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ARTICLE



Good Mzungu? Whiteness and white supremacy in postcolonial Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Scholars looking at whiteness through a postcolonial lens have notably explored the lingering and multi-faceted nature of whiteness in the wake of empire. We apply Shome's argument that whiteness is rendered visible through how it is 'disembodied' to explore how whiteness is signified and interpreted in a postcolonial Ugandan context and with the term *Mzungu*. Disembodied whiteness centres the discursive and material forms of whiteness. Interview and focus group data from domestic workers who work for foreigners in Uganda are analysed. We argue in Uganda whiteness is structurally present in the growth of the development aid state and discursively understood in contrast and relation to Africanness and Blackness. Whiteness, *Mzungu*, African, Black represents multiple understandings and a duality for the Ugandan domestic workers who work in the foreign households of the aid state. Ultimately, postcolonial whiteness in Uganda sustains white supremacy, but fissures, contestation, and disruption also follow its production.

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Introduction

Reading the English-language newspapers in Uganda it is common to see various references to a '*Mzungu*' (Kiswahili for white foreigner). A *Mzungu* drinking too much, the attitude of a *Mzungu*, and frequently, *Mzungu* men and women's sexual adventures. A common narrative is that a *Mzungu* man or woman must be careful against the manipulation of their Ugandan lover (Kidimu 2011). Many of these articles are shown in the Life Style sections, written with a tone of cheeky humour, but they reveal important contemporary representations of what whiteness and *Mzungu* signification can correspond to in postcolonial Uganda – one of power, benevolence, opportunity, and innocence. Thus, postcolonial whiteness has both evolved and

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calcified from the days of colonialism and always stands in relation to a manufactured image of Africa, which Ugandan feminist scholar Sylvia Tamale (2020b, 67) describes as the product of 'overlapping hegemonies of race, civilization, markets, nation, gender, white supremacy, sexuality, language, [and] culture'.

In this article, we explore how whiteness is positioned and signified in postcolonial Uganda and is understood by Ugandan domestic workers. Drawing from postcolonial whiteness and African postcolonial/coloniality literature, we interrogate the lingering, remaining effects of whiteness 'as a transnational field of power' (Boucher, Carey, and Ellinghaus 2009, 4) that is both a material structural position and discursively embodies racial tropes connected to 'resources', 'knowledge', and 'development' in a geography with a limited amount of white bodies but where whiteness is omnipresent (Pierre 2013, 2020). We adopt Shome's (1999, 108) argument that whiteness is 'more about the discursive practices that because of colonialism and neocolonialism, privilege and sustain the global dominance of white imperial subjects and European worldviews' than about specific white individuals. Shome (1999) notes that we must situate and evaluate postcolonial whiteness within the 'interlocking axes of power, spatial location, and history'. Furthermore, it is also necessary to understand postcolonial whiteness in relation to anti-Blackness in Africa. With that, we apply Mbembe's (2017) construction on the duality of 'Black reason' to domestic workers' internal processing of their racial subjectivities.

Analysing interview and focus group data from eighteen domestic workers who work for foreigners in Uganda we argue that whiteness is structurally present in the growth of the development aid state and is discursively symbolised in contrast and relation to Africanness and Blackness. First, structurally, postcolonial whiteness in Uganda is pronounced in the institutional effects of neoliberal restructuring that sustains global white dominance via the control and management of the development aid state (Pierre 2013, 2020). The aid state effected domestic workers overall livelihoods, their direct jobs, and the availability of jobs in general, and shaped how they saw whiteness through its perceived proximity to money, resources, and opportunities. Second, whiteness also formed for domestic workers through its epistemological power to know and define Africa and Africans. This assumed authoritative knowledge set the parameters of how domestic workers understood how they were treated and valued and their perceptions of being constructed as poor and expendable. Lastly, the hegemony and tension of whiteness was on display when domestic workers hoped for the possibility of a 'good *Mzungu*'. We find that whiteness and Blackness represents multiple understandings and expressions for the Ugandan domestic workers who work in the foreign households of the aid state.

In the remaining article, we outline the methods employed to collect and analyse the data; the literature on colonial and postcolonial whiteness; our construction of Ugandan postcolonial whiteness; and our discussion of findings of domestic workers' articulations of postcolonial whiteness.

Methods

Our findings emerge from interview and focus group data collected in 2017 from a purposeful sample (Marshall and Rossman 1999) of eighteen domestic workers employed in the households of embassy, international NGOs, and business professionals. Their employers were from Denmark, France, Germany, Russia, America, England, Spain, and Canada. We interviewed twelve women and six men. The focus group included ten participants who we also individually interviewed. All names are pseudonyms. Their job descriptions ranged from housekeeping, gardening, security, childcare, and cooking with a monthly salary spectrum of UGX 33,000 to UGX 600,000 and an average monthly salary of UGX 320,000 (around \$88). All interviews were in English, as it was the language collectively spoken, but most spoke different first languages. The workers came from throughout Uganda with the northern region representing the most with twelve participants. Therefore, our sample reflects domestic worker diversity by gender, region, work conducted in the household, and employer country of origin.

