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# Beads of Empowerment: The Role of Body Art in Challenging Pokot Gender Identities

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BEADS OF EMPOWERMENT:

THE ROLE OF BODY ART IN CHALLENGING POKOT GENDER IDENTITIES

by

JENNIFER FLEISCHMAN

Under the Direction of Kimberly Cleveland

ABSTRACT

Pokot female body art identifies a woman's beauty, husband, and social rank among the Pokot community through color, pattern, and mass. In the last sixty years, as a result of Kenya's entrance into the global economy, Pokot women have turned a "traditional" art form into a commodity, creating a product for Western tourists that, in turn, provides Pokot women with a means to earn income that is less readily under male control. Pokot women consciously create beadwork that alludes to the "Idea of Africa," while also conforming to Western standards of "colonial chic." The result is a body art that visualizes a harmonious interaction between "exotic" and "modern." This thesis argues that with the successful integration of beadwork into the global market, Pokot women have strategically identified an alternative to their traditional, gender-related power constraints and challenged historical constructions of Pokot gender identity.

INDEX WORDS: Pokot, Body art, Beadwork, Gender, Global economy

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by

JENNIFER FLEISCHMAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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by

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## INTRODUCTION

For the Pokot of western Kenya, body adornments are used as a way to identify power, wealth, and status visually within the community. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as a result of tourism and economic change in Kenya, body art became a profitable commodity for groups in Africa such as the Pokot, who were forced to find new forms of capital in order to survive within the global market. As a result, Pokot women began to employ a blending of old techniques and traditions with new materials and contemporary "Western" aesthetic preferences, in order to create body art that has a "primitive" feel and also fits the standard of popular modern jewelry from a Western standpoint. In this circumstance, Pokot women consciously mark their body as both a blend of "modern" and "primitive" in order to gain economic profit in a postmodern world. In this way, a Pokot woman's body becomes what feminist body theorist Elizabeth Grosz suggests Michel Foucault might call a "technique of self production."[1] This thesis explores how Pokot women of Kenya utilize tourism and globalization to shift their beadwork from being symbolic reiterations of a patriarchal heterosexual culture to a commodity, providing them with opportunities to find alternatives to the traditional understanding of their own gender identity.

To begin, this paper will provide an ethnographic background of traditional Pokot society and gender roles as they have been explained and interpreted by multiple Pokot scholars dating back to the 1950s. I provide a basic ethnography of the Pokot, followed by an investigation of male and female relations, as well as their respective expectations. I also discuss Pokot belief systems that form the basis of their social organization. I direct much of my attention to the so-

[1] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward A Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 143.

cial roles of men and women within the community with a specific focus on the daily jobs and household duties that both complete on a routine basis.

My position on gender identity as something that is socially constructed provides a basis for my utilization of a feminist discourse. As such, Chapter Two establishes my methodology and examines previous scholarship on Pokot men and women in order to explain why I consider a feminist standpoint a relative way to communicate my argument. Namely, I suggest a feminist perspective as a way to create different forms of gender knowledge through reflection, articulation, and collectivity instead of trying to rewrite preexisting patriarchal knowledge. I focus on gender as a type of identity defined through stylized acts and relative norms created and maintained by powerful bodies within society. It is fitting, therefore, to recognize gender identity as something malleable in order to understand how Pokot women have the ability to challenge previous definitions of gender identity upon their conscious decision to commodify their beadwork.

Chapter Three focuses on the function of Pokot female body art within their community. For the Pokot, motifs and composition provide significant insight into the symbolic underpinnings of their social structure. Therefore, in this chapter I first discuss how the Pokot integrate cultural and social aspects of society into their art. This will center on an analysis of what is considered aesthetically-pleasing body art in regards to colors, patterns, and mass. Here, I also examine the materials and technology that are employed to create the beadwork.

Building on this information, Chapter Four analyzes how Pokot traditional beadwork is transformed into a product for profit. I examine how globalization, as an advanced stage of colonialism, has reinforced an idyllic, exoticized identity of Africa and its art as constructed by colonial discourse. I will also analyze how Pokot women employ a Western construct, centered around the "Idea of Africa," in order to sell art that is considered suitable for consumption within

the global market. The next part of this chapter focuses on the capitalization, production, and distribution of Pokot beadwork. I conclude by suggesting that because beadwork is, for the most part, under the control of women, Pokot women have, in turn, been able to challenge previous norms of gender identity and feel a sense of empowerment through such actions.

# 1 POKOT ETHNOGRAPHY

Cultural identity in East Africa is built on a complex mixture of history, belief systems, ecological conditions, philosophy, subsistence modes, and material culture. In this chapter, I will present information surrounding the cultural identity of the Pokot people in order to provide a more lucid understanding of where they come from, who they are, and how they live. Their location and major population movements historically link them to other groups from East Africa. There is no written history on the Pokot before the colonial period. Instead, rituals, gender roles, and identities are based heavily on their traditional, essentialist beliefs and are orally passed down from one generation to the next. Likewise, the Pokot possess an ideological framework that justifies and reinforces its subsistence modes. Pokot beliefs, rituals, and traditions all form a cultural identity that is most clearly expressed through material culture, particularly body art. Further, it is by drawing on their historically rooted beliefs that Pokot women are able to adapt to globalization without having to abandon their own traditions completely.

## 1.1 Location/Population

The Pokot live in the Upper Rift Valley province of northwestern Kenya and eastern Uganda. Within the province, they inhabit three different districts. The West Pokot district is located in Kenya and is the largest population-wise, with 308,086 Pokot people according to a 1999 census.[2] The Baringo district, also located in Kenya, had a population of 39,000 Pokot people according to a 1985 census.[3] The smallest district, Upe, is located in Uganda and con-

[2] Kjartan Jónsson, "Pokot Masculinity: The Role of Rituals in Forming Men" (PhD dissertation, University of Iceland, 2006), 45.
[3] Ann Muir, "Response to Maendeleo: Changing Perceptions amongst the Pokot of Nginyang in a period of transition" (master's thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985), 65.

sisted of around 11,642 Pokot people.[4] In the West Pokot district, the Pokot make up ninety percent of the population. However, in the smaller districts, Upe and Baringo, the Pokot people are a minority. In both districts, Pokot people reside with other groups, the majority coming from the Turkana, Kikuyu, and Luhya groups which, along with the Pokot, share a Nilo-Hamitic history and ancestry.[5]

## 1.2 History

Historical knowledge of the Pokot people dates back to the end of the nineteenth century when European explorers first wrote about their encounters with the group. Until the 1960s and 70s, most scholarship on the Pokot consisted of basic ethnographies or discussions of political and social structures. From the 1980s on, fieldwork conducted in the area provided more information regarding Pokot beliefs, customs, practices, and rules. Although there is a lack of a written history about the origin of the Pokot, there are several theories about the origin of the Nilotes, a larger group from which the Pokot draw their ancestral roots.

Nilotes consist of several ethnic groups in southern Sudan, eastern Congo, western Kenya, and northern Tanzania.[6] European explorers lumped groups making up the Nilotes together on account of their language similarities. Within the Nilote, there are three subgroups, which are named according to the geographical area in which they are based: the River-Lake Nilotes, Plains Nilotes, and the Highland Nilotes.[7] The Pokot are encompassed within the Highland Nilotes and further classified within the Kalenjin group.

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[4] Ibid.
[5] The Eastern and Southern Nilotic languages were formerly widely believed to constitute a single Paranilotic (or, earlier, "Nilo-Hamitic") grouping; they were believed to have arisen as a sort of "mixed language" combining Nilotic (modern Western Nilotic) and "Hamitic" (in particular, modern Cushitic) elements. See Muir, 65.
[6] Jónsson, 60.
[7] Pat Robbins, *Red-Spotted Ox: A Pokot Life* (Copenhagen: IWGIA, 2010), xxvii.

Due to the lack of written records, scholars have based theories of origin primarily on ethnographic material and linguistics. Most Pokot scholars, including Pat Robbins and Harold Schneider, hypothesize that the Pokot, as part of the larger Kalenjin group, migrated from various parts of Africa, including but not limited to Egypt, Lake Turkana, southeastern Sudan, and Ethiopia.[8] European explorer Joseph Thomson recorded the first specific written reference of the Pokot in his travel journal from 1884. He noted the warrior-like abilities of the Pokot who, at the time, were referred to by Thomson and other explorers as the Suk, a name used to identify the group until the 1960s.[9]

Confusion surrounding the meaning of the name of Pokot also stems from a lack of written history about the group. Some scholars believe the Pokot's original name, Suk, came from the Maasai, a neighboring group with which the Pokot often competed for cattle and land. The most noted origin theory suggests that out of fear of taxation, when a British colonial power asked a Pokot man to which group he belonged, he answered "Suk" which means tree stump in the Pokot language.[10] Upon Kenya's independence from the United Kingdom in 1963, the Pokot refused to continue to use the name Suk, as they considered it derogatory and demeaning of their intelligence.[11] According to scholar Kjartan Jónsson, the most common view among Pokot people is that the name Pokot is derived from the word *pö-köt,* which means escape.[12] Hence, the word Pokot means "refugees."

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 66.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 67.

