

Chapter 11

Interracial Sex and the Making of Empire

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In an oft-cited and widely critiqued essay, the historian of British empire, Ronald Hyam (1986b), claimed that “the expansion of Europe was not only a matter of ‘Christianity and commerce,’ it was also a matter of copulation and concubinage.” To this he added, “Sexual opportunities were seized with imperious confidence” (p.35). In *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (1990), Hyam further developed his contention that the sexual opportunities available abroad to Europe’s empire builders were more than just a perk of imperial expansion; they were, he boldly claimed, what sustained the large numbers of European men who fanned out across the globe in the service of empire. Freed from repressive Victorian morality codes at home, European men could fulfill their libidinous desires with the colonies’ sexually decadent “natives.” Hyam’s explorations of the complex role played by sex in the making of empire are characterized by a marked interest in what interracial sexual relations meant for British men and for imperialism. As one of his critics points out, his “imperialist centered approach” causes him to take “the position of the white male colonialists, imperial administrators and soldiers who staffed the British Empire, and he fails to link his discussion of sex and empire with any analysis of the power relations in the various situations which he describes”; nor does he offer any analysis of the “providers” of sexual opportunity – colonized women and girls, as well as colonized men and boys (Berger 1988: 84; for Hyam’s response to Berger, see Hyam 1988; for other critiques, see Strobel 1992; Voeltz 1996). Hyam’s approach, which perpetuates the erasure of the colonized found in outdated colonial histories, where Europeans, as agents of the “civilizing mission,” were the center of attention, is particularly problematic precisely because interracial sexual relation-

ships are constituted through multiple histories; to take up only one of those histories is to tell only part of the story. It might not be possible to tell both sides of the story with parity in evidence, but we cannot let that prevent us from raising questions, even if we do not always answer them fully, about how colonized populations negotiated their sexual encounters with Europeans.

For all of its well-documented shortcomings, however, Hyam's work made a claim for the British empire that subsequent, more sophisticated scholarship substantiated, rather than contradicted, not only for Britain, but for Europe's other imperial powers more broadly: sex, and in particular interracial sex, was critical to the formation of empire.¹ Drawing on this extensive body of literature, this chapter brings together examples from the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia in order to assess the multiple modalities of interracial sexual relationships as they unfolded over the *longue durée* of Europe's imperial expansion, beginning in the late fifteenth century and winding down in the mid-twentieth century with the wave of independence movements that swept across Africa, Asia, and parts of the Caribbean. This chapter illuminates the common threads running through this chronologically and geographically broad field of enquiry, as well as the diverse and divergent patterns in the historical development of these relationships.

A singular focus on temporality, geography, or even colonizing power does little in the way of explaining these commonalities and variations. Rather, the life histories of individual colonial projects provide the necessary context for understanding the different forms taken by interracial sexual relationships (marriage, concubinage, prostitution, rape) at particular historical moments and in particular locales and how this changed over time; the ideologies and anxieties that shaped their existence; the diverse systems of regulation devised to encourage, manage, control, penalize, criminalize, or prohibit interracial sex; and the kinds of relationships and categories of people that were marked out for different forms of regulation. In short, context is key. It matters greatly whether the unit of analysis is a settler colony, an administered colony, a colony under company rule, a slaveholding colony, or a colony with a large standing military. Equally, demographics matter: gender ratios across and within racial groups significantly influenced patterns of race mixture. Cultural beliefs and practices, not least among them attitudes about sex on the part of indigenous, enslaved, and European communities, also shaped practices and policies where interracial relationships were concerned.

Divided into three different overlapping sections, this chapter traces the common threads and divergent patterns that are discernible in the global history of interracial sex and the making of empire. It begins by attending to the dominant raced and gendered configuration of interracial sexual relationships – the colonizing male/colonized female dyad – while also addressing the question of relationships between colonized men and colonizing women. The second and third parts assess how the nature of different colonial encounters and their imperatives influenced patterns of interracial sexual relationships by drawing on examples from the Americas and Caribbean, where conquest and colonization were immediate, and Africa and Asia, where the era of formal colonization in the nineteenth century was generally

preceded by centuries of trade-based relationships and company rule. Considerable effort has been made to provide the broadest possible coverage, both spatial and temporal; however not all areas and time periods are covered equally. The extensive references that accompany this chapter are intended to provide readers with sources for further consultation.

Common Threads/Divergent Patterns

The raced and gendered configuration of interracial sexual relationships

Colonial interracial sexual relations varied greatly across time and space, but were also remarkably consistent in their raced and gendered configuration: they almost always occurred between European men and indigenous women, or in the case of empires' slaveholding societies, enslaved or formerly enslaved non-native women. Imbalanced sex ratios among Europeans in the colonies offer a partial explanation for this pattern. From the earliest days of Europe's overseas exploration in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European women were largely absent from contact zones in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Caribbean. Even in Latin America where the age of encounter quickly gave way to Spanish colonization and widespread settlement during the sixteenth century, the emigrant female Spanish population peaked at just below 30 percent. While their numbers increased in the following century – 42 percent of Spanish emigrants to New Spain were female as were 32 percent of emigrants to Peru between 1598 and 1621 – Spanish men still outnumbered their female counterparts by a substantial margin in many places throughout Spain's New World empire (Horton 2001: 22–23; Sanchez-Aborno 1984: 16–17, 21). Even as late as the nineteenth century in Cuba, white men still outnumbered white women (Stolcke 1989: 57). This partly accounts for the frequency with which white men cohabitated and/or married indigenous women and formed a range of different sexual and domestic arrangements with enslaved and free/d women of African descent throughout Spain's Caribbean and Latin American possessions.

