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## **Chapter Six**

### **Sexuality, 1800-1920**

**Esme Cleall**

#### **Introduction**

There were two kinds of sex in colonial discourse: Sex between one man and one woman that occurred within monogamous, Christian, marriages, between people of the same ethnic background, in utmost private, for the purposes of reproduction. And sex that was not confined to these tightly policed boundaries. Sex for pleasure, same-sex sex, inter-racial sex, extra-marital sex and sex for money, amongst many other sexual practices, were illicit, exoticised and altogether unacceptable. These two kinds of sex are reflected in the three arguments that I make in this chapter.

First, I argue that sexuality was a discourse of otherness: sexual activity that might broadly be defined as 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' were mapped onto an 'us' and 'them' binary.

Indigenous people were sexually other and it was their sexuality that helped define their otherness. As Sander Gilman argues, by the eighteenth century 'the black, both male and female, becomes ... an icon for deviant sexuality' and this worked in two directions: what it meant to be sexually other came to be racialised and those who were racialised came to be seen as sexually different (Gilman 1985: 81). Discourses of sexuality were closely bound up with the gendered ideology of colonialism. Enlightenment thinking suggested that the social position occupied by women was a core indicator of civilisation (Wilson 2007: 14-46; Hall 2007: 46-77). Writers such as the British historian and East India Company civil servant James Mill argued that '[a]mong rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted' (Mill 1817: 293). At the apex of civilisation were European, Christian women gendered by emergent evangelical discourses of the familial. At the bottom

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of the hierarchy, Mill wrote, lurked many ‘degraded’ women ranging from those in southern Africa where ‘the women are reckoned unworthy to eat with the men’, to those in India where Hindu women occupied a position of which a ‘state of dependence more strict and humiliating ...cannot easily be conceived’ (Mill 1817: 293-94; Cleall 2012: 26).

Secondly, I argue that this otherness was fragmented: there were lots of ways of being sexually other. What the ‘degradation’ Mill and others spoke of entailed oscillated between women’s oppression and women’s ‘disorder’ with sexuality a key signifier of each. In India, a dominant discourse developed that cited women’s oppression as a key justification for colonial intervention. In the early nineteenth century, *sati* was increasingly used to imagine Indian women’s victimised state (Mani 1998). Over the following decades, similar concerns about Hindu women’s oppression were reconfigured around other tropes from the child bride, to the zenana woman. Women who were ‘unrestrained’ by patriarchal structures could, however, be equally challenging to colonial expectations, and were typically seen as ‘uncivilised’, and potentially subversive (Hunt 2002: 1; Herdon 2002: 79-91). Whilst colonial discourse could operate as an oppositional formation – there were ‘proper’ ways of constructing a family and ‘disordered’ ones – the ‘other’ was always fragmented, and contained within it, oppositions of its own (Cleall 2012: 25-27). A wide variety of indigenous sexual practices were seen to be ‘other’ from child marriage to polygamy.

Thirdly, I argue that a lot of effort, discursive, judicial and reformist, was put into policing the boundaries between ‘good’ sexuality and ‘bad’ sexuality, keeping them separate and consolidating the first articulation here. What Ann Laura Stoler calls the ‘management of sex’ in the Dutch East Indies was a high concern to all the major European colonial regimes (Stoler 1995: 7). As Stoler puts it, ‘The regulation of sexual relations was central to the development of particular kinds of colonial settlements and to the allocation of economic activity within them. Who bedded and wedded whom in the colonies of France, England,

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Holland and Iberia was never left to chance' (Stoler 1995: 47). This meant that the sexual relationships of Europeans in the colonies was just as much a site of concern as that of indigenous peoples. And, perhaps, most importantly of all, the interracial relationships between colonisers and colonised was an issue of central concern that needed to be discouraged and prevented. As the French theorist Michel Foucault suggested, sexuality is an especially 'dense transfer point for relationships of power', serving as a 'lynch-pin' through which many personal dynamics are informed (Foucault 1990: 103). Drawing on Foucault, Stoler has explained that this was no less so in a colonial environment where discourses about sexuality were prolific.

Sexuality was an important colonial discourse and sex was an important experience and practice that was shaped by colonial contexts. It often signified and embodied relationships of power that were often uneven and, whilst frequently confirming these discrepancies, also had the power to subvert them. Sexuality spoke to the deeply enmeshed intersectional logics of race, class and gender and to the tendencies of colonial regimes to police the intimate lives of their subjects and actors.

### **Fantasy and representation**

The language of race, gender and sexuality were intimately entangled (de Groot 2000: 53). Just as transgressive sexuality was racialised, so were attitudes towards race sexualised, at least from the early modern period on (Morgan 2005: 54-67). At the same time, the language of gender was mapped onto racial distinctions with European read as 'masculine' to the feminised colonial other (McClintock 1995: 55).

