

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS: ROUTES AND ROOTS – 11

Bodies beyond Binaries

in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia



Edited by

KATE IMY, TERESA SEGURA-GARCIA,
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Bodies beyond Binaries

Global Connections: Routes and Roots

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and Erica Wald

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For Coco and Toni, who were born while this book was in the making.

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Unframing the Binary: Introducing Bodies Beyond Binaries

*Kate Imy, Teresa Segura-Garcia, Elena Valdameri
and Erica Wald*

As a complex or as a matrix—and in contradistinction to accounts that render it mainly a supine subject—the body is an agent, a force, which *indexes* historical processes that, in turn, help to stabilize it as an object of violence, a resource for labor, a vessel of reproduction, an instrument of pleasure, and above all, a mode of power.¹
—Antoinette Burton, “The Body in and as World History”

In its constitutive precariousness, perceptual blind-spots, linguistic indeterminations, muscular tremors, memory lapses, bleedings, rages, and passions, the body as archive re-places and diverts notions of archive away from a documental deposit or a bureaucratic agency dedicated to the (mis)management of “the past”.²
—André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive”

In the past few decades, historical research has amply demonstrated that the body can be fruitfully employed as a prism through which to explore not only forms of social identity like race and gender but also phenomena linked to processes of modernity like nationalism, imperialism, and anticolonial struggles. *Bodies Beyond Binaries in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia* centers on histories of the body to understand the embodied making and unmaking of nations and empires within individual and collective bodies. Formal European empires claimed preeminence over much of the world in the nineteenth century, before endemic warfare and violence in the twentieth century led to a collapse and reconfiguration of power in Asia around imperially-minded nations like the United States, Japan, and China. By exploring how former colonial powers informed and interacted with nation states, as well as Indigenous, migrant, and displaced communities, this volume endeavors

¹ Antoinette Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 272–284, here 276.

² André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances”, *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 2 (2010): 34.

to understand how embodied, human experiences of pain and pleasure, horror and exaltation, reveal the faultlines of inclusion and exclusion that colonial powers alternately promised or withheld, shaping postcolonial destinies.

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have explored how, like women and subaltern groups in local contexts, ruling powers regarded colonized people as being enmeshed in a bodily existence.³ In this, historians of the body owe a great debt to feminist scholars reinterpreting the insights of scholars such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said, most associated with the so-called “somatic turn”.⁴ Historians such as Anne McClintock, Ann Stoler, Antoinette Burton, and Theodore Jun Yoo, among others, have provided important insights about how this inescapable corporeality made the attainment of rationality—and by extension, autonomy and freedom—questionable for the colonized and contingent upon different variables.⁵ Bodies—raced, sexed, classed and ethnicized—were central sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised and on which the colonial rule of difference was inscribed. Race went beyond an association with skin color and incorporated many forms of somatized or biologized distinction. Certain physical traits came to denote inferiority, aberration, and anomaly due to essentialized gendered and sexual connotations. In the context of asymmetrical power relations, “natural” physical difference became the justification for social inequality. Investigating the body mainly as a symbolic and discursive signifier, scholars have challenged naturalistic essentialisms by shifting the focus on the socio-cultural constructions of the body.

The body has proved to be a compellingly complex and productive topic for historical interrogation, as it sheds light on the intricacies and entanglements of race,

³ For a concise discussion on the somatic turn in scholarship, see Bryan Turner, “Introduction: The Turn of the Body”, *Routledge Handbook of Body Studies*, ed. idem (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012) 1–17; and Roger Cooter, “The Turn of the Body: History and the Politics of the Corporeal”, *Arbor* 186, no. 743 (2010): 393–405. On feminist perspectives on the body a classic reading is Londa L. Schiebinger, *Feminism and the Body* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self”, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Writings of Foucault*, eds. Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press 1997), 223–251; and “Governmentality”, in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, eds. Michel Foucault and James D. Faubion (London: Penguin, 2001), 3:201–222; Edward Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors”, *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 205–225.

⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and, by the same author, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities* (London: Routledge, 1999); Theodore Jun Yoon, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labour and Health, 1910–1945* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2008).

gender, class, health, and age. These debates continue to resonate today with the fundamental changes in the relationships existing between bodies, technology, and society. The ambivalence of the body turns it into an object that is both inscribed and defies inscriptions. The body is both universal yet particular, individual yet collective, a living organism yet a cultural product, something timeless and at the same time profoundly historicized. Modern rational thinking has tried to erase this ambivalence and tension. Within science, we find the body framed as an object of nature to heal, within the broader economy as labor to employ, in the light of politics as matter to discipline and control, in religion as flesh to redeem, in psychology as unconscious to free and in sociology as the support of signs to transmit.⁶ And yet, the body remains stubbornly fluid, unwilling to be neatly categorized or siloed. The body is at the heart of organizing social behaviors and attitudes as well as power relations, confrontations with modernity, and colonial encounters. Yet the meaning and value of bodies shifts through identity formation, repression, and struggles for equality. Modern bodies' encounters with modernity, in particular, were profoundly mediated by the context of colonialism. Intrusive modern empires sought to impose their own notions of modernity and teach ways of behaving, clothing, moving and curating one's body that still shape the present.

As we interrogate and analyze the profound influence of colonization in Asia, this volume asks: can colonizing and colonized bodies and their histories escape binaries? Established dichotomies, Susan Gal has argued, hold the inherent possibility of opening up cracks and leave space for change, subversion, creativity, and negotiation, no matter how carefully traced and protected their boundaries appear.⁷ Colonial bodies, whether in perceptions, representations, and repressions, are largely subsumed within several binaries—including colonized/colonizing bodies, subaltern/hegemonic bodies, and mind/body. While these frames show how the body became the site and sign through which differences and hierarchies were reinforced or challenged, scholars often unintentionally reify this stratification, obscuring the coexistence and comingling between conquerors and conquered, as well as among these heterogeneous groups.

This edited collection aims to reframe this analysis through twelve case studies focusing on different Asian colonial and, to a lesser extent, postcolonial, settings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The wide variety of contributions provides a complex picture in which bodies are both symbolic *and* material, methods *and* archives, analytical *and* pedagogical tools—in short, that which defies or goes beyond binaries. In so doing, this book builds on, and owes a great deal to, Tony

⁶ Umberto Galimberti, *Il Corpo*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1983), 11–26.

⁷ Susan Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2002): 77–95.

Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton's *Bodies in Contact*.⁸ Burton and Ballantyne's work has called into question what we know about colonized bodies, and we hope, with this volume, to open up further "cracks". They have argued that examining empires helps us make sense of global history—of its "monumental quality and its ultimately fragmented character"—through the historical subjects who lived with and through it.⁹ The volume sheds light on historical connections and disconnections between different contexts, and to local adaptations and idiosyncrasies. In this way, the volume contributes to a critical rethinking of ideas and practices surrounding bodies that, while being bound to identifiable sites, are products of transnational, inter-imperial and global encounters that often stabilized social and political hierarchies and inequalities.

The volume cannot claim to be all-encompassing in our encounter with the many bodies of colonial and postcolonial Asia, nor with the many ways of making use of the body and knowing the body in this large, diverse setting. Far from being a comprehensive study of the many meanings of the body in Asia, the book features chapters focused on very specific communities, individuals, knowledge, and practices. This specificity is in some ways a benefit rather than a limitation—an opportunity to highlight core themes and problems in the study of the body, and to point the way forward to additional research.

Embodiment Beyond Binaries

Bodies Beyond Binaries integrates varied perspectives on the body through analytical lenses such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, non-human, class, caste, emotion, health, and religion. While historiography on the body has acknowledged the centrality of such lenses, our volume engages with the intersection of, and dialogue between, these critical concepts, cutting across conventional scholarly categories. In this way, supposedly binary categories of corporeality such as ruled and unruly bodies, emotional and trained bodies, mobile and confined bodies, and respectable and deviant bodies are reconsidered, problematized, and transcended. In its exploration of bodies beyond binaries in colonial and postcolonial Asia, the volume reveals and addresses the ambiguous, malleable, mutable nature of such categories.

⁸ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁹ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: Bodies, Empires and World Histories", in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. idem (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 4.

This work brings together a range of contributions from established and emerging scholars working on different Asian regional and transregional foci. They have used the body—and epistemes, techniques, and practices surrounding it—as a productive topic for historical investigation on political, social, economic, and epistemological shifts. Through the case studies presented, the insights in this book are not simply relevant across Asia, but also question Western-centric and culturally essentialist perspectives on the history of the body across the world. This includes rejecting the notion of “the Asian body”—an immutable, “Oriental”, othered body presented as antithetical to “the Western body”.¹⁰ Rather than taking “the body” as self-evident, this volume recognizes bodies as historically and contingently produced through racialization, gendering, sexualization, and class conflict.¹¹ In this sense it is useful, as propounded by Angelica Pesarini in her study on Black “mixed race children” in Italian colonies in East Africa, to think of bodies as counter-archives that are capable of challenging dominant ways of knowing.¹² While Pesarini argues that bodies as archives can make visible the invisible knowledge subjugated in the institutional archive, we also claim that bodies can make invisible the “visible”, blurring boundaries and confounding dichotomies.

Groundbreaking works by David Arnold, Mark Harrison, Warwick Anderson, Hans Pols, and Ari Heinrich have pointed to the crucial role of modern science and medicine in categorizing colonized bodies as “naturally” inferior, thereby crystallizing power relations and marginalizing local forms of knowledge. Their research has shown how these disciplines, exploiting the growing authority of “Western” science, propounded as scientifically based theories that were largely social creations, thus concealing the politico-ideological context wherein conceptions of the body arise.¹³ Engendered for purposes of epistemic dominance, governance, and

¹⁰ See, for example, Bryan Turner and Zheng Yangwen, “Introduction: Piety, Politics and Philosophy: Asia and The Global Body”, in *The Body in Asia*, eds. idem (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–21; and, in the same volume, Susan Brownell, “The Global Body Cannot Ignore Asia”, 23–29. The chapters, however, provide a useful discussion on embodiment and the need to investigate the social practices that produce it.

¹¹ Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, 274. For an inspiring critique of the use of the term “body” as a term that generalizes across bodily difference and generates exclusion, see Gordon Hall, “Why I Don’t Talk about ‘The Body’: A Polemic”, *MONDAY Art Journal* 4 (April 2020), <https://monday-journal.com/why-i-dont-talk-about-the-body-a-polemic/>.

¹² Angelica Pesarini, “Making Visible the Invisible: Colonial Sources and Counter Body-Archives in the Boarding Schools for Black ‘Mixed Race’ Italian Children in Fascist East Africa”, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 58, no. 5 (2022): 625–639.

¹³ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); David Arnold, ed., *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Mark Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian Preventive Medicine, 1859–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

social engineering by the colonial imperatives that shaped relations between Asia and the West, scientific knowledge impacted the perceptions and experiences of “Other” people with their visible and invisible bodily differences turned into proofs and justifications of unjust orders, domination and power.

Colonial modernity, however, was not a “coherent system that could be imported with marginal adaptations”, as Miriam Silverberg suggests.¹⁴ Rather, modernity and colonialism were ever-shifting, ambiguous ideological forces whose inconsistencies colonized peoples and collectivities could exploit to resist, hijack, and selectively appropriate for different purposes.¹⁵ For, even though the agencies of modern colonial power strove to fix bodies and make them legible sites of legitimacy, bodies—Burton suggests—must be understood as “technologies of resistance and rule and much in-between.”¹⁶ Those whose bodies faced the most coercion, manipulation, and control from colonial states must not be reduced to passive recipients of ready-made epistemic intentions by Western historical actors.¹⁷ Bearing this in mind keeps us vigilant about the need to acknowledge cross-cultural interactions, networks and circulations in the production of colonial bodily knowledge as well as to be aware of the heterogeneous, fissured and fragmented nature of the “colonial”.¹⁸ At the same time, a focus on bodies provides us with a concrete space to which colonial discourses were tethered so that we can assess

Press, 1994); Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Hans Pols, *Medicine and Dutch East Indies Colonial Government: Social History of Health Care* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Ari Heinrich, *The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Miriam Silverberg, quoted in Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender*, 3.

¹⁵ Miriam Silverberg, “Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin, and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story”, in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997): 255.

¹⁶ Burton, “The body in/as world history”, 274.

¹⁷ Exemplary of this approach to body politics in the Chinese context is Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella’s Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2005), challenging earlier arguments by Fan Hong in *Footbinding, Feminism and Freedom: The Liberation of Women’s Bodies in Modern China* (London and New York: Routledge 1997) on the positive influence of Western missionaries in liberating passive Chinese women from the ‘backward’ practice of footbinding.

¹⁸ A classical exploration of this topic is Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). We draw on the arguments made by Ann Laura Stoler in *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), in which she emphasizes the ontological uncertainty, contradiction, and fragility of the colonial archive. A useful discussion on the colonial archive from eighteenth-century New Spain is María Elena Martínez, “Sex and the Colonial Archive: The Case of ‘Mariano’ Aguilera”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (2016): 421–43.

their material and corporeal effects beyond the solely discursive and literary realms and within historical reality and specificity.¹⁹

This volume challenges the notion of intrinsic separateness between Asian and Western bodies. In so doing, the chapters that follow adopt varied spatial frameworks, from the global and the national down to the micro-spatial level. Taken together, these divergent scales invite us to identify several interconnected nodes, as well as acknowledge the significance of wider analytical frames such as the regional, imperial, and global. Broader contexts and connections thus become visible, allowing us to capture the influence of translocal, transnational, and transimperial factors on processes that, at first sight, might seem merely locally rooted.²⁰ Finally, *Bodies Beyond Binaries* attempts to go beyond sharp boundaries between the colonial and postcolonial periods, which often prove more limiting than instructive. The volume's broad temporal approach makes visible continuities and discontinuities in terms of discourses and materialities surrounding the body and corporeal models. In this way, it sheds light on how individuals and communities deployed the body to assert their power, challenge authority, or define or hide their identities across colonial and independent Asia.

Gendered Bodies between Nations and Empires

One, and perhaps the main, *fil rouge* of this book is the feminist critique that bodies, and other intimate aspects of life, are deeply political.²¹ Exploring the everyday and embodied activities of states and political ideologies, a rich body of literature has revealed the embodied nature of nationalism, which could take cues from, inform, or reject colonizing cultures.²² An important insight of this research is that gender

¹⁹ For an insightful discussion, see Robert J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 408–10.

²⁰ Here we follow Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Marrying Global History with South Asian History: Potential and Limits of Global Microhistory in a Regional Inflection”, *Comparativ* 29, no. 2 (2019): 52–77.

²¹ Among many others see Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Jennifer L. Fluri, “Bodies, Bombs and Barricades: Geographies of Conflict and Civilian (in)Security”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 2 (2011): 280–96; and Teri Chettiar, *The Intimate State: How Emotional Life Became Political in Welfare-State Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

²² Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour, and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992); Patricia Hill Collins, “Producing the Mothers of the Nation: Race, Class, and Contemporary US Population Policies”, in *Women, Citizenship, and Difference*, eds. N. Yuval-Davis and Prina Werbner (London: Zed, 1999), 118–129; Tamar Mayer, “Embodied Nationalisms”, in *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, eds. Lynn Staeheli, Eleonore Kaufman, and Linda Peake (New York: Routledge, 2004),

binaries are often central to nation-building, from the formulation of violent martial masculinity to forge and protect the nation, to a glorification of national motherhood to reproduce it. Public spheres become sites for deliberating and debating ideals of masculinity and femininity in nascent nations.²³ In this context, women, their bodies and sexuality became catalysts of the re-assertion of hegemonic masculinity and of the regulation of femininity. Rather than providing actual care or protection, this instead manifested as a projection of ongoing danger for women due to the figure of the “enemy”, who could range from Muslims in Hindu nationalist discourse or communists in the New Order Indonesia.²⁴ Oral histories and ethnographies confirm that an emphasis on nationalist masculinization often goes hand-in-hand with gendered violence.²⁵ This does not necessarily eliminate women from taking part in nation-building or violence but does force them to carve out a space wherein to cautiously negotiate their marginalized role. For example, women can successfully mobilize the condition of motherhood to stake their claim in national politics or can act as warrior citizens to protect their land and defend their bodies as symbols of the nation to be protected from dishonor.²⁶

As several studies have explicated, anti-colonial nationalist movements creatively incorporated the ideals and values of hegemonic masculinity introduced by, or in dialogue with, imperialism. Against this background is the cult of the body that gained global momentum in the early twentieth century in Asian (semi)colonial settings. This must be largely understood as a response to imperial hierarchies

156–161; Véronique Benei, *Schooling Passions: Nation, History, and Language in Contemporary Western India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 2014).

²³ See the concise and insightful chapter by Barbara Molony, “Feminism and Gender Construction in Modern Asia”, in *A Companion to Global Gender History*, eds. Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 2nd edition (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 527–544. See also Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997) and Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family”, *Feminist Review* no. 44 (1993): 61–80.

²⁴ For instance, Chandrima Chakraborty, *Masculinity, Asceticism and Hinduism: Past and Present Imaginings of India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011), 192–196; Alessandra Consolaro, “Alla ricerca del ‘vero uomo’: declinazioni della mascolinità di Narendra Modi”, *Kervan* 25, no. 2 (2021): 315–337; Saskia E. Wieringa, “The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia: Sexual Politics and Nationalism”, *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 70–92.

²⁵ See Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Saskia E. Wieringa, “Sexual Slander and the 1965/66 Mass Killings in Indonesia: Political and Methodological Considerations”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 4 (2011): 544–565.

²⁶ Recent examples are the mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina or the Mothers’ Front in Sri Lanka in the 1980s; Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism and Nationalism in India* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1–19. For an exploration of the feminization of violence in the Indian context, see Tanika Sarkar, “The Women of the Hindutva Brigade”, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25, no. 4 (1993): 16–24.

and colonial ideologies, and as a project delineating claims to political autonomy from colonial subjects.²⁷ New ideas of “muscular” nationalism that emphasized physical culture as tied to political activism thus became powerful tools to challenge a supposedly superior masculinity, and to “perform” a nationalism based on a premise of hegemonic masculinity.²⁸ A substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated that the reinvigoration of the individual physique was increasingly viewed as vital to a grassroots regeneration of the collective national/communal body and, through it, to forging nations vis-à-vis colonial regimes and coloniality. Such developments were largely based on ideas that circulated globally—eugenicist ideas, fears of degeneration, and “survival of the fittest” mentalities impelled by Spencerian-organicist visions of society.²⁹ The fixation on male physicality—in terms of both strength and health—as a means to social revitalization is hardly surprising considering the centrality of the body in the colonial experience. Presenting their own bodies as sites and symbols of power deserving of deference from “their” colonial subjects, colonial officials across empires portrayed the colonized as having weak, effeminate, and inferior bodies.³⁰ That “the history of colonisation is a history of feminisation” explains not only the fact that gender identities and national identities developed in tandem, but also the powerful,

²⁷ Sebastian Conrad, “Globalizing the Beautiful Body: Eugen Sandow, Bodybuilding, and the Ideal of Muscular Manliness at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of World History* 32, no. 1 (2021): 95–125.

²⁸ Conor Heffernan, “What’s Wrong with a Little Swinging? Indian Clubs as a Tool of Suppression and Rebellion in Post-Rebellion India”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 7–8 (2017): 554–577; Joseph S. Alter, “Yoga at the Fin de Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a ‘Hindu’ Twist”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 759–776; Simon Creak, “Muscular Buddhism for Modernizing Laos”, *Journal of Lao Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 1–22; Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); and by the same author, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914–2004* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

²⁹ Among many others, see Joseph Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 3 (July 2004): 497–534; Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Hong Fan and Fan Hong, eds., *Sport, Nationalism and Orientalism: The Asian Games* (London: Routledge, 2007); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism*; Stefan Hübner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018); Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (circa 1900–40)”, *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2019): 512–559.

³⁰ A classic by now, Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) has influenced scholars working on several colonized regions.

explicit link between masculinity, physical culture, and anti-colonial political mobilization.³¹

This muscular nationalism, which established a connection between physical weakness and colonial humiliation, needed the feminine to articulate its manliness. As several chapters in this volume highlight, besides being symbolic bearers of tradition, honor, and identity, female bodies became a contested terrain where notions of morality, health, modernity, and national or communal belonging were negotiated. This contestation often created ambiguities that women could exploit, particularly in the case of physical culture and sport for girls and women.³² Overall, the fact that sport was identified with masculine prowess influenced not only women's access to sport and physical cultures but also the field of the history of sport, so that women appear, if at all, only *ex negativo*. Even the medical field, which opened up educational and employment opportunities for greater numbers of women in colonial spaces like Korea and India, still contracted women's identities around notions of "appropriate" gender roles.³³ While women doctors were aware of the man-made nature of women's perceived "weakness", they often subscribed to conventional views of women's roles in society to avoid being marginalized in a male-dominated society. In many ways, discourses around nationalism are essential to understanding colonial binaries and the limits placed on actual people living within them.

The India Question

One limitation of the present work reflects a broader challenge in the field: the dominance of India and the British Empire in contemporary thinking on colonial Asia. In fact, the origins of this study lie in an earlier project that was more limited in its spatial and chronological scope. From 2017 to 2018, "The body in colonial India" brought together historians of modern India in two workshops—the first one, co-organized by Teresa Segura-Garcia and Julia Hauser at the University of Kassel, and the second one at Goldsmiths, University of London. This earlier

³¹ Geraldine Meaney, "Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics", in *Irish Women's Studies Reader*, ed. Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), 230–44, here 233.

³² For two further recent examples see Elena Valdameri, "Training Female Bodies for New India: Women's Physical Education between Global Trends and Local Politics in Colonial South Asia, c. 1900–1939", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 39, no. 11 (2022): 1240–1264; and Claire Nicolas, "On the Field: Race, Gender and Sports in Colonial Ghana", *Gender & History* (2024): 1–15.

³³ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, (New Delhi: Chronicle Books, 2005); Sonja M. Kim, *Imperatives of Care: Women and Medicine in Colonial Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

project was born out of the realization that, over the previous decade, the body had received increasing academic attention in research on the history of colonialism in India. By the late 2010s, scholars had examined the interplay between the body and several areas of enquiry—most notably gender and sexuality, science and medicine, physical training and sports, and the consumption of food and stimulants. Collectively, their findings foregrounded the impact of colonialism on the bodies of colonizers and colonized alike. In this way, scholars established the centrality of the body to the colonial experience in India. What had been assessed to a lesser extent was the degree to which the body emerged as a discursive contact zone between Indian and European actors in the colonial period. The workshops advanced the historiographical debate by examining the role of knowledge in shaping bodily understandings and practices in colonial India. They did so in relation to a specific set of variables—gender, race, class, caste, and religion.

“The body in colonial India” went beyond an initial binary, that of “traditional” Indian versus “modern” European knowledge. In blurring this dichotomy, we highlighted the emergence of what Harald Fischer-Tiné has termed “pidgin knowledge”—that is, knowledge that is shaped by variegated, multidirectional processes of appropriation and reappropriation across several spatial settings. The existence of this diffused knowledge on the body in colonial India forced us to confront a far more complex, far-reaching picture that could hardly be addressed from an exclusively South Asian perspective. In this way, “The body in colonial India” was ultimately a call to challenge further binaries, from “colonizer” versus “colonized” to “India” versus “Europe”. It is the disruption of these dichotomies that led us to consider the role of the transimperial, the transanticolonial, and the transnational in and beyond the Indian subcontinent. *Bodies Beyond Binaries* thus expands our earlier inquiries beyond South Asia to explore the entanglements in terms of notions, practices, and epistemes across Asia.

Historians of colonial South Asia have explored the role of the body across a wide range of often overlapping analytical categories—from nationalism and anticolonialism to physical culture, from scientific theories to medical practice, from the consumption of food and stimulants to sartorial and bodily self-presentation. Spanning both corporal ideas and practices, these contributions have collectively established that the body was an important site of encounter, conflict, and resistance in colonial India. Joseph S. Alter has convincingly established that M. K. Gandhi’s concern with bodily concepts and practices—from sex and celibacy to diet reform, fasting, and naturopathy—are key to understanding Gandhian politics as well as Indian nationalist politics as a whole.³⁴ Hindu nationalists, as Meera

³⁴ Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

Nanda has shown, sought to reconcile what they identified as “Vedic” concepts of the body with supposedly Western scientific theories.³⁵ They sometimes encountered these Vedic ideas in the writings of Theosophical authors, who had in turn obtained them from supposedly canonical Hindu texts. Hindu nationalists incorporated these concepts into their discourse, arguing that the Vedas had discovered revolutionary theories thousands of years before European scientists. In the realm of bodily practices, physical culture—including newly created disciplines such as modern postural yoga—became tools to strengthen Indian bodies, often placed at the service of national renewal in the face of colonial rule.³⁶

If food was central to the colonial encounter in India, it was also a key site where tensions around Indian and European bodies were played out. E. M. Collingham has established that while in the early colonial era Europeans partook in local foodways, by the second half of the nineteenth century they predominantly drew sharp distinctions between what they understood as European and Indian food.³⁷ This argument has been confirmed by Parama Roy, where she has proposed that disgust and rejection became part and parcel of the colonial culinary encounter in India.³⁸ Cecilia Leong-Salobir’s comparative research on India, Malaysia and Singapore has broadly pointed towards the same conclusion.³⁹ Historians have also examined, however, Indian attitudes towards European foodways. As Utsa Ray has demonstrated, while some Indians were attracted to Western cuisine, others condemned it. Those who were opposed to the consumption of “polluting” European food included orthodox Hindu communities as well as members of the lower castes in search of upward social mobility.⁴⁰ These shifts around food were, as Collingham has pointed out, part of a much wider shift in bodily prescriptions that also included dress, domestic spaces, symbolic displays of power, and the social lives of the British in India. Food

³⁵ Meera Nanda, “Madame Blavatsky’s Children: Modern Hindu Encounters With Darwinism”, in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. Jim R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Brill: Leiden, 2010), 279–344.

³⁶ Joseph S. Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Harald Fischer-Tiné, *The YMCA in Late Colonial India: Modernization, Philanthropy and American Soft Power in South Asia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

³⁷ E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); and, by the same author, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸ Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Cecilia Y. Leong-Salobir, *Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

⁴⁰ Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

was also relevant for the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies within the caste system, and the biases and material inequities of military recruiting.⁴¹ In this way, the body emerges as an agent of historical change with a leading role in the making of (colonial) inequalities along the lines of race, gender, caste and class.

In terms of another type of consumption, that of drugs and stimulants, both upper-caste Indians and Europeans were active in anti-vice movements.⁴² Through these tools of social control, they attempted to shape the bodies of several social groups, including European soldiers and Indian laborers.⁴³ The British colonial preoccupation with the consumption of stimulants extended well beyond the disciplining of Indian bodies. As Harald Fischer-Tiné has established, British administrators were concerned by the white “subaltern” communities of the Indian subcontinent, whose bodies threatened the “colonizer” versus “colonized” dichotomy that ideologically underpinned imperial rule.⁴⁴

While this survey of the historiography of the body in colonial India cannot be all-encompassing, it is worth pointing out that dress has constituted another important domain of historical research on the body in colonial South Asia.⁴⁵ Emma Tarlo has explored the role of dress in the making of imperial authority in nineteenth-century India, as well as in the mass nationalism of the interwar years.⁴⁶ Nira Wickramasinghe’s findings on colonial Sri Lanka have similarly underscored the symbolic meaning of dress in the island’s nationalist politics in the late colonial period.⁴⁷ These contributions have established that, through fashion and clothing, the body emerged as a cultural artifact that expressed and bolstered both the imperial and the nationalist political projects.

⁴¹ Harald Fischer-Tiné, Julia Hauser and Ashok Malhotra, “Introduction: Feeding Bodies, Nurturing Identities: The Politics of Diet in Late Colonial and Early Post-Colonial India”, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 1 (2021), 107–116; Kate Imy, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁴² Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurennev, eds, *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ Jessica R. Pliley et al., eds, *Global Anti-Vice Activism, 1890–1950: Fighting Drinks, Drugs, and ‘Immorality’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁴⁴ Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and White Subalternity in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009).

⁴⁵ Charu Gupta, “‘Fashioning’ Swadeshi: Clothing Women in Colonial North India”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 42 (2012): 76–84; Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Nira Wickramasinghe, *Dressing the Colonised Body: Politics, Clothing and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka* (Orient Blackswan, 2003).

There is another area of historical enquiry in which South Asian scholars have dominated the field, beyond the history of the body. This is the history of emotions. Scholars working on this area have stressed that emotions, rather than being universal, are the products of specific cultural environments. The relationship between the/a body and the culture and environment which surrounds it is critical to this production. Emotions play a critical role in ideas about “civility”, “modernity” and “progress”, suggesting that certain culturally-constructed emotions were woven into the process of colonization. Margrit Pernau’s work has highlighted the ways in which this is necessarily a complicated narrative. Rather than being controlled or contained, in many respects emotions intensified and came to the fore in nineteenth century India.⁴⁸ Razak Khan has argued for the centrality of the category of “space” in the history of emotions, underscoring the importance of local dynamics vis-à-vis often homogenizing units such as “nation” and “region”.⁴⁹ Véronique Benei has explored how emotions such as pride, resentment, nostalgia, and belonging are manifestations of an embodied “banal nationalism” that are negotiated, mobilized and expressed from a very early age within the educational sphere in contemporary western India. Such emotions, Benei has argued, shape individuals’ perceptions of their own identities and their relationships with broader collective identities, such as linguistic and regional communities.⁵⁰ In this way, the study of emotions has much to offer to the closely interlinked project of the study of the body, especially in terms of embodiment and performative emotional practices.

The history of the senses also sheds light on the all-pervasive nature of political and socialization processes. In his comparative study of India and the Philippines, Andrew Rotter has highlighted how race was constructed in part through senses with inferior-deemed races. Rotter has explored the senses of smell and sound as embodied cultural phenomena.⁵¹ meLê yamomo’s sound history of colonial Manila and the broader Asia-Pacific region has examined the performing bodies of circulating musicians—transimperial, transnational bodies on the move that generated and disseminated new forms of cultural consumption under the

⁴⁸ Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Margrit Pernau, Benno Gammerl and Philipp Nielsen, eds., *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity* (New York: Berghahn, 2019).

⁴⁹ Razak Khan, *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and, by the same author, “The Social Production of Space and Emotions in South Asia”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 5 (2015): 611–33.

⁵⁰ Véronique Benei, *Schooling Passions: Nation, History, and Language in Contemporary Western India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

⁵¹ Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses. Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (New York: Oxford University Press 2019).

umbrella of “modernity”.⁵² Anticolonial politics can also be productively studied through the senses, as explored by Kama MacLean in her project on the sounds of mass mobilization—including the political speeches of nationalist leaders such as Gandhi—in colonial India.⁵³ Together, then, histories of emotions and of the senses are particularly fruitful tools for thinking about bodily materiality in relation to other bodies, space, and the environment.

Towards a Trans-Imperial History of Bodies

As discussed, the earlier “body in colonial India” frame still pointed towards the role of the global and the transimperial in producing a nuanced, sophisticated understanding of corporeal concepts and practices within and beyond the Indian subcontinent. *Bodies Beyond Binaries* also addresses the scholarly gap around the body across Asia in a transimperial perspective. This transimperial approach must necessarily consider research on the body produced in a variety of spatial and temporal contexts. This ambitious undertaking, of course, is still limited by differing access to archives, language training, research travel, and other material inequities across the historical profession. As a result, while this volume does not capture each colonial and postcolonial space context equally, it does highlight the benefit of a broader geographic scope and the avenues for further research.

Historians of early modern and modern European empires in Asia have examined the interplay between the body and colonialism across various chronological and spatial contexts. This includes the contributions of scholars of women and sexuality who have explored how the arrival of Iberian colonizers and missionaries from Portugal and Spain to Southeast Asia led to transformations in the gendered bodily practices of local populations, as well as how early Iberian perceptions of gendered difference contributed to emerging discourses of racial otherness.⁵⁴

⁵² meLê yamomo, *Sounding Modernities: Theatre and Music in Manila and the Asia Pacific, 1869–1946* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and idem, “La Sonoridad del Mundo en Manila del siglo XIX: A Synesthetic Listening to Early Globalization in Manila”, in *Transnational Philippines: Cultural Encounters in Philippine Literature in Spanish*, eds. Axel Gasquet and Rocío Ortuño Casanova (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2024).

⁵³ Kama MacLean, “(What) Can the Subaltern Hear? The Sounds of Mass Mobilization in Interwar India” (paper presented at German Historical Institute, London, 21 February 2023).

⁵⁴ For the role of the body in early modern gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia, see Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006); and Carolyn Brewer, “Baylan, Asog, Transvestism, and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines”, *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 2 (1999), 1–5; and, by the same author, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521–1685* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). For the construction of

Research on the body in Europe's early modern empires has also gone well beyond Asia, with explorations on the encounter between Jesuit missionaries and local populations in the Mariana Islands, in the Western Pacific. Blending historical research with archeological fieldwork, scholars working on this setting have established the centrality of the body in the making of gender identities, as well as in the dynamics of cultural contact and colonial domination.⁵⁵ For the modern period, historians of France's colonial ventures in Southeast Asia have convincingly established that imperial policies deeply impacted gender and sexuality in the region. Imperial gender politics instituted a framework of domination that empowered white sexual desire over the commodified bodies of both local and—in a transimperial connection—Japanese women in French Indochina.⁵⁶

colonial visions of difference in the early modern Philippines, see Sebastian Kroupa, "Reading Beneath the Skin: Indigenous Tattooing in the Early Spanish Philippines, ca. 1520–1720", *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 3 (September 2022): 1252–1287; and Greg Bankoff, "Big Men, Small Horses: Ridership, Social Standing and Environmental Adaptation in the Early Modern Philippines", in *The Horse as Cultural Icon: The Real and the Symbolic Horse in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Edwards, Karl A. E. Enekel, and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 99–120. For the Portuguese case, see Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, "Gendering Practices and Possibilities in Portugal and Its Empire during the Early Modern Period", in *Gendering the Portuguese-Speaking World: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 49–70; and Amélia Polónia and Rosa Capelão, "Women and Children on Board: The Case of the Carreira Da India in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries", in *Privacy at Sea: Global Studies in Social and Cultural Maritime History*, ed. Natacha Klein Käfer (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 41–76.

⁵⁵ Sandra Montón-Subías and Boyd Dixon, "Margins are Central: Identity and Indigenous Resistance to Colonial Globalization in Guam", *World Archaeology* 53, no. 3 (2021): 419–434; Sandra Montón-Subías and Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "A Body Is Worth a Thousand Words: Early Colonial Dress-Scapes in Guam", *Historical Archaeology* 55, no. 2 (2021): 269–289; Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "Sexual (Mis) Encounters in the Mariana Islands: Tracing Sexuality in Spanish Policies and Chamoru Responses to Contact and Colonization, 1521–1769" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2022); Verónica Peña Filiu, "Foodways, Missionaries, and Culinary Accommodation in the Mariana Islands (1668–74)", *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9, no. 2 (2022): 263–280; Verónica Peña Filiu and Enrique Moral de Eusebio, "Sexo, comida y colonialismo en las islas Marianas", in *I estoria-ta: Guam, las Marianas y la cultura chamorra*, ed. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura y Secretaría General Técnica, Centro de Publicaciones, 2021).

⁵⁶ Pascal Blanchard et al. (eds), *Sexe, race & colonies: La domination des corps du XVe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: La Découverte, 2018); Michael G. Vann, "Sex and the Colonial City: Mapping Masculinity, Whiteness, and Desire in French Occupied Hanoi", *Journal of World History* 28, no. 3–4 (2017): 395–435. See also the special issue "Commodified Women's Bodies in Vietnam and Beyond", *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 1 (2012)—in particular, Christian Henriot, "Supplying Female Bodies: Labor Migration, Sex Work, and the Commoditization of Women in Colonial Indochina and Contemporary Vietnam": 1–9; Frédéric Roustan, "Mousmés and French Colonial Culture: Making Japanese Women's Bodies Available in Indochina": 52–105; and Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze": 10–51.

As this research suggests, attitudes about sexual intimacy and gender binaries flowed between empires and evolved and regressed across time and space. Barbara Watson Andaya and Michael Peletz have argued that sexual intimacies and kinship networks between local communities and traders in Southeast Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries depended on a multiplicity of gender identities long before European presence. These forged and maintained transnational familial connections.⁵⁷ However, as Dutch and British economic interests dominated the social and economic landscape of Asia, a growing number of troops and traders commodified and extracted women's sexual labor through enslavement and coercion.⁵⁸ For Indrani Chatterjee, this was the result of trading companies' emphasis on heredity inheritance and natal legitimacy to bolster plantation economies and supplant existing networks of devotion, education, and exchange.⁵⁹ Coerced sex became a common feature as European empires seized control over much of Asia in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ By the twentieth, Japanese occupation forces in East and Southeast Asia similarly conscripted *ianfu*, euphemistically referred to as "Comfort Women," for sexual enslavement.⁶¹ For Takashi Fujitani, this was in part to counter the potential fragmentation of Japan's multiethnic army by encouraging Korean conscripts to overcome ethnic differences through shared power over women.⁶² This pattern continued with an increased American military presence across East and Southeast Asia during the Cold War, as narratives of soldiers' "saving"—or controlling—women with their sexual prowess proved common.⁶³ In this way, a

⁵⁷ Kate Imy, "Transactions: Sex, Power, and Resistance in Colonial South and Southeast Asia", in *The Routledge Companion to Sexuality and Colonialism*, ed. Chelsea Schields and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Routledge, 2021), 78–93.

⁵⁸ Michael G Peletz, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), 87, 91; Barbara Watson Andaya, "From Temporary Wife to Prostitute: Sexuality and Economic Change in Early Modern Southeast Asia", *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 11–34, at 12, 15, 17.

⁵⁹ Indrani Chatterjee, "When 'Sexuality' Floated Free of Histories in South Asia", *Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (November 2012): 945–62, at 951.

⁶⁰ Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

⁶¹ Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Muta Kazue, "The 'Comfort Women' Issue and the Embedded Culture of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Japan", *Current Sociology* 64, no. 4 (2016): 620–636.

⁶² The Japanese terms *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) and *ianfu* (comfort woman) are most common. Katharine McGregor, "Emotions and Activism for Former So-Called 'Comfort Women' of the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands East Indies", *Women's Studies International Forum* 54 (2016): 67–78.