Throughout Africa and Asia, contrary to popular perception, imbalanced sex ratios continued to be the status quo long after the age of exploration and conquest was over and, as Ann Stoler notes (1989: 638), "rough living and a scarcity of amenities had become conditions of the past." It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that European women took up residency in the African and Asian colonies in sizable numbers and, even then, they were still outnumbered by their male counterparts. This was largely the case because colonial governments and private businesses variously restricted the emigration of European women to the colonies, refused employment to rank-and-file married male recruits, and only extended the privilege of bringing a wife to the colonies to men of rank or those who had successfully completed several tours of service and could demonstrate their ability to maintain their wives in a standard suitable to European womanhood (Stoler 1989: 637). Such

practices influenced the colonies' demography in stark ways. In Britain's Gold Coast colony, at the late date of 1931, only 17 percent of the European male population were accompanied by their wives (Gold Coast Census: PRAAD, ACC, ADM 5/2/6). In the French colonies of Ivory Coast, Dahomey (Benin), and Congo, the 1904–1905 census recorded a total of 2,469 French-born men and only 236 French-born women (Tiryakian 1993). Improvement did not follow in the following decade and a half: by 1921 the European sex ratio in Ivory Coast was 1:25 (Stoler 1991: 53). Even in the settler colony of Madagascar, French-born women made up only 37 percent of the total French-born population. This statistic is striking given that by definition settler colonialism depended on the ability of the settler population to reproduce itself in large enough numbers to sustain a permanent occupation.

In colonial Asia during the twentieth century European demographics were less skewed, but they were never balanced and they varied greatly from place to place:

While in the Netherlands Indies, the overall ratio of European women to men rose from 47:100 to 88:100 between 1900 and 1930, on Sumatra's plantation belt in 1920 there were still only 61 European women per 100 European men. . . . In Tonkin, European men (totaling more than 14,000) sharply outnumbered European women (just over 3000) as late as 1931 (Stoler 1989: 638).

These gender imbalances, as Stoler points out (2002: 2), resulted from how sexuality was managed, not the other way around: in other words interracial sexual relationships were not tolerated and/or encouraged because there were so few European women in the colonies; rather, there were so few European women in the colonies because colonial regimes found it more expedient to meet the sexual and domestic needs of European men through relationships with colonized women. When and where this was no longer the case, colonial administrators sought to increase the number of European women in the colonies as part of a wider set of efforts to bring interracial sexual relationships to an end. Rather than heralding their demise, such efforts pushed these relationships to the margins of colonial society, where they were carried out more clandestinely (Edwards 1998: 118).

While more balanced sex ratios might have decreased the frequency of interracial sexual relationships in some colonial settings, or at the very least diminished their visibility, this was not the case across the board and especially so in slaveholding societies. In colonial America's slaveholding south, sex – often coerced – between white slave masters and enslaved and/or free/d women, persisted long after the gender ratios in the white population evened out (D'Emilio and Freedman 1997: 35). During the eighteenth century in colonial Barbados, white women often marginally outnumbered white men; elsewhere in the West Indies, with the exception of Jamaica, by the second half of the eighteenth century sex ratios in the European population became relatively balanced as well, but this did not curb the frequency with which white men engaged in sexual relationships with black women (Beckles 1993: 70–71; Burnard 1991: 98). Clearly then, lack of sexual access to white women was not the primary factor driving white men into sexual relationships with black

women. Indeed, the very nature of their sexual relationships with white women, structured by notions of respectability and expectations of paternal responsibility for any resultant offspring, may have heightened their libidinous desire for black women, with whom sexual contact was not subjected to the same kinds of morality codes. Given that these relationships reinforced rather than undermined racial domination, and reinscribed white male privilege (unlike white men, white women did not have immunity from the law and social custom to freely engage in sexual relations with black men), they formed an integral part of the system of white supremacy and patriarchy that was at the heart of chattel slavery.

Just as white men's unfettered sexual access to colonized/enslaved women embodied the raced and gendered power dynamics of empire, so too did the restricted sexual access of colonized/enslaved men and white women to one another. Across Europe's empires, sexual relationships between European women and indigenous or enslaved men in the colonies were comparatively rare. Cast as sexually depraved in general and fixated on white women in particular, colonized/enslaved men were seen as sexual threats to white women and by extension to race-based colonial power. Because in the colonial imagination it was unthinkable that all but the most degenerate white women would willingly engage in sexual relationships with colonized/enslaved men, rape became the primary paradigm through which such relationships were understood. Popularly known as the Black Peril, hysteria over the rape of white women gave way to draconian legislation. In early twentieth-century colonial contexts as diverse as Papua New Guinea and Southern Rhodesia, native men were put to death for the rape, attempted rape, or even suspected rape of white women (for Papua New Guinea, see Inglis 1974, 1975; for Southern Rhodesia, see McCulloch 2000). In a number of American colonies black men could be castrated for the attempted rape of white women and put to death if convicted of rape (D'Emilio and Freedman 2006: 163–209). And while lynching is typically a phenomenon associated with post-independence US history, there can be no doubt that in colonial America extrajudicial modes of punishment were also meted out to black men suspected of raping white women (on the history of lynching in colonial America, see Berg 2011). Neither the outbreak of Black Peril scares, nor the severity of punishments they provoked, correlated to actual incidences of rape. Instead these scares reveal how colonial communities' investments in protecting white women's sexual-cum-racial purity were often a means through which Europeans in the colonies shored up their interests and created racial unity during crises of control, whether real or perceived (Stoler 2002: 58).²