Our main research questions were: (1) How is whiteness materially and discursively signified in postcolonial Uganda? (2) How do domestic workers understand whiteness *vis-à-vis* their positionality as domestic workers in foreign households? Domestic work is an important site to explore postcolonial whiteness because workers experience the structural manifestations of whiteness through the consequences of neoliberal restructuring policies with the growth of informal, precarious domestic work and because of their proximity to whiteness as employees to aid state workers. Thus, domestic workers embody the materiality to the consequences of postcolonial whiteness and an interpretive knowledge to the discursive codes of whiteness. Still, directly talking about race was both natural and difficult at times for the participants. The focus group allowed for a space to tease out ideas about race as workers were able to participate in a guided conversation but responded and interacted with each other in a comfortable and amiable environment. Most of the workers knew each other from being part of HTS-UNION. Our research partnership also facilitated trust as one author is a lead organiser in the union and has built strong reciprocal relationships with many of the participants, and the other author, an American sociologist, has worked with the union on collaborative research projects for several years.

The research partnership we created sought to dismantle the false separation between research and activism. The American sociologist practiced a 'politics of resourcefulness' (Derickson and Routledge 2015, 1) in the field distributing material resources including transport, food, and goods, relayed pertinent information, and collaboratively advocated for domestic workers' rights. Nonetheless, the latter's embodied positionality as a white American woman exposed the wider parameters of racialised global research inequity along with a multitude of feelings, expectations, and assumptions for the workers on how to engage (Faria and Mollett 2016).

This tension and constant reflexivity sharpened our analysis by illustrating the pervasiveness to the coloniality of whiteness in our findings. Codes drawn from the data highlighted specific perceptions to racial subjectivities, the material working conditions of domestic work, and how workers understood their lived experiences through the prism of race. We created two memos one that categorised domestic workers' constructions of Ugandans/Africanness/Blackness and the other of whiteness and then analytically linked the two together with an interpretive focus that detailed the formation of postcolonial whiteness.

Whiteness of and beyond colonialism

Scholars who link whiteness and empire highlight the importance of documenting how whiteness has always been transnational, a constellation of overlapping processes, and a field of symbolic and material power that impacted, shaped, and embedded in local contexts to produce diverse 'colonial regimes of whiteness' in the facilitation of global white supremacy (Boucher, Carey, and Ellinghaus 2009, 6; Du Bois 1920; Levine-Rasky 2002). Therefore, through empire 'whiteness travels' via physical bodies, material and cultural forms, worldviews, and defined power relations (Shome 1999, 108). The epistemology of whiteness reflects a 'racialised modernity' (Hesse 2007, 647) where whiteness is synonymous with notions of morality, continuous progress, and liberal thought (Goldberg 1995); essentially, a 'fantasy produced by the European imagination' that was naturalised and universalised (Mbembe 2017, 43). Hence, whiteness and empire literature link the discursive and material realm of global whiteness and how it is revealed in specific regions, geographies, and historical moments as a product of specific European empire-making.

For example, scholars who study white settler formations in vast colonial geographies from Canada, US, Australia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Venezuela, and the spectre of whiteness in non-settler colonial societies alike, expose the implementation of racial categorisation and hierarchisation that solidified and valued white dominance (Glenn 2015; Kennedy 1987; Pierre 2020; Razack 2002; Wade 1997; Wolfe 2016). Along the way there were tensions

and contestations as terms and categories shifted from Anglo, British, *españoles*, *criollos*, settler, citizen, to an overt category of 'white'; or in more racially mixed colonial formations in Latin America, a broad 'mestizo' category. Essentially, racial categorisation activated a form of boundary control between racial groups and dictated all manners of social relations and the distribution of rights and privileges as a form of colonial management and rule (Goldberg 2002).

Consequentially, these practices of 'regimes of race' (Wolfe 2016, 18) across colonies and empires were informed by a global white supremacist logic that naturalised and justified colonial rule but also intersected with local knowledges and 'historical agents' to produce adaptable forms of racial signification, appropriation, and interpretation, what Dikötter (2008, 1482) calls the 'interactive model of interpretation' of 'racist belief systems'. Furthermore, all geographies regardless of colonial status were shaped by the emergence of global white supremacy. Throughout both 19th and 20th centuries countries attempted to capture, prove, and implement practices of whiteness in relation to other countries and groups within their borders (Christian 2019; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012).

