

Thousands were drawn from the middle ranks of the colonized and were neither "cultural brokers" nor natural "intermediaries." The populations that fell within these contradictory colonial locations were subject to a frequently shifting set of criteria that allowed them privilege at certain moments and pointedly excluded them at others. This is not to deny that sharp distinctions divided those who were ruled and those who did the ruling but to highlight the fact that these divisions were not as easily (or permanently) drawn as the official discourse might lead one to imagine.

While Beidelman's contention that "anthropological curiosity [has] stopped at the color bar"¹⁰³ may be exaggerated, much evidence supports his claim. For the most part, it has not been progressive social scientists who have sought to describe colonial mentalities but postcolonial intellectuals who have broached the psychology and political economy of rulers and ruled. Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, and Ashis Nandy¹⁰⁴ have sought to identify a colonial consciousness that entrapped the defenders of empire as well as its more passive middling participants. The colonial everyman they paint is often a politically conservative composite of middle-class moralism and what V. S. Naipaul once called "B-rate mediocrity."¹⁰⁵ It is also they who have pointed to the intimate injuries of empire for the colonized: hypermasculinity, guilt, alienation, rage at and acceptance of a system that nurtures violence. White women appear as racist accomplices, defined by proxy to their men.

Such caricatures effectively capture certain features of colonials but are limiting. Some colonial administrations selected for mediocrity; others produced it. Middle-class moralism, as we have seen, comprised a wide range of substitutable prohibitions and standards, given new meanings by the changing political agenda to which it was applied. Still, their combined sensibilities suggest that a liberatory political analysis was contingent on locating racism, class tensions, and sexual subordination as key to the everyday cultural idioms of colonial domination. For anthropology, it suggests that we take seriously Memmi's insistence that colonialism creates both the colonizer and the colonized. Attending to the internal structures of colonial authority makes it harder to ignore those features of European class and gender perceptions and practice that were selectively refashioned to create and maintain the social distinctions of empire and the cultural boundaries of rule.

3 Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power

Gender and Morality in the Making of Race

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Over the past fifteen years the anthropology of women has fundamentally altered an understanding of colonial expansion and its consequences for the colonized. In identifying how European conquest affected valuations of women's work and redefined their proper domains, feminist scholars have sought to explain how changes in household organization, the sexual division of labor, and the gender-specific control of resources within it have modified and shaped how colonial appropriations of land, labor, and resources were obtained.¹ Much of this research has focused on indigenous gendered patterns of economic activity, political participation, and social knowledge and on the agency of those confronted with European rule—but less on the distinct agency of those women and men who carried it out.

More recent attention to the structures of colonial authority has placed new emphasis on the quotidian assertion of European dominance in the colonies, on imperial interventions in domestic life, and thus on the cultural prescriptions by which European women and men lived.² From an earlier focus on how colonizers have viewed the indigenous Other, more work is beginning to sort out how Europeans in the colonies imagined themselves and constructed communities built on asymmetries of race, class, and gender—entities significantly at odds with the European models on which they were drawn.

Feminist attempts to engage the gender politics of Dutch, French, and British imperial cultures converge on some strikingly similar observations; namely, that European women in these colonies experienced the cleavages of racial dominance and internal social distinctions very differently than men precisely because of their ambiguous positions, as both subordinates in colonial hierarchies and as agents of empire in their own right.³ Concomitantly, the majority of European women who left for the colonies in the late nine-

teenth and early twentieth century confronted frequent constraint on their domestic, economic, and political options, more limiting than those in metropolitan Europe at the time and in sharp contrast to the opportunities open to colonial men.⁴

In varied form these studies raise a basic question: in what ways were gender inequalities essential to the structure of colonial racism and imperial authority? Was the strident misogyny of imperial thinkers and colonial agents a by-product of received metropolitan values ("they just brought it with them"), a reaction to contemporary feminist demands in Europe ("women need to be put back in their breeding place"), or a novel and pragmatic response to the conditions of conquest? Was the assertion of European supremacy in terms of patriotic manhood and racial virility an expression of imperial domination or a defining feature of it?

In this chapter I further pursue the premise that imperial authority and racial distinctions were fundamentally structured in gendered terms. I look at the administrative and medical discourse and management of European sexual activity, reproduction, and marriage as part of the apparatus of colonial control. Here I attend more to the dominant male discourse (less to women's perceptions of the constraints placed on them), arguing that it was how women's needs were defined, not by but for them, that most directly shaped specific policies.⁵ The very categories "colonizer" and "colonized" were secured through forms of sexual control that defined the domestic arrangements of Europeans and the cultural investments by which they identified themselves. Treating the sexual and conjugal tensions of colonial life as more than a political trope for the tensions of empire writ small but as a part of the latter in socially profound and strategic ways, this chapter examines how gender-specific sexual sanctions and prohibitions not only demarcated positions of power but also prescribed the personal and public boundaries of race.

Colonial authority was constructed on two powerful but false premises. The first was the notion that Europeans in the colonies made up an easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity—a "natural" community of common class interests, racial attributes, political affinities, and superior culture. The second was the related notion that the boundaries separating colonizer from colonized were thus self-evident and easily drawn. Neither premise reflected colonial realities. Settler colonies such as those in Rhodesia and Algeria excepted—where inter-European conflicts were violent and overt—tensions between bureaucrats and planters, settlers and transients, missionaries and metropolitan policy makers, and *petits blancs*

and monied entrepreneurs have always made European colonial communities more socially fractious and politically fragile than many of their members professed.⁶ Internal divisions grew out of competing economic and political agendas—conflicts over access to indigenous resources, frictions over appropriate methods for safeguarding European privilege and power, competing criteria for reproducing a colonial elite and for restricting its membership.

The shift away from viewing colonial elites as homogenous communities of common interest marks an important trajectory in the anthropology of empire, signaling a major rethinking of gender relations within it. The markers of European identity and the criteria for community membership no longer appear as fixed but emerge as a more obviously fluid, permeable, and historically disputed terrain. The colonial politics of exclusion was contingent on constructing categories. Colonial control was predicated on identifying who was "white," who was "native," and which children could become citizens rather than subjects, on which were legitimate progeny and which were not.

What mattered was not only one's physical properties but also who counted as "European" and by what measure.⁷ Skin shade was too ambiguous. Bank accounts were mercurial. Religious belief and education were crucial markers but never clear enough. Social and legal standing derived from the cultural prism through which color was viewed, from the silences, acknowledgments, and denials of the social circumstances in which one's parents had sex. Sexual unions based on concubinage, prostitution, or church marriage derived from the hierarchies of rule. But, in turn, they were provisional relations, based on contested classifications, that could alter individual fates and the very structure of colonial society.⁸ Ultimately, inclusion or exclusion required regulating the sexual, conjugal, and domestic life of both European colonials and their subjects.

POLITICAL MESSAGES AND SEXUAL METAPHORS

Colonial observers and participants in the imperial enterprise appear to have had unlimited interest in the sexual interface of the colonial encounter. No subject is discussed more than sex in colonial literature and no subject more frequently invoked to foster the racist stereotypes of European society.⁹ The tropics provided a site for European pornographic fantasies long before conquest was under way, with lurid descriptions of sexual license, promiscuity, gynecological aberrations, and general perversion marking the Otherness of the colonized for metropolitan consumption.¹⁰ Noting the rigid sexual pro-

tocols of nineteenth-century Europe, some colonial historians, such as Ronald Hyam, have suggested that imperial expansion itself was derived from the export of male sexual energy.¹¹ Grann and Duignan saw colonialism as "a sublimation or alternative to sex [for European men]."¹² Both statements misconstrue the case, but one thing is clear: with the sustained presence of Europeans in the colonies, sexual prescriptions of varied sorts and targeting different actors became increasingly central to social policy and subject to new forms of scrutiny by colonial states.

The salience of sexual symbols as graphic representations of colonial dominance is relatively unambiguous and well established. Edward Said, for example, argued that the sexual submission and possession of Oriental women by European men "fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled."¹³ Orientalism was described as a "male perception of the world[,] . . . a male power fantasy," "an exclusively male province," in which the Orient was penetrated, silenced, and possessed.¹⁴ Sexuality, then, serves as a loaded metaphor for domination, but Said's critique was not (nor did it claim to be) about those relations between women and men. Sexual images illustrate the iconography of rule, not its pragmatics. Sexual asymmetries and visions convey what is "really" going on elsewhere, at another political epicenter. They are tropes to depict other centers of power.

If Asian women are centerfolds for the imperial voyeur, European women often appear in male colonial writings only as a reverse image—fulfilling not sexual but other power fantasies of European men.¹⁵ Whether portrayed as paragons of morality or as parasitic and passive actors on the imperial stage, they are rarely the object of European male desire.¹⁶ To assume that European men and women participated equally in the prejudices and pleasures that colonial privilege bestowed on them eschews the fact that European women took part in colonial relations in ways that imposed fundamentally different restrictions on them.

Sexual domination has been more often considered as a discursive symbol, instrumental in the conveyance of other meanings, but less often as the substance of imperial policy. Was sexual dominance, then, merely a graphic substantiation of who was on the bottom and who was on the top? Was the medium the message, or did sexual relations always "mean" something else, stand in for other relations, evoke the sense of *other* (pecuniary, political, or some possibly more subliminal) desires? This analytic slippage between the sexual symbols of power and the politics of sex runs throughout the colonial record—as well as through contemporary commentaries on it. Some of this may reflect the polyvalent quality of sexuality—symbolically rich

and socially salient at the same time. But sexual control was more than a convenient metaphor for colonial domination. It was a fundamental class and racial marker implicated in a wider set of relations of power.

Kenneth Ballhatchet's work on Victorian India has pointed in a similar direction.¹⁷ By showing that regulations on sexual access, prostitution, and venereal disease were central to segregationist policy, he linked issues of sexual management to the internal structure of British rule. He convincingly argued that it was through the policing of sex that subordinate European military and civil servants were kept in line and that racial boundaries were maintained. This was a study, then, about relations of power between men and men. Ballhatchet had little to say about constraints on European colonial women as his emphasis was not on relations of power between women and men.

