Introduction: Books, boundaries and Britishness

Boundaries – spatial, cultural, moral – are the fault lines of empires. Such boundaries – which divided 'inner' and 'outer', 'self' and 'other', and 'home' and empire' – became sources of growing concern in the late nineteenth century. At a time when nations were first imagined somatically, as gendered and racialized bodies, and individual bodies were conceptualized in political terms, as waging battles against external enemies, the phenomenal expansion of the material and communicative circuits of the European empires that had commenced in mid-century, while serving to consolidate imperial space and usher in a new 'globalizing' age, also served to undermine and reconfigure the boundaries of rule through which imperial and colonial regimes operated. Such a process was facilitated by particular commodities, although ones rarely analysed as such, namely printed matter such as books and periodicals, which were purveyed through the trade networks of empires in growing numbers. For in addition to being forms of material capital, such printed matter also functioned as cultural capital that served to mark the 'distinction' – and hence worth – of European cultures and norms. It was this latter aspect that made print culture so appealing to colonizing regimes as a means of 'civilizing' subjects. Yet employing books and periodicals as cultural–moral capital posed a problem for these regimes, for the acquisition of such capital by colonized subjects served not only to fracture the boundaries demarcating colonizer and colonized, and nation and empire, but ultimately to diminish the value of such commodities – and with it their power to serve not only as colonizing tools, but as a means of ensuring the 'strength' and 'purity' of European bodies, nations and empires.

Purifying Empire explores the material, cultural and moral fragmentation of the boundaries of imperial and colonial rule in the British empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by exploring how a particular biopolitical project, namely the drive to regulate the obscene in late nineteenth-century Britain, was transformed from a national into a global and imperial project and then re-localized in two different colonial contexts, India and Australia, to produce two related but

distinct moral regulatory projects.[1] While a considerable body of work, most notably by scholars of gender and sexuality, has demonstrated both the role of empire in shaping moral regulatory projects in Britain and their adaptation, transformation and, at times, rejection in colonial contexts, this book illustrates that it is in fact only *through* such comparative and transnational studies that it is possible to elucidate both the temporalist nature of colonialism (namely the historically differentiated structures and projects of rule in different colonial contexts) and the contradictions (political, racial and moral) that sustained imperial and colonial regimes.[2] Placing two distinct types of colonies, namely a settler and an exploitation colony, within the same analytical framework as their imperial metropole, and exploring how and in what ways a particular metropolitan disciplinary project was transformed in both contexts, serves to reveal not only the continuities and discontinuities in the imperial project, but also the sites of disorder, or the locations in which imperial and colonial states failed to impose order or failed to even attempt to do so. It thus sheds new light on the hierarchies of production, power and knowledge that constituted both imperial and colonial regimes and that linked the local to the global.

Secondly, *Purifying Empire* situates debates about obscenity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not simply in the realms of law or discourse, where they are generally located, but in the biopolitical

[1] Biopower is a modern form of power that, according to Michel Foucault, works on transforming the lives of individuals rather than operating in relation to a series of acts. It has two poles, discipline and governmentality. While 'Discipline operates on particular individuals in a particular space' (which it does under the aegis of institutions such as schools, families and hospitals, which collect information about an individual and act on it), 'Governmentality . . . operates on particular groups of individuals' (which it does by gathering information by such means as statistical analyses, censuses, and reports on health and hygiene, which it uses, by such means as legislation, to manage population). Moral regulation ('a special kind of social control that has a specific object – the conduct of life of the regulated, and a specific aim – the change of their identity') operates through both formal systems of governance (such as legislation and policing) and informal ones (such as schools, families and hospitals) and is therefore an aspect of the operation of biopower. Tadros, 'Between Governance and Discipline', 78; Ruonavaara, 'Moral Regulation', 289; and Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 1. See also Foucault, 'Governmentality', pp. 87–104.

