (30). She observed that membership in the white Kenyan community was predicated foremost on one’s “Colonial Britishness” (29) - the maintenance of aristocratic lifestyles and homesteads similar to those described by Hughes (2010). The case of Kenya’s whites, however, involves its own dynamics of power and privilege. In a nation where political and economic turmoil also challenge the belonging of whites, the flexible status of the community calls their commitment to Kenya into question.

Uusihakala’s ethnography is centered on the white Kenyan project of commitment, expressed through several measures, mainly historical narrative and personal remembering. The former is a *connaissance* of one’s family history, the ability to identify with figures or families considered to have pioneered the country in the formative years of colonialism. The latter measure is a practice of “selecting memories and silencing others” (Uusihakala 1999:31), choosing to invoke or celebrate memories that give whites an unperturbed sense of belonging (in many cases, memories of one’s childhood in Kenya). Though a key expression of one’s commitment to the country, Uusihakala

describes both these measures as fraught with difficulty. By rationalizing one's belonging around ideas and experiences that have explicitly passed, white Kenyans are constantly reminded that their belonging was forged in dominance and privilege (35). Uusihakala's fieldwork renders images of white Kenyans re-enacting the experiences of colonial-ism in their everyday life, in family get-togethers - celebrations of kinship roots dispersed and entrenched throughout the Kenyan nation. These images are fractured however, when black Africans walk through the scene. Like Crapanzano and Hughes, Uusihakala emphasizes the effort of whites to erase blacks from their picturesque colonial lifestyles. She describes the difficulty experienced by a white informant when he attempts to invite a black friend to tea at his brother's house. The brother concedes to allowing the black man to be hosted on the verandah, but refuses to allow him indoors. Maintaining the home as an area exclusive to whites remains a symbolic gesture of "Colonial Britishness" (Uusihakala 1999:29).

Like the conflict between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, cleavages also persist in Kenya over how whites sought to be represented. Kennedy (1987:188) claims that, During British rule, presenting a front of white ethnic unity was critical to the project of European dominance in East Africa. Many lower income settlers were pressured to conform to the "collective norms" of colonial aristocracy - to adopt the character of Colonial Britishness illustrated in Uusihakala's vignette. The notion of a classless white society however, simply expressed "the white community's tenuously held position of predominance in the colonial order" (Kennedy 1987:189). Self-identifying colonials preferred to remain separated from blacks on their more sanitized and segregated farmsteads while

Kenyan cowboys, identified by their working class lifestyles, maintained relationships with blacks more characteristic of Afrikaners in Crapanzano's ethnography (Kennedy 1987:189-190). An ethno-graphic examination of contemporary colonial/cowboy distinction has unfortunately not been produced, but could yield significant insight into this longstanding distinction within the white Kenyan community.

Incoherence in the understanding of whiteness is clearly problematic in the everyday experiences of both white and non-white Kenyans. As Uusihakala's (1999) research demonstrates, extreme variance in attitudes occurs even between members of the same nuclear family. While some whites choose to include blacks in their narratives and rememberings, others choose to selectively erase them. Though being white in Kenya is not definitively negative, whiteness presents an image that is complicated and incongruous, making differentiating positive from negative representations of whites, like in South Africa, conflicting for Kenyans caught up in these politics of identity. The product of these cleavages is a whiteness that is fundamentally untrustworthy - unwilling to define itself by any concrete set of values. As the incoherence of whiteness is re-constituted in everyday life, the ability of whiteness to improve itself is diminished.

It is also informative that Uusihakala's (1999) ethnography of whites is centered on *commitment*, as an explicitly contentious issue. In Zimbabwe, the whites' project of belonging was undertaken through an engineering of the landscape and the argument that whites improved the land for the economic betterment of the nation. Commitment, in this case, was demonstrated in their investment to the land, and later, in the efforts of whites to remain and "belong awkwardly" (Hughes 2010:129) amidst a political climate that was openly hostile. Though European citizenship policies did

permit many whites to leave Zimbabwe when conditions became intolerable, efforts to cast themselves as committed to Zimbabwe were embodied in their livelihoods (Hughes 2010).

