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Introduction

The image of a European man and a native woman living in familial harmony has long been an enduring vision of colonial societies. In early colonial British India, creolization, conjugality, and cooperation between men and women of different cultural backgrounds created the image of a golden age in which racial hierarchies and boundaries were unimportant. By many accounts, the ideal eighteenth-century East India Company man was one who learned local languages, participated in native customs, such as hooka-smoking, and lived intimately and had a family with a local woman. A collaborative Raj was phased out by a coercive Raj, and native female companions were replaced by the influx of white women from Europe. By 1857, when Indian soldiers rose up against their British masters and gave Britons cause to establish more rigid racial hierarchies, an age of many kinds of partnership between Britons and those they ruled on the Indian subcontinent came to an abrupt end.

Sex and the Family in Colonial India goes beyond this conventional narrative about the progressive racializing of British colonialism on the Indian subcontinent to closely examine the familial dynamics of interracial sexual contact for native women and European men who participated in these relationships. Comprised of European fathers, indigenous mothers, and their mixed-race children, such colonial families formed a constitutive part of Anglo-Indian colonial society in its formative years, endangering the whiteness of British rule, and potentially undermining its political authority. Multi-ethnic and interracial, these families were crucial grounds on which racial and gender hierarchies were built and consolidated, giving rise to the hierarchies of colonial settlements. The growing social and sexual distance between Britons and Indians has often been explained as part of a growing empire's demand to become morally conscious, recognizing the demands put on colonizing groups to uphold their racial, national, and religious superiority. This book argues that the process of

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"making empire respectable," was never a straightforward or sequential process, but rather a process that was rife with ambivalence.[1]

This history of intimate relations between Britons and Indians was based on a complex process by which the early colonial state's interests intersected with and supported the anxieties of the members of colonial societies who feared they had become too intimate with those they ruled. At various times, European men and native women expressed unease about their social and racial status. These anxieties merged with the concerns over social propriety of early colonial settlements and their governments. By examining what sorts of social, racial, and class borders native women and European men crossed when they became involved with one another, and what kinds of racial, class, and gender hierarchies structured their experiences, this study argues that interracial sexual relationships were a crucial and constitutive part of early colonial state formation and governance in British India, laying the foundations for the colonial social order.

During these early years of British colonialism, from 1760 to 1840, the English East India Company expanded its dominions and consolidated its authority on the Indian subcontinent through military conquest and by subsidiary alliances with local leaders. By relying on local trading and banking networks for much of the eighteenth century, the British succeeded by insinuating themselves as another actor in the fragmented political situation of India. The transition from the East India Company as a commercial enterprise to a government charged with collecting revenues and managing judicial systems of the Indian subcontinent produced growing anxieties about how to regulate expansion. Interactions between British officials and local traders, merchants and informers became suspect to charges of corruption. Simultaneously, the domestic and private living arrangements of East India Company servants and their local female companions were linked with the rise of British political authority in India. Accusation of various types of corruption – moral, social and political – gave rise to disciplinary regimes that regulated the proximity between Britons and indigenous subjects.

The expansion of the Company's territorial frontiers corresponded closely with growing anxieties about social frontiers and the ways in which they ought to be managed, particularly in defining whose bodies

[1] Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures," *American Ethnologist* 16 (1989): 634–60.

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were contained within them.[2] Although conjugal relationships between European men and native women were commonplace in many colonial settlements on the Indian subcontinent, cohabiting with or marrying a native woman was often regarded as a socially and sexually transgressive act, one that gave rise to multiple types of regulation. In spite of the image that men who participated in interracial sex were socially enlightened and cosmopolitan, European men often kept these relationships secret, revealing them only in final wills and testaments. By expressing some embarrassment about their native mistresses and anxiety about the future status of their descendants, men who had "gone native" articulated the dangers of assimilation. At the level of colonial governance, institutions such as judicial courts and charitable funds, which regulated and supported the East India Company's activities, were drawn into disputes about the legal status of interracial families and the various religious, racial and national identities of the individual members of these families. In establishing whose rights might be attended to by the institutions of the East India Company state, courts and charities came to define what constituted a "family," and in a larger sense, who was a British subject and who was putatively "Indian" before a formal conception of India existed.

