Gendered Colonialisms in African History

Nancy Rose Hunt, Tessie P Liu and Jean Quataert

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Co-edited by
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Editorial

The editorial collective of *Gender & History*, in cooperation with Blackwells, has decided to publish a book series alongside the journal in order to make path-breaking work on the gender dimension of past societies widely available to students, teachers and public audiences. These international, interdisciplinary collections will address the social history of gender relations, changing cultural constructions of feminity and masculinity, and the power of gender to represent and reinforce other forms of difference and hierarchy. We seek especially to trace the links between representations of womanhood and manhood and the social positions of women and men, and to examine the gendered construction of class, race, ethnicity, sexual identity, and other relations of domination and subordination. While the series is open to a variety of theoretical perspectives, we aim to develop feminist scholarship that attends to inequalities of power. Individual volumes will have specific themes, but all will approach topics from a comparative perspective and suggest new conceptual frameworks for gender analysis.

We begin the series with *Gendered Colonialism in African History*, which represents *Gender & History's* first focused look at the history of sub-Saharan Africa. The collection presents essays by younger scholars that address questions which are just emerging in this field. We know this volume will be of great interest to Africanists and to students of colonialism and postcolonial societies in other regions. Europeanists and Americanists have as much to learn as specialists, for placing gender in an African perspective reveals striking new ways of looking at things that are often taken for granted: the body and the construction of the gendered subject; connections between representations and violence; generational relationships among women and among men; the process through which white masculinity was constituted through the exclusion of white womanhood as well as the oppression of black manhood; memory, fantasy, and the gendering of legimitate and illegitimate forms of power; and the contradictions of consumption. These essays question received dichotomies of colonizer/colonized, metropole/locality, hegemony/resistance, and tradition/modernity, and suggest the multifarious ways in which gender became imbricated in relations of power.

The editorial collective is especially grateful to Nancy Rose Hunt, a specialist in African history, who took time from her own archival research

and field work in Europe and Africa to conceive this volume, communicate with authors, and write the introduction; and to Tessie P. Liu and Jean Quataert who, as historians of France and Germany respectively, see Europeans' relations with colonial subjects as central to the formation of European identities and worked on this volume in that spirit. The journal's American co-editor, Grey Osterud, tried to ensure that these essays are comprehensible to non-specialists, did the copy-editing and proof-reading, and compiled the index. Finally, the editorial collective is grateful to those in both the book and journals divisions at Blackwells for enabling our dream of a book series to come to fruition, and to Basler Afrika Bibliographien for allowing us to use the stunning photograph on the cover.

ABSTRACTS

Introduction

NANCY ROSE HUNT

This introduction reviews major trends in African women's and gender history since the 1970s, and argues that these essays on 'gendered colonialisms in African history' demonstrate that an important third wave of historical writing in African colonial and post-colonial studies has begun. This third wave is marked by subtle, but cautious 'post-' moves; masculinity studies; and careful attention to memory and secrecy, generational and homosocial struggles, African forms of meaning-making, and a multiplicity of 'metropolitanizations' within colonial and post-colonial Africa.

'*Ngaitana* (I will circumcise myself)': The Gender and Generational Politics of the 1956 Ban on Clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya

LYNN M. THOMAS

Drawing on state and mission documents as well as oral interviews conducted in Kenya and England during 1995, Thomas examines the colonial state's unsuccessful effort in 1956–59 to ban clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya. Thomas challenges the terms of contemporary international debates over 'female genital mutilation' and Kenyan historiography on 'female circumcision' by situating girls and women as the most ardent defenders of clitoridectomy. Thomas's history of the ban also reveals how relations of gender and generation structured and subverted the elaboration of a more interventionist colonial state in postwar rural Kenya.

'Cocky' Hahn and the 'Black Venus': The Making of a Native Commissioner in South West Africa, 1915–46

PATRICIA HAYES

This article investigates the links between gender and administration, ethnography, and violence in the shaping of South African colonial rule in northern Namibia after 1915. The Native Commissioner, 'Cocky' Hahn, elaborated a mode of indirect rule in Ovamboland which depended on local hierarchies and sought to keep rituals intact. Hahn simultaneously practiced violence against the Ovambo and studied them as an ethnographer. The essay explores an incident of violence against an Ovambo woman to show how the invisibility and inaudibility of African women were produced and reproduced in colonialism and in history.