As a critical interface of sexuality and the wider political order, the relationship between gender prescriptions and racial boundaries is a subject that remains unevenly unexplored. While recent work shows clearly that European women of different classes experienced the colonial venture very differently from one another and from men, we still know relatively little about the distinct investments they had in a racism they shared.¹⁸ Feminist scholars have made efforts to sort out the distinct colonial experience of European women, how they were incorporated into, resisted, and affected the politics of their men.¹⁹ Studies of the intervention of state, business, and religious institutions in the reproductive decisions of colonized populations are now joined by those that examine the work of European women in these programs, the influence of European welfare programs on colonial medicine, and the reproductive constraints on colonial women themselves.²⁰

Most of these contributions have attended to the broader issue of gender ideologies and colonial authority, not specifically to how sexual control has figured in the fixing of racial boundaries *per se*. Although feminist research across disciplines has increasingly explored the "social embeddedness of sexuality" and the contexts that "condition, constrain and socially define [sexual] acts,"²¹ this emphasis has not refocused attention on the racial "embeddedness of sexuality" in colonial contexts as one might expect. Important exceptions include recent work on southern Africa, where changing restrictions on colonial prostitution and domestic service were explicitly class-specific and directly tied racial policy to sexual control.²²

The fastening of sexual control to racial tensions is both obvious and elusive. Take, for example, Ronald Takaki's²³ assertion that sexual fear in nineteenth-century America was at base a racial anxiety. Few scholars would disagree, but nothing in the assertion accounts for why it is through sexu-

ality that such anxieties are expressed. Winthrop Jordan sought some sort of answer in proposing that in the nineteenth-century American South, "the sex act itself served as a ritualistic re-enactment of the daily pattern of social dominance."²⁴ Sander Gilman has argued more generally that sexuality is the most salient marker of Otherness and therefore figures in *any* racist ideology.²⁵ Like skin color, he contended, "sexual structures, such as the shape of the genitalia, are always the antithesis of the idealized self's."²⁶ If we accept Gilman's claim there should be no surprise that colonial agents and colonized subjects expressed their contests—and vulnerabilities—in these terms.

This notion of sexuality as a core aspect of social identity has figured importantly in analyses of the psychological motivation of and injuries incurred by colonial rule.²⁷ Here, sexual submission substantiates colonial racism, imposing fundamental limits on personal liberation. Among colonial and postcolonial male authors, questions of virility and definitions of manliness have been placed at political center stage. The demasculinization of colonized men and the hypermasculinity of European males are understood as key elements in the assertion of white supremacy. But these are studies concerned with the psychological salience of women and sex in the subordination of men by men. They only incidentally deal with *sexism* and racism as well as racism and sex.²⁸

An overlapping set of discourses has provided the psychological and economic underpinnings for colonial distinctions of difference. These discourses tie fears of sexual contamination, physical danger, climatic incompatibility, and moral breakdown to the security of a European national identity with a racist and class-specific core. Colonial scientific reports and the popular press are filled with assertions varying on a common theme: native women bear contagions, white women become sterile in the colonies, colonial men are susceptible to physical, moral, and mental degeneration when they remain in the tropics too long. What work do such statements perform? To what degree are they medically or politically grounded? We need to unpack what is metaphor, what is perceived as dangerous (is it disease, culture, climate, or sex?), and what is not.

SEX AND OTHER CATEGORIES OF COLONIAL CONTROL

Though sex cannot of itself enable men to transcend racial barriers, it generates some admiration and affection across them, which is healthy, and which cannot always be dismissed as merely self-interested and prudential. On the whole, sexual interaction

between Europeans and non-Europeans probably did more good than harm to race relations; at any rate, I cannot accept the feminist contention that it was fundamentally undesirable.²⁹

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, Holland, and Iberia was never left to chance. Unions between Annamite women and French men, between Portuguese women and Dutch men, between Inca women and Spanish men produced offspring with claims to privilege, whose rights and status had to be determined and prescribed. From the early 1600s through the twentieth century the sexual sanctions and conjugal prohibitions of colonial agents were rigorously debated and carefully codified. It is in these debates over matrimony and morality that trading and plantation company officials, missionaries, investment bankers, military high commands, and agents of the colonial state confronted one another's visions of empire and the settlement patterns on which it would rest.

In 1622 the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) arranged for the transport of six poor but marriageable young Dutch women to Java, providing them with clothing, a dowry on marriage, and a contract binding them to five years in the Indies.³⁰ Aside from this and one other short-lived experiment, immigration of European women was explicitly restricted for the next two hundred years. VOC shareholders argued against female emigration on multiple counts. First, they maintained that the transportation costs for married women and daughters were too high.³¹ Second, they argued that Dutch women (with stronger ties than men to the Netherlands?) might hinder initiatives for permanent European settlement. By goading their bachelors to quick profits through nefarious trade, they would then press for repatriation to display their newfound wealth.³² Third, the VOC feared that Dutch women might engage in private trade and encroach on the company's monopoly.³³ Fourth, the objection was raised that European children would become sickly, force families to repatriate, and deplete the font of permanent settlers.³⁴

The East Indies Company regulated against female migration by selecting bachelors as their European recruits and by promoting both extramarital relations and legal unions between low-ranking employees and imported slave women.³⁵ There were some Euro-Asian marriages among the colonial elite, but government regulations made concubinage a more attractive option by prohibiting European men from returning to the Netherlands with na-

tive wives and children.³⁶ For the middling colonial staff, the East Indies Company firmly discouraged Euro-Asian marriages. Households based on Euro-Asian unions, by contrast, were seen to bear distinct advantages. Individual employees would bear the costs of dependents, mixed unions would produce healthier children, and Asian women would make fewer financial and affective demands. Finally, men would be more likely to remain if they established families with local roots.

Concubinage served colonial interests in other ways. It permitted permanent settlement and rapid growth by a cheaper means than the importation of European women. Salaries of European recruits to the colonial armies, bureaucracies, plantation companies, and trading enterprises were carefully calibrated and kept artificially low. Eliminating expenses for family support and transportation costs was only part of the story. As important, local women provided domestic services for which new European recruits would otherwise have had to pay. In the mid-nineteenth century such arrangements were de rigueur for young civil servants intent on setting up households on their own.³⁷ Despite clerical opposition (the church never attained a secure and independent foothold in the Indies), by the nineteenth century concubinage was the most prevalent living arrangement for European men.³⁸ Nearly half of the Indies' European male population in the 1880s were unmarried and living with Asian women.³⁹ Government decrees designed to limit barrack concubinage in 1903 were never enforced.⁴⁰ It was only in the early twentieth century that concubinage was more actively condemned.⁴¹

The administrative arguments from the 1600s invoked to curb the migration of European women, on the one hand, and to condone sexual access to indigenous women, on the other, bear a striking resemblance to the sexual politics of colonial expansion in other times and places. Colonized women living as the concubines of European men—referred to as *nyai* in Java and Sumatra, *congai* in Indochina, and *petite épouse* throughout the French empire—formed the dominant domestic arrangement in colonial cultures through the early twentieth century. Unlike prostitution, which could and often did increase the number of syphilitic and therefore non-productive European men, concubinage was considered to stabilize political order and colonial health. It kept men in their barracks and bungalows rather than in brothels or hospitals or, worse, in “unnatural” liaisons with one another.⁴² Although prostitution served some of the colonies for some of the time, it often proved medically and socially problematic. It had little appeal for those administrations bent on promoting permanent settlement,⁴³ and venereal disease was difficult to check even with the elaborate

system of lock hospitals and contagious-disease acts developed in parts of the British empire.

Across Asia and Africa, colonial decision makers counted on the social services that local women supplied as “useful guides to the language and other mysteries of the local societies.”⁴⁴ Their medical and cultural know-how was credited with keeping many European men alive in their initial, precarious confrontation with tropical life.⁴⁵ Handbooks for incoming plantation staff found for Tonkin, Sumatra, and Malaya urged men to find a bed-servant as a prerequisite to quick acclimatization.⁴⁶ In Malaysia commercial companies encouraged their European staff to procure local “companions” for psychological and physical well-being, as protection against the ill health that sexual abstinence, isolation, and boredom were thought to bring.⁴⁷ Even in the British empire, where the colonial office officially banned concubinage in 1900, it was tacitly condoned and practiced long after.⁴⁸ In the Indies a similar sanction against concubinage among civil servants was only selectively enforced. It had little effect on domestic arrangements outside of Java and no real impact in Sumatra's new plantation belt where Javanese and Japanese *houshoudsters* (as Asian mistresses were sometimes called; lit. “housekeeper”) remained the rule rather than the exception.⁴⁹

Concubinage was the prevalent term for cohabitation outside marriage between European men and Asian women. But the term ambiguously conveyed 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. If glossed as companionship or cohabitation outside marriage, it suggests more social privileges than most women who were involved in such relations would have enjoyed.⁵⁰ They could be dismissed without reason, notice, or severance pay. They might be exchanged among Europeans and “passed on” when men left for leave or retirement in Europe. The Indies Civil Code of 1848 made their position poignantly clear: native women “had no rights over children recognized by a white man.”⁵¹ Some women combined sexual and domestic service with the abject status of slave or coolie and lived in separate quarters. On East Sumatra's plantations, where such arrangements were structured into company labor policies, Javanese women picked from the coolie ranks often retained their original labor contracts for the duration of their sexual and domestic service.⁵²

Most of these women remained servants, sharing only the beds of European staff. But some combined their service with varied degrees of independence and authority and used their positions to enhance their economic and political standing. In Indochina and the Indies, officials complained that local women provided employment to their own kin, making sure that the

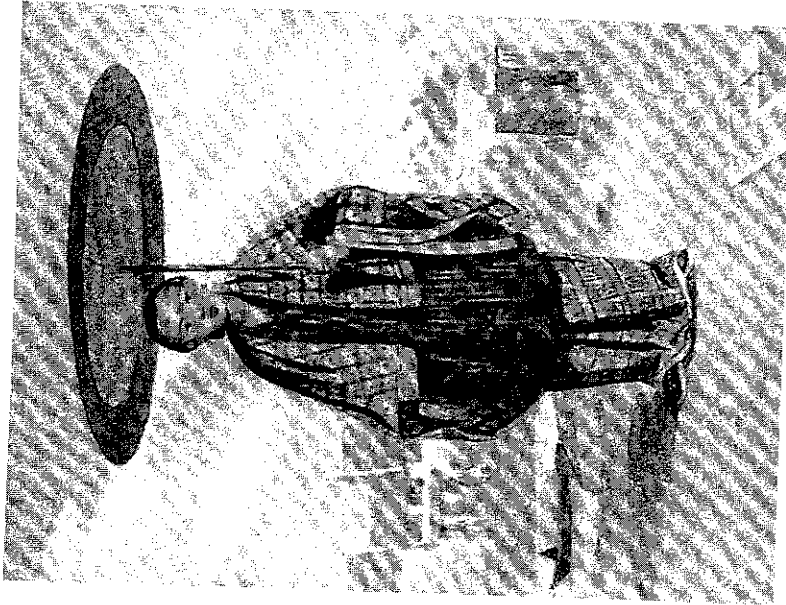


Figure 7. Lithograph, "The Nyai or Native Huishoudster," from the portfolio of K. Fuhri, 1853. KITLV no. 35 B 185.

