

Family & Gender IN EMPIRE

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KEY TERMS

English paternalism: The act by Britain to limit the autonomy of their colonies to promote their vision of progress and modernization.

Queering: A framework that subverts heteronormativity by analyzing places and periods that use heterosexuality or identity binaries through a non-normative lens.

Settler colonialism: A system of colonization that relies on migration and genocide, that works to displace an Indigenous population of a certain nation

Reproductive Futurity: The notion that imperial powers will place more value on the future of their colonies (such as reproduction) over the well-being of their current subjects.

Nuclear Families: A family constructed primarily by two cis-gendered heteronormative married people and their offspring.

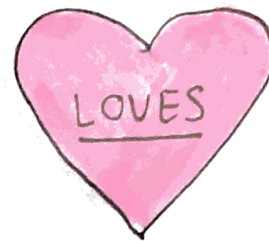
Identity: Complex relationship between an individual and a group.

Race: Human difference and hierarchy constructed through uneven negotiations between natives and colonial powers.

Native: Those who were previously present before the arrival of colonial rule.

Metropole: Central location for colonial populations and powers (ex: London).

Empire



As empires grow there must be a continual reaffirmation of the morality of their cause for expansion, empire must be made respectable to effectively perpetuate colonial rule and continually fabricate race and ethnicity. Policing of family units, viewed through a patchy history of court cases exposes the anxieties of a growing empire and reveals the precarity of settler colonial projects globally. Across British colonies, fears of non-normative families mirrored both the hopes and fears of colonists.



NUCLEAR
FAMILIES



The creation of controllable family units through established native intermediaries that mirrored colonial ideals turned nuclear/normative families into pillars of empire. Nuclear Families are made to model and uphold structures of empire.





Native Femininity

With the assertion of white femininity as the purest and truest form of womanhood, Native femininity was left to fill certain niches and stereotypes. In India during the mid-16th to mid-17th centuries, there was much interaction between British men and Native women, which led to an imposition of white-masculine ideals on Indian women. The sexuality of these Native women was highly emphasized in any work that discussed their presence. The identities of these women are mysterious to historians today, because of the lack of historical records in their own voices. The hyper-feminization and sexualization when contrasted with the soft and pure femininity prescribed to white women of the same period is starkly different. White men had some level of respect for white femininity, while native femininity was something to ogle at.

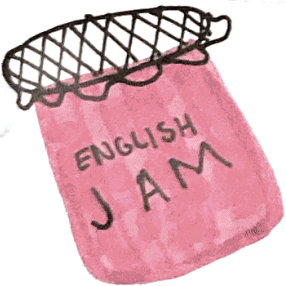
There did exist an even starker contrast to the hyper-feminization of the native Indian woman, which was the hyper-masculinization of Black women. Black Jamaican women were often portrayed as strong individuals who embodied a more masculine physicality. Black women who were enslaved were seen as less feminine than white women who lived on the island. They were still subject to exoticism, however, and British men were often enamored with and amused by Black women. British authors often wrote of his fascination with seeing a strong, muscular woman in feminine clothing, and the sexuality it exuded. While Indian women and Black women faced hyper-feminization and hyper-masculinization, respectively, both groups were subject to sexualization and exoticism.

White Femininity

In weaving together the threads of court records, historical narratives, and the policing of bodies we can learn how the empire sought (and seeks) to establish white femininity as an incredibly fragile and pure ideal. It becomes central to the formation and deployment of English paternalism in the colonies and at home.

The creation of this incredibly porous and delicate form of white femininity demonstrates the continued fears around respectability and the intense anxieties about settler reproductive futurity to facilitate the continuation of a racialized class system.

White femininity then becomes foundational to upholding a productive, lucrative, and respectable empire. Narratives of white women, like those in Ghosh and Levy, turn from stories to deep structural beliefs in colonial societies. These ideas, while only about white bodies, expose so much about the way that colonial powers understood the creation of race as a meticulous and precarious project that needed many stabilizing factors.



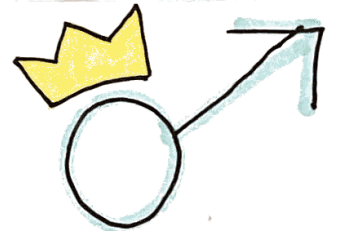
Women in the home became global points of empire construction and the perpetuation of the settler colonial projects in their presence in the colony and the metropole.



White Manhood

The concepts of 'whiteness' and masculinity worked together to create and solidify each other. White men's countries were proud of the masculinity that they brought to the world. Through the conquering and subjugation of other nations, countries like England, Australia, and the United States were able to revel in their overpowering masculinity. When white men's countries colonized other countries, they not only monopolized resources and power but also monopolized manhood itself. Men of color were viewed as docile and dependent and everything white masculinity was not. This destruction of manhood was felt from India to Jamaica, South Africa to the United States.

An example of the emasculation of men of color by imperialism came out of the gold rushes in Victoria, Australia, and California in the United States. Men from Western nations and China embarked across the sea to stake their fortune on Aboriginal and Indigenous land.



However, despite Chinese men and English men having the same motives and committing the same acts of settler colonialism, white settlers were adamant that the Chinese were not settler colonists, and did not possess the same masculine drive to settle and conquer that the white man did.

By undermining their status as workers and colonists, they also undermined their manhood. Anti-Chinese campaigners worked to create difference between white manhood and Chinese manhood, embellishing and fabricating falsities wherever they could.



EMPIRES

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FINAL TAKES

As we have outlined, the nuclear family and Western gender norms have always, and will always be a part of the project building and maintaining a durable empire. Non-normative families continue to cause empires great amounts of stress as they show visions into an imagined otherwise from the structures created and continually reinforced by nation-states.



“To write settler sexuality, patriarchy, and the nuclear family into our mo’olelo is to obscure, or even unravel, the complex ‘upena of relations that actually organized our society, thereby furthering the ongoing agenda of settler colonialism by erasing alternatives to the 21st-century household and civilization” Osorio pg 74

Some sources that we used that will be helpful if you would like to explore this topic further are:

- *Sex and the Family in Colonial India : The Making of Empire* by Durba Ghosh. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- *Drawing the Global Colour Line : White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008)
- "The Unhappy Marriage of 'Queerness' and 'Culture': The Present Implications of Fixating on the Past." by Arti Gupta (*Australian Feminist Law Journal* 48, no. 2 (July 3, 2022): 221–44)
- *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* by Catherine Hall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)
- *Queering Colonial Natal : Indigeneity and the Violence of Belonging in Southern Africa.* by T. J. Tallie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019)
- *Remembering Our Intimacies: Mo'olelo, Aloha, 'Āina, and Ea* by Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctv1xx9n48>, 2021)
- *The Long Song: A Novel* by Andrea Levy (New York: Picador, 2010)