### **[Insert image 6.1 here]**

*[Caption: Jean-Léon Gérôme's classic image *The Snake Charmer* (c. 1879) provides a good example of the Orientalisation of the East.]*

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In using the language of ‘penetration’ and ‘rape’ to discuss the European exploration and exploitation of the ‘virgin’ territories of empire, the very processes of colonisation were imbued with sexualised metaphors. What Anne McClintock discusses as the ‘porno-tropics’ in the western imagination – ‘a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears’ – affected both the presentation of the landscape and the people who inhabited it (McClintock 1995: 22). Landscape, or ‘nature’, read as female, was to be ‘discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned’ by the masculine colonisers (McClintock 1995: 31). Erotic images of ‘exotic’ others circulated in ‘Orientalist’ discourse, through European travel writing, art and literature (Said 1978/2003; Ali 2015: 33-46).

The European Empires became sites of homosexual as well as heterosexual fantasy and practice (Aldrich 2003). In French Indochina, homosexuality was seen as a ‘typically Asian practice’, whilst in Algeria it was considered to be a ‘peculiarity of the Arabs’ (Yee 2001: 269; Dunne 1994: 29). And as Robert Aldrich has demonstrated, homosexual practices amongst indigenous cultures in places as wide-ranging as Polynesia and North Africa, attracted the fascinated attention of European travel writers, whilst spaces of empire also provided the opportunity for same-sex sexual relations for Europeans both with indigenous people and within the army itself (Aldrich 2002: 201-18).

Female sexuality was also particularly frightening. As Ann McClintock writes ‘women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Folklore saw them, even more than the men, as given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial’ and in the colonial setting this tendency was further exaggerated (McClintock 1995: 22). Ideas about colonized women’s ‘excessive’ sexuality became embodied in specific women of colour taken to Europe for display and examination.

**[Insert image 6.2 here]**

*[Caption: Poster advertising viewings of Sarah Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus’]*

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The most famous example of such women was Sara (or as she was known by her Cape Dutch owners Saartjie) Baartman the so-called 'Hottentot Venus' who was taken to London in 1810 and then to France where she was exhibited before medical professionals and a voyeuristic public until her early death in 1816 (Crais and Scully 2008). The primary draw was her prominent buttocks which were highly sexualised and pathologised as an example of the steatopygia (protruding buttocks) that had been widely reported by travellers to the Cape. Her genitalia were also a source of fascination for both the French and British. Her elongated clitoris was seen to exemplify what had become known as the 'Hottentot Apron' and seen as an example of 'primitive' genitalia. As Sander Gilman writes, Baartman was exhibited less as a woman than as a 'collection of sexual parts' and this is reinforced by the fact that, after her death and dissection her reproductive organs were preserved as 'scientific curiosities' (Gilman 1985: 88). Yvette Abrahams sees Baartman's display as 'the turning point toward exhibiting the savage as raw sexuality' and thereafter, the genitals of both black men and women were seen as anatomically different from those of white Europeans (Abrahams quoted in Levine 2006, 127).

The processes by which 'race' and 'sex' became intertwined occurred differently across colonial sites. Titillating images of bare-breasted Polynesian women, for example, imagined to be 'sexually available', differed from those of secluded, yet also sexually charged, depictions of the Indian zenana (Cleall 2012, 25). Erotic images of African and Asian women differed markedly and were defined relationally to one and other, with Asian people further up the racial hierarchy (Bhattacharya 1998: 22-35). Yet both relied on assumptions about the sexualisation and commodification of non-European women and both drew on tropes of disordered sexuality. So did images of Bengali men as effeminate, African men as sexually aggressive, and Indochinese men and women as 'androgynous' (Sinha 1995; Yee 2001: 270-275).

### **Cultural imperialism**

Changing the sexual behaviour of indigenous peoples was a key element of the ‘civilising missions’ that characterised a range of European missions from the British, to the French and Portuguese, and encompassed a range of activities from inculcating domestic values, to encouraging the adoption of commercial trade, to western education and Christian proselytisation (for the Portuguese example see *Bandeira Jerónimo 2015*). Often these ‘civilising missions’ had gendered dynamics. As Rebecca Roger demonstrates in the case of nineteenth-century colonial Algeria, the training of girls and women was key to the French ‘civilising mission’ (Rogers 2011: 741-759).

*[Insert image 6.3 here]*

*[Caption: A Hawaiian missionary family, c. 1878]*

Missionaries were one such agent that identified and attempted to ‘correct’ sexual ‘deviance’. Missions had an ambivalent relationship with the formal axes of empire, which changed according to time and place (Copland 2006: 1025-54; Porter 2004; Stanley 1990; Daughton 2008). In French Algeria, for example, proselytisation was explicitly prohibited, whilst in colonial Bechuanaland, Scottish missionary John Mackenzie was actively involved in the extension of British rule. Swiss and Norwegian mission societies, hardly insignificant in the numbers of Protestant missions, operated independently from their own nations’ national interests though often within the boundaries of another European power’s colonial interests. Despite these complexities, however, missionaries shared with other colonial actors a tendency to embody images of sexual otherness in the sexual practices of actual Africans, Asians, Americans and Australasians. Horrified by what they saw as the sexual degradation of indigenous others, particularly women, across the non-western world, missionaries were

