

**'Maasainess' and Whiteness: The Ruins of Colonial 'Penetration' in Hoffman's *The White Maasai* and Budgor's *the Warrior Princess***

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**Abstract**

This paper looks at 'Maasainess' and Whiteness as binaries in constant engagement aimed to question how Whiteness is re-inscribed in Maasainess in the autobiographical genre. It explores the image of the Maasai often figured as a male warrior, a residue from the colonial intrusion into the East African region during the nineteenth century. To trace the various embodiments of this male figure and how it enhances the intersections between Maasainess and Whiteness, I focus on two autobiographies by Euro-American women: Corine Hoffman's *The White Maasai* and Budgor's *The Warrior Princess: Becoming the First Female Maasai Warrior*. Drawing from Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the contact zones and Renato Rosaldo's imperial nostalgia, the paper reads Maasainess and Whiteness as sites of cultural encounters, even contested encounters. Both Hofmann and Budgor appropriate the Maasai male warrior by way of nostalgia as a trope and double cultural signifier to embody and reflect white privilege as well as freeze the image of Africa to its colonial past. It argues that the autobiography as a tool for self-expression is employed to extend the colonial agenda to appropriate cultural spaces and entities to further perpetuate the differences between Maasainess and Whiteness as cultural markers. However, the two autobiographies read here as medium of self-expression defy such cultural appropriations through their constant engagement with Whiteness and Maasainess as categories of difference, highlighting the fault lines in the cultural appropriation of Maasainess by Whiteness.

**Keywords:**

Maasainess, Whiteness, Cultural Signifier, Cultural appropriation  
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## Introduction

The representation of the Maasai of East Africa and their culture in literary and cultural productions coincides with colonial intrusion in the region particularly in the late nineteenth century. Since then, the Maasai culture has been circulating in local and global imaginaries through the image of the Maasai male warrior. This paper reads two female autobiographies: Corinne Hoffman's (2005) *The White Maasai: My Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure* and Mindy Budgor's (2013) *The Warrior Princess: My Quest to Become the First Female Warrior*. In these two texts I am interested in the intersections between 'Maasainess' and Whiteness and how the two binaries engage each other and in questioning the autobiographical genre as a medium of self-expression which represents the residue of violence and the colonial disposition to name, possess and claim belonging in other cultures. In this regard, the paper questions the implied hegemony of whiteness to claim Maasainess not only as a means of self-expression but also as an extension of the colonial violence, which resulted in the forceful 'penetration' of East Africa often claimed as an 'Eden' for the Western world.

## Becoming Maasai: Cultural Appropriations in Hofmann's *The White Maasai*

Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) argument that travel books "gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized" situates the autobiographies read in this paper (Pratt 1992, p. 3). In addition to being a residue of nineteenth-century European travel writing, the two autobiographies are contemporary updates to the colonial library about Africa. Hofmann's *The White Maasai: My Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure* and Budgor's *Warrior Princess: My Quest to Become the First Female Maasai Warrior* appropriate the tropes of the Maasai male warrior and that of the white hunter, albeit in ways that challenge conventional gender stereotypes. The common denominator between these two writers is their point of departure, since both are tourists searching for leisure on holiday in Kenya intrigued as they are by their encounter with the Maasai, an experience that substantiates their stories. Both writers use self-narration to reconstruct their gender roles as women

in their countries of origin and demonstrate how they appropriate 'Maasainess' to make meaning of their experiences as women – in Africa, Europe, and America.

As Westerners, both women exploit the privilege granted by the leisure industry to gaze upon other people's cultures while the colonial legacy coupled with wealth affords them the audacity to transgress cultural and gender boundaries and write their individual experiences against the backdrop of the Maasai people. This assumed knowledge of self and the Other is what, according to Gurminder K. Bhambra (2007), "enables Europeans, both individually and collectively, to affirm their sense of self at the same time as making invisible the colonial order that provides the context for their 'self'-realisation" (Bhambra 2007, p. 118). As tourists, both authors operate from what Keith Hollinshead (1999) terms as "the violence-rendering rhetorical instrument of imperialism, perpetually dealing in Eurocentric accounts which tend to totalize Western/North Atlantic view as the proper account for our received pasts and our lived presents" (p. 31). Both Hofmann and Budgor rely on the colonial archive binaries inspired by the Africa and Europe divide to provide them insights essential in understanding the people they associate with in Kenya. They mirror Achebe's observations about *Heart of Darkness*: "Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book," but rather "it was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination" and "Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it" (Achebe 1989, p. 17).

