

## Under White Men's Eyes

*Racialized Eroticism, Ethnographic Encounters,  
and the Maintenance of the Colonial Order*

My mother used to say that the black woman is the white man's mule and the white woman is his dog. Now, she said that to say this: we do the heavy work and get beat whether we do it well or not. But the white woman is closer to the master and he pats them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain' gon' treat neither one like he was dealing with a person.

—Interview with Nancy White

- 1 A white American man says to me, "You know, they [African men] only want to fuck you because they hate you." I think but do not say, "No. They want to fuck me because they hate you."<sup>1</sup>
- 2 My boyfriend, a black American man, asks me to talk to him during our intimate moments about the racial implications of our union, about our bodies. He wants to generate and amplify the idea that my body should not belong to him, that in giving in to him, in giving myself to him, I am defying the social order. He says that he craves these ideas; they make him feel powerful and strong.

- 3 Discussing erotic subjectivity in my graduate seminar, the class is split on the idea of ethics. “Fucking for facts,” one student calls it. “It’s ethical only if you marry the person,” says another. “But somebody gave you a grant, you’re obligated to be professional.” “There’s always a power imbalance.” “Love is love, it doesn’t matter where you are.” “It depends if you are a man or a woman.” “You can’t count out the idea of race.” “How do you know if they want you for you?”
- 4 I organize a panel addressing erotic subjectivity at a professional conference. My home discipline, ethnomusicology, has historically been reluctant to engage fully with the subject of erotic subjectivity. On this panel, six female ethnomusicologists speak frankly about the ways that race and sexuality have structured their ethnographic work, writing, and institutional experiences. It was a gratifying intellectual experience for me that was somewhat dampened by a few male colleagues whose thoughts demonstrate why these conversations are difficult to have in the first place. Two white male colleagues say that they feel marginalized by our conversation because they cannot immediately relate to those experiences, and suggest that the topic is unnecessary. One man criticizes my personal story for the details I include, and those that I don’t; he suggests that I was both promiscuous and deceptive.

Later, I reflect upon each of these moments and the histories they represent: The white man believed that hate fuels the intimacy and arousal between African men and white women. That the history of colonialism has been so thoroughly internalized that there is no room left for emotional, physical, or spiritual union apart from the web of violence that comprises the discourse of the black sexualized body.

My black American boyfriend was strengthened in emotional and sexual power by the idea of our difference, a difference structured by the histories that have regulated my body and his. By breaking through those histories, or confronting them through direct engagement, a kind of balance is restored for him and a corrective narrative emerges in which he has agency to name and define.

The students struggle with institutional legitimacy, the discourse of power imbalance that they have inherited from anthropology classes and fieldwork ethics. A part of them want direct answers about what they should do, what they can write about, and what people will think. They recognize that there are complicated answers to complicated questions, and they know that they too will be theorizing these issues as they process them

through their ethnographic encounters. They point to the constraints both professional and personal of intimate encounter, and how to situate those experiences within our work. They rightly point out that it matters, in fact is crucial, how one's gender, sexuality, and race intersect in these conversations. It matters, indeed, not only how we see ourselves but also how the world—comprised of located culturally intelligible lenses—interprets our bodies.

Thinking about negative or critical responses to a professional presentation is useful insofar as it provides an opportunity to examine the context into which we are speaking. Some forms of critique are valuable, obviously, and others reveal more about the critic and the discipline than anything else. But taken beyond the context of an isolated criticism, we can see that particularly when these criticisms rely upon tactics of shaming or accusation, they represent a history of determining whose experiences are given priority and value within the field. I considered our panel successful not only because of the conversations that were had during the discussion but also because many people came to me throughout the week to share similar experiences and thoughts on our topic. However, the response from those colleagues, and my initial reaction to them, showed me how one becomes trampled by voices that do not edit themselves, who feel entitled to the priority of their experience and knowledge, and who will call upon gendered forms of criticism to shame and silence dissent.

