GENDER, IMPERIALISM AND GLOBAL EXCHANGES

EDITED BY STEPHAN F. MIESCHER,
MICHELE MITCHELL AND NAOKO SHIBUSAWA

WILEY Blackwell

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This edition first published 2015
Originally published as Volume 26, Issue 3 of *Gender & History*

Registered Office
John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

Editorial Offices
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available for this book.

ISBN 9781119052203 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Marie Schiffer Lafite, Cape Town, South Africa, 1914. Western Cape Archives and Record Service (KAB) PIO 1 - 147 E

Set in 11/12.5pt Times by Aptara Inc., New Delhi, India
Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

1 2015

Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges

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Introduction: Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges

Michele Mitchell and Naoko Shibusawa with Stephan F. Miescher

Neatly coiffed and tastefully dressed, Marie Schiffer Lafite gazes slightly to the right of the camera in a Cape Town studio photograph that accompanied her 1914 passport application.[1] A long-time resident of South Africa, Schiffer Lafite sought guarantee of re–entry privileges before leaving on an extended visit to relatives in her native Mauritius, a sugar plantation colony in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. Piecemeal evidence from early-twentieth-century immigration files in the Western Cape archives tells us that Schiffer Lafite lived in Port Elizabeth for a dozen years before moving westward to Cape Town in 1902, after her first marriage ended. She later married 'Lafite', a French hairdresser, and was working as a shop assistant at the time of her application. The archives do not reveal much more. They do not tell us when or how she emigrated, or whether she came alone, with a family or with others.

Schiffer Lafite's Mauritian origins, however, suggest that she left the plantation economy for a wider range of social opportunities in urban areas with more diversified economies. The ebb and flow of migration that deposited Schiffer Lafite on the South African coast was part of the massive global movement of fortune-seekers and labourers, free and unfree, dating back centuries. Mauritius itself was purportedly an uninhabited island prior to the advent of European colonisation in the late sixteenth century. The Dutch, then later the French and still later the British, established and operated sugar plantations with imported labour from Africa, India and elsewhere in Asia. Schiffer Lafite's ancestry reflected this movement and co-mingling of people; she was labelled 'creole/coloured' by the South African state. Lorena Rizzo's article in this collection underscores that such categorisations mattered to South Africa by the early twentieth century when its state officials came to see classifications as vital to accounting for and controlling the mobility of its African, Asian and European subject populations.

More so than excavating Schiffer Lafite's biography per se, Rizzo analyses such archival photographs for what they can tell us about strategies of governmentality in a modernising South African state.[2] The state archives reveal how an administrative bureaucracy came to oversee and govern a range of life's activities – including monitoring crossings over borders old and new. Yet the archives also reveal how the applicants' own self-representations (knowingly or unknowingly) resisted tidy, essentialising

Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges, First Edition. Edited by Stephan F. Miescher, Michele Mitchell and Naoko Shibusawa.

categorisations and placement. Even further, individuals like Schiffer Lafite used the very categories employed by the South African state to justify their subject positions. Rizzo stresses how Schiffer Lafite's file represents 'tensions of empire' – to borrow from Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper – because it shows how she used colonial ideals about gendered respectability to contest categorical exclusions based on her race and citizenship.[3] The visual element of the file allows us to see that the assistant shopkeeper carefully fashioned her self-image by wearing a fairly simple, yet chic, shirtwaist and by styling her hair in a manner popular among working women in Europe and the Americas during the 1910s. Schiffer Lafite's investment in a studio portrait may or may not have been especially for the application, but nonetheless underscored that she was a modern, respectable subject. Her strategy appeared to work: a Cape Town immigration officer approved her request for re-entry.