## 1.3 Belief Systems and Life Philosophy

Similar to other groups from East Africa, the Pokot employ an ideological and essentialist framework that justifies and reinforces their cultural, social, and political identities. In order to differentiate themselves from others, Pokot people possess ethnic, religious, and cultural characteristics by negating the undesirable ones of their dominating neighbors or competing groups.[13] Moreover, because religion permeates all spheres of life in many African societies, knowledge of religion is key to understanding the main aspects of Pokot culture because it "exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people."[14]

The Pokot god is *Tororot,* an all-encompassing God who created the world. *Tororot* upholds Pokot social order and only members who faithfully follow tradition can gain access to him.[15] Jónsson states, "*Tororot* is believed to be the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent creator of the world giving fertility to men, animals, and plants and is, for that reason, called father, *papo.*"[16] Relative to my research, it is important to note the lack of inclusion of women in the preceding statement. The Pokot believe *Tororot* created men superior to women, thus men believe it is their right to subordinate women.[17] Therefore, in order to please their god, men continually espouse power over women.

Further, there are two deities that assist *Tororot* in watching over the Pokot. *Asis*, a word for sun, is the eye of *Tororot* and is believed to see everything that men do to please or displease *Tororot.*[18] He has similar attributes to *Tororot* and "is considered to be a manifestation of God

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[13] Robbins, xvi.
[14] Jónsson, 81.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 111.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 113.

Himself."[19] Comparatively, *Ilat* is the Pokot god of rain and water and serves as *Tororot's* messenger and prophet. According to Jónsson, he is the god the Pokot people favor the most, as he has the ability to bless and punish people according to their conduct.[20] Within Pokot religion, these three deities are seemingly inseparable from everyday life. By acknowledging the deities' powers, Pokot people strengthen their general way of living, fertility, wealth, and overall ability to deal with unfortunate events.

In order to please *Tororot,* the Pokot strive to lead a life of peace and harmony in the seen and unseen worlds, a concept called, *pöghishyö*.[21] In all aspects of life, ranging from health issues to fighting between the sexes, *pöghishyö* is sought out. Through conquering hardships to achieve *pöghishyö,* Pokot people feel they are able to please *Tororot.* Jónsson suggests the importance of that relationship:

> The concept *pöghishyö* reveals how interconnected the members of community are, because one person can upset the balance of life and endanger the life of all others by antisocial behavior. It also reveals how interconnected individuals, gods, and the spirits are because the preservation of *pöghishyö* depends on the humans, i.e. that they follow the traditions of the society and adhere to its values, respect the gods and the ancestors, and fulfill their obligations towards them. They enjoy their favor and blessing if they fulfill their obligation, but wrath if they fail.[22]

The Pokot seek to preserve and restore the state of their community whenever it is put off balance. *Tororot* created the fundamentals of society, and it is up to the Pokot people to live in accordance with him. In order to comprehend how the Pokot abide by *Tororot* in everyday life, it is necessary to look at the social organization of the Pokot with a specific focus on male and female duality.

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[19] Ibid., 114.
[20] Ibid., 115.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 118.

## 1.4 Social Organization

The Pokot have no form of centralized government that maintains control over the population as a whole. Instead of a central authority, there is an age-set system based on rites of passage.[23] Age and gender are the key axes in social organization, and, in the quest to uphold traditions and rituals, social organization is dependent upon age-set rituals. Pokot society, as created by *Tororot,* is patrilineal, patriarchal, and polygamous.[24] Social organization features an extremely hierarchal system, awarding elder Pokot men the highest status in the community.

For Pokot children, there is little discrepancy between their reception and treatment based on sex. However, as anthropologist Robert Edgerton and Frances Conant explained, and Jónsson confirmed in a more recent study on the Pokot, there is a shift in tasks as a Pokot member ages:

> Tasks, which are later sex-specific, such as gathering firewood, weeding, milking, or grinding grain, are entirely interchangeable among boys and girls. Older than this there is increasing emphasis on the division of labor by sex, intensified association with groups of the same sex, and diverging expression of sexuality and the conduct of courtship.[25]

As such, men and women move through a series of separate age-sets, which consist of rituals based on both history and religion. Due to the importance of rituals among the Pokot, in the following section I discuss the most important rite of passage for both men and women, as well as explain male and female relationships and expectations of one another in order to show how this expression of a hierarchal belief in distinction between the sexes disassociates men from women in nearly all aspects of Pokot life.

Initiation into adulthood centers on circumcision and is the most important ritual in a Pokot's life. It is up to the individual boy or girl to decide when they want to undergo initiation

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[23] Barbara Bianco, "Women and Things: Pokot Motherhood as Political Destiny," *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 4 (November, 1991): 771.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Robert Edgerton and Frances Conant, "Kilapat: The 'Shaming Party' among the Pokot of East Africa," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1964): 411.

into adulthood. However, most start the process around puberty, at the age of nine or ten.[26] Initiation takes place over a period of two to three months and includes circumcision, a seclusion period, and a public coming out ceremony. Social anthropologist Abner Cohen summarizes the general characteristics of the initiation ceremony:

> It is conducted by elders.., there is indoctrination of customs… the novice is subjected to trials, the rites are general, being designed for all the members of the relevant sex…directed at the group rather than the individuals, and members of the other sex are excluded.[27]

While it is acceptable to go through this process alone, most children prefer to undergo initiation with their friends in their respective neighborhoods.[28] It is relevant to note that because a prearranged marriage is likely to happen immediately following the coming out ceremony, a female generally goes through initiation in the neighborhood of her future husband.[29] In this case, a man's other wives or other women in the man's neighborhood will help a woman integrate into her new setting. Pokot scholar Elizabeth Meyerhoff suggests that this action may be viewed from two perspectives: "One is that women are accepting their position in the patriarchal system and giving their support to it; the other is that women are making their own statement of solidarity outside and separate from the patriarchal order."[30] Hence, initiation may be seen as the beginning of men's attempts to control women or as an opportunity for women to perceive and articulate their collective power as a sex and form strong social bonds with each other.

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[26] Elizabeth Meyerhoff, "The Socio-Economic and Ritual Roles of Pokot Women" (PhD dissertation, Lucy Cavendish College, 1981), 132.
[27] Abner Cohen, *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values* (London: Routledge, 2000), 20.
[28] Meyerhoff, 169.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

In undergoing initiation, emphasis is placed on granting children a mature status, rather than on the actual physical changes resulting from circumcision. Anthropologist Barbara Bianco confirms this and states:

> Circumcision, the most important rite of passage celebrated by the Pokot, further amplifies social attractiveness. It reconfigures the body and channels its desires into the pursuit of cattle and children, the primary means by which Pokot men and women create intimacy and reconstitute social bonds.[31]

Hence, circumcision symbolizes a mark of social maturity in which Pokot commit to seeking and promoting *pöghishyö* through social bonds. Thus, initiation into adulthood, which culminates with circumcision, plays a fundamental role in molding and creating Pokot identity. Namely, in that when they have completed initiation, their expectations and position in society have altered and they are now expected to become fully grown, responsible members of society. However, the responsibilities and expectations of the respective sexes are quite different.

When a Pokot female completes initiation into adulthood, she is expected to come out of it with a full understanding of her roles as wife, mother, and provider. During initiation, elder women constantly reinforce the gender values a Pokot woman, or *mrar*, should uphold in order to please her husband.[32] While in seclusion, a female also creates several forms of body art that she will wear in her coming-out ceremony. The primary purpose of this body art is to beautify her body in a way that will impress her future husband. I provide a more in depth discussion of this body art in Chapter Four.

While the women assume the positions of mothers and wives, men are also expected to take on new responsibilities within the community. After males complete initiation into adulthood, they assume societal positions as elders, protectors, providers, and fathers. Immediately after initiation into adulthood, elders select age-set leaders from the newly initiated group. These

[31] Bianco, "Women and Things," 771.
[32] Meyerhoff, 168.

leaders are chosen on the basis of their ability to talk wisely, endure pain, and tolerate harsh words and threats, as their peers often judge the leaders more critically.[33] Going forward, age-set leaders are in charge of both supervising the initiation rituals as well as making certain all rituals are completed according to tradition.

Because Pokot ideological framework reinforces subsistence modes, a man's role as protector and provider is dependent on cattle, the single most important animal for the Pokot. A man's allegiance to his herd should be forthright, and the way in which he cares for his cattle indicates his ability to provide and protect. Jónsson relates the importance of cattle in the creation of a man's identity:

> Cattle constitute a big part of male identities, which is reflected in the fact that men take names derived from their favorite bulls during the circumcision period and are taught to be ready to die for them if need be. They are taught to admire their strength and polygamous nature.[34]

Importance of cattle for a Pokot man is further confirmed in that his primary jobs include tending to his cattle as well as taking part in cattle raids on neighboring communities. A successful Pokot man should be able to keep numerous cattle in good health, which, in turn, provides for his family and also denotes his wealth in society.[35] A Pokot man not only provides for himself, but for his entire family, which is generally quite large due to polygamy. Pokot men are expected to marry and begin a family immediately after initiation.

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[33] Jónsson, 187.
[34] Ibid., 34.
[35] Ibid.

## 1.5 Marriage

Marriage among the Pokot is viewed as a secular contract that takes place immediately after initiation into adulthood.[36] Since women are considered socially inferior, upon marriage, a man simply understands his wife to be a capital asset or another sign of his wealth.[37] For this reason, a man with several wives commands more respect among his peers. Through marriage, a male's identity is expounded upon his wife. Meyerhoff explains one instance of how a woman's identity is defined through her husband stating, "Upon marriage, a woman is identified by the name of her husband, whereas a man is not. For example if a woman's husband's name is Merinyang, she would be known as Kokomerinyang: *koko* meaning 'wife of'."[38] Furthermore, a woman is expected to accumulate ritual knowledge of her husband's particular clan rather than her natal neighborhood.