Taken alone, each one of these moments and my reflection upon them represents a historical conflict, institutional parameters both of educational possibilities and of intellectual freedom, and the imagination of bodies and of intimacy. However, they represent somewhat myopic perspectives of the spectrum of arousal and desire that occurs between people. They offer no insight into the power exchange of sexual encounter, or the histories that individuals bring into their sexual lives. And they offer no resolution to the questions of individual subjectivity within these narratives. Within these moments, people are reduced, *products of these histories*, rather than agents within them. We become comprised entirely of discourse—figurines acting out historical scenes of violence. And we are confined in the ways that we can speak back to this discourse. In order to make these moments productive, they need to be set in dialogue with each other.

These configurations lead to some specific questions about the connections between the racialized sexualized subject, intimate encounter, and ethnography. In particular, for me, questions arise about the connections between ethnomusicology, ethnography, and ethnopornography. For in-

stance, what methodological overlap can be found in the history of ethnomusicology as a discipline and the circulating imagination of the encountered Other? What disciplinary mechanisms enable the continued neglect of these histories and the erasure of counternarratives? As I will discuss later, there is disciplinary anxiety about the erotic when it is manifested in intimacy or desire. This anxiety runs counter to the methodological imperative of the ethnographic encounter, such that the disjuncture reproduces specific power hierarchies that have developed alongside and within ethnomusicological thought and method. These reproduced power hierarchies have the effect of silencing dissent, amplifying dismissive voices, and generating ethnographic methodologies that embolden those who benefit from such imbalance.

In analytical terms, how can we best situate the overlapping categories of body, self, and the context through which those realities become manifest? When my black American boyfriend focuses in on racial difference as a means to arousal he is choosing to activate the historical narratives that have defined our bodies, and in doing so reimagines his position of power vis-à-vis those narratives. In order to situate this example, it is crucial not to generalize and give the impression that all black men fantasize along these terms. Such a generalization is both violent and reductive, and serves no purpose here. While I think that performing the theater of dominance and subjugation through those terms might serve as a relief, for him, even temporarily, from a state of aggression that characterizes daily life in a hostile racial environment, it does not mean that that performance is neutral or meaningless. I'm going to avoid an individualized psychological portrait of this man because I think the specifics of his needs and situation are not necessarily instructive in elucidating the psychosexual dynamics that drive such a performance. I think, too, that they are not unique, but rather representative of particular types of sexual encounters. I hope that in using such an example, the ways that the racialized body is eroticized will become more evident, as will the circumstances through which the body shapes our experience of subjective consciousness. I'd also like to point out that in this relationship, although not in every relationship, these moments did not define the union; they were isolated performances. I think that characterizing them as theatrical is useful because they existed apart from both daily experience and moments of intimacy that felt more closely tied to other areas of psychosexual connection.

It can be challenging to have these conversations for a number of reasons, primarily for me because the way that my body is understood as both racialized and sexualized is not only always shifting over time and context

but also changes from encounter to encounter. Focusing in specifically on my ethnographic experiences in West Africa from 2008 to 2017 will locate the frame of my analysis quite a bit, but there are myriad factors that simply cannot all be attended to here. What is represented here is really my perception of the context through which race and sexuality become meaningful aspects of ethnographic research rather than a precise account of all the possibilities of what other people thought and felt. People clearly do not necessarily articulate around race in every encounter, though it is still an important quality of the experience.

In this chapter I explore the erotic as a framework of analysis through an account of a few experiences conducting field research on the north-western border of Ghana and Burkina Faso. I interrogate how the explorations of the erotic body, the lived realities of desiring and being desired, and the practices that surround the gendered, racialized, sexualized subject shed light on anthropological knowledge. Although race and sexuality are a meaningful aspect of all ethnography, I prioritize a discussion of encounter between white women and black men in Africa because I am proceeding from my own subjective consciousness and experience. Additionally, generalizations about race and gender offer much less analytical fruit than located and specific case studies, though there are certainly broader implications to be drawn from such examples. Furthermore, the ethnopornographic gaze is already crafted through white heterosexual patriarchal machinery, making corrective accounts more necessary. Finally, the social construction of black men and white women is animated uniquely by such a gaze, and is a source of anxiety in very particular ways.