After the collapse of the diverse European empires, in the late 19th century in Latin America, and mid-20th century in Africa, Asia, and Middle East following World War II, the power and idea of whiteness remained. Thus, as postcolonial scholars note, the 'post' in postcolonial 'can be misleading' (Meer 2019, 1166). Postcolonial scholars argue that what is necessary is to understand how the structures of colonialism transformed, adapted, yet also hardened in new ways. More frequently, scholars are conceptualising postcolonialism through the prism of 'coloniality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Quijano 2000; Sseremba 2020). Quijano's (2000) 'coloniality of power' uncovers how western domination continues post-independence because of the durable ways economic, social, political, economic, and ideological structures re-articulate. The 'coloniality of power' identifies how the contemporary 'global racial system', according to Bashi Treitler and Boatcă (2016, 163), organises and sustains a 'relative stable *global racial hierarchy*' [emphasis in original].

For several scholars, exploring whiteness specifically through a postcolonial lens uncovers the lingering, transmutable, and multi-faceted nature of whiteness in the wake of empire (López 2005; Pierre 2013; Shome 1999). These scholars argue that we must map the contours of white institutional apparatus because 'racialisation was embedded institutionally, built into the particular structure and practice of colonial rule' (Pierre 2013, 12), and identify the interpretive codes and markers that render whiteness durable and omnipresent, but also what Shome (1999) calls 'disembodied'. Disembodied whiteness centres the discursive and material forms of whiteness present without ostensibly white bodies. A whiteness found in what

Meer (2018, 1172) describes as ‘contemporary social processes’. Institutionally, whiteness is reproduced in the growth of neoliberalism and liberal democracy, the continuation of national languages, education institutions, government organisation, and cultural-social forces.

Beyond institutions, the spectre of whiteness in postcolonial spaces, however, is most visible in how it is everywhere but perceivably nowhere at the same time. Mbembe (2001) describes the postcolonial landscape as one of signs where evolved meanings structure a new common sense. Thus, we need to identify the new common sense of whiteness. Whiteness continues to be a taken-for-granted social ideal of symbolic, moral, aesthetic, and material value (Goldberg 1995). The discursive link between whiteness and modernity produced during the Enlightenment and colonialism remains in postcolonial spaces through the common-sense racial logics of perceived colorblind processes without having to overtly acknowledge whiteness. These are the ‘racialised cultural codes’ (Breen and Meer 2019, 599) which affirm and naturalise contemporary attributes of progress, development, and advancement with whiteness (Hage 2000). With this conceptualisation, therefore, the production of whiteness can be achieved by countries, groups, and individuals attempting to attain white status, privilege, and representation while global white supremacy remains intact (Christian 2019; Bonnet 2002; Gabay 2018).

Ugandan postcolonial whiteness

Applying postcolonial whiteness scholars’ analyses of how whiteness lingers in postcolonial spaces we explore how whiteness is signified and interpreted in a postcolonial Ugandan context and its articulation by domestic workers. We follow Shome’s (1999, 109) argument that ‘whiteness needs to be studied through the interlocking axes of power, spatial location, and history’ and Pierre’s (2013, 2020) analysis of the continuation of white supremacy in postcolonial African geographies. Both conceptually trace whiteness as a global dominant force that intersects with locally situated material practices and interpretive frames that sustain the global racial hierarchy without the need or dominant presence of white bodies. Ugandans, and domestic workers, specifically, have an understanding of whiteness informed by its global structural signification that is constantly being produced by what Patil and Purkayastha (2018) label a ‘transnational assemblage’ of racial meanings, but also challenged by their narrative of ‘Black reason’ (Mbembe 2017). Whiteness, and in contrast Africanness and Blackness, represents multiple understandings, and a duality for the Ugandan domestic workers who work in the foreign households of the aid state (Mbembe 2017). All-together, these forces, potentially *symbolised through the term Mzungu*, display how global white supremacy – as ‘an international power system’ replete with specific

practices across scales sealed together by 'an ideology of white (broadly defined) racial superiority' – is reproduced in Uganda after colonialism (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2020, 1).

The foundation to the coloniality of whiteness in Uganda is found in the racial order created during British in-direct rule. Racialisation in Uganda had four levels. First, the British racialised all indigenous Africans with constructions of 'Blackness' (Mbembe 2017) and 'savage immaturity' (Reid 2017, 22) but distinctions were made amongst perceived 'native' groups. Second, the British placed the southern Buganda at the top of the 'native' hierarchy because they were constructed as 'more intelligent and culturally advanced' (racially closer to Europe due to the 'Hamitic Myth') therefore chiefs became agents of colonial order and landed gentry (Mamdani 1976; Reid 2017, 22). Third, British beliefs in the martial race theory positioned groups in northern Uganda as ideal military soldiers because of their supposed 'propensity for violence and aptitude as warriors' and as an appropriate migratory labour pool (Reid 2017, 295). Lastly, 'nonnative' groups, such as Indians, were not regarded as equal to Europeans or settlers but served as economic middlemen and petty bourgeoisie to control markets (Mamdani 1976). Therefore, through in-direct rule ethnicity was racialised at multiple scales with all Africans racialised Black and inferior in relation to whiteness but ethnic differences amongst Ugandan groups were also fabricated, amplified, hardened, and subject to different customary laws while nonnative groups were governed by civil law.¹