As a result of essentialist thinking, Pokot marital relations are characterized by hostility and antagonism rather than mutual interest and affection.[39] Perhaps the best way to explain this situation is through a story recorded by anthropologist Barbara Bianco during her fieldwork:

> One middle-aged man described his predicament: "I am only concerned with becoming rich and I do not want to be troubled by my wives. When they trouble me, I beat them. It is necessary because I rule them; they do not rule me. But my sons hate me and want me to die so that they may inherit my riches. One of my wives works magic so that I cannot run with other women, my oldest wife wants to poison me, and my new wife hates me and is always running away. How can a man be happy in such a situation?" When asked for her side of the story, the man's senior wife would only say, "We cannot rule men; we can only hate them."[40]

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[36] Meyerhoff, 41.
[37] Muir, 65.
[38] Meyerhoff, 13.
[39] Edgerton and Conant, 416.
[40] Ibid.

This provides the impression that married life is anything but dependent on civility and adoration. Instead, men and women seek mutual support and intimate relationships with members of their own sex.

After marriage, husband and wife maintain seemingly separate lives. As mentioned earlier, the roles each sex takes upon becoming an adult do not encourage or create circumstances where a man and wife will spend an excessive amount of time together, fostering an intimate bond. Couples do not confide in each other and often carry a great amount of enmity towards one another.[41] Although both modernity and globalization have offered the opportunity for women to have more freedom, most research suggests that animosity towards the opposite sex still persists. Edgerton elaborates on a woman's position within the community:

> Woman is a property, and must do as she is told and all the work. Women accept these truths, but not without resentment. They often complain that they are "treated like animals" or "traded like cattle." The resolute is an undercurrent of hostility equivalent to a long-standing armed truce.[42]

Thus, the respective gender roles only serve to heighten feelings of resentment towards the other sex.

The relative norms constructed in regards to Pokot gender identity allow a man complete freedom in nearly all aspects of life. For instance, it is not necessary for a man to provide his wife with any information about his day-to-day activities. A man may leave home without telling his wife where he is going or what he is going to do.[43] In his position as provider, he spends a significant amount of time away from home herding cattle and taking part in cattle raids. Furthermore, because the Pokot are a polygamous society, a man must divide his time between his wives. A Pokot husband makes sure all of his wives are living in homes a sufficient distance

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[41] Jónsson, 56.
[42] Edgerton and Conant, 413.
[43] Jónsson, 35.

apart from one another in order to avoid confrontation among them.[44] Jónsson suggests: "The ideal Pokot man follows the rules of the tradition, and enjoys *Tororot's* favor in return in form of numerous cattle and domestic animals, good health, several wives and many children, who will remember him after his death, as well as their descendents."[45]

Conversely, a Pokot woman upholds a completely different lifestyle in comparison to her male counterpart. By Pokot standards, following the relative norms constructed by tradition deems a married woman successful. In contrast to her husband, a wife is expected to fulfill her motherly duties and stay close to home so that her husband may locate her at any given time. A wife is expected to supervise her children, prepare food, and milk cattle. Jónsson states:

> A humble and faithful wife is one who follows the directives of her husband without arguments and pleases him by all means she can. A good wife takes care of her family and makes her husband proud. Her aims in life are to become a good wife and a mother of many children.[46]

For this reason, the bonds women form during initiation are of the utmost importance. These social bonds create a system of mutual support and feeling of reliability that Pokot women do not achieve through marriage.

## 1.6 Economy and Subsistence Modes

The Pokot have been dependent on and committed to both pastoralism and agriculture as their primary subsistence modes throughout their history. It is estimated that the majority of the Pokot today are primarily pastoralists who live off products of their herds' milk, blood, and meat, and who keep cattle, goats, and sheep.[47] Cattle is the single most important animal for the Pokot, as it represents a family's social and economic status within the community. In recent years,

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[44] Ibid., 57.
[45] Ibid., 34.
[46] Ibid., 35.
[47] Muir, 65.

pastoralism, as a livelihood, has undergone an increased number of challenges. The Pokot have seen a reduction in their land area as a result of the establishment of protected lands by the Kenyan government. Pokot scholar Pat Robbins explains how this transformation occurred:

> The introduction of so-called group ranches and the privatization of pastoral lands have furthermore exacerbated the pressure on range land with overgrazing and land degradation as a result. As a consequence of all these factors combined with prolonged drought periods, the precarious food security of the Pokot pastoral households has been exacerbated, and, according to recent assessments, the greatest challenge today is endemic poverty.[48]

As a result, pure pastoralism is no longer an option for the Pokot. Westernization and globalization have caused the Pokot to both integrate their primary subsistence modes into the so-called modern cash economy and also find ways to use their material culture as a commodity.

The Pokot have become part of the Kenyan and global economies, seeking employment in different areas of tourism whether they have preferred to or not. The monetary economy of the modern world is changing the traditional way of life for the Pokot, creating new jobs that were unfathomable to the Pokot in earlier times. Pokot men, who could formerly live almost solely by pastoralism, now work in game lodges or go to the cities to work as laborers.[49] Pokot women create ornamentation to sell to Western tourists in the markets of cities, including Nairobi and Narok Town. The ability to capitalize on this material aspect of traditional Pokot culture has, as I will further discuss, created opportunities for Pokot women to articulate female empowerment and challenge the patriarchal norms that have dominated Pokot culture.

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[48] Robbins, xvi.
[49] Ibid.

## 2 FEMINIST STANDPOINT

Beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century, much criticism surrounded ethnographies of Africa, suggesting they reflected what cultural critic and author Edward Said termed, "Orientalism," i.e. a Western style of dominating the "other."[50] By the 1970s and 1980s, a new string of reflexive anthropologists recognized this problem and started to consider themselves more like mediators, criticizing traditional fieldwork methods while also broadcasting how easy it is for an anthropologist to manipulate and construct the "other" in an ethnography. Anthropologists acknowledged ethnographies as molded by their historical contexts and as such, anthropologists could neither absorb all the reality of a given field nor describe it in its fullness. As these flaws came into view, scholars pointed out that the reliability of ethnographies could be improved if several people conducted research and consulted and corrected each other along the way. In this way, ethnographies become, as anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff suggest, "a historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts, each with its own kinds of subjects and subjectivities, objects and objectivities."[51] Through the employment of reflexive comparitivism, one's own research becomes a cultural object in its own right as opposed to totalizing immovable knowledge.[52]

Thus, in spite of the problematic nature of a Westerner writing about a society with a greatly different culture without firsthand fieldwork, I have chosen to adhere to "reflexive comparativism" by using a feminist standpoint to link past and present Pokot research and ethnographies in order to produce a current understanding of how Pokot gender knowledge is an open-

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[50] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979), 12.
[51] Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 9-10.
[52] Michael Herzfield, "Performing Comparisons: Ethnography, Globetrotting, and the Spaces of Social Knowledge," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 57, no. 3 (Autumn, 2001): 259.

ended social and cultural construct. In this chapter, I will analyze the most relevant Pokot research in regards to my argument in order to explain why using a feminist standpoint is a viable method of challenging the chronological, naturalizing boundaries framed by preexisting knowledge of the Pokot. By using this mode of address, I hope to denaturalize the present and past and to show how Pokot gender identity is constructed and open to reinvention.

## 2.1 Scholarly Studies on the Pokot

While there is a wealth of scholarly studies on the Pokot and their economic and subsistence modes, there are only two dissertations that focus specifically on male and female gender constructs. In 1981, anthropologist Elizabeth Meyerhoff completed her dissertation, "Socio Economic and Ritual Roles of Pokot Women." Meyerhoff provided the first detailed account of Pokot women's rituals in order to formulate her argument that sexuality is the greatest form of power Pokot women have in their relationships with men. She also acknowledged a lack of scholarly studies on Pokot women and hoped her thesis would challenge the influx of anthropological literature that was being produced at a time when women were universally regarded as, "the 'second sex' or 'oppressed' or dominated by men."[53] Her dissertation is an important contribution to my research and provides pertinent information as to how gender knowledge is formed and constructed among the Pokot.

Anthropologist Kjartan Jónsson completed his dissertation titled, "Pokot Masculinity: Role of Rituals in Forming Men," in 2006. In his dissertation, Jónsson attempts to explain how age-set rituals of Pokot men from birth to death shape male identities. His research provides relative information pertaining to the relationships between Pokot men and women. While both Meyerhoff and Jónsson frame their narrative analyses around their own fieldwork, they also em-

[53] Meyerhoff, 1.

ploy "reflexive comparativism," relying heavily on preexisting research on the Pokot.

Meyerhoff states her aim is to "examine different rituals of Pokot women in an attempt to conclude how women in the patriarchal and misogynistic Pokot social body are able to articulate areas of female empowerment and are not all that 'muted' as previous scholarship would suggest."[54] During the year she spent with the Pokot doing research for a museum, Meyerhoff established personal relationships with members of the community and grew fascinated with Pokot women in particular. At a later date, she returned to the community and spent several years carrying out her own fieldwork specifically on Pokot women. In the introduction to her dissertation, Meyerhoff states there was not enough research focusing on Pokot women for two reasons: "Firstly, all of the anthropologists who have published on the Pokot to date are male, and secondly, Pokot men definitely give the appearance that they are 'dominant,' and it is Pokot men, rather than women, who continually emphasize their view and perspective of the world in public situations."[55] Her research method combines interviews, both participant and outside observation, as well as preexisting knowledge in hopes of creating a balanced body of work that perceives Pokot females as having an equal amount of power within society when compared to their male counterparts.