I begin with an examination of erotic subjectivity as it has been discussed in anthropology, pointing in particular to areas in which I plan to intervene. I then offer thoughts on two types of ethnographic encounter: one of violence/subjugation and one of desire/love. I choose these broad categories of analysis because I think that the borders between viewing and surveillance, desiring and objectifying, and being desired and being observed, are barbed and irregular, particularly as we negotiate the cultural expectations inherent in ethnographic work. In fact, the relationship between these encounters should highlight the proximity between what is pleasing and empowering, and what is prohibitive and violent. I draw from Audre Lorde's theories of the relationship between the pornographic and the erotic in order to help situate located experiences along these lines.<sup>2</sup> I engage her thinking in conversation with that which approaches theories of how an ethnopornographic gaze is generated and reproduced. Ulti-

mately, I hope to complicate worn notions of difference, while examining how colonial ideas of both black men and white women's bodies remain intact and operative. The reproduction of these ideologies can be potentially subverted through a critique that provides a nuanced analysis of power, race, and sexual encounter. I conclude with a reflection that demonstrates how these scenes reveal the ethnopornographic gaze as a multidirectional entanglement. As we seek to navigate ethnographic terrain, both in research and in writing, we are bound up in colonial histories, in disciplinary expectations, in institutional regulation, and in interpersonal complexity.

### **Erotic Subjectivity and Gendered Ethnography**

As an interpretive frame, erotic subjectivity can be understood as an epistemological position through which the political dimensions of sensuality are made real. Previous anthropological accounts of erotic subjectivity have fruitfully explored intimate encounter as a meaningful aspect of ethnography and as a subject position.<sup>3</sup> These works have productively demonstrated that sexual encounter is a way of knowing;<sup>4</sup> it is a social relationship that is given meaning through culturally grounded interpretive parameters, and is dependent upon an exchange of power, and is therefore always political.

We are directed toward a relationally constructed understanding of subjectivity as we traverse the landscape of desiring and being desired, as well as the culturally specific terms through which desire is produced. Field research becomes a process not only of getting to know another but also of relearning ourselves. The ways in which we experience ourselves as gendered, sexualized subjects must be reexperienced, reexplored, and reconstructed as we seek to connect with others and to learn how they live within their bodies. Negotiating these parameters is always a relational process. Other scholars have productively shown how conflict as well as passion and everyday choices in relationships can have important implications for anthropological knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Thus the choices that are made when revealing shared moments between people are not arbitrary; they point us to other ways of knowing.

Though previous writers have challenged the ethical problems of intimate encounter in the field, they proceed from an assumption of the inherent power imbalance between the researcher and her "subjects." These assumptions do not allow for an adequate examination of the multidirectional power flows and mediations that occur in practice. "All relationships are

agreements about distribution of power, agreements negotiated in varying degrees of intimacy.”<sup>6</sup> The complexity of power distribution is articulated through these struggles. It is rare that one person “has” power, while power is exercised upon another. More often it is balanced by myriad factors, some of which are interpersonal, others of which are based upon social categories. In addition to these problems, the ethnographer’s body must be understood as a marked space, and thus also be open to critical interrogation.

I contribute a perspective that represents the historical construction of African bodies but also interrogates the ethnographer’s body within this discourse. I recognize how the black male body is both fetishized and pathologized while contributing an analysis of the construction and production of whiteness. In this context, whiteness perpetuates colonial ideology through continuous revalidation and legitimization. This occurs by a culturally specific prioritization of the inherent superiority and aesthetic value of whiteness as sexual power and beauty. This must be understood as a gendered experience, revealing the construction of the white female body as linked to the colonial endeavor.<sup>7</sup> It is clear, here, how the concept of ethnopornography generates the operative gaze around both black men and white women; both categories are inscribed through the circulations of imagery/ideology produced by systematized erotic racial imaginations.