Although relationships between colonized/enslaved men and white women were typically a hidden facet of colonial life, this was not always the case, especially when both parties shared similar class status. In twentieth-century British West Africa, wealthy African men who had married white women in Europe were given permission to return home with their wives provided they were able to demonstrate to colonial authorities that they could provide their wives with a lifestyle befitting European womanhood. The stringent standards West Africans were required to meet are reflected in the very small number (six) of documented cases fitting this

description (Ray 2009: 641). If, however, we expand our analysis to include the British metropole, relationships between black men and white women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries become significantly less exceptional. At the opposite end of the class spectrum, in the context of the early American colonies, it was not uncommon for white indentured female servants and black male servants and slaves to cohabit openly and some even married (Hodes 1997: 19–38; Finkelman 1997: 125). In South Africa's Witwatersrand during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sexual relationships between black men and white women “developed most readily along class lines – those between [black] ‘houseboys’ and white female servants being relatively prominent” (Van Onselen 1982: 47, 49). In the latter two cases, the window of opportunity for these relationships closed as systems of racial domination intensified (a similar trend holds true for colonial Barbados; see Beckles 1989: 134). In the case of colonial America it was the entrenchment of racialized chattel slavery that ultimately led to laws criminalizing relationships between white women and black men, while upholding the right of white men to engage in sexual relationships with enslaved women (Millward 2010: 24). In South Africa the increasingly institutionalized system of racial segregation and domination that undergirded settler colonialism and ultimately culminated in the formation of the apartheid state in 1948, ruptured the common bonds that had previously brought white and black domestic workers together in ways that facilitated their romantic relationships.

Both the ubiquity of the colonizing male/colonized female dyad and the comparative rarity of relationships between indigenous and/or enslaved men and white women speak volumes about the raced and gendered nature of colonial power. Because this pattern was an enduring feature of empire, it places indigenous and/or enslaved women at the center of the making of empire in ways that require much greater attention to their lives within and beyond their relationships with European men. As Pamela Scully (2005a, 2005b) has aptly pointed out, the “victim/traitor dynamic that has shaped so much of the literature on indigenous women” involved with European men leaves little room for understanding the full complexities of their lives, including how the gendered cultural and sexual economies of local societies “created the conditions for particular kinds of interactions with powerful strangers” (para 28). The following sections make clear that indigenous communities often shored up their own interests by extending sexual and marriage rights to European men, but we know much less about how local women perceived and negotiated their relationships with European men.

Conquest/early settler colonization

When Portuguese explorers left the Iberian peninsula in the early fifteenth century in search of a sea route to the Indies, they ushered in the era of Europe's imperial expansion. Portuguese mariners spent much of that century exploring the western African coast before Bartolomeu Dias rounded the southernmost tip of the continent

in 1488. A decade later Vasco da Gama finally reached Calicut in southern India. For Africa and Asia, Portuguese exploration paved the way for a protracted process of European empire building that began with trade and ended in formal colonization in the nineteenth century. Encounter in much of the Americas and the Caribbean proceeded along very different lines. Spain's maritime exploits in the New World at the end of the fifteenth century ushered in an era of almost immediate conquest and colonization for the regions' inhabitants.

Upon arrival or shortly thereafter Europe's invading settlers used a combination of military and germ warfare to achieve wide-scale theft of land in the New World, especially in the Caribbean, Latin America, and parts of North America. Evidence suggests that for native communities faced with the threat of extinction by Spain's invading armies, handing over native women to conquistadors, already a common practice among Amerindians, may very well have been a strategy of survival. During the invasion of Mexico, for instance, "chiefs sought to placate the invaders, or to cement alliances with them, by gifts of women" (Lunenfeld 1991: 327). The most famous instance of this, the relationship between Malintzin and Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, began when her Tabascan masters gave the enslaved Malintzin to Cortés "along with nineteen other women . . . in order to stave off war, avoid being conquered themselves, and to encourage Cortés to move on" (John Taylor 2000). Malintzin's linguistic prowess quickly distinguished her from the other women and Cortés soon took her as his interpreter and mistress. She later bore him a son. Although, as a woman, her role as a prominent interpreter and advisor to Cortés was unusual, her sexual relationship was not, nor was her subsequent marriage to another Spanish conquistador. In the years that followed conquest, both marriage and concubinage between indigenous women and European men became an integral component of Spanish America's settlement, as sex ratios in the European population remained imbalanced. In the highland areas of Mexico and the Andean region, where indigenous populations survived the Spanish American conquest in the largest numbers, these relationships produced a large *mestizo* population. By the mid-sixteenth century, however, Spanish colonists began to fear that their own prerogatives were being undermined by the growth of the *mestizo* population and in turn the Crown stopped encouraging marital unions between Spanish men and Christianized Indian women (Stoler 2002: 76). In addition to the native population, a sizable number of imported African slaves also supplied labor to the region's lucrative mining economy, and later plantation and livestock-raising economies (Florescano 1984: 164–165). Sexual relationships between European settlers and enslaved and free/d women gave rise to a population of mixed African and European descent, albeit much smaller than the *mestizo* population.

Where conquest was achieved through genocide, as in much of the Caribbean and North American colonies, or where indigenous labor was difficult to obtain, as in Brazil, Europe's settler colonial regimes relied almost exclusively on imported slave labor from Africa to achieve their economic objectives. Given the unequal power relationships that accompanied conquest and colonization, in large swathes

of the New World interracial sexual relations were often characterized by coercion, especially in slaveholding societies, where the imbalance of power between colonizer and colonized was made more obscene by the relations of dominance between owner and owned. While rape was common elsewhere in the colonial world, in the slaveholding societies of the Americas and Caribbean it occurred with far greater frequency and impunity, and the line between coercion and consent was never clear.