houses in which they served were peopled with gardeners, washerwomen, and night watchmen from their own families. Working for colonial men of higher station, these huishoudsters might run parts of the businesses of the men with whom they had arrangements, hire and fire the servants, and manage shopping budgets and other household affairs.⁵³ Javanese women (like the European-born in a later period) were called on to keep men physically and psychologically fit for work, to keep them satisfied without distracting them or urging them out of line.⁵⁴ Women who worked in such capacities in remote districts and plantation areas provided for the daily needs of the lower-level European staff without imposing the emotional and financial obligations that European family life would demand.⁵⁵

Concubinage reinforced the hierarchies on which colonial societies were based and made those distinctions more problematic at the same time. In North Sumatra, grossly uneven sex ratios often made for intense competi-

tion among male workers and their European supervisors for women who would perform these services.⁵⁶ Javanese women were not the only ones requisitioned for such jobs. Elsewhere in the Indies, impoverished Indo-European women lived in situations that blurred the boundaries between companionship, concubinage, and paid-for sex. And it was that very blurring that disturbed the racial sensibilities of the Dutch-born elite.⁵⁷ Metropolitan elites were openly disdainful of these liaisons on moral grounds—all the more so when these unions became sustained and emotionally significant relationships. Such affective ties defied the racial premise of concubinage as no more than an emotionally unfettered convenience.⁵⁸

The tension between concubinage as a confirmation of racial hierarchy and as a threatening compromise to that order was nowhere more visible than in reactions to the progeny that it produced. Mixed-bloods, poor Indos, and abandoned *métis* children straddled the division of ruler and ruled as they threatened to blur that divide. Referred to by the common Dutch term *voorkinderen* (children from a previous marriage or union), in the colonies the term was racially marked to signal illegitimate children of a mixed union. Economically disadvantaged and socially invisible, they were sent "back" to native *kampongs* or shuttled into the shoddy compounds of impoverished whites.⁵⁹

Concubinage was a domestic arrangement based on sexual service and gender inequalities that "worked" efficiently by some criteria and badly by others. When European identity and supremacy were thought to be vulnerable, in jeopardy, or less than convincing, concubinage came under more direct attack. At the turn of the century and increasingly through the 1920s, colonial elites responded by clarifying the cultural criteria of privilege and the moral premises of their unity. Sex in the politically safe context of prostitution and where possible in the more desirable context of marriage between "full-blooded" Europeans, replaced concubinage.⁶⁰ As in other colonial regions, the ban on concubinage was not always expressed in explicit racist language. On the contrary, difference and distance were often coded to mark race in culturally clear but nuanced terms.⁶¹

Restrictions on European Women in the Colonies

Most accounts of colonial conquest and settlement concur in suggesting that European women chose to avoid early pioneering ventures, but the choice was rarely their own.⁶² In the Indies, a government ordinance of 1872 made it impossible for any soldier below the rank of sergeant major to marry. Even above that rank, conditions were very restrictive.⁶³ In the Indies



Figure 8. 'A picnic at Daoen Lassi,' from photo album titled "Souvenirs of Ternate," 1903. Note the range of women of different dress and different hue, wearing Javanese dress on an "outing." KITLV no. 10.311.

army, marriage was a privilege of the officer corps, with barracks concubinage instituted and regulated for the rank and file. In the twentieth century, formal and informal prohibitions set by banks, estates, and government services operating in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia restricted marriage during the first three to five years of service, while some prohibited it altogether. In Malaya, the major British banks required their employees to sign contracts agreeing to request permission to marry, with the understanding that it would not be granted in less than eight years.⁶⁴

Many historians assume that these bans on employee marriage and on the immigration of European women lifted when specific colonies were politically stable, medically upgraded, and economically secure. But marriage restrictions lasted well into the twentieth century, long after rough living and a scarcity of amenities had become conditions of the past. In India as late as 1929, British employees in the political service were still recruited at the age of twenty-six and then prohibited from marriage during their first three probationary years.⁶⁵ In the army, marriage allowances were also de-

nied until the same age, while in the commercial houses, restrictions were frequent but less overt.⁶⁶ On the Ivory Coast, employment contracts in the 1920s denied marriage with European women before the third tour, which meant a minimum of five years' service, so that many men remained unmarried past the age of thirty.⁶⁷

European demographics in the colonies were shaped by these economic and political exigencies and thus were enormously skewed by sex. Among the laboring immigrant and native populations as well as among Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the number of men was, at the very least, double that of women and sometimes exceeded it by twenty-five times. Although in the Indies the overall ratio of European women to men rose from 47:100 to 88:100 between 1900 and 1930, representing an absolute increase from 4,000 to 26,000 Dutch women,⁶⁸ in outlying islands the ratios were kept far more uneven. On Sumatra's plantation belt in 1920, there were still only 61 European women per 100 men.⁶⁹ On Africa's Ivory Coast, European sex ratios through 1921 were still 1:2.5.⁷⁰ In Tonkin, European men sharply outnumbered European women as late as 1931, when there were 14,085 European men (including military) to 3,083 European women.⁷¹ While these imbalances were usually attributed to the physical hazards of life in the tropics, political explanations are more compelling. In controlling the availability of European women and the sorts of sexual access allowed, colonial state and corporate authorities avoided salary increases as well as the proliferation of a lower-class European settler population. Such policies did not mute the internal class distinctions within the European communities. On the contrary, they shaped the social geography of the colonies by fixing the conditions under which European privileges could be attained and reproduced.

As in North Sumatra, the marriage prohibition was both a political and an economic issue, defining the social contours of colonial communities and the standards of living in them.⁷² But, as importantly, it revealed how strongly the conduct of private life and the sexual proclivities individuals expressed were tied to corporate profits and the security of the colonial state. Irregular domestic arrangements were thought to encourage subversion as strongly as acceptable unions could avert it. Family stability and sexual "normalcy" were thus concretely linked to political agitation or quiescence.

Domestic arrangements varied as government officials and private businesses weighed the economic versus political costs of one arrangement over another, but such calculations were invariably meshed. Those in high office saw white prestige and profits as inextricably linked, and attitudes toward concubinage reflected that concern.⁷³ Colonial morality and the place of con-

cubinage in it was relative. Thus in Malaya through the 1920s, concubinage was tolerated precisely because "poor whites" were not. Government and plantation administrators argued that white prestige would be imperiled if European men became impoverished in attempting to maintain middle-class lifestyles and European wives. In late-nineteenth-century Java, in contrast, concubinage itself was considered a major source of white pauperism, condemned at precisely the same time that a new colonial morality passively condoned illegal brothels.⁷⁴

What constituted morality vacillated, as did what defined white prestige—and what its defense should entail. No description of European colonial communities fails to note the obsession with white prestige as a basic feature of colonial thinking. Its protection looms as the primary cause of a long list of otherwise inexplicable postures, prejudices, fears, and violences. But what upheld that prestige was not a constant; concubinage was socially lauded at one time and seen as a political menace at another. White prestige was a gloss for different intensities of racist practice, gender-specific and culturally coded. Although many accounts contend that white women brought an end to concubinage, its decline came with a much wider shift in colonial relations along more racially segregated lines—in which the definitions of prestige shifted and in which Asian, creole, and European-born women were to play new roles.

Colonial communities were not generic; sharp demographic, social, and political differences existed among them. Colonies based on small administrative centers of Europeans (as on Africa's Gold Coast) differed from plantation colonies with sizable enclave European communities (as in Malaya and Sumatra) and still more from settler colonies (as in Algeria) with large, heterogeneous, and permanent European populations. But these "types" were less fixed than some students of colonial history suggest, such as Winthrop Jordan, who argued that the "bedrock demographics" of whites to blacks and the sexual composition of the latter "powerfully influenced, perhaps even determined the kind of society which emerged in each colony."⁷⁵ North Sumatra's European-oriented, overwhelmingly male colonial population, for example, contrasted with the more sexually balanced mestizo culture that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in colonial Java.

But these demographics were not the bedrock of social relations from which all else followed. Sex ratios themselves derived from the particular way in which administrative strategies of social engineering collided with and constrained people's personal choices and private lives. These demographic differences, and the social configurations to which they gave rise,

will need to be explained, as do some of the common politically charged issues that a range of colonial societies shared. Some of the similar—and counterintuitive—ways in which the construction of racial categories and the management of sexuality were inscribed indicate new efforts to modernize colonial control.⁷⁶

EUROPEAN WOMEN AND RACIAL BOUNDARIES

Little is as striking in the sociological accounts of European colonial communities as the extraordinary changes that are said to accompany the entry of white women. These adjustments are described as shifts in one direction: toward European lifestyles accentuating the refinements of privilege and new etiquettes of racial difference. The presence of European women was said to put new demands on the white communities to tighten their ranks, clarify their boundaries, and mark out their social space. The material culture of European settlements in Saigon, outposts in New Guinea, and estate complexes in Sumatra were retailored to accommodate the physical and moral requirements of a middle-class and respectable feminine contingent.⁷⁷ Housing structures in the Indies were partitioned, residential compounds in the Solomon Islands enclosed, servant relations in Hawaii formalized, dress codes in Java altered, food and social taboos in Rhodesia and the Ivory Coast codified. Taken together these changes encouraged new kinds of consumption and new social services that catered to these new demands.⁷⁸

The arrival of large numbers of European women coincided with new bourgeois trappings and notions of privacy in colonial communities. And these, in turn, were accompanied by new distinctions based on race. European women supposedly required more metropolitan amenities than did men and more spacious surroundings for them. Women were claimed to have more delicate sensibilities and therefore needed suitable quarters—discrete and enclosed. Their psychological and physical constitutions were considered more fragile, demanding more servants for the chores they should be spared. In short, white women needed to be maintained at elevated standards of living, in insulated social spaces cushioned with the cultural artifacts of "being European." Whether women or men set these new standards and why they might have both done so (and for different reasons) is left unclear. Who exhibited a "need for" segregation? In Indochina, male doctors advised French women to build their homes with separate domestic and kitchen quarters.⁷⁹ Segregationist standards were what women "deserved" and, more important, what white male prestige required that they maintain.