Distinctions about race and gender articulated from within the household and the colonial state merged with a common purpose of hierarchizing the rights and privileges of different members of the "colonial family," in its broadest sense. In India, as in other British colonies, the gender order of the family, with a father as a patriarch who was both legally and financially responsible for the females, servants, and children of the household, was an ideal that was mapped onto early colonial institutions of governance in India and the ways in which these institutions were conceived and managed.[3] Unlike other colonies, however, colonial families in British India were often not "legitimate," in the sense that the parental conjugal unit were frequently unmarried and some men kept several women in a harem-like arrangement. In the process of structuring and limiting their fiscal responsibilities, colonial fathers and officials showed the ways in which patriarchal authority

[2] Kathleen M. Brown, "The Anglo-Algonquin Gender Frontier," in Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: race and the intimate in colonial rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), ch. 4.

[3] Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 42–56.

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within the family was a process that was reinforced by institutions of governance, such as courts, the military, and the church. For many men, taking responsibility for familial obligations was repaid by greater political and legal legitimacy.

In this model colonial household/state, indigenous women who were often without full names, were assumed to be voiceless, denied rights or exercising any agency. In spite of archival efforts to render them invisible, native women were represented in various ways by themselves and by others in hundreds of archival documents, such as final testaments, court records, church registers, and family papers. More important, in spite of the ways in which the state and its archives attempted to suppress the subjecthood and agency of these nameless women, many women were able to avail themselves of the limited benefits that participating in interracial conjugal relationships offered. At relatively elite levels, women inherited property, managed large households, and showed that they were literate and politically savvy. At less elite levels, women who provided sexual and domestic labor to rank-and-file soldiers and lower-ranking Europeans were drawn into negotiations with colonial institutions by seeking financial restitution for their work. Present in the various contact zones of the Anglo-Indian colonial encounter – European households, judicial courts, military cantonments, local palaces, churches, orphanages – native women were key figures of early colonial society. By enabling indigenous women to become visible, this study demonstrates how intimately involved the Company and its various employees and institutions were in the lives of these marginal subjects of early Anglo-Indian colonial settlements and the ways in which these subjects were drawn into the workings of the nascent colonial state on the Indian subcontinent.

I

From 1600, when the East India Company was first founded until about 1760, the Company was primarily a trading company chartered by the English monarch to conduct trade in India. Between 1600 and 1707, the Company worked within the ruling structures of the Mughal empire and in competition with other European trading companies, such as the Dutch VOC and the French Compagnie des Indes l'est.[4] By the end of the eighteenth century, the East India Company had become an ad hoc colonial power on the Indian subcontinent, edging out its European competitors.

[4] Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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Between 1707 and 1750, the Mughal empire was in continual crisis.[5] Because the authority of the Mughal empire was unstable, European trading companies began to negotiate directly with provincial service elites in Bengal, Awadh, Arcot, and Hyderabad for access to trade, merchants, and banking.[6] By the 1750s, political affairs on the Indian subcontinent responded to both global and local tensions.[7] Succession battles within the provinces drew in British and French trading company officials who sought to stabilize local political matters for the sake of profitable commerce.[8] British military and diplomatic victories in global conflicts such as the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) resulted in British-led military forces effectively eliminating the French as a possible European rival on the subcontinent.