In her analysis of creolization in the early French Caribbean, Doris Garraway (2005) deploys an alternative reading of the concept of libertinage, as “a sexual economy that undergirded exploitative power relations among whites, free people of color, and slaves,” to show how interracial sex was implicated in the making of “the extreme segregationist regime that reached its apogee in the exceptionally brutal slave society of late-eighteenth-century Saint-Domingue” (p. xiii). There, as in other slaveholding societies, white men’s sexual access to enslaved women was held as a right grounded not only in their privileged racial position, but also, as Carolyn West (2004) points out, in their portrayal of “enslaved women as promiscuous, immoral Jezebels who seduced their masters.” “Consequently,” West continues, “there were no legal or social sanctions against raping Black women” because they were always, in the minds of their masters, willing participants – they were in effect unrapeable (2004: 1491; also see D. White 1999; for the Caribbean see Beckles 1989: 142–143 and Garraway 2005: xiv). Such relations were not just about domination and desire, they were also about wealth and its reproduction. Both rape and consensual sex held out the possibility of literally reproducing slave masters’ wealth, and hence the empire’s wealth, when it resulted in pregnancy because the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrem*, common in many parts of the New World, mandated that the offspring’s legal status followed that of the mother (Garraway 2005; Davis 2002: 16).

From the perspective of enslaved women, given that their consent was not a prerequisite and resistance could have dire consequences, it is difficult to speculate about how they negotiated and experienced their sexual encounters with white men, except to say that their choices were made “in a context warped and circumscribed by slavery” (Brown 1996: 237; Millward 2010: 26). While sexual relationships with white men could result in manumission for enslaved women and/or their offspring, there were no guarantees. As Jessica Millward notes, “manumission laws were slaveholders’ laws, and any space left for a slave to gain freedom through them was a loophole, not an open door” (p. 26). Still, according to Millward, “some shrewd and deliberate enslaved women maximized their relationships with those who owned them in order to provide a better future for themselves or their children” (p. 26). Over time, as the freed and free-born population increased, so too did the number of women whose relationships with white men were no longer defined primarily by their status as property; however, as historian Marisa Fuentes asks (2010: 565–566), “if ‘freedom’ meant free from bondage but not from social, economic and political degradation what does it mean to survive under such conditions?” Focusing on free/d women in Barbados, Fuentes argues that under these conditions the agency

often ascribed to black women in their sexual relationships with white men elides the wholly unequal terrain upon which such relations were negotiated and the disparate outcomes they produced for individual women.

The emphasis here on the predominance of rape in slaveholding societies is not meant to suggest that more stable, if not equitable, arrangements, whether marriage or concubinage, were unheard of in some slaveholding societies. Verena Martinez-Alier's work on colonial Cuba has demonstrated that despite strong social sanctions against intermarriage, whites and blacks did marry, while many others openly cohabitated outside of marriage (Stolcke 1989). Nor do I want to suggest that rape was uncommon in non-slaveholding colonial societies. To be sure, rape and other forms of sexual exploitation of colonized women by European men were facets of colonial life that rarely received public censure precisely because, like enslaved women, non-enslaved colonized women were regarded as sexually available. The rape of native women, who were often cast as sexually licentious, was widespread not only in the North American colonies, but also in the westward conquest and colonization of the American frontier. In the case of colonial India, Ghosh (2006) notes that European men were frequently acquitted of rape charges "based largely on the understanding that native women who lived among Europeans and their acquaintances were assumed to be potential conjugal companions to European men and sexually available, thereby mitigating any accusation of rape" (p.197). In short, the very idea that a native woman could be raped could be called into question. Yet, in some colonial contexts indigenous women had recourse to a legal system that, in theory at least, regarded their rape as a criminal offense; enslaved women did not have that benefit. Underscoring this reminds us that the label "colonized" glosses over pronounced differences in status within colonized populations. Perhaps the most dramatic of these axes of difference was between enslaved and free, especially in areas where slavery outlived colonialism.

The other point to be made here is that neither concubinage nor marriage were guarantors of freedom from sexual violence or exploitation. In the colonial context, concubinage, a befittingly ambiguous term for an even more ambiguous phenomenon, generally referred to cohabitation outside marriage between European men and colonized women. As Stoler notes (2002: 59), this narrow definition:

glossed a wide range of arrangements that included sexual access to a non-European woman as well as demands on her labor and legal rights to the children she bore. Thus, to define concubinage as cohabitation perhaps suggests more social privileges than most women who were involved in such relations enjoyed. Many colonized women combined sexual and domestic service within the abjectly subordinate contexts of slave or "coolie" and lived in separate quarters.

And although marriage came with a certain set of legal rights and protections, it did not necessarily protect colonized women from abuse, racial domination, or gendered oppression. These observations are particularly important to keep in mind as we move to the next section, which deals in large part with marriage and concu-

binage in the contexts of early colonial trading settlements, company rule, and late formal colonialism.

Trade, company rule, and late formal colonialism

Where trade, rather than outright conquest and colonization, dominated imperial agendas during the early centuries of Europe's overseas expansion, as was the case in much of littoral Africa and Asia, and even parts of northern North America, the power relations between Europeans and those with whom they came into contact were not as imbalanced as they would later become. In this context interracial sexual relations were often, but not always, a middle ground upon which Europeans and indigenous communities solidified economic, political, and social alliances. Indeed, European economic imperatives and the precarious position in which European men often found themselves, as outnumbered strangers in unfamiliar lands, meant that the vanguard of early traders and colonists depended on indigenous communities for their very survival. This continued to be the case into the nineteenth century in many parts of Africa and Asia. In this context indigenous women provided European men with more than just sex and language instruction, they also dispensed medical care and domestic services, and often served as cultural interpreters and partners in commercial exchanges (Stoler 2002: 49). Without overstating the case, where the balance of power between Europeans and indigenous communities was more equitable, interracial sexual relationships tended to be more consensual, at least as far as the men who brokered such relations on behalf of their female relatives and dependents were concerned. Europeans were in no position to seize "with imperious confidence" sexual opportunities with local women, without first securing the approval of their fathers, uncles, lineage heads, or other male power-holders, who typically controlled sexual access to female dependents. This point is important because it draws our attention to the fact that while some women brokered relationships with white men on their own, and others willingly cohabitated or married them at their families' behest, others were forced to accept arrangements that were not of their own choosing.³