Similarly, Hofmann and Budgor bring their "peculiar gifts" to the image of the Kenyan Maasai that they retrieve from colonial archives and postcolonial databases such as ethnography, tourism, and social media. The two autobiographies demonstrate their keen effort to delve into the nineteenth-century settler literature from which white female settlers who lived in Kenya produced memoirs. Such works include Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1937), Alyse Simpson's *The Land That Never Was* (1937), Beryl Markham's *West with the Night* (1942) and Elspeth Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (1959). A parallel that can be drawn here is the fact that both the settler women and the contemporary authors use the Kenyan landscape as a metonym for Africa in the Western worldview to provide a backdrop for their stories. Gillian Whitlock, in *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography* (2000), points to the

“nostalgia for imperial dominance, the strategic forgetting that this requires, and ways of relating to the ruins of colonialism in late imperial culture” (Whitlock 2000, p. 2). Whitlock reminds us that there is no new project as far as imperialism is concerned but new endeavours towards erasing the past or managing its aftermath. This concept of “imperial nostalgia,” which Renato Rosaldo invokes in his writing about how ethnographers keep returning to the ruins of what colonialism destroyed with a particular “yearning,” provides an entry point to read the two autobiographies (Rosaldo 1989, p. 107). The two authors attempt to construct their identity through ‘Maasainess’ while reconstructing their gender roles through cultural appropriation in ways that disturb their racial and gender identities. To understand the gist of their occupation, it is important to read Hofmann and Budgor against a background of the imperial project in which opportunistic designs were disguised as a divinely-inspired mission to civilize Africa.

Corinne Hofmann—a Swiss of mixed parentage, a French mother, and a German father—was born in Frauenfeld, Eastern Switzerland, the touristic Swiss Canton of Thurgau. At the age of 21, she opened a boutique where she sold bridal gowns and second-hand clothes. During a trip to Kenya in 1986 with her boyfriend Marco, Hofmann met Lketinga Leparmorijo, a Samburu-Maasai to whom she is attracted, which “annoy[s]” her boyfriend Marco, who is “embarrassed the way [Corrine is] staring so fixedly at [the] man” (Hofmann 2005, p. 3). Hofmann observes that Lketinga is “a tall, dark brown, beautiful exotic man” and “more beautiful than anyone [she had] ever seen” (Hofmann 2005, p. 2). Her desiring gaze is cast upon the Maasai body and its aesthetics, the ochre-painted half nude body of a Maasai Moran often presented for touristic consumption. She returns to Kenya in one and half years to find Lketinga, whom she marries and has a daughter with. This relationship barely lasts four years, after which she returns to Switzerland with her daughter Naripai. Hofmann writes about her life experiences in a memoir she calls *Die weisse Massai*, published in 1998, translated into English by Peter Millar as *The White Masai* in 2005. In 2007, however, the book was republished under the expanded title *The White Masai: My Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure*, with a different cover photograph of Lketinga and a small family portrait of Lketinga, Hofmann and their daughter Naripai at the bottom of the page. The subtitle of the book summarizes the two main concerns of the story, namely, romanticisation of culture and the commoditization of leisure. Even after

more than a decade, she is still showing the contrast between herself and Lketinga, evident in her subsequent book cover photos that immortalise the image of Africa through Lketinga in warrior regalia as its icon. In contrast, a portrait of Hofmann and her daughter against a European background is used for her sequel *Back from Africa. The White Maasai*, which became a four million bestseller and was consequently made into a film, *The White Masai*, starring Nina Hoss and Jacky Ido. Hofmann published other books as sequels to the first book: *Zurück aus Afrika (Back from Africa)* (2007), *Wiedersehen in Barsaloi (Reunion in Barsaloi)* (2005) and *Afrika, meine Passion (Africa, my Passion)* (all written in German and translated into English).

In a revealing illustration of Pratt's conceptualisation of contact zones as sites of cultural encounters and clashes, *The White Masai* carefully recounts Hofmann's experiences in a culture which is not her own, highlighting the differences between her and her husband. The story concludes with Hofmann's return to Switzerland after her marriage to Lketinga fails due to the couple's cultural incompatibility and Hofmann's failure to accept the man behind the aestheticized warrior image. Pratt's reflection on colonial transracial marriages is pertinent to my understanding of this postcolonial transracial marriage. Pratt (1992) observes:

While lovers challenge colonial hierarchies, in the end they acquiesce to them. Reciprocity is irrelevant. Such is the lesson to be learned from the colonial love stories, in whose denouements the 'cultural harmony through romance' always breaks down. Whether love turns out to be requited or not, whether the colonized lover is female or male, outcomes seem to be roughly the same: the lovers are separate, the European reabsorbed by Europe, the non-European dies an early death. (p. 97)