'Not Welfare or Uplift Work': White Women, Masculinity and Policing in South Africa

KEITH SHEAR

Analysing the centrality of gender in the formation of state institutions in early twentieth-century South Africa's emerging segregationist order, the article uses newspapers and government files to reconstruct a campaign by white women to enlist in the police. The ensuing debate, featuring competing visions of the state's role in shaping and maintaining the social order, compelled government officials to articulate their own assumptions about policing in a colonial context. Shear demonstrates that the labeling and consequent suppression of the campaigners' position as 'feminine' gendered officials' contrasting vision of punitive racial policing as 'masculine'.

Love Magic and Political Morality in Central Madagascar, 1875–1990

DAVID GRAEBER

This article focuses on the dangerous forces that people in Imerina, Madagascar, see as lurking in their social worlds and explores how their most intimate fears are related to broader questions of political morality. These fears are often worked out in stories about magic. Asking why ideas about the gender of practitioners of love medicine in Imerina appear to have undergone a dramatic reversal over the past century leads Graeber to a whole series of questions about the links between perceptions of colonialism and, especially, slavery and the association of women with powers of command.

'Fork Up and Smile': Marketing, Colonial Knowledge and the Female Subject in Zimbabwe

TIMOTHY BURKE

Since the 1920s, capitalist professionals in Europe and the United States have frequently feminized the activity of consumption and the figure of the consumer. This article explores this process in colonial Zimbabwe from the 1950s through the 1970s, marking the manner in which colonial institutions and ideologies, particularly those connected to domesticity, were reproduced within marketing. Burke traces both continuities with colonial visions and new contradictions that emerged when marketers conceptualized the ideal African consumer as female.

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Introduction

NANCY ROSE HUNT

Masculinity as theme, gender and colony as analytics, men as subjects and authors of gendered histories: these are some of the more striking moves that this set of essays in African history reveals at first glance. The topics explored here from a gendered perspective include generational relationships, representation and violence, colonial state-building, consumption and commodity cultures, memory and forgetting, and languages of domesticity, reproduction, and 'tradition'. Final selections for anthologies of previously unpublished work are necessarily arbitrary, contingent as they are on the predilections and schedules of multiple authors, readers and editors. This collection is no different. Many exciting contributions needed more time than our deadlines would allow, and much that might have been included never reached our mailbox. The chronological and geographical boundaries of this issue are delimited more narrowly than we would have liked, as are authorial identity and location. *Gender & History* welcomes more work from the African continent, essays not originally written in English, and reports of research-in-progress in both fields and archives.

Numerous anthologies devoted to women and gender in African history have been published over the past three decades.[1] This special issue, while making original work available, does not fully do justice to current debates about and shifts in geography and identity that have taken place in the production of historical knowledge about Africa. Our inclusion of essays by a Zimbabwean historian trained in Cambridge (UK) now based at the University of the Western Cape and by a South African historian now based at Northwestern University (USA) is a clue to recent transnational movements within Africanist scholarly production. Yet this selection only hints at realignments that began in the 1980s. More and more African men and women have migrated to African studies centers in the West, especially in North America, for graduate training, post-doctoral fellowships, special institutes, and conferences. The late 1980s and 1990s have also seen the first concerted attempts to promote women scholars as well as gender studies within sub-Saharan Africa through doctoral fellowships, institutes and conferences.[2]

It surely would be incorrect to claim, therefore, that the five essays included here are uniquely representative of the best new work on gendered

colonialisms in African history. Recent issues of major journals, such as the *Journal of African History*, the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, and the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, reveal how integral to the field scholarship on women and gender has become. Yet such a conceit nevertheless shapes my comments here. These five essays represent important new directions in historical studies of colonial Africa, serve to define a certain moment in historical writing among Africanists, and suggest past and future lines of inquiry in feminist historical studies of sub-Saharan Africa.