As a white woman my body is subject to scrutiny in particular ways that both enable and impede field research. In addition to the experience of sexual objectification in the field, practices of intimacy remain taboo. Though female Africanists rarely discuss practices of desire, white male Africanists have discussed sexual encounters in field research as a means to verify their masculinity among male community members,<sup>8</sup> or quite commonly make no note of it at all, thus reinforcing the priority of their epistemic positions. White women’s sexuality remains under greater scrutiny from the academic community and legitimized forums for knowledge production. This points to a continuing ideology of “otherness” regarding black men’s sexualized bodies, which have been pathologized, and white women’s bodies as the exclusive property of white men. What this configuration demonstrates is that while ethnopornographic accounts are generally understood to be produced and consumed in a unidirectional fashion by a group of people engaged in particular historical and cultural positions, they are actually produced and experienced in multidirectional and overlapping ways. This is significant because it acknowledges the more complicated power dynamics generated through ethnographic engagements that move us away from simplistic outsider/insider relations or flat-

tened conceptions of power imbalance. In fact, a more complete analysis of the circulations of ethnographic narratives, images, and imaginations would incorporate an intersectional framework coupled with historical and cultural specificity.

From a disciplinary perspective, though much work has been done on erotic subjectivity both in terms of pleasure and violence,<sup>9</sup> I think there is still much to be done in terms of moving from interpersonal encounter to theoretical models of understanding these encounters as epistemically relevant to anthropological knowledge production. If we continue to receive these stories as personal accounts exclusively, we miss an opportunity to glean crucial points of knowledge about how human beings relate to each other and why they relate in those ways. My personal experience tells me that though the topic of erotic subjectivity is no longer taboo, it is quite possible to experience professional and personal retribution for disclosing these accounts. If we don't create space for these conversations either by (1) assuming that these relationships don't happen, or (2) acknowledging that they do happen but have nothing to do with what we know and how we learn it, then we immediately foreclose the possibility of greater insight. As a potentially corrective account, let us turn to two categories that demonstrate the complexities of race, sexuality, and ethnographic work.

### Encounter: Violence/Subjugation

An important aspect to thinking through what constitutes violence/subjugation as distinct from that which is intimate/erotic has been the framework of the pornographic. Audre Lorde distinguishes between the two, writing, "The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography represents sensation without feeling."<sup>10</sup> She continues, "The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings."<sup>11</sup> Proceeding from her configuration of the erotic as a source of power that requires emotional, spiritual, and intellectual as well as physical connection, the pornographic becomes a harbor of that which is devoid of those connections—that



which is objectifying and dehumanizing, that which can be consumed, that which emphasizes observation or surveillance over engaged and reciprocal viewing. It is crucial at this point to note that this configuration of the pornographic as apposite to the erotic is not absolute or universal. I use the dichotomy in order to both set up the dual encounters of violence and desire, and to theorize the possibilities for agency within ethnographic circulation.

This construction of the pornographic helps structure what I consider to be forms of ethnographic violence. Grappling with observation and surveillance, expectations of exchange, objectification, and physical and emotional fear are part of my ethnographic experiences. My body is subject to scrutiny during field research in particular ways that are determined by local discourses on race and sexuality. I work in a rural area on the northwestern border of Ghana and Burkina Faso, though these experiences include traveling and working in major cities in both countries as well. In this context, whiteness is considered a marker of high status and is aesthetically valued. My whiteness also increases my visibility, making me vulnerable to interrogation and regulation. Though people are subjected to various forms of violence during ethnographic work, there are four broad categories to which I want to draw attention:

1. Expectation of exchange
2. Institutional implications of revealing encounter
3. Physical violence
4. Surveillance

It is difficult for me to assess/describe these four categories because I continue to be regulated by a fear of naming and calling attention to these practices, particularly when my work is ongoing. This fear is produced partially by an anthropological discourse that suggests that when we encounter violence we have failed to adequately recognize the cultural cues, contexts, or circumstances that lead to those experiences. And that sense of failure has primarily to do with a gendered and racialized normativity in research accounts. Because white male bodies are governed differently (I'm going to leave aside issues of sexuality for the moment), these categories of violence affect them differently. Certainly men experience violence, and the ways that they are constrained from writing/speaking about that are real and meaningful, but they are also not subjected to the same systemic violence as women and people of color. Once you have to articulate difference, being

made to feel violated, unsafe, or out of control as part of your research, you are making yourself vulnerable to the scrutiny of “white men’s eyes.” And that gaze is chilling because you didn’t give consent to be watched.