In contrast, the aim of Jónsson's dissertation is to "explain how the rituals of Pokot men from birth to death shape identity in order to suggest how they internalize rituals both physically and mentally."[56] Jónsson's interest in the Pokot originated when, as a visiting missionary, Pokot members asked him to build a Christian church. Unfamiliar with the general history of the Pokot, he felt that he could not build a church unless he knew more about the men, as he consid-

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[54] Ibid., 3.
[55] Ibid., 2.
[56] Jónsson, 4.

ered the Pokot a male-oriented society.[57] Similar to Meyerhoff, he mentions previous scholarship based on the Pokot in his introduction. However, whereas Meyerhoff indicates that research on the Pokot focused solely on men, Jónsson suggests the exact opposite, stating a clear need for a study specifically on Pokot men. Since these dissertations are separated by only twenty-five years, the contradiction in their acknowledgement of previous scholarship on the Pokot seems first and foremost odd, and, second, perhaps a conscious decision given their respective arguments. Like Meyerhoff, Jónsson's fieldwork relied on participant and outside observation as well as preexisting knowledge. While Meyerhoff conducted interviews with her subjects, Jónsson hired Pokot men as research assistants who could carry out some of the interviews on his behalf. He trained them to interview Pokot elder men who knew traditions and encouraged them to delve as deeply as possible into the lives of their subjects.

Both Meyerhoff and Jónsson sought to use their experiences to create knowledge, and also divulged preexisting knowledge, which, in some circumstances, strengthened their argument, while in others, reified exactly what they hoped to disprove. First, both maintain the belief that anthropology has a Western bias and are aware that they, as Westerners, are a distortion factor. As such, they both try to avoid cultural bias as much as possible in their studies of the Pokot. Further, both understand that the Pokot comprehend gender and social differences through essentialism. As such, both acknowledge that Pokot gender identities are reflected in rituals and the symbols constituting them. Lastly, both researchers reference Michel Foucault's ideas regarding the social construction of people. Specifically that, "the discourse and categories dominant in a society are 'inscribed' upon people, both interpersonally and institutionally, and within them. Selves are socially constructed through mediation of powerful discourses."[58]

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Jónsson, 27.

These assumptions surrounding knowledge provide a sufficient transition into looking at certain key points from both dissertations in regards to Pokot gender knowledge in order to understand my choice in a feminist standpoint. That is, you will see, through the following key points, how two different arguments framed from two entirely different experiences produced (one purposely, one not), in my opinion, the same knowledge in regards to Pokot gender constructs.

In Meyerhoff's research, the dependence on a male/female duality is evident early on and is referenced, perhaps both consciously and subconsciously, countless number of times throughout her thesis. In Meyerhoff's observations and recordings of rituals focusing on the transition from girl to woman, she always concludes with some mention of how the step or process relates back to or compares to male rituals in addition to how men in the community perceive the rituals. For example, when describing certain aspects of the main ritual in a Pokot woman's life, the transformation from girl to woman, she explains that elder women are the ones responsible for coaching the girls through the initiation process. However, she explains that what the female elders are constantly reinforcing is a set of values created by men centered on how to treat men and how to please their husband, suggesting the only way to be a civil woman is through pleasing her male counterpart. Even when Meyerhoff tries to illustrate how a Pokot woman maintains some form of control through different forms of psychological power, she ends with statements subordinating women such as, "because women are aware of their relative status to men and very conscious of where the ultimate power lies, they are very hesitant to carry out these activities."[59] These instances, as well as others of a similar nature, are the main considerations when formulating thoughts regarding Meyerhoff's creation of gender knowledge.

On the other hand, Jónsson maintains a strict focus on men and their rituals and only mentions women in a secondary context when speaking about rituals in which both genders are

[59] Meyerhoff, 115.

involved such as marriage. During his discussion, Jónsson suggests a Pokot man views his wife as merely an economic transaction and compares acquiring a wife to acquiring a cow. In short, by maintaining a clear focus on men and limiting any information regarding women to that which perceives them as inferior and subordinated, Jónsson creates gender knowledge based on his experience that supports both his argument as well as preexisting gender knowledge about the Pokot.

Jónsson and Meyerhoff approach their research with essentially the same techniques and methodological frameworks. Namely, both situate the readers in a way where we are to consider Pokot women subordinated and inferior to men. While this is not a problem for Jónsson's argument, it is a significant problem when trying to justify Meyerhoff's argument. In effect, by orientating the readers in a way where we are already considering Pokot women subordinated, she is immediately creating a problem that needs justification. However, in spite of her efforts to create a balanced body of work, her narrative of experience and her attempt to articulate areas of female empowerment essentially reaffirm Pokot women as having little-to-no power over themselves. As feminist theorist Dorothy Smith states, "creating knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged entails giving people an alternative to the hegemonic view."[60] Thus, in an effort to demonstrate the empowerment of women in order to contest hegemony, Meyerhoff neglected to take the standpoint of the subordinated view and, as such, reified both hegemony and fixed identities. Instead of using one singular experience to justify a "problem" of difference as Meyerhoff did, I hope to build from the wealth of information Meyerhoff and other scholars provide in order to articulate my argument using a feminist standpoint in a way that acknowledges evidence from the past to suggest gender knowledge as socially constructed by patriarchal institutions.

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[60] Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 80.

These two dissertations demonstrate the lack of research on the Pokot from a clear feminist standpoint. That is, while Meyerhoff assumed the role of a woman and hoped to create knowledge about Pokot women, her dependence on a male/female duality in her attempt to articulate areas of female empowerment essentially reaffirms Pokot women as having little-to-no power within the community. Meyerhoff's thesis also leads the reader to question how knowledge produced by experience can be constructed in a way that is less vulnerable to the biases of privilege and more convincing in its attempts to create new social realities through challenging gender identity. Hence, my initial interest in using a feminist standpoint surfaced when comparing how these two different arguments, framed from two entirely different experiences, produced (one purposely, one not), in my opinion, the same knowledge in regards to Pokot gender constructs.

## 2.2 Feminist Standpoint and the Creation of Knowledge

Feminist standpoint draws from both general standpoint theory and feminist theory to create a standpoint, which, as Smith states, has a goal of "creating knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged and giving people an alternative to the hegemonic view."[61] Within this context, knowledge is understood as something socially constructed rather than fixed. Sociologist Joey Sprague further elaborates on the aim of standpoint theory:

> Standpoint theory argues that all knowledge is constructed in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture, and interests, and that these matrices change in configuration from one location to another. A standpoint is not the spontaneous thinking of a person or a category of people. Rather, it is the combination of resources available within a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed.[62]

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[61] Ibid., 80.
[62] Ibid., 41.

A researcher using standpoint theory presumes that preexisting knowledge is based on a collective interpretation of both storied experiences and preexisting knowledge. Taking standpoint theory and combining it with feminist theory to create a feminist standpoint implies examining how knowledge and power are connected to make visible both the hidden power relations of knowledge production and the underpinnings of gender.[63] My aim is to integrate multiple perspectives with my own in order to communicate how Pokot women have responded to and challenged power imbalances.

While it is nearly impossible to generalize the numerous viewpoints of feminist standpoint, what is relative to my argument, and generally held constant within feminist standpoint, is the importance and relativity of the terms knowledge and experience in regard to their inseparability from politics and epistemology. Within this facet of feminist standpoint is the belief that knowledge is a social and cultural creation, as opposed to the essentialist belief that knowledge is a fixed entity.

Third wave feminists' reactions against essentialism are based on the assumption that powerful bodies socially create gender knowledge. Feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler, assert that essentialism imposes homogeneous attributes upon women, employs incorrect dichotomies, generalizes women's experiences within a single category, and is ultimately not conducive to social change. Instead, knowledge should be understood as malleable, linking back to the post-structuralist belief that the creation of knowledge is dependent on power relations that exist within a given society at any given time. Foucault elaborates on this understanding of knowledge:

> The discourse and categories dominant in a society are "inscribed" upon people, both interpersonally and institutionally, and within them. Knowledge is socially

[63] Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland, *Feminist Methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 63.

> constructed through mediation of powerful discourses. Truth, is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.[64]

What is most crucial about the preceding statement is the declaration of knowledge as created through powerful social bodies. That is, instead of completely avoiding powerful bodies or trying to suggest women have equal power, feminist standpoint theory aims to analyze power relations and the ways in which women can negotiate relations of power to create new knowledge based on their own social experiences.

One of the aims of a feminist standpoint is to construct the subject through interpretation of both the author's own experience as well as others' past experiences. Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis defines experience as:

> The process by which for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in a social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social, and in a larger perspective, historical.[65]

Therefore, by articulating one's own experience in relation to past social realities, feminist standpoint assumes experience can be a form of knowledge. In her article, "Experience," gender historian Joan Scott states: "Seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission – the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience."[66] According to Scott, the task of the researcher, then, becomes analyzing how experiential knowledge is produced rather than treating the experience as factual.[67] At this level, there can be agency, in

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[64] Jónsson, 27.
[65] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 159.
[66] Joan Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 24.
[67] Scott, 37.

the sense that experiences allow women to accept, resist, or counter constructions of their own gender identity.