A variety of sexual and domestic arrangements between indigenous women and European men played an integral role in rooting the European presence in areas where a long era of trade and company rule preceded formal colonization. In North America's Great Lakes region, where France lacked the manpower to colonize Native American lands through brute force and its interests were primarily economic, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century marriages between indigenous women and French traders and the kin networks they produced formed the bedrock of the region's lucrative fur trade. Inter-marriage was not only an integral part of stranger integration and alliance-making between Europeans and Native Americans, it also placed Native American women and their *métis* offspring at the heart of the process of cultural transmission and adaptation (Sleeper-Smith 2001, esp. 38–46). While interracial marriage was common in the Great Lakes and elsewhere in Native American

regions of North America, so too was the practice of providing temporary sexual access to Native women. Like intermarriage, this was part of a wider ideology of reciprocity and set of practices designed to display hospitality and to engender friendships and loyal trading relationships (Hurtado 1996: 60; the classic work on the idea of reciprocity in the making of Native American–European relationships in the Great Lakes Region is R. White 1991).

Spiritual beliefs also appear to have played a role in Native motivations for granting Europeans sexual access to native women, at least in the case of the Mandan and Hidatsa peoples of the Upper Missouri and other Great Plains Indians, who “believed that the coitus transferred power from one man to another, using the woman as a kind of transmission line” (Hurtado 1996: 60). Thus, both indigenous and European systems of patriarchy shaped the limits of indigenous women’s control over their own bodies and sexuality. Although the grand narrative about interracial sex in the context of the fur trade remains focused on consensual relationships, however imperfectly defined, a lesser-known aspect of this history is the purchase of enslaved Native American women by fur traders for use as “wives” and the rape of Native American women (Hurtado 1996: 61; Carter and McCormack 2011: 342). This last point draws our attention, once again, to the need to pay attention to both the common threads and divergent patterns that characterize histories of interracial sex.

In littoral Africa and Asia, intermarriage and interracial cohabitation functioned similarly during the long period of trade and company rule that only gave way to formal colonialism in the nineteenth century. Some of our earliest information about these relationships comes from the Portuguese sphere of influence on the coast of West Africa. On the Upper Guinea coast during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Portuguese traders were few in number, relatively autonomous, and although they were ostensibly there to trade on behalf of the Portuguese Crown, the Crown provided them with little in the way of protection, supervision, food supplies, or shelter. Instead, individual Portuguese traders had to develop reciprocal relationships with local African communities in order to meet their economic objectives and everyday needs. Through marital alliances with local women, Portuguese traders, like African strangers, were absorbed into host societies and through these attachments Africans attempted to derive the maximum benefit from the Portuguese traders in their midst (Brooks 1993: 38; also see Newitt 2010: 81). Pursuing interracial unions was as a strategy used not only by European men to advance their agendas, but also by African societies to shore up their interests. While these relationships were brokered with the benefit of the family and wider community in mind, some African women who married or cohabited with European traders were able to accumulate considerable wealth and power for themselves. The African and mixed-race women who became known as *nharas* in Guinea-Bissau and *signares* in Gorée and Saint-Louis, Senegal, as well as their counterparts on the Gold Coast, derived their wealth largely from the entrepreneurial niches they were able to carve out for themselves in the transatlantic slave trade. Thus, their fortunes were not only linked to European men and the wider Atlantic economy, but also to their

exceptional skills and personal networks. If, as Amanda Vickery has noted for the eighteenth century (2011: 24), “women everywhere were more likely to garner prestige and power via men than by their own abilities or female contacts,” the *nharas* and *signares* demonstrate that this was not a one-way street. In this early period of the colonial encounter in littoral Africa, European men’s entrepreneurial successes were often realized through their relationships with African women. On the Upper Guinea coast, these unions gradually produced an identifiable Luso-African population and culture, through which both Africans and Europeans increasingly mediated their relationships (for the development of the Luso-African population and culture on the Upper Guinea coast, see Mark 2002; Brooks 2003).

Even at this early period, however, a divergent pattern in official policy had already emerged further south along the coast in the port of Elmina, where the Portuguese Crown disapproved of marital unions between local women and traders and officers who came to the Gold Coast under the auspices of the Crown (Feinberg 1989: 88; de Marees, van Dantzig, and Jones 1987: 217). Unlike the Portuguese on the Upper Guinea coast, who lived among local communities, most of their counterparts in Elmina resided within the confines of their coastal fort, São Jorge da Mina, built in 1481 to protect King João II’s royal monopoly on trade (Boxer 1963: 11; Feinberg 1989: 88). As with the construction of the fort, all regulations were geared towards the promotion and protection of trade (Vogt 1979: 7–8). Thus, the administration’s disapproval of intermarriage likely stemmed from concerns that access to local women’s networks would increase opportunities for illicit trade. In short, the tightly controlled institutionalized trade in Elmina rendered these unions a threat rather than an asset to the Crown’s economic interests.