Racist but Moral Women, Innocent but Immoral Men

Recent feminist scholarship has challenged the universally negative stereotype of the colonial wife in one of two ways: either by showing the structural reasons why European women were racially intolerant, socially vicious, abusive to servants, and prone to illness and boredom, or by demonstrating that they really were not.⁸⁰ Some scholars have attempted to confront what Margaret Strobel calls the "myth of the destructive female" to show that these women were not detrimental to colonial relations but crucial to bolstering a failing empire and to maintaining the daily rituals of racialized rule.⁸¹

Colonial discourses about white women were full of contradictions. At the same time that new female immigrants were chided for not respecting the racial distance of local convention, an equal number of colonial observers accused them of being more committed racists in their own right.⁸² Insecure and jealous of the sexual liaisons of European men with native women, bound to their provincial visions and cultural norms, European women, it was and is argued, constructed the major cleavages on which colonial stratification would rest. Writing about French women in Algeria, the French historian Pierre Nora once claimed that these "parasites of the colonial relationship in which they do not participate directly, are generally more racist than men and contribute strongly to prohibiting contact between the two societies."⁸³ Similarly, Octavio Mannoni noted "the astonishing fact" that European women in Madagascar were "far more racist than the men."⁸⁴ For the Indies, "it was jealousy of the dusky sirens . . . but more likely some say . . . it was . . . plain feminine scandalization at free and easy sex relations" that caused a decline in miscegenation.⁸⁵

Such bald examples are easy to find in colonial histories of several decades ago. Recent scholarship has been more subtle but not so different. For the French Ivory Coast, the ethnographer Alain Trefort contended that "the presence of the white woman separated husbands from indigenous life by creating around them a zone of European intimacy."⁸⁶ Gann and Duignan attributed the decline of racial integration to, as we saw in the previous chapter, the decline in the price of steamship tickets to British Africa.⁸⁷ Such conclusions are not confined to metropolitan men; Ashis Nandy tied the racism of white women to the homosexual cravings of their men.⁸⁸

What is striking here is that women, otherwise supporting players on the colonial stage, are charged with reshaping the face of colonial society, as in the case of Africa, and imposing their racial will on, a colonial world where "relatively unrestrained social intermingling . . . had been prevalent in earlier years."⁸⁹ Similarly, in Malaya, the presence of European women put an

and to "free and easy social intercourse with [Malayan] men as well," replacing it with "an iron curtain of ignorance . . . between the races."⁹⁰ European women were not only the bearers of racist beliefs, but hard-line operatives who put them into practice. It was they who destroyed the blurred divisions between colonizer and colonized, who encouraged class distinctions among whites while fostering new racial antagonisms, formerly muted by sexual access.⁹¹

What underwrites these assessments? Are we to believe that sexual intimacy with European men yielded social mobility and political rights for colonized women? Or less likely, that because British civil servants bedded Indian women, Indian men had more "in common" with British men and enjoyed more parity? Colonized women could sometimes parlay their positions into personal profit and small rewards, but these were *individual* negotiations with no social, legal, or cumulative claims. Sex was not a leveling mechanism but a site in which social asymmetries were instantiated and expressed.⁹²

European women were positioned as the bearers of a redefined colonial morality. But to suggest that they fashioned this racism out of whole cloth is to miss the political chronology in which new intensities of racist practice arose. In the African and Asian contexts already mentioned, the arrival of large numbers of European wives, particularly the need for their protection, followed from new terms and tensions in the colonial contract. Their presence and safety was repeatedly invoked to clarify racial lines. It coincided with perceived threats to European prestige,⁹³ increased racial conflict,⁹⁴ covert challenges to colonial politics, outright expressions of nationalist resistance, and internal dissension among whites themselves.⁹⁵

If white women were the force behind the decline of concubinage, as is often claimed, they did so as participants in a broader racial realignment and political plan.⁹⁶ This is not to suggest that they were passive in this process, as the dominant preoccupations in many of their novels attest.⁹⁷ Many European women opposed concubinage but not because they were categorically jealous of and threatened by Asian women.⁹⁸ More likely, it was because of the double standard concubinage condoned for European men.⁹⁹ Some Dutch women championed the cause of the wronged *nyai*, while others urged improved protection for nonprovisioned native women and children as they did for themselves. Still, few went so far as to advocate the legitimization of these mixed unions in legal marriage.¹⁰⁰ Significantly, what European women had to say had little resonance and little effect until their objections coincided with a realignment in both racial and class politics in which they were strategic.

Race and the Politics of Sexual Peril

If the gender-specific requirements for colonial living imposed specific restrictions on women, they were also racialized assessments of danger that assigned a heightened sexuality to colonized men.¹⁰¹ Although novels and memoirs position European women as categorically absent from the sexual fantasies of European men, these very men imagined their women to be desired and seductive figures to others. Within this frame, European women needed protection from the "primitive" sexual urges aroused by the sight of them.¹⁰² In some colonies that sexual threat remained an unlabeled potential. In others, it was given a specific name. The "Black Peril" referred throughout Africa and much of the British empire to the professed dangers of sexual assault on white women by black men.

In southern Rhodesia and Kenya in the 1920s and 1930s, preoccupations with the Black Peril prompted the creation of citizens' militias, ladies' riflery clubs, and commissions to investigate whether African female domestic servants would not be safer to employ than men.¹⁰³ Some colonial states went further still: in New Guinea the White Women's Protection Ordinance of 1926 provided "the death penalty for any person convicted for the crime of rape or attempted rape upon a European woman or girl;"¹⁰⁴ and in the Solomon Islands authorities introduced public flogging in 1934 as punishment for "criminal assaults on [white] females."¹⁰⁵

What do these cases have in common? First, the proliferation of discourse about sexual assault and the measures used to prevent it had virtually no correlation with actual incidences of rape of European women by men of color. Just the contrary: there was often no *ex post facto* evidence, or any at the time, that rapes were committed or attempted.¹⁰⁶ Sexual assaults may have occurred, but their incidence had little to do with the fluctuations in anxiety about them. Moreover, the rape laws were race-specific. Sexual abuse of black women was not classified as rape and therefore was not legally actionable, nor did rapes committed by white men lead to prosecution.¹⁰⁷ If these accusations of sexual threat were not prompted by the fact of rape, what did they signal, and to what were they tied?

Allusions to political and sexual subversion of the colonial system went hand in hand. The term "Black Peril" referred to sexual threats, but it also connoted the fear of insurgency, and of perceived nonacquiescence to colonial control more generally.¹⁰⁸ Concern over protection of white women intensified during real and perceived crises of control—threats to the internal cohesion of the European communities or infringements on its borders. Thus colonial accounts of the rebellion in India in 1857 detailed descrip-

tions of the sexual mutilation of British women by Indian men although no rapes were recorded.¹⁰⁹ In Africa too, although the chronologies of the Black Peril differ—on the Rand in South Africa peaking a full twenty years earlier than elsewhere—we can still identify a patterned *sequence* of events.¹¹⁰ In New Guinea, the White Women's Protection Ordinance followed a large influx of acculturated Papuans into Port Moresby in the 1920s. Resistant to the constraints imposed on their dress, movement, and education, whites perceived them as arrogant, "cheeky," and without respect.¹¹¹ In post-World War I Algeria, the political unease of *pieds noirs* (local French settlers) in the face of "a whole new series of [Muslim] demands" manifested itself in a popular culture newly infused with strong images of sexually aggressive Algerian men.¹¹²

Second, rape charges against colonized men were often based on perceived transgressions of social space. "Attempted rapes" turned out to be "incidents" of a Papuan man "discovered" in the vicinity of a white residence, a Fijian man who entered a European patient's room, or a male servant poised at the bedroom door of a European woman asleep or in half-dress.¹¹³ With such a broad range of behaviors defined as dangerous, most colonized men were potentially threatening as sexual and political aggressors.

Third, accusations of sexual assault frequently followed on heightened tensions within European communities—and renewed efforts to find consensus within them. Rape accusations in South Africa, for example, coincided with a rash of strikes between 1890 and 1914 by both African and white miners.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in Rhodesia, after a strike of white railway workers in 1929, otherwise conflicting members of the European community came together in a common cause. The threat of native rebellion produced a "solidarity [that] found sustenance in the threat of racial destruction."¹¹⁵ When labor actions by Indonesian workers and European staff were most intense, Sumatra's white community did the same. They expanded their vigilante groups, intelligence networks, and demands for police protection to ensure their women were safe and their workers "in hand."¹¹⁶

Subsidized sponsorship of married couples was accompanied by new incentives for family formation (*gezinsvorming*) in both groups, a policy explicitly designed to weed out "undesirable elements" and the socially malcontent. Higher salaries and bonuses, upgraded housing, and a more mediated chain of command between field-worker and staff differentiated the political interests of European from Asian workers more than ever before.

The remedies sought to alleviate sexual danger embraced new prescriptions for securing white control. These included increased surveillance of native men, new laws stipulating corporal punishment for the transgres-

sion of sexual and social boundaries, and the demarcation of new spaces that were made racially off-limits. These went with a moral rearmament of the European community and reassertions of its cultural identity. Charged with guarding cultural norms, European women were instrumental in promoting white solidarity. But it was partly at their own expense, for on this issue they were to be almost as closely policed as colonized men.¹¹⁷

Policing European Women and Concessions to Chivalry

Native men were the ones legally punished for alleged sexual assaults, but European women were frequently blamed for provoking their desires. New arrivals from Europe were accused of being too familiar with their servants, lax in their commands, and indecorous in their speech and dress.¹¹⁸ In Papua New Guinea "everyone" in the Australian community agreed that rape assaults were caused by a "younger generation of white women" who simply did not know how to treat servants.¹¹⁹ In Rhodesia, as in Uganda, sexual anxieties persisted in the absence of any incidents and restricted women to activities within European enclaves and in their homes.¹²⁰ The Immorality Act of 1916 "made it an offense for a white woman to make an indecent suggestion to a male native."¹²¹ European women in Kenya in the 1920s were dissuaded from staying alone on their homesteads and discouraged by rumors of rape from taking up farming on their own.¹²² As in the American South, "the etiquette of chivalry controlled white women's behavior even as [it] guarded caste lines."¹²³ A defense of community, morality, and white male power was achieved by increasing control over and consensus among Europeans, by reaffirming the vulnerability of white women and the sexual threat posed by native men, and by creating new sanctions to limit the liberties of both.