After independence and decades of internal strife whiteness reformed in the growth of the development aid state. Neoliberal reform was introduced in Uganda in 1987 with the Economic Recovery Programme. Ugandan elites created several policies to liberalise the economy and the country was labelled the 'jewel in the crown' (Weigratz 2010, 123) by overseas development agencies. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) was the vehicle of liberalisation.² The development aid state requires a foreign governance machinery to support it (Hilgers 2012; Tamale 2020b). This machinery is populated by what Pierre (2013, 81) calls 'development whites': foreign diplomats, aid-NGO workers, and contractors throughout Africa who guide any given country through its economic restructuring and manage overseas aid assistance and private foreign development projects. Whiteness is positioned through the direct presence of these individuals in Uganda but more powerfully through the lingering effects on the Ugandan state and elites via the adoption of global neoliberal proscriptions for traditional economic growth, social development aid initiatives, and by the circulation of development discourses that are supposedly delinked from race. Mbembe (2001, 60, 61) calls the reconfiguration of African states through neoliberalism a form of 'fractionated sovereignty' where the state is simultaneously being compelled to enact harsh economic measures and as a result is no longer able to execute

hegemonic compromises of 'rules, rights, obligations' that 'ensured the stability of certain postcolonial modes of governance'. Hence, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 907) argues, the 'coloniality of power makes many countries in Africa perpetually dependent on external powers', and as Tamale (2020b, 20) writes is seen when 'presidents beg for aid from Western capitals ...'

Thus, first, we see Ugandan postcolonial whiteness in these 'development white' actors but more pronouncedly through the indirect institutional effects on all aspects of Ugandan life. All Ugandans live within the milieu and shadow of whiteness embedded in the institutions that constrain and shape their lives – such as their work, their education, housing, spatial inequalities, forms of knowledge available, and more. In this way, the coloniality of whiteness 'seeps into every crevice' of Ugandans lives (Tamale 2020a). Institutional development practices and modern development discourses are in essence an extension and reproduction of race (Loftsdóttir 2014; Wilson 2017). According to Pierre (2020, 86) the postcolonial 'racial vernacular of development' naturalises the racial ideological work development discourses and practices produce that reinforce global racial inequity. Accordingly, white indirect rule in Uganda is now reconfigured and rendered more fluid but still entrenched through the production of the aid state. The new emerged racialisation process finds foreign creditors, diplomats, managers, and aid workers; Kampala political elites and state bureaucrats; Asian Ugandan investor elites and capitalists; former northern Ugandan refugees, and rural migrant labour occupying an aid state racialised division of labour. Different groups simultaneously represent whiteness, show a proximity to and a capturing of whiteness, and or must navigate and negotiate their subjectivities and material livelihoods in relation to whiteness. For us, the racialisation of the aid state and migrant labour pool of domestic workers exposes the coloniality of power inured between whiteness and Blackness. Thus, Ugandan domestic work growth with neoliberalism is an evolution from colonial racial-gendered labour control (PLA 2007).

Second, postcolonial whiteness in Uganda is signified and interpreted within a discursive and representational realm for domestic workers whose proximity to whiteness has granted them specific interpretive codes to disentangle and process how whiteness shapes their and their fellow Ugandans' lives. Constructions around whiteness in relation to Africanness and Blackness is produced for domestic workers from what Patil and Purkayastha (2018, 1952) label as the 'transnational assemblage' and Mbembe (2017) argues is the construction of 'Black reason'. The transnational assemblage is the multiple, overlapping, and hegemonic global cultural representations or racial tropes and ideas that are produced from unequitable material forces across multiple scales that form and come together 'to sustain racialised power structures' (Patil and Purkayastha 2018, 1967). Through the assemblage whiteness continues to be associated with prestige, modernity, and

advancement while through anti-Blackness, Blackness sits in opposition, what Yancy (2004) describes as its 'antithesis'; and 'Africa' is ideologically reproduced through derivative negative global tropes (Mudimbe 1988). Through the machinations of the aid state African subjectivities are rendered as 'peculiar types of beings' who need 'capacity building', embody 'bad governance' and must dismantle 'corruption' (Pierre 2020, 87). Importantly, however, as Mbembe (2017, 28, 30) contends, there is a duality to 'Black reason' where the 'founding [racist] narrative western consciousness of Blackness' attempts to be 'exorcised' by the second narrative, the 'Black consciousness of Blackness'. Black consciousness of Blackness is 'nourished' (Mbembe 2017, 30) by struggle, resistance, local knowledges, and systems of care. Domestic workers construct their views on whiteness and Blackness in this context which exposes the power, contradictions, artifice, and cruelty of whiteness and the collectivity, perseverance, and care of Blackness.