We draw upon an image and archival instance from Rizzo's article to open this special issue on gender, imperialism and global exchanges because her focus on the modernising state and border-crossings is at once compelling and illustrative. To be more specific, Rizzo's analysis of Marie Schiffer Lafite speaks in a particularly productive way to our overarching concern with how gender and sexuality have shaped embodied interactions in colonised settings. This volume contains analyses of gendered exchanges that occurred between colonial and metropolitan locations during periods of both instability and stability. Our contributors consider moments when upheaval challenged colonial regimes or even resulted in decolonisation; they explore how former colonies transitioned into becoming 'nations'; they examine transnational dynamics between modern states. *Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges* brings together scholarship that considers the gendered dimensions of sexual, bodily, social, material, political, cultural and intellectual dynamics of empire from a wide range of geographic, as well as temporal, settings.[4]

Articles by Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, Sivan Balslev, Jialin Christina Wu and Shaul Mitelpunkt take up the importance of gendered performance in exhibiting national strength or liberation. Similarly, both W. Chris Johnson and Katherine M. Marino compellingly demonstrate how perceptions and performances of womanhood – not to mention feminism and femininity – could also be mobilised in political struggles connected to decolonisation, anti-imperialism and transnational solidarity. Víctor M. Macías-González, Jane McCabe and Laura Ann Twagira are among the authors here who examine ways in which individuals responded to a globalising world that either expanded or circumscribed their access to power, wealth and status. But while Marie Grace Brown's article on Sudan in this issue refers to the centuries-old networks of trade that connected northeast Africa to South Asia, and articles by Christine Walker and Jessica Hinchy examine the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, the focus on the global has oriented the volume as a whole towards the twentieth century.

Our call for gendered histories of imperialism and global exchanges ended up, it seems, being decidedly more legible to scholars whose work grappled with a world created by capitalist modernity and hegemonic forms of western colonialism than to scholars working on earlier eras of imperialism. One possible reason for this issue's chronological tilt towards the early modern and modern, particularly the twentieth century, was our decision to think in terms of *global* exchanges, which arguably gestures to capitalist modernity.[5] Whereas earlier empires ruled by the Han, Romans, Guptas, Mongols, Aztecs, Incas, Songhai and others were non-capitalist, modern

colonialism cannot be separated from the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe. Indeed, capitalism implanted modern colonialism in enduring ways that transformed the societies of the colonised and the coloniser. As Ania Loomba has explained, 'Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries'.[6] African, Asian and indigenous labour toiled on sugar plantations in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, the Atlantic and the Caribbean producing for the colonisers both 'sweetness and power', as Sidney Mintz puts it. The sugar economies channelled profits to Europe, particularly as Spain, Portugal, Britain, the Netherlands and France made extensive forays into the Americas. In addition, sugar economies also underwrote entire industries necessary for the functioning of trade and for the trafficking of free and unfree labourers, not to mention the production of items used in diverse transactions: ships, barrels, ropes, iron shackles, weapons, promissory notes, ledgers, pens and inks. Similar economies stemmed from colonial production, cultivation and extraction of commodities and raw sources such as: cotton, tropical fruits, coffee, tobacco, grains, indigo, tea, opium, spices, rubber, silver, diamonds and precious minerals. The sale of these goods proved increasingly profitable for many planters, merchants, intermediaries and seafarers who were now operating across the globe in increasingly interlinked networks.[7] European colonialism thus spurred industry and allowed the primary accumulation of capital for further expansion.[8] Indeed, European colonialism and capitalist modernity has indelibly shaped the world with which we must contend today.

Yet as Samir Amin stresses, 'Capitalism was not destined to be Europe's exclusive invention'.[9] Given Chinese advances in state organisation, technology and manufacturing, capitalism could have been a Chinese innovation centuries before it appeared in Europe, as Amin, Kenneth Pomeranz and Andre Gunder Frank have pointed out.[10] But such alternatives were precluded once capitalism began in Europe and spread throughout the world by conquest and forceful acquiescence of other societies to reshape their economies to serve European and (later US and Japanese) profit-making goals. Capitalism has always been a worldwide system in aspiration if not in reality. Predicated on a logic of ever-expanding profits, capitalism thus continues to be a system that forever and even voraciously seeks new places and novel ways to 'monetise' (to use a more current term) anything and everything. According to Amin, moreover:

> Historical capitalism, as it has really existed, has always been imperialist in the precise sense that the mechanisms inherent in its worldwide spread, far from progressively 'homogenizing' economic conditions on a planetary scale, have, on the contrary, reproduced and deepened the contrast, counterposing the dominant (imperialist) centres to the dominated peripheries.[11]

In other words, capitalism has created an entrenched asymmetry – a worldwide modernity of unequal exchanges – in which labour is compensated or not according to one's status *and* location on the globe.[12] The very scale and scope, as well as the intrusiveness, of modern colonialism in directing and defining life distinguished it from earlier colonialisms.