This collection should be placed within a historical trajectory of studies on women and gender in Africa. In the early 1970s, North American feminist historians and anthropologists, like feminist scholars in other fields and regions, embarked on a revolution in the authorship and subject matter of historical inquiry. Until recently most work in African gender studies has focused on women rather than men as subjects of history. A first wave of feminist scholarship focused primarily on the economically productive activities and social agency of African women.[3] A second wave of writing, latterly influenced by what I call the 'colonialism and culture' school of colonial studies, turned to questions of gender meanings and relations, to colonial domesticity, customary law, motherhood, reproduction, sexuality, and the body.[4] Are we now, with these studies of masculinity, of the formation of subjective, social and institutional identities, and of generational, homosocial struggles, and with subtle, cautious 'post-' moves, witnessing the beginning of a third wave in histories of gender in Africa?

It is important to remember the vexed origins of women's history in North America: women were struggling for their own place within the academy, all too often against explicit sex discrimination. Women scholars struggled for recognition, for funding, and for a new vision that would include African women's social action. In those days of self-conscious white liberal guilt and the search for a useable African past, interest focused on women in development, especially agrarian change, land tenure, urbanization, and women's roles in formal, informal, and household economies. Although feminist scholars worked within and against the dominant narratives of economic transformation in Africa, their work was seldom integrated into mainstream scholarship. As Jean Hay has so astutely pointed out, the marginality of African women's history and Africanist women historians is evidenced in the kind of publication that ensued: interdisciplinary anthologies and special issues focused on women.[5]

Women's history monographs did, on occasion, receive accolades within African studies. Consider the Herskovits prize, the highest North American award bestowed on Africanist authors. In 1980, Margaret Strobel's *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890–1975* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979) was the first book by a woman and about African women to receive this honor. Claire C. Robertson's *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana* (Indiana University Press,

Bloomington, 1984) won the prize five years later. Women's history again received this recognition in 1991. Luise White's *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990) continued the tradition of portraying African women as powerful subjects of their own lives, yet it also suggested how much the field had changed over two decades. Not only did the book highlight sexuality, a theme that had hardly been broached since Strobel's original work on ritual, but women's history was no longer so narrowly tied to marking out the parameters of and justifications for a new field of historical inquiry. Rather, White used the history of prostitution to refigure the history of labor, cities and the colonial state.

The two most recent Herskovits awards have also gone to women: Keletso E. Atkins's *The Moon Is Dead! Give us our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and James Currey, London, 1993) in 1994, and Henrietta L. Moore and Megan Vaughan's *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia, 1890–1990* (Heinemann, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1994) in 1995. During her acceptance speech, Atkins moved the audience with an autobiographical sketch of her own migrations, exclusions, and significant turning-points as an African-American woman struggling for acceptance as an African historian. Although Atkins did not define her book explicitly as a study of masculinity, it is an important examination of identity formation and the struggles of washermen in Durban. *Cutting Down Trees* was the first Herskovits prize-winner with the word gender in the title. Co-authored by an anthropologist and a historian, this history of gender relations and the production of knowledge marks out its terrain and analytic through reconsidering the work of a woman anthropologist, Audrey Richards. *Cutting Down Trees* also marked the emergence of a significant 'post-' move within African history.

The lexicon of cultural history—grammars and tropes, representations and gender meanings, modernity, coloniality and post-coloniality, consumption and public culture[6]—has arrived in African historical studies. These paradigm shifts from women's history to gender history and from roles, agency, and oral history to identities, subjectivities, and memory are not, of course, limited to African history. Yet these essays show that such moves are coming into African studies in particular ways, with specific sensibilities and choices in subject matter. These sensitivities involve acute debates about the production of Africanist knowledge and epistemologies in and especially outside the continent.