In lieu of sanctioning stable unions with local women, the administration supplied officers with female slaves who tended to their domestic needs (Vogt 1979: 57). Their sexual needs were met through a system of prostitution, in which women, who were likely enslaved, were housed in the fort expressly for this purpose (Vogt 1979: 234, n. 63; on the likelihood that these women were slaves, see Akyeampong 1997: 146–49). Despite these provisions, some fortsmen also maintained liaisons with townswomen. The local contacts made through these relations may even partially account for the rampant illicit trade that was occurring between the fort’s residents and local townspeople. Even if unsuccessful, the administration’s disapproval of marital unions in favor of a system of prostitution must be understood as an explicit attempt to manage interracial sexual relations in a manner intended to advance the Crown’s agenda on the Gold Coast.

When the Dutch wrested control of Elmina from the Portuguese in 1637, it signaled the end of Portuguese hegemony on the coast and ushered in an era of intense competition among Europeans for control over the coast’s lucrative trading settlements. Whether it was the trading companies of the Dutch in Elmina, the Danes in Accra and Keta, or the Swedes and later the British in Cape Coast, all regulated interracial sexual relations in an attempt to stabilize the European male population, create and sustain local political and economic alliances, and groom the offspring of these unions for company service (Ray 2007: 36–53). As was the case on the Upper

Guinea coast, coastal ethnic groups, such as the Fante and Ga, were drawing on their own precolonial traditions of using marriage alliances to foster stranger integration and strengthen their political and economic positions when they extended the privilege of marriage and/or cohabitation with local women to Europeans. These cases demonstrate that from the earliest moments of Europe's imperial expansion, the domain of interracial sexual relations was a space in which Europeans and Africans were actively working out the mechanics of encounter. Accordingly, it was in and around trading settlements, where interracial unions and the prominent Afro-European trading families they produced were prevalent, that hybrid cultural formations took root characterized by cultural transfer on both sides (see, e.g., Yarak 2003; Feinberg 1989; Everts 2002; Gocking 1999).

Asia's early colonial encounters were also shaped in large part by the relationships that European men forged with indigenous and Eurasian women. These relationships and the enduring matrilineal kin networks they produced became the bedrock of what Jean Taylor (1983) calls *mestizo* culture. While specifically referring to Indonesia, Taylor's (1983: xix) definition is useful because it considers the diversity in both local and European populations that constituted many early colonial enclaves:

Mestizo characterizes a culture made up of many influences, extending beyond the Dutch and Indonesian. It underlines the fact that migrants on Dutch ships represented many states in Europe and that the local peoples amongst whom they lived included Indians, Japanese, Indonesians of all sorts, and people descended from an earlier meeting of East and West, from unions between Asians and Portuguese.

The gendered nature of immigration to Indonesia played a significant role in ensuring the longevity of *mestizo* culture's Asian influences. Because with few exceptions Dutch authorities prevented Dutch women from immigrating to Indonesia until the nineteenth century, Indies families were the product of relationships between European male immigrants and the locally born Asian or part-Asian women who were their wives, concubines, and slaves (Jean Taylor 1983: 15). Rarely sent to Europe, the female offspring of these unions, in turn, served as the bride pool for incoming European immigrants. Steeped in the cultural milieu of their mothers and Asian servants, they ensured the continuity not only of the Asian influences in *mestizo* culture, but also of the powerful kin networks that dominated the Dutch Indies until the nineteenth century. As Taylor notes (1983: 71), "crucial family links were not those between father and son but between a man and his in-laws. At the heart of the Indies clan were women, locally born and raised, who brought men into relationships of patron and protégé as father-in-law, son-in-law, and brothers-in-law." To be sure, not all interracial sexual relationships were marital in nature, many were fleeting, others were coerced. What is important to point out, however, is that they were an indispensable part of the way in which the early European presence established itself in parts of Asia, and, as we have already seen, West Africa, during the era in which Europe's interests in these regions were trade-based, rather

than about large-scale territorial acquisition and direct political control. This ethos was characterized by the fact that throughout Asia and Africa it was trading companies, like the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) and West India Company (GWC); Britain's Royal African Company and later the British African Company of Merchants; and the Swedish African Company, that presided over Europe's imperial presence in these regions.

The period of company rule in Asia and Africa was not, however, uniform in terms of the context that it provided for interracial sexual relationships. For instance, within a few decades of founding the VOC's settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, the Dutch made interracial marriages illegal in 1685. This is not surprising given that VOC rule at the Cape was less about trade and more about widespread territorial acquisition and conquest of native peoples. While much has been written about the ubiquity of interracial marriage and cohabitation in the Gold Coast during company rule, there was a darker side to this story. As the slave trade came to dominate the commercial life of the coast's trading settlements, women held captive in the bowels of Elmina and Cape Coast castles prior to embarking on the dreaded Middle Passage were raped by the European inhabitants of the castles. Scholarship has not yet established the extent of this practice, but it has been memorialized in the narratives that the castles' tour guides regularly tell visitors. This provides a stark reminder, yet again, of the significant role that a woman's status played in shaping her sexual encounters with European men and underscores a point made earlier about the link between slavery and rape. Needless to say European men could not rape with impunity the free townswomen of Elmina and Cape Coast; they reserved that treatment for enslaved women who could do little in the way of resisting their captors and were without kin who could protect them from the depravations of the slave trade.

As Europe's limited governance in service of trade transformed over the course of the nineteenth century into formal colonialism characterized by large-scale land acquisition and the institutionalization of territory-wide governance structures in Africa and Asia, often achieved through military conquest, colonial regimes were far less dependent on the good will and cooperation of indigenous communities. Although European men still had many of their sexual and domestic needs met through relationships with colonized women, colonial governments would come to view such relationships as a hindrance rather than a help to the new colonial dispensation. As a result, administrators and policymakers focused their attention on eradicating concubinage. It is instructive that marriage and prostitution were not the foci of these efforts. By the late nineteenth century interracial marriages recognized by the colonial state were largely a thing of the past, although mixed marriages contracted in accordance with native law and recognized by indigenous communities were not.⁴ Prostitution was elevated above concubinage as the preferred method of meeting the sexual needs of European men who were not permitted or could not afford to marry full-blooded European women.