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determined to control the sexuality of those they sought to convert. From India, to Polynesia, to Australasia, the Americas and Africa, they encountered a range of sexual practices they believed incompatible with Christian life. '[m]issionaries knew better ways, it seemed, to do almost anything', Patricia Grimshaw writes of American missionaries, and much of their critique revolved around issues of sexuality and gender. 'They proclaimed prevention of pregnancy a sin', 'wives bore too many babies or gave them away uncaringly to relatives', 'mothers breastfed for intervals that were too long or too short', the 'early betrothals should be done away with... and their choice of marriage partner should be divested of kinship considerations', on the other hand, 'young people should not be given unfettered choice', adolescents in Polynesia and New Zealand seemed to have 'too much liberty at far too young an age', whilst, everywhere, pre-marital sex was 'denounced as disgraceful' (Grimshaw 2007: 271-2). Bridewealth and dowry arrangements were read as harbouring forms of sexual slavery, and even virginity, highly prized in nineteenth-century Europe, could be suspect in the colonies as missionaries wrote of Ndebele women 'doomed to perpetual virginity' in King Mzilikatzi's 'hareem' (Cleall 2012: 37). In German East Africa, missionary influences in the gender order have been argued to have been so pervasive as to have left a powerful legacy of gender inequality (Montgomery 2017: 225-268).

One of the problems that missionaries faced was that even if indigenous people were prepared to convert to Christianity, many of them wanted to retain their traditional sexual practices. Forcing converts to give up polygamous marriages proved a particular sticking point in Africa, whilst the continued marriages of newly converted Christians to partners who intended keeping their traditional faith was seen as pre-emptive of 'backsliding' in India. Sexual relationships were a key site where missionaries agonised over an all too unclear boundary between 'heathenism' and 'Christianity'. There were no easy answers to questions as to what was to be done with second or third wives, whether children could be circumcised,

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whether new converts could live communally or whether Christianity demanded the absolute privatisation of marriages and whether tomtoms might be played at a Christian wedding. As I have argued elsewhere, 'in posing such questions, missionaries engaged with the intangibility of difference; in attempting to answer them they erected boundaries to define it' (Cleall 2012: 54-55).

At the same time, missionaries constructed 'ideal' families, whose sexuality was contained within the boundaries of Christian marriage, reproduction and private walls. The ideal family reoccurred as a trope in missionary writing formed around a sexual bond yet divested of any obvious sexual overtones. Converted families could perform this role but, amongst Protestant missionary societies, most frequently it was represented by the missionary family itself as the embodiment of domestic ideology

Ideas of 'cleanliness' and 'purity' permeate the image and as Karina Hestad Skeie notes in the case of Norwegian Missions in Madagascar, so too did images of the house and the home (Skeie 1999: 72). But at the centre of the family was the marital bond which, amongst other things, Protestant missionaries saw as an important distinction between their practice and the celibacy of Catholic missions. Many Protestant missionary societies considered marriage a 'task' that it was advisable to complete before departure. Women would act as a 'helpmeet' to the day-to-day running of the mission and, during the frequent periods when a male missionary was away from their station, or incapacitated by sickness, acted on his behalf (Hall 2002: 91-92, 96).

In missionary literature, such marriages were sentimentally represented as exemplars of compatible gender relations, though, as in Jane Eyre's caustic assessment of the view that 'God and nature intended you for a missionary wife', these representations were not universally shared (Brontë 1847: 356). Catholic missionaries, meanwhile, were constructed

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by their Protestant counterparts as suspiciously celibate and more relaxed in their attitudes towards indigenous sexual practices.

### **European women and the ‘myth of the destructive female’**

Sexual relationships between European missionaries and indigenous people had the power to disrupt neat binaries though, again, how this occurred was contingent on time and place.

Whilst, later in the nineteenth century the missionary couple were held up as an exemplary sexual partnership, Emily Manktelow has demonstrated that, in the early days of missionary activity, interracial marriage was actually encouraged by the London Missionary Society (LMS), one of the largest British Protestant organisations (Manktelow 2014: 135-159).

Relationships with indigenous women, that is those that were sanctioned by marriage vows, were thought to be of pragmatic value, helping to integrate the missionary into the society of the South Seas, where many early LMS missionaries were based. At the same time, such a policy meant avoiding the need to bring European women, who were perceived as ‘both a sexual and a physical liability’, into the foreign mission field (Manktelow 2014: 139). The changes that led the LMS as a society to turn against these practices are both complicated and instructive for thinking about broader shifts in sexual attitudes. Manktelow suggests that in the South Seas a series of ‘scandalous events’ including ‘backsliding’ and non-Christian marriage led to the cession of the practice of integration. As Elizabeth Elbourne has explored, the early Cape Colony also had a tradition of LMS relationships with women of colour including the marriages of James Read, John Barlett, Michael Wimmer and Johann Heinrich Schmelen to Khoisan women (Elbourne 2008: 197-232). Some interracial relationships were openly constructed as ‘disordered’, perhaps most famously, the Dutch missionary Johannes Van der Kemp’s marriage to Sara Janse, who, besides being from Madagascar, at the time of marriage was only thirteen years old and enslaved (Van der Kemp had purchased her freedom himself). But others seem to have been tacitly accepted (Elbourne 2008: 220-21). Over time,