⁶³ Gregory Daddis, *Pulp Vietnam: War and Gender in Cold War Men's Adventure Magazines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.

trans-imperial frame elucidates the continuities and disjunctures between colonial powers as they navigated binary thinking across time and colonial spaces.

The (binary) framework of inclusion and exclusion is often a central organizing feature of empires. However, the myriad ways these categories were, and are, defined and redefined across empires is particularly relevant to this study. Moreover, a transimperial comparison with, for example, the Japanese empire or the American empire in the Philippines, helps elucidate the ways in which ideas or practices crossed imperial boundaries, transforming or transmuting as they went. As Hanscom and Washburn highlight in *The Affect of Difference: Representations of Race in East Asian Empire*, while the Japanese empire rebuffed Western notions of biological racism, it nevertheless constructed a racialist ideology which produced notions of difference—they utilize the framework of “affect” to describe this construction of a colonial shibboleth.⁶⁴ The close attention paid by the imperial state to personal matters such as “language, dress, romance, family and hygiene” was common to imperial formations or regimes which sought to produce or provoke difference through these systems of inclusion or exclusion.⁶⁵ In their volume, and in work which followed, historians of Japanese imperialism have examined constructions of neo-racism (along lines outlined by Etienne Balibar) as well as the layers of internal colonialism as the Japanese imperial state constructed the racial and sexual frontiers which shaped relations with groups such as the Ainu in what is now northern Japan.

Another challenge to colonial binaries is that many people existed at the intersection of colonial power structures. For Indrani Chatterjee, the English East India Company initially encouraged relationships between white men and Indian women to reproduce a labor force of mixed race civil servants, plantation workers, domestic servants, and soldiers in the eighteenth century. The categories of “legitimacy” and “orphan” reflected the commodification of sex to delegitimize women’s rights as mothers.⁶⁶ Separating “legitimate” and “illegitimate” children assigned unequal values to the identical labor of childbirth performed by both enslaved women and wives. For Ann Stoler, Dutch colonial leaders similarly oscillated between supporting and rejecting interracial unions. Initially, they supported marriage with Asian women to prevent paying Europeans the higher wages to support European wives. At the same time, Eurasian and Indo-European children were widely stigmatized within and beyond colonial Asia.⁶⁷ Metis children—including Eurasians—had to fight to

⁶⁴ Christopher P. Hanscom and Dennis Washburn, *The Affect of Difference: Representations of Race in East Asian Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁶ Chatterjee, Indrani. “Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India”, *Subaltern Studies* 10 (1999): 49–97, at 50–51, 59.

⁶⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 1 (1989): 134–61, at 143.

claim their Europeanness through a combination of “physical features of race” and a “moral certainty” derived from a child’s name, clothing, education, and upbringing.⁶⁸

Even identities considered transgressive by modern actors have had shifting relationships to power over time. Evelyn Blackwood has discussed cross-regional identities of ritual practitioners such as the *banci* and *waria* (Indonesia) and *paway* (Malaysia) that were part of priestly classes adopting multiple gender roles and performances for ceremonial purposes. Unlike in European contexts, these roles were at the center, rather than the margins, of society. However, as European colonial powers, and reformist religious groups, criticized such performances, gender transgression increased to resist colonial sexual regimes.⁶⁹ Similarly, Adnan Hossain and Anjali Arondekar note that the gender-nonconforming *Hijra* community in India, to be discussed further by Howard Chiang, served powerful roles such as tax collectors for the Mughal empire in India. While this added to justifications of an “extermination” campaign under the British, Hossain notes that *Hijra* in Bangladesh continue to challenge binaries by interpreting Islamic knowledge through Hindu and Muslim rituals and mythologies.⁷⁰ In this way, non-binary thinking ebbed and flowed before, during, and after formal colonization across vast geographic distances and became vehicles for resisting and justifying colonial power.

Thematic Sections and Chapter Overview

The chapters in this volume speak to and build upon many themes raised by other scholars, providing a fresh and innovative approach to the history of the body and colonialism “beyond binaries”. To do justice to the vibrancy of the field and its diverse approaches, we have divided the chapters into four thematic sections. The first, “Ruled and Unruly”, tackles the colonial binary of ruler/ruled to interrogate the limits of colonial governance on dictating the meaning and value of diverse bodies within and beyond colonial spaces. Howard Chiang takes readers through the conceptual challenges of interpreting trans histories in Asia without relying on

⁶⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 3 (1992): 514–51 at 515–16, 521, 525, 532–3.

⁶⁹ Evelyn Blackwood, “Gender Transgression in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 4 (2005): 849–79, at 851, 852, 864–865.

⁷⁰ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), Chapter 2, 67–96; Adnan Hossein, “De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space”, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 321–31; Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c.1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

frames and terminology from outside Asia. As a result, Chiang offers “transtopia” as an interpretive alternative to what contemporary observers might consider exclusively transgender identities. This frame helps us understand the multiplicity of gender transgressions that existed in, among other places, China, India and the Ottoman Empire.

Samiksha Sehrawat continues to interrogate the ungovernability of bodies through a case study of colonial clinics in India. By showing South Asian patients’ embodied actions to resist, question, or challenge medical practices, Sehrawat shows the limitations of colonial control. At the same time, the influence of colonial medical practices had a profound influence on postcolonial India, blurring the boundaries of colonial and postcolonial bodily surveillance. Chie Ikeya’s study of the Burmese Muslim similarly transcends the colonial/postcolonial divide by interrogating discourses and legal definitions of Burmese Muslims. British legal codes that demonized Muslim bodies as outsiders continued to shape postcolonial definitions of the “true” Burmese body and the inability of Burmese Muslims to truly belong. Such framing enabled colonial and postcolonial state violence, destabilizing and undermining, rather than confirming, state power.

The second section, “Emotional and Trained”, shows the dichotomy between institutional regimes that sought to discipline and suppress emotional instincts that would challenge colonialism, while also enabling students to gain tools that could embolden anticolonial resistance. Margrit Pernau examines the influence of global New Education movements in colonial India’s Jamia Millia Islamia, to demonstrate how education functioned beyond a simple colonizer-colonized binary. Focusing on the prominent Muslim minority community in India and the global, especially German, influences on education and training, Pernau argues that students and administrators constantly sought new methods and models to sate physical and emotional needs. These could include, but often went beyond, dominant colonial or nationalist imperatives.

Sara Legrandjacques similarly considers the impact of global educational movements on the minds and bodies of those who imagined themselves to be global students rather than colonial subjects. Examining Indochinese students traveling within and beyond the French Empire, Legrandjacques establishes that students simultaneously engaged with bodily practices that could frame them as Western, nationalist, anti-colonial, or pan-Asian. In turn, Chinese students who visited the educational hub of Hanoi became agents of diplomacy that could strengthen or undermine French imperial agendas. Likewise, Julia Hauser shows that Aurobindo Ghose and Mirra Alfassa used a French colonial space in Pondicherry to offer ways of thinking about the body that could challenge British colonial rule in India. Yet their goals were often framed as humanitarian rather than nationalist, offering multiple models for using and reframing gender to challenge dominant norms

about gender and the body. In so doing, an institution created in the high tide of colonial rule simultaneously could appeal to radically different political ideologies, from communism to Nazism. This gave Indian spiritual and physical culture leaders an international appeal that went beyond, but was still connected to, colonialism.

The third section, “Mobility and Confinement”, explores the paradoxical ways in which colonial states commanded the right to move, or limited the mobility of, people, without ever fully controlling the meaning of these journeys. Teresa Segura-Garcia’s examination of Catalan travelers through India traces how well-connected men from Barcelona navigated their proximity to, and distance from, whiteness and Europeanness. Throughout their travels in elite spaces with British and Indian companions, they alternated between identifying with, and distancing themselves from, the diverse Indian residents that they encountered. In turn, residents and colonial administrators questioned where these southern European men fit within colonial categories of whiteness and masculinity.

While mobility exposed men to a variety of ideas about race and gender, many women felt like objects of debate because of their seclusion. For Elena Valdameri, many medical authorities saw *purdah*, or female seclusion, as detrimental to women’s health. This was especially important in debates over the size and shape of a woman’s pelvis and the perception that *purdah* severely curtailed women’s reproductive potential. Many nationalist leaders and medical professionals saw women not only as the keepers of tradition but as builders of the next generation, making limitations to their reproductive abilities harmful to the nation. Women, in turn, rejected these restrictions by creatively establishing their own norms for physical fitness. Kate Imy, meanwhile, explores the uncertainty of confinement for white, Asian, and Eurasian internees in Singapore during the Second World War after British colonial leaders quickly surrendered to the Imperial Japanese Army. While white internees tried to retain their power in Japanese camps, South Asian soldiers and Eurasian civilians struggled to understand where to invest their trust and loyalty. This proved challenging in the midst of contending colonial agendas that shared a penchant for racism and violence.

The final thematic section, “Respectability and Deviancy”, shows the often arbitrary lines between licit and illicit bodily performances under colonialism. Erica Wald’s examination of pig-sticking explores how a pursuit of elite Indian rulership became a mark of imperial pride and masculinity for British leaders. This depended on multiple hierarchies and binaries between ruler/ruled and hunter/prey. It also showed British dependence on Indian bodies, their inability to fully control animal species, and the often meaningless yet forcefully policed boundaries between the permissible and the illegal.

For Denise Lim, the figure of the European “vagrant” was equally problematic in colonial Singapore, existing at the boundaries of acceptable masculinity and

racial humiliation. If race was a marker of colonial rule and class privilege, then the migration of destitute Europeans called colonial racial hierarchy into question. By contrast, Laura Díaz-Esteve examines how westernized performances of elite masculinity by Filipino revolutionaries came under criticism during the Spanish-American War. Americans initially saw such men as modern representatives of liberation for resisting Spanish rule. Over time, the same men became “wild” and “savage” for protesting American intervention. In this way, these chapters show how identical behaviors could be deviant or respectable depending on who performed them.

New Directions

As this discussion makes clear, historians of the body, like historians more broadly, must act as disciplinary magpies, drawing extensively on interdisciplinary research, to speak to the broad range of issues that embodied histories of colonialism entail. One example of this (among many) can be drawn from related work on the mingling and embodiments of human and nonhuman interactions. Here, the work of Donna Haraway, working across science and technology studies, has been particularly influential. Haraway has explored the entanglements of human and nonhuman—suggesting that there has always been an interspecies dependence. More than this, Haraway has demonstrated that it is folly to suggest that we are *singularly* human, just as it is to suggest that any animal is singularly animal, “every species is a multispecies crowd.”⁷¹ Joining Haraway, more recent work has suggested an “animal turn” in history, with particular focus on the relationship between animals and empires⁷². Sivasundaram has reminded us of the ways in which race, so central to our understanding of empire, “can be conceived differently if the human and nonhuman are integrated: to be an imperialist necessitated the working out of the boundaries of the human”.⁷³

⁷¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 165.

⁷² Rohan Deb Roy, *Malarial Subjects: Empire, Medicine and Nonhumans in British India, 1820–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani (eds.), *Animalia: An Anti-imperial Bestiary for Our Times* (Duke University Press: Durham, NC, 2020); Jonathan Saha, *Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Sujit Sivasundaram, “The Human, The Animal and the Prehistory of COVID-19”, *Past & Present* 249, no. 1 (November 2020): 295–316.

⁷³ Sujit Sivasundaram, “Imperial Transgressions: The Animal and Human in the Idea of Race”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 1 (2015): 156–172.

Recent work in the history of emotions, fat studies, and disability studies has similarly suggested the myriad ways in which we might continue probing embodiment in colonial Asia.⁷⁴ Kathleen LeBesco has urged us to rethink the ways in which we understand and study fatness. Fat, she reminds us, is political, not to be confined to studies of medicine or aesthetics.⁷⁵ Writing of disability histories through literature, Erica Fretwell has argued the ways in which “limitation” of the/a body opens up new possibilities. “Disability”, Fretwell writes, “is the lived reality of marginalization and an inherently creative activity.”⁷⁶ As Matthew Kohrman’s work on disability in modern China indicates, these questions are tied not only to access to public space and political engagement in modern nation states, but how states define themselves.⁷⁷ The chapters in this volume represent an effort, though incomplete, to track not only the interconnectedness of colonial and postcolonial thinking about the body, but to push the disciplinary, geographic, and temporal boundaries that limit our understanding of human change and continuity.

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⁷⁴ Margrit Pernau, Benno Gammerl and Philipp Nielsen (eds.), *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences since Early Modernity* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); May Friedman, Carla Rice and Jen Rinaldi (eds.), *Thickening Fat: Fat Bodies, Intersectionality and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (eds.), *Bodies out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁷⁵ Kathleen LeBesco, *Revolted Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Erica Fretwell, “How to Read Disabled Bodies in History”, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Literature and the Body*, ed. Travis Foster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 167. For more on disability and empire, see Esme Cleall, *Colonising Disability: Impairment and Otherness Across Britain and Its Empire, c. 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

⁷⁷ Matthew Kohrman, *Bodies of Difference: Experiences of Disability and Institutional Advocacy in the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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PART 1

Ruled and Unruly

Trans without Borders: Castration and the Politics of Historical Knowledge

Howard Chiang

Abstract

This essay outlines the programmatic contours of a new keyword, transtopia, which makes room for different scales of gender transgression that are not always discernible through the Western notion of transgender. The methods of comparative racialization, native diversification, and genealogical furcation comprise an epistemological overhaul in which transness is made globally legible in a non-hierarchical way. Using examples from the early modern Ottoman empire, colonial India, and modern Sinophone culture, I relocate the legibility of eunuchism from transgender to transtopian history. By challenging the modern West as the privileged site of theoretical production, a transtopian hermeneutic directs attention to the web of interrelations forged between historical actors and their con/texts from which transness gains nuance and momentum.

Keywords: castration; transtopia; race; genealogy; Ottoman; India; Sinophone

The interest in deuniversalizing the West is so common nowadays that it is hard to imagine postcolonial criticism without it.¹ Even so, historians of gender and sexuality seem to have fallen behind. This is far from suggesting that the field has witnessed no interest in non-Western cultures. Quite the contrary. Over the last few decades, scholarship on the history of gender and sexuality in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East has grown at a steady and promising rate.² Yet an implicit norm continues to govern our scholarly apparatus,

¹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

² For a global synthesis of the most recent findings in LGBTQ history, see Howard Chiang, ed., *The Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) History* (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019).

trickling down to the everyday politics of knowledge production in the history of sexuality. Inasmuch as it would be acceptable for scholars dealing with specific cultures such as those of Britain, France, and the United States to evade regional specificity in titling their work, historians of the non-Western world are expected to designate our project with descriptors such as “in Mexico,” “in South Asia,” “Iranian,” “Japanese,” and so forth.³

Consider the following contrast. On the one hand, monographs such as *Female Masculinity*, *Transgender History*, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, and *Female Husbands: A Trans History* give no indication of their geographical scope even though they all focus on US and, to a lesser extent, European history.⁴ On the other hand, titles such as *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times*, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran*, and *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* leave no confusion about the spatial parameters of their analysis.⁵ That this division remains sedimented in queer historiography is what spurs my plea to resist the telos of transgender knowledge.

To that end, I propose a new keyword, *transtopia*, to refer to different scales of gender transgression that are not always discernible through the Western notion of transgender.⁶ The development of this new rubric from the specific context of the Asia Pacific presents a way of decolonizing the study of gender and sexuality from Western epistemological hegemony. With its word roots unpacked, *transtopia* binds the *temporal* designation of change in the *trans-* prefix to the *spatial* projection of difference implicated in the *-topia* suffix. Conceptualizing *transtopia* as an alternative “place” frozen in or across time does not account for its entire epistemological force. *Transtopia* must also be thought of as a mutable “chronotype” that transcends specific geographical units. Given that transphobia has historically assumed varying shapes and scales, *transtopia*, as its antidote, recognizes the need for different forms of political battle and ammunition. In academic research, this translates into the

³ This observation is inspired by Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 1–24.

⁴ Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Boston: Seal Press, 2008); C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). This statement is of course not a commentary on the scholarly merit and pioneering nature of these works.

⁵ Michael G. Peletz, *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c. 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁶ Howard Chiang, *Transtopia in the Sinophone Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

demand for new modes of historical knowledge without implicating a hierarchy of transness defined narrowly around the Western notion of transgender. To counter what Susan Stryker has identified as “homonormativity” in the field of queer studies, transtopia renders transness as something that has a universal bearing to all of us and imagines a universe in which gender-crossing is not the exception but the norm by which all embodied subjects can be measured, calibrated, and understood.⁷ Updating Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s thesis, then, virtually any aspect of human culture must be not merely incomplete but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a conjunctural analysis of transphobia and homophobia.⁸

Of course, the West-versus-non-West binary can only go so far. Decentering Euro-American hegemony can never be the only goal of decolonization.⁹ While the Orientalism of European sources has been justifiably critiqued, what often remains unremarked is the way Western cultures figure in non-Western language commentaries, including Sinitic-language sources (a point to which I return toward the end of this essay).¹⁰ The recourse to Asia nativism is as problematic as the perpetuation of Orientalist presuppositions.¹¹ And despite the possibility that the binary might reinforce a universalist-particularist tension in dominant area studies paradigms, it is precisely the unspoken position assumed by the modern West as the privileged site of novel theoretical production that the project of transtopia seeks to unsettle.¹² Insofar as transtopia is first formulated outside the typical register of Euro-America, transness becomes globally legible in a nonhierarchical way.

This essay parses the analytic of transtopia through the methods of comparative racialization, native diversification, and genealogical furcation. My approach extends the work of Benjamin Hegarty, Ying-Chao Kao, Wen Liu, Alvin Wong, and Ting-Fai Yu to critique the flattening effect of queer theoretical models arising out of the West that, when applied to the Asian Pacific context, are not apt to engage with the most salient structures of power and conditions of resistance.¹³ In particular, I

⁷ Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review*, no. 100 (2008): 145–57.

⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 1.

⁹ Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Joseph Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 23–61.

¹¹ A key text that typifies the position of Asia nativism is Chen, *Asia as Method*.

¹² On the problem of universalism and particularism, see Naoki Sakai, “Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (1988): 475–504.

¹³ Wen Liu, “Non-Western Sexuality, Queer Asia, or Cold War Geopolitics? Repositioning Queer Taiwan in the Temporal Turn,” *National Taiwan University Studies in Taiwan Literature*, no. 26 (2021): 3–36; Alvin K. Wong, “Beyond Queer Liberalism: On Queer Globalities and Regionalism from

draw on three historical instantiations—the early modern Ottoman Empire, colonial India, and contemporary Sinophone culture—to relocate the legibility of eunuchism from transgender to transtopian history. Eunuchism refers to the bodily state of castrated men. Rather than asking who is more or less properly trans, a transtopian hermeneutic directs attention to the web of interrelations forged between historical actors and their con/texts from which transness gains meaning and momentum.

First, transtopia utilizes comparative racialization to render different markers of bodily trait as interconnected, such as the interrelation between transness and Blackness. Eunuchs in the early modern Ottoman court occupy a historical position that may not seem directly related to the contemporary idea of transgender. Some might even argue that writing these royal servants into trans history risks miscasting the nature of a politically recuperative project. However, as Abdulhamit Arvas's work has shown, early modern Ottoman eunuchs embodied the “transing of gender and race.”¹⁴ The pertinent question becomes: In what ways is the transness of eunuchs made legible through the labyrinth of historical racialization? Even though eunuchs have been known to exist across time and space, dating back to the ancient civilizations of China, Egypt, and Greece, race sharply demarcated two groups of eunuchs in the Ottoman context. Couched in an anti-Black rhetoric, Ottoman elite discourses distinguished Black from white eunuchs in terms of social hierarchy, individual volition, and, in some instances, genital morphology.¹⁵ White eunuchs tended to exert greater political freedom and occupy a more politically central position than Black eunuchs; the former were sometimes given the choice to be castrated, while the latter were not; and, so the rumor goes, white eunuchs had only their testicles removed, but Black eunuchs lost both their penis and testicles (ergo less threatening to the imperial harem). In fact, when it came to anti-Black racism, the experience of enslaved eunuchs was not an exception but the norm. Judges,

Postcolonial Hong Kong,” in *Sexualities, Transnationalism, and Globalisation*, ed. Yanqiu Rachel Zhou, Christina Sinding, and Donald Goellnicht (London: Routledge, 2021), 107–18; Benjamin Hegarty, *The Made-Up State: Technology, Trans Femininity, and Citizenship in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Ting-Fai Yu, “Queer Sinophone Malaysia: Language, Transnational Activism, and the Role of Taiwan,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 303–18; Benjamin Hegarty, “A Queer Footnote: The Anthropology of Containment,” *American Ethnologist* 51 (2024): 84–89; Ying-Chao Kao, “The Coloniality of Queer Theory: The Effects of ‘Homonormativity’ on Transnational Taiwan’s Path to Equality,” *Sexualities* 27, nos. 1–2 (2024): 136–153.

¹⁴ Abdulhamit Arvas, “Early Modern Eunuchs and the Transing of Gender and Race,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2019): 116–36.

¹⁵ For the contextualization of this anti-Black disparagement in the wider history of African slavery, Ottoman social and political crises, and westernizing reforms, see George H. Junne, *The Black Eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire: Networks of Power in the Court of the Sultan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016); Jane Hathaway, *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

professors, and civil servants of color were routinely insulted in Ottoman accounts. By drawing attention to the white versus Black distinction, a transtopian reading of Ottoman eunuchs underscores the operation of race as a social vector in the shaping of gender liminal subjects: it activates a mutually imbricated analytic whereby antitransphobic and antiracist strategies work together to decode the histories of border transgression. Although the critique of race has begun to take center stage in American trans theory, engaging with the history of Ottoman eunuchs shows how we can think of race outside a purely Western and modern framework.

Moreover, transtopia widens the foundation of trans history by diversifying and destabilizing the coherence of non-Western categories. Similar to the way Ottoman eunuchs crossed gender and social conventions, the *hijra* community in colonial India came under intense scrutiny, especially after the passing of the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) in 1871. British officials implemented the law in order to solve what they perceived as the “eunuch problem,” including prostitution, obscenity, gender transgression, social unrest, moral corruption, and urban insanitation. As Jessica Hinchy’s research makes clear, the very equation of *hijra* with the eunuch category obscures more than what it illuminates.¹⁶ In the logic of colonial governmentality, eunuchs, defined as impotent men, included not only self-identified *hijras* but also *zenanas* (effeminate men who adopted feminine gender roles or the clothing/appearance of the opposite sex), *sakhis* (religious devotees who cross-dressed), and cross-gender performers (including *bhands*). Not all of these groups underwent genital alteration. Local authorities, in fact, increasingly broadened the definition of eunuchs to include anyone who was “reasonably suspected” of committing sodomy, feminine dress and public performance, castration, and kidnapping.¹⁷ The point is that the colonial apparatus of identifying, registering, and convicting eunuchs was *itself* the mechanism whereby *hijra* became a category of deviant sexuality. The depiction of *hijras* as habitual criminals clashed with their self-understanding as a knowledge tradition, belonging to discipleship-based lineages, and members of a form of nonreproductive and nonconjugal community. The incongruence between the subject positioning of *hijras* and the technology of colonial containment illustrates the purchase of shifting the grounds of *hijra* genealogy from a purely transgender to a transtopian framework. By offering a multidirectional critique, a continuum model of transness exposes such epistemic collision, refuses an

¹⁶ Jessica Hinchy, “The Eunuch Archive: Colonial Records of Non-normative Gender and Sexuality in India,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, no. 2 (2018): 127–46.

¹⁷ Hinchy, “The Eunuch Archive,” 133.

overdetermination of *hijra* as a transgender category, and acknowledges that the wider social and historical valence of *hijras* bears more than matters distinctively sexual.¹⁸

In addition to interweaving transgressions of bodily difference and pluralizing native categories, transtopia disrupts the notion that transgender identity always occupies the assumed destination of historical narratives. It does so by opening up new ways of relating the past to the present. What I term *genealogical furcation* arranges different trajectories of “branching out” in which history unfolds around certain epistemic anchors, such as the body operating as the material conduit of disparate truth conditions. The case of Chinese eunuchs illustrates at least three discrepant pathways by which such relations can be (re)imagined, even though these actors, like Ottoman eunuchs and South Asian *hijras*, often fall outside the remit of contemporary transgender thinking.

First, the historical demise of Chinese eunuchs served as the precondition for the emergence of transsexuality in the Sinophone world.¹⁹ This genealogy is sutured by not only the coeval shifts in Chinese biopolitics and geopolitics (how the contested meanings of “life” and “sex” evolved from the late Qing to the Cold War era), but also, more than a matter of chronology, the way that the castrated body provided Chinese modernizing thinkers something concrete with which to grasp new theories of sex, including ideas about sex hormones and plasticity (both of which had proven to be necessary for envisioning sex change in the human body). Not only did eunuchs use their bodies as templates for narrating China’s historical

¹⁸ Gayatri Reddy, *With Respect to Sex: Negotiating Hijra Identity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Aniruddha Dutta and Raina Roy, “Decolonizing Transgender in India: Some Reflections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014): 320–36. For a critique of India-centrism in the study of South Asian *hijras*, see Adnan Hossain, “De-Indianizing Hijra: Intraregional Effacements and Inequalities in South Asian Queer Space,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (2018): 321–31. See also Adnan Hossain, *Beyond Emasculation: Pleasure and Power in the Making of Hijra in Bangladesh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On the temporal implications of the turn from *hijra* to *khwajasara* in Pakistani trans communities, see Omar Kasmani, “Futuring Trans* in Pakistan: Timely Reflections,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2021): 96–112.

¹⁹ My thinking on this subject is inspired by Susan Stryker’s comment on the decolonizing of trans studies: “If we accept the basic proposition that gender is part of a regulatory apparatus of statelike powers that—as described by Foucault, Agamben, Hardt, Negri, and others—individuates embodied subjects while aggregating them as members of a conglomerate body-politic, then any analytically rigorous conceptualization of *transgender* necessarily depends on the concrete, material, and historical arrangements that must be ‘crossed’ in a given biopolitical context: Chinese transgender in the transit from eunuchism to transsexuality, is specific to itself” (Susan Stryker, “De/Colonizing Transgender Studies of China,” in *Transgender China*, ed. Howard Chiang [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 287–92, on 289).

progression, but other agents seized the same corporeal “type” for the transmission of new scientific ideas and modernizing ideals.²⁰

Second, despite the death of court eunuchs, contemporary fascination with fictionalized eunuchs—as gender-transgressive but powerful martial artists—looms especially in Sinophone cinema. That is to say, even though the physical bodies of eunuchs have disappeared from the center of Han Chinese political culture, the Sinophone periphery generates a vibrant space for the expression of queer and nonnormative fantasy. If the Sinophone world is understood as Sinitic-language cultures and communities outside or on the margins of China and Chineseness (e.g., Taiwan and Hong Kong), its relationship to “Chinese history,” then, always takes the form of Derridean supplementarity.²¹ Because such configuration upsets the fixed permutations between the supplement and that which is to be supplemented, I would go so far as to make a similar case for transtopia’s *différance*.²² As David Valentine has shown, it was only in the 1990s that an academic discipline and a global movement coalesced around the category of transgender.²³ Viewed in this light, the “trace” of transtopia in the twenty-first century may very well supplement but also exceed the ordinary status of transgender as a master sign.

There is a third mechanism whereby the transness of Chinese eunuchs surpasses both pre- and post-transgender telos of knowledge production. Insofar as the history of sexuality relies on the conditions and idioms of archival knowledge, the politics of what, why, and how certain kinds of information are preserved by historical actors frustrates any straightforward correlation across a linear timeline. The paradox of sexuality’s invisibility and the retrospective search for its signs in the archive has been placed under the microscope by queer historians and archival theorists.²⁴ Here, I wish to elucidate this tension in the Asia Pacific by turning to the writings of the Sinophone physician Chen Cunren (1908–90) on the subject of castration, which offer an illuminating example of archival subversion. Known as the

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of these themes, see Howard Chiang, *After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

²¹ On the Sinophone concept, see Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

²² Chiang, *Transtopia*, 137–69.

²³ David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Zeb Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and the essays in Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., “Queering Archives: Historical Unravellings,” special issue, *Radical History Review*, no. 120 (2014); Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, eds., “Queering Archives: Intimate Tracings,” special issue, *Radical History Review*, no. 122 (2015); Daniel Marshall and Zeb Tortorici, eds., *Turning Archival: The Life of the Historical in Queer Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

founding editor of the journal *Kangjian bao* (Health news) in 1928, Chen famously joined the five-person coup that protested the Nationalist government's effort to abolish Chinese medicine in 1929.²⁵ Toward the end of his career, Chen published a series of essays on Chinese eunuchs in Hong Kong, where he relocated from Shanghai in 1949. These essays, which first appeared in *Dacheng* (Panorama) magazine in the 1970s, remain the most detailed and authoritative account of Chinese castration in the twentieth century.²⁶ Hence, they warrant a closer inspection.

The elusiveness of the eunuch category with respect to queer/trans genealogy is captured in Chen's eunuch project in at least four ways. First, even though Chen expressed his interest in the topic from the position of a medical authority, he executed traditional philological techniques—something distinctively absent in contemporary trans inquiry—in order to excavate Chinese classical references on the topic of castration, including discussions about its origins, its development, and the details of the actual procedures. In so doing, he enumerated a comprehensive taxonomy of the terms used to refer to eunuchs throughout Chinese history: *taijian*, *yanren*, *jingshen*, *sibai*, *siren*, *gongren*, *furen*, *huanguan*, *huansi*, *huangmen*, and *gongong*.²⁷ Each of these terms hinted at a different modality of gender and social transgression. Such a diversity of philological connotations defied a singular containment by the word “eunuch,” echoing what we saw in the case of *hijra*, and, by extension, a linear genealogical interpretation of its transness.

Second, assuming the viewpoint of a medical historian, Chen treated his study of Chinese eunuchs as an opportunity to chronicle the prevalence of castration in other civilizations, including European, Middle Eastern, and South Asian cultures. This circles back to my point about the mirror image of Orientalism in Western sources, such as the way non-Western eunuchs often become Orientalized “others” in European travelogues, literature, and stage plays. In Chen's rendering of anti-eunuchism in his vision of Chinese modernity, Greek slaves, Roman servants, Persian eunuchs, Italian castrati, and Indian *hijras* similarly served as an

²⁵ Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, *Neither Donkey nor Horse: Medicine in the Struggle over China's Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 113.

²⁶ Originally published as Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijian kao” [An investigation of male castration and eunuchs], *Dacheng* 44 (1977). The version I consulted is the reprint edition: Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 3 (1990): 77–88; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 2,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 4 (1990): 129–36; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 3,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 5 (1990): 124–31; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 4,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no. 6 (1990): 120–27; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 5,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 58, no. 1 (1991): 126–35; Chen Cunren, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 6,” *Zhuanji wenxue* 58, no. 2 (1991): 113–17. *Dacheng*, a magazine featuring cultural commentaries, was originally founded in 1970 as *Daren* and published until 1995, with the name change occurring in December 1973.

²⁷ Chen, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1,” 77–78.



作者在上海哈同花園曾為流落在上海的老太監診病，其面容完全與常人迥異。

Figure 1.1. Chen Cunren's photograph of a eunuch whom he met in Republican-era Shanghai. In the side bar, Chen stated that the face of the eunuch resembles nothing like that of a normal person. From "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1," *Zhuanji wenxue* 57, no 3 (1990).

aggregated object of negation. As a Chinese medicine practitioner (as opposed to a doctor trained in Western biomedicine) and someone concerned with the fate of the Chinese nation in the aftermath of imperialist aggression, Chen came to his encyclopedic project from a globalized stance on recasting China's colonial modernity: geopolitical "others" undertook the role of omnipresence in China's relation to the world.

Third, the intent to document the place of eunuchs in Chinese history afforded Chen a context for discussing his own personal encounters with Qing eunuchs. According to Chen, these encounters were made possible with the time he spent in attending to the clinical needs of Aili Garden (also known as Hardoon Garden), owned by a successful Jewish businessman, Silas Hardoon, in Shanghai in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁸ Chen's remark on the bodily traits of eunuchs paralleled the medical depictions of the Chinese castrated body as a mutilated exemplar circulating in and outside China starting in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 1.1).²⁹ When he described in detail the grotesque facial and physical features of those eunuchs whom he saw

²⁸ Chen, "Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1," 86.

²⁹ Chiang, *After Eunuchs*, 15–69.

on site, his condemning tone rode on the lexicons of perversity, abnormality, and pathology—all of which, too, enjoy notable currency in transphobic medical discourses today. In other words, Chen’s disparaging *rhetoric* turned dynastic eunuchs into an unlikely predecessor of modern transsexuals.

Finally, the project also enabled Chen to connect Chinese eunuchism to both endocrinological theories of sex mutability and the phenomenon of transgender sex workers in postindependence Singapore.³⁰ In so doing, Chen inserted Chinese eunuchs into a global circuit of sexual science. Whereas China’s place in the social and intellectual history of sexology has been studied extensively with respect to the problem of same-sex desire, Chen’s writing on castration narrativized China’s connection to global sexual science through the figure of the eunuch.³¹ It is hardly disputable that labeling dynastic eunuchs “transgender” resembles an anachronistic move. Even so, the temporal ruptures ligated through a textual effect such as Chen’s treatise implode rather than sustain the two coeval targets of transtopian critique: the transphobic denial of the past and the transgender presumption of the present.

What can scholars of Western trans history learn from transtopia? First and foremost is the lesson that the operation of *transgender* as an umbrella category carries its own historicity, one that is neither universal nor exemplary. When we confront the culturally circumscribed nature of this rubric, we are ready to accept its status as a single point of positioning on a historical continuum neither predetermined by nor tethered to the time and place of a given identitarian locus. A well-known example is the history of Two-Spirit people as a moving form of resistance toward heteronormative settler colonialism.³² Scholars of the early modern world have also begun to rethink the relationship between historical cases of castration and the modern notion of trans.³³ Another example concerns the concept of sex change itself, particularly the way its parameters and the kinds of procedures

³⁰ Chen, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 1,” 88; Chen, “Nanxing kuxing taijiankao 6,” 117.

³¹ Tze-lan Sang, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 99–126; Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: Male Same-Sex Relations in China, 1900–1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 41–59; Chiang, *After Eunuchs*, 125–77; Laurie Marhoefer, *Racism and the Making of Gay Rights: A Sexologist, His Student, and the Empire of Queer Love* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

³² Scott L. Morgenson, *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

³³ Greta LaFleur, “Trans Feminine Histories, Piece by Piece: or, Vernacular Print and the Histories of Gender” (presentation, the Global Early Modern Trans Studies Folger Symposium, Washington, D.C., May 18–20, 2023); Zeb Tortorici, “Fantasies of Corporeal Eradication: Performing Genitalia in Colonial Latin American Archives” (presentation, the Global Early Modern Trans Studies Folger Symposium, Washington, D.C., May 18–20, 2023).

it entailed evolved over time.³⁴ Before the 1960s, American surgeons, sexologists, and psychiatrists frequently considered simple castration surgeries “sex change” operations. They even debated about the most adequate way to perform such procedures, for instance, with respect to the removal versus the retention of gonads.³⁵ Even today, the clinical record suggests that some individuals experience intense castration ideations and embody a modern-day eunuch identity after castration.³⁶ Transtopia questions the exclusion of these “others within” from radical queer and trans thinking. To the extent that such exclusion anchors the normative hierarchy of transness, a shift to the language of transtopia might just be the solution to the divisiveness of trans politics and feminism—and what is needed to diversify the history of gender and sexuality.

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³⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³⁵ See, for example, UCLA surgeon Elmer Belt’s explanation in a letter to a prospective patient of the rationale for keeping the testes inside the transsexual’s body: Elmer Belt to E. V. H., December 9, 1958, Elmer Belt 1958–59 folder, box 3, series IIC, Harry Benjamin Collection, Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction, Indiana University, Bloomington.

³⁶ Richard J. Wassersug and Thomas W. Johnson, “Modern-Day Eunuchs: Motivations for and Consequences of Contemporary Castration,” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 50, no. 4 (2007): 544–56; Richard J. Wassersug, Emma McKenna, and Tucker Lieberman, “Eunuch as a Gender Identity after Castration,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, no. 3 (2012): 253–70.

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Embodiment and Biomedical Authority in South Asia: Reading Objectification and Subversion in the Colonial Clinic¹

Samiksha Sehrawat

Abstract

This chapter examines the representation and construction of the bodies of colonial patients and their experience of embodiment. The institutional regulation of racially “othered” bodies of colonial patients required the foregrounding and reification of their ethnic practices in both military and zenana hospitals, often at the expense of providing better medical treatment. Indian soldiers’ embodied experience during the First World War is revealed both in their aversion to return to the horrors of trench warfare after hospitalization and from inquiries regarding malingering. However, colonial patients asserted themselves through embodied actions of non-compliance that checked medical authority and transformed colonial institutions.

Keywords: embodiment; biomedicine; colonial India; colonial clinic; military hospital; zenana hospital

Introduction

Colonial medicine has been perceived as both a concrete benefit for the colonized and the means of “colonizing the body”. Colonial historians have conceived colonial public health as “the knowledge and regulation of the other”, while casting hospitals as sites of colonial hegemony over South Asian elites.² Indian historians examining the impact of biomedical therapeutics on the body of the colonized have focused on colonial or nationalist elites laying claims to mediating this new form of

¹ I want to thank the organizers and participants at the “Bodies Beyond Binaries” Conference, Zürich, and Dr Manu Sehgal for contributing to the development of my ideas.

² Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 132; David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

biomedical knowledge and biopower over the South Asian population.³ However, to fully understand how colonial medical modernity differed from its operation in Europe, it is important to examine embodiment in medical interactions. Foucault's enormously influential account of *The Birth of the Clinic* analyzing the shifts in the interrelationship between the body of the patient, the doctor and the space in which the patient is examined has not been utilized to explore medical institutions and interactions in South Asia.⁴ This chapter addresses the crucial transition whereby mediation of biomedical knowledge and power shifted control from patients to professionals—a process referred to as medicalization and medical dominance.⁵ Interpreting this from a body studies perspective is especially important given that the interaction of science with culture is central to both medicalization and colonialism. How the medical gaze operated on South Asian bodies under colonialism has not been historically imagined.⁶ The history of embodiment thus does not examine how biomedical authority over the colonized body was established or circumvented in South Asia. This chapter subjects colonial medical authority to three embodiment analytical frameworks—Michel Foucault's theorization of the objectification of bodies within the clinic; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of motor-intentionality to ponder patient choices in seeking or leaving biomedical therapy; and analysis of embodied interactions between doctors and patients through conceptions of intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty), habitus and practice (Pierre Bourdieu). By throwing light on the way medical institutions and discourses treated colonized bodies, this chapter thus furthers understanding of how modern state disciplinary regimes emerged from the representation of the body by positivistic medical science under colonialism.

