

# Conference

## **Gender, War and Culture: From Colonial Conquest, Standing Armies and Revolutionary Wars to the Wars of Nations and Empires (1650s-1910s)**

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### **Part II: Chapter 15**

#### **IMPERIAL CONQUEST, VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS AND CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS IN THE COLONIES: THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF COLONIAL WARFARE, 1830s-1910s**

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This chapter will address the following historical processes listed in the Handbook 2.2:

- changes in the form of colonial and imperial wars
- colonialism and imperialism.

It will also address the following of the listed topics:

- gendered experiences on the battle and home fronts
- gender, war and violence.

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#### **Introduction**

From the 1830s to the 1910s the contact zones of colonialism were structured by violence, in places ranging from the British settler colonies of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to crown colonies of various European empires including British India, the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina. Carved out by warfare or conquest by force, typically they depended on the continued threat of violent suppression. Insurrections and uprisings commonly characterized colonial societies. The visible presence of troops, their continual availability to colonial regimes, and the widespread deployment of indigenous men as soldiers and police all sustained the rule of colonizers. This chapter will necessarily consider warfare in its diffuse and chaotic forms, as sparked by imperial invasions and gradual conquests of colonial territories, including the suppression of uprisings. It will also assess the intersections of gender and militarized violence in the daily life of colonial societies.

War, militarism and the threat of force shaped gender relations under colonialism. Some women became warriors (though this would become much more widespread in the twentieth century both in Western armed forces and in anti-colonial liberation struggles), or actively supported troops in ways that challenged norms of femininity. In various colonies women warriors' roles in

colonial resistance led to subsequent mythologies of powerful women, including the Rani of Jhansi who famously fought the British during the Indian Rebellion of 1857-58 and after whom a female company of soldiers would be named in World War II. In the province of Aceh in northern Sumatra, the anti-Dutch resistance warrior Cut Nyak Dien of the turn of the twentieth century struggles to preserve Aceh's autonomy, would gain sufficient prominence, despite the traditionally masculine gendering of the warrior in local Islamic culture, that she would later become something of an Indonesian national hero.<sup>1</sup>

Heroic manliness was associated with imperial conquest, as for both colonizers and indigenous people manhood was measured at least in part by fighting skills and preparedness for violence. Indigenous men were employed as troops and police in all colonies, occupying the lowest ranks and often being compelled to carry out the most extreme violence of suppression. Racial hierarchies within armed forces shaped military strategies as well as daily lives in and beyond army cantonments, including for the wives, partners and children of soldiers, and for women forced into prostitution or concubinage.

### **Militarized prostitution**

In some militarized colonial societies, official and semi-official forms of organized prostitution developed to service imperial troops. In the increasingly hegemonic nineteenth-century British Empire, military expenditure was directed gradually further towards the army rather than the navy. In India as Britain gradually expanded its territorial control in the period under study, colonial society became thoroughly militarized. In the wake of the 1857-58 First War of Independence, the British government assumed control of the formerly East India Company army, and increased the ratio of white to indigenous soldiers, such that by the 1860s there were 65,000 British troops to 140,000 "sepoys." As British colonial reach expanded, so did the cantonments housing troops proliferate, and along with them the nearby bazaars, including prostitutes to service the soldiers. Lock hospitals, to forcibly treat indigenous women with venereal disease, were first established in India from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and proliferated with the expansion of contagious diseases ordinances in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While women were controlled, blamed and punished in the anti-VD campaigns, infection rates of British troops in India ran as high as nearly 40% of hospital admissions in 1859 and over 50% in 1895.<sup>2</sup>

Prostitutes in India were racially diverse, including some Japanese, Mauritian and Burmese women and even a few Europeans,<sup>3</sup> but the fact that they were dominantly indigenous rendered militarised and paid sex a pervasive cross-racial relationship under British colonial rule. Thus while actual warfare in colonial India was limited to sporadic wars of conquest or the suppression of rebellion particularly in 1857-58, British rule depended on the visible presence of troops, and in turn on the commodification of women's sexual services. Racialised and gendered relationships endangered Indian women's health even as they limited their options and their movements. Relationships between armies and 'camp-following' women were far from new, but that in late-19<sup>th</sup> century British India was a signal development in what Cynthia Enloe has pointed to as the investment of government authority in military prostitution, protecting the male customers while also sustaining their masculinity.<sup>4</sup>