Lastly, we can understand Ugandan postcolonial whiteness through the application and interpretive framing of the term '*Mzungu*'. The term used widely throughout East Africa emerged from aspects of various Bantu languages to describe an image of early European traders as 'one who moves around' (Haugen 2015). *Mzungu* is a complex, relational word that connotes the physical presence of white people, foreigners; but is also associated with the attributes that whiteness discursively embodies (Haugen 2015). Terms such as *Whitefella* in Australia, *Gringo* in Latin America, *Obruni* in Ghana, and *Umlungu* in South Africa, are similarly used to epitomise a disembodied whiteness where whiteness is understood as an idea, a trait, and something that can be possessed by non-white bodies albeit in an unstable fashion (Hage 2000; Keshodkar 2004; Pierre 2013). *Mzungu* representations exposes whiteness' aspirational qualities but also an awareness that it is a highly unequal material force, an exasperation, a disappointment, and most devastatingly violent – essentially, the localised processes of global white supremacy. South African author and former domestic worker, Sindiwe Magona (1992), wrote that the *Umlungu* was a force of 'destruction' where South Africans were expected to 'chase the mirage' of progress.

Discussion of findings

In the following analysis of domestic worker interview and focus group data, we examine how postcolonial whiteness is signified in the psyche, imaginations, and ruminations of what domestic workers envision as 'white', how it is relationally defined to Blackness, and what the hope and possibilities for African futures entail in the shadow of the ubiquity of whiteness without the ubiquity of white bodies. We find the material forces and interpretive codes of postcolonial whiteness sustains global white supremacy, but futures, contestation, and disruption also follow in its wake.

Power of whiteness: money, possibility, and authority

During our interviews and discussions with domestic workers we asked the question, 'What does it mean to be "white" in Uganda?' The answers given expose how whiteness was seen structurally as providing material well-being and opportunities to achieve but also as a supposedly authoritative source of knowledge, notably about Africa and Africans. Most definitively, whiteness was money. Laila, who provided childcare and cleaning for a North American doctor stated, *'When we Africans see these Mzungus, we think that they have a lot of money and they are rich, yes'*. Betty, who works for a European embassy, reiterated, *'Yeah because of the money that is what I normally see about them, because with Ugandans they don't have all that capacity of having all that money, then for them they have that capacity'*. Pierre's (2013) study similarly found that the term *Obruni* was associated with money and power for middle-class Ghanaians. With Laila and Betty, and other domestic workers, their economic labour is under-valued vis-à-vis the monetary advantage of white subjectivity. The monthly salary of the domestic workers' we spoke with ranged from \$16.29 to \$244. The domestic workers' salaries represent the precariousness of work in Uganda since liberalisation, the devaluing of domestic work, and the gendered and racialised tropes that sustains poor wages for Ugandans, all while working within the shadow of their highly compensated white bosses (Christian and Namaganda 2018). The contemporary linkage between whiteness and money naturalises its presence while obscuring the global historical foundation of violent white wealth accumulation through racial capitalism (Du Bois 1920).

Moreover, whiteness is not just about the material wealth of whites but the opportunities that whiteness provides. Aaqil, who works for a leader with an international NGO, stated,

They said when they are white ... they upgrade themselves ... they upgrade themselves not because of money or what; they say that we are ignorant, we Black Africans are ignorant, so for them, they have more experience than we, so that's the challenge.

Aaqil connects whiteness beyond the material fact of advanced income and to the cultural and epistemological capital whites seemingly embody. Within liberal thought the modern world was structured around the tropes of advancement, progress and development that centred a European white ideal. Whites supposedly embody this because progress and constant improvement of self, the ability to 'upgrade', are traits that are naturalised through white subjectivity (Goldberg 1995). Aaqil's understanding of this is also understood relationally to Blackness and Africanness. If whites 'upgrade' because the social world afforded them more 'experience' and possibilities for improvement, then 'Black Africans' are not just at a structural

disadvantage, the 'challenge' Aaqil states; but their disadvantage is perceived, in Aaqil's perspective by whites, as a natural product of their 'ignorance'. Thus, whiteness is the discursive meanings around the new racial codes of progress and development that sustain racial disadvantage through white supremacy.