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however, sexual scandal engulfed many of these missionaries. A generational shift spelled the end of missionary marriages to women of colour and ideologies requiring greater 'social and sexual distance' between 'black' and 'white' were increasingly adopted (Elbourne 2008, 197-232)

This can be seen as part of a larger shift of a turn away from interracial marriages following a period of greater 'freedom' and a 'toleration' of such relationships in the eighteenth century.

There is a long tradition of scholarly work, that Margaret Strobel discusses as 'the myth of the destructive female', where the arrival of the European woman has been associated with the hardening of racial attitudes and subsequent deterioration of race relations in places as diverse as British India, Malaya, Papua, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Africa (Strobel 1991,

2). Interestingly, these arguments seem to transcend different imperial nationalities. Before

the arrival of European women, scholars have suggested, there was a 'golden age' of

interracial love and relationships, where solitary European men formed intimate sexual attachments with indigenous women (or in some renditions of the narrative, men). One

famous example, of such a relationship is that between the British Resident James Achilles Kirkpatrick and the Muslim Noblewoman Khair un-Nissa (Dalrymple 2002). It was the

'insular whims and prejudices' of European women, Percival Spear famously asserted, that 'widened the racial gulf' in eighteenth century India whilst, writing of British Africa, L.O.H.

Gann and Peter Dunigam have stated that 'it was the cheap steam ticket for women that put an end to racial integration' (both quoted in Stoler 1995: 32). Though these writers have

suggested that the trouble women spelled in the Empire can be located in their inherent

racism, other explanations as to why the arrival of European women should have led to this hardening of racial attitudes have consistently returned to the sexual dynamics of colonial

relationships. Some have claimed that women disrupted the intimacies between European

men and indigenous women that had, apparently, been beneficial to colonial rule facilitating

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greater cultural awareness on the part of the coloniser (Strobel 1991: 1). Thomas Beidelman, writing on colonial Tanganyika, has suggested that the desire of indigenous men European women were thought to have excited, and the vulnerability of the wives and daughters themselves, necessitated the chivalrous protection of European men and greater practices of segregation (Stoler 1991: 32). Taking a slightly different perspective, Ashis Nandy has claimed that the reason white women in colonial India 'were generally more racist than their men' was because 'they unconsciously saw themselves as the sexual competitors of Indian men, with whom their men had established an unconscious homo-eroticized bonding (Nandy 1988: 9-10).

In reality, the relationship between the arrival of European women and the shift in racial attitudes was much more complicated. As Stoler puts it in the case of the Dutch East Indies, 'the arrival of women was tied to other plans' often coinciding with strategies of political stabilisation (Stoler 1991: 32). 'Sometimes', she argues, 'their presence was encouraged precisely to enforce the separation between Asians and whites' (Stoler 1991: 32). Of the British Empire, Strobel also points to the coinciding between their arrival and in the intensified appropriation of indigenous labour, a growth of evangelical Christianity, and the increased numbers of Europeans of all genders (Strobel 1991: 2). And of course the shift did not mean that interracial relationships came to an end. Interracial relationships continued well into the twentieth century and varied considerably across time and place evoking, as Owen White explains in the French case, questions of citizenship, paternity and social identity (White 1999). 'Relationships between colonisers and colonised continued in many forms operating on what Woollacott describes as 'a spectrum running from marriage, through concubinage, to prostitution, and ultimately rape', importantly, 'the spectrum should be viewed as a loop, with evidence that women's experiences ran in both directions' (Woollacott 2008: 320).

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Whilst the idea of a 'golden age' before the arrival of European women does not seem to apply to the Australian case, as Angela Woollacott, points out, here, as elsewhere in the settler colonies there was a distinctive culture of masculinity linked with the imbalance in the sex ratio (there were hugely more men than women in Australia at the beginning of the nineteenth century and this did not even out until the beginning of the twentieth century) (Woollacott 320, 315). As Marie-Paule Ha explores, similar gender imbalances occurred in the French colonies, which only towards the end of the nineteenth-century, started to encourage female migration to the colonies as a solution to both 'concubinage', 'forced celibacy' overseas and an overrepresentation of women back home (Ha 2013: 222-225). What R. W. Connell discusses as 'frontier masculinities' developed in many of the settler colonies, characterised by male homosocial bonding, harsh conditions and the experience of physical violence (Connell 1995: 185-95).

### **Enslavement**

Slavery and its legacies structured sexual relationships in the Caribbean. The marriages of the enslaved were often unrecognised both by slave owners and abolitionists because of abolitionist concerns about divorce within African families (Bush 1990: 99). Refusing to recognise loving bonds, sexual or otherwise, conveniently absolved slave owners from having to think about the pain inflicted during indiscriminate separations of close family members through sales (Bush 1990: 100).