### **Violence and imperial conquest: Rape, sexual assault and captivity narratives**

Sexual conquest was a tool of colonial conquest, naturalized and unacknowledged as the violence it was. In settler colonies particularly, rape and bartering for sexual services shaped daily life for indigenous women and undermined traditional gender relations for the colonized. In the 1860s, white male violence against First Nations women in British Columbia was justified through racialized assumptions of women's sexual immorality. Adele Perry notes that white male travellers in frontier British Columbia saw Aboriginal women as just part of their travel experience, quoting

R.H. Alexander's 1862 journal: 'we went through the bush after some Indian girls and had some great fun.'<sup>5</sup> Sexual assault of Indigenous women fed into First Nations' resentment and resistance of white colonization.

In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Queensland, Aboriginal women were believed to constitute a majority of prostitutes beyond metropolitan Brisbane.<sup>6</sup> Blaming Aboriginal women's lack of morality and Aboriginal men's abuse of their women for women's prostitution served to obscure Aboriginal destitution, white sexual abuse of Aboriginal women, and the history of pervasive sexual assault stemming from the early period of frontier warfare. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as the first British settlers, in the areas that would from 1859 become the colony of Queensland, took land by violence, rape of Aboriginal women was widespread. Aboriginal resentment of such abuse was one trigger for the recurrent staging of attacks and reprisals, the cycle of often-deadly skirmishes that constituted frontier warfare.

Fears of interracial rape and miscegenation structured conceptions of white womanhood, circulated globally and justified instances of land grabbing in settler colonies as well as harsh repression of indigenous men in many places. In western Canada in 1887, for example, allegations of Blackfoot sexual assaults on settler women bolstered calls for government limits on Aboriginal freedom of movement.<sup>7</sup> In 1830s-40s Australia, sensational narratives of white women being taken captive by indigenous men for lascivious purposes gained widespread currency, while having specific local effects in justifying repression of Aboriginal people. The first and probably most popular of these was sparked by the May 1836 shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle* off the coast of Queensland on what is now Fraser Island. Captain Fraser and other survivors eventually made it ashore, where they were taken in by the Ngulungbara, Badtjala and Dulingbara groups. The captain died, but his wife Eliza Fraser survived. Several of the other survivors made it to another island where they were able to contact British authorities. A rescue party was sent, including a convict who had previously escaped and lived on the island for six years, learning a local language. Eliza Fraser's rescue involved an overnight trip during which the convict rescuer may have raped her, but there was no evidence of rape by an Indigenous man. Fraser was delivered to Moreton Bay, thence to Sydney and finally returned to England, where she sold melodramatic versions of her own story to the press. The Eliza Fraser captivity narrative took on a life of its own, circulating globally, including being given local settings such as in North America replete with tepees and Indians; the sensational version distorted actual events and featured innuendos of violent sexual assault of a white woman by indigenous men.

Thus by 1840 when the White Woman of Gippsland narrative emerged from the southern Australian area now in the state of Victoria, newspaper audiences were well-primed. On 28 December 1840 Scottish settler Angus McMillan published in the *Sydney Herald* a report of an expedition he had recently undertaken to find a way from the Gippsland interior to the coast, a coastline that had been the site of several shipwrecks. He and his party startled a camp of Kurnai people who ran off, leaving behind various European goods. McMillan's detailed inventory of the abandoned objects included blood-stained clothing, a lock of a European woman's hair, and the body of a two-year old white boy. McMillan's report concluded by noting that as the group ran off one of the women constantly looked behind her, as the women were driven away by men brandishing spears. He concluded that she was a white woman captive, and thus was born the myth of the White Woman of Gippsland. No evidential basis for the White Woman has ever been discovered, despite three official search parties and a private expedition in the 1840s, discussion in the NSW Legislative Assembly, local and international newspaper reports, and from the 1870s versions of the myth in fiction and poetry. These fabricated versions often rendered the White Woman as a sexual captive. As Kate Darian-Smith and Julie Carr have argued, the timing of the myth is key to understanding its ideological dimensions. From 1839 British settlers invaded Gippsland to open it up as grazing country, and McMillan was central to this bloody process. The myth of a sexually-violated white woman captive was a weapon of war, deploying contemporary