Rather than articulate in detail many experiences that illustrate each of these categories, I am going to offer one that I hope will demonstrate the subtle ways that they become part of field research. This anecdote is drawn from a research trip in the borderland village of Ghana and Burkina Faso where I conduct much of my work:

I was sitting outside at a drinking spot when he arrived.<sup>12</sup> My friend, Peter (a black Ghanaian), and I had already been there for a while by that time.<sup>13</sup> Though I had tried to avoid being near him, I felt that getting up and leaving would be more inappropriate, and so I decided to stay and behave casually, greeting him and his companions. After some time, he got up, came over, and began stroking my hair, which was pulled back into a ponytail. He started saying, “My wife, my wife,” and then began touching my face, even leaning down to kiss my cheek. I recoiled, tried moving my face from his hands, and asked him to stop. He didn’t react but went back to his conversation with his friends. I was seething, embarrassed, and angry. Touching a woman’s hair or her face in public is unthinkable, especially if she is with another man. It presumes an enormous amount of intimacy. An intimacy that not only did we not share but that I would never want articulated in the way that he was doing it. The public display was intended more to posture towards his friends and Peter than for me, I thought. After he left, I asked Peter directly how he could sit quietly when I was visibly uncomfortable, even to the point of crying out for him to stop. I felt so violated; realizing that I had hoped my friend would protect me made me feel vulnerable and weak. After all these years I still needed a man to intervene on my behalf, to make me safe. It was a gesture of ownership to which I did not agree, that had nothing to do with how I knew him but only with the ways that he wanted other people to see him. Being able to hurt me, to insult me, and degrade me in public made him feel important, and there was no recourse available to me, no option but to say nothing. Who would I tell? What would the complaint be? The truth is that I let this person into my life not seeing clearly who he was or what I was agreeing to by being his friend. And I’ll pay for that mistake as long as I remain unmarried—as long as I don’t belong to another man. Peter, my friend, calmly explained that he had merely been seeking a

reaction from him; had he offered it to him, it would have provoked an extended dispute. By not reacting at all, Peter had sidestepped the conflict. Though I later saw his reaction as thoughtful and reasonable, I was still left with a sense of sadness and shame. Sadness for the loss of what once was an important friendship, sadness that he felt compelled to treat me as property, sadness that I felt he was more concerned with public perception than with anything else.

When I think about this, I cringe; I hate it. But it is not without analytical merit. There are questions that we would never ask, and if we did the responses to them would tell us nothing. But lived experience will reveal people's behavior and thought processes. The interaction here between this man and Peter is particularly revealing of how men engage and respond to each other, and what that says about local ideas of masculinity and status. My emotional response was countered by one that was more firmly grounded in a local model of conflict resolution between men. Just as cultural norms are important, deviation from them is informative; this man's behavior was well outside an appropriate cultural standard, but that tells me something about how men and women address each other and behave toward each other in public and why that is meaningful. It is a performance, even more so because the intention was to shock; it is a heightened example of how intimacy does or does not get performed in public in this community.

### Encounter: Desire/Love

Is there a space to discuss intimacy in terms that provide insight into how white women and black men negotiate the historical constructions of their bodies? Can there be intimacy in these terms that circumvents these histories, that is comprised entirely of the subjectivity of two people? Probably not. What happens first in the mind of most readers when they hear a white woman tell a story of desire or love toward a black man during her research? What assumptions are made that inform the way the reader will process and understand that story? I believe that in the minds of most readers there is an assumption that racial difference has drawn you together and is a priority in your relationship, or that you are unaware of the implications of your racial difference and its history, and therefore are incapable of attaining a union on any kind of equal footing. The reader commits the same act of violence that subjects your body to scrutiny and his to pathology.