By recognizing the malleability of knowledge and the agency that comes with experience, the idea that gender identities and roles can be continuously produced, accepted, challenged, created, and confirmed becomes the fundamental basis for feminist standpoint. In turn, it is crucial to theorize knowledge as situated, that is, as shaped and conditioned by social positioning. Theorist Donna Haraway provides an appropriate reiteration of this in her term, "situated knowledge," to emphasize that our "embodied vision" is located in some specific social and physical place and that our knowledge is situated, partial, open to critique, and able to integrate multiple perspectives.[68] As feminist theorists Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland suggest, and I would agree, a feminist standpoint must create an argument that:

> …produces the best current understanding of how knowledge of gender is interrelated with women's experiences and the realities of gender. [While also] exploring (as opposed to assuming) how women experience life differently from men, or intersexual, or others, because they live in specific social relationships to the exercise of male power.[69]

In order to eliminate a history's constructed gendered identities, women must situate themselves in a way that accepts their own experiences and the very mark of their otherness. By doing this, women may assert their subordination as the hallmark of their iconography in order to establish a vehicle by which they can make effective challenges to dominant understandings of reality and offer well-grounded strategies for empowerment.

In her efforts to construct the subject of her argument (Pokot women) as equal, Meyerhoff attempts to change knowledge that has already been created on the basis of her own experi-

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[68] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 586.
[69] Ramazanoglu and Holland, 61.

ence. That is, in her attempt to create new knowledge, she relies too much on reproducing naturalized gender categories that consider women subordinate, which, in turn, reaffirms rather than challenges new ideas in regards to gender knowledge. Namely, her narrative analysis maintains the thought that Pokot women are powerless instead of challenging it. Feminist theorist Susan Hekman suggests what occurs when there is a continuous reiteration of a male/female dichotomy: "In challenging differences by asserting their opposites, the challenge becomes necessarily parasitic on the difference itself, not an escape from it."[70] Thus, instead of Meyerhoff using her experience to justify a "problem" of difference, she could have privileged evidence that suggests gender knowledge to be socially constructed by patriarchal institutions and built her argument from that.

More specifically, by embracing the idea that gender is something produced, maintained, and transformed through social power, Meyerhoff could have strengthened her argument by creating a standpoint that challenged the chronological boundaries framed by preexisting knowledge. In this way, by interconnecting standpoint with experience, new knowledge is able to emerge.[71] In turn, by using this mode of address, Meyerhoff could denaturalize the present and past showing identity, experience, and gender as constructed and open to reinvention.

Along the same lines, instead of always trying to justify a female instance of power with a reiteration of her male counterparts' take on it, Meyerhoff could strengthen her position by articulating her argument from the same perspective in which she experienced it, that being from a female standpoint. In this way, instead of trying to rewrite knowledge centered on power among genders, this vantage point allows her experience to create a different form of gender knowledge. Namely, one that is not competing with or trying to reverse preexisting knowledge, but instead

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[70] Susan Hekman, *Feminism, Identity and Difference* (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 11.
[71] Ramazanoglu and Holland, 73.

seeking to create new gender knowledge on the basis of a female standpoint that is equal to patriarchal knowledge. It is my hope that through the reflection, articulation, and collectivity of the aforementioned Pokot narrative analyses, in addition to other scholars' research, and my own position, I can create new gender knowledge on the basis of a female standpoint that is equal to the existing patriarchal knowledge.

# 3 POKOT BODY ART

The importance of body art among the Pokot resonates in their primary role as pastoralists. Art historian Herbert Cole suggests that because pastoralists are by nature a mobile people, they must create art that is easy to transport.[72] In comparison to other African groups who can create and store shrines, furniture, and other types of concrete art, the Pokot rely on personal ornamentation as a form of art due to its transportability. The semiotic aspects of Pokot body art serve to communicate visually a wealth of information. Pokot body art articulates the philosophical underpinnings of their worldview and also identifies power, wealth, age, and social status within the community. That is, whereas Westerners' personal possessions such as vehicles and shelter denote wealth and status, the Pokot use body art to make monetary and social status visible within the community. In the course of my writing, it has become clear that I would have to provide a descriptive analysis of Pokot women's "traditional" body art on a micro-semiotic level, in order to communicate how Pokot women use their body art to integrate into the global economy which, in turn, provides them with ways to empower their own gender identity and move away from patriarchal constraints. In this chapter, I will provide a visual analysis of Pokot women's body art in order to explain how it reflects Pokot ideals and standards. Accordingly, I will explain how the Pokot's integration into the global economy has changed their materials and technology over time, providing further opportunities for women to seek empowerment.

## 3.1 Reflection of Pokot Ideals through Body Art

For the Pokot, body art both articulates the philosophical underpinnings of their worldview and elucidates their concepts of beauty, social ideals, and social structure. As previously stated, duality through essentialism is the main organizing principle of the Pokot. The male pas-

[72] Herbert Cole, "Vital Arts in Northern Kenya," *African Arts* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1974): 14.

toral Pokot considers himself the center of human perfection based on his commitment to *Toro-rot*. Women are imperfect, but men cannot maintain their commitment unmitigated without them. Social unification of opposites is the highest ideal and is played out among Pokot of different sexes and age-sets. The Pokot seek to express this social unification through body art.

As explained in Chapter One, wealth for men is counted in cattle, children, and wives. However, because of the mobility and disbursement of cattle and wives, concentration of capital cannot be used as an indicator of wealth. Instead, the Pokot rely on body art to indicate wealth visually.[73] Body art does not generate more wealth but, instead, becomes essential in establishing and reinforcing Pokot identities, in marking rites of passage, and in generating another form of wealth, *pachigh*.

The term *pachigh* is used to link aesthetically pleasing objects to the word beauty.[74] The first group of things that are considered *pachigh* are those made by nature. This can include anything from a group of cattle, to a sunset, to certain physical features of a woman such as firm breasts or skin tone.[75] The second grouping of objects considered *pachigh* are objects made by the Pokot. For instance, the chalk used to paint on a body as well as the design itself may be considered *pachigh.* Also, the beads on a woman's necklace as well as the necklace itself can be *pachigh.*[76] When several *pachigh* objects are used together to form a single being, it is called *pachigha.* Pokot women, who are the primary creators of body art, understand each object's individual ability to be *pachigh* and, as a result, put a significant amount of time and effort into creating body art. In turn, a woman and her body art not only pleases the husband, it also ele-

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[73] Harold Schneider, "The Interpretation of Pakot Visual Art," *Man* 56 (August 1956): 104.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

vates his status, as the wife is considered an embellishment of the man's overall *pachigha.*[77] Furthermore, women create and wear body art throughout their lives in hopes of maintaining beauty. By recognizing what is considered aesthetically beautiful to the Pokot, we can better understand the process and overall purpose of Pokot body art.

## 3.2 Body Art in the Pokot Community

Similar to other Northern Kenya groups, Pokot body art is of a highly pedagogic nature composed with a framework of conventions taught by Pokot elders and passed down to each generation. Cole further elaborates on the importance of body art:

> Personal decoration is of such importance in Northern Kenya that a person received his first beads shortly after birth and wears others into the grave. Clearly a person is naked without some form of self-decoration, although he may wear little or no real "clothing" in our sense of the word.[78]

Certain types of adornment become a necessary way of identifying social rank within society. For the sake of this paper, I will focus specifically on the body art initiated Pokot women create primarily with beads.

The adornments an initiated woman receives upon marriage and continues to collect throughout her life serve as a way to enhance her beauty further while also promoting her husband's status. Since men become wealthy through acquiring cattle, wives, and children, any body art a woman wears provides visual identification of her husband's accumulations of wealth. Among females, the biggest change in adornment happens after initiation into adulthood.

As previously explained, initiation is the single most important event a young girl, *tipin*, will go through in her life. The event takes place at the onset of puberty over a period of two to three months and includes circumcision (*rotwa)*, a seclusion period, and a public coming out

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

ceremony (*kipuno).*[79] While men are not present during the entire initiation, older women are constantly reinforcing the gender identity a Pokot woman, *mrar*, should uphold in order to please her husband. Accordingly, young girls, *tipins* understand initiation as not only a physical change, but also a social change, allowing them to give birth and become socially identified through their husbands.[80] During the interim period between *rotwa* and *kipuno,* the females are called *chemeris,* which defines them as not yet women but no longer girls. During seclusion, *chemeris* wear and create several different forms of body ornamentation that, as anthropologist Barbara Bianco explains, serve multiple purposes:

> Initiation body art further amplifies social attractiveness. It reconfigures the body and channels its energies into the pursuit of cattle and children, the primary means by which Pokot men and women create intimacy and reconstitute social bonds. Commonplace items of adornment provide an entrée to the images and values through which distinction between sexes can become implicated in the workings of power.[81]

A Pokot girl will first adorn the body art she creates during initiation for her *kipuno* and continue to wear the ornamentation throughout her life. Overall, the goal of this body art is "to conjoin Pokot beauty (*pachigh)* with goodness (*koromnyo)*, aesthetics with ethics."[82] The body art a *chemeri* creates during seclusion includes a special ritual belt, headpiece (*cyon)*, headband (*sanai)*, and necklace (*til)* (Figures 1,2,3). Additionally, many of the initiates may choose to wear coiled, iron anklets and bracelets that produce a clinking sound when the woman dances, making her entire ensemble come alive. Initiates must wear their body art until four days after completion of *kipuno.*

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[79] Meyerhoff, 149.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Barbara Bianco, "Gender & Material Culture in West Pokot, Kenya," in *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa,* Dorothy Hodgson, ed. (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 30.
[82] Bianco, Women and Things, 771.