[2] As Richard Phillips contends, 'the complex and multi-layered historical geography of imperial state formation meant that British imperial and colonial states did different things – with respect to the regulation of sexualities for example – in different times and places'. Phillips, 'Imperialism and the Regulation', 341. Such a claim has been richly borne out in the literature pertaining to prostitution and contagious diseases, as demonstrated notably by the work of Philippa Levine, among others. See, for example, Levine, *Prostitution, Race*; Phillips, *Sex, Politics, and Empire*; Howell, 'Race, Space', 229–48; Ogborn, 'Law and Discipline', 25–57; and van Heyningen, 'The Social Evil', 170–97. See also Stoler, *Race and the Education*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; and Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

realm of what Alison Bashford terms 'imperial hygiene'.[3] Like the emissions of the body, sources of impurity and pollution that are 'marginal stuff of the most obvious kind', obscenity, which is the representation of matter that is deemed beyond representation or that is beyond the accepted norms of public display, is the 'marginal stuff' of art.[4] While 'art' symbolizes the transformation and containment of base matter into the higher realms of culture and sentiment, 'obscenity' symbolizes its efflorescence, or its traversal of the boundary of the body – a traversal that not only endangers the production of a rational, coherent subject, but threatens the 'strength' and 'purity' of the national/imperial body.[5] In viewing the drive to regulate the obscene as both *coterminous with* and a *product of* drives to discipline bodies through regulating sanitation, contagious diseases and the white slave trade, this book thus looks at the effects not only of language upon bodies, but of bodies upon language.

Thirdly, *Purifying Empire* examines the nature of imperial and colonial dis-order, namely of the limitations of governmental power and the role such limitations played in shaping conceptions of modernity, particularly the genealogy of the idea of Australia and India as being *more* modern than their imperial metropole. For the British government's failure to institute an effective system to regulate 'obscene' publications in the empire led, in the case of Australia, to the erection of a system of quarantine as a means of making Australia 'purer', 'cleaner' and 'whiter' than Britain. In India, on the other hand, although 'the modernizing impulses of metropolitan Europe were modified by the imperative of producing colonial subject-bodies that were fundamentally different from European citizen-bodies', as James Mills and Satadru Sen have argued, in electing to regulate 'obscenity' – in contrast to Australia – largely through the inculcation of self-governance, the colonial state erased the distinction between European citizen bodies and colonial subject-bodies and enabled Indian elites, like their Australian counterparts, to hijack this particular project of European modernity.[6] Examining the struggles and contestations that took place between not only colonizers and colonized, metropole and colony, or state and society but between different groups *within* each of these categories serves to demonstrate that governmentality was not 'a singular colonial strategy' but was instead part of 'the struggles going on among groups of colonizers and the colonized and between them, not only over the control of

[3] Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene*.
[4] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 121; Michelson, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, p. xi; and Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 90.
[5] Nead, *The Female Nude*, p. 2.
[6] Mills and Sen, 'Introduction', p. 11.

governmental technologies but also over their appropriateness, application, and desirability'.[7] Attempts to regulate the obscene could thus be both empowering and disempowering, strategies of rule and – since 'desires emerged, whetted by and in reaction against . . . regulation' – of resistance.[8] Moreover, while linked by a common set of fears, discourses and modes of regulation – and even, as we shall see in the case of translations of Émile Zola's works, by the same 'obscene' texts or other matter – such regulatory projects played out differently in Britain, India and Australia. They all, however, serve to reveal the nature of imperial and colonial power at its most intimate and vulnerable, and most subject to contestation.

Chapter 1, 'Colonialism and governmentality', offers a re-assessment of the nature of colonial governmentality.[9] Beginning with an overview of the concept of 'governmentality', it argues that while the notion of an all-transforming colonial governmentality has for the most part been discarded by scholars of colonialism, governmentality continues to be regarded as a set of technologies that can be effectively applied to virtually any subject(s), context or time period, regardless of the incongruities in its operation. But since colonialism was not a unitary project, then neither was colonial governmentality. Understanding its nature, this chapter demonstrates, requires examining the historically differentiated political rationalities or differentiated structures and projects of rule in different *types* of colonies – particularly in exploitation and settler colonies, which because they are regarded as so dissimilar are rarely placed within the same analytical framework – and then comparing them to each other. It illustrates, furthermore, that since culture is difficult to subject to governmental power, *perceptions* of the nature or functioning of colonial governmentality may in fact have played a more significant role in fashioning colonial modernities than the actual operation of governmentality itself.