I opened this chapter with a quote from Nancy White, in which she elucidates the ways that both black and white women are regulated by white patriarchal dominance.<sup>14</sup> Patricia Hill Collins considers this quote at length, amid a discussion of controlling images.<sup>15</sup> She writes that even when negative images are replaced by positive ones (such as those of white women as desirable, beautiful, or valuable), they are not less damaging, nor will reliance upon them undo the system of domination and control that undergirds them.<sup>16</sup> In other words, there is no way to utilize the type of objectifying and dehumanizing images that are circulated through the ethnopornographic imagination in order to avert that gaze. When white women speak about desire and ethnographic encounter, the controlling images of white women and black men that were generated through the colonial order snap sharply into focus: what is happening is taboo, both of these bodies do not belong to their inhabitants, and arousal can be fueled only by either hatred or the desire to dominate white men's property. And the controlling image for white women is that desire is generated by a need to be transgressive. And those images and their circulation prevent the myriad possibilities of human connection that happen during ethnographic work from being fully discussed. In effect, these images and their attendant ideologies reinstate a colonial mindset—and neither black men nor white women can move away from that predetermined mold that assigns motivation and prevents subjective agency.

Audre Lorde suggests that the erotic requires an engagement with “our sense of self.” Though she was referring to love between women, I think that we can equally apply her construction to desire and intimacy between men and women. In the context of ethnographic work, the terrain of desire is peppered with land mines.<sup>17</sup> And in the context of my work in West Africa, those land mines take many forms, but race is often primary because of the heightened visibility of difference and the particular history that it represents. So, as we seek to encounter another person fully, we may not be prioritizing their racial difference, but we are likely to step on a race mine because other people will call attention to and notice that difference. Essentially, race might not be the determining factor in the desire, but it exists whether or not we choose to acknowledge it.

But none of that prevents intimacy in its truest terms. In my personal experience, both love and desire are generative of many forms of intimacy, only some of which are sexual. In some cases, I have experienced a shared and heightened closeness with someone because people on the outside of the union are invested in seeing you a certain way that seems so differ-

ent from your experience of each other. The desire backs up to violence, though, because it is easy to recognize that social expectation and interaction punctuates the interpersonal in ways that cannot be avoided. And in some ways, both people are placed under the ethnopornographic gaze as people assign desires and motivations to you. And then as a pair you are subject to the consistent mechanisms of regulation and surveillance. I think that the prominence of the violent encounters makes crossing the landscape of desire more difficult, because there is such a burden of institutional and disciplinary convention and regulation that it prevents people from “outing” these relationships or entering into them fully.<sup>18</sup>

## Reflection

Both “encounters” offer portraits of possible ethnographic experiences. Taken together they demonstrate how interpersonal relationships are structured by context and informed by located understandings of race and sexuality. This chapter represents a taxonomy of limits: the ways that our bodies generate limitations on people’s engagements and responses to us, and how we are limited/restricted by those responses and engagements. We exist within a context through which violence and desire take place, and sometimes within that context we learn interesting things that become difficult to report and effectively analyze because of institutional parameters. Those institutional parameters regulate men and women differently, and when women make claims that challenge those parameters and seek to clarify their experiences, they can be easily silenced by the same voices that uphold the institutional restrictions. Thus, the discipline is governed by invisible rules that come to bear when we try to talk about it. These systemic limitations uphold the white male normativity of the gaze that is being challenged. Ignoring erotic subjectivity is methodologically cynical because it suggests that there are ways that knowledge can be revealed and not revealed, and the idea that some means to knowledge are more legitimate than others ultimately sustains the limitations that are placed on people.

The idea of ethnopornography animates ethnographic encounters and the limitations that are placed on discussing those encounters. Observation has been so critical to anthropology—looking at, watching, scrutinizing, analyzing, studying, and charting. The mapping of another’s world is the history of anthropology. Though we have addressed this unilinear model and seek more intersubjective methods of research and writing,

the challenge remains how to represent multidirectional ways of looking and knowing, of charting each other, and exchanging and encountering and meeting partway and in between. Because there is no one model of power that exists between people, it is always renegotiated and reformed. And the historical circumstances that inform how we see each other will come to bear differently at different times, and therefore have to be constantly considered. From this standpoint, ethnopornography as understood as multidirectional and historically and culturally specified opens up possibilities both for framing ethnographic encounters and for analyzing them. Disciplines that are grounded in ethnographic engagement, such as anthropology and ethnomusicology, require methodological and theoretical consideration of the production and consumption of racialized, gendered, and sexualized images and their attendant narratives that emerge in our work. This matters not only because the ethnopornographic informs knowledge production but also because it moves us toward more complex and varied portraits of human encounters, our vision of each other, and the stories that we tell and are told. Thus, while ethnopornographic circulations deserve critique, they also produce effective assessment tools through which to situate our work.