Sexuality was a tool to control the black population, 'emasculat[ing] black men and 'terroris[ing] black women' (Hall 2014: 35). Enslaved women who attempted to resist the sexual advances of their owners were liable to severe reprisals. Those who complied, on the other hand, were sometimes subjected to vengeful punishments by jealous wives (Bush 1990: 113). For colonial society, isolated incidents of rape were not, however, as threatening as the long-term relationships white men forged with their enslaved 'housekeepers'. Relationships

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of concubinage were so widespread as to comprise the very social fabric of Caribbean society. Assessing the degree of agency which enslaved women had in such relationships is very difficult. Certainly many enslaved women were raped by their owners and overseers. But sometimes, to some extent, women were able to exercise agency and, as Bush suggests 'Black women, too, despite their racial and sexual inferiority, could at times manipulate white men to their advantage' (Bush 1990: 111). We should be aware of the 'subtle and complex framework of sexual relations' that characterised slave societies (Bush 1990: 114). Through sex, and in particular through long-term sexual relationships, an enslaved woman might exert power denied to her elsewhere. The children of these liaisons occupied a highly ambiguous position. Some were entirely disowned by their white fathers. But others were treated more favourably and sometimes recognised as the legal heir. Depicting enslaved women as 'scheming jezebels' was a means to exonerate, white men from their relationships with black women (or, at least, to plant the blame firmly on the latter), at a time when race was becoming increasingly important to constructions of European identities (Altink 2005: 279). But this did not stop mixed-race relationships being highly problematic for the planter class. The planter elite proved itself unable to reproduce itself meaning that, unlike in North America, the Caribbean never became a settler society (Hall 2014: 35). Abolitionists were particularly alarmed by the degree of sexual 'corruption' in the Caribbean, with systems of concubinage 'at the heart of [the abolitionist] critique of slavery' (Hall 2002: 112). As Catherine Hall has argued women activists in particular used the predatory sexuality of corrupted white men', the 'enforced separation of mothers from children' and the failure to support the families of the enslaved as key evidence in underlining the immorality of slavery (Hall 2014: 35-36). The attempted destruction and denial of black families through the sale of close kinship members, the rape of black women and refusal to recognise marriage, has had lasting consequences (Hall 2014: 35).

### **Violence and rape**

Rape and sexual violence were not just confined to systems of slavery but were filtered through sexual relations in the empire (see also Kent and Fitzpatrick in this volume). If, following the work of Shani D’Cruze, sexual violence is not read as deviance but as ‘an integral part of the maintenance of historically located patriarchal power relations’, then its widespread prevalence in colonial settings demonstrates not only the ubiquity of violence in the colonial sphere but its complex intersection with race and gender structures (D’Cruze 1992: 337). As is discussed above, rape operated as a power-tool in enslaved societies including at the Cape of Good Hope where rape has been seen as a means of controlling the enslaved and reproducing slave populations (Scully 1995: 337; Ross 1979: 421-433). British soldiers were reported to attack Indian women (Cleall 2012: 145). And, in Australia, European men demanded access to Aboriginal women, bartered for money, food and goods (Woollacot 2008: 321).

Only some incidents of sexual violence were given the particular meaning of ‘rape’. That most rape that occurred was of indigenous and enslaved women by white men, did not enter colonial ‘rape scripts’ which continued to focus on the rape of European women by colonized men (Paxton 1999). Rape inside marriage was not recognised. And in the courts in both Britain and the colonies, ideas about ‘chastity’, class, age and circumstance meant that many rape cases were dismissed out of hand (Kolsky 2010: 1093-1111). Further, as today, there were huge difficulties reporting and resultant silences in the reporting of rape due to the stigmatising differential between ‘chaste’ and ‘unchaste’ women (Paxton 1999: 9). In a context when rape was not only highly taboo in the metropole, but was loaded with the additional ideological and symbolic overtones of a colonial setting, rape became ‘dangerously overdetermined’ (Paxton 1999: 10).

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By far the most common way in which rape was imagined was of an unprovoked assault on a white woman by a black man. This was known as the 'black peril' referred to across Africa, or 'yellow peril' in societies that saw high levels of Chinese migration. It has been widely demonstrated that these panics and anxieties had no statistical relationship with actual incidences of assault by men of colour (Stoler 1995: 58). Indeed, the gap between actual rapes and fear of rape was so extreme that it has been treated by some historians as a form of 'psychopathology', or 'a complex paranoia' (McCulloch 2000: 5; Pape 1990: 701). We need to be careful not to repeat the historical silencing of raped women in completely dismissing their claims. But it is clear that the report of actual rape, as well as rape fantasies, and transgressions of social space perceived in a colonial context as 'attempted rape', were escalated and exploited for political ends (Stoler 1995: 58). In Southern Rhodesia they helped to secure the more rigid demarcation of segregation, and across the various European empires they performed important ideological work in othering men of colour as depraved sexual predators.