Along with deterring the expansion of French influence in south India, in the north, successive British military victories over native rulers, such as the nawab of Bengal, the nawabs of Awadh, and the Mughal emperor, enabled the East India Company to incorporate more territories under their influence. In 1757, Robert Clive led royal troops and the Company's forces into battle against Siraj-ud-daulah at the Battle of Plassey and defeated the nawab of Bengal's forces.[9] The British accession to diwani conferred the right to collect revenues in the Bengal province and marked the beginning of British rule in Bengal.[10] Subsequently, the Bengal Presidency was established as the seat of the East India Company's administration and by 1840 extended from Calcutta beyond Delhi, the Mughal capital.

In this period of expansion, the East India Company established its government in India in piecemeal fashion. Many of its military and political activities were conducted by Englishmen who took up an

[5] Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707–1748* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986); Richard Barnett, *North India Between Two Empires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), chs. 1–2; Michael Fisher, *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals* (Delhi: Manohar, 1987); Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chs. 5–6; Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics Under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[6] C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[7] For a broad overview of this process, see C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: the British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (New York: Longman, 1989).

[8] See Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724–1857* (Hyderabad: Booklovers, 1963) for conflicts over local control in Hyderabad. See P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740–1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chs. 2–3 on succession battles in Bengal.

[9] Marshall, *Bengal*, pp. 81–90.

[10] *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

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orientalized lifestyle with great appreciation and admiration for local customs and traditions; this lifestyle enabled many British officials to establish the social bonds necessary for successful diplomacy. Early British officials participated in such local customs as smoking the hookah, enjoying the nautch and living in the style of a "nabob," marked with oriental luxury and excess.[11] Some scholars have reclaimed a more positive definition of "orientalism," arguing that British officials of the period before Cornwallis were genuinely interested and respectful of local customs and traditions of scholarship, and that the late eighteenth century was marked by Anglo-Indian friendship – an amicability that later enabled the British conquest of Bengal.[12] And as other scholars have pointed out, scholarly knowledge about India often coincided with "carnal knowledge" about native women.[13]

Throughout the 1750s and 1760s, as the East India Company's dominions expanded in India, military and bureaucratic costs mounted while the Company's profits declined. Although individual members of the Company's service made huge profits from their activities in India, the Company itself was unable to effectively transfer enough revenue to Parliament to pay for its administration.[14] In spite of the accession to diwani and the promise of Bengal's revenues to fund the Company's expenses, the windfall was never realized. A famine in 1769–1770, which wiped out an estimated one-fifth of the population of Bengal, further exacerbated popular and parliamentary allegations that Company officials were mismanaging British affairs in India. By the 1770s, various factions in England clamored for a close examination into the Company's activities.[15]

A Regulating Act in 1773 attempted to reform the Company's affairs by bringing the Company's activities under the surveillance of parliament. The following year, Warren Hastings, governor of Bengal, was named governor-general of all of India and he was expected to form policy in consultation with the Supreme Council, a group of civil servants charged with protecting parliamentary and Company interests

[11] T. C. P. Spear, *The Nabobs: English Social Life in 18th century India* (New York: Penguin, 1963), pp. 135–6.
[12] Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[13] Rosanne Rocher, "British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: the dialectics of knowledge and government," in Carol A. Breckinridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 217n. "Carnal knowledge," is a paraphrase of Ann Stoler's title.
[14] C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 51, 65.
[15] Huw Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics, 1757–1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

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in India. A High Court in Calcutta was established to adjudicate and preside over civil and criminal suits over British subjects in the Company's extensive domains. Domestic violence cases, such as the type discussed in chapter 5, were an unanticipated feature of the court's deliberations, drawing colonial judges into policing intimate violence in the households of British men in the Company's territories. As well, members of the court, such as William Jones, took on the task of codifying India's legal practices in order to rationalize Anglo-Indian law.[16] The commercial operations of the East India Company were increasingly being reinforced by an administrative and legal component overseen by Parliament.

Despite these reforms, charges continued to circulate back to England that Company rule in India was corrupt and despotic. A second regulating act, Pitt's India Act of 1784, expanded parliamentary supervision over the Company and separated the civil service and military administration of the Company's presidencies from the commercial operations, hoping to resolve the tension between the Company's role as merchant and sovereign in India.