This collection, therefore, demonstrates that histories of gender in Africa have moved far from the first generation of women's history in their contents and analytic frames, in their use of social theory and evidence, and in authorship. These essays also provide an opportunity to examine the questions that are being marked out as subjects of research and debate in

historical studies on colonial Africa. Gender as a set of social and symbolic relations is at the center of analysis here. At the same time, new themes and vocabularies emanating from cultural studies—representation, alterity, cultural production, commodity culture, transnationalism—are at work and play, refiguring the import and methodologies of gender analysis itself. These essays help situate how Africanist scholars are reproducing and disrupting various 'post-' moves, both those which are more generally effecting 'intellectual transformation across the human and social sciences'[7] and those quite particular to new scholarship (some Africanist) in colonial and post-colonial studies.

Colonialism can no longer be viewed as a process of imposition from a singular European metropole, but must be seen as 'tangled layers of political relations' and lines of conflicting projections and domestications that converged in specific local misunderstandings, struggles, and representations (which Graeber alternately terms fantasies). These essays remind us that social action in colonial and post-colonial Africa cannot be reduced to such polarities as metropole/colony or colonizer/colonized or to balanced narrative plots of imposition and response or hegemony and resistance. Such narratives, however refigured and nuanced in recent years, limit our appreciation of the enigmatic mutations and durations, facts and fictions, transgressions and secrecies that sustained research in fields and archives opens up.

The work presented here insists on multiple and distinct colonialisms, metropoles, masculinities, femininities, and domesticities. These pluralities refuse to collapse into easy twos, into binary formulations about African colonial life. Indeed, the most consistent current throughout these five essays is a critique of such reified dualities. David Graeber almost skips over the colonial as a domain of social action altogether (with the exception of the Norwegian missionary, Lars Vig, and his collection of love charms), evoking it rather as a strongly transformative yet parenthetical backdrop for his analysis of memory work, the transformation of social identity, and nightmarish fantasies within Merina social relations. Graeber argues that the important question is not 'how people dealt with their conquerors, but how, as a result, they ended up reconsidering and remaking their relations with each other'.

Lynn Thomas insists that situating such a history within a bifurcated narrative of indigenous responses to European impositions would flatten the complexity of local conflicts, dilemmas, and meaning-making that were at the core of social action. Indeed, such a casting would distort how much of African history was being made, if not wholly outside of colonial power relations, then at least in African terms (and songs) and outside of colonial purview. Keith Shear argues that a binary colonizer/colonized framework would be unable to account for the conflict within white South African society over the gendering of policing. Shear defines identity not in subjective or social but in institutional terms, examining how the masculine

identity of the South African police force was defined in reaction to the gender meanings that an alternative policing system advocated and staffed by white women represented. The threat of a new conjunction of women and police power acted circuitously to bolster, or even to forge, the hypermasculinity that was required to enforce racial domination. In the process, a 'subordinate masculinity' of women was excluded once and for all.[8]

While Thomas rejects the Africanist 'resistance paradigm that reifies dualities', Graeber and Hayes reject respectively the paradigms of hegemony and colonial representations that have shaped much recent, fashionable work in colonial studies.[9] Graeber insists that colonized African subjects were not always or only creatures of colonial hegemonic institutions, work spaces, and explicit domesticating projects of identity transformation. Rather, he demonstrates that Merina people were also creatures of their own fears, fantasies, and shifting social relations, of their own memories and inaudibilities of previous, precolonial forms of servitude and authority.

Timothy Burke, by contrast, suggests that colonial Africans in the postwar period were creatures of colonial cultural production: they were consumers. And, I would add, they consumed more than commodities; they also consumed images, stories, newspapers, cartoons, movies, and music. To explore the full complexity and cultural *métissages* of masculinities and femininities in late colonial Africa, Africanists will need to expand the kinds of sources they examine. These essays demonstrate that the resources for composing colonial identities were vast and various, and that there was much more cultural mixture going on in these compositions and recompositions than historians and anthropologists have usually allowed for.