In Kenya, the degrees to which whites have sought assert their commitment isn't as evident. Though a significant number of Kenya's commercial farms are owned and operated by whites, the extent to which Kenya's economy depends on them is not as actively discussed. Unlike in Zimbabwe, Kenyan citizenship laws *do* permit citizens to maintain other nationalities (Republic of Kenya 2010), a flexible citizenship making the possibility of their departure a significant and ever-present factor. The white Kenyan project of commitment therefore echoes its own fundamental problem – the freedom of mobility enjoyed by whites over other citizens who are unequivocally Kenyan. This privilege of mobility, to stay or go based on the success or failure of their commitment, arguably endows whites with a powerful form of sovereignty, a freedom to excuse themselves from whatever conditions they deem unfavorable.

According to Bashkow (2006: 20), the Orokaiva people of Papua New Guinea believe whites possess a magical capacity for travel and mobility. The ability to travel, he explains, “represents a moral condition that in Orokaiva culture stands for a lack of encumbrance by social obligations or troubles”. Both Hughes (2010:14) and Razack (2002:13) also understand the power of mobility as part and parcel of European Cartesian ideologies. The ability to control the landscape, says Hughes (2010:14), is what makes whites “built for mobility”. “The mapping of subjects” says Razack (2002:20), “achieves [the white's] sense of self through keeping at bay and in place any who would threaten his sense of mastery”. For white settlers, it is the ability to

dominate spaces beyond Europe that symbolically and materially define their superiority (Razack 2002). Blackness, however, “is signified through a marking and is always static and immobilizing” (Razack 2002:20), starkly contrasted against white re-presentations of freedom and mobility. Though the reality of leaving Kenya has its own complex implications for whites, it remains an opportunity most Kenyans can't afford, making the notion of whites as committed to Kenya a challenging and unrealistic idea.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated both the continuity and discursion in how whiteness is represented in the African imagination. Though the scale and phenomena of experience are vast and subjective, I hope to have encapsulated the most significant mindsets in the most significant national settings. In the case of South Africa, I've demonstrated how a coherent and objective understanding of whiteness is clouded by the scale and variance with which non-white South Africans have experienced whiteness and the competing rhetoric through which different white groups have sought to differentiate themselves. In Zimbabwe, the political disenfranchising of whites has failed to render them symbolically unthreatening. Though the political landscape now finds whites in a marginal position of belonging, their inextricability from land and power continues to mark them as privileged persons with counter-nationalist ethics of patrimony and wealth accumulation. In Kenya, whiteness is questioned on conditional terms of commitment, and in the inability of local peoples to see whites as citizens of Africa and not of elsewhere. The perceived ease with which white Kenyans could leave the country at any time makes their belonging problematic, a problem whites themselves

experience as the everyday enacting of their familial heritage is fractured by the appearance of even non-threatening Africans.

In a broader framework, I've attempted to problematize whiteness as both a progressive and reifying way of thinking about Africa's position in the world. Though globalization has brought Africa closer to the view of whites than ever before, Ferguson (2006:6) demonstrates how the symbolic marginality of Africa serves as a "polemical argument" reinforcing Western hegemony. Mbembe (2001:3) describes Western images of Africa as "a bottomless abyss where everything is noise, yawning gap, and primordial chaos." If those are the representations shaping Western views of Africa, what representations shape Africa's view of us? The danger in a generalized representation is illustrated in Cheney's fieldwork experiences. As children learn about the history of colonialism in their country, she notes that teachers make no distinction between the British as a colonial power, and whites as individual actors. There is a clear association, says Cheney (2007), with whites as antagonists or "racial associations with colonial power" (117). As Ugandan children are taught about the Kabaka crisis of 1955, Cheney, an observer in the classroom, describes children turning to her with a contemptuous look, "as if I had personally banished their king" (117).

Though the worldviews of children are malleable and ephemeral, these and other experiences demonstrate how whiteness in Africa risks becoming a symbol for all things Western, colonial or deviant. Though colors of skin no longer differentiate people according to value or virtue, the colonial histories embedded in that skin are visible, powerful and indelible. As a symbol of power in many African worldviews, studying whiteness affords anthropologists a meaningful framework in understanding

global structures of power (Hartigan 1997:495). Though a study of whiteness may reify its hegemonic symbolism, it also represents an important expression of African resistance, demonstrating, as Hartigan (1997) puts it, "that whites benefit from a host of social arrangements and institutional operations that seem, to whites, to have no racial basis" (495). To understand whiteness is to better understand the lived experiences of contemporary Africa – a project in which both Africans and Westerners can become better global citizens.

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