³ Prakash, *Another Reason*, pp. 143–158.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003), trans. A.M. Sheridan. Influential surveys of the colonial clinic in South Asia do not address embodiment. Mark Harrison, Margaret Jones, Helen Sweet (eds.), *From Western Medicine to Global Medicine: the Hospital Beyond the West* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009); Mridula Ramanna, *Western Medicine and Public Health in Colonial Bombay, 1845–1895* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002).

⁵ Peter Conrad and Joseph Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Peter Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorders* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). The classic account of medical dominance was provided by Eliot Freidson, *Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For a more recent assessment, see M.A. Elston, "The Politics of Professional Power", in J. Gabe, M. Calnan and M. Bury (eds.), *The Sociology of the Health Service* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 58–98.

⁶ Prakash elaborates how "bodies" of South Asian medical knowledge transformed the relationship between South Asian medical practitioners and South Asian patients, *Another Reason*, p. 143–150. Projit Mukharji takes a similar approach but eschews questions of professionalization or embodiment, *Nationalizing the Body: The Medical Market, Print and Dakari Medicine* (London: Anthem, 2009).

The first section examines how customary, spatial and institutional controls deployed in colonial hospitals objectified and reified South Asian patients' bodies. Foucauldian perspectives on the patrolling of the body by institutional authorities will be examined here through the discourses surveilling the bodies of female patients entering colonial women's hospitals and by regulating patients' diet in military hospitals through rules that were concerned with dispositions, maneuvers, tactics and techniques linking ethnicity, diet, medical treatment and colonial military service. This section outlines how the medical objectification of the patient's body in hospitals was reconciled with the social regulation of bodies to produce gendered and racial difference. It shows how colonial hospitals became part of the external environment created by colonialism that sought to place constraints on individual action.

Patients' embodied responses to this colonial site where their bodies were regulated medically and socially, are explored in the second section. Phenomenological analysis of the body of colonized patients as a "lived body" is used here to probe why the medical model failed to establish its authority in colonial South Asia despite its success in establishing itself as a sign of modernity. By drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which insists that only embodied subjects act in the world, it is possible to explore the intentionality of patients through their embodied actions. Analysis of embodied interactions between surgeons and South Asian patients shows the extent to which the practice of biomedicine was transformed by surgeons' attempts to enter an intercorporeal space shaped by South Asian patients' habitus, setting limits to medical dominance.

Objectification in the Colonial Clinic: Regulating Bodies by Institutionalizing Ethnicity

In addition to facilitating the medical gaze through the social regulation of bodies, colonial hospitals were also meant to regulate racially "othered" bodies. After briefly examining the objectification of South Asian patients' bodies by subjecting them to the medical gaze, this section will pivot to those aspects of the colonial "clinic" that made it colonial—the insertion of ethnic practices in institutional rules governing the bodies of both women patients and male soldiers. It will explore how British women doctors' discourses about South Asian women patients regulated their bodies' movements, social interaction and sexuality through the improvised institutionalization of sex-segregation practices in the colonial clinic. It will then analyze how the regulation of sepoy patients within the institutional space of the hospital focused on formulating rules that would address the ethnic and religious customs of patients.

According to Foucault, the medical gaze is necessarily objectifying because it functions by distilling the disease from a visual examination of the patient's body,

to a focus on biophysical symptoms revealed by medical and laboratorial examinations while discounting the patient's testimony as subjective.⁷ To demonstrate how the medical gaze penetrated South Asian female patients' bodies, we will consider here a case report about a patient suffering from hypertrophy of both breasts in the *Journal of the Association of Medical Women*.⁸ The case history was dominated by a description of symptoms, of the physical examination by the doctor and the measurements of the enlarged breasts. Even though the doctor was unable to diagnose the patient, the case history dismissed the patient's own explanation of the swelling being due to the application of leeches in a move that discounted phenomenological evidence while relying on evidence collected by the doctor and understood through the abstraction of scientific rationality.⁹ The account provided assessments of the patient's digestive, respiratory and circulatory systems in accordance with the medical model of the body, which conceptualizes the body as a machine and assumes that illness can be explained in terms of determinate causes operating on the body. Under this model, the body of the patient is an object of scientific inquiry and intervention, with medical professionals treating the body as an ensemble of specialized parts requiring separate specialized interventions. The medical gaze required localized pathological symptoms for specific body parts while disregarding the embodied experience of patients. Thus, diagnosis itself becomes an act of objectification underpinning the doctor-patient power dynamic. The objectification of the patient Ramdessi (described as a "Hindu female") was evident from the dismissal of her phenomenological account of the illness to a minor paragraph marked "previous history" and the illustration of the case by a photograph exposing the patients' swollen breasts to all readers of the *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India*. What makes the case significant is that the visual illustration of her case disregarded any ethnic rules regarding veiling followed by the patient as well as her privacy and consent. The decision to publish Ramdessi's photograph was at variance with the fact that practices of veiling were a major preoccupation of the *Journal*, which adumbrated on institutionalizing rules of veiling in colonial women's hospitals. Paradoxically, British women doctors were concerned with both opening South Asian women's bodies to an optical hexis and with veiling them from the gaze of men prohibited by ethnic customs from beholding them. Indeed, discourses and disciplinary regimes advocated for

⁷ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*.

⁸ Letter to Editor from A.N. De Souza, Medical Officer, Municipal Female Hospital, Amritsar, Punjab, *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India* [henceforth *JAMWI*], vol. 1, no. 8, Nov. 1909, pp. 34–5.

⁹ Science has been criticized for "restricting experience to zero", Claude Alvares, "Science, Colonialism and Violence: A Luddite view", in Ashis Nandy (ed.), *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

colonial women's hospitals were concerned overwhelmingly in the early twentieth century with the exercise of ethnic practices of sex-segregation on the bodies of women patients.¹⁰

British women doctors vociferously demanded the institutionalizing of customary regulation of South Asian women's bodies through patriarchal sex-segregation that imposed spatial controls in zenana hospitals. Devices meant to ensure that women patients' bodies were not visible to those outside the hospital were repeatedly canvassed. Reports from the Dufferin Fund (National Association for Supplying Female Medical Aid to the Women of India) commended the "purdah wall"—a high wall surrounding hospitals meant to obscure women patients' bodies from view, while British women doctors advocated installing "chiks" or curtain made of bamboo pairings over windows and doors.¹¹ Contemporary observations included descriptions of how women entered the hospital without exposing them to view and violating purdah practices.¹² Concern about patients being "ill from long confinement indoors", also led British women doctors to argue that open spaces ought to be provided in women's hospitals to enable South Asian women to "come out and sit about unobserved by men" as an "important element in their treatment".¹³ By regulating how female bodies inhabited the space of the hospital, these practices shaped the embodied experience of colonized women.¹⁴ The constitution of the female gender in South Asia was facilitated by the circumscription of female bodies in the space of the hospital in order to preserve the parameters, physical and moral, of the group.¹⁵

¹⁰ Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 109–112.

¹¹ "Appendix 12: Reports from Native States: Kotah", *Dufferin Fund Report [DFR] 1890*, p. 285; "Appendix 13: Reports from Branches: Patiala", *DFR 1895*, p. 443; "Reports of Branches and Native States: Hanam Konda", *DFR 1907*, p. 265; *DFR 1911*, p. 6. "Report by a Member of the Association on a 'Dufferin Ward' marked as Dispensary on the Map", *JAMWI*, Nov. 1908, p. 20; "Letter to the Editor by Common Sense", *JAMWI*, Nov. 1910, vol. 1 no. 12, p. 31.

¹² Saleni Armstrong-Hopkins, *Within the Purdah, Also in the Zenana Homes of Indian Princes and Heroes and Heroines of Zion: Being the Personal Observations of a Medical Missionary in India* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1898), p. 32.

¹³ Kate Vaughan, "Dufferin Fund", *JAMWI*, Aug. 1910, vol. 1, no. 11, p. 9. Maneesha Lal, "Purdah as Pathology: Gender and the Circulation of Medical Knowledge in Late Colonial India", in Sarah Hodges (ed.), *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics, Controversies* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006), pp. 85–114.

¹⁴ For literature on embodiment, space and gender, see Seemanthini Niranjana, "Femininity, Space and the Female Body: An Anthropological Perspective", in Meenakshi Thapan (ed.), *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 107–24.

¹⁵ Niranjana, "Femininity, Space and the Female Body", pp. 112–16, 118; Meenakshi Thapan, "Introduction: Gender and Embodiment in Everyday Life", in Thapan (ed.), *Embodiment*, p. 6.

British women doctors regulated South Asian women's bodies in hospitals to ensure adherence to codes of morality that veiling practices represented. Considerable stress was given by members of the AMWI to closing men's access to spaces occupied by women patients in zenana hospitals in the interests of morality. One critic argued that "no decent woman" would seek treatment in a hospital that is not "entirely separated from one for men".¹⁶ An authoritative survey of women's medical care in India emphasized the dangers of ignoring the "moral question in Indian hospitals" and warned that scandalous sexual attacks on the bodies of female patients and staff were likely without appropriate supervision and inspection by British women doctors.¹⁷ British women doctors argued that by imposing strict sex-segregation within the hospital, they were making these spaces safe for women patients and staff, protecting them from a society that believed that "young women who take up independent work, or a woman who goes alone to a mixed hospital, is looked upon as of doubtful morality".¹⁸ Women entering public spaces were considered as opening themselves to a wide range of verbal and physical harassment for transgressing social rules about gendered bodily comportment and the established spatial boundaries for women's bodies. The zenana hospital was thus fashioned into an institutional space shaped by the visible and invisible boundaries created by social structures to regulate women's sexualities. While as a public space, the colonial hospital was required to be potentially open to all, discourses about the zenana patient sought to transform it into a public *interior* space. The zenana hospital's ability to accommodate the "public" was limited by the requirement that it accommodate the social regulation of women's bodies through colonial conceptions of sex-segregation in South Asia by making it "more private".¹⁹ Colonial women's hospital rules turned South Asian women's bodies into sites of patriarchal control by regulating their visibility, their spatial access and social interaction within the hospital.

Recent research revisiting links in Foucault's work on the relationship between medicine and surveillance²⁰ suggests that it would be productive to explore how British women doctors transposed the power dynamics created by the medical gaze to the social surveillance of female bodies in the hospital. While the medical gaze

¹⁶ "Report by a Member of the Association on a 'Dufferin Ward' marked as Dispensary on the Map", *JAMWI*, Nov. 1908, p. 22.

¹⁷ Margaret Balfour and Ruth Young, *The Work of Medical Women in India* (Bombay: Humphrey Milford, 1929), p. 166.

¹⁸ Balfour and Young, *Work of Medical Women*, p. 166.

¹⁹ *DFR 1895*, p. 443. For comparison, see similar efforts to transform public parks into enclosed sex-segregated spaces for the regulation of female bodies in contemporary Iran, Reza Arjmand, *Public Urban Space, Gender and Segregation: Women-only Urban Parks in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2017).

²⁰ Thomas Osborne, "Medicine and Epistemology: Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Clinical Reason", *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 2, (1992), pp. 63–93.

allowed doctors to identify the location of disease in the patient's body while disregarding the patients' subjectivity, British women doctors were also implying that they had the power to determine which behavior was immoral, thereby rendering the subjectivity of patients insignificant to determining their bodies' visibility within the hospital. While, by wielding the medical gaze, doctors were elevated to the status of specialist and their patients objectified, British women doctors' exercise of authority over sex-segregation rules in the hospital conferred on them the authority to act as specialists on sex-segregation and ethnic practices affecting South Asian women.²¹

The regulation of the body in colonial medical institutions exercised social control on the micro level by also regulating the eating habits of Indian soldiers in military hospitals. Colonial military medical policy showed a sustained preoccupation between the 1860s and 1920s with regulating the cooking and distribution of hospital food in line with ethnic practices of Indian soldiers. How to provide a hospital diet to invalid soldiers without violating the ethnic commensality taboos and dietary proscriptions²² in military hospitals for Indian soldiers was at the heart of lengthy deliberations that eschewed questions of the quality of health care provision.²³ The hiring of special cooks called "langris" or brahmins to cook hospital food was a central concern for the Lukis Committee formed to consider the improvement of Indian army hospitals.²⁴ When Indian soldiers were deployed on the Western Front during the First World War, the Kitchener Indian Hospital set up a "standing" caste committee of convalescent Indian officers "to ensure the observance of all caste regulations, especially in the cooking and distribution of food" and to advise hospital authorities "on any doubtful point that might arise". As a result, food cooked for soldiers in hospital kitchens was divided into three parts: for Muslims, meat-eating Hindus and "other Hindus".²⁵ Colonial military

²¹ For the racial and gender politics of this move, see Samiksha Sehrawat, "Feminising Empire: The Association of Medical Women in India and the Campaign to Found a Women's Medical Service", *Social Scientist*, vol. 41, pp. 65–81.

²² Commensality taboos reflect status relations between different ethnic groups through rules regarding sharing food. Members of an ethnic group would not like their food to be touched by or shared with men from ethnic groups who were believed to be inferior to them in status.

²³ For details of decisions in the 1880s and '90s that claimed that Indian troops preferred the rudimentary regimental hospitals while seeking to reduce military expenditure on Indian soldiers' medical care, see Samiksha Sehrawat, "'Prejudices Clung to by the Natives': Ethnicity in the Indian Army and Hospitals for Sepoys, c.1870s–90s", in Biswamoy Pati and Mark Harrison (eds.), *Social History of Health and Medicine in Colonial India* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 151–72.

²⁴ *Report of the Committee appointed to Consider the Introduction of Station Hospitals for Indian Troops in Place of Regimental Hospitals* (Simla: Government Central British Press, 1910), p. 2.

²⁵ "A Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital Brighton", Military Department Library, India Office Records, L/MIL/17/5/2016, British Library, London (henceforth, BL), pp. 9, 12.

officers' claims that this was to accommodate the "prejudices clung to by natives"²⁶ need to take into account external power relations linked with British imperial security concerns. Indian soldiers were employed for their cheap military labor through patterns of military service that foregrounded their martial ethnicity to ensure their loyalty to British colonial rule.²⁷ Thus, both the desire to reduce expenditure on medical care and the strong link between military recruitment of Indian soldiers and "martial race" ethnicity influenced decisions to continue with poorly equipped regimental hospitals despite evidence that Indian soldiers were willing to be flexible about their ethnic practices.²⁸

The regulation of patients' bodies in colonial hospitals reaffirmed colonial discourses that asserted the primacy of ethnicity in South Asian society. Such essentializing discourses were privileged over concerns about the health of the colonized population despite claims of imperial benevolence and the "white man's burden" that centered on medical care. However, it is important not to see this objectification as totalizing, as traces of its subversion by colonial patients' embodied intentionality exist in the historical record.

For instance, evidence suggests that some South Asian women evaded the extension of patriarchal surveillance of their bodies in the colonial clinic and used access to hospitals in ways that empowered them. Saleni Hopkins-Armstrong, a doctor employed in a Dufferin Fund hospital in Hyderabad, Sind, related an account of the daughter of a revered *peer* (holy man), who evaded the strict seclusion imposed on her. Not only did she carry out a romantic intrigue with a young man against the wishes of her father, the woman also went to considerable lengths to ensure that she was allowed to leave the prison-like sex-segregation of her home to visit the hospital. She feigned severe symptoms to ensure that she was allowed a lengthy visit with the doctor.²⁹ By deliberately flouting hospital rules and regimes, this woman (unnamed in the account) also undermined the objectification

²⁶ Letter from AGI to Military Secretary, GoI, 4 May 1877, Prog. no. 607, Military Department Proceedings, Government of India, May–June 1880, IOR/P/1529, BL.

²⁷ For insightful analyses of the links between martial ethnicity, masculinity and the Indian army, see Mary Des Chene, "Relics of Empire: a Cultural History of the Gurkhas 1815–1987", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Stanford University, 1991; Cynthia Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers: State Security in Divided Societies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980); Dirk Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput, and Sepoy: the Ethnohistory of the Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990); and Lionel Caplan, "'Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'the Gurkha' in British Military Writings", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, Jul. 1991, pp. 571–97.

²⁸ The decision to finally introduce central station hospitals equipped with more advanced diagnostic and treatment facilities followed medical breakdowns during the First World War exposing the abysmal medical care provided to Indian soldiers. Samiksha Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care in North India: Gender, State, and Society, c. 1830–1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 193–241.

²⁹ Armstrong-Hopkins, *Within the Purdah*, pp. 157–71.

of patients' bodies in colonial hospitals. Her determined efforts to enter the hospital were intentional and agential. Rather than abiding by rules objectifying her body, this woman was in the hospital not to be subjected to the medical gaze, but to assert her personal feelings, autonomy, and unique identity, forcing a recognition of her as a living, subjective individual.

To go beyond the objectifying effect of the medical gaze and related ambitions of social surveillance of colonial patients through the colonial clinic, the next section uses Merleau-Ponty's theorization of motor-intentionality and intercorporeality to explore how patients' embodied actions impacted medical institutions. Utilizing Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus and practice it explores embodied interactions to interrogate the doctor-patient dynamic beyond its textual representation.

Patient Embodiment as Leaving, Arriving and Interacting: Repurposing the Colonial Clinic

Merleau-Ponty's appreciation of agency as existentially acting in the world is a very useful concept for investigating the agency of colonized patients phenomenologically. By conceiving an intentionality that emanates from bodily existence, he allows us to explore patient embodiment as a "sentient tropism, a tending toward the world".³⁰ The distinction here is between interpreting agency as the intentionality of action, which privileges the mind as producing judgments that lead us to act in particular ways, and between an operative intentionality which is "apparent in our desires, our evaluation and in the landscape we see, more clearly than in objective knowledge".³¹ Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "intentional arc" foregrounds motor agency as being inherently linked with desire, cognition, and perception.³² Thus, the movement of patients into or out of hospitals reveals a sense of intentionality characterized by their bodily relation to the world rather than through articulation of mentalized intent. Methodologically this opens up new possibilities because it allows us to use colonial sources more effectively, for, despite their elision of the intentions of South Asian patients, these sources document patients' embodied actions. Examining the intentional arc of South Asian patients'

³⁰ Thomas Csordas, "Embodiment: Agency, Sexual Difference, and Illness", in Frances E. Mascia-Lees (ed.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment* (Blackwell, 2011), p. 139.

³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1962] 2005), trans. Colin Smith, xx.

³² An intentional arc expresses a recursive interlocking of the world, embodied action, and understanding. Merleau-Ponty's conception of intentionality conceptualizes a direct and spontaneous reaction of the body to the things in the world, emphasizing the embodied intentionality of relating to and moving toward various things in the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 157–9.

lived body can reveal to the historian how they participated in sense-making processes that allowed them to use colonial medical facilities.

One of the most widely documented embodied actions by patients in the colonial medical archive was the seasonal surge of patients, especially for cataract surgery. Large numbers of patients traveling to hospitals offering new surgical techniques with rapid recovery and early discharge would lead to a rapid increase in hospital inpatients. It was not unusual for patients attending such surgical centers to increase tenfold within two to three years.³³ Seeking surgery was thus an intentional, meaningful and purposeful act that overcame the general tendency among South Asian patients to avoid both surgery and hospitalization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and involved traveling very large distances. The seasonal use of colonial hospitals by large numbers of patients established a pattern of embodied enaction that shaped and changed the environment of the colonial hospitals according to their needs. These needs included avoiding treatment at times of “scarcity and dearness of provisions”, or during epidemics, allowing them to “put off such operations as cataract, stone, slowly growing tumours, etc., for a more convenient occasion”³⁴ when demands for labor by the agricultural cycle were lower.³⁵ However, descriptions of their rationale for seeking surgery as inferred by colonial medical officers are insufficient to interpret their actions as agential.³⁶ Since textual evidence of patient intentionality is not available to the historian, motor-intentionality expressed through their embodied actions of movement into and out of the hospital becomes significant, as it employs a “paradigm of enactive embodiment” influenced by Merleau-Ponty, so that the cognizer can be reconceptualized as an embodied being and cognition as enactive.³⁷ Thus, South

³³ See for example the increase in patients at the Delhi hospital Eye Ward between 1914–16 due to the introduction of a new technique of eye surgery. Similar improvements in cataract surgery at Jullundhur, Amrtisar and Moga also led to an influx of very large numbers of patients. Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 73–80. An innovation allowing the operation of lithotrity to be completed in one sitting adopted at the Indore Charitable Hospital led to an eight-fold increase in patients between 1864 and 1881. P.N. Shrivastav, *Madhya Pradesh District Gazetteers: Indore* (Bhopal: Government Central Press, 1971), p. 589.

³⁴ “Dispensaries”, *Delhi Administration Report 1918–19*, p. 26.

³⁵ Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 75–7. Also see Lauren Nauta’s extended discussion of the seasonal influx of patients for surgery across the Punjab, Nauta, “Medical Development in Colonial India: Seasonality, Specialization, and Efficacy in the Punjab Plains, 1870–1930”, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2006, pp. 274–8.

³⁶ I am interpreting “agency” here in terms of James Scott’s focus on infrapolitics or the use of “weapons of the weak” as survival strategies, James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 183–201.

³⁷ See for example, Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes (eds.), *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

Asian patients' motor-intentionality created a seasonal pattern to surgical work in hospitals, with "crowd[ing] ...during the autumn and spring months and the hot weather ...practically ...an off season".³⁸ This had a measurable impact on colonial hospitals, requiring expansion of hospital accommodation and new equipment.³⁹

Another pattern of embodied action—a general aversion to using colonial hospitals, which was a persistent theme in discussions of Indian hospitals and Indian patients under colonialism—can also similarly be rendered meaningful. Patients' decisions to leave the hospital in ways that ran counter to directions by medical personnel can also be interpreted through Merleau-Ponty's conception of the embodied "intentional arc". Accounts of patients in colonial Indian hospitals frequently relate cases of patients who left earlier than advised to, even at times abandoning treatment.⁴⁰ So strong was this pattern, that even patients asked to wait for surgery were likely to leave, especially if they were unable to observe the process of surgery itself.⁴¹ This led to changes to surgical procedures meant to reduce waiting times for patients.⁴² Patients undergoing cataract surgery at the Civil Hospital in Amritsar, Punjab, were thus operated on within about an hour of their arrival. Sacrificing procedures meant to ensure asepsis during surgery, patients who had walked from a distant village were operated upon while still covered by "the dust of the road".⁴³ Photographs of the Amritsar operating theatre show patients huddled with their bags, observing the unconscious patient on the surgical table as they waited their turn.⁴⁴ Thus, the colonial operating theatre was not a room designed to keep out all infection but one marked by the presence of the

³⁸ "Preliminary Statement Showing Money Required for Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat Department for Sep.–Mar. 1916", [hereafter, "Preliminary Statement for Expenditure"], CCO, H, F.no. 222B, 1915, DSA, p. 15.

³⁹ Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 77–80.

⁴⁰ A representative account reads: "it is very difficult to persuade some of the very ill patients who come to stay in Hospital.... And when a patient has been persuaded to stay in Hospital if she is not well at once she says some relation at home is dead or very ill and she must go; if she has had an operation and her pain relieved she also wants to go...." Agnes Scott, "St Elizabeth's hospital, Karnal", *Delhi Mission News*, vol. 7, no. 6, Apr. 1914, p. 70.

⁴¹ Miriam Young, *Seen and Heard in a Punjab Village* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), pp. 76–7, p. 83. A.J. Hayes (ed.), *At work: Letters of Marie Elizabeth Hayes, Missionary doctor at Delhi, 1905–8* (London: Marshall, 1909), pp. 241–2.

⁴² Derrick Vail, "Cataract Extraction in the Capsule: the Jullundur Patient", *Ophthalmic Record*, vol. 20, no. 2, Feb. 1910, p. 76.

⁴³ J. Williamson, "Major Smith's Operation for Extraction of Cataract in the Capsule", *Ophthalmoscope*, vol. 5, no. 10, October 1907, p. 555.

⁴⁴ This was a widely documented practice. Margaret Rawson, "First impressions", *Herald of the Baptist Missionary Society*, Oct. 1913, vol. 95, no. 10, p. 333; Iris Butler, *The Viceroy's Wife: Letters of Alice, Countess of Reading, from India, 1921–25* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), p. 83.

dusty bodies of the colonized, who insisted that they be “within sight and sound” of the patient being operated on.⁴⁵ Such changes in surgical procedures created disruptions to learned techniques that were deeply ingrained for surgeons. While the hospital was produced as an external environment that burdened patients’ bodies with performative priorities embedded in biomedical surgical practices such as asepsis, their sensorimotor engagement with this environment enabled them to limit the power bestowed on the doctor by the medical gaze.

Consideration of the sensorimotor unity of perception and action of individual patients who left or entered the hospital in atypical ways can also be instructive in interpreting their motor intentionality. Many women patients were using their sensori-motor actions for the intersubjective constitution of the hospital as a space where they could have rest, treatment or new experiences. Patients whose “intentional arc” had been impacted by disabling illness were especially likely to atypically favor a stay and return to the hospital, which came to be seen as a place that could restore, however partially, their motility.⁴⁶ Such patients’ atypical attitude towards colonial medicine may have been shaped by their experience of illness, which Havi Carel argues has the potential to challenge the sufferer’s most fundamental beliefs, expectations, and values.⁴⁷

Yet another example of atypical sensori-motor action were visits to the hospital by a group of veiled women curious about the institution of the hospital or dispensary. The intention to visit the hospital was not entirely to seek treatment through subjection to the medical gaze but rather to turn their own curious gaze on to hospital staff, seeking explanation for the embodied actions of the staff in terms that were culturally familiar to South Asian patients. One rural woman who had walked for six miles to a medical mission camp demanded, “Show me the memsahib!” in a reversal of the optical hexis employed by the medical gaze.⁴⁸ “Purdahnashin” (those observing veiling) patients were sometimes able to travel to the women’s hospital because these spaces were no longer deemed out of bounds due to the regulation of its space to prevent exposure to people deemed undesirable by patriarchal

⁴⁵ Surgeons ensured that the patient was with their friends throughout treatment and that patients could see the next step of the treatment/operation as they were being prepared for the operation. Williamson, “Major Smith’s Operation”, p. 555.

⁴⁶ There are numerous cases of patients such as Latifan, suffering from tubercular bone disease, whose partially restored motility after treatment led her to atypically return to the hospital for continued treatment despite a long stay. “Some Patients at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital Karnal”, *Delhi Mission News*, vol. 8, no. 9, April 1918, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Havi Carel, ‘Introduction’, *Phenomenology of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 4.

⁴⁸ Miss Bazely, “The Medical Mission: I—Camping”, *Delhi Mission News*, Vol. 8, No. 9, April 1918, p. 118.

regulation of their sexuality.⁴⁹ For such women, a visit to a women's hospital or a female doctor allowed their bodies to inhabit new spaces and have new experiences—as in the case of women whose purpose was to seek small Western objects such as pins, or the group of women pretending to be ill when “[n]one [of whom] had anything the matter... [yet] went off in triumph, laden with powders and doses, well satisfied with their adventure”.⁵⁰ Their motor intentionality in visiting the colonial hospital was meant not to subject them to the medical gaze but rather to create liberty, extending their motility (capability for movement). Attention to such employment of motility reveals how South Asians constituted the hospital by disclosing its intersubjective significance for them, allowing us to move beyond constructivist accounts of colonial medicine.

It is also important not to overlook the corporeality of the doctor-patient relationship and implicitly accepting textual evidence of the objectification of the body. Doctors' case histories—such as the one discussed in the first section—are ubiquitous, documenting the doctors' detachment from their personal feelings or attitudes required by the clinical gaze. However, medical treatment is a socially meaningful embodied practice. Focusing on the intercorporeality⁵¹ of interactions during treatment reveals what discursive representations of the medical gaze obscure—how surgeons needed to establish bodily resonance with patients and how it opened them to shaping their medical practice to the needs of South Asian patients despite the existence of power differentials created by colonialism and by an objectifying medical science. Here this conception will be used to query textual traces of patients' embodied action that proved resistant to the medical regulation of the colonized in hospitals. First, we will consider instances when doctors had to adapt their practice to the intractable behavior of patients, referred to as medical “non-compliance”.

A well-documented example of South Asian patients' disregard of postoperative instructions was their opening up of bandages to view the body parts that had been operated on.⁵² Specifically, the analytical focus will be on cataract patients who opened up eye bandages against injunctions to protect the surgical incision

⁴⁹ Miss Mayo, “Some Experiences of Mission Life in Delhi”, *Delhi Mission News*, Vol. 4, No. 8, October 1905, p. 96.

⁵⁰ F.C. May, “Into the Villages”, *Delhi Mission News*, vol. 4, no. 2, April 1904, p. 27.

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty's ideas on intercorporeality have led to the reconceptualization of social understanding as an embodied interaction that relies on behavior matching, primordial empathy and interactional synchrony to create mutual understanding. Intersubjectivity is thus seen to emerge from a complex layer of embodied responsiveness, expressivity and communication through a double embodiment created by the temporary merging of object and subject in embodied interactions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), trans. A. Lingis, pp. 259, 307.

⁵² Young, *Seen and Heard*, pp. 81–2.

from infection and light. The embodied actions of numerous South Asian cataract patients, even those separated by time and space, followed a persistent pattern: patients would peep from under the bandages to check if they could see some time after the operation. Often, they would leave once they had ascertained that they were able to see despite instructions to stay for continued monitoring.⁵³ Such non-compliance was seen as arising from patients' ignorance of the importance of asepsis, and as a marker of cultural difference, with a characteristic remark explaining: "it was quite useless expecting them to act as a European would under the circumstances".⁵⁴ However, the actions of the patients become meaningful when analyzed as an embodied occurrence arriving from their habitus. In opening bandages after cataract surgery, patients were enacting practices associated with South Asian oculists. Cataract couching was widely practiced in colonial India and had been performed by indigenous practitioners since the time of the Sushruta Samhita, c. 800 BCE.⁵⁵ Immediately after couching the eye, indigenous practitioners would wave fingers in front of the patient to indicate that the operation had restored vision.⁵⁶ This embodied practice of checking the restored vision of the patient had prevailed in Asia since the fifth century CE when an Ayurvedic text described the last step of the cataract surgery as demonstrating its success by "show[ing] ...a finger, threads, relatives and friends" to the patient.⁵⁷ Accounts of Indian oculists' couching for cataracts underscored the importance of this embodied practice: "Very great stress is laid on this part of the ritual, and the onlookers are not allowed to lose sight of the wonderful results achieved by the operation."⁵⁸ Cataract surgery

⁵³ Andrew Timberman, "Lt. Col. Henry Smith, IMS, and the Environment in Which He Developed the Technique of the Intracapsular Operation. Its Advantages", *Ohio State Medical Journal*, May 1912, vol. 8, no. 5, p. 246. S.E. Maunsell, *Medical Experiences in India, Principally with Reference to Diseases of the Eye* (London: H. K. Lewis, 1886), p. 16. James French, Charles Ducat, Geo Richmond, "Successful Treatment of the Diseases of the Eye in India", *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*, vol. 20, October 1825, p. 409.

⁵⁴ Maunsell, *Medical Experiences*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Vijay Thakur, "Surgery in Early India: A Note on the Development of Medical Science", in Deepak Kumar (ed.), *Disease and Medicine in India: A Historical Overview*, (New Delhi: Tulika, 2001), p. 22; O.P. Jaggi, *Medicine in India: Modern Period*, vol. 9, part 1, *History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 232–7.

⁵⁶ P. Breton, "On the Native Mode of Couching", *Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta*, 1826, p. 350. Also see description from the Calcutta Eye Infirmary, "Review" *British and Foreign Medico-chirurgical Review*, vol. 21, no. 41, 1858, p. 110.

⁵⁷ Vāgbhata, *Aṣṭāṅga-saṃgraha* (Uttarasthāna, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 2000), trans. K.R. Srikantha Murthy, Vol. 3, pp. 133–55.

⁵⁸ R.H. Eliot, *The Indian Operation of Couching for Cataract* (New York: Paul Hoeber, 1918), p. 16. H.E. Drake-Brockman, "The Indian Oculist and his Equipment", *Transactions of the Ophthalmological Society of the United Kingdom*, vol. 40, 1895, p. 251.

in colonial hospitals led patients to repeat the same embodied action: “I had the greatest difficulty, in preventing them [South Asian patients] either from removing the bandage completely, or from lifting up the pad, in order to look out and satisfy themselves of the result of the operation.”⁵⁹ Patients’ “anxious and curious” relatives would also often remove the bandages on the eye to examine the eye.⁶⁰ The patients, requiring a sensory confirmation of the success of the operation, were opening the bandage as required by embodied memory linked to cataract surgery and their *habitus*. Pierre Bourdieu conceptualized habitus as the dispositions, skills, styles, tastes, and behavior that are shared by the members of a community. Habitus is acquired by individuals through practical immersion in the life world, by participation in interactive experiences, mimetic learning, implicit routines, and rituals. It is carried by individuals as body memory. According to Bourdieu, this embodied memory is “beyond the grasp of consciousness”—a second nature effectively guiding the behavior of the individual in specific settings.⁶¹ The habitus forms the basis of common sense or “a practical sense of embodied social customs and interactions which constitutes the prereflective background of social life”.⁶²

Further analysis of cataract surgery in colonial India from a body studies perspective shows that British surgeons were also drawn into the learned dispositional network of the habitus of South Asian patients. This is evident from probing a second set of embodied interactions around cataract surgery focused on the collective examination of the opaque lens removed from the cataract-affected eye. The lens was provided as evidence that the object impeding the vision had been removed and vouchsafed the success of surgery:

The crowd of expectant natives [waiting outside the operating area were]... specially loud in their acclamations when a lens [surgically removed from the patients’ eye] was given them for inspection after its removal. By way of adding to their confidence, each lens was placed on a piece of paper on removal, and sent out to the anxious relatives, by whom it was carefully treasured, after having been passed round for the inspection of the general public.⁶³

⁵⁹ Maunsell, *Medical Experiences*, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Maunsell, *Medical Experiences*, p. 18. Also see French, et al., “Successful Treatment”, p. 410.

⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), trans. Richard Nice, p. 14.

⁶² Thomas Fuchs, ‘Intercorporeality and Interaffectivity’, in Christian Meyer, J. Streeck, and J. Jordan (eds.), *Intercorporeality: Emerging Socialities in Interaction*, Foundations of Human Interaction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 14.

⁶³ Maunsell, *Medical Experiences*, pp. 8, 84. For a similar story, see Farrer “Removing bajra”, Ellen Farrer Chronicle, 6 March 1917, Indian Missionaries and Institutions, IN/150, Baptist Missionary Society Collection, Regent’s Park College, Oxford.

This mirrored the practice of indigenous oculists who would provide patients and their relatives with “manifest proof” of treatment in the form of a membrane (“*jhili*”)⁶⁴ and its reiteration by British surgeons drew them into the habitus of South Asian patients. It is useful to examine this interaction between the surgeon, S.E. Maunsell, and South Asian patients’ relatives through “theories of social practice”, which analyzes how the performance of a practice involves different participants relating to and interacting with one another’s bodies; things involved in the practice; and, artefacts such as techniques, language and images. This approach emphasizes the material and corporeal dimensions of social interaction around the practice. Bourdieu’s concept of the practical sense is another useful theoretical lens of analysis.⁶⁵ The surgeon’s mimetic enaction of the South Asian coucher’s practice showed his tacit knowledge of the typical interactive sequences following the removal of the cataract from the patient’s eye. Through it he entered an inter-corporeal space within which he was interacting with South Asian patients’ and their relatives’ habitus. This habitus established the shared body memory of their community and made embodied practices immediately evident or foreseeable in the context of eye surgery. As members of a culture the relatives understood each other intuitively, anticipating the next moves in the context of cataract surgery, knowing how to react, without the need to resort to deliberation, to a theory of mind, or to mentalizing procedures. By entering this shared understanding that the lens should be shown to relatives after the surgery, Maunsell was participating in the coproduction of a social reality that was profoundly influenced by the assumptions of South Asian patients. British doctors’ written accounts of eye surgery indicate their dismissal of South Asian patients as ignorant and render medical practice as an exercise of the medical gaze. Such a rendering represents the doctor as exercising power emerging from the untrammelled exercise of his gaze. However, the analysis of the embodied interactions between surgeons and patients reveals uncertainties and “gaps” during medical practice that required adaptation by doctors and the constitution of medical interactions through communication and collaborative interactions with South Asian patients. Doctors were acting agents who were bodily

⁶⁴ Eliot, *Indian Operation of Couching* (New York: Paul Hoeber, 1918), p. 16.

⁶⁵ Practical sense is a pre-reflective stance that comes from practical mastery rather than abstract knowledge that individuals use to generate empirical cognitive acts in pursuit of their aims. He defines it as “an acquired system of preferences, of principles of vision and division (what is usually called taste), and also a system of durable cognitive structures (which are essentially the product of the internalization of objective structures) and of schemes of action which orient the perception of the situation and the appropriate response” in Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford University Press Stanford, California 1998), p. 25. For a discussion of practical sense as “regulated improvisations” that we draw on here, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), trans. by Richard Nice, pp. 57–65.

anchored in and oriented toward their patients' habitus, engaged in a process of incorporating practices meant to accommodate colonized patients' expectations. Thus, structural, functionalist and discursive analysis may indicate the structures, rules and norms that organized doctor-patient relationships, but they fail to consider embodied interaction between historical actors from the viewpoints of the various participants and thus do not reveal how their actions make reference to and influence each other.