I quote Pratt in extenso here because she encapsulates the tragicomedy of transracial marriages. These marriages, Pratt notes, begin from a point of transgression of the normalised assumptions of racial inequality while the end is a double tragedy, featuring both the death of romance and its history. The death, even if metaphorical, implies complete erasure of this history from the European lover. These ideas illuminate my reading of Hofmann who terminates her relationship with Marco, her Swiss boyfriend, so that she can marry Lketinga, a Maasai from Barsaloi. Hofmann's marriage to Lketinga predictably experiences the diminution of the initial romance, which blinded her to their cultural differences. Hofmann's decision to

marry a black man and a Maasai at that subverts at least two important beliefs of white supremacy: Hofmann is not concerned with colonial notions of racial purity which led to the excessive policing of women nor is she afraid of the black peril which kept women under domestic confinement as Ann Stoler accounts (Stoler 2002, pp. 59-61). Colonially, as Stoler points out, "European women in Kenya in the 1920s were dissuaded from staying alone on their homestead and discouraged by rumours of rape from taking up farming on their own" (Stoler 2002, p. 60).

European male characters, in contrast, are not prohibited from having concubines and their sexual abuse of non-Europeans of both sexes was not punishable by law. Hofmann, a woman on her own, gave up her privileges as a white middle-class woman to venture into the African savannah for "romance and adventure." Although an autobiography is a collection of personal stories, Hofmann's story only begins in Kenya without necessary flashbacks to her point of origin, except for her few trips back to Switzerland. According to Whitlock, an autobiographer like Hofmann deliberately "manoeuvre[s] for [her] public; for the privilege of addressing the reader about her life" among the Samburu in Barsaloi (Whitlock 2000, p. 3). Hofmann's marriage to Lketinga is not an exception from earlier imperial undertakings, interracial marriage being the best symbol, because "in each case these establishments were always tenuous and doomed to wither and fail; yet each preserved in autobiography, where they remain potent" (Whitlock 2000, p. 117).

Hofmann, in her touristic venture, performs an inversion of the notion of erotic pursuit as a hunt in which the male is the hunter and the woman the prey in her relationship with Lketinga. She assumes the conventionally masculine role by feminizing him as a beautiful, desirable object to be captured and consumed. While walking with her boyfriend Marco, she sees a Maasai man whom she describes as "a tall, dark brown, beautiful exotic man" (Hofmann 2005, p. 2). This scene is also a deeply racialized event in which the male object of the gaze is eroticised. Lketinga, the Maasai warrior and tourist object, is available for consumption by tourists like Hofmann who can afford to 'consume' Africa at their own expense. These tourists articulate and pursue desire in ways that are not available to Maasai men, whose travels to Europe and America are financed by well-wishers; and for whom this consumption of exotic European or American women is not on

the agenda in a similarly uncomplicated manner. Hofmann describes Lketinga as an eroticized version of the masculine warrior rendered in a way that subverts the military warrior image of the Maasai. Her desiring gaze is reminiscent of the white hunter's; she desires and 'hunts' this beautiful man; tracking him down to his home. Hofmann appropriates the colonial male gaze and uses it to satiate her obsessive desire for the Maasai man. Keith Hollinshead, in another context, describes "globe-consuming Western travellers" who "carried with them the dominant psychological features of the developed urban-industrial world and the accordant privilege to recognize/identify/position things in the world" (Hollinshead 1999, p. 31). Hofmann exercises this "privilege," by appropriating Maasai culture to produce a series of narratives from which she builds a globally recognised career as a writer and memoirist.

Hofmann's rhetoric is a familiar one, and the para-textual elements of her book suggest a canny awareness of how autobiographical travel writing of the confessional kind taps from the colonial archive and feeds into the tourist market. Recent works on tourism and post-colonialism continue to expose the decadence inherent in the tourist industry. The title of her autobiography and the cover photo lead the reader towards the dichotomy between 'Maasainess' and whiteness as categories of difference. The 2007 English edition title, *The White Masai: My Exotic Tale of Love and Adventure*, invokes the contrast between being white and being Maasai but also the appropriation of the term 'Masai' in coining Hofmann's new identity which is iconic in representing Africa and 'Maasainess' as an identity that can be self-assigned at will. This juxtaposition of the words 'White' and 'Masai' is both strange and familiar, especially when Hofmann situates 'whiteness' and 'Maasainess' in relation to terms such as 'exotic' and 'adventure.' Hofmann's autobiography elaborates on what Graham Huggan describes as "aesthetic perception" (Huggan 2001, p. 13). For Huggan, "exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic perception - one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery" (Huggan 2001, p. 13). Although 'exotic' to Hofmann and her boyfriend, the image of the Maasai is familiar to both and what they see only affirms pre-existing knowledge about the Maasai. This admixture is best described, in Huggan's words, as a "semiotic circuit that oscillates between the opposite poles of strangeness and familiarity" (Huggan 2001,

p. 13). It is this perception of the Maasai as 'exotic' and part of an African adventure that informs Hofmann's pursuit of marriage to Lketinga.