The last rite of passage for an initiate, in which she adds the final touches to her body adornments, is a secret ceremony called *sewo.*[83] While no outsider is able to witness this secret ceremony, Pokot women confirm that it revolves around the burying and uncovering of beads. Meyerhoff states:

> It seems that each initiate and her leader must bury two metal beads under stones in a particular spot. It is from the same spot that the leader then uncovers two metal beads belonging to the girls who were last initiated in the neighborhood. These two beads are given to women and they wear them on their special ritual belts.[84]

In most cases, the beads symbolize the clan of her future husband, as most bride wealth negotiations are made prior to initiation. After *sewo,* if the new *mrar* has a husband-in-waiting, he will meet his bride and take her home. The newly-initiated woman will travel home wearing all of the body art she created, signifying to the rest of the community that her husband will be the first to have sexual intercourse with her, thus initiating his power over her procreative life.[85] This only further suggests the importance of initiation in that a *tipin* not only becomes a *mrar*, she also becomes a wife.

Once a woman has her first child, she moves up within the hierarchy of wives. Upon childbirth, a woman receives a special belt or *lökötyö,* from elder women, which uses aesthetics to show the community both public and private aspects of a woman's marriage (Figure 4). Accordingly, since children allude to a successful marriage, it becomes extremely important to publicize procreativity. A husband takes pride in letting the community know that he is fertile. Bianco elaborates further on the importance of adornment in broadcasting procreative abilities:

> Given that motherhood is highly valued and publicly celebrated in societies where bride wealth rather than bride-service is practiced, adornment worn by postpartum

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[83] Meyerhoff, 149.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 150.

> women should be especially important in research agendas concerned with power and public worth.[86]

This further emphasizes a man's hope to affirm power through his wife's body. Bianco confirms that by studying the *lökötyö*, we can understand how procreativity is perceived as a business.[87] The *lökötyö* confirms the woman as a kind of asset in which the ability to produce more assets (children) creates more wealth for her husband.[88]

Pokot women articulate their individual power among wives through sexuality. Accordingly, a woman's sexuality may be enhanced in two ways: first, through procreativity, and second, through advertising sexuality to her husband by way of her body. A wife who provides her husband with a lot of children has more authority than a wife with a lesser amount. In this circumstance, authority is defined as the privilege to teach young girls the expected code of behavior by emphasizing the necessity of upholding male values.[89] Moreover, a powerful sexuality increases the attention a woman receives from her husband. As a result, the more sexuality a woman expounds, the more materials her husband will provide her to make body art. This is of particular importance, as the more materials a wife accumulates, the more possibilities she has to create body art for profit, as this paper will discuss further in Chapter Four. In addition to the body ornaments a woman makes during initiation, she also receives numerous ornaments throughout her life from her peers that signify her sexuality and rank among her husband's wives, the most notable ornament being a beaded necklace. A woman who adorns herself with numerous necklaces is interpreted as a very sexual woman. Therefore, by looking at the body art of an initiated woman, other members of the community immediately realize her procreative abilities and rank among the wives.

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[86] Bianco, "Gender and Material Culture," 30.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Meyerhoff, 162.

As children are the ultimate signifier of wealth for Pokot men, when one of them goes through initiation, he wants the entire community to know. As such, a man provides his wife with precious materials so that she may create a headband to wear during the initiation of their children (Figure 5). The headband is constructed using cowrie shells, rawhide string, beads, ivory, and ostrich feathers.[90] Both ivory and ostrich feathers are considered materials of high status that must only be worn by Pokot elders. The use of precious materials is yet another way to show a man's wealth on his wife's body. A woman wears her headband and *lökötyö* throughout her child's initiation process. When worn together, the social identity of her husband is completely exposed to the community.

Above all, the initiation headband, coupled with other adornments, suggests a woman has achieved her goal as a wife. Through adornments, women suggest their sexual capabilities and become walking advertisements for males' lineages to which they have to been contracted. As discussed above, Pokot body art is based on the social unification of opposites. As such, it is necessary to discuss the visual aesthetics in addition to the technology and materials used to create Pokot body art.

Production of beaded body art is solely women's work. This is due to the fact that it falls into the category of work that would mitigate male perfection if performed by males. Therefore, it is relegated to females who are already polluted by menstruation.[91] As a result, women as the artists, maintain some control over the number of ornaments men may obtain. Additionally, women are also responsible for most of the innovations and changes in style, pattern, and color.

The focus on opposites within Pokot body art leads to the creation of ornaments that are based on high contrast and complementary colors. Pokot body art is generally completely ab-

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[90] Jónsson, 245.
[91] Meyerhoff, 106.

stract and often an embodiment of concrete aesthetics, livestock, and humans.[92] Conventional use of color is of overriding importance, as each ethnic group in East Africa has its own color code that serves as an identity marker differentiating it from other groups.[93] The brightest adornments that also contain a variety of colors and a wealth of surface pattern have the most *pichighyo*. An overall preference for black is linked to the rarity of black cattle in the region, making them more valuable than others and, therefore, more beautiful.[94] In regards to other colors, it is typically acceptable to create an entire strand of one color and juxtapose it next to another solid colored strand. Different colored beads alternating between red and white or white and blue are considered acceptable, as well as stringing several of the same colored beads together on a solid string and juxtaposing with another solid colored strand. What are not considered beautiful are groupings of white and yellow, red and blue, or yellow and red. Art historian Harold Schneider explains these groupings are unacceptable because, "the contrast between colors is reduced and likened to colors of goats and sheep, they become monotonous.[95] In contrast, many patterns may mimic high contrast color schemes found in nature, while others may signify clan lineage.

With the Pokot's entry into the global economy came a change in choices of materials for their beadwork. While some materials still originate in Pokot areas, a majority of the materials, in particular the beads, are imported from other countries. With the ability to trade, Pokot women gained more resources and, thus, more opportunities to create and manipulate color schemes and patterns. Perhaps the single most important introduction has been that of various

[92] Schneider, 105.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 105.

colored glass beads, first imported from Czechoslovakia around the 1900s.[96] Prior to this, the Pokot were using universally distributed East African beads that were primarily in pigments and natural colors of materials such as wood and metal. This new resource allowed Pokot women to refine the expression of their aesthetic principles and cultural identity, thus making color more important than structure. As bead scholar Peter Francis further explains:

> As a communicative medium, glass beads have the advantage of the potential to transmit meaning in several ways. These are size, shape, color, surface texture or decoration, structure of finished object, and pattern of finished object. The durability and communicative qualities compensate for lack of speed.[97]

Thus, the ability to create new body art using vibrant glass beads was quite appealing and became the norm from the 1900s on. Glass beads became the primary medium of Pokot aesthetic expression due to the modularity and color of glass beads, two factors that were previously severely limited due to East Africa's reliance on metal for beads.

Subsequently, the tools necessary to make Pokot beadwork became simple, cheap, and, most importantly, portable. Iron, copper, or aluminum wires are used to hold the beads together structurally. Hair from the back of cattle is used as thread for stringing beads together. Natural materials such as bone and horn are carved into small discs as add-ons for necklaces.[98] More precious materials, including ostrich feathers and cowrie shells are also added on to the beadwork of higher-ranking elder women. In the early 1900s, women primarily used a bone pusher to coil wire. During this time, knives used for scarring were also used to cut thread.[99] By the 1950s, razors and steel needles became the norm for threading and stringing beadwork.

The integration of glass beads provided the Pokot with a way to refine both their group and individual identities. In essence, the change from metal beads to glass beads is what gave

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[96] Peter Francis, *The Czech Bead Story* (Lake Placid, NY: Lapis Route Books, 1979), 182.
[97] Ibid.,183.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

women complete freedom in regards to the production of beadwork. The execution of subtle and overt messages in regards to social unification of opposites and clan lineage make beadwork a time consuming job that requires patience and attention to detail. The entire process of creating body art entered into the female domain to men's satisfaction because it kept women occupied. While a woman must initially rely upon her husband to provide cash to purchase beads, upon first selling ornaments to outsiders, she can begin to control the cash brought in from her commodity. The ways and extent to which a Pokot woman successfully integrates her beadwork into the global market, thus affording her opportunities for empowerment, are discussed further in the next chapter.

Figure 1. Pokot Woman's headpiece, *cyon*, 1960s, from Dorothy and Rob Udall Collection, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Figure 2. Pokot Woman's headband, *sanai*, 1960s, from Dorothy and Rob Udall Collection, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Figure 3. Pokot Woman's necklace, *til*, 1960s, from Dorothy and Rob Udall Collection, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Figure 4. Pokot women wearing pregnancy belts, *lökötyö.*

Source: Jónsson, Kjartan. "Pokot Masculinity: The Role of Rituals in Forming Men." PhD diss., University of Iceland, 2006.

Figure 5. Pokot Woman's initiation headband, 1960s, from Dorothy and Rob Udall Collection, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

# 4 STRATEGIC HYBRIDITY FOR THE GLOBAL MARKET

In the last fifty years, globalization and tourism have necessitated that the Pokot integrate into the global economy. By understanding globalization as an advanced stage of colonialism, it becomes apparent how Pokot women successfully transform their "traditional" body art into a marketable item through the homogenizing practice of Western exoticization. In this situation, rather than focusing on the intrinsic cultural identity of Pokot art, Western interpretations accentuate "primitive" and "traditional" elements of the body art, thus perpetuating the colonial notion of the "Other." Unable to escape from the generic "Idea of Africa" carelessly allocated to the continent by Europeans during the colonial period, Pokot women, similar to many other African groups, create body art that confronts modes of neoliberal globalization. In this chapter, I examine how globalization, as an extension of colonialism, has provided avenues for women to significantly challenge their gender identity and gain a degree of independence and empowerment away from patriarchal constraints.