Eye surgeons, keen to enhance their surgical skill, required large numbers of cataract patients on whom they could practice surgery.⁶⁶ To ensure that South Asian patients would accept cataract surgery in colonial hospitals, surgeons sought to establish a mutual understanding through embodied interactions that mobilized a tacit background knowledge of the practice of couching during their interaction with patients. They were employing what Bourdieu terms the "logic of practice", differing profoundly from the "logical logic" of the medical gaze.⁶⁷ Practical knowledge necessary for participating in a practice is held tacitly, carried by the body in the form of certain performative competences. It becomes manifest outwardly in competent responses by participants reacting to situational challenges they encounter while engaged in the performance of a practice. Biomedical surgeons' "practical sense" made room for "organized improvisations" on the professional code governing doctor-patient interactions.

In this and other attempts to adapt surgical practice to patients' embodied actions, surgeons were influenced by a tacit communication between their bodies and that of the colonized, which involved an entanglement of self and other to produce intersubjectivity and sociality. While engaged in interactions with patients, doctors were participating in an overarching corporeality that encompassed the individual bodies and objects involved in it. This intercorporeality established immediate relations among all participants, allowing them to reflexively enable and prompt each other to act, resulting in the incremental attunement of their bodies with each other. Maunsell's intercorporeal interaction with a patient's relative can be examined using Merleau-Ponty's conception of intercorporeality to reveal the extent to which patients were able to shape the practice of medicine: "A serious old Hindoo expressed his delight, astonishment, and unbounded gratitude, when he found placed in his hands, the white object which for years past he had seen in his wife's eye, and which he knew to be the cause of her blindness...."⁶⁸ Maunsell's statement conveys an intuitive understanding of the patient's husband's emotions which indicates a *bodily resonance* in their embodied engagement. Resonance is constituted by interrelated

⁶⁶ Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 68–73.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 110.

⁶⁸ Maunsell, *Medical Experiences*, pp. 8, 84.

bodily movements between bodies “attuned to one another, and sensitized to the relevant objects and characteristics of [...] practice”.⁶⁹ Maunsell’s social cognition in this interaction was based on both intercorporeality and interaffectivity.

However, such intercorporeal bonding between participants engaged in a practice does not always result in social solidarity. Given the multiperspectivity of participants, the potential for conflicting interpretations of the practice remains due to the different positions occupied by participants during the performance of the practice. Thus, medical accounts by British doctors could relate these interactions as ones in which their medical gaze had established their power over patients, and dismiss South Asian patients’ actions as evidence of the backwardness of the colonized. This was consistent with colonial discourses essentializing the colonized as inherently irrational who required a lengthy tutelage to facilitate their transition to modernity.⁷⁰

A phenomenological perspective on medical modernity thus throws light on the limits of medicalization in South Asia. In Europe, medicalization operated as an effect of modernization. Medicalization has been seen as a process which concentrated power in the hands of medical professionals and extended medical expertise into other areas of society, such as law and governance. In the West the increased use of hospital statistics, diagnostic tools and technologies was accompanied by the consolidation of medical authority over the patient, and through the alignment of the medical profession with the state, over society more widely. This shift in the practice of medicine largely disempowered the patient in relation to the doctor.⁷¹ South Asian patients’ actions thus become meaningful as conscious, purposeful and goal-driven activities designed to mediate illness on their own terms rather than in ways determined by biomedicine or associated professional codes. Their embodied actions located biomedical practitioners in a habitus informed by the practice of South Asian oculists, thus effectively treating biomedical surgeons and oculists as on par. Thus, South Asian patients undermined the medical profession’s power through their health seeking behavior.⁷² In effect, this limited the potential of medical dominance and the medicalization of South Asian society.

⁶⁹ Thomas Alkemeyer, Kristina Brümmer and Thomas Pille, ‘Intercorporeality at the Motor Block: On the Importance of a Practical Sense for Social Cooperation and Coordination’, in Meyer, Streeck and Jordan (eds.), *Intercorporeality*, p. 227.

⁷⁰ In medical settings, these discourses have survived as “culturalism”, Didier Fassin, “Culturalism as Ideology”, in Carla Makhoul Obermeyer (ed.), *Cultural Perspectives on Reproductive Health* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 300–318.

⁷¹ For an overview, see, Kristin Barker, “Social Construction of Illness: Medicalization and Contested Illness”, in Chloe Bird, et al. (eds.) *Handbook of Medical Sociology* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010), p. 152.

⁷² For contemporary phenomenological analyses of asymmetries in relationships between healers and sufferers and between competing medical systems, see Harish Naraindas, Johannes Quack

Conclusion

The colonial hospital was created as a space for the colonial medical gaze and racialized South Asian bodies by institutionalizing their regulation in conformity to ethnic practices. The implications of this go beyond just considering hospitals to be part of colonizing discourses that essentialized South Asian society as bound to irrational ethnic practices—it reveals how medical and social surveillance were co-constituted under colonialism. Foucault posited that scientific thought emerged as a system establishing positivistic science as the means of knowledge about the human subject, who was created as its locus in the modern world and which made possible the project of creating a system of democratic governance.⁷³ Thus, by making ethnic groups rather than individuals the object of positivistic science in colonial hospitals created a divergence from this “modern” relationship between the human subject and positivistic science. It bestowed a medical modernity to South Asia that was more interested in social and state control than in ethical and professional treatment of patients or in their pastoral care. The legacy of this divergence continues to haunt medical attitudes to patients in South Asia today. To illustrate this, it may be useful to consider the consequences of British women doctors’ appropriation of the right to define and police South Asian women’s bodies, which extended their medical expertise to include control over the non-medical bodily and social conduct of the colonized female body. The resulting discourse on zenana medical care proved influential in shaping attitudes towards women’s bodies for South Asian nationalists and women’s organizations, especially in relation to reproductive health. The consequent medicalization of childbirth in modern South Asia continues to be part of the lived experiences of South Asian women today.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this construction of the patient’s body as an object by the medical gaze existed in tension with a hermeneutic parity produced by South Asia’s medical pluralism. Colonial patients’ embodied action in intercorporeal therapeutic settings established a check on the power of the biomedical profession. By being attentive to how colonized patients used gesture as embodied action, this essay makes an

and William Sax (eds.), *Asymmetrical Conversations Contestations, Circumventions, and the Blurring of Therapeutic Boundaries* (New York: Bergahn, 2014).

⁷³ Cindy Patton, “Introduction: Foucault after Neoliberalism; or, the Clinic Here and Now”, in Cindy Patton (ed.), *Rebirth of the Clinic: Places and Agents in Contemporary Health Care* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. ix–xx.

⁷⁴ For an overview of the literature on twentieth century medicalization of childbirth that argues for the centrality of British women doctors’ discourses in shaping developmental, nationalist and international discourses on maternal mortality, see Samiksha Sehrawat, “Colonial Legacies and Maternal Health in South Asia”, in Clémence Jullien and Roger Jeffery (eds.), *Childbirth in South Asia: Old Paradoxes and New Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 40–67.

important intervention in interpreting the subversion of biomedical authority in societies with medical pluralism. It allows us to view colonial patients not merely as socially determined organisms but rather phenomenologically aware, active body-subjects whose corporeal properties enabled them to intervene creatively in medical settings.

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CHAPTER 3

The Body of the Burmese Muslim

Chie Ikeya

Abstract

Across the colonial-postcolonial divide, the body of the Burmese Muslim has served as a potent embodiment of difference and object of emotions. A non-normative body that troubles the binary frame of the Burmese Buddhist native versus Indian Muslim foreigner, the Burmese Muslim has also occasioned reckonings with the historicity and mutability of social constructions that have become taken for granted realities. As such, Burmese Muslims have been subject to recurrent attempts at political and social control. I explore this persistent record of the Burmese Muslim, starting at the turn of the nineteenth century and extending to the present, and analyze the development of new regimes of social reproduction spawned through but not determined by colonial agenda and priorities.

Keywords: Burmese Muslims; colonial Burma; social reproduction; Burmese nationalism; minority population

Introduction

The body of the Burmese Muslim has been, simultaneously, hypervisible and illegible. In 1901, the British colonial government abolished the category of “Burmese Muslim” and ascribed to those who identified as Burmese Muslim an alien religious, racial, and legal status—what the British called “personal” status. Decades of advocating by Burmese Muslims for official recognition as an indigenous minority population and a valid classification of personhood did not reverse this decision. Contrasting this denial of the Burmese Muslim by the British administration and, subsequently, Burmese national governments, the body of the Burmese Muslim woman—how she dressed, what she felt, and whom she loved, bedded, wedded, and birthed—has constituted a matter of public debate. Across the colonial-postcolonial divide, the female body of the Burmese Muslim has served as a potent embodiment of difference and object of emotions. A non-normative body that troubles the binary frame of the Burmese Buddhist native versus Indian Muslim foreigner, the Burmese Muslim has also occasioned reckonings with the historicity and mutability of social constructions that have become taken for granted realities.

As such, Burmese Muslims have been subject to recurrent attempts at political and social control, including negation, conditional inclusion, and expulsion. I explore this persistent record of the Burmese Muslim, starting at the turn of the nineteenth century and extending to the present.

The work that Muslim bodies performed in the making of empires and nations—and in making their borders and boundaries matter—has been the subject of much scholarship, not least on South Asia.¹ Scholars such as Charu Gupta, Durba Mitra, and Asha Nadkarni have shown that Muslim bodies, constructed as vectors of sexual and reproductive excess and perversion—polygamy, promiscuity, prostitution, and overfertility—constituted targets of regulation in British India, of which Burma was a province from 1886 until 1937.² Virtually no such studies exist on Burma, a country considered “outside the arc of Islam” in Asia and essentialized as a Buddhist heartland, despite its shared border and history (of the British Raj) with India and Bangladesh.³ In examining the centrality of Burmese Muslims to the colonial modern constitution of binary bodies (native-foreign, civilized-uncivilized, Buddhist-Muslim, and Burmese-Indian), I take up the challenge by scholars such as Shefali Chandra “to look beyond more obvious exchanges between colonizing and colonized groups, white and nonwhite,” to probe the development of new regimes of the body, sexuality, and reproduction spawned through but not determined by colonial agenda and priorities.⁴

¹ This voluminous scholarship cuts across regional boundaries such as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and includes works such as Aihwa Ong and Michael Peletz, eds., *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, eds., *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia* (New Delhi: Kali for Women 1996); Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Judith Surkis, *Sex, Law, and Sovereignty in Algeria, 1830–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

² Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New York: Palgrave, 2002; first published, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); and Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

³ Eric Tagliacozzo, “Burmese and Muslim: Islam and the Hajj in the Sangha State,” *Burmese Lives: Ordinary Life Stories Under the Burmese Regime*, edited by Wen-Chin Chang and Eric Tagliacozzo, 83–106 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 85.

⁴ Shefali Chandra, “Whiteness on the Margins of Native Patriarchy: Race, Caste, Sexuality, and the Agenda of Transnational Studies,” *Feminist Studies* 37.1 (Spring 2011): 127–153, p. 132.

Sovereign vs. Captive Bodies

In 1895, the Chief Court of Upper Burma heard a landmark case that set the precedent for applying “Muslim” not “Buddhist” law to parties who were Burmese Muslim.⁵ Annexed in 1886, Upper Burma was the last territory under the authority of the Burmese Konbaung government to be incorporated into the British Empire and ruled as a province of British India. As such, the British administration based in Lower Burma was still in the process of extending its judicial system of plural legal jurisdiction to Upper Burma. Under this legal dispensation, religious laws—euphemistically termed “personal laws” and formulated as laws that applied only to members of a particular religious community—governed the family affairs of the subjects of British India. In cases concerning marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance, the civil courts administered the “Buddhist law” when the parties were Buddhist, “Muhammadan law” when the parties were Muslim, “Hindu law” when the parties were Hindu, and “Chinese customary law” when the parties were Chinese.⁶

The litigants in *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa* (1895) were identified as *zerbadi*, a term that entered the Burma census for the first time in 1891 as a category of race referring to “the offspring of a Muhammadan native of India by a Burmese wife.”⁷ The court transcript of *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa* itself described the *zerbadi* parties to the lawsuit as “native Muslims” and “Mahomedans of the country, more or less closely descended from Natives of India, but of what portion unknown.”⁸ While neither the plaintiffs nor the defendants refuted the claim that they all belonged to “the Burmese Muslim community,” they disagreed on whether the *zerbadi* were governed by the Buddhist or Muslim law of inheritance.

The defendant Ma Pwa possessed a will left by her deceased father Ko Lin that named her the successor to his estate. The lawyer for her nephews, who were Ko Lin’s grandsons by his elder daughter Ma Myit, contested the validity of the will on the basis that Ko Lin and his family, though Muslim, were “Burmese Buddhists for the purpose of inheritance” and, as such, could not dispose of their property

⁵ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa* (1895), cited in Chan-Toon, *Leading Cases on Buddhist Law* (Rangoon: Hanthawaddy Press, 1899), pp. 382–88.

⁶ On the implementation of the British colonial jurisprudence of “personal laws” in Burma, see Chie Ikeya, *InterAsian Intimacies across Race, Religion, and Colonialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024).

⁷ Lewis, C.C., *Census of India, XIIA, Burma, Part II, Imperial Tables* (Rangoon: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, 1901), p. 111, fn. *Zerbadi* is probably a corruption of the Persian word *zīr-bād* meaning “below the wind.”

⁸ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, pp. 382–383.

by will.⁹ Indeed, British legal authorities in Burma insisted that inheritance among Buddhists in Burma was strictly intestate and disallowed wills.¹⁰

The plaintiffs argued that the custom among the *zerbadi* was to divide intestate property according to Buddhist law. “The conditions of life in Burma (where the Burmese Mahomedan woman was the working bee of the hive),” their lawyer explained, “made it inequitable that succession should be otherwise than it is among the Burmese Buddhist community, the Burmese woman occupying the same position in the social and domestic economy whether a Buddhist or a Mahomedan.”¹¹ The presiding judge conceded that “there may be a custom having the force of law that the Zerbadi [sic] community is governed by the rules of Buddhist law which they have adopted in matters of inheritance.”¹² But he sided with the ruling of the district court that prior to British rule, all those who went to court, including the *zerbadi*, had no choice but “to swallow Buddhist law,” the law of the land. “The British Government which has succeeded has now expressly legislated that in certain matters, of which inheritance is one,” he declared, “the personal law of certain religious communities, of which Mahomedans are one, shall be applicable to the members of such communities.”¹³

The judge did not stop there. He proceeded to refute the advocate’s contention that the socio-economic position of a Burmese Muslim woman equaled that of her Burmese Buddhist counterpart.

The learned Advocate for appellants in his ingenious argument has referred to the assimilation of the Zerbadis to their Buddhist neighbours around them, their holding of land like natives and not foreigners, their marriages with Burmese women, and the freedom accorded to their wives and daughters who do not live as *pardanashin* women, but go into public and transact business like their sisters who enjoy the liberty and privileges of Burmans in general.¹⁴

⁹ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, p. 383.

¹⁰ The colonial administration debated on multiple occasions (1881, 1888, 1904, and 1917) the question of whether testamentary power should be conferred on Buddhists. Notwithstanding historical evidence of testamentary alienation of estates by Buddhists, each judicial debate determined that Buddhists in Burma had no capacity to make a will. See Taw Sein Ko, “Correspondence on Buddhist Wills,” *Journal of Burma Research Society* 7, no. 1 (April 1917): 56–57; Tha Gywe, “Burman Buddhist Wills,” *Journal of Burma Research Society* 7, no. 1 (April 1917): 57–69; Taw Sein Ko, “Buddhist Wills,” *Journal of Burma Research Society* 7, no. 3 (December 1917): 274–77; Than Tun, “The Legal System in Burma, 1000–1300,” *Burma Law Institute Journal* 1, no. 2 (June 1959): 171–84; Andrew Huxley, “Wills in Theravada Buddhist S. E. Asia,” *Recueils de la société Jean Bodin pour l’histoire comparative des institutions* 62.4 (1994): 53–92.

¹¹ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, p. 384.

¹² *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, p. 386.

¹³ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, p. 385.

¹⁴ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, p. 386.

“Probably,” the judge granted, “the Burmese women whom Mahomedans or Zerbadis have married would not be willing to submit to the seclusion of strict Mussulmanis so that the men are unable to control their social freedom.” However, he continued, “it is understood that in the matter of divorce the tendency is to follow the Mahomedan law.” In his will, Ko Lin stated that he had exercised *talaq* (“repudiation” or unilateral divorce), divorcing his wife, the mother of Ma Pwa and Ma Myit, according to Muslim law. Extrapolating from this information, the judge concluded that it was inconceivable that “the Buddhist law of inheritance in which the position of the wife is so strong can prevail among Zerbadis.”¹⁵

In doing so, the judge enshrined a colonial jurisdictional imperative: Buddhist law applied only to members of the Buddhist community (and only to their familial and religious affairs); Muslims could not have recourse to Buddhist law, just as Buddhists were precluded from the application of Muslim law. The British formulation of “personal law” and its orderly implementation depended on a simple and stable classification of legal status, to each of which one and only one “personal law” could be uniformly and inexorably applied. The judge ignored a fact laid out in plain sight. The adherence to the Muslim law of divorce, however widespread it may have been among Burmese Muslims at the time, did not preclude a practice among the same group of following the Buddhist law of inheritance.

Masquerading as immutable reality, the “inconceivability” of Burmese Muslims exercising the Buddhist law of inheritance was a legal conjecture that was predicated on the conjuring of binary bodies: the liberal, autonomous body of the Buddhist woman and the captive, docile body of the Muslim woman. This colonial fantasy positioned Buddhist and Muslim women at opposite ends of the spectrum of liberty. The former enjoyed social and economic freedom while the latter, essentialized as a *pardanashin*—a woman who observed seclusion and lacked the ability to act as her own economic agent—endured oppression. These gendered, religious figures embodied the presumptively primordial, discrete religious “communities” that were governable by their respective religious or customary law.

The advocate for the Burmese Muslim plaintiffs deflected, even as he appealed to, this imaginative construct by emphasizing the “Burmese-ness” of the *zerbadi*. The *zerbadi*, he attested, were native, Burmese people who shared with Burmese Buddhists “the conditions of life in Burma.” A Burmese Muslim woman, no less than a Burmese Buddhist woman, was a “working bee of the hive”; the former held the same responsibilities *and* rights as the latter. His argument capitalized on the British conflation of the Burmese with Buddhists, who comprised approximately 85 percent and 87 percent of the total population in Burma according to the British

¹⁵ *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa*, pp. 386–387.

decennial censuses of 1891 and 1901.¹⁶ Though Buddhism originated in India, colonial authorities naturalized Buddhism in Burma, identifying it as the authentic religion of the natives of Burma. As such, the plaintiffs' strategy reified essentialist understandings of Burmeseness. Yet it challenged the presumed fixedness of religion and community and underscored the historicity and particularity of Burmese Muslims who were distinct from the universal figure of the Muslim. On this basis, the plaintiffs hoped, the court would be persuaded to recognize "Burmese Muslim" as a distinct "personal status" that merited its own customized law.

British legal authorities in Burma as elsewhere did recognize that actual social practices often diverged from the dictates of textual law and exhibited important regional and local variations. Their administration of "Buddhist law" provides a case in point. They acknowledged that what they referred to as "Buddhist law" was actually "Burmese Buddhist law" or "Burmese Buddhist customary law," and refused to apply it in cases involving Chinese Buddhists in Burma. If the British colonial judiciary was open to accepting variant legal statuses among Buddhists (e.g., Burmese vs. Chinese), why not also different legal categories of Muslims?

In the eyes of the Upper Court of Burma, however, to be (or to become) a Muslim woman signified a conversion so radical and contrary to the essence of the Burmese woman as to transform the person into an alien—to alienate her of her status as native and Burmese. The judge insisted on the irreconcilable differences among Muslim and Burmese women. In being or becoming a Muslim, a Burmese woman bound herself to Muslim law and forfeited the entitlement to be considered Burmese.

In 1905, the Chief Court of Upper Burma once again refused to recognize "Burmese Muslim" as the personal status and law of the *zerbadi*, upholding the precedent set by the 1895 case. Two Burmese Muslim women filed an appeal against a decision by the District Court of Mandalay that "Muslim law," not "Burmese Buddhist law," should apply to Burmese Muslims in so far as inheritance and succession were concerned. The women claimed that there was "abundant evidence that outside the Courts the Zerbadis voluntarily and habitually applied the Buddhist law in cases of inheritances."¹⁷ As evidence, the appellants called over a dozen witnesses. Mullah Ismail—an elite member of the *zerbadi* community in Mandalay, *akauk wun* (tax collector) under King Mindon (r. 1852–1878), and subsequently a partner and shareholder of the Burmah Oil Company (the leading British oil company at the time)—testified that prior to and immediately after the British annexation of Upper Burma in 1886, the *zerbadi* settled questions of inheritance according to the laws applicable to Buddhists; Aga Javad, identified as a longtime "Persian" resident

¹⁶ Government of India, *Census of 1891, Imperial Tables, X, Burma Report, Volume II* (Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1892), p. 24; Lowis, *Census of India*, p. 25.

¹⁷ *Ma Le and Ma Me v. Maung Hlaing and Ma Mi* (1905) 2 Upper Burma Rulings, pp. 1, 1–2.

of Mandalay, stated that in the forty years that he lived in Burma, he had not once heard of a *zerbadi* requesting the application of Muslim law; Mahomed Isaak, an elderly *zerbadi* and honorary magistrate of Mandalay, explained that Muslim *zerbadi* did not strictly follow the Buddhist law, though they were guided by it, and in general chose to deal with matters of inheritance without going to the courts; Maung Hla, a fifty-year-old *zerbadi* lawyer, affirmed that cases involving *zerbadi* were not decided according to Muslim law, as did Cho Gyi, a 62 year-old woman and one of only two women witnesses who claimed that “in the King’s time Zerbadis divided their inheritance according to Buddhist law,” clarifying that property acquired during marriage was the joint property of husband and wife.¹⁸

The testimonies of these witnesses indicated the prevalence among elite, propertied Burmese Muslims of a practice known among legal scholars as “forum shopping”: of choosing, in a plural legal system, a body of law or forum of dispute resolution that is most likely to deliver a favorable outcome.¹⁹ Again, the presiding British judges refused to accept that Burmese Muslims submitted themselves to Buddhist law of their own volition. The judges were willing to admit that most Burmese Muslims had Burmese names, spoke Burmese, and dressed in Burmese style. One even declared that he was persuaded that there existed “from time immemorial a custom having the force of law, by which questions of inheritance and succession affecting the Zerbadis of Mandalay have been decided by Buddhist law.”²⁰ But they would not countenance the assertion that this custom reflected the desire of the Burmese Muslim subjects. They dismissed the appeal by reasoning that Burmese Buddhist law had been “forced on the Zerbadis by a despotic monarchy” that refused to permit the application of any other law. As in *Ahmed and another v. Ma Pwa* (1895), intricacies of actual lives and practices that either challenged the orthopraxy presupposed in codified personal laws or defied the juridical ordering of society were rejected.

An Illegible Subject

In the decade separating the two civil cases discussed above, “Burmese Muslim” became not only an impossible legal status but an impossible subject position altogether. In 1901, the government abolished the category of “Burmese Muslim” of whom there were 6,872 according to the 1891 census, from the decennial census. In effect, the British excised “Burmese Muslim” from colonial administrative

¹⁸ *Ma Le and Ma Me v. Maung Hlaing and Ma Mi*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁹ Mitra Sharafi, “The Marital Patchwork of Colonial South Asia: Forum Shopping from Britain to Baroda,” *Law and History Review* 28 (2010): 979–1009.

²⁰ *Ma Le and Ma Me v. Maung Hlaing and Ma Mi*, pp. 1, 6.

taxonomy. This left individuals who had previously returned their “religion” and/or “race” as “native Muslim” or Burmese Muslim with the choice of identifying as either *zerbadi* or, starting in 1921, “Indo-Burman,” a new umbrella category of which *zerbadi* became a subgroup. Throughout these years, the British administration persisted in officially defining *zerbadi* and Indo-Burman alike as “the offspring of a Muhammadan native of India by a Burmese wife,” turning Indian patrilineage into an intrinsic characteristic of Burmese Muslims who were now ascribed an alien descent. At the stroke of a pen, the British administration curtailed the possibilities of formal existence as a Burmese Muslim and furthermore made illegible Burmese Muslim communities who claimed no Indian patrilineal—or, for that matter, matrilineal—ties and considered themselves native Muslims.

Such administrative obfuscation of Burmese Muslims did not make them invisible. As the 1905 case suggests, Burmese Muslims appeared stubbornly in civil trials, reminding both judges and litigants what a troubling subject the Burmese Muslim constituted in the eyes of colonial law and government. As the invalidity of Burmese Muslim as a personal status became settled law over subsequent decades of British colonial rule, however, Burmese Muslims sought the application of Buddhist law not as Burmese Muslim persons but rather on the basis of “reversion to Buddhism,” as in the case I examine next. This strategy diminished the Burmese Muslim body in the legal archive.

In June 1929, Justices of the Rangoon High Court were asked to determine the fate of the dead body of Pwa Myit: a Burmese Buddhist who had become Muslim upon marriage to her second husband, Po Thet, who was *zerbadi*.²¹ According to the record of the case, Po Thet passed away after thirty years of marriage and Pwa Myit followed suit just over a year later. Before she died, three Burmese Buddhist women, two of whom were her relatives, moved into her house. We can only speculate on the circumstances under which the Burmese Buddhist women moved into Pwa Myit’s house; the court record supplies no information on this matter. Perhaps the women had forced their way into the home of an elderly widow in anticipation of a legal battle for her estate. Or, perhaps, they provided care for Pwa Myit because her late husband’s kin would not. Upon her death, the Burmese Buddhist women claimed that Pwa Myit had “reverted to Buddhism” and refused to hand over her corpse to Pwa Myit’s *zerbadi* step-daughter (by Po Thet) and Po Thet’s cousin, who insisted on a Muslim burial. The two parties took their battle to court as the late Pwa Myit lay in a coffin, caught between competing claims and endless questions about who she *really* was—Buddhist or Muslim—at the time of her death. Had she died a Muslim, Justice Baguley argued, “I would hold that a Mohamedan relation of the deceased would be entitled to possession of the body and would be entitled

²¹ *Ma Khin & ors v. U Ba & ors* (1929) 7 Indian Law Reports, Rangoon Series, p. 603.

to bury it in preference to a Buddhist relation of approximately equal standing.” By the same token, he explained, if Pwa Myit had died a Buddhist, the Buddhist relation would be entitled to succession “in preference to a Mohamedan relation of equal standing.”²² Justice Mya Bu concurred that “it is only fair and equitable to extend the rights to the one who belongs to the same religion as the deceased.”²³

Neither party in the case raised the possibility that Pwa Myit, though a Muslim convert, might have wished or been permitted a choice of funerary and burial rites. She may have counted herself one among numerous Buddhist individuals who converted to Islam in the process of marrying a Muslim person without disavowing Buddhist ties and rituals.²⁴ Unlike in the aforementioned cases where Burmese Muslims testified in court that they availed themselves of Buddhist law, there was consensus that Pwa Myit would not be granted the right to be cremated unless she had “reversed” her conversion to Islam and returned to Buddhism. Her dead body and its afterlife manifested how the colonial laws delimited the terms of being and belonging.

We Burmese Muslims

Yoked to India by a colonial taxonomy that insisted on classifying *zerbadis* as Muslims of Indian descent and, thereby, an alien presence, some Burmese Muslims took the fight for government recognition outside the courts to lobby for political representation. Already in 1909, they had formed the Burma Moslem Society (BMS) which described itself as a society of “Burman Muslims” though it counted Indian Muslims among its members.²⁵ It had long opposed the use of the category *zerbadi* in official documents. When the Indian Statutory Commission visited Burma in 1929 to assess the possibility of constitutional reforms—including the separation of Burma from India—that would give India and Burma a greater degree of self-government, the organization published a memorandum “on behalf of Burmese Muslims.”²⁶ The petitioners deplored the tendency among Burmese Buddhists to regard Burmese Muslims “as foreigners and interlopers” and asked that Burmese

²² *Ma Khin & ors v. U Ba & ors*, p. 607.

²³ *Ma Khin & ors v. U Ba & ors*, p. 608.

²⁴ See Ikeya, *InterAsian Intimacies*.

²⁵ Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma* (Wiesbaden, Germany: O. Harrassowitz, 1972), 57.

²⁶ Known as the “Simon Commission” after its chairman Sir John Simon, the commission’s visit to Burma came on the heels of its visit, first, to India in 1927 for the similar purpose of evaluating constitutional reforms. It was part of a series of commissions and conferences that were convened by the British government to assess revisions to the constitutional structure in India and Burma that culminated in the separation of Burma from India in 1937.

Muslims be “regarded as Burman citizens in every respect.”²⁷ Burmese Muslims, the memorandum declared, “know of no other home except Burma.” It proceeded to affirm the allegiance of Burmese Muslims to Burma:

The majority of them are born in Burma and die in Burma. They have all their properties and vested interests in Burma. They regard this province as the land of their birth, adoption and domicile. In the matter of patriotism and in regard to efforts towards social, educational and political amelioration of the country as a whole, they are not a shade less than the Burman Buddhists.²⁸

In the face of mounting political campaigns for the separation of Burma from India as well as the impending government census of 1931, the BMS stepped up its request to the colonial administration to replace *zerbadi* with “Burma Muslim,” a term that allowed the group to affiliate with the Burmese without renouncing their religious distinction. It published a call to all permanent Muslim residents in Burma to register themselves in the census as “Burma Muslims.”²⁹ In 1931, Burmese Muslims also broke away from the All-Burma Muslim Educational Conference, a gathering of Indian and Burmese Muslims from all over Burma held annually since 1905, and established their own annual All-Burma Burmese Muslim Educational Conference.³⁰ The question of the language of instruction in Muslim schools in Burma had served as a divisive issue since 1915 when the Burmese Muslim members, objecting to the dominance of Urdu, asked that Indian Muslim teachers acquire a satisfactory knowledge of Burmese within the next three years. The issue became all the more divisive as the left-leaning *Dobama Asi Ayone* (We Burmese or Our Burmans Association), the most influential political organization in Burma prior to the Second World War, turned Burmese language into a pillar of its program for emancipating Burma from British colonialism, as suggested by its slogan: “Burma is Our Country, Burmese is Our Literature, Burmese is Our Language, Love Our Country, Cherish Our Literature, Uphold Our Language.”³¹

²⁷ “The Memorandum of the Burma Muslim Community to the Royal Statutory Commission” (1929), IOR/Q/13/1/7, item 17: E-Bur-986, India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London, p. 2. The memorandum was authored by the president of the Burma Moslem Society, Maung Bah Oh, but prepared with the support of the Young Muslims’ Union, Mandalay, and in consultation with “representative Muslim elders in different parts of the province” (p. 1).

²⁸ “Memorandum of the Burma Muslim Community,” p. 4.

²⁹ Yegar, *Muslims of Burma*, p. 64. For more on the 1930s movement that advocated for the recognition of Burmese Muslims as native or indigenous Muslims, see Ayako Saito, “The Formation of the Concept of Myanmar Muslims as Indigenous Citizens: Their History and Current Situation,” *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 32 (2014): 25–40.

³⁰ Yegar, *Muslims of Burma*, p. 51.

³¹ Khin Yi, *The Dobama Movement in Burma, 1930–1938* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988), p. 5. This is Khin Yi’s translation from Burmese. Founded in 1930 and modelled

The effort by *zerbadis* to secure their future as “Burman citizens” who shared with other Burmese the same language, literature, and culture pleased neither the Indian Muslim nor pan-Muslim communities from whom the “Burma Muslims” distanced themselves, nor the *dobama* (“we Burmese” or “our Burman”) ideologues and activists with whom the “Burma Muslims” aligned themselves. Contemporary discussions of Burmese Muslims in the press were suggestive of this bitter consequence.

The 22 February 1932 issue of *Thuriya* [The Sun], the first openly nationalist vernacular paper and the leading newspaper at the time, featured an illustrated article entitled “Burma Muslim Woman and Sartorial Practice.”³² Criticizing the failure of Muslim authorities to issue clear guidelines on how a “Burma Muslim” woman should dress in public, it solicited answers from the readers, offering a monetary reward for those who could identify correctly which of the pictured attires was commensurate with Islam (Fig. 3.1). The three figures embodied a civilizational scale: on one end of the lineup stood a *pardanashin* whose entire body was covered; on the other end, a scantily clad woman outfitted like a flapper wore high heels, a petticoat that accentuates her silhouette, and smoked a cigarette. In the middle sat a woman in what would have been viewed as traditional Burmese attire (except for her shoes) and, as the illustration would have it, just the perfect balance of clothing and coverage, neither excessive nor risqué; her head, face, and neck were visible, unlike the Muslim woman, yet she was modestly dressed, unlike the ultramodern woman. She personified decorum and moderation, unlike the other two who symbolized civilizational extremes—one frighteningly conservative and the other alarmingly liberal.³³

While ostensibly written by two Muslim men, this was unlikely, as a reader pointed out in a letter to the paper in response to the article. Given the general proscription against the representation of living beings in Islam, Ba Thaw argued, Muslim men would be disinclined to submit for publication such an image.³⁴ The

after the Irish nationalist Sinn Féin Party (“We Ourselves” or “Ourselves Alone” Party in Irish), *Dobama asi ayone* represented a new generation of intellectuals and activists, mostly graduates of Rangoon University, who demanded radical political and social changes unlike the older, and England-educated, generation of Burmese politicians. They called themselves *thakin* (master) to symbolize their goal of returning Burma to its rightful masters, the Burmese, and transforming the nation into a classless society of only masters. On the *Dobama Asi Ayone*, see Khin Yi, *Dobama Movement*.

³² “Myanmar muslim amyothami hnit wut sa sin yin hmu,” *Thuriya*, February 22, 1932, pp. 9, 19.

³³ The Modern Girl around the World Research Group, Alys Eve, Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dong, and Tani Barlow, *The Modern Girl Around the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). On the modern woman in Burma specifically, see Chie Ikeya, *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011); Tharaphi Than, *Women in Modern Burma* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁴ Ba Thaw, “Do Myanmar muslim,” *Thuriya*, February 27, 1932: 19.

မြန်မာမူလင်အမျိုးသမီးနှင့်ငတ်စားဆင်ယင်မှု။



Figure 3.1. Burma Muslim Woman and Sartorial Practice, *Thuriya*, 22 February 1932

objective of those behind the illustrated submission, he suspected, was not to seek knowledge of Islam but to insult *dobama* Muslims.

In subsequent discussions of the subjects of *dobama* Muslims and “Burma Muslim woman” in *Thuriya*, the various readers who wrote in argued over what kinds of veiling were in fact prescribed by Islam; how Burmese women, whether Muslim or not, should dress in public; and how the Burmese Muslim differed from Indian Muslims.³⁵ Consensus emerged around two points. First, the *burkha* or the veiling of a woman’s whole body except her eyes, originated in India, not in the heartland of Islam. Second, the *burkha* had no place in Burma. The verdict confirmed the opinion of legal authorities who likewise viewed the *pardanashin* as the antithesis of a Burmese woman.

³⁵ “Do Myanmar muslim: purdah,” *Thuriya*, February 26, 1932: 8; Ba Thaw, “Do Myanmar muslim”; “Do Myanmar muslim,” *Thuriya*, March 1, 1932: 19–20; “Do Myanmar muslim,” *Thuriya*, March 25, 1932: 7–8; “Myanmar Muslim akyaug: purdah,” *Thuriya*, March 30, 1932: 23.

Had the *dobama* Muslims won a concession in this debate? Perhaps. There was acknowledgement that veiling was a heterogeneous practice with wide ranging local and regional variations. Islam could be assimilated—it could be Burmanized—as the Burmese Muslim had been doing. At the same time, the resolution to the debate over *dobama* Muslims and veiling required the hierarchization of different veiling practices and the rejection of the “Indianized” variant. In the hopes of convincing the colonial administration and Burmese lawmakers that they belonged in Burma, the *zerbadis* and “Burma Muslims” estranged themselves from fellow Muslims.

Conditionally Burmese

The exchange of views about the Burma Muslim woman in *Thuriya* exemplified public discussions about the fate of Burmese Muslims that unfolded over the course of the 1930s. First, it highlighted the conditional status of the Burmese Muslim in Burma, contingent upon their continual performance of Burmeseness and fidelity to Burma. Second, it fixated on the body of the Burmese Muslim woman. Both found expression in the literary works of writers celebrated to this day as the founding fathers of modern Burmese literature, such as the prominent Marxist writer and *Dobama Asi Ayone* member Thein Pe Myint (1914–1978).³⁶

“Khin Myo Chit” (1933) marked Thein Pe Myint’s debut as a modernist writer. An archetypal tale of the political coming of age of the male protagonist, it offers a lesson in the gendered duties of a political person: a woman dies for her man and the man learns to renounce his attachment to her in order to give his life to his community and country. The title, which is a feminine Burmese name that literally translates as “Friend [who] loves [her] kind,” alludes to the heroine of the short story, Khin Htway, a Burmese Muslim schoolteacher. She agonizes over her relationship with Htein Lwin, a young Burmese Buddhist anti-colonial revolutionary. Their love for one another, she is convinced, calls into question Htein Lwin’s loyalty to the Burmese Buddhist and undermines his nationalist credentials. She resolves to end their relationship and rebuffs Htein Lwin’s endless endeavor to see her—a decision that wreaks havoc on her body which wastes away under the unbearable weight of a broken heart. In her dying words, Khin Htway implores Htein Lwin to be strong if he loves her—to not succumb to grief as she will—and carry through with his struggle to deliver Burma from colonial rule. For him to see Burma a free and prosperous country, she says, would make her suffering worthwhile.³⁷

³⁶ For other examples, see Ikeya, *InterAsian Intimacies*.

³⁷ Thein Pe Myint, “Khin Myo Chit,” reprinted in *Thein Pe Myint Wutthu Do Baung Gyouk Sak* (Yangon: Ya pyi sa ouk taik, 1998), p. 34.