Ann Stoler's observation (2002: 51) that concubinage increasingly fell out of favor with colonial administrators, "when European identity and supremacy were

thought to be vulnerable, in jeopardy, or less than convincing” helps to make sense of the timing of some of the better-known French and British efforts to bring the practice to an end. Typically, such efforts were undertaken as part and parcel of the process of legitimizing, institutionalizing, and professionalizing the colonial service in Asia and Africa. In French Cambodia, as part of Governor-General Doumer’s efforts to professionalize its ragtag colonial service at the turn of the twentieth century he “took immediate steps to police the private lives of French administrators,” which included instructing them “to avoid relationships with native concubines” (Edwards 1998: 117–118). Similar injunctions against concubinage were soon made elsewhere in Indochina. While interracial concubinage was never officially prohibited in French West Africa, by the second decade of the twentieth century colonial administrators were no longer openly encouraging the practice and it was generally frowned upon by colonial society, although it remained a common, if clandestine, practice (Conklin 1998: 70; O. White 1999: 12). The French colony of Guinea appears to have been exceptional in its efforts to ban concubinage (see Klein 2001: 153–154). Not surprisingly this change in attitude came on the heels of increased colonial anxieties about the legal status and citizenship rights of the *métis* offspring of these often-temporary unions.

The early twentieth century also witnessed significant changes in official attitudes and policies towards interracial sexual relationships throughout much of British Africa and in many of Britain’s Asian and Pacific colonies. In 1909, then secretary of state for the colonies Lord Crewe issued a circular prohibiting concubinage between native women and British officers in an effort to bring the latter’s sex lives in line with the new racial politics of British colonial rule in these areas, which emphasized more than ever before the need to maintain social and (quite often) spatial distance from subject populations. In this new dispensation, the notion of European (white) prestige, which rested on claims of racial purity, cultural superiority, and moral integrity of which sexual chasteness was a defining feature, was widely regarded as the backbone of a successful colonial administration. Accordingly, interracial concubinage was condemned because colonial policymakers, like Lord Crewe, believed that “it is not possible for any member of the administration to countenance such practices without lowering himself in the eyes of the natives, and diminishing his authority to an extent which will seriously impair his capacity for useful work in the Service.”⁵ Although concubinage took many different forms and involved varying degrees of intimacy and physical proximity, it was more likely to draw colonial officers into intricate webs of social relations and obligation with local families precisely because it was an ongoing relationship, unlike prostitution or “occasional illicit acts” as one colonial office advisor put it (T.C. Macnaghten, 1908, File minute for December 16: TNA, CO 533/52, no. 45005). Thus an officer’s ability to discharge his duties impartially was at risk. While the stated purpose of British efforts to end concubinage was to ensure administrative efficiency, in practice they revealed the inherent instability of colonial rule.

If a broadly discernible pattern suggests that interracial sexual relationships move from being a commonplace feature of Europe’s early imperial expansion towards

condemnation and prohibition as of the late nineteenth century, numerous examples that do not fit this chronology caution against making sweeping temporal claims. Instead we need to focus on the developmental stages and exigencies of individual colonial projects, in order to better discern how “similar shifts in the rhythms of rule and sexual management” are linked to “similar patterns within specific colonial histories themselves” (Stoler 2002: 77). When such projects are occasioned by immediate conquest and colonization or become formalized, as trade gives way to conquest and the implementation and expansion of alien political rule, regardless of the century in which it occurs, anxieties around interracial sex appear to surface and/or intensify. Durba Ghosh (2006: 9–10) has convincingly shown that colonial anxieties around interracial sex, sexual morality, and racial prestige and purity, predate the late nineteenth century in India. The presence of these anxieties during the eighteenth century in India is largely explained by the fact that the British imperial project there was already firmly rooted, fairly formal, and rapidly growing, even in this earlier time period. As Ghosh puts it (2006: 2), “The expansion of the [East India] Company’s territorial frontiers corresponded closely with growing anxieties about social frontiers and the ways in which they ought to be managed.” Elsewhere in the British empire, these concerns came even earlier, while in others they came later: as we have already seen, laws penalizing or banning intermarriage and sex between whites and blacks in several North American colonies were introduced as early as the seventeenth century, yet throughout most of British Africa it was not until the early twentieth century, precisely when formal colonial rule had been established, that active efforts were made to curtail such relationships, and even then they were limited to colonial employees (Woodson 1918: 339–343; Hyam 1986a).

In the Dutch empire, anxieties about waning Dutch cultural purity and its relationship to the ubiquity of interracial sexual relationships initially surfaced during the period of VOC rule in Batavia, but became the subject of policy and prohibition after the VOC was dissolved at the end of the eighteenth century and the Dutch embarked on the complete colonization of the Indonesian archipelago. In the VOC’s Cape settlement in South Africa, within the first few decades of its existence a combination of germ and military warfare against the Khoisan had strengthened company rule enough to lessen its dependence on Khoisan intermediaries. The life of Krotoa, a prominent young Khoisan woman, who became a translator and intermediary, is illustrative of this shift. In the decade following the settlement’s founding in 1652, Krotoa was incorporated into Dutch settler society as the wife of a Danish surgeon and the mother of his three children. She also brokered diplomatic relationships between the Dutch settlers and the Khoisan, but as the Dutch replaced diplomacy with force in their quest to settle the Cape, they “no longer needed Krotoa’s skills as a translator.” After her husband’s death and with the arrival of a new Governor who disparaged the Khoisan, Krotoa’s children were taken from her and she was expelled from colonial society, dying alone on Robben Island in 1674 (Scully 2005b). While interracial sex between indigenous and enslaved women and European settlers remained a common feature of settler colonialism in the Cape, as noted earlier the Dutch outlawed interracial marriage as early as 1685.