Hofmann's description of their arrival in Kenya employs the usual touristic tropes: "wonderful warm tropical air [which] embraces us the minute we land at Mombasa Airport" where she "already [...] feel[s] in [her] bones that this is [her] country"; she declares, "I'm going to be at home here" because "the extraordinary atmosphere works its magic only on me" (Hofmann 2001, p. 1). The narrator's romantic view of Africa as a place of homecoming is a familiar one, but her boyfriend Marco's interjecting voice provides a counterpoint when he says, "this place stinks!" (Hofmann 2001, p. 1). This expression of repulsion contradicts the touristic recital of romantic fantasy about African landscapes, which may be approximating the romance of previous colonial women travellers' first encounters in Africa. The same voice interrupts Hofmann's daydreaming, reminding her to be vigilant against "that Maasai, for they steal from tourists" (Hofmann 2001, p. 2). Marco's warning represents a prevalent view of Africa as a dangerous, dirty, and uncivilized place that, paradoxically, coincides with the exoticization of its peoples and landscapes. These sentiments also reveal the tension that existed between the Whiteman and the black African male.

The exploitation of the African landscape and its people as the canvas upon which Western subjects re-inscribe and construct their personal identities is clear in Hofmann's deployment of Africa to justify her presence in it. She narrates, "My thoughts are with the Maasai [sic] who has somehow lodged himself in my head" (Hofmann 2005, p. 3). Hofmann's framing here points to Africa's complicity in its exploitation (in this case represented by the Maasai who lodges himself in the white woman's mind). This romantic imagination of the African landscape through a "beautiful" Maasai warrior is undercut by Marco, the narrator's boyfriend, critic, and judge, who reminds the narrator to "pull [herself] together" because this romantic imagination of Africa is intertwined with a reality of being African and living in Africa (Hofmann 2005, p.3). Marco represents Western epistemologies presented as navigational shorthand to the tourists before they come to Africa and during their stay. Therefore, when Hofmann accuses Marco of blocking her view, she can be read as symbolically saying that her European understanding of Africa corrupts her vision and ability to gaze at African beauty.



Kenya, as a country which is representative of the image of the African landscape and culture, fails to embody the Maasai image in any meaningful way. Instead of emphasizing the connection between the Maasai image and the Maasai people, governments celebrate this detached state to foster what Noel B Salazar calls the "tourismification" of people. "Tourismification" is Salazar's coinage out of the word "touristification" which he adopts from Ning Wang. Salazar coins "tourismification" because, he argues, "it is not the mere presence of tourists that is shaping this phenomenon but, rather, the ensemble of actors and processes that constitute tourism as a whole" (Salazar 2015, p. 49). These factors may include comments, attitudes and certain performances or simply gestures by either tourists or the people in tourist destinations. In the following examples, Hofmann receives advice and information which frame the image of the Maasai in a negative light without her asking for any. The driver who takes Hofmann and other tourists into the Maasai Mara tells the tourists that the Maasai are "the last uncivilized people in Kenya" and a taxi driver from the airport tells Hofmann that the Maasai are "a primitive race" (Hofmann 2005, pp. 5, 112). The immigration officials discourage Hofmann from bothering to take Lketinga to Switzerland unless she ensures he "learns how to put on proper civilised clothes" with "a guarantee of one thousand Swiss francs" plus Lketinga's "return ticket has to be purchased upfront" (Hofmann 2005, p. 30). Hofmann, as a tourist, eagerly wants to maintain Lketinga's 'Maasainess' displayed through what she calls "exotic apparel" (Hofmann 2005, p. 30). But Ursula, a German woman married to a Maasai, warns Hofmann against marrying Lketinga, because a Maasai who "[has] never been to school, can't read or write and barely speaks English" will be at odds with "the Swiss obsession with perfection" (Hofmann 2005, p. 30). Ursula's lecture lands on deaf ears and is resisted by Hofmann's strong will to transgress cultural borders. In fact, it is Hofmann who is "disappointed" with Ursula's husband who "looks like a 'normal black'" with no "jewellery or traditional clothing" (Hofmann 2005, p. 30).

Hofmann's romantic obsession with what she believes to be authentic 'Maasainess' results from nostalgia, or what Rosaldo in a different context calls "innocent yearning" for traditional ways of living (Rosaldo 1989, p. 108). Hofmann's admiration of Lketinga is transgressive but strangely limited to the superficial touristic desires played out in Kenya and other touristic destinations. After observing responses to Lketinga in Nairobi, she finally concedes that it may have been unwise to relocate with him to

Switzerland: “Here in Nairobi even the natives give Lketinga strange looks: some laughing, some respectful. He doesn’t fit into this hectic modern city. When I realize that, I’m glad the passport didn’t work out” (Hofmann 2005, p. 63). Yet, Hofmann’s dismissal of Ursula’s husband as ‘a normal black’ without a trace of the exotic, underscores her objectification of Lketinga as a touristic product, consequently providing pleasure by its ability to remain “exotically authentic” in its natural environment.