The story drew heavily on an emergent liberal discourse of modern love and marriage in 1930s Burma that empowered individual choice and the heterosexual conjugal couple as the foundation of the family.³⁸ This modernist formulation of intimate liberation, however, did not extend to those who loved and married across religion. True love culminated in the realization that a Muslim woman can only be a crippling burden on a Burmese Buddhist man. “Khin Myo Chit” imputed to Khin Htway a parasitic existence and an innate degeneracy. She lives off her host (Htein Lwin) without whom she cannot survive. Htein Lwin, in contrast, can finally thrive without Khin Htway, who is presumed to be incapable of reinvigorating the community of Burmese Buddhists. The story implied that true love and happiness for Htein Lwin resides in a relationship with a Burmese Buddhist woman who can be his helpmate and nurture future Burmese Buddhists. It left only one choice for a Burmese Muslim woman who loved a Burmese Buddhist: self-abnegation. This was a cruel, gendered romanticization and absolution of the eugenicist theory among Burmese Buddhist intellectuals such as Thein Pe Myint that Burmese Muslims were a threat to the health of the body politic whose reproductive bodies needed to be controlled.³⁹ By depicting Khin Htway’s death as enlightened, wilful suicide, “Khin Myo Chit” insinuated that Burmese Muslim women like Khin Htway accepted their conditional belonging in the Burmese body politic—as bodies requiring regulation and containment.

The politicization of the female body was not unique to the Burmese Muslim. Burmese Buddhist women were urged to resist marrying foreigners and to boycott the use of imported clothes and textiles and wear, instead, blouses made of *pinni* (light brown, homespun cotton).⁴⁰ In a sharp historical reversal, the body of the lay Buddhist female displaced the male body of the monk—who must renounce all carnal temptations, especially food, alcohol, and sex—as the primary focus of disciplinary control and asceticism. Inspired by the Gandhian *swaraj* (self-rule) movement and its emphasis on renunciatory bodily practice such as celibacy, vegetarianism, fasting, and the wearing of *khadi* (home-spun cloth) as a central method of achieving self-government, women emerged as the primary target of this ascetic modality of self-rule in Burma as in India.⁴¹

³⁸ On reformulations of love and marriage in colonial Burma, see Chie Ikeya, “Talking Sex, Making Love: P. Moe Nin and Intimate Modernity in Colonial Burma,” in *Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s*, edited by Susie Protschky and Tom Berge, 136–65 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

³⁹ On reproductive nationalism in Burma, see Ikeya, *InterAsian Intimacies*.

⁴⁰ Ikeya, *Refiguring Women*, pp. 86–88.

⁴¹ Joseph Alter, *Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Srirupa Prasad, *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890–1940: Contagions of Feeling* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 43–59.

Anti-colonialists in Burma likewise envisioned the virgin, self-disciplining bodies of Burmese Buddhist women, untouched by foreign goods and men, as the bastion of Burmese sovereignty, the embodiment of self-mastery, and the foundation for Burmese liberation. The Burmese Buddhist woman was imagined to achieve progress and flourish through this practice of discipline, unlike the Burmese Muslim woman who was expected to perish.

An Object of Pity and Redemption

Though configuring the Burmese Muslim woman's body as a source and sign of degeneracy and affliction, popular narratives did not necessarily condemn her to death and destruction. Many characterized the Burmese Muslim woman as a suffering captive who needed to be saved and restored to Buddhism, as in the article "Kala gadaw" (1934), or "An Indian's mistress."

Penned by the student activist, writer, and education reformer Po Kyar (1891–1942), the article purports to be a reportage based on the author's first-hand knowledge of a Burmese wife of an Indian Muslim man.⁴² It opens with Po Kyar's unexpected encounter with a childhood friend, May Mya, on his way to the port city of Sittwe in western Burma. On board the boat to Sittwe, Po Kyar meets a couple he construes to be Indian. The husband, who is fluent in Burmese, explains that he moved from India to Burma nine years ago. Po Kyar soon discovers to his surprise that the wife of the Indian man, whom he mistook to also be Indian, is a Burmese convert to Islam and a native of his hometown with whom he had gone to school.

Upon learning that her Muslim husband is a halal butcher, Po Kyar asks May Mya if she herself also slaughters animals, an activity regarded as a demeritorious act that contravened the teachings of the Buddha. Seen through his eyes, May Mya is an unrepentant convert and *kala gadaw*. She explains to Po Kyar that in the hopes of bettering their lot, Burmese women, even those already married to Burmese men, were flocking to Indian Muslim men. The revelation confirms Po Kyar's worst fear: women like May Mya were not so much wives as "mistresses" who prostituted not only their bodies but their beliefs for material benefits. "So this is what it has come to," Po Kyar remarks, horrified by what has become of his childhood friend.⁴³ He returns to Rangoon convinced that May Mya has transformed beyond recognition—she is no longer recognizably Burmese—and beyond salvation. But the story takes a proverbial turn when May Mya arrives at his doorstep: battered, disheveled, and beseeching redemption.

⁴² Po Kyar, "Kala gadaw," *Youq Shin Lan Hnyun* (May 1934): 26–32, p. 26.

⁴³ Po Kyar, "Kala gadaw," p. 31.

The spiritually, sexually, and physically exploited body of Burmese converts and wives of Indian Muslim men enacted the deleterious effects of Burma's attachment to India under British colonial rule, beckoning rescue and "reversion" to Buddhism. Putatively based on the actual experience and testimony of the women, such narratives also evoked the imminent danger to Burmese Buddhist women posed by the forced marriage, so to speak, of Burma to India and the urgency of securing a divorce. Yet, the separation of Burma from India in 1937 did not make the body of the Burmese Muslim any less embattled or incendiary, or any less of a contested object of public feelings and opinions. Accusations that Indian men used the wombs of Burmese women to (pro)create an interloping population of Burmese Muslims and destroy the *sin sit* (pure, genuine) community of Burmese Buddhists inflamed the "anti-Indian riots" of 1938, the most spectacular incidence of communal violence in colonial Burma.⁴⁴ The independence of Burma from India inaugurated a sharpened focus on the Burmese Muslim as a troubling internal other.

A Body with a Seditious Heart

On the first anniversary of the 1938 riots, the leftist press *Kyi pwa yay* (Progress) published a 158-page book entitled *Kabya pyatthana* (The Mixed Problem, 1939) by one of its editors, Pu Galay. U Hla (1910–1982), who had co-founded the press with his wife and fellow writer Daw Amar (1915–2008) had commissioned Pu Galay to write the book.⁴⁵ "Some *kabya* treat Burma as not their own, as though they do not belong, which results in a real loss for the country," wrote U Hla in his foreword to the book by way of explaining the need for its publication.⁴⁶ By "some *kabya*," he had in mind the *zerbadi* or, as Pu Galay put it, *kabya* (mixed person/people) descending from Burmese women and Indian Muslim men. The gender-race-religion pairing of Burmese Buddhist women and Indian Muslim men reinforced the definition of *zerbadi* and Indo-Burman adopted by the colonial administration. One of the most revered kings in Burmese history, Kyansittha (r. 1084–1112), who also happened to be a son of an Indian princess, was therefore not *zerbadi* because he was the son of a Burmese father, according to Pu Galay. Indeed, he wrote approvingly of such marriages between Burmese men and Indian princesses while ignoring the royal gifting of Burmese princesses to Indian men.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ikeya, *InterAsian Intimacies*.

⁴⁵ On the press and the famous husband-wife partnership, see Daw Amar, *Kyun ma yay te thu bawa Ludu U Hla* (Yangon: Kyi pwa yay sa pe, 2009), pp. 326–329.

⁴⁶ Hla, "Meik set," in Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana* (Mandalay: Kyi pwa yay, 1939), p. 6.

⁴⁷ Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, pp. 39, 57–58.

U Hla defended the focus of the book by explaining that it was “impossible to cover all aspects of the *kabya* problem in one book,” and that he intended it as volume one of what would become a two-volume tome.⁴⁸ The second volume never materialized.

In his opening passages, Pu Galay conceded that “a person who is not mixed is truly rare” and that all human beings were *kabya* in one way or another. What he, like U Hla, found unnerving was that the *zerbadi* was Burmese in neither *thwe* (blood) nor *seik* (heart). “It’s worse to be *kabya* in heart than to be *kabya* in body,” he declared, insisting that “every person who lives in Burma and dies in Burma ought to share one blood, one heart, with Burmese people.”⁴⁹ The remainder of the book chronicled the reputedly corrupt *seik* of the *zerbadi*. It painted an unflattering picture of the early history of *zerbadis*: as fugitives of the Mughal empire and criminals executed for their transgression of the royal order by King Alaungpaya (r. 1752–1760) prohibiting cattle slaughter. Unworthy subjects they were, but Burmese kings bestowed upon them royal titles out of benevolence, stressed Pu Galay.

The British colonialists then arrived, Pu Galay continued, bringing with them “hordes” of Indians and upending the historically harmonious relations between *zerbadis*, *kabya* and the Burmese.⁵⁰ His description of this more recent and populous group of *zerbadis* emphasized their kinship with the Burmese: they dressed like the Burmese, they went by Burmese names, and they spoke Burmese. He detailed, with express sympathy, the struggle of the *zerbadi* to make Burmese, not Urdu, the language of instruction in Islamic schools in the country. “Burmese Muslims are Burmese countrymen, born to people of the Burmese race and in the land of Burma,” he asserted, and blamed Indian Muslims for what he portrayed as the underdevelopment of the Burmese Muslim, i.e., their lack of competence in either Burmese or English as a result of the dominance of Urdu in the madrasas.⁵¹

Pu Galay did not otherwise demonstrate compassion for his subject. The rest of the book amounted to a blow-by-blow account of the chasm between the “pure and genuine” Burmese and the Burmese Muslims. The list of accusations against the latter ran long: they coerced Burmese women into conversion; they married multiple women and repudiated them, while denying their wives the same prerogatives; by agitating for constitutional representation, they had played right into the hands of the British, serving as pawns in the colonial game of divide and conquer; they had forsaken their own Burmese people to side with the British, only to find that they had alienated themselves as a community that was “neither Indian nor Burmese.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Hla, “Meik set,” p. 6.

⁴⁹ Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, pp. 11–12.

⁵⁰ Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, pp. 100–105.

⁵² Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, pp. 90–91, 95–98, 116–117.

The book ended with one last example of the so-called *kabya* problem: the failed attempts to legislate marriages between Burmese women and foreigners until 1939, when a bill governing the marriage of Buddhist women in Burma to non-Buddhist men was finally approved. The Buddhist Women's Special Marriage and Succession Act was scheduled to come into force in April 1940. The Act was reproduced in full in the book as its final chapter.

The Act required a Buddhist woman who intended to marry a non-Buddhist man to file a notice of intent with the Registrar, usually a village headman or a magistrate, 14 days in advance of the marriage—a procedure that was intended to allow any person with objections to the marriage to file a complaint with the Registrar. It additionally instructed the Registrar to: publicize the intent to marry “by affixing a copy thereof at some conspicuous place in his office”; and notify the parent or guardian, in cases where one of the parties were under 20 years of age, and the (ex?) husband “if the woman had already married a man.”⁵³ There was only one member of parliament who voted against this Act, Pu Galay observed: the *zerbadi* barrister and councilman Mirza Mohamed Rafi.⁵⁴ A native of Burma who had campaigned against separation from India, he was, to Pu Galay, living proof that the *zerbadis*, though Burmese in body, suffered from a seditious heart. Their inclusion in the Burmese body politic demanded constant vigilance.

The Body of Evidence

A century after the British colonial regime deemed them a perpetual alien presence in Burma, recognizable and legible only as people of an irrevocable foreign origin (Indian) who are subject to a foreign personal law (Muslim law), Burmese Muslims have again become objects of legal debates, media campaigns, and political agitation and retaliation that have rekindled the question of whether Burmese Muslims are—or can ever be—“really” Burmese. The military-led political and economic liberalizations that began in 2011 ushered in a wave of violence against those labelled “Indian” (*kala*), Muslims in particular, incited by monastic nationalist movements such as Ma Ba Tha (Association to Protect Nation and Buddhism) as part of their “Buy Buddhist” and “Marry Buddhist” campaigns.⁵⁵ In sermons across the country attended by large audiences, comprised of mainly women, leading Ma

⁵³ Pu Galay, *Kabya pyatthana*, p. 2. The permissible objections had to be made on the grounds that one (or both) of the parties was underage, of unsound mind, or, for the female party, already married.

⁵⁴ *Buddhist Women's Special Marriage and Succession Act* (Burma Act XXIV 1939), p. 132.

⁵⁵ *Ma Ba Tha* is the Burmese abbreviation for *Amyo tha bada thathana kar gway saung shauk yay ahpwe*.

Ba Tha monks alleged an insidious plan among Muslims in and beyond Burma to devour the Burmese people, destroy Buddhism, and Islamicize Burma through a strategy of deliberate demographic aggression: seducing or forcing Buddhist Burmese women into polygynous marriages, conversion to Islam, and unwanted, uncontrolled sex (including rape) and breeding. They repeatedly cited the example of Wa Wa Myint, a young woman who was interviewed by a Ma Ba Tha monk about her failed marriage to a Muslim man. She testified in front of an audience in a monastery in October 2012 that her husband pretended to be a Buddhist until their marriage, at which point he forced her to convert to Islam. When she disclosed her desire to “reconvert” to Buddhism, he became physically and emotionally abusive.⁵⁶ As in the 1930s, those proclaiming to be defenders of Burmese Buddhists promoted an alarmist myth of a Burmese Buddhist nation under assault by Muslim terrorists waging a global “love jihad,” an alleged conspiracy to forcibly convert unsuspecting women to Islam through rape and duplicitous marriage.⁵⁷

The crowning achievement of Ma Ba Tha was the enactment in 2015 of a set of “National Race and Religion Protection Laws,” including an amendment of the Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage and Succession Act, that criminalized polygamy and restricted the capacity of Buddhist women to consent to intermarriage and conversion.⁵⁸ The revised “Myanmar Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Law,” preserves the Buddhist woman’s freedom “to profess the religion freely according to her faith” by prohibiting the conversion of the Buddhist woman “by using various means”; the vague language leaves open to interpretation what constitutes forced conversion. Article 33 furthermore allows any married woman who is a Myanmar citizen, regardless of her religion, to have recourse to the law through the act of conversion to Buddhism,⁵⁹ with the obvious objective of encouraging women to convert or “revert” to Buddhism while discouraging the conversion of Buddhist women with the threat of penal consequences (e.g., imprisonment up to six months,

⁵⁶ Niklas Foxeus, “Performing the Nation in Myanmar: Buddhist Nationalist Rituals and Boundary-Making,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 178 (2022): 272–305, p. 288. Also see Nyi Nyi Kyaw, “Islamophobia in Buddhist Myanmar: The 969 movement and anti-Muslim violence,” in Melissa Crouch (ed.), *Islam and the State in Myanmar: Muslim–Buddhist Relations and the Politics of Belonging*, 183–210 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nyi Nyi Kyaw, “The Role of Myth in Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Myanmar,” in Iselin Frydenlund and Michael Jerryson (eds), *Buddhist–Muslim Relations in a Theravada World*, 197–226 (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁵⁷ Charu Gupta, “Allegories of ‘Love Jihad’ and *Ghar Vāpasī*: Interlocking the Socio-Religious with the Political.” *Archiv Orientální* 84, no. 2 (2016): 291–316.

⁵⁸ The four laws are: the Population Control Law no. 28/2015, the Conversion Law no. 48/2015, the Myanmar Buddhist Women’s Special Marriage Law no. 50/2015, and the Monogamy Law no. 54/2015.

⁵⁹ It reads: “While a non-Buddhist woman, who is a citizen of the Union of Myanmar, was cohabiting with a non-Buddhist man as husband and wife, and the woman converted to the Buddhist religion; they shall be treated as though they contracted a marriage under this Act.”

fine of 50,000 kyats). In addition, under the Myanmar Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law, persons other than the individual who intermarries or converts are permitted to initiate criminal proceedings against a "Myanmar Buddhist woman" and her non-Buddhist partner who cohabit without registering their marriage in the manner required by the laws.⁶⁰ The law thus expanded the power of the law to control women's bodies. While the National Race and Religion Protection Laws were condemned by national and international civil society groups alike—several women's organizations in the country came together to denounce the laws as antithetical to the interests of women—they also garnered wide support, especially among Buddhist women in Rakhine state.

Such fearmongering by Buddhist ideologues and organizations occurred with the tacit sanction of the quasi-civilian state that carried out "security operations" against the Rohingya. A minority Muslim population based in the western Rakhine state, almost a million Rohingya have been displaced since 2012. According to the proponents of these anti-Muslim campaigns, Burmese Muslims are "Bengali jihadists," temporary guests, and undesirable immigrants who do not belong in Burma. The transition in 2016 to the democratically elected government under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party National League for Democracy (NLD) did not alter this situation. In an interview with the Voice of America, conducted shortly after being appointed the Minister for Religious Affairs by the NLD, Aung Ko declared that Muslims (and other religious minorities in Burma) were "associate citizens," unlike Buddhists, who were "full citizens."

Beyond the borders of the country, graphic media reporting on the Rohingya crisis have hypervisibilized the raped, mutilated, starved, scarred, and displaced bodies of Rohingya women in internment camps in Bangladesh—bodies that circulate as corporeal evidence of the widespread persecution of the Rohingya which has been declared a genocide.⁶¹ These refugees maintain, just as "Burma Muslims" and *dobama* Muslims did, that they are native Muslims, born and raised in Burma, who know of no other home.

⁶⁰ Article 27 of the 2015 Law

⁶¹ See, for example, "All My Body Was in Pain": Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma," Human Rights Watch, November 16, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/16/all-my-body-was-pain/sexual-violence-against-rohingya-women-and-girls-burma>; Hannah Beech, "When a Baby Is an Everyday Reminder of Rohingya Horror," *New York Times*, July 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/07/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-rape-refugees-childbirth.html>; "Burma's Path to Genocide, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," accessed March 28, 2023, <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/burmas-path-to-genocide>; Natasha Yacoub, Nikola Errington, Wai Wai Nu, and Alexandra Robinson, "Rights Adrift: Sexual Violence Against Rohingya Women on the Andaman Sea," *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 22, no.1 (2021): 96–114.

Across the colonial-postcolonial divide, the body of the Burmese Muslim has animated, circulated, and sustained public feelings of indignation, anger, and pity, mobilizing people into collective action and legitimating both mundane and spectacular forms of violence, including the legislation of anti-miscegenation laws that granted government authorities and monastic leaders far-reaching powers to subject Burmese women to moral and corporeal control. In the name of protecting Burmese women, community, and nation, such projects of social and political regulation have secured a privileged position for Burmese Buddhists and consigned others to dehumanization, dispossession, and displacement. This is a reiterative, cumulative history of the Burmese Muslim, in which those who proclaim to be defenders of Burmese Buddhists have labored relentlessly—and often successfully—to install as truth and truism an imaginative feat: of a “pure and genuine” Burmese Buddhist body, community, and nation that must survive and propagate at the expense of the Burmese Muslim body.

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PART 2

Emotional and Trained

Bodies, Emotions, Labor: The Jamia Millia Islamia and the New Education Movement

Margrit Pernau

Abstract

The movement for New Education emphasized the importance of the body and bodily work over forms of learning centered only on books and their intellectual processing. From its beginning, the movement has been transnational. This chapter traces the encounter of Zakir Husain, Abid Husain and Muhammad Mujeeb, foundational figures of the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, with German New Education during their student days in Berlin. Though they always claimed that what they had learned from Spranger and Kerschensteiner was central to the pedagogy they implemented at Jamia, the chapter shows that it was the American project method of Dewey and Kirkpatrick that shaped the everyday teaching at Jamia and which entered into the conversation with Gandhi's ideas on education in 1937.

Keywords: New Education; Jamia Millia Islamia; History of Emotions; Global History; Body History; Project Method; Wardha scheme; Basic Education

The scheme is a revolution in the education of village children.

It is in no sense an importation from the West.

—M. K. Gandhi, Foreword to the Report on Basic
National Education, (1938, CWMG, 73, 202)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, men and women in different regions of the world started to think about education in new ways. They discussed methods of teaching that no longer relied exclusively on books and rote learning imparted to children, who sat silent and motionless at their desks. Instead, intellectuals and pedagogues were looking for ways to use and develop the children's faculties in a holistic approach, involving their minds and their creative powers, but also engaging their emotions and their bodies—their head, heart, and hand, as the contemporary motto went. This search was not just an intellectual movement but led to experiments with different educational practices. At the same time, it was a

truly global movement in which theoretical reflections and practical experiences were shared across countries and continents. After the First World War, it found its institutional form in the New Educational Fellowship, which also brought out journals in different languages to facilitate communication among its members and beyond.¹

Given the centrality of the body for New Education, it is surprising that there is not much literature focusing on this aspect. For South Asia especially, research has centered on the disciplining of the body, inside and outside of schools, as a significant aspect of colonial rule.² This is important and the research work is excellent, but it does not tell the whole story of twentieth-century Indian educational reform. In this chapter, I will focus on the multiple practices of incorporating the body into education through labor and handicraft. These practices shifted the attention from the imparting of knowledge by teachers to its acquisition by pupils. They changed the ways knowledge was learned and the very content of what was learned. Moreover, the pedagogues devoted close attention to the habitual emotions that resulted (or were at least hoped for) from this education. I take the Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi as my case study. Established during Gandhi's first non-cooperation campaign as a national educational institution, Jamia operated at the margin of the colonial state. The founders of Jamia certainly had to work within the overall framework of colonial rule, but they neither accepted state funding nor worked towards having their degrees recognized by the state. This left them with comparably more freedom to experiment with new ways of educating the young.³ These experiments were pursued in dialogue with other educationists, and especially with practitioners of New Education, in India and beyond.

This framework allows us to complicate several binaries. First, New Education never encompassed a homogenous corpus of knowledge or practices, nor did it exist in stark distinction from more traditional forms of education. While it started as a movement around the turn of the century, its roots went much deeper—notably, Rousseau and Pestalozzi have not only been claimed as ancestors by the new educationist but had also already been incorporated into schools as a “new education before New Education.”⁴ On the other hand, New Education still held on to a number—smaller or larger—of traditional practices. Only for very few educational thinkers and for almost none of the practitioners was there ever a choice between

¹ Brehony, “New Education”; Fuchs, “Networks”; Hofstetter and Schneuwly, *Passion*; Bagchi, Fuchs, and Rousmaniere, *Connecting Histories*.

² Mills and Sen, *Confronting the Body*; Sen, *Colonial Childhoods*; Seth, *Subject Lessons*; Topdar, “Knowledge and Governance”; Tschurennev, *Empire*.

³ Hasan and Jalil, *Partners*; Talib, “Jamia Millia Islamia”.

⁴ Oelkers, “Reformpädagogik”.

the book and the body, the education of the intellect or the body, the emphasis on the pupils' initiative or the cultivation of discipline—although the strategies to practically deal with these binaries, or even to overcome them at a conceptual level, differed to a considerable extent.

Second, the different strands of New Education not only communicated closely but also shared a language and several practices, notably the incorporation of handicrafts and bodily labor into schooling. This, however, did not lead to a shared vision for the future or a common political agenda.⁵ On the contrary, the similar language and practice could draw just as easily from a critique of modernity—seeking salvation in a vision for a future marked by villages, handicrafts, and guilds—as it could from an enthusiastic acceptance of the rapid changes of the present and helping children to not only cope with, but contribute to said changes. Education through bodily work could aim at emotions like devotion and a willingness to sacrifice, which would stabilize existing social hierarchies, but it could also create the self-confidence needed for future citizens in a democratic state.

Third, New Education was, as already mentioned, a global movement with a multitude of centers, which were in communication with each other. This globality could be consciously embraced by the actors as a form of cosmopolitanism, but they could also brush it off as irrelevant in comparison to the national roots of the movement. Moreover, subscribing to cosmopolitanism rarely meant taking a stand against nationalism, though it might have led to arguments in favor of a different, less exclusionary form of nationalism.

Overcoming binaries—those created by the historical subjects, but also those of our own making—is an important move to complicate an all-too- neat picture. But it still leaves us questioning what structured the field and what guided the choices of the historical subjects. Of course, not every New Educationist communicated with everyone else, and not every practice traveled in every direction. However, the selection processes are anything but self-explanatory. Nor do the explanations the historical subjects themselves offer always provide a satisfactory answer. My argument is that emotions played a central role in two respects. Emotions validated the creation of pedagogical knowledge and rendered it plausible. Moreover, emotions, being at the center of the communication processes, provide explanations as to why certain forms of knowledge and certain practices resonated and therefore traveled well, globally or along certain specific channels, and others did so to a lesser extent or even not at all.⁶

⁵ On this approach see Danilina, *Ethiken*. I have learned more than I can say from our discussions over the years.

⁶ The role emotions play in global history can only be alluded to in this article. It will form the subject of a separate article that Frederik Schröer and I are working on.

Jamia's Primary School: A Vignette

After the First World War, the non-cooperation movement under Gandhi's leadership appealed to the nation to withdraw from all involvements with the colonial state and, notably, from its legal and educational institutions. As elsewhere, this call struck a chord with the students at Aligarh, the renowned Muslim university. However, as Zakir Husain, one of the young teachers, explained to Gandhi, it would only have a chance if an alternative education were to be offered to the young men.⁷ This idea led to the foundation of the Jamia Millia Islamia in October 1920 in Aligarh. In the early days, its set-up was not only highly improvised but also more politically motivated than the result of pedagogical reflections. It was set against colonialism rather than against modernity and aimed to teach the students morality through an emphasis on religion rather than on manual labor or handicrafts (though some crafts were taught from the beginning).⁸ The aim was to raise young Muslims who would take a leading role in the national movement and who were as pious as they were nationalists.⁹

This changed in the middle of the 1920s when Jamia moved from Aligarh to Delhi. While primary education had formerly been but an annex to the training of college boys, it now started to gain increasing importance. One reason for this was the lull in the nationalist movement after Gandhi had called off the campaign; at least as important was the fact that Zakir Husain, Abid Husain, and Muhammad Mujeeb, the future leading trio of the Jamia, had moved to Berlin for their higher education. Zakir Husain pursued a Ph.D. in economics, Abid Husain in psychology, and Muhammad Mujeeb studied printing, but all three took a passionate part in the contemporary discussions on New Education. They shared their new knowledge with Jamia in Delhi, writing articles for the monthly journal *Jamia* and spreading information about the new ideas. Once they returned in 1926, Zakir Husain became the *Shaikh ul Jamia* (corresponding to the position of Vice Chancellor in the state-funded institutions) and quickly brought together a team of like-minded colleagues to reform the school.¹⁰

Abdul Ghaffar Mudholi had joined Jamia as a student in Aligarh, slowly working his way up. In 1930 he took over the direction of the primary school. Combining a passion for teaching and for the collection of archival material, he was for many decades Jamia's quasi-official chronicler, penning volume after volume in which he described not only the history of the institution but also its pedagogical practices in

⁷ Faruqi, *Dr. Zakir Husain*, p. 58.

⁸ Ansari, "Hindustani".

⁹ Mudholi, *Jamia ki kahani*; Husain, "Shazrat".

¹⁰ Mujeeb, *Zakir Husain*.



Figure 4.1. Teaching at the primary school. © Jamia's Premchand Archives and Literary Centre, reproduction from the title page of Sughra Mehdi, *Hamari Jamia*.

great detail. As he tells in his history of the primary school, when he was appointed there were only a few children left. In a radical break from traditional practices, Mudholi began not by teaching the alphabet but by showing the children pictures and toys and asking them about their homes and families. Stories were then disaggregated into sentences and words, written on the blackboard. To involve the senses, the word “crow” was written in black while “perroquet” was written in green, and the latter’s multi-colored feathers were reflected in the writing. The children had fun, but they also learned to copy the words. Next came the letters, and here the bodies came into play as the children tried to enact the shapes of the letters, stretching to form an *alif*, forming a fist to show a *wa*, and enthusiastically shouting the sounds of the letters. This free movement was facilitated by the fact that Jamia could not yet afford desks. Instead, the children sat on the floor or jute bags—whatever was available.¹¹ This meant a different engagement with the body than the traditional one premised on the forms of disciplining involved in sitting at a desk, as motionless as possible, for long hours. Body movements were no longer either restricted or synchronized, but allowed for individual expressivity. This did not exclude discipline, but what (ideally) powered the learning process was an active engagement of the children: learning could be and should be fun.

¹¹ Mudholi, *Madrassa-e ibtida'i*, pp. 12–15.



Figure 4.2. Pupils of the primary school working on the Garden Project © Jamia's Premchand Archives and Literary Centre

For the children of the fourth standard, at roughly ten years, the involvement of the body became even more systematic. Jamia was located at the periphery of Delhi, where land was still mainly used for horticulture and farming. Jamia had access to enough land to keep all the boys busy at the same time.¹² Mudholi started a discussion with the boys about what they wanted to grow. As neither the pupils nor the teacher had much knowledge on the subject (or if Mudholi did, he did not tell them), they needed to find out which plants would best grow in the soil, when and how they needed to be planted, and how they should best set about the irrigation. The pupils asked around among the gardeners of the neighborhood, but they also started to put together a small library with books they considered helpful for finding answers. Whatever they decided, they had to put it into practice through their own labor, in the process establishing ownership in the project—intellectually as well as emotionally. This ownership and the emotions that went with it were not just a top-down result of the teaching process, but constitutive of the learning experience. What the children learned, they learned with the help of their bodies and emotions.

¹² Girls entered the formal education system at Jamia only after Partition. The role of women at Jamia is sadly under-investigated. Nishat Zaidi and I are working on a special issue of the *Journal for Urdu Studies* focused on the contribution of Jamia's women to education, social work and literature.

Once the planting season was over, the pupils started to document the process in writing, drew charts for the different tools they were using, inquired about prices, and calculated profits. This meant that after the harvest they were ready to sell their products. For this, they established a small shop on the premises of Jamia, an enterprise which they later expanded to non-agricultural products as well. The initial profit was invested in buying books for the library, but every pupil also received some money for his efforts. To encourage and facilitate saving, the pupils founded a bank. All of this taught them not only gardening, shop-keeping, and banking, but also reading, writing, and mathematics, involving their bodies just as much as their minds. Even more important: they learned to solve real-life problems without the help of a teacher, through a joint effort, using a multitude of oral and written sources but also checking them through their own experience.¹³ While excitement about and pride in their achievements ranked highly—notably when their efforts were personally validated by Zakir Husain, who inspected their harvest and accepted a gift of vegetables, and who deposited money at their bank—bodily labor was also experienced as hard work, more so in the heat of summer, when a whole day of work left their feet hurting from thorns and blisters and their heads tired from carrying loads for the whole day.¹⁴ New Education at Jamia did grant importance to children's joy and even boisterous fun, but involving the body was not only about giving in to the more pleasant emotions. The children's freedom to have their own experiences and the need for discipline were not perceived as mutually exclusive.

The Educational Thought of Jamia: Beyond the Dichotomy of India and the West

These were new ways of instruction. As Zakir Husain, Muhammad Mujeeb, and Abid Husain acknowledged the influence of their academic teachers and their encounter with German New Education until the end of their lives, it is a valid hypothesis to look to these scholars as inspiration and models. Eduard Spranger, Abid Husain's Ph.D. supervisor, was an influential educationist in Germany until he died in 1963 and beyond. Shortly after his return to Delhi, Abid Husain translated his teacher's opus magnum, the *Psychologie des Jugendalters* (Psychology of Youth), into Urdu. Some chapters were published as a pre-print in the *Jamia* journal and the complete book came out in 1928 under the title of *Nafsiyat-e unfuwan-e shabab*.¹⁵

¹³ Mudholi, *Madrasa-e ibtida'i*, pp. 19–31; Mudholi, *Baghbani Project*.

¹⁴ Mudholi, *Ek Mu'alim*, pp. 107.

¹⁵ Husain, *Nafsiyat*; Khan, "Entanglements".

However, this book raises more questions than it answers. Spranger held a chair not for pedagogy but for psychology. Though he was interested in the reform of education and saw himself as part of the broader movement, he had never worked as a teacher, nor was he in regular contact with the young people he wrote about. The *Psychologie* deals extensively with the emotions of young men (with a rare side glance at young women, which relies on secondary literature and does not influence the overall interpretation). Unlike Sigmund Freud and Siegfried Bernfeld, from whom he emphatically distanced himself, he sought to anchor psychology in the humanities, not in the natural sciences, by emphasizing the category of understanding—for Spranger the sole category capable of uncovering the internal structures of the psyche and their meaning.¹⁶ These structures, he explained further, are neither individual nor universal but profoundly bound up with the objective spirit as it finds its expression in the nation-state. Therefore, the book has a restricted scope, its topic is nothing but the “psychology of the German youth of our cultural epoch.”¹⁷ Some of this might also be valid for French or American youth, but already for German Jews other rules apply—not to speak of the Russian soul.¹⁸ While dwelling lengthily on the emotions of young German men—the hunger of their feelings, their longing for being understood, their desire for redemption—the book does not give much space to the body as a tool for education and learning. If the body is mentioned, it is a racialized body. Emotions are linked to the body but only in so far as race creates potential and delimits the possibility for the experience of certain emotions. The depth and intensity of German feeling, for him, is simply not available to others.

Spranger’s casual racism was more than a slip of the pen. He was deeply involved with *völkisch* and right-wing groups within the education movement and shared their worldview—be it the faith in authoritarianism, the profound veneration for the Prussian state and the military, or anti-Semitism.¹⁹ Already long before 1933, keywords like “command”, “obedience”, and “authority” marked his writings. For Spranger, democracy was not a value in itself. Rather participation in the political process had to be restricted to those who have learned to think and feel from the perspective of the state, to an extent that their inner being had merged with the state.²⁰ His position after 1933 has given rise to controversy. His vocally expressed sympathy with the new regime found its limits when the NS youth organization disrupted his classes and challenged his authority—a conflict that had less to do

¹⁶ Spranger, *Psychologie*, pp. 17–21.

¹⁷ Spranger, p. 38.

¹⁸ Spranger, p. 39.

¹⁹ Himmelstein, “Konstruktion”, pp. 53–72.

²⁰ Spranger, *Volk, Staat, Erziehung*.

with the content of his teaching, than with the struggle for supremacy between the old *völkisch* and the Nazis. However, he quickly withdrew his protest once it became clear that this would have led to serious consequences. Rather than choosing inner emigration and keeping silent, Spranger spent the subsequent years as an ambassador for the regime's policy.²¹ As for many others, his career went on without a hitch after 1945, when he was honored as the grand old man of German pedagogy.²²

Neither Spranger's political positions, which were in stark opposition to everything Jamia as an institution, or Abid Husain as an individual stood for, nor his reflections on the emotions of German young men can easily, if at all, be seen as the inspirations for Jamia's teaching.²³ Spranger's close friend Georg Kerschensteiner is a more probable source. Though it remains to be proven that Abid Husain or his friends personally met him,²⁴ they certainly knew his writings. Unlike Spranger, Kerschensteiner had many years of practical experience as a teacher before he rose to become inspector of schools and director of education in Bavaria and then a member of the German Reichstag. He is known for developing a model of the working school which aimed at the integration of schools and vocational training, starting with basic handicrafts in primary school and providing full training for artisanal professions (*Handwerker*, hand workers, in German) by the time the pupils left school at the age of 14. This education vied for the economic advantages that practical training provided both for young men and their future employers, but it went beyond this. Being confronted with an object they had to produce required the pupils to measure themselves against visible goals outside their own minds—the body was central to this. This only was possible if the children's labor was oriented towards a well-defined result.²⁵ This contributed not only to a better work ethic but also improved their morality. "*Sachlichkeit ist Sittlichkeit*" was Kerschensteiner's motto—it was the focus on an object, the original meaning of objectivity, that not only created but was morality.²⁶ The friendship and mutual admiration between Spranger and Kerschensteiner notwithstanding, concerning emotions and the body they were worlds apart: while Spranger dwelt at length on youthful passions but refused to link them to the materiality of the body,²⁷ even in the chapters dealing with juvenile eroticism and sexuality, the body was at the core of Kerschensteiner's

²¹ Ortmeier, *Eduard Sprangers Schriften*.

²² Ortmeier, *Mythos und Pathos*.

²³ Though both Abid Husain and Zakir Husain acknowledged his formative influence: Oesterheld, "Zakir Husain", pp. 75–76.

²⁴ Mujeeb, *Zakir Husain*, pp. 35–36.

²⁵ Gonon and Kerschensteiner, *Arbeitsschule*, p. 38. For a good introduction to Kerschensteiner's ideas in English see Gonon, *Modern Vocational Education*.

²⁶ Gonon and Kerschensteiner, *Arbeitsschule*, p. 37.

²⁷ Spranger, *Psychologie*, p. 37.

pedagogy. *Sachlichkeit*, not a dwelling on the psychological intricacies of the soul or the passions and desires, was to be central to the work of the teacher. *Sachlichkeit* is the outcome of the encounter of the body and the external object, the *Sache*, and hence can only be imparted by work involving the body. *Sachlichkeit*, in turn, will lead to joy in work (*Arbeitsfreude*) and an emotional attunement to the national state. Though emotions are powerful enough to guide the course of the pupils' activities, in school and beyond, they are toned down and lack exuberance. Challenging yet one more binary, they might be called rational emotions.

Kerschensteiner emphasized the world of traditional artisans, almost completely ignoring the conditions of factory workers. He warned against the moral dangers of the big cities and believed that common people needed guidance as they were apt to misuse their freedom for license.²⁸ All this could have struck a note with young Indians under the influence of Gandhi. However, where the teaching at Jamia's primary school most clearly differs from Kerschensteiner's model is the promotion of the children's own initiative and their taking ownership of the projects they devised. Teaching democracy by practicing it in school, wherever possible, was not something Kerschensteiner would have deemed appropriate. He remained a monarchist, only grudgingly accepting the changes brought about in Germany through the revolution of 1919. To no lesser extent than for Spranger, it was the state, and not the child, which was at the center of his reflections. If practical work involving the body enhanced the development of the child's personality, this was an advantage only in so far as it contributed to the well-being of the state.²⁹

Despite the assertions of Zakir Husain and Abid Husain, the influences explaining the pedagogical practices at Jamia's primary school, as described above, have to be sought elsewhere. Once Jamia's focus had shifted towards a primacy on educational issues, the enthusiasm and willingness of the teachers were no longer considered a sufficient qualification and had to be supplemented by training. While the Jamia leaders were in close conversation with Khwaja Ghulam us Saiyidain, principal of the teacher training college at Aligarh, it was to Moga, in the Punjab, that they sent Jamia's aspiring teachers for a year, one young man at a time. At Moga, American Presbyterian missionaries, who had trained in New York with John Dewey and William Kilpatrick, had opened an experimental village school after the First World War, combining learning through the project method with vocational training for the lowest strata. As their model quickly drew interested observers from all over India, they opened a teacher training school, which offered one-year courses combining an introduction to pedagogical theory with hands-on

²⁸ Kerschensteiner, *Staatsbürgerliche Erziehung*.