notions of men's "honour" and role as protectors while serving to justify the land-grabbing and massacre of Kurnai people.<sup>8</sup>

### **Interracial sexual assault, the Indian 'Mutiny' and frontier warfare**

This circulating imperial ideology erupted soon after as sensationalized stories of sexual violence by colonized men against white women in the 1857-58 war in India. During and after the series of uprisings inscribed in British history as the 'Indian Mutiny', a dominant narrative emerged in which the rape and torture of Englishwomen was a key trope. These stories came to undergird violently repressive measures by the Raj at the time and in subsequent decades. We know from the work of scholars such as Jenny Sharpe and Nancy Paxton that, while British men, women and children were indeed killed, there is little evidence of rape by Indian men of English women. Subsequent official investigations found no evidence of systematic rape or torture even in the notorious massacre at Kanpur.<sup>9</sup> Much of the "news" reported from India at the time relied on hearsay accounts. Between 1857 and 1947 there were more than eighty novels written in English about the events of the rebellion. These stories commonly enacted in their plot the concept of "a fate worse than death" as proper English heroines chose death rather than the possible fate of falling sexual victim to an Indian man.<sup>10</sup> These "Mutiny" rape stories, so popular in Britain, entrenched definitions of femininity that cast women as in need of male protection, and as under the threat of sexual assault, helping to police moves towards women's social autonomy. As various scholars of colonialism have pointed out, fears of the sexual assault of white women by colonized men often peaked during real or perceived crises of control.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the timing, when one of the worst massacres of white settlers by Aborigines occurred in southern Queensland in October 1857, settlers drew parallels with the Indian uprising. On 27 October 1857, a large group of Aborigines attacked the Hornet Bank station homestead of the Fraser family on the Dawson River in south-central Queensland, killed all the males except one who survived, raped the mother and two of her daughters, and then killed the women and children. In sum, eleven whites, including several of the Fraser family's employees, were killed. According to Gordon Reid, whose research on the events including the multiple and protracted reprisal killings, is extensive, "at least 150 Aborigines died; the total may have been 300."<sup>12</sup> Connections drawn by settlers between the actions of the Aboriginal people in the Dawson River area, and the sepoys in India, served to justify brutal reprisals.

The Jiman [Yee-man] and other Aboriginal people in the region had been under pressure for some time from the settlers encroaching on their lands and taking them as pastoral properties. There had been widespread rape, assault and abuse of Aboriginal women, and numerous instances of unprovoked violence by the white settlers. Yet the settlers cast the attack on Hornet Bank station as murderous and treacherous, in similar terms to those used about the sepoys. While the Queensland press was divided in their responses to the killing of the Frasers, with at least one paper calling for fairness towards the Aborigines, the *Moreton Bay Free Press* commented:

Little did we imagine that when reading the horrible indecencies inflicted upon, and the subsequent butchery of, one-hundred-and-seventy-nine women and children at Cawnpore, that a tragedy of similar nature was being enacted at our very doors.<sup>13</sup>

For settlers in Queensland, the primary reason for their protracted vigilante violence was to establish their hold over the land. They told colonial officials that as a recently and sparsely-settled region they were vulnerable to Aboriginal attack, and complained about the inadequate numbers and inefficiency of the Native Police forces. They believed, with some reason, that had they not acted in reprisal, comparable subsequent attacks would have been made on other stations. Racial reasoning, too, was invoked to justify the disproportionate killing of Aborigines. Gender and sexuality were part of the mix, with the rape of the Fraser females considered a horrific part of the attacks, and linked to the greatly-exaggerated stories of the sexual assault of British women emanating from India.