Many readers will recognize that the title of this chapter, “Under White Men’s Eyes,” refers obliquely to Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s essay “Under Western Eyes,” in which she so deftly critiques the representations of women in the Global South.<sup>19</sup> She effectively suggests that the eyes we look through, the perspective that is validated and understood as the priority, is skewing everything we see, and if we want to know more or know differently, we have to change the lens and the terms through which we evaluate other people’s experiences. Though I began the chapter with reference to one white man and the way that he saw my experience, his vision is a stand-in for the institutional and disciplinary codes that consistently and effectively prevent dissent. As Nancy White points out, white women are rewarded for good behavior, but that reward will never be an admission to full subjecthood. And the punishment for deviance can be severe. And the fear of that punishment limits our anthropological engagements and the ways we are able to speak.

In ethnomusicology, a prominent example of the way that women’s voices are edited is located in Kofi Agawu’s *Representing African Music*, in which he criticizes Michelle Kisliuk for her account of a personal relationship in *Seize the Dance!*, an ethnographic account exploring the musical lives of the BaAka of the Central African rainforests in 1998.<sup>20</sup> Agawu’s

primary criticism was that Kisliuk did not fully account for the nature of her relationship with her field assistant, who is now her husband. Agawu claims that Kisliuk's failure to fully disclose the precise intimate nature of the relationship demonstrates that the author will always place the frame around the research agenda, what is written, and how it is represented, and thus attempts to research and write in ways that lay bare the procedure of knowledge production are not more ethical than more objective ways of writing. Agawu's choice to isolate Kisliuk's text speaks to a perception of reflective research accounts as "personal" when written by women and "introspective" when written by men.<sup>21</sup> The effect of such a critique is undermining because it (1) neglects the theoretical movements that Kisliuk was responding to, effectively portraying it as storytelling rather than a well-grounded research account, and (2) reinforces a gendered divide within the discipline, in which men might choose to share personal information or not, but women will be criticized if they do and paradoxically chastised for not sharing *enough* or the *right information*. Kisliuk responded to this critique with an essay coauthored with her husband in which she not only pushes back against Agawu but reveals a multilayered and rich account of the ways in which their relationship intersects with and is intertwined in both life and work.<sup>22</sup> The notion that one must reveal everything at all times in order to be both critical and reflective is untenable. Ethnography happens in the mind as much as in the physical field, and we process and understand moments and scenes of life in nonlinear and complex ways. No one can represent everything, and not everything is of critical importance at all moments of analysis. The point is not to share everything but to utilize reflexivity and positionality to add to our greater understanding of knowledge production, to situate one's stance, and to prioritize multiple ways of speaking and knowing. When someone suggests that my story is incomplete or that what I choose to tell is not the valuable information, they refuse to hear why I have chosen what I have said and what it might offer. And that refusal speaks to a disciplinary problem and a continued discomfort with erotic subjectivity, particularly when it is a white woman speaking about a relationship with a black man.

I think it is meaningful that I chose to respond to the white man's voice only to myself. That silent response, and the ethnographic details that I cannot include in this chapter, highlight the mechanisms of regulation, or what Adrienne Rich called the "cartographies of silence."<sup>23</sup> The structures of power that determine who has the authority to speak and when they speak and for whom they are making claims become critical in assessing

the resultant dialogues. And in order to change how we are able to speak back to these regulations, we must call attention to them and consistently question how we hear some voices, what we assume, and how we read those stories. Because if a woman speaks and we criticize her truth, and how she knows, and we make it a personal story, we limit the impact of her knowledge. And if there is information that cannot be included, knowledge that cannot be shared, we must witness that silence as part of the story of anthropology and learn to hear those silences at the same volume as the loudest voices. I suggest that one reason for this continued silencing is that although we have begun to incorporate erotic subjectivity into anthropological accounts, we have not yet linked those accounts to ethnopornography in ways that allow for more profound theorization of the connections between ethnography, colonialism, and racialized erotics. By locating the myriad possibilities of human engagement within the frame of ethnopornography, we will deepen the analytical possibilities of the ethnographic encounter.