Colonialisms that emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also distinct from earlier empires because of the ways in which human worth increasingly became determined by labour-value. This concept of human worth was distinct

from notions about 'wealth in persons': if such a concept can refer to a person's or community's acquisition of 'outsiders' whose labour can result in wealth accumulation, 'wealth in persons' quite importantly refers to the practice of incorporating ostensible 'outsiders' to replenish populations diminished by war, disease or plunder.[13] From the nineteenth century onward, however, capitalism has particularly relied upon forms of alienated labour that have even transformed workers themselves into commodities who have little – if any – control or creative input into the very goods they produce. Legally enslaved workers experienced a particularly profound alienation from their labour: the enslaved were quite literally commodified and could be 'sold' on the market in ways quite distinct from 'wage slavery'.[14] Crucial to the process of accumulating capital therefore was determining who would be denied full or even partial compensation for their labour power.

To be sure, like gender, concepts about 'race' have been decisive in determining how, whether and to what extent labourers receive compensation. Biologically based notions about human difference and variation became entrenched during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to imperial expansion, colonialism and Enlightenment thought. Indeed, as Kirsten Fischer argues, not only did 'assumptions about sexual difference also chang[e] dramatically in the eighteenth century', but 'assumptions of gender, race, and class difference propped each other up in the developing social hierarchy' as well.[15] 'Race' became a particularly significant marker of difference and unequal treatment among humans around the world who lived and toiled in modern colonial contexts with economies built upon unfree labour. Although slavery had existed earlier in various contexts, and whereas both Africans and indigenous populations in the Americas engaged in captive forms of labour both before and after their encounters with Europeans, the advent of European colonialism created a more permanent, heritable system of chattel, racialised slavery.[16] Race, then, served to differentiate between humans whose worth was constructed as beyond price or 'priceless' and humans who became exchangeable and valuated commodities.[17] Thus an individual's labour-value and human worth became pegged to varied yet overlapping racial hierarchies that have persisted long after the end of legal slavery and formal colonisation. Walter Mignolo reminds us that the 'modern/colonial world was founded and sustained through a geopolitical [and economic] organization of the world that, in the last analysis, consisted of an ethnoracial foundation'.[18]

Gender – or perceptions of sexualised and embodied difference – could and did shape notions about power, human worth, economic interactions and diverse forms of work during the pre-modern period and in non-capitalist contexts.[19] Feminist Marxists such as Silvia Federici insist that we must consider gender as another means of assessing how much a person was alienated from her labour.[20] That acknowledged, a critical shift occurred with the advent and expansion of industrial capitalism. As Joanna de Groot underscores, the 'growth of new forms of production . . . and of new forces of market relations and international interconnections' during the nineteenth century resulted in 'increasingly explicit and elaborated arguments for the crucial importance of gender and ethnic differences'.[21] In various locations and contexts during the nineteenth century and since, capitalism and imperialism have had a profound impact – often simultaneously – on gendered forms of productive as well as reproductive labour. And, in terms of a sexual division of labour between women and men, Heidi Tinsman stresses that wage labour can be seen as 'inherently problematic for women' due to the

long-established association of women with unpaid labour in domestic spaces.[22] Gender has, then, powerfully determined labour-value and human worth since the beginnings of capitalist modernity.[23] The contributors to this volume productively demonstrate how gendered, sexualised and racialised notions of human worth went beyond labour-value. They therefore contribute to vital scholarship that considers how people who were considered fully human were accorded a host of political and legal rights, a superior social standing and better access to economic, educational and cultural opportunities.