### **Militarized concubinage and quotidian racialized gendering**

Colonized men, other than soldiers and police (such as the Native Police in the Australian colonies), were commonly infantilized or subordinated through being compelled into menial and labouring jobs. At the same time colonized women were pushed by circumstance into prostitution and concubinage. The sex-ratio imbalance among colonizers, with relatively few settler or colonizing women especially in colonialism's early stages, shaped gender relations across axes of race and power. Racialized conceptions of colonized women centred on sexual services for colonizing men and the domestic labour of unsanctioned marriages and unequal household partnerships. In some colonies, such as the Dutch East Indies, systems of concubinage shaped societies with articulated racial hierarchies.

Concubinage evolved early in the Netherlands' Indies, from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. From 1830 the East Indies Army, administered by the Minister of the Colonies, continued this tradition, such that army barracks housed the wives and children of native soldiers, as well as separate quarters for the European soldiers which included segregated areas for those living with concubines. Interracial concubinage was recognized in the colonial civil law code, and practised by senior officers as well as ordinary soldiers. The racial logic which underlay the tolerance of concubinage was enshrined in the prohibition against returning to the Netherlands with a native wife. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes began to change, with religious disapproval of interracial concubinage strong enough to cause a decline, yet even so in 1911 23% of European soldiers had concubines.<sup>14</sup> For indigenous women, life as a concubine had its perils. Dutch soldiers returning to the Netherlands typically abandoned both their concubines and their children, leaving the women with nothing to live on or to support their children, and nowhere to live.<sup>15</sup> Increasingly, for indigenous women, concubinage was essentially a form of prostitution, albeit with one long-term customer. And a major consequence of concubinage was that of *metissage*, the Indo-European community. Concubinage was, like prostitution, a militarised institutionalization of indigenous women's subordination under European colonialism.

The New Zealand Wars were fought episodically from the 1840s to the 1870s, in the north of the North Island as well as the Taranaki and Waikato areas.<sup>16</sup> In the latter region, from 1864 to 1866, Maori women participated in the war against the British forces as combatants, including some who were taken prisoner, and some killed.<sup>17</sup>

However, recent work on interracial relations in 19<sup>th</sup>-century New Zealand has pointed towards Maori women's agency in forging relationships that offered them both economic and emotional benefits. Angela Wanhalla shows that, while there was a sex trade closer to prostitution in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century North Island where whalers spent less time on shore, in the South Island the practices of European men who engaged in sealing and whaling led to more stable and productive unions that she likens to those which emerged in fur-trading areas of Canada. In southern New Zealand these interracial unions were sometimes just for the sealing or whaling season, but they also included short and long-term marriages. In the settlement of Maitapapa in the Otago region, from the 1830s interracial marriages became so dominant as to produce a majority mixed-descent population later in the century.

### **Masculinity, violence and imperial rule**

Christian evangelizing that accompanied colonial conquest imposed European notions of gendered respectability. But ideologies of civility could barely mask colonizers' behaviour that relied fundamentally on violence or the threat of violence. In Africa, for example, in the decades either side of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the European imperial powers rapidly grabbed colonial territories in expeditions and wars that were commonly extremely violent in an imbalanced way, with the Gatling and other early machine guns used to mow down indigenous warriors. Imperial conquest was linked to the creation of national or religious heroes, such as Henry Morton Stanley in King

Leopold's Congo, and the contest between the British General Gordon and the Mahdi of Omdurman in 1880s Sudan, a contest taken up in the 1890s by Kitchener.<sup>18</sup>