Chapter 2, 'From sovereignty to governmentality: the emergence of obscenity regulation as a biopolitical project in Britain', explores how the regulation of obscenity first emerged as a biopolitical project in Britain in the early nineteenth century. It argues that obscenity, in contrast to other forms of libel such as blasphemy and sedition, came to be regarded as a social problem in this period – one that required regulation through both disciplinary and governmental means. Generated by the construction of a new set of relations of ruling (wrought by the emergence of a complex civil society which included not only new print cultures but new civil

[7] Pels, 'The Anthropology', 176.
[8] Sigel, *Governing Pleasures*, p. 12.
[9] The first major assessment of colonial governmentality was offered by David Scott over a decade ago. See Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 191–220.

associations that sought to act upon others through undertaking projects to improve their morals), the aim of this particular regulatory project was to manage the bodies of the working classes through the inculcation of self-governance. This chapter demonstrates, moreover, that empire played a key role not only in fashioning an obscene print culture in Britain, but in spurring the transformation of its regulation into a biopolitical project.

But while the empire played an important role in projects to regulate the obscene throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, 'Globalizing the local: imperial hygiene and the regulation of the obscene', the last quarter of the century marks a distinct transformation in the regulation of obscenity not only in Britain but in its empire. This was thanks to, firstly, the coming together of moral reform organizations, the newly emergent medical profession and the state in a medico-moral alliance that attempted to shift the focus away from viewing 'purity' as a moral question to regarding it as a medical and racial one and as, therefore, a 'hygienic' problem. Such a transformation was also, however, a product of a growing awareness that the increased intermingling of peoples, things and texts wrought by the expansion of the material networks of the empire, while serving to strengthen imperial ties, also rendered the boundaries between metropolitan and colonial spaces more unstable. For in addition to transporting the diseases, pollutions and impurities of colonial spaces to the metropole, such networks also conveyed 'obscene' publications. 'Obscene' publications from Britain and Europe were, in turn, being purveyed through the trade networks of the empire and were serving to undermine the 'strength' and 'purity' of Britain's empire. But while Britain could no longer be conceived of as ontologically distinct from its colonial possessions, the fashioning of the empire as contiguous space – as, in essence, an imperial body – meant that Britain could erect a cordon sanitaire around it to protect the race, nation and empire. This chapter thus reveals how the regulation of the obscene was transformed into a project of imperial hygiene through the construction of an international system to police the trade in 'obscenities' throughout the empire.

Envisioning the empire as an imperial body that needed to be purified through policing its margins posed problems, however, for the project of imperial hygiene and, in turn, for imperial power. The first difficulty was that the colonies were engaged in undertaking their own social hygiene projects, and while these often intersected with imperial projects – or, in the case of the regulation of the obscene, were in many ways derived from them – their genealogies were often decidedly distinct. As Chapter 4, 'Localizing the global in settler societies: regulating the obscene in

Australia', illustrates, in the case of Australia the regulation of the obscene emerged as part of the 'White Australia' policy, which was initially designed to keep non-whites out of the geographical boundaries of the nation-state in order to protect Australia's racial and cultural 'purity'. However, with its evolution in the early twentieth century into an endeavour to bar eugenically 'unfit' Britons, the regulation of the obscene was in turn transformed into a project to construct Australia as more hygienic – as, essentially, 'whiter' – than the imperial metropole through the construction of a system of quarantine to keep out 'impure' publications from Britain. Since such a project was largely undertaken by the state, sovereign and disciplinary rather than governmental power thus predominated in Australia as a means of regulating the obscene, which as this chapter demonstrates reveals a lack of faith in the self-governing capacities of Australia's citizens.

The second problem for the project of imperial hygiene was that some margins, as in the case of India, could be policed more rigorously than others. As illustrated in Chapter 5, 'Localizing the global in exploitation colonies: regulating the obscene in India', this was not due to the Indian government's reluctance to intervene in indigenous custom or because of the difficulties (cultural, economic, and so on) in doing so, although these of course played a part. The rationale was instead more contradictory and complex. On the one hand, the colonial government was opposed to taking an active role in regulating the obscene because it had, by the late nineteenth century – thanks in part to its employment of the governmental technology that Henry Schwarz has termed 'aesthetic imperialism' – become convinced of the self-governing capacities of its subjects, or at least of those exposed to Western education.[10] But on the other hand, it opposed undertaking such a regulatory project because the disorder that threatened the imperial body served to justify the civilizing mission of colonialism. Purifying and containing all of the margins of empire would, in short, undermine the social order of the entire imperial/colonial project. But in failing to erect an effective cordon sanitaire around India to keep out 'obscene' publications emanating from Britain or conveyed to India from other parts of the empire, or to effectively police them within India, both British culture and the empire that purveyed it became perceived as a threat to the strength and purity of the Indian 'race' and 'nation'. As in Australia, a tension thus emerged between colonial modernity and national desire, in which the latter sought to dissociate itself from empire and justify its authority through declaring the nation the true, legitimate and authentic bearer of modernity.