Moreover, Africanists will need to dismantle the notion that there was any single metropole for any given African locality, colony, identity, or gender crisis. Political metropole? Perhaps. Yet social, cultural, or economic metropole, one external capital for impositions and borrowings? No. Just as Hayes's and Shear's contributions insist that we avoid imagining any linear transfers from Europe of languages of masculinity and domesticity, so Burke's work on advertising suggests the new possibilities for cultural meaning provided by other media such as popular literature, radio and cinema. How would these multiple forms of cultural production have intersected with the lives and meaning-making of such social types as Kenyan female and white South African male initiates, stoep-cleaning Ovambo women, European tourists curious about 'native tribes', colonial ethnographer-officials, Merina love-medicine users and accusers, middle-class white South African police women and poor white prostitutes, and advertisers and consumers? How did such new cultural forms become part of various men's and women's composition of masculine and feminine (among other) identities? In Cyprien Ekwenzi's novel, *Jagua Nana*, young Freddie may have looked from Lagos to London for his dreams of manhood, but his middle-aged girlfriend, named after a fancy motor-car, looked to Accra as her cultural capital for the latest clothing fashions as late as the early 1960s.[10] When, if ever, did

Hollywood become yet another cultural metropole within specific African localities? And what kinds of gendered iconography did men and women quote or censor from these kinds of resources?

A key question that Burke's work helps us pose is: how did the lives, aspirations, and gendered styles of Africans, white and black, intersect with various forms of cultural production within what was an increasingly global *ecumene*, not necessarily those cultural forms emanating from London, Paris, or Lisbon alone, but from Lagos, Accra, Onitsha, Johannesburg and Bombay as well?[11] My sense is that eventually, hopefully sooner rather than later, Africanists will begin to compare and contrast their micro-histories of colonial Europeans and 'colonial middle figures'[12] in a growing variety of complex milieux so as to begin to note some of the grids and grammars—geographic, linguistic, denominational, representational—to which these people were mutually subject, some of the ideas, images, commodities, and styles around which 'modern' (and 'pre-modern') European and African colonial men and women forged their 'differential identities'. Indeed, one of Patricia Hayes's central points is that 'Cocky' Hahn was consuming Hottentot Venus postcards, organizing flogging spectacles in his domain for Ovambo chiefs, displaying dances of female initiates for official South African visitors to his territory, and attending them himself in local Kwanyama leather clothes.

What kinds of principles and practices of 'mutuality and exclusivity' were at work in the formation of colonial identities and situations? Consider again Shear's essay, which turns precisely around the historical emergence of a principle of exclusivity, the rigidifying of the masculine here reinforcing racial domination. Moreover, where did women's and men's 'differential power relations among each other'[13] converge with the composition and identification of any individual or social category? Consider rugged, rugby-playing 'Cocky' Hahn in relation to his frail accuser, the mandolin-playing Percival Chaplin, in Hayes's study. Homosocial tensions were also at work among Meru women and girls in post-war Kenya. Thomas's essay transforms how we think about female rites of passage in Africa, including those that have embraced forms of body marking such as clitoridectomy. Such a gendered practice can no longer be uniquely scripted as a struggle between colonizer and colonized, or between men and women. Rather, Thomas highlights the generational conflicts among women over this homosocial domain of life.

Africanists have long negotiated issues of racial mutualities and exclusivities in colonial history. We need now to consider intra-male and intra-female forms of social organization, leisure, institution building, and domination and submission. Thomas, Shear, and Hayes explicitly point to homosocial identity formation, whether in social, institutional, or subjective identities. Shear reminds us that the language of domesticity and of female difference which underlay the white, middle-class movement for female preventive policing was based on a metropolitan discourse that

ultimately reinforced the conviction that the South African police force should be a homosocial domain of men. Advertising and the development of consumer cultures in post-war Africa were mediated by similar languages. The very focus on creating African 'middle figures' in single-family, urban homes had important consequences for homosocial forms of organization and leisure in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