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## Notes

John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 148. The chapter opening quote comes from an interview with Ms. Nancy White. The quote can also be found in Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (Dec. 1986): S17. Patricia Hill Collins writes about this quote: "This passage suggests that while both groups are stereotyped, albeit in different ways, the function of the images is to dehumanize and control both groups" (ibid.). The same quote can be found in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 114.

- 1 Of course, as I'll show, this is a reductive statement, one intended to draw attention to the relationship established during colonialism that marks out the governance of the black male body by white patriarchal institutions. The man who made this remark did so in the context of trying to reduce interracial relationships to a preformatted mold of desire and violence.
- 2 Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 53–59.
- 3 On intimate encounter as a meaningful aspect of ethnography, see Don Kulick and Margaret Willson, eds., *Taboo, Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork* (London: Routledge, 1995); Fran Markowitz and Michael Ashkenazi,



- eds., *Sex, Sexuality, and the Anthropologist* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). On intimate encounter as a subject position, see Ellen Lewin and William Leap, eds., *Out in the Field: Reflections of Gay and Lesbian Anthropologists* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Jafari Allen, *¿Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Jafari Allen, "One Way or Another: Erotic Subjectivity in Cuba," *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 2 (2012): 325–38; Lyndon Gill, "Transfiguring Trinidad and Tobago: Queer Cultural Production, Erotic Subjectivity and the Praxis of Black Queer Anthropology" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010); Lyndon Gill, "Chatting Back an Epidemic: Caribbean Gay Men, HIV/AIDS, and the Uses of Erotic Subjectivity," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, no. 2–3, (2012): 277–95.
- 4 Lyndon Gill in particular has taken an expansive view on erotics and sexual encounter. See for example, his recent book, *Erotic Islands: Art and Activism in the Queer Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).
  - 5 Esther Newton, "My Best Informant's Dress: The Erotic Equation in Fieldwork," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (1993): 3–23; Wekker, *Politics of Passion*.
  - 6 Suzanne Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (1994; repr., New York: Routledge, 2006), 71.
  - 7 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
  - 8 Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (1977; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
  - 9 See Eva Moreno, "Rape in the Field: Reflections from a Survivor," in Kulick and Willson, *Taboo*, 166–89.
  - 10 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 54.
  - 11 Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," 54.
  - 12 I have chosen to leave out the name of this man, but for clarification I will mention that he is a black Ghanaian who resides in the area where my work is conducted.
  - 13 I have changed the name of my male companion to Peter for the purposes of this publication.
  - 14 John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 148.
  - 15 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 114.
  - 16 Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 114.

- 17 This chapter owes much to many conversations with Chioke l'Anson. I am particularly grateful to him for helping me clarify my thought process and for offering constructive and thoughtful guidance. I thank him too for giving me the metaphor of "race mines," out of which much of this chapter emerged.
- 18 See also Patricia Tang, "Ana sa jëkkër (Where Is Your Husband?): Writing Gender out of Ethnography," paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Ethnomusicology, Indianapolis, Indiana, November 15, 2013.
- 19 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (1984): 333–58; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* 28, no. 2 (2003): 499–535.
- 20 Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Michelle Kisliuk, *Seize the Dance!: BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance* (1998; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 21 For further discussion of how women's writing is portrayed as less serious when they employ unconventional research methods or narrative style, see Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, eds., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 22 Justin Serge Mongosso and Michelle Kisliuk, "Representing a Real Man: Music, Upheaval and Relationship in Centrafrique," *Emergences* 13, no. 1/2 (2003): 34–46.
- 23 Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems, 1974–1977* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 17.