[10] Schwarz, 'Aesthetic Imperialism', 563–86.

For since the emergence of bourgeois society was one of the major cultural factors linking metropoles and their colonies in the nineteenth century, colonialism was therefore engaged in the (unintended) project of fashioning modern bourgeois subjects who, in turn, were engaged in fashioning the bourgeois self – which entailed policing boundaries, ensuring racial purity and, in turn, regulating the obscene. Thus, rather than appearing as an agent of modernity, in failing not only to eradicate India's own 'obscene' print culture but in opening up India to the obscene effluvium of the whole empire, Britain became conceived of not only as anti-modern, but as hindering the production of a distinct 'Indian' modernity. As in the case of Australia, 'margin' and 'centre' were thus effectively reversed as Britain's Indian subjects strove to define themselves as more modern than their ostensible colonizers.

The expansion of the material and discursive networks of the British empire began roughly a century before what is generally perceived to be the beginning of the era of 'globalization'. In offering a radical re-assessment of processes of cultural transmission and exchange beginning in the globalizing era of the nineteenth century, *Purifying Empire* disrupts such ahistorical narratives of globalization. Through focusing on three discrete contexts, one metropolitan and two diverse types of colonies, it also challenges theories of both globalization and imperialism that embrace a centre–periphery model in elucidating processes of cultural transmission and exchange. For although the particular regulatory project explored here was initially exported from metropole to colonies, it assumed new life in the process, becoming appropriated, distorted and resisted in ways that not only served colonial interests but that were antithetical to, and undermined, the interests of the metropolis. It thus de-centres the metropolis from the histories of imperialism and globalization. Lastly, in illustrating not only the tensions and insecurities of imperial power, but the emergence of new forms of resistance to it, *Purifying Empire* reveals the importance of culture as a factor in destabilizing empires – often decades before their political and military collapse – while at the same time demonstrating why aspects of imperial cultures such as languages, literatures and knowledge systems, as well as moral and bodily norms, were embraced by colonized peoples around the world even in the face of, and often in conjunction with, their rejection of the political, military and economic aspects of imperialism. In an era witnessing not only an escalation of processes of globalization but the emergence of a new 'new' imperialism, including new forms of resistance, this book thus serves both as a cautionary tale and as an emblem of hope – for the fracturing of the cultural–moral boundaries through which empires are constructed and maintained serves, ultimately, to undermine them.

1 Colonialism and governmentality

Since the work of Michel Foucault, the concept of governmentality has become central to understanding power not simply as repression, but as an epistemological (practical and discursive) phenomenon that normatively produces subjects. The chief concern of governmentality is to apply economy, which Foucault regards as 'a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and goods', to the maintenance of a healthy and productive population.[1] Enacted under the aegis of a series of institutions (the judiciary, the school and the family), discourses (medicine, criminal justice and demography) and procedures and analyses (surveys, statistics and regulations), what is distinctive about this form of power 'is not its relation to capitalism, but its point of application', which is the '*conditions* in which [the] body is to live and define its life' (emphasis in original).[2] In subjecting them to 'rational' principles governmentality seeks to foster an identification of interests, a 'contract between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self', that ensures that subjects are obliged to transform themselves in an 'improving direction' to do as they ought.[3] It thus serves to construct the normative regularities of civil society.

Although not a universal form of power – it emerged, as Foucault made clear, in European society at a specific time and then became

[1] Foucault, 'Governmentality', p. 102. Foucault defines governmentality as 'The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target the population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security'. Foucault, 'Governmentality', p. 92.

[2] Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 201.

[3] M. Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', p. 19. As Alan Hunt cogently elaborates, 'others' are governed through 'rationalized programmes, strategies, tactics and techniques directed towards acting upon [their] actions'. These include surveillance, constraint and coercion, all of which are aimed at stimulating the governance of the self through 'those voluntary practices by which people not only set for themselves rules of conduct, but seek to modify the social presentation of their selves' by acquiring certain socially visible behavioural characteristics. Hunt, *Governing Morals*, pp. 185, 155.

gradually more important – scholars of colonialism have traced the emergence of governmental power in colonial contexts through the projects of modernization initiated by colonial regimes.[4] Analyses of the operation of governmental power through localized theories and historically specific accounts, or projects, that focus on the particular technologies or sites through which colonial states sought to manage their populations, have demonstrated the ways in which physical exploitation was accompanied and followed by an epistemological one as colonial regimes, bringing with them new conceptions of space and time and new understandings of economy, society, history and progress, set about enumerating, demarcating, and classifying colonized peoples.[5] In doing so they sought to tame the unruliness of difference, delineate the unstable boundaries of rule between colonizers and colonized and facilitate the management of populations. Nationalist movements in turn appropriated governmentality in an effort to 'purify', 'strengthen' and reform their own societies to challenge the project of colonial modernity and make colonized subjects capable of self-rule.