European colonial communities in the early twentieth century assiduously controlled the movements of European women and, where possible, imposed on them restricted and protected roles. There were, however, European women who did work. French women in the settler communities of Algeria ran farms, rooming houses, and shops along with their men.¹²⁴ On the Ivory Coast married European women worked to "supplement" their husbands' incomes,¹²⁵ while in Senegal the "supplementary" salary of French wives maintained the white standard.¹²⁶ Some women missionaries, nurses, and teachers questioned the sexist policies of their male superiors, but less so the practices that buttressed the racial order.¹²⁷

In smaller European enclaves, there were often fewer opportunities for women to be economically independent or to act politically on their own. The "revolt against chivalry"—the protest of American Southern white

women to lynchings of black men for alleged rape attempts—had no counterpart among European women in Asia and Africa.¹²⁸ French feminists targeted those women with skills (and a desire for marriage) to settle in Indochina at the turn of the century, but colonial administrators blocked that immigration. Officials not only complained of a surfeit of resource-rich widows, they also argued that European seamstresses, florists, and children's outfitters could not possibly compete with the cheap and skilled labor provided by well-established Chinese firms.¹²⁹ In Tonkin in the 1930s, there was little room for single women, be they unmarried, widowed or divorced.¹³⁰ Although some colonial widows, such as the editor of a major Saigon daily, succeeded in their own ambitions, most were shipped out of Indochina—regardless of skill—at government expense.¹³¹

Rejecting expansion based on the "poor white" Algerian model, French officials in Indochina dissuaded colons with insufficient capital from entry and sought to repatriate those who tried to remain.¹³² Single women were seen as the quintessential *petit blanc*. With limited resources and shopkeeper aspirations, they presented the dangerous possibility that straitened circumstances would lead them to prostitution and thus to degrade white prestige at large. In the Solomon Islands lower-class white women were overtly scorned and limited from entry.¹³³ Similarly, an Indies army high commander complained in 1903 to the governor-general that lower-class European-born women were far less modest than their Indies-born counterparts and posed a greater moral threat to European men.¹³⁴ Indies officials themselves identified European widows as among the most economically vulnerable and impoverished segments of the European population.¹³⁵

Professional competence did not protect single European women from marginalization.¹³⁶ They were held in contempt along with European prostitutes, on the basis of similar objections.¹³⁷ White prostitutes undermined prestige, while professional women needed protection. Both fell outside the colonial space to which European women were assigned: custodians of family welfare and respectability and dedicated and willing subordinates to and supporters of men. These norms were so rigorous precisely because European family life and bourgeois respectability were conceived as the cultural bases for imperial patriotism and racial survival.

WHITE DEGENERACY, MOTHERHOOD, AND THE EUGENICS OF EMPIRE

de-gener-ate (adj.) [*degenerate*, pp. of *degenerate*, to become unlike one's race, degenerate < *degener*, not genuine, base < *de-*,

from + *genus*]. 1. to lose former, normal, or higher qualities. 2. having sunk below a former or normal condition, character, etc.; deteriorated. 3. morally corrupt; depraved—(n.) a degenerate person, esp. one who is morally depraved or sexually perverted—(vi.) -at'ed, -at'ing. 1. to decline or become debased morally, culturally, etc. . . . 2. Biol. to undergo degeneration; deteriorate.

Webster's New World Dictionary

European women were vital to the colonial enterprise and the solidification of racial boundaries in ways that repeatedly tied their supportive and subordinate posture to community cohesion and colonial security. That contribution was reinforced at the turn of the century by a metropolitan bourgeois discourse (and an eminently anthropological one) intensely concerned with notions of "degeneracy."¹³⁸ Middle-class morality, manliness, and motherhood were seen as endangered by the related fears of "degeneration" and miscegenation in scientifically construed racist beliefs.¹³⁹ Degeneration was defined as "departures from the normal human type . . . transmitted through inheritance and lead[ing] progressively to destruction."¹⁴⁰ Degeneracy, brought on by environmental, physical, and moral factors, could be averted by positive eugenic selection or, negatively, by eliminating the "unfit" or the environmental and more specifically cultural contagions that gave rise to them.¹⁴¹ Eugenic discourse has usually been associated with Social Darwinian notions of "selection," with the strong influence of Lamarckian thinking reserved for its French variant.¹⁴² However, the notion of "cultural contamination" runs throughout the British, U.S., French, and Dutch eugenic traditions.¹⁴³ Eugenic arguments used to explain the social malaise of industrialization, immigration, and urbanization derived from notions that acquired characteristics were inheritable and thus that poverty, vagrancy, and promiscuity were class-linked biological traits, tied to genetic material as directly as night blindness and blond hair. This Lamarckian feature of eugenic thinking in its colonial expression linked racial degeneracy to the sexual transmission of cultural contagions and to the political instability of imperial rule.

Appealing to a broad political and scientific constituency, Euro-American eugenic societies included advocates of infant welfare programs, liberal intellectuals, conservative businessmen, Fabians, and physicians with social concerns. By the 1920s, however, it contained an increasingly vocal number of those who called for and put into law if not practice the sterilization of what were considered the mentally, morally, or physically unfit members of the British, German, and North American underclass.¹⁴⁴

Feminist attempts to appropriate this rhetoric for birth-control programs largely failed. Eugenics was essentially elitist, racist, and misogynist in principle and practice.¹⁴⁵ Its proponents advocated a pronatalist policy for the white middle and upper classes, a rejection of women's work roles that might compete with motherhood, and "an assumption that reproduction was not just a function but the purpose . . . of women's life."¹⁴⁶ In France, England, Germany, and the United States, eugenics placed European women of "good stock" as "the fountainhead of racial strength,"¹⁴⁷ exalting the cult of motherhood while subjecting it to the scrutiny of this new scientific domain.¹⁴⁸

Eugenics reverberated in the colonies in predictable and unexpected forms. The moral, biological, and sexual referents of "degeneracy" (distinct in the dictionary citation above) were fused in how the concept was actually deployed. The "colonial branch" of eugenics focused on the vulnerabilities of white rule and measures to safeguard European superiority. Eugenics was designed to control the procreation of the "unfit" lower orders and to target "the poor, the colonized, or unpopular strangers."¹⁴⁹ But eugenic thinking reached further. It permeated how metropolitan observers viewed the degenerate lifestyle of colonials and how colonial elites admonished the behavior of degenerates among themselves.¹⁵⁰ Whereas European and U.S. studies focused on the inherent propensity of the impoverished classes to criminality, in the Indies delinquency among "European" children was linked to the proportion of "native blood" that children of mixed unions had inherited from their native mothers.¹⁵¹ Eugenics provided not so much a new vocabulary as a new biological idiom in which to ground the medical and moral basis for anxieties over European hegemony and white prestige. It reopened debates over segregated residence and education, new standards of morality, sexual vigilance, and the rights of *certain* Europeans to rule.

Eugenic thinking manifested itself, not in the direct importation of metropolitan practices such as sterilization, but in a translation of the political principles and the social values that eugenics implied. In defining what was unacceptable, eugenics also identified what constituted a "valuable life" and "a gender-specific work and productivity, described in social, medical and psychiatric terms."¹⁵² Applied to European colonials, eugenic statements pronounced what kind of people should represent Dutch or French rule, how they should bring up their children, and with whom they should socialize. Those concerned with issues of racial survival and racial purity invoked the moral duty of European colonial women to fulfill an alternative set of imperial imperatives. They were to "uplift" colonial subjects through educational and domestic management and attend to the family environ-

ment of their men. Sometimes they were simply encouraged to remain in the metropole and to stay at home. The point is that a common gendered discourse was mapped onto different imperial situations that celebrated motherhood and domesticity.

If in Britain racial deterioration was conceived of as a result of the moral turpitude and the ignorance of working-class mothers, in the colonies the dangers were more pervasive, the possibilities of contamination worse. Proposals to secure European rule pushed in two directions. On the one hand, they pushed away from ambiguous racial genres and open domestic arrangements. On the other hand, they pressed for an upgrade and homogenization of European standards as well as a clearer delineation of them. The impulse was clear: away from miscegenation toward white endogamy; away from concubinage toward family formation and legal marriage; away from, as in the case of the Indies, mestizo customs and toward metropolitan norms.¹⁵³ As stated in the bulletin of the Netherlands Indies Eugenics Society, "eugenics is nothing other than belief in the possibility of preventing degenerative symptoms in the body of our beloved *moedervolken* [people, populace], or in cases where they may already be present, of counteracting them."¹⁵⁴

Like the modernization of colonialism itself, with its scientific management and educated technocrats with limited local knowledge, colonial communities of the early twentieth century were rethinking the ways in which their authority should be expressed. This rethinking took the form of asserting a distinct colonial morality, explicit in its reorientation to the racial and class markers of being European. It emphasized transnational racial commonalities despite national differences. Not least it distilled a notion of *Homo europæus* for whom superior health, wealth, and education were tied to racial endowments and a White Man's norm. Thus, Eugene Pujarniscle, a novelist and participant observer in France's colonial venture, wrote: "[O]ne might be surprised that my pen always returns to the words *blanc* [white] or 'European' and never to 'Français' [.] . . . in effect colonial solidarity and the obligations that it entails allies all the peoples of the white races."¹⁵⁵

Such sensibilities colored imperial policy in nearly all domains. Fears of physical contamination gave new credence to fears of political vulnerability. Whites had to guard their ranks, to increase their numbers, and to ensure that their members respected the biological and political boundaries on which their power was thought to rest.¹⁵⁶ In Europe the socially and physically "unfit," the poor, the indigent, and the insane, were either to be sterilized or prevented from marriage. In the colonies it was these very

among Europeans who were either excluded from entry or institutionally while they were there and eventually sent home.¹⁵⁷

to sustain the notion that good health, virility, and the ability to rule were inherent features of being European, colonial rulers invested in a politics of exclusion that policed their members as well as the colonized. Such strategies and concerns were not new to the 1920s.¹⁵⁸ In the 1750s the East Indies Company had already taken "draconian measures" to control pauperism among "Dutchmen of mixed blood."¹⁵⁹ In the same period, the British East Indies Company enforced policies that discouraged lower-class European migration and settlement and argued that such populations would destroy Indian respect for "the superiority of the European character."¹⁶⁰ Patriotic calls to populate Java with poor Dutch farmers were also blocked for similar reasons in the mid-1800s and then again with new urgency in the following century as successive challenges to European rule were felt more profoundly.