Heroic masculinity became fused with imperial or colonial conquest. There is some evidence that, at least in some cases, violent masculinity became associated with quotidian colonial administration, such as the case of Carl Hahn, the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland in South African-controlled South West Africa from 1915. Patricia Hayes has shown how the German-descended but English-identified Hahn was considered an enlightened administrator in his 'indirect rule' of the Ovambo, also gaining a reputation for his seeming attempts to preserve traditional culture and his ethnographic knowledge. Yet 'Cocky' Hahn was brutal in his administrative methods, a fact which came to light in official investigation of a complaint against him in 1923: not only was Hahn notorious for the floggings practised in his district, he was known to beat indigenous men, to kick them when he grew tired of beating, and in one allegation by another white official, to have come up behind an Ovambo woman servant kneeling to polish the veranda of his residence and to have taken a running kick straight into her genitals.<sup>19</sup> It is hard to imagine a more graphic instance of the gendering of colonial subordination and violence.

Drawing on the extensive international scholarship produced in the last twenty years in what is often called 'the new imperial history', this chapter surveys the interconstitution of gender, war and violence in a range of colonial settings. Attentive to both change over time and differences between colonies, it will assess the ways in which warfare and the sustained use of violent suppression shaped shifting gender ideologies and gendered relations of power in war itself, militarized colonial regimes and violent frontier daily life between European colonizers and the colonized.

#### Possible additions to complete the chapter

- could include material on British Burma and French Cambodia, late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> Cs, probably on prostitution, concubinage and other changes in women's status consequent on wars and militarily-enforced colonial rule

- could add more material from frontier Canadian west in mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> C e.g.

Lesley Erickson, *Westward Bound: Sex, Violence, the Law and the Making of a Settler Society* (UBC Press, 2012)

- could add example of panic over interracial sexual assault (as example of fear arising during perceived imperial crises) in early 20<sup>th</sup> C Southern Rhodesia e.g. Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902-1935* (Indiana University Press, 2000)

- could add section on gender relations including sexual abuse of indigenous women during "explorers" expeditions, which typically presaged colonial expansion and often frontier warfare—perhaps in sub-Saharan Africa e.g. Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Blackwell Publishers, 2001)

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese & Other Histories of Sumatra* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), p. 336.

<sup>2</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 44, 270.

<sup>3</sup> Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 145.

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- <sup>5</sup> Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 61-62.
- <sup>6</sup> Levine, *Prostitution, Race & Politics*, pp. 235-6.
- <sup>7</sup> Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), p. 159.
- <sup>8</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, "Marking Capture: White Women Captives in Australia," in Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (eds.), *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives* (Melbourne: History Dept. University of Melbourne, 1999), pp. 71-78; Julie Carr, *The Captive White Woman of Gippsland: In Pursuit of the Legend* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2001).
- <sup>9</sup> Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 64.
- <sup>10</sup> Nancy L. Paxton, *Writing under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 111.
- <sup>11</sup> For example, Ann Laura Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures," in Anne McClintock et al. (eds.), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 353.
- <sup>12</sup> Gordon Reid, *A Nest of Hornets: The Massacre of the Fraser Family at Hornet Bank Station, Central Queensland, 1857, and Related Events* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. ix.
- <sup>13</sup> *Moreton Bay Free Press* 18 November 1857, quoted in Reid, p. 74.
- <sup>14</sup> Hanneke Ming, "Barracks-Concubinage in the Indies, 1887-1920," *Indonesia* No. 35 (April 1983), p. 71.
- <sup>15</sup> Ming, "Barracks-Concubinage in the Indies," p. 72.
- <sup>16</sup> Angela Wanhalla, *In/Visible Sight: The Mixed-Descent Families of Southern New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2009), pp. 5-11.
- <sup>17</sup> Judith Binney, *Encircled Lands: Te Urewera, 1820-1921* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2009), pp. 71-2, 97.
- <sup>18</sup> Janice Boddy, *Civilizing Women: British Crusades in Colonial Sudan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 16-24.
- <sup>19</sup> Patricia Hayes, "'Cocky' Hahn and the 'Black Venus': The Making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa, 1915-46," *Gender & History* Vol. 8 No. 3 (November 1996): 374-381.