A common thread throughout the following articles is the matter of who deserved to be treated and recognised as fully human in an era of imperial exchanges and ongoing capitalist globalisation.[24] Work on the subject of imperialism and global exchanges can, of course, focus squarely on the trade of manufactured products and raw resources. Given the centrality of gender, embodiment and sexuality to this volume, the articles herein more closely examine human actions, representations and aspirations. A number of contributors interrogate how, whether and why actors in particular historical contexts either adopted or subverted normative behaviours that dominant populations associated with human integrity. Moreover, the authors consider how concepts about personhood have been shaped by gendered assumptions regarding the very ability to make rational economic decisions, participate in affairs of state, question authority, attain education, travel without supervision or restriction or decide how – and whether – to work for others. Jessica Hinchy, Jane McCabe and Laura Ann Twagira explore work and workers in an extensive manner; Hinchy, Christine Walker and Lorena Rizzo discuss colonial contexts in which enslaved or racialised labour was anything but incidental.

This special issue is also designed to problematise the notion of 'exchange' through critical examination of labour flows and the extraction of resources. 'Exchange' does not refer solely to the extractive or exploitative. A number of authors, including Marie Grace Brown, Sivan Balslev, Sarah Steinbock-Pratt and Víctor Macías-González, note the pleasures and benefits that women and men derived from diverse commodities. Through gender analysis, contributors assess complex and occasionally conflicted forms of interchange – between women and men, women and women, men and men – that involved some degree of mutuality. And, authors such as Jialin Christina Wu, Lorena Rizzo, Katherine Marino, W. Chris Johnson and Shaul Mitelpunkt additionally consider how gender and sexuality shaped forms of interaction and mobility as well as collective resistance, projections of power and militarism. As a whole, this volume contributes to existing literature that reveals how thorough gender analysis of political economies provides a notably productive means of considering both global and globalising practices.

The special issue also contributes to the theoretical and historiographical effort to widen the conventional focus on how the centres dominated the peripheries. For the most part, our authors are less concerned even with how centres and peripheries mutually influenced and constituted each other.[25] Instead, they largely focus on actions primarily located outside the metropoles. From wide-ranging locations, diversely situated with respect to evolving global markets, they examine the movements and exchanges of bodies, ideas and commodities. They analyse the ways in which people took advantage of, made sense of, tried to work with or fought against the conditions wrought by a world forged and indelibly shaped by western imperialism and capitalism. After all, as Cooper and Stoler have pointed out, 'What Europeans encountered in the colonies

was not open terrain for economic dominion, but people capable of circumventing and undermining the principles and practices on which extraction or capitalist development was based'.[26]

We have organised the articles into four major themes or rubrics: labour, commodities, fashioning politics and mobility and activism. This structure is not only intended to illuminate critical connections between the articles within each section. Given that a number of authors address more than one major theme in their respective articles, we have also juxtaposed the organising rubrics themselves in a manner that we hope creates especially revealing and meaningful dialogue *across* different sections of the special issue. There is, then, considerable overlap between historical dynamics and phenomena – including labour flows, consumption, sartorial practices, cultural transmissions, colonialism, nationalism, border crossings, transnationalism, activism and state interactions – that are addressed by the authors who appear in different sections. When we began this collaborative project, our approach to gender, imperialism and global exchanges was deeply informed by a shared sense that it is imperative to highlight sexualised and gendered treatments of *working* bodies. The special issue therefore begins with three articles that focus on the gendered politics of labour.

Labour

It could be said that we are following the example of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, the ur-text of capitalist modernity, by foregrounding our work with a section on labour.[27] Our ambition for this special issue is much more modest, of course, and we differ from Smith in our ultimate aim – especially given our commitment to rigorous analysis of gender and sexuality. Our focus is not so much investigating the wealth of nations, but exploring how gender and sexuality have shaped the ways in which people have functioned within a world of increasing unequal exchanges and asymmetries since the advent of European imperialism. Who, where and – as Hinchy shows – *when* one was situated on earth forcefully dictated one's life conditions and chances. Some humans were commodities; others were denied full recompense for the value that their labour yielded for their employers. Indeed, as Marx famously explained, under-compensating or not compensating labour enabled capitalists to accumulate profit or capital.[28] The essays grouped in this section examine the expansion or contraction of access to status, power and material comfort of three very different types of workers: nineteenth-century eunuchs in North India with administrative and military roles; biracial Anglo-Indian young men in New Zealand in first decades of the twentieth century and farmers in French Soudan (Mali) during the Cold War. In addition to focusing on labour, the three articles speak to how gendered notions were central to the conceptualisation of workers.[29]