Demeaning an effeminate subordinate or controlling rebellious, youthful girls in these homosocial situations were signs of manhood and womanhood, just as the insistence on a homosocial police force was a way to reinforce state power and racialized violence. What kinds of historical antecedents do these forms of intra-male and intra-female domination and submission have in particular historical settings? It is not possible to read Dunbar Moodie and Patrick Harries on mine marriages in South Africa and not wonder about the performative quality and emotional depth such relationships might have had. I do not intend to suggest that homosexuality was part of these homosocial relations in Kenya and South Africa.[14] I do think, however, that the analytic vocabulary of homosocial and heterosocial which has proven so useful in American and European gender histories would be immensely helpful in sharpening gender analysis here. Thus I signal its curious absence from African histories.[15] These essays show that men and women were defining and expressing masculinities and femininities according to generational, institutional, and work rhythms and practices. They also show that whether men and women were interacting with each other or primarily in relation to others of their same gender *mattered.* A vocabulary of homosocial and heterosocial would help in locating these differences, alongside age and race, as axes of power, and would enable an even more complex tracing of gender within men's and women's lives in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

New questioning of what we mean by metropole and colony has been a critical line of thought since Bernard Cohn, Ann Stoler, Fred Cooper, Nicholas Dirks, and Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff began writing new histories, organizing conferences, and assembling collections, generating what might be termed the 'tensions of empire' or 'colonialism and culture' school of historical ethnography. This school still poses immense challenges to European and American historiographies. Indeed, one can lament how little sustained social history research has yet been done on the internal colonies of Europe and the historical formation of European colonial identities on metropolitan terrain.[16] Future work will likely include much more comparative analysis, multi-sited histories, and an examination of both the internal colonies and colonizations of Europe and the external 'metropoles' and 'metropolitanizations' within Africa suggested by Burke, Hayes, and Shear.

The challenges along these lines are myriad. The question of how to effect a recentering of the production of knowledge about Africa within Africa itself has received considerable attention in recent years.[17] Yet the challenges for African colonial studies do not lie only there. The questioning

of what we mean by 'metropole', a question that is raised at least implicitly in all these essays, poses immense difficulties to Africanist historians long accustomed to approaching colonial studies through a single European power. Scholarly work has too long been marked out along the lines of scholars' linguistic competencies and national identities. This kind of specialization has papered over transnational processes and hybrid colonial situations, where multiple metropolitan identities and projections overlapped and conflicted. Just as anthropology may in future years be reshaped by an increased awareness of the need for 'multi-sited ethnography',[18] these essays pose questions about the historical processes of gendered and colonial identity formation that will likely only be answered through comparative and multi-sited research methodologies. Language skills, national identities, funding sources, research itineraries, and perhaps even intellectual inquisitiveness have, thus far, worked against such approaches. French and francophone Africanists have tended to write French colonial histories, British and anglophone Africanists to write British colonial histories. Sustained communication and cross-fertilization across this key linguistic divide is rare indeed. Belgian (post)-colonial and lusophone Africa have been characterized by greater diversity in the linguistic competencies and nationalities of practitioners. Yet the linearity of most historical formulations of what constituted metropole still stands in much of these more marginalized literatures.[19]

Finally, these essays testify to a firm refusal to fetishize the domains of archive, representation, text. There are certainly signs of a shift toward 'post-ness' in African studies here, yet on no easy, unproblematized terms. Rather, these essays turn away from the recent fashion of studies in colonial representations, too often facile, literary rereadings of such public forms of colonial discourse as memoirs, travelogues, fiction, and photographs. They insist that the politics of representation cannot be confined to European geographies and imaginaries, but must extend to African ways of conceptualizing time, space, and social relations. Equally important, these essays examine the concrete historical practices which flowed from such European representations, integrating the histories of Africans in all their diversity with those of Europeans, and in the process transforming both.

Hayes's essay represents a strong and significant criticism of what has become a fashionable enterprise, studies of European iconographic and discursive projections of Africa which often border on the prurient and, in the very act of republishing this negativity, risk restimulating the perverse Euro-American fascination with the colonial encounter. Hayes insists that studies of representation not be detached from histories of the implications of this sexualized form of degradation for social action, especially violence. The point is not to reject a 'post-' lexicon of representations and the production of knowledge, but to make sure that studies of the colonial Africanist imaginary are anchored to specific, local historical contexts, power relations, and human interactions.