²⁹ Gonon and Kerschensteiner, *Arbeitsschule*, pp. 14–17.

teaching experience in the village.³⁰ Abdul Ghaffar Mudholi was among the first Jamia sent to Moga, and, as always, he provided a detailed narrative about his experiences.³¹

Teaching methods in Moga—as in the other places inspired by what came to be called American progressive education—aimed at overcoming two binaries. First, it neither opted for a teacher-centered pedagogy, in which the children became active only in ways and according to goals previously set by the teacher, nor did it leave the children to follow their inclination without guidance or accountability. Though children learned from every experience, Dewey explained, not all the lessons were equally valuable—some led nowhere, and others even promoted socially inadequate behavior. Teachers thus had the responsibility of setting up a frame that would provide the right kind of experience.³² Second, experience in itself did not yet amount to teaching, but only once the mind and the body came together, identifying a problem before setting out to solve it, actively experimenting with possible solutions, and finally evaluating the results of the experiments and correlating them to the initial problem, deciding whether the goals of learning had been achieved. Books did not substitute for experience but helped in its interpretation. This method, Dewey explained, not only allowed integration of school and society, breaching the gap between the experience the pupils had inside and outside of the school, but it also provided a model for continuous learning. The most valuable thing pupils learned was to solve problems on their own, a quality which could not be valued enough in a rapidly changing society.³³ It is here that we find the greatest difference to Kerschensteiner's model. While both relied on manual work (Kerschensteiner a little more, while for Dewey a project could also resolve an intellectual problem), Kerschensteiner envisioned a society with stable hierarchies in which the elite provided the required guidance in society and state and in which change occurred slowly, if at all. Dewey embraced modernity and its rapid social and economic changes and never left a doubt that democracy was the only form of government that could master these challenges.

More than anything else, however, Jamia has always seen itself as a Gandhian institution.³⁴ It was in response to his appeal that the institution had been founded,

³⁰ Bara, "Christian Missionaries"; Zimmerman, *Innocents Abroad*. See also Harper, "Training School", pp. 13–25; Singh, "School Gardening", pp. 151–159.

³¹ Mudholi, *Ek talib*, pp. 94–121. See also the dissertation William J. McKee, former principal of the school at Moga, wrote under the supervision of William Kilpatrick: McKee, *New Schools*, especially chapter 9, "A Day in the School at Moga."

³² Dewey, *Experience and Education*.

³³ Dewey, *School and Society*; Dewey, *Democracy and Education*.

³⁴ Gautier, "Laboratory"; Gautier, "Jamia Millia Islamia". A huge thank you to Laurence for sharing this article before its publication and for our ongoing discussions on Jamia.

and Gandhi had been a stalwart supporter, both politically and financially, in its early years. Throughout his life, he made it clear that he regarded Jamia as his family, whom he could visit without invitation or announcement. During his time in Germany, Zakir Husain saw himself as a Gandhian ambassador, spreading his political message and regularly spending hours at the spinning wheel.³⁵ The influence of Gandhi's educational program on the actual teaching practices at Jamia, however, is more complicated. Since his early "experiments with truth" in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century—which owed as much to aspects of Indian traditions as to global influences, from Tolstoy to Ruskin and Emerson, from British vegetarians to Theosophists—the body was at the core of Gandhi's search for an old-new moral engagement with the world as a precondition for salvation, both individual and civilizational.³⁶ Moral force, he held, could only be created through bodily practices which aimed at the control of the senses. This implied the traditional ascetic routines of fasting and sexual abstinence but also the overcoming of bodily desires through manual labor. If they disciplined their bodies in this manner, Gandhi exhorted his followers, they would be able to face suffering and even death without fear and without resorting to violence or even anger. This would not reduce their virility—on the contrary, perfect control of the body and emotions would enhance their manliness and the manliness of India as a nation.

Labor in the Gandhian ashrams in South Africa had encompassed a variety of forms, ranging from farming or working the printing presses to the tasks traditionally deemed degrading, like making sandals and cleaning latrines. From the first non-cooperation campaign onward, spinning held pride of place and for a time became mandatory for each member of the Congress party. Spinning, Gandhi explained, combined all the virtues required for the national struggle. It not only reversed the destruction of the Indian cottage industry by the colonial power and liberated the country from the domination by British industry, but it also overcame the division between the villages and the cities as well as between the classes; it was a remedy against rural unemployment and poverty, and finally, it created the disciplined body and mind required for a non-violent struggle for Swaraj.³⁷

Gandhi's experiments with education started in South Africa when he assumed responsibility for teaching not only his own family and the inmates on the farm but for some time also the children of the imprisoned Satyagrahis. Given his emphasis on moral education through the disciplining of the body, intellectual training, and to an even greater extent knowledge acquired through books came a very distant second. Work was the pedagogical tool of preference; but Gandhi also provided oral

³⁵ Husain and Ehrentreich, *Botschaft des Mahatma*, photo 74.

³⁶ Parel, "Introduction"; Alter, *Gandhi's Body*; Howard, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism*.

³⁷ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation*.

instruction whenever he had time—on the way to the train station, or after lunch, though he admitted that more often than not, both he and the children fell asleep from exhaustion.³⁸

Though at first sight, there seems to be a resemblance between Gandhi's focus on work and Kerschensteiner's working school, and even Dewey's ideas, the differences are as important as the similarities. The emphasis on orality allowed Gandhi to create an immediate bond with the children and to teach through his example and his personality as much as through what he said. What it did not allow the children was to learn how to acquire knowledge on their own and to compare and evaluate knowledge from different sources. Though Gandhi did not subscribe to a static model of truth, but throughout his life rather experimented with different ways to approach truth, this did not translate into a mode of teaching that would permit children to conduct their own experiments. There was a stark divide between those who were allowed or successfully claimed the right to use their bodies for experiments and those whose bodies were submitted to an external discipline. For the latter, education led to pre-set results, whether in the shape of a moral character, in the ability to perform certain work, or even in the knowledge they acquired from Gandhi's instruction. They were active insofar as they moved their bodies to an extent unimaginable in traditional schools, but they were at no stage participating in the formulation of goals.

Even after the end of the non-cooperation movement and during the time of a growing distance between Gandhi and his erstwhile supporters from the Khilafat movement, Jamia remained steadfast in its allegiance to the Congress. Rather than with Mohammed Ali, who had been central to its founding and its early days in Aligarh, they threw their lot in with the Congress Muslims Hakim Ajmal Khan and Dr Ansari, who both acted as the *Amir-e Jamia* (corresponding to the office of Chancellor) for several years. Though the institution's dependence on the financial contributions of the Princely states, notably Hyderabad and Bhopal, precluded it from officially taking part in political activities, there were always several teachers and students who joined Gandhi in his campaigns and followed him to prison—with the blessing of Jamia and to its pride. On a more mundane level, Jamia's pupils regularly spent time at the spinning wheel, though spinning was never the only handicraft that the school taught.

While many teachers wore *khadi* daily, the pupils followed suit at least for important public events.³⁹ At first glance, the poverty Jamia willingly accepted looked deceptively like Gandhi's asceticism. But for the Jamia *biradari*, denying themselves bodily pleasures was not so much a matter of principle but rather a

³⁸ Gandhi, *Autobiography*, p. 350; Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, p. 225.

³⁹ Mudholi, *Madrassa-e ibtida'i*, p. 53.



Figure 4.3: Spinning classes on the roof of the primary school. © Jamia's Premchand Archives and Literary Centre.

question of setting priorities straight: Jamia was constantly starved for funds, to the extent that the survival of the institution hung in the balance more than a few times. Under these circumstances, reducing costs was the only option—this went for the teachers' salaries as well as for the schools' equipment and the funding available for running projects. In other areas, too, Jamia was ready to discipline the body where required. As Mudholi's earlier description has shown, children were expected to cope with bodily fatigue during projects and to overcome their reluctance for certain kinds of labor. But this never led to asceticism as a value in itself, or to a deprecation of aestheticism and the quest for beauty, wherever it could be found. Nearly all of the projects conducted in the primary school involved the drawing of posters and charts, which were to be hung on the bare walls of the school's simple accommodation (see fig. 4.1 above). This search for beauty was all the more important for events to which Jamia's benefactors and the general public were invited, and where aesthetics was an important element of making the guests feel welcomed. Striving for beauty with reduced means also prevented the aesthetic experience from re-inscribing class boundaries and made it accessible both to the lower-class visitors from the neighborhood as well as to the influential and well-off patrons from the city and beyond.

Beauty was not only sought in the visual realm but to an even greater degree in language. Even the youngest students already listened to poetry and wrote their first

poems.⁴⁰ This acculturation into the exquisiteness of the Urdu language continued until the young men were old enough to take part in Jamia's *mushairahs*, poetical debates that regularly brought together India's finest poets under the auspices of the Urdu Academy.⁴¹ Though poetry had undergone quite a transformation since the nineteenth century, and the song of the rose and the nightingale, of desperate lovers and their cruel beloveds, no longer held pride of place, the ideal of the man of heart, of a subject able to feel deeply and to be moved to tears by beauty, remained deeply ingrained. Learning to appreciate beauty in all its forms was part of the education of a moral subject. In this respect, at least, Jamia was closer to Tagore's Shantiniketan than to Gandhi's ashrams, though this was not reflected in reciprocal visits or other forms of actual exchange.⁴²

Once again, it is not tenable nor does it make sense to uphold binaries. Jamia's teaching overlapped with the Gandhian model in several significant aspects: the importance accorded to vocational training, the use of labor to overcome distinctions of class and caste, and the emphasis put on moral education. These aspects were shared with many of the proponents of New Education all over the globe. The German focus on the state did not make sense in a situation where the state still belonged to the colonial sphere and where the state's inherent link to physical violence left Gandhi and his followers uncomfortable. Concepts of the nation (*qaum, watan*) or even society (*samaj, ijtema'*), as an entity larger than the individual partially replaced it. The emotions of love or sacrifice with respect to the motherland were as important to Gandhi as they were to Jamia. The same holds for the importance both accorded to fearlessness, though the reference to death and dying is less ubiquitous in Jamia than in Gandhi.

What did constitute a difference was the playfulness of Jamia's pedagogical experiments. Mudholi was just twenty-five years old when he took over the primary school and became responsible for reforming its teaching, and even Zakir Husain was no more than thirty-one years old when he returned from Berlin and became the *Shaikh ul Jamia*. They did not yet have ready-made systems they wanted to apply but collectively tested what worked best. From the beginning, the pupils were involved in these experiments. They did not decide whether or not horticultural labor was to become part of the curriculum, but, as shown above, they did have a decisive voice in what to grow, where to sell it, and what to do with the money. For these decisions, they had to move beyond the oral instruction of the teacher and find things out for themselves, be it through books and articles, by asking

⁴⁰ See for instance the regular column devoted to children's writings and to their poems in Jamia's children's magazine, *Payam-e Ta'lim*. See Pernau, "Education".

⁴¹ Tasks for an Urdu Academy to be founded: Husain, "Musalmanon"; [Husain], "Mushairahs".

⁴² Ganguly, *Tagore's University*.

specialists in the neighborhood, or through conducting experiments. Together, the playfulness and the autonomy given to teachers and pupils balanced the harsher aspects of discipline—which nevertheless remained present.

Wardha

The end of Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement in 1931 and the Round Table Conferences held in London to discuss the future constitutional development in India led to a flurry of debates on the future of education. Even if the British might still have wanted to hold onto their power in areas like foreign policy, military, police, and several economic issues, education was certainly among the subjects to be transferred completely to Indian control. An editorial in the *Jamia* from July 1933, probably penned by Abid Husain, voiced this sense of urgency: though the love for the motherland (*hubb-e watan*) and the passion for freedom (*hurriyat ke josh*) was burning in the hearts of the *Jamiawalas*, the editorial read, they felt as if their present sacrifices were not enough and envied those who were able to take the path of politics. But their task lay in education, and this was what they had to focus their inadequate forces on. Notably, they had to develop an encompassing system of education for the Indian Muslims, considering the requirements of the community and the nation, and testing it in practice. The editorial concluded that this model could then be taken up by others throughout the country.⁴³

Gandhi came in a little later with a series of articles in his newspaper *Harijan* in 1937, in which he outlined his vision of education for an independent India. Further elaborating on his earlier ideas, he focused his plan on the reconstruction and reform of Indian villages. This meant that education had to be conducted in the children's mother tongue and through manual labor. Given the way he had worked towards transforming spinning into a national symbol and practice, one which held the nation together across regions, religions, and classes, the earlier variations of engaging the body gave way to a focus on spinning as the central and even the only educational activity. It was through spinning that other subjects would be taught if they were to be taught at all. He aimed at a seven-year compulsory and free education for all children. This, he explained, could be financed if the schools were to become self-supportive, i.e., if the children produced enough marketable yarn to finance the salaries of their teachers.⁴⁴

⁴³ Editor, "Shazrat".

⁴⁴ Gandhi, *Educational Reconstruction*. This publication contains the articles in *Harijan*, the proceedings of the Wardha conference and the report of the Zakir Husain Committee.

To further discuss these proposals, a conference of educationists met with Gandhi at Wardha in October 1937. Zakir Husain represented Jamia while Khwaja Ghulam us Saiyidain brought his experience from the Aligarh Teacher Training College. Many of the participants came from different Gandhian schools, notably from his ashram at Sevagram. In his inaugural address, Gandhi underlined the fundamental originality of his ideas: what he suggested was not teaching handicrafts side by side with liberal education but transforming the entire system so that every form of teaching would happen through manual labor.⁴⁵

Zakir Husain was the first to take the floor, and he respectfully contradicted Gandhi—to the consternation and annoyance of the latter’s devoted followers. The ideas that Gandhi presented were not very new to those working in education, Zakir Husain explained, nor were they necessarily linked to certain political programs. They were at the core of the American project method as well as the Russian complex method, and they worked in cities as well as in villages and whether one subscribed to non-violence or not. Neither was teaching through a handicraft as easy as Gandhi had made it look, a point which raised the question of training teachers. Nor could every subject worth teaching be imparted in this way. Finally, Zakir Husain identified a danger in making education self-supportive, as the emphasis might well shift from learning to earning and convert the teachers into slave drivers exploiting their pupils.⁴⁶

In a clever move to diffuse the tensions, Gandhi appointed Zakir Husain as the chair of the committee set up to further develop these ideas. Zakir Husain knew that if he wanted the chance to spread Jamia’s educational ideas, it would only be by aligning with Gandhi’s program. Substantial differences notwithstanding, the areas of overlap were extensive enough to make this collaboration look like a viable proposition. The report agreed on education in the mother tongue and through handicraft, though the formulations chosen were notably softer than Gandhi’s demands, leaving open the possibility to add other crafts or to shift the emphasis from vocational training to relating knowledge to life and exploiting “for educative purposes ... the resources implicit in craft work.”⁴⁷ Moving beyond binaries, this was both particular, a scheme designed exclusively for Indian children and radically different from the West, and universal, drawing on the unanimity of modern educational thought.⁴⁸ The report left open the question of financing the proposal. In the end, a compromise was effected in which the yarn spun by the children would be bought by the state and constitute one source, among others, financing the schools.

⁴⁵ Gandhi, *Educational Reconstruction*, Gandhi’s Inaugural Address, pp. 46–52.

⁴⁶ Gandhi, Zakir Husain, pp. 53–55.

⁴⁷ Husain, *Basic National Education*, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Husain, pp. 11–12.

Once the report was published, Jamia quickly became caught between the fronts. In an unusually tense article, Zakir Husain warded off the criticism coming from the left. Without naming the critics or refuting their arguments, he suggested that the progressives (*taraqqi pasand*) were reacting not so much against the scheme as such as against Gandhi himself, whom they saw as a conservative force (*qadamat pasand*) while overlooking the fact that he sometimes supported modern ideas.⁴⁹ The critique of the progressives hit all the harder given that *Jamia* had been regularly publishing articles on village development since the mid-1920s, a trend which went in a noticeably different direction than Gandhi's idea that all it would take to solve the problems of rural poverty would be to teach the villagers morality, cleanliness, and spinning. Instead, the articles focused on questions of rural indebtedness, the system of heritage that led to the division of the holdings beyond a level where agriculture could still support a family, and the social structure in the villages. Refusing to be drawn into that debate, Zakir Husain instead explained in great detail the advantages of educating children through work and the involvement of the body—a method that no one, from the left or the right, had challenged and which had been gaining ground even in the state-funded schools since the beginning of the 1930s.⁵⁰ Even more dangerous for *Jamia*, but less interesting for a discussion on educational goals, were the attacks from the Muslim League and from other Muslim organizations that saw *Jamia* as giving in to Gandhi's philosophy. If the education of Muslim children was not kept separate, they claimed, grave religious, linguistic, and political dangers for the children and the community would result.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the Indian National Congress accepted the suggestions of the Zakir Husain Committee at its next session.⁵² Education through the body and manual labor thus became the model for rural education, first in the Congress Provinces, and after 1947 in the whole of India.

Conclusion

Irrespective of what Gandhi claimed, this form of education cannot be neatly classified in the binary of authentically Indian or imported from the West. The article has shown that the pedagogical practices involving the students' bodies and emotions through manual work had multiple origins and *Jamia* did not adopt any of them

⁴⁹ Husain, "Wardha", paraphrase p. 236.

⁵⁰ Bureau of Education, *Education*, pp. 49–52.

⁵¹ Oesterheld, "National Education".

⁵² Desai, *Report*.

without critical adaptation; the same holds for Gandhi's ideas and experiments. More interesting than where the practices "really" came from and belonged to is the question of how ideas about what children needed to know, how they learned, and the practices of teaching in the classroom and beyond travel.

The inquiry into what Zakir Husain and his friends claimed to be the German roots of their pedagogical faith has shown that only a rather superficial reading of the works of Spranger and Kerschensteiner can point to them as inspiration for Jamia. Spranger's faith in the Prussian state and its military and bureaucratic representatives, his development of psychology to counter the body-centered interpretation of Freud and Bernfeld, his belief in race and blood, his authoritarianism, and his anti-Semitism could not be farther from the political and social aims that Jamia stood for. Less starkly, Kerschensteiner's nostalgia for a world of artisans and obedient subjects also makes for an awkward comparison with Jamia's devising of a pedagogy, that would work for the village but also for the city and for the industrial settlement and would prepare all of the children for democratic citizenship.

My suggestion would be that emotions play a far bigger role in global history than they have been credited with. Not only did emotional norms and styles of feeling travel, but emotions were also the carriers of more complicated processes of encounters and appropriation.⁵³ Germany in the interwar period, and especially the reformist circles of educationists, had developed a longing for India as a space of salvation, which can only partially be interpreted through Edward Said's Orientalism.⁵⁴ Indian students were open to the German self-interpretation as a partially colonized country after the Treaty of Versailles. This created a resonance and an attunement which allowed them to sympathize in the word's original meaning of feeling together. Many intellectual propositions could travel through this bridge—others, like the *völkisch* ideas, were either not seen, discarded as unimportant, or re-interpreted as popular. Ludicrous as such a mistranslation may seem from today's vantage point, the contemporaries, Indian and German, could have imagined it pointing to a romantic love for the *Volk* and the people, which they shared. In the case of Kerschensteiner, it probably was the idea of vocational training that created an emotional resonance with Gandhian ideas of linking manual labor and education. In turn, this emotional resonance made it easier to engage with Kerschensteiner's ideas and to select those that were emotionally in tune with Gandhi without necessarily already being well-developed or present at all.

This is not to say that for Zakir Husain and his friends, feelings got in the way of a rational investigation of the matters at hand—rather, the all-too-neat distinction between emotions and rationality itself, often linked to the body-brain duality, is

⁵³ Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, pp. 8–12.

⁵⁴ Marchand, "Eastern Wisdom"; Horn, "New Education".

one of the most important binaries we have to challenge. Instead of assuming that the creation and vetting of knowledge is something in which emotions can only have a disruptive power, it is by looking at their multiple entanglements that we perceive how knowledge traveled and how new knowledge was created.

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A Healthy Body for a Healthy Mind? The Corporal Impact of Student Mobility From and Towards Indochina, 1900–1945

Sara Legrandjacques

Abstract

This chapter explores how educational migration from and towards Indochina transformed the students' bodies during the first half of the twentieth century. It, therefore, challenges the binary idea of intellectual training by associating it with corporal changes. Climate, illnesses and even clothing influenced the students' experiences abroad. At the same time, education could modify how the migrants considered their physical characteristics. Consequently, some recommendations and initiatives, coming from both public authorities and private actors, emerged as early as the 1900s. Stressing this entanglement of actors, I show how the students' bodies became an issue regarding the development and effectiveness of educational migration, using material from the Government General of Indochina and French institutions, including the sanatorium des étudiants welcoming Indochinese in the metropole, and students' magazines.

Keywords: educational migration; Indochina; intellectual training; physical changes; metropolitan France; students' experience

“Đáng was among the best pupils, and perhaps the best pupil from Hanoi’s *Collège du Protectorat*, when in 1910, the *Société d’Instruction Occidentale* decided to offer again a certain amount of scholarships in order to allow some educated and hard-working natives to continue their studies in the metropole. Đáng joined the competition and finished first. He boarded with several other compatriots, all scholarship-owners, from the *Société d’Instruction Occidentale*: Lê, Dư, Quynh, who were also our pupils for 1910–1911.

Among those four, Đáng was the one who, due to his size, looked like a child the most. His pensive face, his large forehead were supported by a body that looked really fragile. We could wonder whether his small self could resist the change of climate well. Thanks to the school’s healthy diet, to fresh air, to rational physical

exercises, Đàng, to our great satisfaction, acclimated himself perfectly. He could work as much as he wished: what a huge joy it was for him!”¹

In 1912, the *Comité Paul-Bert*, a patronage committee dedicated to Indochinese pupils studying in metropolitan France, published this obituary for one of its *protégés*, Nguyễn Văn Đàng. Born in 1894 in Tonkin, the northern province of French Indochina, the young man was enrolled at the *Institut du Parangon*, a professional school welcoming both French and colonized students located in Joinville-le-Pont, east of Paris. If the tribute praised the brilliant educational trajectory of Đàng, it also highlighted some of the *Comité’s* fears and doubts regarding the acclimatization of Indochinese students sent to France.

In the 1910s, student mobility was nothing new within the French colonial Empire: a handful of Indochinese youth started to travel during the late nineteenth century and official support regarding this academic migration developed at the turn of the century.² In 1911, as a result, the *Comité Paul-Bert* was supervising no less than 44 students,³ including Đàng. Educational flows increased after the Great War: in the mid-Interwar years, between 150 and 200 Indochinese attended Paris’ educational institutions, representing about half of the educational diaspora in the metropole. At the same time, an Indochinese university was thriving in Hanoi: it re-opened in 1917 after an initial launch—and closure—in 1907–1908, welcoming students from the whole Indochinese peninsula but also from other Asian territories, including China and Japan.

Historians’ attention was first drawn to this Asian appetite for training as early as the 1970s;⁴ some of them considered the students’ experiences in the metropole through a political lens,⁵ while others focused on the institutional history of education in South-East Asia.⁶ Yet, Đàng’s story epitomizes the necessity of associating intellectual training with physical issues: his body was more than once considered

¹ *À la mémoire de Nguyen Van Dang* (Tours: Imprimerie E. Arrault et Cie 1912) p. 5.

² Sara Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes. Pour une histoire globale des mobilités étudiantes en Asie (Inde britannique-Indochine française, années 1850–1940)” (PhD diss., Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne 2021).

³ Archives nationales d’outre-mer (ANOM), Gouvernement général de l’Indochine (GGI), file 2 568 : « Statistics for March 1911 ».

⁴ Daniel Hémerly, “Du patriotisme au marxisme : l’immigration vietnamienne en France de 1926 à 1939,” *Le Mouvement social*, n°90 (1975) : pp. 3–54.

⁵ In addition to Daniel Hémerly’s paper, see: Scott McConnell, *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France 1919–1939* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 1989); David M. Pomfret, “Colonial Circulations’: Vietnamese Youth, Travel, and Empire, 1919–1940,” in *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard I. Jobs, David M. Pomfret (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), pp. 115–143.

⁶ Gail P. Kelly, *French Colonial Education. Essays on Vietnam and West Africa*. (New York: AMS Press 2000); Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L’expérience indochinoise (1860–1945)*

a hindrance to his education—because of ideas around acclimatization but also due to a bike accident which prevented him from studying for weeks, and which eventually led to his death. Đàng’s obituary includes a photograph of him, showing a young man wearing a European three-piece suit with tie, his hair precisely combed backwards with brilliantine. Here, this physical presentation invites us to investigate how bodies were visually westernized, and under which circumstances, considering the use of official representations through photographs.

This chapter attempts to challenge the traditional perception of academic migration, associated with intellectual goals, by stressing the corporal effects of student mobility from *and* towards Indochina. It follows groundbreaking research on this colonial territory, conquered by the French from 1858 and including one colony, Cochinchina in the South, and four protectorates—Annam, Tonkin in the East and Cambodia and Laos, in the West—until the proclamation of the independence of Vietnam on the 2nd of September 1945. With *La Colonisation des Corps*, François Guillemot and Agathe Larcher-Goscha considered the impact of French colonization on Vietnamese bodies. By so doing, they echoed a larger interest within the field of colonial and imperial studies and stimulated scientific but also socio-political debates from the early twenty-first century,⁷ aiming to show how colonial subjugation dominated and transformed colonial bodies⁸. In addition, some scholars have underscored the physical effects of imperial migration and colonial settlement, first through the case of European travels towards the colonies.⁹

(Paris: L’Harmattan 2002), 117–135; Hoàng Văn Tuấn, “L’enseignement supérieur en Indochine” (PhD diss., Université Paris-Saclay, Université de Versailles-Saint-Quenty-en-Yvelines 2016).

⁷ See for instance, the debates that followed the publication, in France, of the collective book entitled *Sexe, race et colonies. La domination des corps du xve siècle à nos jours* in 2018. See for instance: Elara Bertho, “Déconstruire ou reconduire. À propos de l’ouvrage Sexe, race & colonies,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 237 (2020): pp. 169–180.

⁸ Jean-Paul Callède, “La problématique du ‘contact’ et l’enjeu du corps en situation coloniale selon René Maunier,” *Hommes et migrations* 1289 (2011) : pp. 10–18; Sophie Dulucq, Caroline Herbelin, Colette Zytnicki, “La domination incarnée. Corps et colonisation (xixe-xxe siècles),” *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 22 (2016); Sara Legrandjacques, “Le corps étudiant à l’épreuve de l’Empire,” in *Corps en crise, crise(s) du corps*, ed. Tom A. Heron, Marine Galiné (Reims: Presses universitaires de Reims 2018), Mathieu Marly, Stéphanie Soubrier, “Lire les corps au combat. Race, classe et grade sous la plume des officiers français (Maroc, 1912–1913),” *Genèses*, 123 (2021). In 2019, an international conference was also organized in Paris: *L’Europe et la différence des corps. Interactions ordinaires en context imperial*, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, November 21–22, 2019: <https://sirice.eu/agenda/l-europe-et-la-difference-des-corps>.

⁹ Mark Harrison, “‘The Tender Frame of Man’: Disease, Climate, and Racial Difference in India and the West Indies, 1760–1860,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* vol. 70 n°1 (1996): pp. 68–93; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies. American Tropical Medicine, Race and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham-London: Duke University Press 2006; Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des corps*, Paris: Venémiaire 2014), pp. 288–291.

Focusing on a specific group of actors—the students—my work stresses the complementarity between the mind and the body in the educational process, be it conscious or implicit. I will demonstrate how academic migration transformed the students' bodies while its first goal was the acquisition of intellectual knowledge. I will therefore question the students' agency regarding their own bodies but also its use and perception by other actors, like the *Comité Paul-Bert* in the 1910s. In this manner, I also offer an imperial and transnational look at colonial education in Indochina, stressing Hanoi's role as an educational hub of training, whose purpose was transforming Asian youth during the first four decades of the twentieth century. To do so, I mobilize a great diversity of primary sources, including official correspondence, journals, and photographs, kept in different archival centers in both Vietnam and France. Altogether, this material emphasizes the political and social use of bodies by the students themselves, through their westernization or its rejection, within or outside of the colony. However, these bodies could also become an obstacle to intellectual training, reinforced by racial and racist considerations inherent in colonialism. Therefore, physical features were negotiated by both students and external actors throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

In-Between Bodies: A Matter of Westernization

In the early 1900s, the French rulers started to establish a few educational institutions in Hanoi, in Northern Indochina.¹⁰ In so doing, they did not aim to offer university training similar to the metropolitan one but wanted to instruct useful auxiliaries able to participate in the development of their colonial territories. In 1902, the first higher school founded in Hanoi was dedicated to medicine and highlights the colonizers' concern regarding the corporal health of the Indochinese population. Students had to assimilate Western knowledge to help the European medical staff. Five years later, in 1907, the first opening of the Indochinese University, still focusing on practical and useful training, confirmed this westernization of education, targeting an Asian audience, not limited to the Indochinese. Its mission was to “spread in the Far East, through the use of French, European sciences and methods.”¹¹ It also transformed the students' bodies, whether they came from Indochina or from other Asian territories. For Chinese students, westernization was first and foremost a way to reject and criticize the imperial power

¹⁰ Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice ?*, 117–135; Hoàng Văn Tuấn, “L'enseignement supérieur en Indochine,” 164–170; Sara Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes,” 167–171.

¹¹ National Archives of Vietnam – Center n°1 (NAV1), *Résident supérieur du Tonkin* (RST), file 73 471, quoted by Hoàng Văn Tuấn, “L'enseignement supérieur”, 126–127.

in China rather than an adhesion to a French community. They consequently faced colonial authorities in Indochina who planned to use French knowledge to increase their influence over the neighboring empire, competing with other Western powers. Here, physical issues, i.e., how the students were clothed and had their hair styled, reveals the multiple—and then, non-binary—social and political meanings associated with westernization.

A Queue Affair: Chinese Students in Hanoi in the Early 1900s

Chinese students started to enroll at Hanoi higher educational institutions in 1905. In 1902, decrees organizing the higher school of medicine started to promote Asian recruitment, reinforced by the founding of the Indochinese University. These colonial initiatives echoed a Chinese demand, coming from a handful of mandarins wanting to provide their sons with French education.¹² However, the first Chinese recruits often lacked a good command of French, preventing them from taking advantage of their stays in Hanoi. A preparatory school was accordingly organized in the colonial capital city, under the name “École Pavie”, and welcomed young men from the neighboring Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guangdong from January 1905. Strongly monitored by both colonial authorities and Chinese officials, these students were voluntarily kept away from their Indochinese classmates. This physical separation was undoubtedly reinforced by their specific clothing and hairstyle, unusual in 1900s Indochina: the hair around their heads was shaved except for a long tail hanging down their backs and they wore long Manchurian dresses.¹³ This specific look underscored their belonging to the Chinese Empire, dominated by the Qing, a dynasty coming from Manchuria, in North-East Asia. In 1644, Shunzhi, the first Qing Emperor (1644–1661), settled in Peking and issued a head-shaving edict, first targeting former Ming officials and soldiers, but rapidly extended to the rest of the population.¹⁴ This rule facilitated the recognition—and so, the repression—of opponents to his new power: any transgressor could be sentenced to the death penalty. Associated with legislation on clothing, it was still in effect in the early twentieth century when the first ten Chinese candidates left Yunnan for Hanoi. However, this hairstyle became a matter of concern for

¹² NAV1, *Gouvernement général de l'Indochine* (GGI), file 4 820: “Letter from the acting deputy consul for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Yunnan to the Governor General in Indochina, 19 June 1904”.

¹³ Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press 2003); Nora Wang, “En Chine: l’affaire de la natte,” in *Histoire du Poil*, ed. Marie-France Auzepy, Joël Cornette (Paris: Belin 2003): 174–197.

¹⁴ Michael Godley, “The End of the Queue: Hair as Symbol in Chinese History,” *East Asian History*, no. 8 (December 1994): 56.

the colonial authorities only a few weeks after the opening of the *École Pavie*. In a letter addressed to the Superior Resident for Tonkin on April 24, 1905, the Education Inspector in Indochina regretted that “two additional students cut their queues” raising to five the number of “rebels”. In October, the school’s director, Charles Maybon, notified in its monthly report that “six students have short hair”, including a new student, Tchang-Yi-Chou, who argued that he cut his tail with the consent of his family.¹⁵ At this point, “most students were preferably wearing western clothes.”¹⁶ Here, the westernization of Chinese bodies is obvious, blooming during the students’ educational experience abroad. If practical arguments were sometimes mobilized by both the students and educational authorities—Western clothes were more convenient for physical training¹⁷—this transformation was seen as political and rapidly became a matter of concern for public authorities in Indochina and in China. In April 1905, the Superior Resident for Tonkin’s reply to the Education Inspector stressed that hairstyle remained a private matter but, at the same time, he commanded the school staff not to encourage queue-cutting.¹⁸ Two months later, Maybon instructed to reserve khaki clothes for gymnastics classes only, as requested by the Chinese viceroy.¹⁹

This political interest in clothing and hairstyle was neither surprising nor exceptional at the turn of the twentieth century. Queue-cutting was already a tool for political opposition in the nineteenth century: between 1850 and 1864, the Taiping Rebellion’s members had let their hair free or hidden it under red turbans.²⁰ At the end of the century, Chinese reformists and republicans started to cut their hair too, especially after the humiliating Chinese defeat against Japan in 1895. This corporal change was then a symbol of the break with the traditional political power embodied by the Qing dynasty but also an attempt at westernization. More and more Chinese were traveling abroad and sometimes suffered from mockery regarding their “pigtales” or traditional dresses.²¹ Queue-cutting became quite common on one’s way to Europe or the United States as an effect, among others, of the meeting with the West. In that context, several Chinese students seem to follow this trend soon after their arrival in Hanoi. However, their experiences give a new dimension to westernization by including a colonial territory located in Asia, and neighboring China. The Frenchification, wished by the students’ families, rather than being only

¹⁵ NAV1, GGI, file 4 821: “Report, October 1905”.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ NAV1, GGI, file 10 149: “Letter from the Superior Resident for Tonkin to the Education Inspector, April 24th 1905”.

¹⁹ NAV1, GGI, file 4 821: “Report, June 1905”.

²⁰ Michael Godley, “The End of the Queue,” 61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

intellectual, became also corporal, and reflected the Chinese youth's rejection of the tradition, if not their politicization.²² In other words, the sources depict Hanoi as a place where the search for modernity became more radical, infused with a rejection of the Qing.

Stressing the students' agency, the case of the *École Pavie* also reveals the French paradoxical position regarding those physical changes. In April 1905, the Superior Resident's note was crystal clear:²³ colonial authorities were anxious to disconnect French knowledge from French behaviors. Here, the involvement of the administrative head of Tonkin underscores a political mission, exceeding educational objectives. Through the foundation of a specific school guaranteeing access to Western knowledge, public authorities aimed to strengthen their diplomatic influence over China, as Charles Maybon confirmed in his 1906 report:

If France, as an Asian power, must continue to follow the policy towards China that she inaugurated several years ago, that is to say if France judges that she must always set herself up as the guardian of the independence and integrity of the Great Empire of which she is now a neighbor, she cannot remain indifferent to the movement of renovation which, in this Empire, is gaining more and more importance, little by little, even in the entourage of the Sovereign. She cannot, on pain of seeing her influence diminish, fail to play her role in the elaboration of new ideas, of new forces which are preparing China for a future which many are worried about.²⁴

From that angle, queue-cutting and Western clothing threatened these diplomatic relations, making the French anxious about offending their Chinese counterparts. They risked losing their influence over their Asian neighbor in a context of imperial competition against other Western powers and Japan, all developing educational facilities for Chinese students, in China or abroad.²⁵

Nevertheless, this diplomatic anxiety did not last long and seemed to vanish as early as the end of 1905. When, in October 1905, Maybon mentioned new hair cuttings, he stressed family consent rather than repressive attempts. In January 1906, he reported a visit from a Chinese educational inspector, T'cheng Yong Tchang; when asked about the necessity to prevent queue-cutting, the Chinese representative

²² A few years later, some students from the *École Pavie* circulated anti-Qing and anti-French publications in Hanoi, confirming this politicization: NAV1, GGI, file 4 815.

²³ NAV1, GGI, file 10 149: "Letter from the Superior Resident for Tonkin to the Education Inspector, April 24th 1905".

²⁴ NAV1, GGI, file 10 152: "Report by Charles Maybon, February 8th 1906".

²⁵ Eric W. Maeder, "Aux origines de la modernisation chinoise: les étudiants chinois au Japon," *Relations internationales* 26 (1981) 162–166. See also: NAV1, GGI, file 10 152: "Notes for Marseille's Exhibition"; ANOM, GGI, files 44 153 and 44 154.

replied that the question was not as important as it used to be because “the practice of dressing in European style was spreading in China and that students had to be allowed to do as they please when they had their family’s permission.”²⁶ After this statement, concerns about the Chinese corporal habits disappeared from official archives, confirming the French authorities’ political opportunism and their semi-passivity regarding those questions.

Reaching the West: From Indochina and Beyond

The Chinese students’ bodies were highly political and revealed both national and diplomatic issues associated with academic migration between China and Hanoi. However, this Indochinese city was first and foremost a place of study for colonial students, mostly Vietnamese. As early as 1902, about 375 applications were sent to the higher school of medicine for only 30 available seats.²⁷ A good command of French was then mandatory to acquire Western medical knowledge and *savoir faire*; it remained a prerequisite—and sometimes, an issue—in any colonial higher school until independence.²⁸ On the contrary, the corporal westernization of the students’ bodies remains difficult to grasp through the available material and does not seem to raise any special issue among the colonial community. Wearing Western clothes, e.g., a three-piece suit, was not, in fact, something unusual for members of the colonized urban elites.²⁹

The lack of primary sources dealing directly with the students’ bodies entails some methodological difficulties for historians willing to scrutinize their corporal experiences. It also confirms the absence of a real political interest in this matter. Here, the use of photographs is even more valuable as it captures a specific image of the students, i.e., of how they looked, physically speaking. Yet, one must keep in mind the limits of these snapshots and consider the contexts of production:³⁰ the

²⁶ NAV1, GGI, file 8 858: “Report by Charles Maybon, January 3, 1906”.