This connects to ongoing racial knowledge production processes and white continued discursive authority to seemingly define and know Africa and Africans. This process, born from how 'Africa and Blackness' took shape together according to Mbembe (2017, 38) as a way for Europeans to 'create bodies of extraction and subjects of race', is justified through a logic of 'nonsense and fantasies'. Domestic workers spoke how their employers already had a conception about Africa, Ugandans in general, and their material needs and abilities. For embassy workers, these assumptions were strengthened by the information embassies supposedly told their employers about how much they should pay their workers, what local customs were like, and the larger economic environment. Elizabeth, a domestic worker and organiser, stated:

In most cases now with the embassies . . . when they are bringing other whites to be working here what they do, they first feed them with what is in Uganda, what kind of people to employ, how much they are supposed to pay them, and they shouldn't get [high] wages because there are a lot of people flogging on the way to get employment.

Perceptions around local Ugandans' needs equated to how much money they should be compensated and the capabilities they allegedly represent. Because most of the country lives in poverty, and informal work is the norm, a job, particularly a job with a foreigner is already considered a fortunate opportunity. The precarious work environment, however, is a direct reflection of postcolonial aid state development and the devaluing of Ugandan labour. According to Tamale (2020b), the institutional apparatus that frame, use, and govern African subjects in aid state regimes continue to extract from ex-colonies and constrain economic livelihoods. Laila, connected the treatment of workers to direct perceptions of Africans when she recalled how her employer, a medical doctor, tells her when she is frustrated with her that, '*This isn't how you are supposed to work, this isn't a professional way to work, like if you have forgotten to tell her something*', and when we asked Laila, 'does your boss say anything specifically about Ugandans or Africans', she stated, '*she just says, "anyways, this is African"*'. We asked Laila, 'How does that make you feel?' and she responded, '*I don't feel good, I know I am an African but that isn't how you are supposed to tell me, sure I am an African, so, what, I am an African*'. 'So, what, I am an African' uncovers the frustration and anger felt by domestic workers who are forced to negotiate the representations of 'Africans' under perceived white epistemological authority. Mbembe

(2001, 9) describes how Western philosophical tradition 'long denied the existence of any "self" but its own' and that Africa 'stands out as the West's obsession with and circular discourses about "absence" "lack" and "non-being"'. Laila's sense of self and identity is challenged through the white epistemological gaze of the aid-state household but as we next address these narratives are also challenged.

Africanness and Blackness: the duality of Black reason

When we asked domestic workers if they thought they were treated unfairly because they were Black, Ugandan, or African they spun an internalised web where they understood their own sense of value and work ethic but in negotiation with the forces of anti-Blackness and how they thought white bosses saw them, particularly as poor and expendable. They also grappled with the entangled awareness that whites bring material opportunities through jobs, and a paternalistic benevolence of giving, but with an implied recognition that these opportunities represent global racial inequality. Hence, the duality of 'Black reason' was in motion for domestic workers (Mbembe 2017).

In interviews, domestic workers spoke of being made to feel like they were a 'useless person', 'very cheap' and whose only purpose is to meet bosses' household needs. This corresponded to sometimes degrading treatment. Barbara, who was a housekeeper in the household of a European embassy residence and contractor described humiliating work expectations from her boss:

I think the way now she normally thinks about Ugandans they are useless, they are nobody, and the rest of things because of her behavior, the way she behaves, yeah ... the lady ... who could go like for toilet, maybe even for a long call, and whatever, whether she is in her period, you find that this is a person who cannot even flush everything, then it's you to come and flush for her.

Similarly, mentioning degrading experiences at work, Elizabeth, recalled an experience where her boss said, '*Have this rubbish*', and Elizabeth was confused. She replied, '*It's rubbish, I throw it?*' and he followed with, '*It's up to you if you want it, you see something good [take it]*'. When explaining this interaction, she reiterated that he is '*considering that I'm poor, I'm a beggar ... Sometimes you feel ashamed within yourself because you feel I'm not a beggar, I'm working and I'm earning a salary I shouldn't ... receive those kind(s) of abuse word(s)*'. Barbara and Elizabeth's experiences expose how some foreign bosses regard Ugandan domestic workers as naturally fitting the representation of demeaning intimate care and as the lucky beneficiaries of white employer benevolence. Hence, postcolonial paid domestic work is an intimate form of labour where race and

gender become the axis through which the logics of colonial racial servitude are reworked (Ally 2009) by the practices of development whites (Pierre 2013) who operate within the machinery of the aid state and the new racial vernacular of development (Pierre 2020). White prestige is maintained, and whiteness is 'regrouped' (Gabay 2018, 66), by providing work defined through racialised embodied labour.

Barbara and Elizabeth, and other domestic workers struggled with reconciling their identity and sense of pride in the work they do, and the racialised construction of being perceived a 'beggar'. Gill, who worked in the household of a European military attaché for 13 years, stated.