As Edmund Burke argued repeatedly in Parliament in the impeachment hearings against Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India, British affairs in India had taken a dangerous turn and threatened not only the British constitution but British ideals about morality, justice, and sovereignty.[17] Hastings, who had learned local languages, studied Indian literature, and adopted political practices was assumed to be infected by such oriental "vices" as greed, luxury, and despotism; he was replaced because he was accused of allowing corrupt local practices to permeate all levels of the East India Company's activities. In the context of this galvanizing public debate, Hastings's conduct in India was read as a political felony in Britain.[18]

Under Governor-General Lord Cornwallis (1786–1793), various social and political reforms were instituted to prevent British officials

[16] Bernard Cohn, "Law and the Colonial State in India," in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Sovereignty and the Rule of Law in British India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003), ch. 2.

[17] George Bearce, *British Attitudes Toward India, 1784–1858* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 1–33. The trial went from 1786 until 1795 when Hastings was eventually acquitted.

[18] Peter Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Marshall, *The Launching of the Hastings Impeachment 1786–1788: The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600–1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 4; Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ch. 3.

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from being corrupted by local political and trading practices. Salaries were raised so that no official would be vulnerable to bribery and civil servants were prohibited from engaging in private trade. The civil apparatus of the Company was cordoned off from the commercial establishment so that civil servants, charged with collecting taxes, adjudicating disputes, and managing local administrative tasks, would not be affected by commercial transactions.[19] Credited with elaborating the first systematic imperial ideologies of conquest and colonial rule in India, when Lord Wellesley arrived in India in 1798, he instituted policies that further bureaucratized the Company's establishment and expanded its dominions.[20]

For the period between 1786 and 1800, standard historical narratives have argued that the prohibitions instituted by Cornwallis and later affirmed by Wellesley brought anxieties about interracial sexual relationships into the forefront of colonial policies.[21] After the mid-1780s, the East India Company attempted to become a much more insular operation that was less reliant on local personnel than it had previously been. The Cornwallis prohibitions on admitting mixed-race subjects to the civil service and to the military was seen to be a sign of the times. Instead of depending on a mixed-race elite to manage colonial affairs, the expulsion of these elites from the Company civil service served as a reminder that people of mixed races were seen as colonial subjects whose loyalty was compromised.[22] The influence of *dubashes*, *banias*, and other local intermediaries was severely limited and a British service elite was expanded to replace the labor of indigenous elites who had previously served to link local populations with the British company state.[23] High-level officials were discouraged from keeping Indian companions and lower-level soldiers and employees of the company were

[19] Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), ch. 1; Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies, 1793–1905* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), Introduction; Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The Social Condition of the British Community in Bengal, 1757–1800* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970, reprint 1988), ch. 1.

[20] Bayly, *Indian Society*, pp. 81–9.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 78, 83.

[22] The text of this directive is partially reprinted and critically analyzed in Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 164–8; C. J. Hawes, *Poor Relations: the Making of a Eurasian Community in British India, 1773–1833* (London: Curzon, 1996), ch. 4; S. C. Ghosh, *Social Condition of the British Community*, ch. 4.

[23] See Bayly, *Indian Society*; Rosanne Rocher, "British Orientalism," and David Ludden, "Orientalist Empiricism: transformations of colonial knowledge," in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

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allowed and enabled to turn to prostitutes to satisfy their heterosexual impulses.[24] These kinds of measures contributed to a growing sense that the proximity between Britons and Indians required careful regulation if the British were to retain political authority on the Indian subcontinent.[25]

These changes in policy have widely been assumed to be a definitive break in the everyday interactions between Europeans and natives, but the reach and the success of the Cornwallis reforms were initially limited. Interracial relationships continued in the post-Cornwallis era, with families and their European patriarchs relying on different strategies to manage the "problem" of their native companions and mixed-race children. What the Cornwallis reforms did was to crystallize existing anxieties about interracial sex that had existed in Anglo-Indian colonial society throughout the late eighteenth century and to create legislation to formalize an end of all forms of Anglo-Indian social intimacy.