Measures were taken both to avoid poor white migration and to produce a colonial profile that highlighted the manliness, well-being, and productivity of European men. In this equation, evidence of manliness, national identity, and racial superiority were meshed.¹⁶¹ Thus British colonial administrators were retired by the age of fifty-five, ensuring that "no Oriental was ever allowed to see a Westerner as he ages and degenerated, just as no Westerner needed ever to see himself, mirrored in the eyes of the subject race, as anything but a vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj."¹⁶² In the twentieth century, these "men of class" and "men of character" embodied a modernized and renovated image of rule. They were to safeguard the colonies against the physical weakness, moral decay, and inevitable degeneration that long residence in the colonies encouraged and against the temptations that interracial domestic situations had allowed.

Given this ideal, it is not surprising that colonial communities were troubled by men who did not fit the profile. Officials worried over the dangers of unemployed or impoverished Europeans. During the succession of economic crises in the early twentieth century, relief agencies in Sumatra, for example, organized fund-raisers, hill station retreats, and small-scale agricultural schemes to keep "unfit" Europeans "from roaming around."¹⁶³ The colonies were neither open for retirement nor tolerant of the public presence of poor whites. During the 1930s depression, when tens of thousands of Europeans in the Indies found themselves without jobs, government and private resources were quickly mobilized to ensure that they were not "reduced" to native living standards.¹⁶⁴ Subsidized health care, housing, and education complemented a rigorous attention to European cultural stan-

dards. In affirming those, European women were positioned to play a key role in keeping men *civilisé*.

The Cultural Dynamics of Degeneration

The *colon* is, in a common and etymological sense, a barbarian. He is a non-civilized person, a "new man." . . . [It] is he who appears as a savage.¹⁶⁵

The shift in imperial thinking evident in the early twentieth century focuses not only on the Otherness of the colonized but also on the Otherness of colonials themselves. In France medical and sociological tracts pinpointed the colonial as a distinct and degenerate social type, psychologically identifiable and with recognizable physical characteristics.¹⁶⁶ Some of that difference was attributed to the debilitating climate and social milieu and from staying in the colonies too long: "The climate affects him, his surroundings affect him, and after a certain time, he has become, both physically and morally, a completely different man."¹⁶⁷ People who stayed "too long" were subject to a sweeping array of maladies. These ranged from over-fatigue and physical breakdown to individual and racial degeneration.¹⁶⁸ But cultural contamination had the most serious consequences because it led to neglect of the conventions of supremacy and *disagreement* about what those conventions were.¹⁶⁹ What were identified as the degraded and unique characteristics of colonials by European observers—"ostentation," "speculation," "inaction," and a general "demoralization"—were "faults" contracted from native culture that marked colonials as *décivilisés* as much as the colonized.¹⁷⁰

Colonial medicine reflected and affirmed this slippage among physical, moral, and cultural degeneracy in concrete ways. The climatic, social, and work conditions of colonial life gave rise to a specific set of psychotic disorders thought to effect *l'équilibre cérébral* and predispose Europeans in the tropics to mental breakdown.¹⁷¹ Neurasthenia was the most common manifestation, a mental disorder identified as a major problem in French colonies and accounting for more than half the Dutch repatriations from the Indies to Holland.¹⁷² In Europe and America it was "the phantom disease . . . of the late nineteenth century," encompassing virtually all "psychopathological or neuro-pathological conditions, and intimately linked to sexual deviation and to the destruction of social order itself."¹⁷³

In Europe neurasthenia was identified as a consequence of "modern civilization" and its frantic pace.¹⁷⁴ But in the colonies its etiology took the *reverse* form. Colonial neurasthenia was said to be caused by distance from

civilization and European community and by proximity to the colonized. Susceptibility was increased by an existence "outside of the social framework to which [a man] was adapted in France, isolation in outposts, physical and moral fatigue, and modified food regimes."¹⁷⁵

The proliferation of hill stations reflected these political and physical concerns. Developed in the early nineteenth century as sites for military outposts and sanatoriums, hill stations provided European-like environments in which colonials could recoup their physical and mental well-being by simulating the conditions "at home."¹⁷⁶ Isolated at cooler altitudes, they took on new importance with the increasing numbers of European women and children, who were seen as vulnerable subjects, susceptible to anemia, depression, and ill health.¹⁷⁷ Vacation bungalows and schools built in these "naturally" segregated surroundings provided cultural refuge and regeneration.¹⁷⁸

Some doctors considered the only treatment *le retour en Europe*.¹⁷⁹ Others prescribed a local set of remedies, advising adherence to an ethic of morality and work that valorized sexual moderation, abstemious diet, and physical exercise. The "regularity and regimentation" of work was coupled with *European camaraderie* that was to be buttressed by a solid (and stolid) family life with European children and a European wife.¹⁸⁰

Guides to colonial living in the 1920s and 1930s reveal this marked shift in outlook. Dutch, French, and British doctors now denounced the unhealthy, indolent lifestyles of "old colonials," instead extolling the energetic and engaged activities of the new breed of husband and wife.¹⁸¹ Prone to neurasthenia, anemia, and depression, women were exhorted to involve themselves in household management and child care and divert themselves with botanical collections and "good works."¹⁸²

Children on the Colonial Divide: Degeneracy and the Dangers of Métissage

[Young colonial men] are often driven to seek a temporary companion among the women of color; this is the path by which, as I shall presently show, contagion travels back and forth, contagion in all senses of the word.¹⁸³

Racial degeneracy was thought to have social causes and political consequences, both tied to the domestic arrangements in which Europeans lived. Métissage generally and concubinage in particular were viewed as dangers to racial purity and cultural securing of racial identity. Through sexual contact with native women, European men "contracted" disease as well as de-

based sentiments, immoral proclivities, and extreme susceptibility to uncivilized states.¹⁸⁴

By the early twentieth century, concubinage was denounced for undermining precisely what it was charged with fortifying decades earlier. The weight of competing discourses on local women shifted as well. While in earlier portrayals their negative attributes had been overshadowed by their role as protectors of the well-being of colonial men, in the new equation they became the primary vectors of sinister influences on physical and mental health. Adaptation to local food, language, and dress, once prescribed as positive signs of acclimatization, were now the signs of contagion and loss of (white) self. The benefits of local knowledge and sexual release gave way to the more pressing demands of respectability, the community's solidarity, and its mental health. Increasingly, French men in Indochina who kept native women were viewed as passing into "the enemy camp."¹⁸⁵ Concubinage became the source of individual breakdown, racial degeneration, and political unrest. Children born of these unions were "the fruits of a regrettable weakness,"¹⁸⁶ physically marked and morally marred with "the defaults and mediocre qualities of their mothers."¹⁸⁷

Concubinage was not as economically tidy or politically neat as policy makers had hoped. It involved more than sexual exploitation and unpaid domestic work. It also involved children—many more than official statistics revealed—and questions of who was to be acknowledged as a European and who was not. Concubine children posed a classificatory problem, impinging on political security and white prestige. The majority were not recognized by their fathers, nor were they reabsorbed into local communities as authorities often claimed. Although some men legally acknowledged their progeny, many repatriated to Holland, Britain, or France and cut off ties and support to mother and children.¹⁸⁸ Native women had responsibility for but attenuated rights over their own offspring.¹⁸⁹ The legal system favored a European upbringing but made no demands on men to provide it. The more socially asymmetric and perfunctory the relationship between man and woman, the more likely the children were to end up as wards of the state, subject to the scrutiny and imposed charity of the European-born community at large.

Concubine children invariably counted among the ranks of the European poor, but European paupers in the late-nineteenth-century Netherlands Indies came from wider strata of colonial society than that of concubines alone.¹⁹⁰ Many Indo-Europeans, as well as creole children born in the Indies of European parents, had become increasingly marginalized from strategic political and economic positions in the early twentieth century, despite the

that new educational facilities were supposed to have provided new opportunities for them. In Java, volumes of official reports were devoted to documenting and alleviating the proliferation of a "rough" and "dangerous pauper element" among (Indo-)European clerks, low-level officials, dismissed soldiers, and vagrants.¹⁹¹ In the 1920s and 1930s youths born and educated in the Indies had few economic options. They were uncomfortably squeezed between an influx of new recruits from Holland and the educated *inlander* (naïve) population with whom they were competing for jobs.¹⁹²

European pauperism in the Indies reflected broad inequalities in colonial society that underscored the social heterogeneity of the category "European" itself. But it was still concubinage that was seen as the principal source of *blutken-haters* (white-haters).¹⁹³ Equated with a progeny of "malcontents," or "parasitic" whites, idle and therefore dangerous, concubinage raised the political fear that its progeny would demand economic access, political rights, and seek alliance with (and leadership of) organized opposition to Dutch rule.¹⁹⁴

The politics of compassion and charity was racially marked as well. Prejudice against métis was often, as in the Belgian Congo, "camouflaged under protestations of 'pity' for their fate, as if they were '*malheureux*' [unhappy] beings by definition."¹⁹⁵ The protection of métis children in Indochina was a cause célèbre of European women at home and abroad. The French assembly on feminism, organized for the colonial exposition of 1931, devoted a major part of its proceedings to the plight of *métis* children and their native mothers, echoing the campaigns for *la recherche de paternité* by French feminists a half century earlier.¹⁹⁶ The assembly called for "the establishment of centers [in the colonies] where abandoned young girls or those in moral danger could be made into worthy women."¹⁹⁷ European women were urged to oversee the "moral protection" of métis youths, to develop their "natural" inclination toward French society, to turn them into collaborators and partisans of French ideas and influences" instead of revolutionaries.¹⁹⁸ The gender breakdown was clear. Moral instruction would avert sexual promiscuity among métisse girls and political precocity among métis boys, who might otherwise become militant men.