## 4.1 Globalization as an Extension of Colonialism

Global, political, cultural, and economic practices have constituted each other within the contexts of particular histories and hierarchies. The "Otherness" of Africa created by past colonial powers is facilitated in the present through globalization. That is, by creating cultural boundaries through defining notions of "the Western" and "the African," colonialism, as an early stage of globalization, provided a way for the "Other" to infiltrate into the global market. In order to understand how the exoticized identity of Africa is defined and perceived within the context of the global market, I must first elaborate on how globalization may be considered an advanced stage of colonialism. So that I may be clear in this suggestion, it is necessary to have a

more comprehensive understanding as to how colonialism has shaped globalization to influence social meaning specific to certain local, national, and international contexts.

For this paper, I define colonialism using feminist theorists' Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan's definition of the term: "a system of domination that works in subtle and powerful ways, upheld not only through political and economic means but also through cultural practices."[100] Using this definition, colonialism becomes something that cannot be simply dismissed as a past event. Instead, colonialism can be connected to the present by considering how the term positions Pokot cultural production in the fields of transnational economic relations and identity constructions. For instance, a beaded necklace a woman sells in a Nairobi market is not meant to reproduce authentic Pokot body art "as it is" to the Pokot; instead, it is a product made by the Pokot as it is understood through signs and codes that allow it to be considered authentic by Western standards. This is because the powerful hierarchies of globalization continue to be fueled by ideologies such as colonialism, which emerged with the development of our modern world.

From this point of view, globalization as a latter stage of colonialism makes more sense in that when the effects of colonization instigate power and domination, social relations are reified through such events as the trade of commodities. In this circumstance, globalization, as Marxist Ellen Meiksins Woods defines it, becomes "a redundant term for the internationalization of capital."[101] Here, the Pokot do not neglect to acknowledge where colonialism positioned them within globalization but, instead, use the cultural identity of Africa as created through colonization to enter into the global market. By acknowledging Western cultures' perspective of the

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[100] Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 328.
[101] Quoted in Valentine Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Frameworks* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 23.

"Other" through an exotic gaze, anthropologist Kathleen Stewart suggests how "Others" such as the Pokot:

> …see themselves doubly – as they construct themselves in the local talk (and this itself is already masked and metaphoric) and as they are imaged by the distanced surround of "America" (whether nostalgically, as our "contemporary ancestors," or, in the ideology of "Progress" and the "need to be realistic," as buffoons – holdovers from the 19th century living in the backwater of the country).[102]

Accordingly, it becomes necessary to discuss in depth how the cultural identity of Africa is defined within globalization today.

## 4.2 The "Idea of Africa"

As cultural theorist and author K. A. Appiah suggests, " 'The Africa'-in philosophy, culture, and arts etc.-cannot be understood outside the history of western colonialism. A specific African identity begins as the product of the European gaze."[103] The emergence of the "European gaze," parallels the first direct colonization of African regions in the latter part of the nineteenth century. During this period, scholars within different fields of study ranging from history to anthropology created the "Idea of Africa."[104] Exploiting travelers' and explorers' writings at the end of the nineteenth century, a "colonial library" accumulated, speaking about Africa based on a paradigm of difference.[105] This idea of difference suggested that there are natural features, cultural characteristics, and values that contribute to the reality of Africa as a continent, and its civilizations as constituting a totality different from any Western location or group.[106] This totalizing identity of Africa subjected the continent to being defined in terms of its "Otherness." Western scholars constructed Africa in a primitive, romanticized, and exotic way, simplifying

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[102] Kathleen Stewart, "Nostalgia – A Polemic," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (August 1988): 236.
[103] Maria Eriksson Baaz, *Same and Other* (Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainsitute, 2001), 6.
[104] Ibid.
[105] V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), xv.
[106] Ibid.

the cultural complexity of Africa and alluding to its "Otherness." Thus, in my opinion, the cultural identity of Africa is based on this "Otherness" or "Idea of Africa" as first perceived by European explorers.

This thought is further reinforced when we understand the term culture as Arjun Appadurai describes it, "a concept of difference."[107] Appadurai explains:

> Culture is a pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity. Unmarked, culture can continue to be used to refer to the plethora of differences that characterize the world today, differences at various levels, with various valences, and with greater and lessen degrees of social consequence.[108]

In this case, Pokot women are seemingly exploiting what is perceived by Westerners to be an African cultural identity. I say perceived because, as a result of colonialism, Westerners see themselves as the ones that sort, differentiate, travel among, and become attached to communities constituted by Diasporas. What most Westerners seem to neglect is that this form of discourse is a storied, idealized past that produces a romanticized nostalgia. More specifically, as Kathleen Stewart states, "Western culture continues to acknowledge difference primarily by differentiating 'exotic' from the 'domestic.'"[109] The homogenizing cultural identity that causes Africa to be described in terms of its "Otherness" in the present is dependent on the idea that past colonial ideas and images are embedded into the memories of Westerners, thus becoming objects of power, or the dominant discourse. How groups such as the Pokot use this cultural identity to their advantage is dependent upon how they position themselves within the global market.

While it is difficult not to conclude that it is largely Western scholars rather than Africans themselves who produce, create, and circulate the majority of discourse surrounding the "Idea of Africa," it is impossible to suggest in today's world that Africans possess no intentionality or

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[107] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), 12
[108] Ibid., 13.
[109] Stewart, 227.

control in their place within the global market. That is, the Pokot grasp how colonialism shapes contemporary identities and that, in consequence, anything from Africa will be judged in terms of its "Africanness." In this situation, rather than focusing on the intrinsic cultural identity of Pokot art, Western interpretations accentuate "primitive" and "traditional" elements of the art, thus perpetuating the colonialist thought of the "Other." Unable to escape from their generic "African" identity, Pokot women confront modes of neoliberal globalization to challenge their own gender identity created within their community. While I acknowledge that other issues besides globalization play a part in the perception of Pokot art within a global market (most notably race), I argue that since globalization is facilitated by the past, it takes on the main role in the creation of Pokot art as a commodity. It is with this understanding that I may assess how Pokot women have transformed a traditional art form into a product for profit.

## 4.3 African Art

The Western "Idea of Africa," affects nearly all aspects of the continent including cultural, social, and political arenas, and art is no exception. In all actuality, I argue there is no such thing as "African" art. Instead, as a result of the Western perception of Africa as explained above, it is difficult for many Westerners to comprehend that Congolese art is quite different from Kenyan art and that within these countries there are thousands of groups that create art in a variety of ways and for different reasons. It is this perception that has allowed for body art's successful integration into the global market. Theorist Maria Eriksson Baaz elaborates on the term African art:

> The concept of "African art" must be situated in the context of history and the process in which different objects, regardless of their meaning and function in the local context, were incorporated in a general Western notion of art and classified as belonging to a specific "African art." Artifacts produced in Africa were satu-

> rated within the evolutionary scheme and presented as symbols of a primitive, childish art that reflected earlier stages in the evolutionary process.[110]

Knowing this, I can conclude that "African art" can be included in the images and signs embedded in Western thought that surround the "Idea of Africa." The question of who contextualizes "African art," and who decides what types of art are popular within the global market, rests solely in the power of Western curators, collectors, and critics who base their knowledge on colonial discourse.

The Western perception that Africa is something timeless and untouched suggests that "African art" should represent a traditional, primitive past. What makes "African art" a popular commodity within the global market is its ability to evoke nostalgia. When tourists from America travel to Kenya, for example, they are hoping to view, in person, the Pokot woman they saw in a coffee table book, standing against a desolate background, completely nude except for the plethora of art that adorns her body. Once they arrive, they purchase an "authentic" necklace similar to the one they remember from the picture, only to return home and tell friends how Africa is just like the pictures and proudly display the necklace for further proof. Therefore, what types of "African art" are considered popular is clearly dependent on the images and stories that served to create the Western "Idea of Africa." Nostalgia occurs when Westerners imagine the "Idea of Africa." As a result, nostalgia surrounding Africa becomes a cultural practice with a storied past rooted in colonialism. Anthropologist Susan Stewart elaborates stating, "nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions and denies the repetition's capacity to define identity."[111] Thus, the task of a Pokot woman becomes not interpreting Western nostalgia towards Africa to be sign of a poor, subordinated history but, instead, to engage with nos-

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[110] Baaz, 8.
[111] Stewart, 227.

talgia as a social practice to mobilize signs of the past in the context of the present in order to help create a better future.

There is a clear difference between the authenticities that the West has established for "African art" in comparison to the evidence of tradition among African people. Scholar Mirko Lauer suggests this difference explaining, "the value of indigenous art and culture is only limited to its primitivism and exoticism in relation to the Western perspective, and consequently, subjected to this cultural dichotomy, indigenous societies are forced to remain genuine, traditional, and stuck in the past."[112] What exactly is meant by the term "traditional" within the global market needs further clarification.

In other words, to talk about the success of "African art" from a globalized perspective, we must consider it a commodity that sells on the basis of the "Idea of Africa." In this circumstance, there is an assumed difference between "traditional society" and "traditional art." Art historian Sidney Kasfir explains,

> Ironically, what we would call traditional "African" art – that which is collected and displayed and hence authenticated and valorized as "African" art – was and is only produced under conditions that ought to preclude the very act of collecting. Seen from an historic perspective, it is a largely colonial enterprise; and seen anthropologically, it is the logical outcome of a social-evolutionary view of the Other.[113]

"African art" in a global market is understood as authentic on the basis that a "traditional" artist from a "traditional" society produced it. So that the only art deemed truly authentic are the pieces made without intent to sell, but instead for personal use, i.e. what a Pokot woman makes for herself. Instead, art made for the global market can be labeled "neotraditional." Appiah con-

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[112] Mirko Lauer, "Populist Ideology and Indigenism: A Critique," in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America,* by Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 249.
[113] Sidney Kasfir, "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow," in *Reading the Contemporary,* eds. Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 90.

siders anything produced for sale to the West a neotraditional work of art.[114] However, what allows this neotraditional art to sell in the global market is the ability for the artist to link it to the timeless and primitive past.