While the Cornwallis and Wellesley reforms of the late eighteenth century were an administrative injunction against interracial relationships and mixed-race children, other developments are often attributed to the decline in Anglo-Indian intimacies. Echoing Kipling's image of the racist, narrow-minded memsahib, many scholars have argued that racial concerns and sexual jealousies expressed by growing numbers of Englishwomen in India ended a period of mutual understanding between the British and Indians and the practice of interracial cohabitation.[26] The 1857 mutiny is thus often described as a more decisive and widespread break in the history of Anglo-Indian cordiality, particularly given the rise in anxieties about sexual attacks against Englishwomen.[27]

This study complicates this progressive narrative of the British empire in India, long considered at its height in the late nineteenth century, and argues that the building blocks of colonial ideologies about racial

[24] Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex, and Class*, ch. 1.

[25] P. J. Marshall, "British Society in India under the East India Company," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (February 1997): 101. See also David Arnold, "European orphans and vagrants in India in the nineteenth century," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7 (1978): 104–27.

[26] Spear, *Nabobs*, p. 143. See foreword by James Lunt, pp. xvii–xviii, in Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608–1937* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1938); Sumanta Bannerjee, *Under the Raj: Prostitution in Colonial Bengal* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), pp. 48–50; Elizabeth M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: the Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (London: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 74–5.

[27] Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1993); Nancy Paxton, *Writing under the Raj: Gender, Race and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830–1947* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

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superiority and moral probity were in formation from the middle of the eighteenth century onward, prior to the development of scientific racism and biological claims about the genetic differences between Caucasians and others.[28] Building on the work of Kathleen Wilson, Sudipta Sen, and others,[29] this book demonstrates that national affiliations and imperial priorities were being actively worked out from the earliest moments of the Anglo-Indian encounter, particularly on the bodies of native women, who represented a clear and present danger to maintaining Britishness within the frontiers of the household and the empire in India. As Chris Bayly has noted, "For all the talk of the high point of imperialism in the later nineteenth century, the basic system of British imperial dominance was put in place between 1760 and 1860."[30]

In this early phase of British rule, the social lives of Englishmen were linked as much to their rising status as members of privileged class groups in India as it was to their social status in Britain. Although these men exhibited eighteenth-century Company masculine ideals – they learned local languages, they wore local dress and they bedded local women – they were always intimately aware of clarifying their class and racial status to their white peers within the colonial settlement and to their families in Britain. For instance, William Fraser, resident in Delhi (1833–1835), was reportedly "half-Asiatic in his habits, but in other respects a Scotch Highlander."[31] Fraser, renowned in Delhi as a Persian-speaking poet, kept the news of his newly adopted practices from his family in Scotland. Likewise, the wills and letters of more ordinary British men show the ways in which they were determined to maintain respectability among other Europeans, in spite of their sexual and cultural practices across racial lines.

Social connections, in Britain and on the subcontinent, sustained the networks of patronage that supplied suitable recruits for desirable

[28] Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800–1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982); Robert Young, *Colonial Desires: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[29] Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[30] C. A. Bayly, "The British and Indigenous Peoples, 1760–1860: power, perception and identity," in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds., *Europe and Its Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 22.

[31] According to Victor Jacquemont, a French traveler who visited Fraser, Mildred Archer, "Artists and Patrons in Residency Delhi, 1803–1858," in R. E. Frykenberg, eds., *Delhi Through the Ages* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 161–2; Mildred Archer, *India Revealed: The Art and Adventures of James and William Fraser, 1801–1835* (London: Cassell, 1989).

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