The inclusion of photographs in the autobiography grants Hofmann authority over the Maasai identity which she appropriates as her own to lend her story some sense of ‘authenticity.’ The photographs are carefully selected to represent a particular image of the Maasai and Africa, images which call for the viewer’s sympathy for both Hofmann and the Maasai. Sverker Finnstrom’s observation “that local populations must not be reduced to passive objects of cultural formation” is useful in this context (Hall & Tucker 2004, p. 16). In all her books, Hofmann displays photos she took with Lketinga in his traditional Maasai attire with jewellery, while others portray Lketinga’s mother with her grandchildren in ragged clothing.

The exoticisation of the Maasai and Kenya by the white tourist is apparent in Hofmann’s visual and textual lexicon as she describes people and the landscape. Regardless of her self-assigned belonging in Kenya, she feels “in total darkness” to which she is called to bring light, by “a dark voice” from a “beautiful exotic man” with an “exotic smell” from the most “primitive race” and “the last uncivilized people in Kenya”; who often “steal” from tourists but are “more beautiful than anyone ever seen” (Hofmann 2005, pp. 2, 3, 5, 112). Hofmann’s voice constantly asserts the touristic, romantic yet paradoxical view of Africa prevalent in the jargon of the tourism industry.

Hofmann appropriates a space and an identity that give her the power to defy obligations imposed by her German-Swiss upbringing. Although Kenya and Lketinga will not grant her the freedom she is seeking, she nevertheless uses this opportunity to break from Marco and familial obligations ahead of her: “I think of myself as a full-time businesswoman and am actively looking for a second shop, in Bern, I hardly have time for thoughts of weddings or children” (Hofmann 2005, p. 4). Like the settler women of the twentieth century “in their most compelling and seductive formulation, *Out of Africa*, Kenya is represented as a place of freedom and

regeneration, an Edenic place in opposition to the constraints and social, cultural and economic exhaustion of Europe" (Whitlock 2000, p. 122). As a businesswoman, Hofmann seems to be empowered and yet fuelled by a materialistic drive that prevents her from committing to Marco, for a possible family. However, the excitement of an exotic life in Africa is enough to make her sacrifice a few years to live among the Samburu-Maasai, in search of freedom, a lost nobility and an authentic self; but the search ends in disenchantment.

White privilege allows Hofmann to invade spaces from which she is otherwise uninvited. Kenya's social and political landscapes continually allow a replay of the colonial history, where people from the global North come and occupy different spaces. According to Whitlock, "Kenya, in particular the area known as the White Highlands, presents an environment that is ripe for European fantasy" (Whitlock 2000, p. 113). Hofmann loves Kenya, embodied in the Maasai, and cannot help but fall in love with Africa which she calls her passion in her most recent book, *Africa My Passion*. Hofmann appropriates a conventionally male status, that of the male white hunter, by leaving Europe to come and conquer Africa through the Maasai male warrior. Consequently, Hofmann's autobiographical representation and the identity she acquires becomes an act of cultural appropriation. Hofmann's appropriation is both actual and metaphorical in that she desires a male warrior and marries one.

Even though I argue that Hofmann's decision is transgressive of racial separation though reiterative of racial inequality, I critique her fetishization of the warrior body as a desirable erotic site ideal for consumption. Hofmann's metaphorical consumption of the warrior image features in her identity reconstruction when she asserts herself as "The White Maasai." In what follows, I turn to discuss *Warrior Princess: My Quest to Become the First Female Maasai Warrior* to show how Mindy Budgor appropriates Maasai identity as a way of intervening in imposed gender roles supposedly on behalf of Maasai women; only to end up reaffirming her own voice and femininity because of her failure to fully appreciate the Maasai cultural logics, thanks to the uncritical use of Western cultural epistemologies in the Maasai context.

***Gender Reconstructions in Budgor's Warrior Princess***

Mindy Budgor, a Jewish-American woman, and a graduate of Chicago Booth School of Business started her first business while doing her undergraduate studies at the University of Wisconsin. Having ambitious parents, Budgor is restless while waiting to hear from various graduate schools after her first degree. Her trip to Kenya with a group of volunteers opens an opportunity for her to do what she wants to do in her life and an escape from the "fire" that her parents constantly "breath[e] down her neck," as she mentions in the autobiography's blurb. Budgor escapes from a patriarchal Jewish father, and a mother and a grandmother who subtly translate patriarchal demands to their daughter, emphasizing the need for challenging work and maintaining an appealing shape necessary for attracting a good husband. Budgor's life account begins with her experience of her formative years, as an assertive girl despite her parents' and school's attempts to shape her in a particular way. For her, Kenya becomes a breathing space away from the suffocating atmosphere of a conservative Jewish family.