²⁷ Laurence Monnais-Rousselot, *Médecine et colonisation. L’aventure indochinoise, 1860–1939* (Paris: CNRS Éditions 1999) 278, quoted in Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes”, 169.

²⁸ On that topic, see: Trinh Van Tao, “L’enseignement du français dans le secondaire et le supérieur au Vietnam de 1918 à 1945: un état des lieux,” *Documents pour l’histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde* 25 (2000): 46–53; Sara Legrandjacques, “Déliar la langue? Enseignement supérieur et enjeux linguistiques en Indochine française dans la première moitié du xx^e siècle », *Relations internationales* 188 (2021/4): 27–41.

²⁹ Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des corps*, XX.

³⁰ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London : Reaktion Books 2001); Ilsen About, Clément Chéroux, “L’histoire par la photographie,” *Études photographiques* 10 (2001): 8–33.

two collections of photographs mobilized below were official snapshots, taken to promote educational or para-educational institutions located in Hanoi. The first selection is related to the *Foyer des étudiants annamites* (FEA) established in 1922 to accommodate Vietnamese—without excluding Cambodian and Laotian—students;³¹ the second is drawn from the *Annales de l'Université indochinoise*, a collection of papers on the Indochinese University, published in 1933 by colonial authorities.³² All together, these photographs expose the westernization of the Indochinese students' bodies, at least partially.

In 1923, about thirty students posed before the entrance of the FEA, alongside its director and founder, Paul Monet. Seventeen among them were wearing white European suits, embellished with either a tie or a bow tie. The others wore long dresses over large white trousers and traditional flat hats. More surprisingly, two of them sported colonial helmets. If we cannot guess those young men's motivations, we can still understand that wearing European clothes was neither unusual nor compulsory for the FEA's residents. Another shot taken in the *Foyer's* meeting room³³ confirms this heterogeneous mix between European and Vietnamese clothing among the residents, in contrast with the Asian decoration of the building. The student's agency regarding clothing appears to be evident, especially as the FEA's byelaws remained quite vague: they only stated the possibility to expel, temporarily or permanently, "any member whose behavior, outfit or words would be judged, by the Committee, harmful for the honorability, credibility, or interests of the Foyer."³⁴

In Hanoi University's *Annales*, two photographs display a few Indochinese students: the first depicts one young Indochinese resting in his room, wearing a large white suit yet hardly distinguishable; more importantly, the second echoes the FEA's photographs by showing four students near a villa in Đò Sơn, a coastal city east of Hanoi where some university students rested in Summer. In this picture, all of them wear Western suits and three of them hold a walking stick.

Although it is still difficult to determine whether those Indochinese adopted French fashion before or during their studies, these photographs highlight the westernization of colonial bodies and, especially, of an educated urban youth. From

³¹ Legrandjacques, "Voies étudiantes", 397–400. Photographs are kept at the DEFAP Library in Paris and also available online: <https://defap-bibliotheque.fr/expositions/des-protestants-francais-en-indochine/le-foyer-des-etudiants-et-leglise-annamite/>. The author would like to thank Prof. Rebecca Rogers for indicating these sources.

³² Gouvernement général de l'Indochine – Direction général de l'Instruction Publique, *Annales de l'Université de Hanoi (Tome 1)* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient 1933).

³³ This photograph, entitled "Foyer des Étudiants Annamites: Salle de Réunion (Meeting Room)" is available online through the aforementioned link.

³⁴ National Archives of Vietnam – Center no. 2, Nam Dinh Residence, file 1 201: "FEA byelaws, 1922".



Figure 5.1. *Indochinese Students at the First Congress of Indochinese Students in France, September 1927.* FR ANOM. Aix-en-Provence (ANOM, SLOTFOM V/1)—Tous droits réservés

1936, the *Association générale des étudiants de l'Université indochinoise* (AGEI), Hanoi University's student union, published a journal entitled *Le Monôme*, i.e., "the student parade". Several of its covers displayed drawings representing some Indochinese young men and women, undoubtedly enrolled at Hanoi University. Men in black suits were then standing alongside women in *áo dài*, the Vietnamese traditional dress brought back into fashion in the early 1930s. This stereotypical representation of student bodies combined tensions between tradition and modernity, the West and the East, with gender. While women supposedly embodied an Indochinese heritage,³⁵ men were represented as acculturated colonial citizens, benefiting from Western culture through their academic stays in Hanoi. Together, they perform a cosmopolitan identity, mixing Asian and European cultures.

³⁵ On the new use of the *áo dài* in the 1930s, see: Nguyen Van Huy, *La société vietnamienne face à la modernité. Le Tonkin de la fin du XIXe siècle à la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan 1995).

Beyond the success of Hanoi University, many Indochinese students associated access to Western knowledge with educational sojourns in Europe since the last decades of the nineteenth century. Their European enrolment steadily grew during the first half of the twentieth century, reaching its apex in the Interwar years. Once again, primary sources do not reveal much about the westernizing effect of this educational migration, but the few available photographs consistently show young men wearing European suits, whether they came from Vietnamese provinces or from Cambodia.³⁶ In 1926, the first congress of Indochinese students epitomizes this westernization, gathering young men posing in their black outfits at Aix-en-Provence's Lycée Mignet³⁷ (Fig. 5.1). Here, we must not ignore the official dimension of this photograph: it may highlight the students' will to represent themselves as equal members of a larger French student community. Westernization could be strategically used by the students and it still remains difficult to seize their looks on a daily basis.

Clothing considerations were perceived as the tip of the iceberg of a westernization in progress that prompted many discussions and criticisms in Indochina. In 1932, Nguyễn Trùng Tam, under the *nom de plume* Nhất Linh, published a cartoon in his satirical journal *Phong Hoá* (Fig. 5.2).³⁸ It represents a mother and her son meeting in Saigon's port: the young man, wearing European clothes, is back from France after his graduation—his suitcase gives his name, Lê Lãng, and title, *docteur en lettres*, i.e., holder of a PhD in Arts. His walking stick, hat and suitcase emphasize his sophisticated style. In contrast, the mother wears a traditional Vietnamese dress. She addresses her son in Vietnamese and expresses despair and confusion when he replies in French. This drawing highlights a specific issue associated with this "France-return", called *déclassement*—i.e., social downgrading. Westernized students back in Indochina neither fit in their original societies anymore, distinguishing themselves from their Indochinese kin, nor were they able to integrate in the colonizers' community, suffering from colonial hierarchies aimed at excluding local populations. *Déclassement* was both feared by public authorities and condemned by Indochinese intellectuals and activists, as illustrated by *Phong Hoá's* cartoon, disconnecting the educated youth from the people when its mission was to represent and act for its freedom.

³⁶ For instance, see Roem's portrait in: *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roem* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

³⁷ ANOM, SLOTFOM, file V/1: "Journal des étudiants annamites, 1927".

³⁸ This drawing has been reproduced and translated into English in: Greg Lockhart, "Broken Journey: Nhất Linh's 'Going to France'," *East Asian History* 8 (December 1994): 81.



Figure 5.2. “The Return of the Sophisticate”. *Phong Hóa* 10 (August 18, 1932): 10.

“My dear son, while you’ve been away studying four years overseas, your father has died. I’ve been alone here dreaming all the time of your return.”

[Son (in French):] “Dear Mother, dear Mother, cheer up, I am back.”

[Mother:~] “Oh dear God! Has my son gone mad? Poor boy! This is your mother!”³⁹

It remains difficult to estimate the extent and degree of the Indochinese youth’s westernization and the social and political ideas associated with it. However, it is necessary to highlight some cases of anti-Western opposition, potentially illustrated by some migrating students’ corporal habits. At the beginning of the twentieth century, military training of Vietnamese recruits developed in Japan, impelled by Phan Bội Châu, an anticolonialist member of the traditional elite. He rejected European domination, and so, European education, and considered the

³⁹ The mother’s lines were translated by Greg Lockhart: Lockhart, “Broken Journey”: 81; the son’s lines were translated by us.

newly modernized Land of the Rising Sun as a convenient training alternative.⁴⁰ At that time, nationalist and pan-Asian ideas flourished in Japan through the circulation and meeting of local and foreign intellectuals.⁴¹ Influenced by those Japanese and Chinese reformists, Phan consequently organized a movement called *Đông Du*, “Going East” and recruited Vietnamese youth from French Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Obviously, these students sent to Japan between 1905 and 1908 had to reject any attempt of Europeanization as they were learning to fight against the French. They lived together and frequently wore military uniforms, some of them joining military schools.⁴² They had to participate in developing a collective sense of belonging while stressing discipline and order traditionally associated with military training. A few decades later, in the late 1920s, the enrolment of Indochinese trainees at military academies in China, especially Whampoa located near Canton, included similar requirements. Students were welcomed as military cadets, wearing uniforms and rifles.⁴³ In so doing, their bodies reflected a potentially violent nationalist opposition to Western domination cultivated outside of European colonial rule that nonetheless relied on westernized military codes.

Corporal Weaknesses: Health, Race, and Education

The bodies of Indochina’s academic migrants, whether through inbound or outbound migration, could be used as cultural and political standards in order to rebel against a national—China—or a colonial—the French—enemy. Clothing and hairstyles sometimes symbolized and suggested modernity, or its rejection. Often observed through the eyes of external actors, these corporal issues stressed the students’ agency too, i.e., their ability to choose and negotiate how their bodies

⁴⁰ Nguyễn Thế Anh, “L’élite intellectuelle vietnamienne et le fait colonial dans les premières années du XXe siècle,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer* 268 (1985): 291–307; Vĩnh Sinh (ed.), *Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-du Movement*. (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies 1988); Yves Le Jariel, *Phan Boi Chau (1867–1940) Le nationalisme vietnamien avant Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: L’Harmattan 2008); Sara Legrandjacques, “Go East! 1905 as a Turning Point for the Transnational History of Vietnamese Education,” *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* vol. 8 issue 2 (2020): 101–114.

⁴¹ See for instance: Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press 2007); Steven Peng-Seng, “Le panasiatisme en Asie: une construction de l’identité asiatique et japonais, 1900–1924” (MA dissertation, Université de Montréal 2014).

⁴² Legrandjacques, “Go East!”: 108.

⁴³ A picture of some Vietnamese recruits in China is available in: ANOM, SLOTFOM, file III/10: “Secret’ picture of Vietnamese military students at Whampoa Academy, 1927–1928”.

represented their inner selves. Escaping from their usual environment, the students could reinvent themselves and put on a performance. They therefore reveal an in-between space that complicates the generally admitted binary perception of colonial bodies. However, student mobility did not escape from stereotypes and prejudices regarding the colonized population's physical abilities. Their presumed weakness was taken into account by individuals and organizations involved in their educational sojourns in Europe. At the same time, their European experiences could become a lever for the development of physical education in South-East Asia.

Bodies at Risk

Historians have stressed the effects of overseas circulation and colonial settlement on Western bodies. The colonies' climate and environment were often deemed dangerous, justifying preventive measures fueled by colonial anxiety. On the contrary, scholarship has remained quite silent about the corporal impact of migration from Indochina, especially when the colonized joined the imperial metropole. Yet, this issue appears, albeit quite implicitly, in several sources related to Indochinese sojourns in France at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1907, the *Alliance française*, a non-governmental association promoting French culture all over the world, established the *Comité Paul-Bert*, a committee dedicated to the patronage of Indochinese pupils and students sent by their families to the French metropole. Its mission encompassed each step of the migrating experience, from the organization of the departure to the trip back, including the sea journey, the admission at a French institution and school holidays too. Above all, its regulations, officially published in 1909, warned of the danger of traveling abroad for the Committee's young *protégés* and *pupilles*: they "must be in good health" before boarding and "their arrival in France had to occur between May 1 and September 1."⁴⁴ The students had to arrive during summertime, when the weather in France was sunny and warm and so, close to the Indochinese climate, because "it was dangerous to send young Indochinese during Winter."⁴⁵ In the same vein, an official medical check-up was compulsory to apply for the Committee's support in order to prove that "the child could bear the French climate" and was not suffering from any organic or contagious disease. A few paragraphs later, the

⁴⁴ ANOM, GGI, file 2 568: "Regulations of the Comité Paul-Bert, 1909".

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

committee's secretary issued instructions regarding the journey itself, including clothing advice:

He must be equipped with enough cloth and personal effects made of cotton for a twenty-five-to-thirty-day trip. He must also possess, even during Summer, an outfit made from serge or flannel and a woolen overcoat or cape.⁴⁶

Once in France, the *Comité's* representatives endeavored to accommodate some of their *protégés* in southern localities: in March 1909, ten were living in the southern half of France. For instance, Rœum, a seventeen-year-old Cambodian, settled in Saint-Pons, a small city located in Hérault, between Montpellier and Toulouse.⁴⁷

Similar preventive measures were taken by colonial authorities bestowing scholarships upon carefully selected students. On December 1, 1924, new rules were adopted by the Government General in Indochina concerning the allocation of grants for metropolitan studies. Article 7 listed the documentation required to apply and included a doctor's certificate delivered by a local Health Board (*Conseil de santé local*) justifying that the applicant was not suffering from "any disability or disease unsuitable for a sojourn in France and particularly, in the province chosen by the applicant."⁴⁸ Medical check-ups remained mandatory, issued by practitioners validated by public authorities. By guaranteeing that the students could put up with the metropolitan environment, colonial officials were not only protecting their subjects. They also wished to ensure their financial investment since the scholarship-holders had to use expertise acquired abroad to contribute to the colonial project.

Bodies should not prevent students from completing their metropolitan training. Nevertheless, these attempts were not enough: in 1910, the *Comité Paul-Bert* noted with regret the death of one of its *protégés*, Duong, originally from Haiphong. This young man was preparing the entrance examination for the *École des Mines*, a prestigious engineering institution based in Paris. He caught tuberculosis during his metropolitan stay and passed away after two months of illness. Right after this tragic loss, the committee decided to strengthen its measures of control and protection both in Indochina and in the metropole. They accentuated medical examinations before the departure, including a follow-up inspection issued by the Indochinese Health Board. In France, the committee urged for a close monitoring of its pupils.⁴⁹ Despite this, two other students affiliated to the *Comité Paul-Bert*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Rœum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

⁴⁸ *Journal officiel de l'Indochine française* (December 1924) available in ANOM, SLOTFOM, file I/2.

⁴⁹ ANOM, GGI, file 2 572: "Note from the Comité Paul-Bert, 20 December 1910".

Nguyễn Văn Đán⁵⁰ and Khatanarak Roun Rœum,⁵¹ died of illness, respectively in 1912 and 1913.

These deadly experiences were not common at the time: most students were able to come back to their homelands safely, whether they succeeded in graduating or not. Individual files, composed of correspondence between the students or their families and the colonial administration, hardly mention medical emergencies. More surprisingly, young men engaged in metropolitan studies sometimes used physical arguments to negotiate their educational stays. After a first stay in Paris, at the *École Coloniale*, in the early 1900s and a few years of practice as medical officer in Indochina, Lê Van Chinh enrolled at the Paris faculty of medicine in 1910, thanks to the Government General's financial support. Shortly after his arrival, he requested from the *Groupe de l'enseignement indochinois en France*, an official organization monitoring and advising Indochinese students in the metropole, the authorization to move to Marseille and to seek admission at the *École d'application du service de santé*, a practical school training military doctors. In his letters, he described both his lung disease and the advantages of settling in a southern city where he already knew some inhabitants. Julien Fourès, head of the *Groupe de l'enseignement indochinois*, underscored Lê Van Chinh's "fear of cold"⁵² when he asked Dr Régner's point of view, a physician in charge of supervising Indochinese medical students sent to the Paris faculty of medicine. Despite this, Régner rejected Lê Van Chinh's first request. After many additional letters, some aggravated symptoms and a new diagnosis, the student was eventually allowed to join Marseille in April.⁵³ If the story does not disclose, for now, if Lê Van Chinh joined Marseille—he actually graduated in colonial medicine in Paris a few years later—his experience highlights agency and the ability to negotiate with public authorities about metropolitan training.

Diseases and epidemics continued to disturb educational paths in the metropole during the Interwar years. The Indochinese were victims, among others, of tuberculosis, flu, and even scarlet fever. In 1924, the erection of a sanatorium, named *sanatorium des étudiants*, started at the Petites Roches, near Grenoble.⁵⁴ If the history of the sanatorium and especially, of its links with Asian students, still needs to be written, correspondence between the Ministry of Colonies in Paris and the Government General in Indochina confirms the important role this new

⁵⁰ *À la mémoire de Nguyen Van Dang* (Tours: Imprimerie E. Arrault et Cie 1912).

⁵¹ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roeum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

⁵² ANOM, GGI, file 2 564: "Letter from Julien Fourès to Dr Régner, February 20, 1910".

⁵³ ANOM, GGI, file 2 564: "Letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General in Indochina, April 1910".

⁵⁴ ANOM, GGI, file 51 520: "Letter from the Minister of Colonies to the Governor General in Indochina, March 12, 1926".

institution could play for South-East Asian graduates-to-be following its opening in 1933. Despite the impossibility for the AGEI, Hanoi University's student union, to fund this new sanatorium, Indochinese were still welcomed. In the meantime, initiatives developed in Paris too, gathering between 130 and 180 students—primary and secondary pupils excluded—in the Interwar years:⁵⁵ in 1932, two residents from the *Maison des étudiants de l'Indochine* (MEI), one of the *Cité universitaire de Paris* (CUP)'s student residences located in the fourteenth *arrondissement* of Paris,⁵⁶ succumbed to tuberculosis. Roger Bauduin de Belleval, the MEI's second director, reacted by organizing a preventive medical service of the Cité, stressing the “specific situation of the Indochinese students” because of their “weak constitution, their difficulties to adapt to [French] climate and the severe restrictions owed to the economic crisis.”⁵⁷ Before delving into these racial and racist considerations attempting to justify the high Indochinese sick rate, the novelty of this initiative needs to be discussed. Historians have recently shown that a university medical service was already in the planning stage during the previous decade.⁵⁸ In April 1931, some duty doctors were appointed at the Cité; three years later, Dr Pélissier ran a complete medical service visited by 114 members of the MEI in 1934–1935.⁵⁹ The residence was then accommodating 47 Indochinese and 64 French citizens.⁶⁰ If we don't know anything of the identities of these patients, academic migration still reveals social and medical issues beyond the intellectual objectives traditionally attached to metropolitan sojourns.

⁵⁵ McConnell, *Leftward Journey*, 52–53; Legrandjacques, “Voies étudiantes”, 514.

⁵⁶ Sara Legrandjacques, “Des colonisés à la Cité. La Maison des étudiants indochinois à la Cité universitaire de Paris (1927–1939),” *Traverse. Revue d'histoire* 1 (2018): 85–96; “Going West. Indochinese Students and the Shaping of Identities at the Maison des Étudiants de l'Indochine, late 1920s–early 1970s,” in ed. Dzovinar Kévonian, Guillaume Tronchet, *International Student Migration to France in the Twentieth Century. The Cité internationale universitaire de Paris Experiment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

⁵⁷ Archives Nationales (France), 20090013/1044 quoted by Brigitte Blanc, Philippe Ayrault, *La Maison des étudiants de l'Asie du Sud-Est* (Paris: Régions Île-de-France 2015): 5.

⁵⁸ Didier Fischer, Robi Morder, « La santé des étudiants à la Cité internationale universitaire de Paris. Entre ardente nécessité et obsolescence de circonstance » in Dzovinar Kévonian, Guillaume Tronchet (dir.), *Le Campus-monde. La Cité internationale universitaire de Paris de 1945 aux années 2000* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes 2022) 287–306.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Archives Nationales (France), AJ/16/7042: “Minutes of the MEI board of directors, 1935”.

Outside the Classrooms: An Imperial Promotion of Physical Education

The supposed inadequacy of Indochinese physical characteristics evoked by Bauduin de Belleval in 1932 was nothing new in the interwar years.⁶¹ In that context, some students assimilated those stereotypes and started to promote physical education to fight their supposed physical weakness. In 1918, Nguyễn Qui Toãn and Trinh Van Hoi solicited the Superior Resident for Tonkin regarding the establishment of a school dedicated to physical education in Hanoi.⁶² The institution opened a year later and welcomed 152 sportsmen-to-be in December 1919.⁶³ Despite lesser enthusiasm in the following months, the school remained active in the 1920s and 1930s. Meanwhile, Trinh Van Hoi developed scientific research about food, and especially rice, in order to find the causes of the Vietnamese corporal “weakness”.

In a paper published by *L'Asie française* in February 1922, André Salles, a former French explorer and photographer, described Hoi's use of his intellectual knowledge to develop his physical abilities.⁶⁴ This inverted perception of the body/intellect relationship—the latter becoming a tool for the former—was fostered by academic migration and new educational experiences abroad. In the early 1910s, Trinh Van Hoi and Nguyễn Qui Toãn were both students in France, supervised by the *Comité Paul-Bert*. Toãn joined Châlons-sur-Marne's *École Normale*, training future teachers while Hoi settled in Lyons where he was admitted to a tanning school affiliated to the school of chemistry within the local faculty of sciences. Their metropolitan curricula highlight how these two men were able to develop initiatives related to the Indochinese bodies once back in the colony, combining Toãn's pedagogical skills with Hoi's interest in scientific research. Above all, their common interest in physical education emerged in France too. During Summer 1913, the *Comité Paul-Bert* sent them, with ten other Indochinese *protégés*, to Reims' *Collège des Athlètes*, a physical training center founded the same year in a local park. The *Comité's* promotion of sports was not exceptional then as their pupils often joined different sports clubs: before his death in 1913, Rœum was considered as a “real sports lover”, registered in every sports club in the Saint-Pons' area, including gymnastics and soccer.⁶⁵ However, Reims' institution distinguished itself by standing as the cradle of Hebertism (*hébertisme*), a new method of physical education developed from

⁶¹ Guillemot, Larcher-Goscha, *La colonisation des Corps*, XX.

⁶² Agathe Larcher-Goscha, « Sports, colonialisme et identités nationales: premières approches du ‘corps à corps colonial’ en Indochine (1918–1945) », in ed. Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis, Youssef Fates, *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie. La jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940–1962* (Paris: La découverte 2003) 13–31.

⁶³ André Salles, “L'évolution physique des Annamites,” *Bulletin de l'Asie française* (February 1922).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *À la mémoire de Khatanarak Roun Roeum* (Paris: Alliance française 1913).

1910 by Georges Hébert. Hebertism linked the body and the mind, suggesting that their respective well-being was deeply connected, and its followers considered that being strong was synonymous with being useful. Unfortunately, no additional details are available on the Indochinese recruits' activities during the 1913 Summer break; in spite of that, Hebertist principles seemed to convince Hoi and Toân who circulated them in Indochina through their school of physical education. According to them, physical education had to improve the Indochinese—and especially, the Vietnamese—bodies and encompassed a social, and even nationalist, dimension: as demonstrated by Agathe Larcher-Goscha, some Vietnamese started to associate physical education and nationalism in the 1920s in order to shape a strong—both physically and spiritually—Vietnamese people.⁶⁶

Here, bodies became highly political again, illustrating Vietnamese patriotism, and colonial authorities supported the establishment of a school of physical education in Hanoi. In 1918, the Superior Resident of Tonkin himself provided the institution with a site located in the southern area of the city, less polluted and well-connected to the rest of the city thanks to a tramway line.⁶⁷ Additionally, funding came from colonial businessmen: quite ironically, Auguste-Raphaël Fontaine, the owner of the Indochinese distilleries, offered fifty piastres for the construction of a playground.⁶⁸ If Europeans had suspiciously looked at the politicization of Chinese bodies in the 1900s, they seemed to consider the new school as a way to strengthen their associationist policy with the Indochinese population. Their involvement was also fueled by racist prejudices on the supposed weaker Asian bodies and on the so-called European “civilizing mission” towards colonial populations.

If student mobility participated in reshaping the Indochinese perception of their own body right after the Great War, this impact of metropolitan sojourns appears actually quite limited in the Interwar years. Few students engaged in physical training while in France and no specific actors, other than the *Comité Paul-Bert*, seemed to really attach importance to sports. When the MEI was planned in 1927–1928, not a word was uttered about physical development. Only a ping-pong room was established within the walls of the new student residence. Although the participation of colonial students in metropolitan sports, especially of Indians within university clubs, is well-known,⁶⁹ historians still need to take a closer look at this phenomenon in the French Empire. Conversely, scholarship has already

⁶⁶ Larcher-Goscha, « Sports, colonialisme et identités nationales ».

⁶⁷ Salles, “L'évolution physique des Annamites”.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Paul R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men. British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2005): 216–223; Sumita Mukerjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities. The England-Returned* (London: Routledge 2010): 82–89.

underscored the spread of sports and physical education in Indochina between the 1920s and the 1940s.⁷⁰ Students enrolled at Hanoi University promoted physical education: almost every issue of *Le Monôme*, Hanoi University student union's journal, promoted physical education with several pages reviewing sporting competitions and praising the benefits of physical training.⁷¹ The first issue even depicts the students as intermediaries between modernity and the Indochinese population, spreading new knowledge and practices related to the body: in 1936, some women students were circulating in the Indochinese countryside to give advice and medicines to the poor.⁷²

The Indochinese youth could still count on the colonizers' support, especially the appointment of a Vichyist Governor General for Indochina, Admiral Jean Decoux, in 1940. The new regime set up by Pétain in the metropole after the French defeat against Nazi Germany was conservative as well as anti-intellectual. As shown by Christophe Pécout, it promoted physical training and outdoor activities.⁷³ In Indochina, Decoux appointed Major Maurice Ducroy chief officer for Sports and Youth in December 1941: among other things, he facilitated the access to sports premises, i.e., stadiums, for university students in Hanoi.⁷⁴ The Governor General also used the foundation of a new university residence, the *Cité universitaire de Hanoi*, to popularize physical education among the colonial educated elites, whether they be Asians or French. The project included "constructions for the practice of sports and outdoor games."⁷⁵ Consequently, the growing number of students reaching Hanoi during the Second World War, from Indochina or elsewhere,⁷⁶ should train both their intellect and their mind. Each week, a 2-hour outdoor training session became mandatory for each young man accommodated at the Cité.

Last but not least, the establishment of new institutions dedicated to physical education confirmed the new primacy of the body over the mind. It also entailed

⁷⁰ Larcher-Goscha, "Sport, colonialisme et identités nationales"; Brice Fossard, *Les élites indochinoises et les secrets de l'Occident. Sports et scoutisme coloniaux* (Paris: Les Indes savantes 2022). See also the ongoing research by Mickael Langlois: "Les arts martiaux vietnamiens au contact de la mondialisation: l'histoire d'un corps à corps [post-] colonial (1900–1975)" (PhD Diss. UNIL).

⁷¹ Several issues from *Le Monôme* are available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

⁷² Thanh Ba, "La Propagande d'Hygiène dans les campagnes," *Le Monôme* 1 (juin 1936) 13–14.

⁷³ Christophe Pécout, « Les pratiques physiques et sportives au service de l'idéal vichyste: L'exemple des Chantiers de la Jeunesse (1940–1944) » *Sciences sociales et sport* n°1 (2008/1) 5.

⁷⁴ "La pratique obligatoire de la culture physique à l'Université," *Le Monôme* 31 (February–March 1942) 6.

⁷⁵ "Concours d'idées pour la construction de la cité universitaire à Hanoi," *L'Écho annamite* (12 janvier 1942).

⁷⁶ According to *Éducation*, a French journal, Hanoi University welcomed 1528 students in 1944: about 1146 were Indochinese, 371 French and 11 Chinese and "diverse": "Les oeuvres culturelles en Indochine," *Éducation* 7 (1949) 23.

new student migration both in Indochina and in France. On the one hand, the *École supérieure d'éducation physique de l'Indochine* (ESEPIC), imagined by Ducoroy and officialized by a decree on November 24, 1941, was located in Phan Thiét, in Cochinchina.⁷⁷ On the other hand, during Summer 1941, six Indochinese students in France joined the *École des cadres* located in Uriage, a town a few kilometers away from Grenoble, in the French Alps. They were members of a larger colonial group also made of four North Africans, four West Africans, two Malagasy, one Guyanese and one Kanak.⁷⁸ The entire group left Marseille in late July for a one-week stay during which the Vichyist administration of the school combined intellectual work with physical honing.⁷⁹ However, these new institutions failed to attract a great number of trainees: only a handful of Indochinese visited Uriage School in 1941–1942. On the other side of the globe, a few Vietnamese candidates applied for an admission at the ESEPIC. In 1943, despite an important promotion in *Le Monôme*, only twenty-nine of the fifty governmental scholarships for these specific schools were attributed.⁸⁰

Conclusion

On May 24, 1926, O Boun Thian boarded the *André Lebon* at Marseille headed for Saigon.⁸¹ This Cambodian young man had just interrupted his business and industrial studies in Paris due to a sudden illness. If the story does not reveal whether his health suffered from the French climate, as often feared by public authorities and other educational supervisors, his father took a dim view of O Boun Thian's decision. Indeed, he owed money to colonial authorities in Indochina that loaned him not less than 22,000 francs for his educational sojourn in France.

O Boun Thian's academic experience illustrates tensions that existed between the Asian youth's body and mind during the first half of the twentieth century. Multiple European and Asian actors then considered student mobility as a useful

⁷⁷ Commissariat de la République française au Laos, *Bulletin administratif du Laos* 12 (1941) 432; ANV1, GGI, file 17 165: "Creation and Organization of the *Ecoles d'Éducation physique en Indochine, 1941–1944*"; Eric Jennings, *Vichy sous les Tropiques. La Révolution nationale à Madagascar, en Gadeloupe, en Indochine (1940–1944)* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle 2004) 260. See also: Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies 1940–1970* (Lexington: Lexington Books 2008).

⁷⁸ Bernard Comte, *Une utopie combattante. L'école des cadres d'Uriage, 1940–1942* (Paris: Fayard 1991) 253.

⁷⁹ Sara Legrandjacques, "Déroutes étudiantes. Les étudiants indochinois en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1940–1945)" *Les Cahiers Sirice* 22 (2019/1) 82–83.

⁸⁰ "Au stade de Phan Thiet," *Le Monôme* 36 (December 1943) 3.

⁸¹ ANOM, GGI, file 51 442.

tool for both individual and collective development. When the former contemplated colonial development as a priority, the latter negotiated it, taking into consideration their own careers and upward mobility but also nationalist and anti-colonialist objectives. Promoting Western knowledge and *savoir-faire* in Hanoi or elsewhere, they also took into consideration corporal issues as they wanted to secure their investment on an educated elite-to-be. Acclimatization, new diseases, but also *déclassement* potentially jeopardized intellectual objectives. However, the corporal dangers and consequences of student migration must not be reduced to a binary opposition between the body and the mind. At the same time, youth circulation participated in circulating new ideas and ideologies that could be directly linked to the bodies, like Hebertism from the 1910s. Former Vietnamese students in France played a part in the propagation of physical education in Indochina.

Consequently, while historians frequently scrutinize education in South-East Asia through an institutional lens, this chapter has shed light on the students' agency and involvement regarding the shaping of higher learning within colonial territories. In so doing, it emphasized political embodiments, i.e., how the students' bodies reflected the students' minds—their westernization, nationalization or anti-colonization. While revealing the complexity of this relation to the body, far from a binary approach, it also unveils Hanoi's regional and imperial role as an academic center, turning Chinese bodies into diplomatic subjects. In a nutshell, it gives both a corporal *and* transnational dimension to the history of education. Thus, it paves the way for new research on student migration and higher learning in Asia, beyond a binary separation between the brain and the flesh, the colonized and the colonizer, the imperial and the international.

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Wrestling for the Humankind of the Future: Aurobindo Ghose's and Mirra Alfassa's Politics of Physical Education in Pondicherry¹

Julia Hauser

Abstract

This article is concerned with the scheme of physical education established by Aurobindo Ghose and Mirra Alfassa at their ashram in Pondicherry. I argue that this scheme was tied to an agenda that was both nationalist and internationalist, and that it was the result of a dialogue between the ashram heads, even though Aurobindo personally showed little passion for sports. The central, and decidedly utopian, aim of physical education of the ashram was to help prepare the emergence of a future humankind in which sexual differences and the need to procreate would disappear – a lofty agenda ultimately complicated by students' resistance as well as the contradictions in the ashram's notion of gender.

Keywords: Aurobindo Ghose; Mira Alfassa; physical education; Indian nationalism; wrestling; Pondicherry

Introduction

Surrounded by a group of children, two students of the International Centre of Education at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, wrestle with each other in a wrestling pit in the summer of 1959. The smell of the wrestlers' sweat is counteracted by other, more pleasant odors, as the soil of the wrestling pit is mixed with fragrant herbs and essences: turmeric, neem, and sandal powder.² The wrestlers do not let themselves get carried away by these fragrances. They are focused

¹ Research for this chapter was enabled by a senior research fellowship at the Rabindranath Tagore Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre of Advanced Studies: Metamorphoses of the Political (ICAS:MP), Delhi, from January to June 2021.

² Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *I Remember...* (Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Bhavan, 1993), 251–252, cited after; Namita Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* (Puducherry: Golden Chain Fraternity, 2017), 188.

on the fight. The one currently dominating the scene is pressing their opponent towards the ground, stretching their left arm, and wrapping their right arm around their waist.³ Wrestling, as Joseph Alter has shown, had been central to Hindu nationalists' attempts at strengthening a Hindu masculinity so belittled in British colonial discourse.⁴ In this, it equaled the resurgence of Sumo wrestling in Meiji Japan, equally intended to bolster masculinity in Japan's struggle against Western imperialism.⁵ Remarkably, however, the image from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, titled "Wrestling / La lutte indienne", shows two young women in combat. As this chapter argues, wrestling was just one discipline among many taught at the ashram, all of which were taught to boys and girls alike. Why, then, were sports so central to an educational institution founded by a self-styled ascetic withdrawn from the world and any kind of physical activity? And what was the role of gender in this context?

Sri Aurobindo Ashram had come into being after Aurobindo Ghose's escape from Pondicherry, then a French colony, following his detention for his connection to an attempt on the life of a British official in Muzaffarpore. According to his biographers, Ghose distanced himself from politics in Pondicherry, instead turning to meditation. A group of former collaborators and disciples assembled around him. First, they lived together informally.

In 1914, Aurobindo met Mirra Richard née Alfassa, a French citizen who had been born to a wealthy Turkish-Egyptian Jewish couple in France. Alfassa, a trained artist who had turned to occultism and became interested in India around 1905, had traveled to Pondicherry in 1914 as the wife of a French politician. Like her husband, she was in sympathy with the Indian independence movement, yet had also come to India in her own spiritual quest. Soon after their meeting Alfassa became Aurobindo's disciple. Together with her guru and her then husband, she co-edited the journal *Arya: A Philosophical Review*, published between 1914 and 1920 which featured articles by Sri Aurobindo. Like many other Hindu nationalists, Aurobindo sought to revive the idea of Aryanism, arguing that humankind could only spiritually evolve if it returned to moral, spiritual, and bodily purity.⁶ Whereas

³ "Wrestling / La Lutte Indienne," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 3 (1959): IV.

⁴ Joseph S. Alter, "Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism" *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 557–588. On the belittling of Hindu masculinity in British colonial discourse, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity. The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁵ R. Kenji Tierney, "From Popular Performance to National Sport: The 'Nationalization' of Sumo," *This Sporting Life* 1 (2007): 67–90.

⁶ On the emergence of Aryanism as a trope in the course of the colonial encounter in India, see Romila Thapar, "The Historiography of the Concept of 'Aryan'," in *India: Historical Beginnings and the Concept of the Aryan*, ed. Ead., et al. (Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006), 1–40; *The Penguin History of Early*

Aryanism was generally tied to anti-Semitism in Europe, this was not necessarily the case in Hindu nationalism, where the demonized Other tended to be Muslim and lower caste rather than Jewish. Consequently, Aurobindo's notion of Aryanism was not offensive to Alfassa, who, in any case, placed little emphasis on her Jewish identity. After spending much of the First World War with her husband in Japan, Alfassa returned to Pondicherry, separating from her husband and living permanently in the community from 1920 until her death in 1973.⁷

In 1926, and against the resistance of several members of the ashram, Aurobindo elevated Alfassa, never enthusiastic about biological motherhood, to the spiritual mother of the ashram as well as of the future humankind he hoped to work for spiritually, thus acknowledging her spiritual parity and entrusting her with the organization of daily life inside the ashram. Aurobindo, by contrast, worked on his spiritual enlightenment until his death or *mahasamadhi* (grand spiritual enlightenment) as the ashram members referred to it, in 1950.⁸ While this sounds like a rigid division of tasks, Aurobindo continually stressed that he and Alfassa were working on the same aspects, and that they depended on each other to do so—not physically, since Aurobindo rejected physical closeness (an alleged obstacle to spiritual progress) as did Alfassa, but in spirit.⁹

In the 1920s and 1930s, the ashram grew slowly. From the Second World War onwards, it attracted a far greater number of men and women, now encompassing not only *sadhaks* (ashram members) but also their children.¹⁰ Most *sadhaks* came from different parts of India, with Bengali speakers a clear majority.¹¹ After 1945,

India: From the Origins to Ad 1300 (London: Penguin, 2002), 12–15; Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 134–157; Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Der Gurukul-Kangri oder die Erfindung der Arya-Nation. Kolonialismus, Hindureform und 'nationale Bildung' in Britisch-Indien (1897–1922)*, Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung / Südasiens-Institut Heidelberg; 194 (Würzburg: Ergon, 2003), 237–328. On the European discourse, see Léon Poliakov, *Le mythe aryen: essai sur les sources du racisme et des nationalismes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1994).

⁷ On the history of the ashram, see Peter Heehs, “Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, 1910–2010: An Unfinished History,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 19, no. 1 (2015): 65–86.

⁸ Id., “Sri Aurobindo and His Ashram, 1910–2010: An Unfinished History,” 66; Id., *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 326–327, 343–344, 354; Georges van Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000), 227.

⁹ Nika Kuchuk, “The Life Incarnate and the Life Divine: Spiritual Evolution, Androgyny and the Grace of the Goddess in the Teachings of Mirra Alfassa, the Mother of Integral Yoga,” *Studies in Religion* 52, no. 1 (2023): 48–66. On Aurobindo's views of sex as an obstacle of spiritual progress and, ultimately, the progress of humanity, see, for instance, Sri Aurobindo, “The Divine Body,” in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga. Shorter Works 1910–1950*, ed. Sri Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*; 13 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1998), 536–557.