In all of these instances, as Ghosh argues (2006: 10), seventeenth- and eighteenth-century anxieties over interracial sex cannot be explained by the rise of “scientific racism and biological claims about the genetic differences between Caucasians and others” in the nineteenth century. Rather, they are better understood as manifestations of internal developments within their respective colonial contexts. What is important, however, about nineteenth-century European racial theory is that it harnessed the power of science to legitimate the hierarchical organization of perceived racial groups in new ways and played a significant role in shaping policy and popular attitudes towards interracial sexual relations in ways that make the nineteenth century a watershed moment in the history of colonial interracial sexual relations (Fredrickson 2005: 107). This was accomplished largely through scientific racism’s theorization of miscegenation as unnatural and the source of racial contagion and degeneracy through the production of mixed-race offspring who were regarded as a biologically inferior and subversive class of people. (Young 1995: 18). A preference for “pure types” emerged on the part of colonial powers that not only pathologized mixed-race people who were viewed as the very embodiment of impurity, but also indigenous people who were Europeanized and Europeans who were indigenized.

The specter of Haiti loomed large in shaping European anxieties about the colonies’ mixed populations. The unprecedented magnitude and violence of the slave uprisings, and the leading role that many contemporary observers believed mixed-race Haitians played in organizing them, alarmed colonial powers everywhere.⁶ Anxieties were particularly acute in colonies with large enslaved and/or mixed populations, like India, where a British observer (Viscount Vilencia, who visited the possessions of the East India Company at the turn of the nineteenth century) noted:

The most rapidly accumulating evil of Bengal is the increase of half-caste children. . . . In every country where this intermediate caste has been permitted to rise, it has ultimately tended to its ruin. Spanish-America and San Domingo are examples of this fact. . . . Their increase in India is beyond calculation . . . it may be justly apprehended that this tribe may hereafter become too powerful for control. . . . With numbers in their favor, with a close relationship to the natives, and without equal proportion of the pusillanimity and indolence which is natural to them, what may not in the future time be dreaded from them? (Gist and Wright 1973: 13)

In France events in Haiti were invoked “as a dire warning” of what could happen to its other colonies if policies continued to alienate the *métis* population. One colonial administrator warned, “rejected by all sides, they will become *declasses*, and I would add, the most dangerous *declasses* from the point of view of maintaining European domination” (O. White 1999: 78). The Haitian case became a powerful trope in the European colonial imagination not only of the dangers of rule by force, but also of the prophylactic necessity of maintaining firm boundaries between colonized and colonizer. The lessons of Haiti and a half-century later the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (the Sepoy Mutiny), were not lost on the colonial policymakers who were charged

with running Europe's second empire. The sexual boundary, above all others, became the subject of such intense scrutiny precisely because of the frequency with which it was transgressed even in the face of well-rehearsed arguments about the importance of racial endogamy to the maintenance of colonial rule.

Although little has been written about the link between interracial sexual relationships and the rise of anticolonialism, evidence suggests that we need to push beyond thinking about the roles these relationships played in the formation of empire to considering how they are implicated in its dissolution. In the introduction to *Empire and Sexuality* Ronald Hyam (1990) devotes a single, albeit lengthy, paragraph to listing numerous instances in areas as diverse as Canton, Kabul, South Africa, Kenya, and Bechuanaland, in which the sexual abuse of native women by European men provoked deep resentment, outbreaks of violence, and anticolonial resistance. He dismisses their significance, however, by concluding that "despite such occasional protests, the Afro-Asian world was remarkably accommodating to the sexual demands placed upon it" (1990: 2–3). His callous assertion is called into question by his own evidentiary list, but there are other examples too. The early South African nationalist, Sol Plaatje, as well as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, two of the twentieth century's most important anticolonial intellectuals and activists, all made the domain of interracial sex a focus of their anticolonial politics. My own research on British West Africa reveals how the early vanguard of Gold Coast nationalists used their grievances over illicit sexual relationships between African women and European men to challenge the legitimacy of British colonial rule well before the onset of formal decolonization. Among these early nationalists was the prolific female columnist and playwright, Mabel Dove, who posited interracial sexual relationships, whether between African women and European men or between African men and European women, as an impediment to national development and pride (2004: 92). In offering us a glimpse of her critique of interracial sexual relations, Dove's writings remind us, once again, of how marginalized colonized women's experiences and perspectives remain to our understanding of the role interracial sexual relations played in the making and unmaking of empire.

Notes

- 1 Readers interested in what is arguably the most canonical study of interracial sex and empire should see Stoler (2002).
- 2 For an overview of the scholarship on Black Peril and the way in which different scholars have linked these scares to internal crises, economic or otherwise, within white communities, see the introduction to McCulloch (2000).
- 3 Arranged marriages were, of course, not unique to interracial relationships. Intra-racial and intra-ethnic marriages and cohabitation were also subject to similar kinds of familial control throughout most of the world at this time period.
- 4 More research on interracial customary marriages needs to be undertaken, but my own research for the Gold Coast confirms that European men continued to contract so-called native marriages with local women throughout the colonial period.

- 5 R.O.A. Crewe-Milnes, 1st Marquess of Crewe, "Crewe to the officer administering the government of the Gold Coast, 11 January 1909." PRAAD, ACC, ADM 12/1/31.
- 6 Scholars have increasingly turned their attention towards documenting the leadership roles of enslaved Africans in the Haitian revolution, thereby revising previously held assumptions about the centrality of mixed-race Haitians to the success of the revolution. See, for example, Fick (1990).

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