They don't mind if our children aren't fine, for them they want you to work and they forget that for them when their family members aren't fine, they can't work ... they should know that we're also human. For example, like I go home after a year. I'm a family man, I have a wife. I have children who want to see me, and they don't allow me to bring my wife here. You see, it's something very, very disturbing.

Like Barbara, Gill is expected to always be present, always be available for his boss' needs and is made to believe his needs, his family are not as important. Gill was one of the few domestic workers interviewed that lived on-site. He goes home once a year. He has tried multiple times to get permission for his family to join him with his boss always saying, 'no'. Gill, further stated *'I'm the manager of his home. I'm the manager of his life. I'm the manager of everything'*, but the professionalism, skill, and empathy he brings to his job in his view is not reciprocated. The 'ambiguity of intimacy' at work that minimised Gill's skill and familial needs structures what Ally (2009, 98) describes as domestic work's 'unique architecture of dependence and exploitation'. Moreover, white bosses' material and epistemological power – where they provide jobs and presume to 'know' Ugandan domestic worker needs, capabilities, roles, and limits – sits in contrast to Ugandan domestic workers' subjective selves as hard workers, professionals, family providers, and givers. Thus, the power of postcolonial whiteness in Uganda is not only found in the realm of the material and knowledge production process but also for its impact on domestic workers' DuBoisian sense of double consciousness and the emotional labour it demands. Still domestic workers' 'Black consciousness of Blackness' counter narrative sought to attack 'the ontological assumptions' about Africa, Uganda and domestic work and laid claim to a politics and identity of care and dignity of work (Mbembe 2017, 30).

Ali's interpretation and narrative for grappling with whiteness in Uganda, particularly, unmask the complex ways whiteness is perceived and experienced and anti-Blackness is produced. Ali is a highly trained and skilled chef specialising in international cuisine. He worked at a top international hotel in Kampala before becoming the chef in the residency of the ambassador of a European embassy.

Ali arrives to work at 7 a.m. and is the sole chef expected to organise and cater embassy functions that can range from a few guests, all the way to 70, along with all family meals. Earlier in our discussion Ali spoke how he did not interact much with 'Mzungu' and that he didn't want to 'generalise', but he emphasised the positive work *Mzungu* were doing in the villages and that: *They really love Africans, they care . . . really showing caring hearts to us Africans because Africa is a poor continent, and you can't compare us to the white colour*. Ali communicates the 'good work' development whites seemingly do in Africa, the resources they have, which becomes essentialised with whiteness, while poverty is associated with Africans. Still, Ali had a difficult relationship with his former boss, the last ambassador, who often spoke in disparaging tones to him. He explained:

In my heart I said, "what did I do to this woman?" Me, I am Black. You, you're white. I'll never be ambassador. There is nothing that connects us. But I had never told her all that . . . to me that ambassador she never wanted to work with maybe Blacks that is what I can say because it was a posting in Africa, but she never liked Blacks, mainly she had hatred about Blacks.

We asked Ali how he come to this perception. He continued:

The way you can read from the body language of somebody, even if you don't tell me that I don't like you, the body language, you can tell . . . you can't come and tell me that 'I'm stinking,' those words aren't supposed to be used by a diplomat.

Ali saw and experienced the multiple performances of whiteness in Uganda: humanitarian do-gooders and perceivably racist boss who underappreciated and overworked him. Domestic workers attempted to reconcile the global worldview of whiteness and Blackness through their own lived realities where contradictions and tensions sat side-by-side. Ali, saw the power whites had in Uganda and the seemingly positive deeds they performed but he also saw how anti-Blackness shaped how he was not granted the respect, consideration, and professionalism as a highly skilled, talented, and capable chef. Therefore, post-colonial whiteness consolidates itself as simultaneously visible and invisible, shaping all spheres of structural realities for Ugandans in overt and indirect ways, but also in shaping contemporary constructions of anti-Blackness that domestic workers understood as rendering Africans as poor, bodies for work, and in need of saving. Ali, and other domestic workers, express the ideological work whiteness continues to produce but also reflect the ways they refuse to be solely defined by it even while its power shapes their lives (Tamale 2020b).

Good Mzungu?

Lastly, despite the inequities and power configurations of whiteness domestic workers articulated, the possibility or hope for a 'good *Mzungu*' emerged at the end of our focus group discussion.

Author 1: What is a good *Mzungu*? How would they treat you, what's an example of one, what would they do?