Orphanages for abandoned European and Indo-European children were a prominent feature of Dutch, French, and British colonial cultures. In the Indies by the mid-eighteenth century, state orphanages were established to prevent "neglect and degeneracy of the many free-roaming poor bastards and orphans of Europeans."¹⁹⁹ By the nineteenth century, church, state, and private organizations had become zealous backers of orphanages, providing some vocational education and strong doses of moral instruction. In India,

the military orphanages of the late eighteenth century expanded into a nineteenth-century variant in which European and Anglo-Indian children were cared for in civil asylums and charity schools in "almost every town, cantonment and hill-station."²⁰⁰ In French Indochina in the 1930s, virtually every colonial city had a home and society for the protection of abandoned métis youth.²⁰¹

Whether these children were in fact "abandoned" by their Asian mothers is difficult to establish. That métis children living in native homes were sometimes *sought out* by state and private organizations and placed in these institutions suggests other possibilities.²⁰² Public assistance in India, Indochina, and the Indies was designed to keep fair-skinned children from running barefoot in native villages but also to ensure that the spread of European pauper settlement was controlled.²⁰³ Emphasis on religious and secular education and socialization was symptomatic of broader fears. Children would grow into *Hollander-haters*, patricides, and anticolonial revolutionaries. As adults, girls would fall into prostitution. And as boys grew into adult men, their affective and lasting ties to native women and indigenous society would turn them into enemies of the state, *verbasterd* (degenerate) and *décivilisé*.²⁰⁴

European Women, Race, and Middle-Class Morality

Rationalizations of imperial rule and safeguards against racial degeneracy in the colonies converged on particular moral themes. Both entailed a reassertion of European conventions and middle-class respectability. Both promoted stronger and more frequent ties with the metropole and a restatement of what was culturally distinct and superior about how colonials ruled and lived. For those women who came to join their spouses or to find husbands, the prescriptions were clear. Just as new plantation staff were taught to manage the natives, women were schooled in colonial propriety and domestic management. French manuals, such as those on hygiene in Indochina, outlined the duties of colonial wives in no uncertain terms. As "auxiliary forces" in the imperial effort, they were to "conserve the fitness and sometimes the life of all around them" by ensuring that "the home be happy and gay and that all take pleasure in clustering there."²⁰⁵ The Koloniale School voor Meisjes en Vrouwen, established in The Hague in 1920, provided adolescent and adult women with preparatory courses in home management and child care as well as lectures on Javanese custom and culture. Practical guides to life in the Belgian Congo instructed (and warned) *la femme blanche* that she was to keep

peace, hygiene and economy"²⁰⁶ and "perpetuate a vigorous race" while ensuring any "laxity in . . . administrative mores."²⁰⁷

The "division of labor" contained obvious asymmetries. Men were considered more susceptible to moral turpitude than were women, who were held responsible for the immoral states of men. European women were to safeguard prestige and morality and insulate their men from the cultural and sexual contamination of contact with the colonized.²⁰⁸ Racial asymmetry would be curtailed by European women charged with regenerating the physical health, the metropolitan affinities, and the imperial purpose of their men.²⁰⁹

At its heart was a reassertion of racial difference that harnessed national rhetoric and markers of middle-class morality to its cause.²¹⁰ George Mosse has characterized European racism as a "scavenger ideology," announcing nationalism and bourgeois respectability to a racist project in which the management of sexuality was central to all three.²¹¹ If the European middle class sought respectability "to maintain their status and self-respect against the lower classes and the aristocracy," in the colonies respectability was a defense against the colonized and a way of more clearly defining themselves.²¹² Good colonial living now meant hard work and physical exercise rather than sexual release, which had been one rationale for condoning concubinage and prostitution in an earlier period. The debilitating influences of climate could be surmounted by regular diet and meticulous personal hygiene over which European women were to take full charge. British, French, and Dutch manuals on European household management in the tropics provided detailed instructions in domestic science, moral upbringing, and employer-servant relations. Adherence to strict conventions of cleanliness and cooking occupied an inordinate amount of the time of colonial women and those who served them.²¹³ Cleanliness itself served as a prop to a Europeaness that was less than assumed.²¹⁴ Both activities entailed a constant surveillance of native nursemaids, laundrymen, and live-in servants while demanding a heightened domesticity for European women themselves.

Leisure, good spirit, and creature comforts became the obligation of women to provide, the racial duty of women to maintain. Seduction of their men by native women would be curtailed by a happy, *gezellig* (cozy) family life much as "extremist agitation" among plantation workers in Sumatra was to be averted by selecting married recruits and providing family housing. There too men would feel "happy and content" (*senang*) and "at home."²¹⁵ Moral laxity would be eliminated through the example and vig-

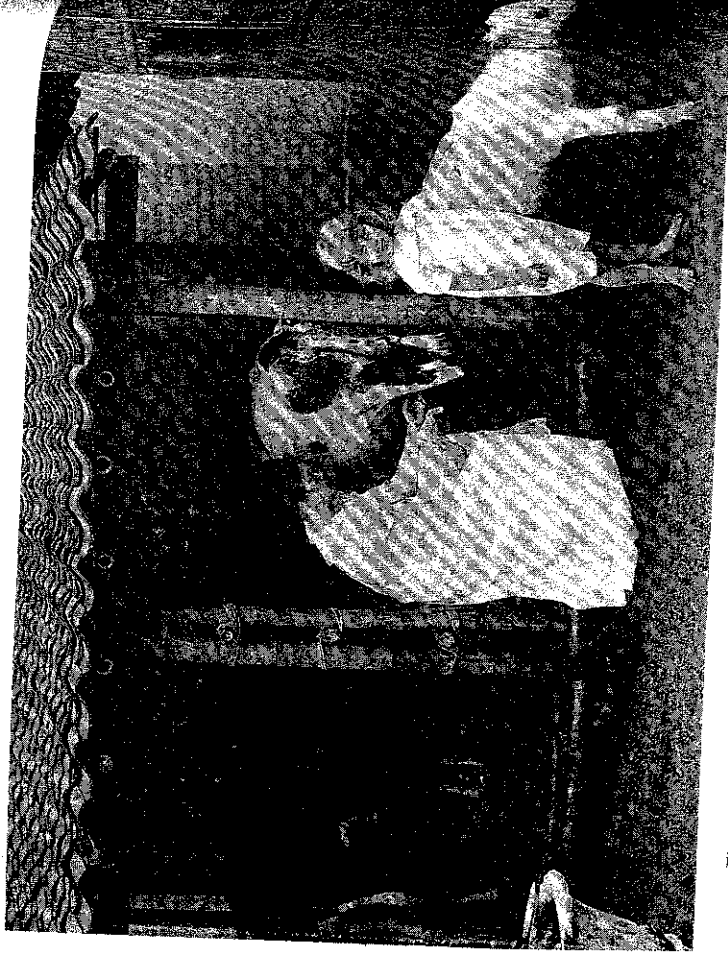


Figure 9. "Milking the cow in the doctor's family J. Kunst in Batavia, Java," 1899. This practice would have been neither encouraged nor deemed necessary by the 1930s. KIT album 680, no. 17.

ilance of women whose status was defined by their sexual restraint and dedication to their home environments and to their men.

Imperial Priorities: Motherhood versus Male Morality

The European woman [in Indochina] can only fulfill her duties to bear and breast-feed her children with great hardship and damage to her health.²¹⁶

The perceptions and practice that bound women's domesticity to national welfare and racial purity were not confined to colonial women alone. Child rearing in late-nineteenth-century Britain was hailed as a national, imperial, and racial duty, as it was in France, Holland, the United States, and Germany at the same time.²¹⁷ In France, where declining birthrates were of public concern, fecundity itself had become "no longer something resting with couples" but with "the nation, the state, the race."²¹⁸ Popular colo-

onial doctors such as Pierre Mille hailed the production of children as women's "essential contribution to the imperial mission of France."²¹⁹ With motherhood at the center of empire building, pronatalist policies in Europe promoted some improvement in colonial medical facilities, new maternity wards, and more attention to the reproductive conditions of both European and colonized women. Maternal and infant health programs instructed European women bound for the tropics in the use of milk substitutes, wet nurses, and breast-feeding practices in an effort to encourage more women to stay in the colonies and to prepare the many more that came.²²⁰ But the belief that the colonies were medically hazardous for white women meant that motherhood in the tropics was not only a precarious but also a conflicted endeavor.

Real and imagined concern over individual reproduction and racial survival contained and compromised white colonial women in concrete ways. Tropical climates were said to cause low fertility, prolonged amenorrhea, and permanent sterility.²²¹ Belgian doctors held that "the woman who goes to live in a tropical climate is often lost for the reproduction of the race."²²² Colonial conditions were associated with high infant mortality, such that the life of a European child was nearly condemned in advance.²²³ Illnesses ranging from fragile nerves to debilitating fevers were thought to hit women and children hardest.²²⁴

These perceived medical perils called into question whether European-born women and thus the "white race" could reproduce if they remained in the tropics for an extended time. An international medical community cross-referenced one another's citations of racial sterility by the second or third generation.²²⁵ Such a dark view of climate was less prevalent in the Indies, but psychological and physical adaptation was never a given. Dutch doctors quoted German physicians, not to affirm the inevitable infertility among whites in the tropics, but to support their contention that European-born women and men should limit their colonial status.²²⁶ French observers would gladly state that unions among creole Dutch in the Indies were sterile after two generations.²²⁷ Medical studies in the 1930s, such as that supported by the Netherlands Indies Eugenics Society, were designed to test whether fertility rates differed by "racial type" between Indo-European and European-born women and whether "children of certain Europeans born in the Indies displayed different racial markers than their parents."²²⁸

Like the discourse on degeneracy, the fear of sterility had less to do with the biological survival of whites than with their political viability and cultural reproduction. Such concerns heightened in the 1930s when white unemployment was high in the colonies and Europe. The depression made

repatriation of impoverished Dutch and French unrealistic, prompting speculation as to whether European working classes could be relocated in the tropics without causing further racial degeneration.²²⁹ White migration to the tropics was reconsidered, but poor white settlements were rejected on economic, medical, and psychological grounds. The reproductive potential of European women was the focus of debate again and again, prompting questionnaires concerning their "acclimatization" and detailed descriptions of their conjugal histories and sexual lives.