Through exploring how a particular governmentalizing project, namely the regulation of the obscene, was transformed from a national project in Britain to a global and imperial one, and was then translated, reformulated and localized in India and Australia, this book aims to shed new light on the operation of governmentalities not only in colonial contexts, but in the West as well – and of how these shaped each other. Colonialism was not, as David Scott argues in his seminal article on colonial governmentality, a unitary project, which means that 'something called "*the* colonial state" cannot offer itself up as the iteration and reiteration of a single rationality' (emphasis in original). What is

[4] Foucault argues that the transformation from an understanding of power as repression to an understanding of it as a science of government, forged by the population (the object of analysis and manipulation), the government (the political means through which this manipulation is performed) and the economy (the field of action through which population and economy are connected), occurred in European states during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was not until the nineteenth century that the two poles of biopower, discipline and governmentality, became connected in concrete ways and which, along with sovereignty, formed a triangulated balance of power. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*; and Tadros, 'Between Governance and Discipline', 91–2, 99.

[5] As Alan Hunt defines it, 'A "project" is a process of governance, practices directed towards the control of some other social agents, institutions, or other social entities'. All governmentalizing projects, according to Hunt, have five main components: agents (ranging from the state to voluntary bodies such moral reform organizations); a target (individuals – or sometimes entire populations or particular segments of those populations – whose behaviour is deemed in need of regulation); tactics or techniques (such as legal measures or the publication of guides to marriage or child-rearing); discourses (which are used in government documents, treatises, texts and so on); and a political context. Hunt, *Governing Morals*, p. 28.

therefore needed, according to Scott, is to explore 'the different political rationalities, different configurations of power, [which] took the stage in commanding positions' within 'the structures and projects that gave shape to the colonial enterprise as a whole'.[6] Such a proposal serves to highlight the temporaneous and localist nature of colonialism. However, in ignoring the connections and similarities *between* political rationalities in different colonial contexts it limits the possibility of generating new understandings of the particular *universalities* of colonial power.[7] Elucidating the connections between both the particular and the universal demands examining the historically differentiated political rationalities or differentiated structures and projects of rule in different *types* of colonies – particularly in exploitation and settler colonies, which because they are regarded as so dissimilar are rarely placed within the same analytical framework – and then comparing them to each other.[8]

Such a comparison also illustrates that while colonial regimes prided themselves on the successful adaptation, operation and transmission of governmental power even in the face of the malleability, subversion and transformation of concepts such as civility and morality, *perceptions* of the nature or functioning of colonial governmentality may in fact have played a more significant role in fashioning colonial modernities than the actual operation – however imperfect – of governmentality itself. For although regarded as universal, the concepts of civility and moral purity that sustained such regimes were in fact highly malleable and subject to constant critique, appropriation and subversion. As Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler rightly note, for colonized societies 'The intrusion of European models into "private" domains did not necessarily reproduce bourgeois civility but gave rise to diverse efforts ... to find new and original ways for expressing ideals of a domestic domain, for demonstrating status, and indeed for showing that a man or a woman could be "modern" in a variety of ways'.[9] Such efforts led in turn to a constant redrawing of the boundaries between self and other, colonizer

[6] Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 197. Scott defines political rationalities as 'those historically constituted complexes of knowledge/power that give shape to colonial projects of political sovereignty' and that characterize 'those ways in which colonial power is organized as an activity designed to produce effects of rule'. Scott, 'Colonial Governmentality', 193.

[7] While I agree with Scott's aim of fracturing the universality of the concept of colonialism, such a concept is, however, meaningless unless it embodies *some* universals.

[8] Since there are seven different types of colonies, and multiple forms of colonialism often coexisted in the same colony, many other comparative possibilities also exist. See Osterhammel, *Colonialism*.

[9] Cooper and Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony', p. 32.