Participant 1: *A good Mzungu they'd treat you well and be honest to you, I also would be honest to a Mzungu.*

Participant 2: *A good Mzungu when you have problems he/she is there. She is standing for you. Gives you money for transport when you don't have, and you go. Very fast helping you in some little things. That's a good Mzungu.*

Participant 3: *A good Mzungu to me is a person whom we see together as family. I take him as my family him/her she takes me as family. What problem she has, I have. The problem I have they have it, and we work hand-in-hand . . . That is how I see a good Mzungu. And wouldn't fear touching you. Your skin is so good, and I don't fear touching her. That's what I call human, the way we live in Uganda.*

Participant 4: *A good Mzungu I feel like we should be like a family who cares and all both care.*

Participant 5: *A good Mzungu to me is that he/she should always be there for you whereby if he is doing something for himself . . . he is doing shopping, buying food he should also consider you in mind.*

Domestic workers' considerations of a 'good *Mzungu*' are informed by their daily needs, personal encounters, and efforts to feel respected, valued, and important in their places of work. Their hope to cultivate more personalised, familial relationships blurs employer/employee positionality but allows them to insert agency and control across a vastly unequal and racialised employment landscape that vacillates between intimacy and alienation (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001). Mbembe in conversation with Goldberg (2018) discusses how despite the history and violence of white supremacy Black communities across geographies have always attended to 'matters of care, matters of repair' as a means of countering superimposed meanings and forces of subjugation. Domestic workers within the Ugandan aid state sought to re-centre their identities of care beyond the forces of postcolonial white supremacy.

Yet, there are limits to the hopes for a 'good *Mzungu*'. As we have addressed, postcolonial whiteness is not just about individual practices and micro exchanges but about the structural global political economic arrangements that left white economic, epistemological, and institutional power lingering, shaping new practices and meanings in postcolonial African geographies. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 41) proclaims, 'the coloniality of power finds full expression in postcolonial Africa'. Individual white employers being kind and caring, nonetheless, can bring immediate material and psychological reprieve. Loftsdóttir's (2014) study interviewed Icelandic aid workers in developing countries and found that some were able to reflect on colonial history, how racialisation shaped all their interactions with locals, and how

disparagingly 'internationalists' spoke about their cook, gardener, and worker. Nonetheless, regardless of these individual self-reflections and actions, the racialised aid state model has merely evolved colonial racial institutional economic structures and discursive tropes rather than fully dismantle them. The Ugandan domestic workers must contend with the challenge of just wanting a 'good *Mzungu*' all the while white supremacy remains.

Conclusion

Drawing from Foucault, Bhabha (1998) refers to the sustaining effect of whiteness throughout the globe as the 'unsettled, disturbed form of authority that it is ... [seen in] the violence it inflicts in the process of becoming a transparent and transcendent force of authority'. Domestic workers in Uganda had to contend with whiteness' 'transparent and transcendent force of authority' as they navigated what material life was available and how they reconciled their own subjectivities vis-à-vis how they were perceived. Thus, the ubiquity of whiteness in postcolonial Uganda is everywhere, shifted but left regardless of who has political power or that an individual 'good *Mzungu*' might exist. Whiteness is left to linger as a place of power 'always somehow invisible, a tyranny of the transparent' (Bhabha 1998, 21). Whiteness' all-encompassing but translucent deception engines its command.

Domestic workers understand that because of white supremacy *Mzungu* are the economic forces and knowledge producers that dictate their realities in both direct, in-direct, conscious, and unconscious ways. Yet, they do exert agency, resistance, and a politics of care that challenges whiteness' grip. As decolonial thought and Black reason proposes, domestic workers seek to disrupt standard narratives of knowledge about themselves, about Africa, about work, and in the process exert power within the confines of white supremacy (Bhambra, Medien, and Tilley 2020; Mbembe 2001; Nyanzi 2013). In a way, domestic workers are attempting to enact their form of the decolonial African activism Tamale (2020b, 21) calls for where self-determination is reasserted, western hegemonies are decentred, interpersonal relationships are valued, and an interconnected, collective identity is pursued. Essentially, we need more studies that unpack and scale-up postcolonial whiteness across geographies and a more thorough engagement with its intersectional dimensions (Tamale 2020b). Our data analysis focused on domestic workers of the aid state, but there are many more institutions, actors, and intersectional dynamics of identity to explore (Nyanzi 2013). We also need to incorporate how through radical acts of care, repair, and decolonial activism many seek to unsettle, challenge, and drain whiteness' deep waters.

Notes

1. Mamdani (2004) addresses the importance of distinguishing between colonial constructions of 'races' versus 'ethnicities'. The facilitation of African ethnic categories, however, was also a racial phenomenon. Colonial anthropologist, D.E. Goldthorpe, assisted the demarcation and boundaries of ethnic groups in East Africa that set the foundation of how postcolonial ethnic identities manoeuvred and made claims (see Sseremba 2020).
2. See Brownbridge (2010) for a breakdown of Uganda foreign aid and debt.

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