Imperial perceptions and policies fixed European women in the colonies as "instruments of race-culture" in what proved to be personally difficult and contradictory ways.²³⁰ Child-rearing decisions faithfully followed the sort of racist principles that constrained the activities of women charged with child care.²³¹ Medical experts and women's organizations recommended strict surveillance of children's activities²³² and careful attention to those with whom they played. Virtually every medical and household handbook in the Dutch, French, and British colonies warned against leaving small children in the unsupervised care of local servants. In the Netherlands Indies, it was the "duty" of the "modern white mother" (*hedendaagsche blanke moeder*) to take the physical and spiritual upbringing of her offspring away from the native nursemaid (*babu*) and into her own hands.²³³

Precautions had to be taken against "sexual danger," against the uncleanly habits of domestics, against a "stupid negress" who might leave a child exposed to the sun.²³⁴ Even in colonies where the climate was not considered unhealthy, European children supposedly thrived well "only up to the age of six,"²³⁵ when native cultural influences came into stronger play. Thus in late-nineteenth-century Hawaii, native nursemaids commonly looked after American children until the age of five. At that point "prattlers" were confined to their mothers' supervision, prevented from learning the local language, and kept in a "walled yard adjacent to the bedrooms [that was] forbidden to Hawaiians."²³⁶

In the Indies, educational facilities for European children were considered moderately good. Still, it was deemed imperative to send them back to Holland to avoid the "precocity" associated with the tropics and the "danger" of contact with *Indische* youths not from "full-blooded European elements."²³⁷

We Dutch in the Indies live in a country which is not our own. . . . We feel instinctively that our blonde, white children belong to the blonde, white dunes, the forests, the moors, the lakes, the snow. . . . A Dutch child should grow up in Holland. There they will acquire the characteristics of their race, not only from mother's milk but also from the

influence of the light, sun and water, of playmates, of life, in a word, in the sphere of the fatherland. This is not racism.²³⁸

dominant images such as those above culturally coded racial distinctions in powerful ways. Dutch identity was represented as a common (if contested) cultural sensibility in which class convention, geography, climate, sexual activity, and social contact played central roles.

For many colonial communities, school-age children were packed off to Europe for education and socialization, but this was rarely an unproblematic option. When children could not be left with kin who were still in Holland, it meant leaving them for extended periods in boarding schools or when they attended day schools, in boardinghouses catering to Indies youths. Married European women were confronted with a difficult set of choices: separation from their children or separation from their husbands.²³⁹ Frequent trips between colony and metropole not only separated families but also broke up marriages and homes.²⁴⁰

Not surprisingly, how and where European children should be properly educated was a primary concern of women's organizations and a major theme in magazines right through decolonization. The rise of specific programs in home education (such as the *Clerkx-methode voor Huisonderwijs*) may have been a response to this new push for women to accommodate their multiple imperial duties—to surveil their husbands and servants while retaining in control of the cultural and moral upbringing of their young. Such conflicting responsibilities profoundly affected the social space European women (not only wives) occupied, the tasks for which they were valorized, and the economic activities in which they could feasibly engage.

The Strategies of Rule and Sexual Morality

The political etymology of colonizer and colonized was gender- and class-specific. The exclusionary politics of colonialism demarcated not just external boundaries but also interior frontiers, specifying internal conformity and order among Europeans themselves. The categories of colonizer and colonized were secured through notions of racial difference constructed in gender terms. Redefinitions of acceptable sexual behavior and morality emerged during crises of colonial control precisely because they called into question the tenuous artifices of rule *within* European communities and what marked their borders.

Even from the limited cases reviewed here, several patterns emerge. First and most obviously, colonial sexual prohibitions were racially asymmetric

and gender coded. Sexual relations might be forbidden between white women and men of color but not the other way around. On the contrary, interracial unions (as opposed to marriage) between European men and colonized women aided the long-term settlement of European men in the colonies while ensuring that colonial patrimony stayed in limited and selective hands. Second, interdictions against interracial unions were rarely a primary impulse in the strategies of rule. For India, Indochina, and South Africa, colonial contexts usually associated with sharp social sanctions against interracial unions, "mixing" in the initial period of colonialization was tolerated and even condoned.

The focus here has been on late colonialism in Asia, but colonial elite intervention in the sexual life of their agents and subjects was not confined to this place or period. In sixteenth-century Mexico, mixed marriages between Spanish men and Christianized Indian women were encouraged by the crown until midcentury, when colonists felt that "the rising numbers of their own mestizo progeny threatened the prerogatives of a narrowing elite sector."²⁴¹ In eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Cuba, mild opposition to interracial marriage gave way to a "virtual prohibition" from 1864 to 1874 when "merchants, slave dealers and the colonial powers opposed [it] in order to preserve slavery."²⁴²

Changes in sexual access and domestic arrangements have invariably accompanied major efforts to reassert the internal coherence of European communities and to redefine the boundaries of privilege across the colonial divide. But sexual union in itself did not automatically produce a larger population legally classified as "European." On the contrary, even in early-twentieth-century Brazil, where miscegenation had made for a refined system of gradations, "most mixing [took] place outside of marriage."²⁴³ The important point is that miscegenation signaled neither the presence nor the absence of racial discrimination. Hierarchies of privilege and power were written into the *condoning* of interracial unions, as well as into their condemnation.

The chronologies vary from one context to another, but parallel shifts are evident in the strategies of rule and in sexual morality. Concubinage fell into moral disfavor at the same time that new emphasis was placed on the standardization of European administration. This occurred in some colonies by the early twentieth century and in others later on, but the correspondence between rationalized rule, bourgeois respectability, and the custodial power of European women to protect their men seems strongest during the interwar years. The success of Western technological achievements was being questioned.²⁴⁴ British, French, and Dutch policy makers had moved

from an assimilationist to a more segregationist, separatist stance. The reorganization of colonial investments along corporate and multinational lines brought with it a push for a restructured and more highly productive labor force. With it came more vocal nationalist and labor movements resisting those demands.

An increasing rationalization of colonial management produced radical shifts in notions of how empires should be run, how agents of empire should rule, and where, how, and with whom they should live. Thus French debates concerning the need to systematize colonial management and dissolve the provincial and personalized satraps of "the old-time colon" invariably tarred colonial and personified the unseemly domestic arrangements in which they lived. British high officials in Africa imposed new "character" requirements on their subordinates, designating specific class attributes and conjugal ties that such a selection implied.²⁴⁵ Critical to this restructuring was a new disdain for colonials too adapted to local custom, too removed from the local European community, and too encumbered with intimate native ties. As in Shanghai, this hands-off policy distanced Europeans in more than one sense. It forbade European staff both from personal confrontations with their Asian field hands and from the limited local knowledge they gained through sexual and domestic arrangements.

Medical expertise increasingly confirmed the salubrious benefits of European camaraderie and frequent home leaves. A *cordon sanitaire* surrounded European enclaves, was wrapped around mind and body, around such European man and his home. White prestige became redefined by the conventions that would safeguard the moral, cultural, and physical well-being of its agents, with which European women were charged. Colonial politics locked European men and women into routinized protection of their physical health and social space in ways that bound gender prescriptions to the racial cleavages between "us" and "them."

It may be, however, that we should not be searching for congruent colonial chronologies attached to specific dates but rather for similar shifts in the rhythms of rule and sexual management, for similar internal patterns within specific colonial histories themselves.²⁴⁶ For example, following the Great Rebellion in India, political subversion was tied to sexual impropriety in new ways. Colonial politicians and moral reforms stipulated new codes of conduct that emphasized respectability, domesticity, and a more carefully segregated use of space. All of these measures focused on European women. Virtually all resonate with those developed in Africa and Southeast Asia but were instituted a half century earlier than in colonies elsewhere. Looking to a somewhat longer *durée* than the colonial crises of the early

twentieth century, we might consider British responses to the 1857 rebellion not as an exception but as a template for colonial responses elsewhere. The modular quality of colonial perceptions and policies was built on new international standards of empire and specific metropolitan priorities. New standards in turn were responsive to local challenges of those who contested life and labor under European rule.

Sexual control figured in the substance, as well as the iconography, of colonialism's racial policies. But colonial politics was not just concerned with sex; nor did sexual relations reduce to colonial politics. Sex in the colonies had to do with sexual access and reproduction, class distinctions and racial demarcations, nationalism and European identity—in different measure and not all at the same time. Major shifts in the positioning of women were not, as we might expect, signaled by the penetration of capitalism *per se* but by subtler changes in class politics and imperial morality and in response to the failures of specific colonial projects. Ethnographies of empire should attend both to changing sensibilities and to sex, to racialized regimes that were realized on a macro and micro scale. They may begin to capture how European culture and class politics resonated in colonial settings, how class and gender discriminations were transposed into racial distinctions that reverberated in the metropole as they were fortified on colonial ground. Such investigations may show that sexual control was both an instrumental image for the body politic—a salient part standing for the whole—and itself fundamental to how racial policies were secured and how colonial projects were carried out.

Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers *Cultural Competence and the Dangers of Métissage*

This chapter is concerned with the construction of colonial categories and national identities and with those people who ambiguously straddled, crossed, and threatened these imperial divides. It begins with a story about métissage and the métis progeny to which those unions gave rise in French Indochina at the turn of the century. This story has multiple strands—about people whose cultural sensibilities, physical being, and political sentiments called into question the distinctions of difference that maintained the neat boundaries of colonial rule. Its plot and resolution defy the treatment of European nationalist impulses and colonial racist policies as discrete projects, because here it was in the conflation of racial category, sexual morality, cultural competence, and national identity that the case was contested and politically charged. In a broader sense, it addresses a tension of empire that this chapter only begins to sketch: the relationship among the discourses of inclusion, humanitarianism, and equality that informed liberal policy at the turn of the century in colonial Southeast Asia and the exclusionary practices that were reactive to, coexistent with, and perhaps inherent in liberalism itself.¹

Nowhere is this relationship between inclusionary impulses and exclusionary practices more evident than in how métissage was legally handled, culturally inscribed, and politically treated in the contrasting colonial cultures of French Indochina and the Netherlands Indies. French Indochina was a colony of commerce occupied by the military in the 1860s and settled by colonists in the 1870s with a métis population that numbered no more than several hundred by the turn of the century.² The Netherlands Indies, by contrast, had been peopled since the early 1600s with those of mixed descent or born in the Indies—numbering in the tens of thousands in 1900. They made up nearly three-fourths of those legally designated as European.