Although Budgor is privileged to have a degree and an opportunity to apply for another, she is equally under pressure to fit into a patriarchal male-dominated world. Budgor's story reflects a capitalist society in which consumerism is the norm. She confesses to being obsessed with designers' products such as Gucci, Chanel, Manolo Blahnik and Under Armor (Budgor 9, 48). Budgor persuades Under Armor, a clothing designer, to fund her warrior-training excursion under the pretext of helping the company to market their products. In her letters to Mr. Plank, the company's CEO, Budgor attempts to demonstrate the durability of Under Armor clothes against the harsh environment of the African Savanna (Budgor 265-273). Budgor chooses to spend three months in the "Forest of the Lost Child" among Maasai warriors who train her to become a warrior. This expedition gives her two kinds of agency which serve two different pragmatic purposes: one is "to help give Maasai women a much-deserved voice in their tribe" and the other "to develop and listen to [her] own voice" (Budgor 2013, p. xii). It is in her prologue that Budgor presents this information which in turn becomes a threshold into the text. She emphasizes the fact that she needed to find her voice first before she could speak for others, hence her decision to relegate the Maasai woman's plight to a secondary mission. In this section, I demonstrate how Budgor's two-fold purpose

becomes futile because of the abuse of her white privilege to appropriate other people's values while dismissing the need to recognize the agency of these people in influencing their own change.

The desire for the reconstruction of self through the agency to exercise one's voice and power over one's life further justifies Budgor's decision to write an autobiography through which she gets to speak and manipulate her story rather than any other form of narrative. In an oral interview with the BBC host of the "Meet the Author" show, Nick Higham, Budgor emphasises that her parents imposed on her career paths and choices that she could not pursue. She resists ballet classes "at age five" through "bulldozing" other children (Budgor 2013, p. 3). She chose to study Entrepreneurship instead of Medicine and quits skating for hockey (Budgor 2013 pp. 2, 3). Budgor's determination to find her own voice over her life made her travel to Kenya where she volunteers in building a clinic in Loita, a Maasai area. Her story reveals a struggle to fashion selfhood in a society where women's rights are known but capitalism creates room for alternative patterns of female subjection. To achieve this goal, Budgor appropriates the Maasai warrior trope to show how women can also exercise resilience and intrepidity. However, she uses her agency as a white middle-class American to speak for the Maasai woman without a full comprehension of the cultural predicaments of Maasai women.

Budgor's mission to empower Maasai women is evocative of Western feminists and humanitarians' views about Africa. These well-meaning individuals often miscalculate the problems facing African people or they tend to address them in the wrong order of priority. Nwankwo's (2005) essay, "Parallax Sightlines: Alice Walker's Sisterhood and the Key to Dreams" in which she discusses Alice Walker's film and book *Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women* offers interesting pointers for my discussion here. Nwankwo reads Walker's work as an example of Western feminists who, without understanding the problems and contexts of their African sisters, "claim to be the key to dreams" (Nwankwo 2005, p. 220). Using words from Tchicaya U Tamsi's poem "Agony," "there is no better key to dreams than my name sang a bird," Nwankwo ironizes the appropriative agency of the Western feminists to African problems as "parallax sightlines" and not the only "key to dreams" of African women's problems (Nwankwo 2005, p. 219). Nwankwo (2005) argues:

Western feminism, like the bird in U Tamsi's poem, which claims that no one else has a 'better key to dreams,' exercises in its methods, practices, and vision a similar claim, no whit different from the patriarchal structures which it fights or claims to differ from. ... Imperialism and Western feminism share the same ancestry, the same pedigree. (p. 220)

Nwankwo's essay is instructive in understanding Budgor's appropriation of the warrior trope to assert her voice while claiming to help the Maasai women. Her appropriation of Maasai or what she assumes to be Maasai women's predicament – their exclusion from initiation into warrior-hood – raises questions about her motive. Budgor's claim to bring empowerment to the Maasai women is highly suspicious given her own need to battle with Western patriarchy and the forces of late capitalism; and her obliviousness of the possibility of solidarity with Maasai women as fellow victims of patriarchy. Although she won the childhood battles of what she would do for recreation and what she should study until the age of 27, Budgor is still under the authority of her parents. Her mother, anxious over her idle time, tells her: "I've been telling you to go to New York, [...] everyone is thin and there are tons of smart, single Jewish men" (Budgor 2013, p. 8). Budgor reveals further that her mother "wants the best for [her] – it's just that a twenty-seven-inch waistline and a Jewish husband define 'the best'" (Budgor 2013, p. 8). Budgor's society is imposing patriarchal obligations upon its youth, denying them agency. These obligations are often undergirded by capitalist motives, framed as values of a modern society, where demanding work determines success and the ability to acquire material wealth defines one's integrity. Contrastingly, Budgor and other social captives of Western capitalist societies find an escape through Safari, a journey in search for freedom although camouflaged by the romance of packages such as holidays and volunteer missions. Consequently, the new generation of capitalist society becomes even more individualistic, as manifested through their excessive consumerism – for example Budgor's 'cultural consumerism' in her attempt to construct her 'selfhood.'