The success of "African art" on a global scale is also dependent on the anonymity of the artist. The Western buyer conceives "African art" as something bound to tradition, and, in consequence, the individual artist is almost always removed in favor of crediting a "traditional" society with creating the art. By linking the art to tradition, it allows Westerners to reinvent "African art" as an object of desire: a projection of the exoticized, primitive, and timeless past.[115] Likewise, removing the artist from the art and instead substituting the group from which the artist comes from as the "artist," the work becomes more authentic as Westerners can immediately feel a sense of exoticism upon hearing the art was made, for example, by the Pokot of Western Kenya as opposed to an unknown Pokot artist.

In essence, these conditions and circumstances which deem a work of "African art" authentic are known to the African artist. To the artist, "imitating a well known 'traditional' piece of art is considered neither deceptive or demeaning; rather, it is viewed as both economically pragmatic and a way of legitimatizing the skill of an predecessor (if an old model) or paying homage to tradition."[116]

## 4.4 Pokot Beadwork in the Global Market

As explained in Chapter One, Kenya's entrance into the global market has increased tourism and forced groups such as the Pokot to find new forms of income. The "Idea of Africa" provides an imaginative resource for Pokot women to use an artistic practice considered by

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[114] K.A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), 148.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Kasfir, 96.

Pokot men to be "busy work," to create a commodity and integrate into the global economy. With this integration comes empowerment. Under this circumstance, empowerment is perceived as, "a process by which people acquire real powers and command real resources within their locality that is a power over material resources."[117] Thus, while a woman still produces beadwork for her own family, she is also free to sell her ornaments and use the cash as she wishes.

The majority of Pokot women sell beads by traveling to larger "tourist" cities where they can form clusters with other women seeking the same kind of refuge.[118] In this case, because a woman is away from her home, she can hide the cash from her husband by immediately spending it or simply neglecting to report her earnings. Other women will sell beadwork directly to visitors on the roadside, while others sell to intermediaries who then take the beadwork to markets. Anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson noted that many migrant market workers hire women to make ornaments which they either take back to sell in their own home country or sell in the larger markets of Kenya and surrounding countries.[119] With the ability to migrate to larger cities, many women break completely from patriarchal constraints and stay in the cities for the rest of their lives. The idea is that if a woman can amass enough capital by either saving or getting it from her husband, she can establish herself within the market and start making a profit. A woman is able to sell her work to visitors for profitable price because tourists are unaware of the local system of values. I argue the tourists, in turn, are paying a large price because of the ways in which Pokot women have strategically created the beadwork.

By using traditional techniques, Pokot women employ intentional hybridism to create beadwork. Mudimbe expounds on this hybridism:

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[117] Meredeth Turshen, *African Women: A Political Economy* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.
[118] Joan Erikson, *The Universal Bead* (New York, NY: Norton and Co., 1993), 34.
[119] Dorothy Hodgson, *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 64.

> First, it takes the sense of an interrupted tradition, not out of desire for purity, which would testify only to the imagination of dead ancestors, but in a way that reflects the conditions of today. Second, a methodical assessment in the artist's labor beginning, in effect, with an evaluation of the tools, means, and projects of art within a social context transformed by colonialism and by later currents, influences, and fashions from the West.[120]

Pokot women blend old and new techniques to create necklaces that supply the Western viewer with thoughts that the art they just purchased is indeed "traditional." The "old" implies the traditional techniques that the woman applies to create the necklaces. The "new" implies the ways in which Pokot women conform to Western standards as to what is popular at the time.

As suggested, the introduction of glass beads from Czechoslovakia allowed for several changes in the use and creation of Pokot beadwork on both micro and macro levels. The importation of glass beads provided a means for Pokot women to create beadwork that is what a Westerner would consider "colonial chic."[121] For example, certain colored bead combinations that would be considered insipid or against Pokot tradition are juxtaposed next to one another. A woman who primarily uses Pokot group colors, black, red, yellow, and blue, to create her own body art, may create a necklace for sale with green and blue, two colors that are not supposed to be next to one another within the Pokot community, yet fit into the niche of what is considered a hot item to a Western tourist. In other words, the Pokot are aware of what Westerners expect to see in markets, most often a traditional item that can be worn in a modern society. As a result, a Pokot woman realizes she must sacrifice her own identity to a certain extent in order to create a cultural product that will sell in a global economy.

Pokot women also depend on the "Idea of Africa" in order to frame, authenticate, and contextualize their beadwork. Westerners want to hear exoticized stories behind the creation and

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[120] Mudimbe, 154.
[121] Kasfir, 97.

history of the art they are about to buy and as a result, Pokot women understand that the story behind the art is nearly as important as the art itself.[122] By the same token, Pokot women who sell body art in the market are likely to intensify the feeling of "tradition" by removing the adornments from her own body (premade for Western consumption, of course) and placing them on the tourist so that they may feel some reassurance and satisfaction knowing they are indeed receiving a piece of authentic body art.[123] This conscious act, I would argue, holds a much deeper, significant meaning.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, within their community, the Pokot, a pastoral and thus mobile group, rely on the body as an external form of both self and cultural identities. The importance of the body within Pokot society resonates in its primary role of communicating social, culture, and historical aspects of a person within the community and, on a broader spectrum, as a way of differentiating themselves from other groups. As such, the body becomes a form of language, and, as feminist Elizabeth Grosz suggests, "the ways in which culturally specific grids of power, regularly act and force condition and provide techniques for the formation of particular bodies."[124]

Conversely, the idea of an African woman's body from a Western perspective is rarely understood this way and is instead perceived through the colonial construction of the idea of an African woman. Art historian Barbara Thompson states:

> The Western sexualization and pathologizing of the African female body sharply contrasts with traditional African ideologies of womanhood, in which women were – and in many cultures today continue to be – honored and depicted in the visual and performing arts as the givers of life, as guardians of moral integrity, and as cornerstones of family continuity and communal unity.[125]

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[122] William Bissell, "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (May 2005): 217.
[123] Kasfir, 96.
[124] Ibid., 41.
[125] Barbara Thompson, ed., *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons, and Ideologies of the African Body* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008), 3.

Whereas the Pokot view the body as a means for generating dynamic cultural meaning, structuring complex social relations, and establishing flows of power, the Western idea of the African female body is romanticized, exoticized, and sexualized.[126] Incidentally, it is logical to presume that because the Pokot view the body as such a sacred entity, compromising their own identity would seem to go against all underpinnings of their group. However, as stated earlier, the economic climate in Kenya coerced the Pokot to come up with different forms of capital that they could then integrate into the global market. It is in this situation we see how the body transforms from a specific identity recognizable that is, "not opposed to culture…but instead the cultural product."[127] Through this simple act, we see a conscious effort made by Pokot women to adhere to Westerners' perception of the 'Other' for their own benefit. Namely, we see how Pokot women recognize their cultural status and identity within a global spectrum and, as such, use their own bodies and the art they place on them to visualize the social-evolutionary view of the 'Other.'

Here, the body becomes malleable in that, under difference circumstances, a Pokot woman may mark her body in a way that allows for her to perform an identity in accordance with where she is at a certain place or time. Feminist theorist Sandra Lee Bartky explains how performing the body acknowledges the dependence on the audience, stating "it might be objected that performance for another in no way signals the inferiority of the performer to the one for whom the performance is intended: the actor for example, depends on his audience but is in no

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[126] Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, "Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference," In *Science and Popular Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3.
[127] Grosz, 23.

way inferior to it; he is not demeaned by his dependency."[128] That is to say, Pokot women, in this situation, as the subordinated 'Other' are not to be perceived as completely powerless. Instead, by recognizing their subordination, they can benefit economically, and, as a result, create forms of empowerment.

[128] Sandra Lee Bartky, "Foucault, Feminism, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance,* eds. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 72.

## CONCLUSION

By investigating globalization as an advanced stage of colonialism, it becomes more lucid as to exactly how Pokot women construct an ideal of themselves using both their own traditions and the Western idea of a "primitive" African art. In this circumstance, pastoralists' need for a mobile art that visually identifies status and wealth within the community provides an advantage to the Pokot and other mobile groups. Namely in that their art is considered more of a "tourist art" in comparison to other regions in Africa that have more concrete forms of art which are not as easy to transport and do not warrant the same feeling of "exoticness."

By examining how Pokot women use the colonial "Idea of Africa" to capitalize on "traditional," "exotic," art, we may comprehend how globalization can be a progressive force in regions normally deemed irrelevant within the global market, giving groups, such as Pokot women, a chance to significantly reshape their social situations. Pokot women succumb to the "Idea of Africa" by combining preexisting Western dichotomies of traditional and modern as well as West and non-West to their own body art in a way that provides a feeling of nostalgia for the Western tourist. The importance of intent in this situation continues in how women use their bodies as techniques of production to frame the present within the Western notion of a romanticized and exotic Africa. The explanation of the presented concepts and histories suggests how Pokot body art has provided avenues for women to feel empowered and challenge gender identities constructed previously by patriarchal underpinnings.

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