Increasing global and labour asymmetries notwithstanding, labourers, even slaves, sometimes held positions of power. Jessica Hinchy examines the eunuch slaves known as *khwajasarais*, who held high-status jobs in the state of Awadh in North India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *khwajasarais* served as entertainers and musicians, as well as military commanders, negotiators, envoys and transmitters of intelligence. Yet they lost their high-status roles after the British East India Company established a system of indirect rule over Awadh in the nineteenth century. Having eunuchs in politics and administration severely challenged British understandings of

proper gender order. British officials thus believed that *khwajasarais* were merely household slaves who had inappropriately come to dominate the public sphere and kept their rulers secluded in the feminine harem. Initial British attempts to regulate *khwajasarais'* labour and curtail their political influence failed due to the resistance by both the Awadh ruler and the *khwajasarais* themselves. But the British won the final battle, using perceived maladministration and the *khwajasarais'* continued political power as the reason for annexing Awadh in 1856. Once slave-nobles, the *khwajasarais* were ousted from their positions and reduced to poverty. In addition to providing a compelling window into colonial refashioning of slavery, gender and governance in British India, Hinchy shows the centrality of gender and sexuality for an understanding of imperial expansion.[30]

Jane McCabe tells the unlikely, but slightly happier story of adolescent, biracial Anglo-Indian men, who were sent away from their homes in Kalimpong, northeast India, to live in rural parts of New Zealand between 1908 and 1938. Seen as the problematic products of one type of imperial interaction, these biracial men were forced to participate in another exchange in the imperial system – fulfilling a need for farm labour in the settler colonies. In so doing, they could demonstrate that they were more robust than the stereotypical 'effeminate' Indian man, and they could find better economic opportunities and social integration than were available to them in India. This plan to kill two birds with one stone, however, did not go smoothly. The Anglo-Indian men, educated and with more refined notions of masculinity, experienced a cultural clash with the rougher, frontiersmen type of white settler masculinity in rural New Zealand. Still racially marginalised, the Anglo-Indian men found it difficult to become landowning farmers themselves. Finding work instead as wage-labourers or small businessmen, the men did achieve social integration. McCabe's study thus reveals the vision of making Anglo-Indian men into hardy, imperial citizens was limited by the ideologies of race, gender and social hierarchies dominant in New Zealand.[31]

Laura Ann Twagira also studies grand colonial plans to shape men into suitable workers. She distinguishes between smallholder farmers and cosmopolitan workers who were both part of the Office du Niger, the irrigation project launched by the French in the Soudan of the 1930s and continued by the Malian postcolonial government. African forced labour built the Office, which was a distinctly male space. French colonial technocrats sought to turn these men, who frequently felt like slaves, into modern farmers. The post-war era brought the abolition of forced labour and a turn to mechanisation that created the African wage-worker. The Office mechanisation was assisted by international development funds that gained prominence within the Cold War context. Twagira, drawing on oral history research, unpacks how African wage-workers, as technological agents, shaped their own engagements with modern agricultural technology, while also interacting with the international politics of development. The two forms of male work at the Office related to what it meant to be a male farmer, as well as what it meant to be a man working with technology in Mande culture. The men who operated industrial machines claimed esoteric technological knowledge that resembled the secret knowledge of the Mande blacksmith. Twagira examines the gendered African technological culture at the Office that bridged the colonial and postcolonial divide. Significantly, her discussion of heavy machinery speaks to labour and to the use of commodities by workers who perform various tasks; such gendered analysis by Twagira therefore relates to analyses of commodities.[32]