The relationship between 'black perils' and the widespread rape of black women by white men is complex. Sometimes rape has been read as a metaphor for a generalised crisis. Some historians have read the relationships between black and white perils as a process of projection (McCulloch 2000: 9). Although little discussed, the 'white peril' that swept Southern Rhodesia, in the wake of the 1896 War of Resistance was used to subordinate the black population at the same time as fears about 'black peril' took hold of the settler imagination (Pape 1990: 710-14). Both served to do important ideological work. As John Pape argues, 'The phenomena that the settlers called 'black' and 'white perils' were an essential factor in building and maintaining a white and male supremacist society' (Pape 1990: 700).

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Although these fantasies took different forms at different moments and on different colonial sites, there were some striking similarities between them. Rape became a powerful way of conceptualising colonial resistance (Ware 1992: 38 & 40). During the so-called Indian 'Mutiny' of 1857-8 there were wide-spread fears about the rape, violation and murder of white women by Indian men. Although subsequent investigations found no evidence of this, the 'memory' of sadistic sexual violence against white women and the trauma it invoked lived on not least in the novels that immortalised events at Kanpur (Brantlinger 1988: 199-224). Such images fed into constructions of the 'Oriental' man as sexually deprived.

According to Nancy Paxton, 'the novels about the Indian Uprising of 1857 popularized and circulated a new rape script, which assigned Englishwomen to the place of rape victims', thus inverting earlier representations of colonial rape as being primarily about the metaphorical rape of the land and the people by colonising Englishmen (Paxton 1999: 25).

***[Insert image 6.4 here]***

*[Caption: The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger, Punch. During the Indian Rebellion, Indian soldiers, represented here by the Lion, were constructed as a sexual threat to European women.]*

The 'White Mutiny' over the so-called 'Ilbert Bill' in the early 1880s was another example of where the spectre of the rape of a white woman by an Indian man served to do powerful ideological work (Sinha 1995: 33-69). The question as to whether Indian magistrates might try European subjects, including over sensitive subjects such as marriage, divorce and rape among Europeans, quickly descended into a discussion of the hypothetical scenario whereby a white woman, raped by an Indian man, was forced to testify in a court dominated by Indian men. The public outcry over such a situation soon revealed deeper anxieties about the sexual threat Anglo-Indian women felt that they lived with not only in public, but in their homes and very intimate quarters where they could be assaulted by lascivious servants (Dussart 2013).

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Similar concerns about domestic servants characterised fears about the 'black peril' in southern Africa. Meanwhile, the idea of white women having consensual relationships with men of colour was so unpalatable to the colonial imagination that such relations were often read as rape regardless of mutual consent.

### **Reproduction**

Relationships between white men and indigenous women of all sorts, whilst widespread, threatened the social order of colonialism which relied on a clear-cut division between coloniser and colonized (see Chattopadhyaya and Fitzpatrick in this volume). So did mixed-heritage children and wider communities of 'Cape Coloureds', 'mulattos', 'métis' and 'Eurasians'. Discursive work needed to be done to seal the breaches that they represented. And sexuality was a site at which the boundaries between races were imposed, redrawn and scrutinised. There were many ways of denying the legitimacy of certain relationships and excluding them from colonial society. Hannah Roberts, for example, has explored the way in which a discourse around 'miscegenation' reveals 'a disciplinary process through which inter-racial sex was placed firmly in a context of sex and vice rather than reproduction and family' (Robert 2001: 69). Such a manoeuvre facilitated the marking of Aboriginal women and children as 'targets of intervention by the state', and making possible policies such as the removal of mixed-heritage children (Robert 2001: 71).

Over the course of the century mixed-heritage children also increasingly spoke to ideas about 'degeneration': the idea that the racial 'stock' was somehow being depleted, diluted and compromised, and again this seems to have happened across a range of western empires. Discourses of degeneration often concentrated around sexuality, perceived as a vulnerable site through which the dangers of a colonial location could take hold. Not only were interracial relationships problematic, but reproduction between white colonisers in the 'tropics' could generate children who had a dubious relationship with the metropole. The

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intimate relationship between European infants and indigenous wet-nurses was one area of concern (Stoler 1995: 145-6). Fluency in indigenous languages was another. And all contributed to the pattern whereby white children were increasingly educated back in the imperial metropole, where it was hoped that their European credentials could be firmed up, despite the long, painful and disruptive separations this represented to family life. They could then return to the colonies as colonisers after the dangerous period of adolescence had passed. Reproduction was in and of itself a highly contested issue that, increasingly, became a matter of imperial concern. Under the Third Republic, French officials saw in the empire a possibility to use Empire to help 'repopulate' the metropole, as Marie-Paule Ha explores (Ha 2013: 225-226). In Britain, the unhealthy 'quality' of potential recruits to the Second South African ('Boer') War was perceived as an alarming warning as to the deteriorated quality of British 'stock'. In its wake, concerns about reproduction escalated. As Anna Davin has demonstrated, motherhood and childrearing became an imperial concern and British levels of reproduction were anxiously compared with that of other 'imperial races', the French, the Germans and the Japanese. Eugenic marriages, education and ideologies of natalism and maternalism were suggested as methods to address the crisis with many such policies aimed at women in particular and with clear class connotations (Davin 1978: 9-65). So too did discourses about disability, and in particular anxieties around the proliferation of a 'feble-minded' population, contribute to understandings of who could and should reproduce. Across western Europe, new developments in birth control, perceived as a threat to 'good', reproductive sexuality, were argued over and could be harnessed for both purposes of women's liberation and eugenic endeavour. In weighing and measuring babies, regimentalising domestic duties and scorning 'non-productive' women, the various European states increasingly intervened in issues of childhood and procreation.