The relationship between Western patriarchy/imperialism and Western feminism becomes obvious through Budgor's obsessive American consumerism which translates into cultural consumerism. Budgor demonstrates this kind of consumption in her autobiography through the appropriation of the 'Maasai warrior' trope for her personal purposes. Her

search for voice and individual agency allows her to draw connections between materialism and the need to work more, which results in consumerism where the absurdity of capitalism becomes obvious. Budgor discovers this relationship through her grandmother, Queen Lee, whose “concern for [Budgor]” has “a direct correlation” with her “accessory count” (Budgor 2013, p. 9). Budgor gets her insight when her grandmother summons her “for a lecture on finances.” Queen Lee “was wearing rings on both hands and a tightly tied scarf around her neck” (Budgor 2013, p. 9). Budgor observes that, “the more worked up she got, the more embellishments were added” (Budgor 2013, p. 9). Budgor’s grandmother could be demonstrating to her the need to have more than what one could spend but her own consumerism defeats the purpose of what she is trying to model. It is the same grandmother who later endorses her trip to Kenya. In Kenya, Budgor attempts to live a life free from consumerism which becomes futile because she cannot survive in the warrior camp without her nail polish. The cover photo of her book displays the obvious contrast between the princess and the warrior in her title. Budgor’s well-manicured nails, polished with the “Chanel Red Dragon” polish she took to the bush, expose the paradox that this mission constitutes (Budgor 2013, pp. 107, 146). Her hand displays the excess of her embellishments such as a gold bangle and a bracelet of pearls with two beaded Maasai bracelets usually worn by men. In this same hand, Budgor holds a spear, which is emblematic of warrior-hood. Instead of bringing balance the title of the autobiography fragments the narrative further by showing how impossible it is for an American fashion-obsessed middle-class woman to become a Maasai warrior.

Budgor fails all the tests that would have made her at home with the Maasai. She finds the tea, sour milk, and mutton soup highly nauseating (Budgor 2013, p. 117). She vomits at her first attempts to eat these meals. Becca, her companion, on the other hand, seems to be at home and less ambitious yet willing to learn from their experience. Budgor’s nausea symbolizes her repulsion at Maasai ways, from food to gender roles and rituals. Her mission, expedition and vision can only be read as a perpetuation of cultural consumerism inherent in Western capitalist societies. As a ‘warrior’ training in the bush, she refuses to cut her hair, thus her claim to become a warrior is reduced into her abstinence from her chocolate indulgence, her restraint from using the phone and her courage to sleep in the bush without the fear of being raped by her male comrades.

Her efforts to construct an independent identity beyond capitalist America become futile because she ends up enacting her societal values through self-centeredness, charity works, obsession with fashion and even the ballet girl syndrome which she resists but manifests in the title as 'princess.'

The discrepancy between Budgor's knowledge of the Maasai woman and what she does in the bush reveals the self-imposing character of Western sympathisers. Nwankwo comments on Walker's shock when asked to buy a refrigerated truck for the women where she was filming *Warrior Marks*, a request she declines. As Nwankwo notes, "what is clear again here is the gulf between the quotidian needs of the African woman and the culturally distant issues peddled to these women by Walker and her global sisters" (Nwankwo 2005, p. 233). This rift between real problems and cultural sentimentalities is present in Budgor's text. Budgor, like Walker, appropriates warrior-hood for her own purposes at the expense of poor African women who have more urgent problems than a desire to become warriors. However, Budgor's knowledge of 'being Maasai' is limited to becoming a male warrior. Although this is the most readily available text for her, as an outsider, she had an opportunity to gain experience about who the Maasai woman is and what her challenges are.

