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Influencers and Colonial Global Biologies

Menstruation as a process has stayed relatively stable across time and culture, but the industrialization and globalization of culture, trade, and clinical technique change the way individual people characterize and engage with their menstruation. For example, many modern westerners treat their period as a secular event and only attend to it with Western clinical means of over the counter medication, birth control, and other simple tech like heating pads; whereas others, I argue, culturally appropriate the treatment of their menses in a reductionist and colonizing manner that simply re-medicalizes menstruation, and does not demedicalize it as many of them aim to do.

To argue this, I will first dissect the components of two posts by one Instagram influencer, Allie Mcfee (@modern goddess lifestyle/@wombhealthacaemy) who creates content based around the spiritual reclamation of divine femininity and healing womb pain caused by periods, PMS, and trauma. I will then explain how said posts and her bricolage of cherry-picked religious practices and neo spiritual beliefs contribute to medical pluralisms, colonization in public health, local and global biologies, and biomedicalization.

Influencers like Mcfee encourage their followers to depart from reliance on traditional western medicine and psychotherapy for relief from pain and adjacently, spiritual awakening and satisfaction; specifically, they promote 'natural' nutritional and herbal solutions as well as somatic practices. These alternatives to drug therapy have their roots in Eastern medicine and religion, and peer-reviewed literature does exist on their benefits, but Mcfee herself does not cite where she sources her knowledge, the data on the effectiveness of these methods, nor a comprehensive data collection of results from people who buy her products and programs.

For example, on March 22 of this year, Mcfee made a post about eating specific foods, nutrients, vitamins, and minerals during specific phases of the menstrual cycle, a common suggestion among female menstrual health influencers. I say suggestion rather than practice because since these are social media posts curated for her image and product promotion, I cannot be 100% sure she actually follows the suggestions she advertises to her followers. Her caption of this post begins with:

"1. Eat for your cycle (foods high in...) Menstrual Phase- iron, minerals, vitamin c; Follicular phase- vitamin E, vitamin d; Ovulatory phase- omega 3s, antioxidants; Luteal phase- magnesium, vitamin d, b complex protein (especially b6)", and ends with, "5. ▼ Get to the root of your Womb Trauma-try my Womb Clearing Method™- a somatic embodiment method to liberate repressed emotions stuck in the body expressing physically through symptoms like pain. This is least talked about in the wellness community- but womb trauma can be a big factor in what's blocking your progress when you feel like you've tried everything."

In between these poles she notes the use of stretching and massage to relieve pain, detoxing from alcohol and caffeine, and testing one's estrogen and progesterone levels. Albeit relatively tame and agreeable suggestions, the juxtaposition of suggesting tailoring vitamin intake to one's cycle with no explanation as to why these parts of the cycle and why these

specific vitamins to her highly specific healing plan that costs upwards of \$300 on her website reveals distinct priorities; her medicine is vague but her finances very pointed and personally beneficial.

With this I argue that Mcfee and others promote a type of medical pluralism that on its surface rejects the technology and profit motive of modern, western medicine and posits eastern medicine as if it is healthier and more ethical because of its ancient roots, yet benefits financially and socially from the promotions of these ideals; the influencer's ad and product revenue solidifying how antithetical their neo-eastern beliefs truly are. This kind of pluralism attempts to remove itself from colonial health institutions while still having the privilege of deciding to defer from them in the first place, and acts much like a colonial entity by destabilizing the reality and perception of other cultures through capitalization and privatization. Further, this colonial pluralism enforces imperialism because it halts these cultures at their ancient health practices, and does not recognize or integrate their modern technology, keeping their perception at a fixed, historical, illusory level.

Comparatively, people of non-white or American lineage are encouraged/forced to modernize themselves to the detriment of their health and culture, such as the Inuit populations taught to shed their culture's diet and hygiene decisions for more industrialized methods, such as shampoo, "For the Inuit, becoming "clean," whatever else it signified, also meant becoming white." (Stevenson, 50). Spiritual white women who steep their diet and exercise in bits and pieces of indigenous lifestyles encourage their followers to get wild, free, and in tune with Earth medicine while Natives everywhere are seen as unclean, uncivilized, out of touch. These influencers complicate our understandings of local and global public health since they are being socially and financially rewarded for making "unclean" hygiene choices sourced from Native practice instead of scalped.

With this, we can see how Mcfee is distinctly, undeniably located within modern medicine culture amongst her Eastern reliance and middle eastern reliances. Niewöhner and Lock (2018) define and dissect local biologies as the entanglement between geographical spaces and the human bodies "temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts" (684); explaining the fluidity of how we refer to and treat our bodies is dependent on our material and social environment. Mcfee displays through her hashtagging how her body and lifestyle is thoroughly modern, as it is dependent on having access to information about other cultures.

I have argued that grouping these ideas for her health plans is a kind of colonial medical pluralism, and I want to further that by arguing this approach as a type of biomedicalization as well. Medicalization, creating body processes as medical problems, and biomedicalization, creating genomic and molecular occurrences into options for medical meddling, (Clarke et al., 47) appear in menstrual health and lifestyle discourses when influencers begin to argue in the opposite yet parallel direction of these terms, positing that: periods are over medicalized, period pain is entirely unnatural and a result of toxic substances from food and products seeping into one's blood, and that the cure is to pursue Eastern *medicine* and neo spiritual philosophy to cleanse yourself down to the genes, to the soul.

Specifically I refer to a post she made on February 22, 2022, describing her Womb Clearing Event in Kauai, Hawaii. In the caption of this post, her hashtags, and across her page, she references: tantra and neo-tantra (Hinduism and Buddhism), Mary Magdalene and the

divine christ consciousness(Christianity), Shakti (Hinduism), chakra work, embodying the wild woman archetype, Numerology, lightcodes, and more. Mcfee uses these terms very loosely to explain how when the body is in disharmony it will speak through period pain and irregular cycles, vaginal pain, and difficulty with self expression and happiness, but why does she focus on simply using a different medium of medicine rather than no medicine at all? It is possible there needs to be discourse on what is medicine/treatment to different people, and what financial goals might be underpinning how they define these terms.

It is difficult to analyze only two posts on this subject, as this is a vast, wealthy pattern of women using Eastern medicine and philosophy to contextualize their menstruation and integrate it into their beliefs about womanhood and woman's role in the modern world, amongst modern technology and modern expectations about production, contribution, and success. A much larger research paper should be done on how these women understand their local biologies within white womanhood, ability to afford to be an influencer, and utilizing Eastern spirituality in the era of globalization.

Works Cited

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