### **State regulation, resistance and feminism**

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In fact sexuality was always policed physically by the various European metropolitan states, as well as discursively, from prosecuting (some) incidents of rape, to regulating marriage, to outlawing sex between men (Phillips 2007: 143). Homophobic practices were exported to the colonies, and alongside other legislation intended to restrict sexual activity (Phillips 2007: 136-153). Sex-work was regulated, in different ways, across the European Empires.

One example of where the British colonial state stepped in to regulate sexuality was over the Contagious Diseases (CD) Legislation passed in the first instance in 1864 (see Speiler in this volume). Alarmed by the rates of sexuality transmitted infections amongst British soldiers and sailors, the British Government took measures to 'regulate' and control sex work.

Women working as sex-workers were required to register as 'prostitutes' and to undergo regular examinations with the intention of identifying cases of sexually transmitted diseases (Levine 2003: 1). Between the 1860s and the 1880s, such legislation quickly spread throughout many of the colonies.

Philippa Levine's work on the CD Acts, which has argued that '[p]rostitution was a critical artefact of colonial authority, a trade deemed vital to governance but urgently in need of control', demonstrates amongst other things the importance of sexuality more widely in thinking about the politics of colonialism (Levine 2003: 227). It both reveals and created ways of policing gender and race hierarchies: the European sex-worker, whilst destabilising, was nonetheless 'fixedly superior' to her 'colonial counterparts' and the definitional shifts adjudicating between British and 'native' values and practices, were 'powerful indices of the ways that the taxonomy of language served the ends of colonization and its deep commitment to a radicalised and gendered vision of the world' (Levine 2003: 227). The differential application of CD legislation in metropolitan and colonial contexts, and indeed between the colonies, not just reinforces the imperative to consider sexuality in Empire as occurring in one 'analytic frame' that stretched from metropole to colony, but asks us to look at the

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complex intersection between colonialism, race and sexuality on different colonial sites. In tracing the application of CD acts between Hong Kong, India, Queensland and the Straits Settlements, Levine has demonstrated how, unlike in Britain where such acts were confined to garrison towns and justified through military necessity, in the colonies CD legislation was thought also to 'bring to heel sexual disorder amongst colonised people' (Levine 2003: 2). Further, as Richard Phillips points out, the reach of the C.D. Acts, whilst widespread, was not universal and the significant omissions of its application, notably to British Africa, speaks to the forging of different forms of colonialism and to the specificities of imperial sites (Phillips 2006: 112-135).

*[Insert image 6.5 here]*

*[Caption: Josephine Butler, by George Frederic Watts]*

Unsurprisingly, the CD legislation met with considerable resistance from British feminists who recognised in the legislation a double standard, whereby women, blamed for carrying sexually transmitted diseases were forced to undergo examination, detention and forced treatment, whilst the male clients of sex workers escaped without censure. The internal examination, and use of the speculum especially, became a focus of particular ire with some finding the procedure so disturbing that it became known as 'instrumental rape'. Josephine Butler was at the forefront of such protests in her campaign, which gained force in the 1870s and led to the repeal of the CD Acts in England in 1886. Butler was also influential in mobilising other feminist challenges to sex work regulation in France, Belgium and Switzerland (Machiels 2008: 195-205). Not only were their actions successful in practical terms, but that campaigners managed to change the discourse around sex and sex-work. Indigenous people were also active in both pushing for and against legislation regarding the policing of sexuality. One of the most controversial issues was the 1891 Age of Consent Act which raised the age of consent in India from ten to twelve years of age. The trial of Hari