Her failure to initiate a process of cultural translation makes her a cultural hawker who simply appropriates cultural values and assigns them utility values, even out of their context. Like the British colonizers, Budgor fails to comprehend "the centrality of women to pastoralist production and their deep pride in their identity as semi-nomadic pastoralists" (Hodgson 1999, p. 130). Budgor too is "fixated, even obsessed with what [the British] perceived as the proud, handsome Maasai warriors" (Hodgson 1999, p. 130). Of course, the Maasai woman needs empowerment but not to attain warrior status or get designer underclothes (Budgor 2013, p. 269). There are other pertinent issues such as more access to education and maternal healthcare. This tailor-made warrior training is specifically rendered to Budgor's own project of self-making. She is simply using the warrior as a trope to create a marketing brand for Under Armor clothes, an opportunity she is constantly pursuing through her letters to Mr. Plank while in the 'bush' (Budgor 2013, p. 270). Budgor uses the Maasai as a commercial brand the same way other Western multi-billion companies use the Maasai name to market their products. Western fashion houses like Louis Vuitton, Calvin



Klein, and Ralph Lauren have used the Maasai to brand their products. Ron Layton, a New Zealander copyright, and patents specialist is advocating for the trademarking of the Maasai name (see [ippmedia.com](http://ippmedia.com)). Unfortunately, Budgor is too naïve to realise that the Maasai women in question may not be interested in Under Armor clothes or any designer clothing no matter how resistant they are to the tropical weather. In a bid to convince Mr Plank of the reliability of their brand's new market, Budgor writes, "people in Africa are now not only beginning to be interested in athletic apparel, but they are specifically asking to be Armoured!" adding, "the backdrop of the forest and the warriors provides a plethora of perfect places for an Under Armour ad campaign" (Budgor 2013, p. 270). Budgor's warrior excursion is inspired by her own desire to find meaning in life, to reconstruct herself as an empowered woman who can make brave decisions. Like her colonial antecedents, Budgor makes Africa her dreamland where she can attain what she could not in the West. Commenting on Budgor's autobiography, in an article titled "Review for Warrior Princess" Sarah Abdelrahim, who writes for *Voices for Biodiversity*, an affiliate of the National Geographic Society, argues that "not knowing much about the Maasai at first, she resolved to make a statement to the tribe's [ethnic] women" (Abdelrahim 2015, n.p.). Budgor's lack of knowledge about the Maasai may explain her self-indulgent 'intervention' plan. If she had no knowledge of this community and what was at stake, there were no grounds for her intervention. It becomes difficult to differentiate Budgor's intervention from other disingenuous projects camouflaged through donor aids and projects, which do not immediately address the needs of the community involved.

Yet, these donor aided projects could be running for at least five years down the line, relieving Europe and America of excessive unemployment numbers by dispatching "experts" as part of the 'aid' package. That Budgor decided that through her intervention Maasai women "could become warriors, too, but without first ascertaining whether or not there were any Maasai women who wanted to make the transition" (Abdelrahim 2015, n.p.) is unmistakable evidence of the author's naivety. Budgor simply vulgarizes the concept of warrior-hood without an informed understanding of why only male Maasai train as warriors. It is not possible to separate Budgor's race, class, and gender from her self-imposed mission. Through the autobiography, she finds her own voice within her family and the American society through Maasai culture. While she can identify the

aspects of the capitalist culture which exploit a woman, as a consumer of its goods and provider of its labour; she fails to become self-reflexive to see herself as complicit in what she is trying to oppose. Budgor's materialistic desires make her sight "parallax," to use Nwankwo's words; like Queen Lee, she cannot see her complicity with what she is attempting to fight against. Budgor's narrative suggests a capitalistic appropriation of the warrior traits such as resilience that she mistakes for male privilege within the Maasai society. In a claim to help Maasai women fulfil a desire to become warriors, Budgor reconstructs her own self as a resilient white woman who transgresses borders of gender and race to assert her voice. My argument is that while Maasai male autobiographers who are indeed warriors themselves consciously challenge the stereotypical imaging of the Maasai as warrior, the two women recirculate and exploit this stereotype.

### **Conclusion**

Both autobiographies demonstrate new ways through which empire relates to its former colonies. Tourism, as it is evident in the discussion, has become a new conduit through which the West imposes itself on other people and places. Although tourism is an incentive to developing economies and offers new horizons of celebrating cultural heritage, it simultaneously mediates the commodification of cultural heritage. The Maasai in East Africa have a peculiar association with the Western fascination for traditional cultures. As is evident in the discussion on the two autobiographies, the Maasai attract intimate attention from white women coupled with volunteers keen to improve their lives but ending up commoditizing them and using their culture for various self-making projects. The autobiographies invoke new ways of interrogating white privilege as the narratives reveal the vulnerability of the Western society and how Africa in their view seems to be the "saviour" rather than the one in need of a "saviour." Moreover, as a tool of self-narration, autobiography as a genre has given the two women the ability to construct their selfhood and challenge notions of female domesticity embedded in both Western and African societies. Both Hofmann and Budgor rely heavily on the colonial archive to inform their understanding of Africa to re-inscribe themselves into Kenya and they use photography as a tool to contribute to a new archive of Western ideologies of Africa which continue to freeze the image of Africa. Through their written and photographic portrayal, both

autobiographies continue to privilege the Maasai male through foregrounding the 'warrior' as a trope symbolic of the ideal human, in the case of Budgor, and the ideal male, in the case of Hofmann.

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