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Mohan Maittee in Bengal in 1890 over the death of his child bride, Phulmoni, after brutal intercourse, was much publicised and a pivot point for the British mood of opinion. Maitee, a man of about thirty-five, was found innocent of rape as the current age of consent legislation stood at ten years of age, though he was found guilty of the more minor crime of causing 'bodily harm' (Sinha 1995: 143). The legislation was read as a major affront to Hindu masculinity, particularly in Bengal where opposition to the bill was at its strongest (Sinha 1995: 138-180). Indeed, it is seen as marking the start of a new era in the history of Indian Nationalism (Sinha 1995: 139). The most controversial elements of the Bill were the marital rape clauses and the refusal of the legislation to distinguish between the age of consent for married and unmarried girls. As Himani Bannerji has demonstrated, the sexualised body of the Indian woman or girl was at the heart of this discourse, there was almost 'no mention' of her agency or volition in consenting to sexual intercourse (Bannerji 1988: 34). Opposition on the grounds of interference into the patriarchal structure of the Indian family found considerable sympathy amongst the British who were facing their own challenges to the patriarchal public sphere in the form of feminist challenges to the C.D. Acts and the feminist and purity campaigns for the British Criminal Amendment Act of 1885 (Sinha 1995: 153). Feminism was an emergent theme across the period. As well as involvement around the social purity campaigns this period also saw the rise of other feminist campaigns from the efforts to improve women's education and access to the legal and medical professions to campaigns around divorce and property laws in Britain, France, Switzerland, Belgium and Germany (Schröder 1995: 368-390). In Britain, successes included the Custody Act of 1839, the Matrimonial Causes Acts of 1857 and 1878 and the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. The campaign for the vote was led by women across the British Empire and involved considerable struggle including petitions, protests and some militant tactics. Women first won the vote in New Zealand in 1893, South Australia in 1895, across Australia

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uniformly in 1902 for white women, in Canadian Federal elections in 1918 and only belatedly in Britain itself in 1918, for middle class women over the age of thirty, and in 1928 for all Englishwomen. Gender and race intersected in these campaigns. In Australia, Aboriginal women did not get the vote on the same terms as white women until 1962, whilst the fact that Maori women obtained the vote before their English counterparts was seen as so outrageous it was used in part as evidence in the British suffrage movement (Lake 1999). At the same time, the attempt to 'raise' the position of women of colour could also be used by white feminists as a means to consolidate and extend their own place in the imperial hierarchy. The 'plight' of the 'Hindoo' woman was something of a cause de celebre for British women who, in mobilising around *sati*, child marriage and other issues were able to cast themselves as not only 'liberated' but 'civilised' (Midgley 2007: 65-92). As Antoinette Burton has demonstrated, it was not a coincidence that British feminism germinated at the same time as the British Empire flourished. The actions of British feminists were complicit with wider imperial goals (Burton 1994). Evoking the concept of 'sisterhood', British women forged imaginative lines of connection with women of colour that concealed structural inequalities. Motherhood was presented as a universal experience with which women across the globe could identify but was understood in profoundly Eurocentric ways. The need for 'lady doctors' to 'rescue' Indian women from the enclosed zenanas where they were forbidden to see male doctors, both facilitated the entry of women into the medical establishment and consolidated the spread of western reformist interventions into the zenana and biomedical practice (Burton 2011: 151-173). In the African and Pacific German colonies too, women who saw themselves first as German and then as female participated in colonial activities from nursing to missionary work (Wildenthal 2001). These processes of 'imperial feminism' continue to shape the way in which the category of 'woman' is constructed and contested today (Mohanty 1984: 333-358).

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From a different perspective the histories of sexual emancipation and colonial emancipation may be argued to be linked. In his work on sexuality in the French colonies, Robert Aldrich suggests that the stigmatised position that homosexual French men occupied at home, could lead to identification and sympathy with the victims of colonisation abroad, including support for anti-colonial resistance (Aldrich 2002: 217).

### **Conclusion**

‘The expansion of Europe’, Ronald Hyam famously wrote, ‘was not only a matter of “Christianity and commerce,” it was also a matter of copulation and concubinage’ (Hyam 1990: 2). He argues that the British Empire, provided an ‘unrivalled field’ of ‘sexual opportunity’ unavailable in the metropole, that it ‘unfroze restraint’ and that without ‘sexual relaxation’ the trials of running an empire would have ‘been intolerable’ (Hyam 1991: 211, 90 & 89). Hyam’s rosy assessment of imperial relations has been rightly criticised by feminist scholars for its glossing over of the hugely exploitative dynamics of sexual practice (Berger 1988: 83-98; Voeltz 1996: 41-44; Bradford 1992: 209-214). His assertion that ‘sexual interaction between the British and non-Europeans probably did more long-term good than harm to race relations’ fails to acknowledge that the ‘opportunities’ he identifies for white male imperialists were had at the expense of others, not least indigenous women (Hyam 1990: 215). In turn Hyam has dismissed the work of feminist historians as ‘hugely over-preoccupied with rape’ (Hyam 1988: 91). In this essay, I have painted quite a different picture of the sexual politics of empire where violence was indeed a recurrent and formative factor. What I have tried to do is to argue not so much that the European empires were sites of sexual freedom but that through the policing of sexuality, both discursively and through instruments of the state, difference was created, reinscribed and defended in colonial discourse. Sexuality was prolific in colonial discourses and whilst, as Robert Aldrich points out, much more work has been done on sexuality in the British and French cases than in the

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Belgium, Dutch Italian, German, Spanish or Portuguese Empires, early indications suggest that this seems to be generally true across the European empires (Aldrich 2013). European Empires were imagined as sites of sexual fantasy and lived as places where sexual relations were seeped with and contributed to the complex dynamics of colonial rule.

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