¹⁰ Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 327, 393; Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 275, 341–355.

¹¹ “Report on the Quarter,” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 152–156.

the community also attracted a few European members, particularly French, American, and German academics, some of them rising to influential positions inside the organization and receiving Indian names.¹² In 1943, the year of the Bengal Famine, Alfassa opened a school for the ashram children. Soon, she would stress the importance of physical education for the children's mental and physical development. Although Alfassa retired into meditation in 1958, she continued to be the central authority of the ashram and school, named the Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education in 1959, until her death in 1973.¹³

The school's name already hints at its purpose. Internationalism, at least in name, was central to it. As Aurobindo had argued in his essay on the "Ideal of Human Unity", first published in *Arya* from 1915 to 1918 and revised on the eve of the Second World War, humankind could only evolve further if greater unity between nations and cultures was achieved. While national governments ought to be abolished in the long run in favor of an overarching world government, national cultures would continue to exist, but needed to be brought into dialogue.¹⁴ At the ashram school, students would be exposed to all cultures of the world, not just because it was open to anyone regardless of nation or religion but

...because an attempt is made to represent here the cultures of the different regions of the world in such a way as to be accessible to all, not merely intellectually, in ideas, theories, principles and languages, but also vitally in habits and customs, in art under all forms [...] and physically too through dress, games, sports, industries, food and even reconstruction of natural scenery.¹⁵

Neither teaching nor the composition of its student body—at least during Alfassa's lifetime—lived up to this ideal entirely. While Ancient Egypt, Asia, Europe, and the United States were represented in the curriculum, significant parts of the world, i.e.,

¹² Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 173; 220; 439.

¹³ Id., *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 341–355.

¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, "The Ideal of Human Unity," in *The Human Cycle. The Ideal of Human Unity. War and Self-Determination*, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo; 25 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997), 279–681.

¹⁵ "Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 134–162. In this regard, Aurobindo's and Alfassa's enterprise resembled another renowned institution in India, Rabindranath Tagore's Vishwa Bharati University at Shantiniketan. However, it differed from the former by its strong emphasis on physical education. On Tagore's institution at Shantiniketan, see H. B. Mukherjee, *Education for Fullness. A Study of the Educational Thought and Experiment of Rabindranath Tagore* (London: Routledge India, 2020). Moreover, as Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné point out, Tagore's establishment stood out above all by its Pan-Asianism. Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné, "Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (Ca. 1905–1940)," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 1 (2012): 65–92.

Africa apart from Egypt, Arab/Islamic cultures, and South America—did not play a role at all. Also, most students were Indian and Hindu.¹⁶ Aurobindo's concept of Aryanism would hardly have been attractive to non-Hindu, particularly Muslim and Dalit, students. Nonetheless, the school combined nationalism and internationalism in a way reminiscent of India's politics of non-alignment, entertaining contacts both to Western countries like France and the United States, but also to Russia.

Aurobindo's and Alfassa's lives have been the subject of inevitably hagiographic in-house publications.¹⁷ Researchers likewise have mainly focused on the tangibly spiritual aspects in the ashram.¹⁸ It is only recently that the political dimensions of Alfassa's work have been examined. Most scholars view her as a Western ally of the anti-colonial movement in India without taking into account her hybrid identity or her sympathies towards French colonialism.¹⁹ Only Jessica Namakkal's recent study stresses the ashram's entanglement with French colonial structures and its sense of superiority and civilizing mission towards its Tamil environment.²⁰ All in all, publications on the Pondicherry ashram are highly focused on the personalities and spiritual agendas of its founders. By contrast, the school and its agenda of

¹⁶ According to a 1959 report, the school had 363 students, of whom 138 were native speakers of Bengali, 95 of Gujarati, 70 of Hindi, 21 of Tamil, 12 of Telugu, 21 of Kannada, Marathi, and Singhalese, and only 6 foreigners. "Report on the Quarter." *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 162–178.

¹⁷ N. Das, *Glimpses of the Mother* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1980); S. Nahar, *Mother's Chronicles* (Auroville: Mira Aditi Centre, 1985); P. Nandakumar, *The Mother (of Sri Aurobindo Ashram)* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1977); Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972); H. Wilfried, *The Mother: A Short Biography* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1986); Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*; Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*; Narayan Prasad, *Life in Sri Aurobindo Ashram* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1965).

¹⁸ David Brème, «La figure de la mère, Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973). Une analyse des hybridations culturelles de ses représentations» (Université de Québec à Montréal, 2018); Marie Horassius, «Rituels et foi au cœur d'une utopie: oscillations et négociations autour des pratiques croyantes à Auroville,» in *Regards sur le mouvement spirituel fondé par Sri Aurobindo et la Mère*, ed. Patrick Beldio, David Brème, and Marie Horassius, *Cahiers de l'institut religioscope*; 15 (Fribourg: Institut Religioscope, 2018); Patrick Beldio, «Le yoga artistique de la mère à l'ashram de Sri Aurobindo,» in *Regards sur le mouvement spirituel fondé par Sri Aurobindo et la Mère*, ed. Patrick Beldio, David Brème, and Marie Horassius, *Cahiers de l'institut religioscope*; 15 (Fribourg: Institut religioscope, 2018).

¹⁹ Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Colonial Rule* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207–217; Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 118–126; Ravi Bajpai and Swati Parashar, "Worlding Encounters: Indian Spirituality and Anti-Colonialism in the Life and Thoughts of 'the Mother' (Mirra Alfassa)," *Global Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad014>

²⁰ Jessica Namakkal, *Unsettling Utopia. The Making and Unmaking of French India*, Columbia Studies in International and Global History (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021).

physical education, although very much connected to the ashram's spiritual aims as we shall see, have hardly been examined to date.

This is astonishing since the connection of sports, nationalism, and colonialism has received much attention both with regards to India and other parts of the world during the last decades.²¹ More to the point, scholars have also pointed to Aurobindo's role in this context.²² However, since the ashram school was founded after his withdrawal from politics, it has not been connected to Aurobindo's or Alfassa's political visions. This article hopes to make an initial and necessarily incomplete contribution to these aspects while also pointing towards another neglected phenomenon. Most studies on sports and anti-colonialism in India have highlighted the prominent role of notions of masculinity.²³ This chapter, by contrast,

²¹ See, for instance, Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires. Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Svenja Goltermann, *Körper der Nation. Habitusformierung und die Politik des Turnens 1860–1890*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998); Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, Asia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Hong Fan and Fan Hong, eds., *Sport, Nationalism and Orientalism: The Asian Games*, Sport in the Global Society (London: Routledge, 2007); Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2007); David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: Norton, 2007); Alain Derlon, *Sport, nationalisme français et régénération de la "race": 1880–1914* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008); Hans Bonde, *Masculinity, Sport, Politics – Nationalism, Regionalism, Globalization. The World, Europe and Danish Association and Disassociation* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2009); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity (1870–1940)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Tim Harte, *Faster, Higher, Stronger, Comrades! Sports, Art, and Ideology in Late Russian and Early Soviet Culture* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2020); Harald Fischer-Tiné and Stefan Huebner, "The Rise and Growth of a Global "Moral Empire": The YMCA and YWCA During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Work of the YMCA and the YWCA, 1889–1970*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné, Stefan Huebner, and Ian Tyrrell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2021).

²² Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva. Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011), 60–64. Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal. The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32–35.

²³ Indra Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Rosselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," *Past & Present* 86 (1980): 121–148; Alter, "Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism " 557–588; Id., "Kabaddi, a National Sports of India: The Internationalism of Nationalism and the Foreignness of Indianness," in *Games, Sports and Cultures*, ed. N. Dyck (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 83–114; Id., "Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 3 (2004): 497–534; Id., "Yoga at the Fin De Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a "Hindu" Twist," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (2006): 759–776; Arafaat A. Valiani, *Militant Publics in India: Physical Culture and Violence in the Making of a Modern Polity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Abhijit Gupta, "Cultures of the Body in Colonial Bengal: The Career of Gobor Guha," *The International*

aims at showing that female protagonists likewise played a role in the debate and that, at least on a discursive level, the concepts advocated went well beyond a binary model of gender.

The article relies on a number of published sources: the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education* (first published in 1949 as a bilingual journal in English and French, the languages of the former colonizers of the subcontinent, and continued up to the present),²⁴ various publications by Aurobindo Ghose and Mirra Alfassa as well as publications and memoirs by ashram members such as Nolini Kanta Gupta or Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, the director of physical education at the ashram school.²⁵ While these sources allow a detailed insight into the normative aspects of physical education at the ashram school, they need to be read against the grain for any conclusions as to breaks and ruptures in the school's ambitious agenda and its ambivalences.²⁶

After surveying the disciplines in physical education at the ashram school, I argue that sports were central to its concept of education, and that the curriculum represented an agenda of Olympic breadth. I then examine Ghose's and Alfassa's views on sports, arguing that the ashram school curriculum reflected their personal as well as political positions on sports. I go on to show that physical education at the ashram was seen as crucial to the development of a new humankind—a humankind that would shrug off the limitations imposed by sexual differences. In practice, however, gender and sexual differences continued to be central to sports at the ashram.

Journal of the History of Sport 29, no. 12 (2012): 1687–1700; Harald Fischer-Tiné, "Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (Circa 1900–40)," *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2018): 512–559; Carey Watt, "Physical Culture and the Body in Colonial India, c.1800–1947," in *Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Maria Framke (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2021), 345–358. The only study focusing on women so far is Elena Valdameri, "Training Female Bodies for New India: Women's Physical Education between Global Trends and Local Politics in Colonial South Asia, c. 1900–1939," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 39, no. 11 (2022): 1240–1264.

²⁴ I consulted the volumes up to 1973, the year of Mirra Alfassa's death, to gain an impression of her role in shaping the curriculum.

²⁵ Nolini Kanta Gupta and K. Amrita, *Reminiscences* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1969); Bhattacharya, *I Remember...*

²⁶ In-person research at the ashram was not possible, as I did not obtain a research visa and representatives of the ashram did not respond to my request for visiting the archives. It might be of interest to scholars based in India that the ashram does indeed have copious archives on its sports activities as is evident from the following publication: Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother: The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*.

A Panoply of Sports

Sports was a prominent part of education at the ashram. From the 1950s onwards, the curriculum encompassed a dazzling array of sports of Western and Asian origin alike. Each term had a specific focus, with athletics, games, gymnastics, and combative sports taught in different parts of the year. Athletics included swimming, throwing of the discus and mallet, high and long jump, and running.²⁷ In terms of games, students engaged in tug-of-war, cricket, basketball, volleyball, softball, hockey, kabaddi, and Alfassa's favorite game: tennis.²⁸ From the 1970s onwards, table tennis was also taught at the ashram.²⁹ From the beginning, gymnastics included "Indian exercises on the Malkham pole and cane" as well as hatha yoga asanas.³⁰ A specialty of the ashram was "gymnastic marching", a type of mass drill accompanied by drums intended to bring together "exercises from different parts of the world".³¹ The principal occasion for this type of marching was the annual *darshan* of the ashram founders and, later, of Mirra Alfassa alone.³² On this day, very much opposed to Aurobindo's rejection of formal rituals that Peter Heehs ascribes to him, students would march past their balcony in neatly organized formations. Images of these events strike the researcher as reminiscent of the mass gymnastic displays in 1920s Russia documented by Aleksandr Rodchenko, of Nazi sports events such as the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936—or indeed of the marches of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In later years, the ceremony was merely dubbed "the march past".³³ Students would also engage in acrobatics. Photos of displays on festive days showed them forming figures or symbols such as the symbols of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, sometimes at night with burning torches.³⁴ Gymnastics included body building, with the weight-lifting section of the gymnasium inaugurated in 1952.

²⁷ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 3, no. 3 (1951): 36–42.

²⁸ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 2 (1950): 18; "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 19, no. 1 (1967): 90–100.

²⁹ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 23, no. 2 (1971): 104–114.

³⁰ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 1 (1950): 24–26.

³¹ Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, *Gymnastic Marching* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1956).

³² "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 6, no. 2 (1955): 54.

³³ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 3, no. 3 (1951): 36–42.

³⁴ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 1 (1950): 24–26.

The ashram was repeatedly visited by body building champions such as Parimal Roy, who had won the title of Mr Asia,³⁵ or Kamal Bhandari, who had won the title of *Bharat Sri*, Mr India.³⁶ The *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education* published photos of these muscular, well-oiled athletes, some of them posing at the seashore, others grouped in *tableaux vivants* reminiscent of the works of Roman and Greek antiquity and classical works of European art such as Michelangelo's *Pietà*.³⁷ Combative sports, finally, encompassed Judo,³⁸ Wrestling, Boxing,³⁹ Fencing,⁴⁰ Lathi,⁴¹ and later Jiu Jitsu.⁴²

Mirra Alfassa or The Mother, Sri Aurobindo's spiritual companion who was in sole charge of the ashram from 1926, is generally characterized as the main architect of the ashram curriculum which included physical education.⁴³ Alfassa spent many hours in the sports ground initially, dressed in white and often seated in an armchair placed in front of the flag of India adorned with her symbol, the twelve-petalled lotus (distantly reminiscent of the charkha). Nonetheless, she was not solely responsible for the ashram's physical education scheme. Other members of the ashram supported her in designing the curriculum. The first members of the sports team came from the anti-colonial sports scene of Aurobindo's city of origin, Calcutta. Chief among them was Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya from Calcutta, a former member of the Calcutta Boxing Club who was also familiar with weight training, wrestling, hatha yoga, folk dances, and drills. From 1945 onwards, Bhattacharya, a tall, muscular man dressed in a khaki uniform with shorts, was employed as Alfassa's personal attendant and the director of the Physical Education

³⁵ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 4, no. 3 (1952): 90–92.

³⁶ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 10, no. 2 (1958): 126–128; "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 13, no. 1 (1960): 168–174.

³⁷ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 2 (1950): 18–19. These types of references had already been central to visual representations of the YMCA in South Asia as well as that of athletes in Europe and the United States. Fischer-Tiné, "Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (Circa 1900–40)," 40.

³⁸ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 162–178.

³⁹ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 4, no. 3 (1952): 90–92.

⁴⁰ "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 5, no. 3 (1954): 118–120.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Report on the Quarter," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 23, no. 2 (1971): 104–114.

⁴³ Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 342.

Department. Soon, Biren Chunder, his former coach at the Calcutta Boxing Club and known as the “Knockout King”, joined him in coordinating the lessons. In 1946, regular medical checkups for students were introduced: boys and girls were weighed, measured, and examined, with results documented comparatively.⁴⁴ Sports facilities soon included a physiotherapy department.⁴⁵ From 1949 onwards, the ashram published a *Bulletin of Physical Education* featuring articles by the ashram founders and other contributors on physical education, spirituality, and didactics as well as annual reports. Finally, further teachers and external coaches, including champions from Europe, the United States and Russia were invited or hired. Particularly gifted students, known as group captains, supported the teachers.⁴⁶ Classes started with fourteen boys in 1945. Soon these were extended to more boys and then girls, with male and female students training separately in the beginning.⁴⁷ Initially, boys and girls were dressed quite differently, boys wearing tank tops and shorts, while girls were dressed in saris or salwar kameez. In 1949, however, girls received their own uniform consisting of white shorts and tank tops in the same color.⁴⁸ Both the co-educational training as well as the girls’ shorts were a source of controversy within and outside the ashram in the first years, but both prevailed.⁴⁹

Before the inauguration of Auroville, the ashram’s sports facilities were the main reason for its expansion and its ensuing colonization of its environment.⁵⁰ In 1948, the ashram acquired land described as uncultivated and badly maintained for the tennis ground from the Pondicherry Government with which it continued to entertain close relations until the end of French rule.⁵¹ In 1951, a new sports ground outside the former premises was inaugurated. The sports ground was adorned with a relief showing a spiritual map of India. It was in front of this relief where Alfassa would be seated when watching lessons, contests, and other events in the sports ground. In 1952, the sports facilities saw a further expansion when a boxing ring, wrestling pit, football ground, weight-lifting area and gymnasium, the latter

⁴⁴ Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 379–384.

⁴⁵ Id., *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 412.

⁴⁶ Id., *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 355–374.

⁴⁷ Id., *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 21–24.

⁴⁸ Id., *Memorable Years with the Mother. The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 96.

⁴⁹ Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 345.

⁵⁰ Namakkal, *Unsettling Utopia: The Making and Unmaking of French India*.

⁵¹ Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother: The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*.

inaugurated on the birthday of the increasingly infirm woman head of the ashram, were added. In the late 1950s, a swimming pool, a dojo (judo building), and finally a further annex were opened. By the mid-1950s, the sports ground had room for more than 1,500 spectators.⁵² When important guests such as the Director of the UNESCO Division of Cultural Cooperation, Prime Minister Nehru and his daughter Indira or M.S. Golwalkar, the leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, visited the ashram, it was in the sports ground that they were received.⁵³

As is evident from this brief overview, the ashram trained its students as well as the adults living there in a wide variety of sportive disciplines.⁵⁴ Regularly, champions and coaches from India, Western Europe, Russia, and the United States visited the ashram to give courses to its members. Next to bodybuilding champions Parimal Roy and Kamal Bhandari, gymnasts from the Soviet Union, tennis stars from Denmark, and, finally, various alumni and alumnae of the *Sporthochschule* in Cologne, Germany, were among those visitors.⁵⁵ One alumnus of the Cologne institution, Werner Haubrich, even stayed for a prolonged period, becoming a member of the teaching body and being named Saumitra by Alfassa.⁵⁶ Some of these coaches also introduced innovations in the curriculum. From 1963 onwards, the students were subject to physical fitness tests after the model of the “Navy Standard Physical Fitness Tests” of the USA⁵⁷ While students were normally grouped and trained according to age and gender, those who did not pass the test

⁵² “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 6, no. 1 (1955): 132.

⁵³ “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 6, no. 1 (1955): 136–138; “Report on the Quarter,” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 21, no. 2 (1969): 104–110.

⁵⁴ As Joseph Alter and others have stressed, this neat division of Indian vs. Western sports was already obsolete in late nineteenth-/early twentieth century India, as exercise and related bodily practices were profoundly influenced by Western notions of physical culture. Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity.”; Fischer-Tiné, “Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (Circa 1900–40).”; Watt, “Physical Culture and the Body in Colonial India, C.1800–1947.”

⁵⁵ Gupta and Amrita, *Reminiscences*, 97–105; “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 2 (1959): 126; “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 10, no. 2 (1958): 126–128. In return, some ashram students went on to attend the *Sporthochschule* in Cologne. “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 21, no. 1 (1969): 116–124.

⁵⁶ “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 10, no. 2 (1958): 126–128; “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 168; Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother: The Growth of Physical Education in Sri Aurobindo Ashram*, 312–319.

⁵⁷ “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 15, no. 1 (1963): 106.

were not included in these groups, but instead lumped together in a unit referred to as the “non-group”, receiving special training as a consequence.⁵⁸ Students were also regularly weighed, measured, and evaluated. This stood in marked contrast to the ideal of the school not to give certificates or break records.⁵⁹ As one quarterly report stressed somewhat ambivalently,

We are not out to break records but nevertheless it is gratifying to compare our performances with that of athletes in other parts of the world and to know that very soon, with the children, we will be able to break, unofficially of course, national and other records.⁶⁰

Given these high-flying aims, the broad variety of sports, with at least four major events per year representing the panoply of sportive disciplines taught at the school, and its internationalist outlook, physical education at the ashram may be said to have been influenced by the modern concept of the Olympics in its approach.⁶¹ It brought together, and regularly displayed to the public, a wide array of sportive disciplines that had originated in different parts of the world. Students were trained by an international teaching body. Due to the anti-British sympathies of its founders, it never included British members of staff. By contrast, the ashram did have some French members such as Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire, an engineer and former military official.⁶² The curriculum aimed at promoting the unity and peace of humankind, but also competition. Yet there was one major difference to the Olympics, and similar concepts, in the twentieth century: participants were almost exclusively citizens of newly independent India. While the Olympic Games had already served as an inspiration to the Asian Games, a festival first promoted by the YMCA, yet turned into an anti-colonial event during the first half of the twentieth century,⁶³ the Pondicherry Ashram promoted only one nation as the representative and forerunner of all nations: India.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 13, no. 2 (1960): 172–176.

⁵⁹ “Why Are Not Diplomas and Certificates Given to the Students of the Centre of Education?,” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 12, no. 2 (1960): 143–145; “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 21, no. 1 (1969): 118.

⁶⁰ “Report on the Quarter.” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 3, no. 4 (1951): 34–38.

⁶¹ Allen Guttmann, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 7–20.

⁶² Vrekhem, *The Mother*, 220.

⁶³ Stefan Huebner, *Pan-Asian Sports and the Emergence of Modern Asia, 1913–1974* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016).

Sports and the Spiritual Evolution of Humankind

At a first glance, it may seem unusual for an ashram to place such an emphasis on sports including Western disciplines, all the more so since Sri Aurobindo, according to his biographer Peter Heehs, was never a passionate sportsman himself. Even though he praised the sports facilities at Cambridge University in retrospect, stressing that they turned any student “in three years from a boy into a man”,⁶⁴ he showed little interest in games during his time at university.⁶⁵ Eventually, failing the riding test, he did not pass the entry exam into the Indian Civil Service.⁶⁶

On the other hand, Aurobindo was hardly someone who rejected physical exercise. Indeed, he was convinced that India had to become strong to overcome British colonial rule—a conviction that was not unique to Aurobindo but shared by virtually all protagonists in the nationalist movement. The British, after all, had claimed that they were entitled to rule the subcontinent because of Hindu men’s alleged physical weakness.⁶⁷ Government colleges, the Boy Scouts, and the YMCA aimed at training the supposedly defective male Indian body.⁶⁸

As John Rosselli and Indira Chowdhury have shown, members of the Hindu elite adopted the stereotype of male Hindu fragility.⁶⁹ Strengthening the male Hindu body, therefore, was central to the emerging nationalist movement since the second half of the nineteenth century and would continue to be so in the twentieth century.⁷⁰ One way of doing so, as Parama Roy, Utsa Ray, Samiparna Samanta, and others have shown, was through diet, with protagonists arguing that Indian men either needed to consume meat, indeed even beef, to build muscle, or alternatively

⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Address at the Baroda College Social Gathering*, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*; 1: Early Cultural Writings (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2002), 353–356.

⁶⁵ Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 23.

⁶⁶ Id., *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 28.

⁶⁷ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity. The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*.

⁶⁸ Satadru Sen, “Schools, Athletes and Confrontation: The Student Body in Colonial India,” in *Confronting the Body. The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, ed. James H. Mills and Satadru Sen (London: Anthem, 2004); Fischer-Tiné, “Fitness for Modernity? The YMCA and Physical-Education Schemes in Late-Colonial South Asia (Circa 1900–40),” 512–559; Carey Watt, “No Showy Muscles’: The Scouting Frontiers: The Boy Scouts and the Global Dimension of Physical Culture and Bodily Health in Britain and Colonial India,” in *Youth and the Scout Movement’s First Century*, ed. Nelson R. Block and Tammy M. Proctor (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publications, 1999), 121–142.

⁶⁹ Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” 121–148; Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*.

⁷⁰ Watt, “Physical Culture and the Body in Colonial India, C.1800–1947,” 345–358.

needed to embrace fasting and vegetarianism to develop their will and moral purity.⁷¹

Just as important as diet was exercise; in fact, both often went hand in hand. In Bengal, a nationalist society founded by Aurobindo's grandfather, Rajnarayan Basu, worked along these lines, as did emerging secret nationalist societies.⁷² Members of the Tagore family organized the *Hindu mela* (Hindu fair), an annual event meant to celebrate Hindu Bengali prowess, inter alia by means of martial arts and acrobatics. In the Punjab, organizations like the Arya Samaj and associations founded by it, such as the Punjab Vegetarian Society, placed a premium on exercise. The *akhara* (open-air gymnasium), therefore, became a central site of the anti-colonial struggle.⁷³ Indian nationalists claimed that physical education would inculcate stamina and courage in young men and embolden them to rise against the British. While Arya Samaj schools such as the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College and, later, the Gurukul Kangri, taught gymnastics, cricket and other games, the Punjab Vegetarian Society celebrated its anniversaries with *lathi* (stave) fights.⁷⁴ Even for Gandhi's agenda of nonviolent resistance, exercise was central.⁷⁵

Aurobindo rejected the idea of nonviolence, in fact arguing that it had led to India's downfall; yet, he shared the view that Hindu men needed to engage in exercise in order to become more virile.⁷⁶ In his opinion, India could only rise to greatness again if "the Vedic institution of the fourfold order, *chaturvarna*", was

⁷¹ Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts. Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010); Id., "A Dietetics of Virile Emergency," *Women's Studies International Forum* 14, no. 4 (2014): 255–265; Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jayanta Sengupta, "Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal," in *Curried Cultures. Globalization, Food, and South Asia*, ed. Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2012), 73–87; Samiparna Samanta, *Meat, Mercy, and Morality: Animals and Humanitarianism in Colonial Bengal, 1850–1920* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021), 133–205; Hauser, Julia. *A Taste for Purity. An Entangled History of Vegetarianism*. Columbia Studies in International and Global History. New York: Columbia University Press, 2024, 38–71.

⁷² Valiani, *Militant Publics in India. Physical Culture and Violence in the Making of a Modern Polity*, 36; Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 6.

⁷³ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2010), 98–106.

⁷⁴ Fischer-Tiné, *Der Gurukul-Kangri oder die Erfindung der Arya-Nation*, 208–211; „Punjab Vegetarian Society," *The Harbinger* IV, no. 22 (1894): 207.

⁷⁵ Valiani, *Militant Publics in India: Physical Culture and Violence in the Making of a Modern Polity*, 12. Gandhi attached particular importance to walking. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *A Guide to Health* (Triplacane; Madras: Ganesan, 1923), 59–64.

⁷⁶ Sharma, *Hindutva. Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, 56–83; R. N. Minor, "Sri Aurobindo's Dismissal of Gandhi and His Nonviolence," in *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, ed. H. Coward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 87–105.

revived. This concept accorded different roles to the four castes, with the Brahmin being assigned to the spiritual realm while the Kshatriya represented masculinity, physical vigor, and political power.⁷⁷ As the founder of the Anushilan Samiti, a bodybuilding club and secret society aiming at overthrowing British rule by means of violence that was inspired by the ideas of Giuseppe Mazzini and the Japanese nationalist Kakuzo Okakura, he advocated exercise as a means of preparing young Hindu men for the anti-colonial struggle.⁷⁸ The Anushilan Samiti taught its members various sports of Western and Indian provenance, inter alia cycling, horse-riding, drill, boxing, and fighting with the lathi, which the samiti used in marches and show fights.⁷⁹ Interestingly, Aurobindo co-operated with two female activists, Sarala Devi and Irish-born Margaret Noble, in his quest for strengthening the male Hindu body through exercise.⁸⁰ However, the Anushilan Samiti did not yet have female members.⁸¹

Aurobindo's writings do not permit any conclusions as to whether or not he joined this kind of training; more likely, he took a different route: that of disciplining mind, body, and emotions by means of yoga, which he defined as "the realization of one's capacity of harmony, communion or union with God."⁸² However, Aurobindo had little sympathy for hatha yoga, considered inferior to other forms of yoga centering on the spiritual dimension.⁸³ Characterizing it as a

⁷⁷ Sharma, *Hindutva. Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, 60–64.

⁷⁸ Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910*, 32–35.

⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Right of Association (Speech)*, 27 June 1909, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*; 8: Karmayogin. *Political Writings and Speeches, 1909–1910* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2002), 67–83; Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910*, 33; Rosselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," 130. Later, the lathi would assume a prominent role in the daily rituals of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a paramilitary Hindu nationalist youth organization. Valiani, *Militant Publics in India: Physical Culture and Violence in the Making of a Modern Polity*, 156–161. While Valiani rejects this perspective, scholars like Maria Framke have shown that the RSS was very much shaped by the Hitler Youth of Nazi Germany. Maria Framke, *Delhi—Rom—Berlin. Die indische Wahrnehmung von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus 1922–1939*, Veröffentlichungen der Forschungsstelle Ludwigsburg der Universität Stuttgart; 21 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013), 89–96.

⁸⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, 99–100; Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India, 1900–1910*, 30–31; Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial (1890–1920). Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 79–124.

⁸¹ According to Sanchari Ray, girls and women only joined radical nationalist organizations from the 1920s onwards. Sanchari Ray, "Women in the Frontline: Radical Protest in Post Swadeshi Days," *Journal of People's History and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2020): 10–22.

⁸² Aurobindo, *Hathayoga*, 503.

⁸³ In this, Aurobindo agreed with Swami Vivekananda, who had postulated a hierarchy between a yoga focused on the mind and one of the body. James Mallinson, "Hatha Yoga," in *Brill's Encyclopedia*

practice eminently suitable for men, he argued that it could help men “outdo the feats of Hercules”, rendering them more masculine by “drawing the whole virile force into the brain”.⁸⁴ Yet while it helped practitioners to obtain an “extraordinary power” and “knowledge transcending the ordinary human bonds”, it could also generate in them a “colossal egotism”.⁸⁵ Hatha yoga, as a consequence, needed to be combined with other forms of yoga focused on the heart (*bhakti yoga*) and mind (*jnana yoga*), as Aurobindo also argued in his later work *Synthesis of Yoga* (1948).⁸⁶

Yet, strikingly, while his notion of yoga was not centered around the body, he claimed that practicing yoga had induced in him certain physical changes. Already when he started taking up yoga in 1905, his health improved, his skin became smoother and fairer, and his mental and physical energy increased.⁸⁷ Aurobindo described these processes as changes that he had been able to effectuate by his sheer spiritual force. After his time in prison, he continued working on what he described as his physical perfection, eventually being able to take on any position for any length of time, and feeling physical bliss and ecstasy (*ananda*) without touch.⁸⁸ His associates remarked that his skin had become radiant, indeed golden.⁸⁹

In his later writings on yoga, however, Aurobindo stressed the necessity of overcoming the body in order to achieve *samadhi* (spiritual enlightenment), arguing that one needed to detach oneself from the body and, while not neglecting it, become indifferent towards its needs.⁹⁰ Bodily inaction could be helpful on the way, yet should not give rise to *tamas* (inertia), the lowest of the three *guṇas* and hence opposed to the aim of enlightenment.⁹¹ Physical needs, sexuality, and emotions needed to be regarded with indifference. Eventually, the “purified heart” would experience “a universal love”.⁹²

of Hinduism. Volume Iii: Religious Specialists—Religious Traditions—Philosophy, ed. Knut A. Jacobson, et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 770.

⁸⁴ Aurobindo, *Hathayoga*, 504. This idea ultimately derived from Patanjali, who had argued in his Yoga Sutras that semen, considered the male life force, was a non-renewable source located in the brain, from where it dripped down into the body. Postures like the headstand were supposed to slow down this process, thus increasing a yogi’s lifespan. Mallinson, “Haṭha Yoga,” 770.

⁸⁵ Aurobindo, *Hathayoga*, 506.

⁸⁶ Id., *Synthesis of Yoga*, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo; 23/24 (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1999).

⁸⁷ Nirodbaran, *Talks with Sri Aurobindo. Volume 1* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2001), 107.

⁸⁸ Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 311.

⁸⁹ Id., *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 330.

⁹⁰ Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga*, 345–346.

⁹¹ Id., *Synthesis of Yoga*, 347–348. On the concept of the three *guṇas*, see Angelika Malinar, “Guṇa,” in Brill’s *Encyclopedia of Hinduism. Volume II*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 758–762.

⁹² Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga*, 661.

In contrast to Sri Aurobindo, Mirra Alfassa was a dedicated sportswoman. A feeble child frequently succumbing to disease, her first tennis lesson at the age of eight, in 1886, introduced her to what would become a lifelong “passion”.⁹³ Like many other girls and women at the time, young Mirra was carried away by the sense of freedom tennis gave to her. Tennis allowed for less restrictive dress and encouraged running, jumping, and reacting forcefully and quickly—capacities very much opposed to the quiet demeanor expected of middle-class girls in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Alfassa’s devotion to tennis, therefore, can be interpreted as transgressing gendered boundaries. Even after her turn to the occult, she continued to play tennis.⁹⁵ At the ashram, she continued her practice, famously captured by Henri Cartier-Bresson in the tennis court.⁹⁶ Photos rarely show her in long dresses. Alfassa seems to have preferred wearing white trousers and kurtas: practical items of dress allowing a quick match on the court each afternoon. Rather than covering her hair and chest with a dupatta as conservative local notions of decency would have required, she generally wore a white cap. She only stopped playing tennis at the age of eighty in 1958.⁹⁷

Much more so than Aurobindo, Alfassa rejected the idea that the body needed to be given up in favor of the spirit. Indeed, she believed that sport was crucial to the development of a new humankind as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo. According to him, man was a “transitional being” likely to evolve first into overman, then into superman.⁹⁸ While Alfassa accepted his view, she accorded a far greater role to the body in this process. In her view, the individual needed to achieve perfection to be fit to encounter the Divine. Only then could the human race evolve further.⁹⁹ Perfection, or so Alfassa argued, ought to be attained by various means. Next to “psychic discipline” and “mental development”, physical education was inevitable, the aim being to push the body to its limits and beyond.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ La Mère, *Entretiens 1950–51* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2009), 49.

⁹⁴ Robert J. Lake, *A Social History of Tennis in Britain* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 29–38.

⁹⁵ A photo taken in 1912 by an unknown photographer shows her playing tennis in a long skirt at the age of 34. The Mother in France, Venice, and Algeria (up to 1912). *A Collection of Photographs of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo*. Compiled and preserved by Tara Jauhar. [http://saaonline.net.in/samo_gallery/album.cfm?refid=5#prettyPhoto\[gallery1\]/18/](http://saaonline.net.in/samo_gallery/album.cfm?refid=5#prettyPhoto[gallery1]/18/) (last accessed 1 March 2023).

⁹⁶ Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Mother playing tennis, 24 April 1950 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mother_tennis2.jpg (last accessed 1 March 2023).

⁹⁷ Vrekhem, *The Mother. The Story of Her Life*, 430.

⁹⁸ Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 275.

⁹⁹ The Mother, “Tournaments,” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 2 (1950): 17.

¹⁰⁰ Id., “The Science of Living,” *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 3 (1950): 15–25.

In order to achieve all-round physical perfection, students needed to be trained in all sportive disciplines, even if not everyone could be a champion. Even though India was already coming into being as an independent nation by the time the ashram started its physical education scheme, exercise was evidently also connected to nation building. This, at any rate, can be inferred from the fact that the *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Center of Education* discussed the development of gymnastics with regards to nationalism, stressing the important role of educators such as Friedrich Ludwig Jahn in Germany or Peer Henrik Ling in Sweden, both of whom had argued that their respective nations could only become strong if their male inhabitants did as well.¹⁰¹ However, it was not only Europe that was identified as a model in this regard. Other articles discussed the development of physical education in ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, or indeed in ancient India. The latter article characterized the development of physical education as a history of decline, attesting a particularly negative role to the emergence of Buddhism as well as the Mughal and British invasions.¹⁰² At present, the article implied, India could only regain physical greatness if it embraced both its history and support from the West. It was not only the idea of a unity of humankind, but also this agenda of nation building that accounted for the panoply of sports taught at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram—a programme of Olympic breadth, taught by an international teaching body, yet implemented by an almost entirely Indian student body.

The body of the individual took center stage in this process of re-building humanity and the national body politic. In Alfassa's view, the aim of physical education was to build in oneself "total harmony", so that eventually, perfect beauty could express itself through the body. To reach this goal, students had to be taught to be in command of their bodies down to "each of the body cells".¹⁰³ Rather than an outward sign of a brilliant mind, illness was a symptom of a body out of balance, indeed of weakness.¹⁰⁴ It could only be cured through a heightened body

¹⁰¹ "The Development and Methods of Educational Gymnastics," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 4 (1959): 100–144. Jahn's political views were decidedly anti-Semitic and anti-French—views Alfassa would hardly have shared. Werner Bergmann, „Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig," in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Personen A–K*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 403–406. The fact that one of the leading ashram members praised him hints at political divergences and conflicts within the ashram which had already come to the fore when Alfassa and Aurobindo took a stance against the Nazi government during World War Two. Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 385.

¹⁰² "Physical Education in Ancient India," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 15, no. 2 (1963): 92–106.

¹⁰³ "Specialisation or All-Round Training?," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 2 (1959): 108–120.

¹⁰⁴ Mother, The. "Physical Education." *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 12, no. 2 (1960): 105–115. In this, Alfassa's notion of disease resembled that embraced both by Ayurveda and

consciousness.¹⁰⁵ Small wonder, then, that none of the photos of physical education at the ashram showed photos of disabled or overweight children, adolescents or adults.

It was not just illness that Alfassa perceived as a form of divergence. To her, even sexual difference was an aberration of nature that would eventually disappear. Even before it did, boys and girls needed to receive the same kind of physical education. Drawing attention to historical figures like the Rani of Jhansi or Jeanne d'Arc as well as recent scientific studies, an article in the *Bulletin* argued that women could attain what was considered the gold standard—"male standards of fitness"—indeed become stronger than "ninety-nine percent of all men" if they took up regular training.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, this would help sexual differences disappear. As long as they continued to exist, men and women would be slaves to desire and hence to each other. But in the course of spiritual evolution, sexual impulses as well as sexual organs would finally vanish. Alfassa's take on spiritual revolution, therefore, was even more radical than the positions of the Theosophical Society, one of the first groups to coin this concept. Whereas the Theosophists merely claimed that humans had to suppress their alleged "animal" instincts, they never bothered about the body parts involved in the process. Alfassa, by contrast, wished to eliminate both. From this point onwards, procreation would neither be possible nor necessary.¹⁰⁷ India, or so both Alfassa and Aurobindo implied, might well have a special role to play in the emergence of this new, "unsexed" humankind which would finally culminate in the descent of a superior instance referred to by Aurobindo as "supermind" on earth.¹⁰⁸

unani tibb, the Muslim-Arab development of ancient Greek medicine. As Harald Fischer-Tiné has argued, all these branches of medicine, including modern Western medicine, influenced each other in colonial India. Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Pidgin-Knowledge: Wissen und Kolonialismus*. Zürich: Diaphanes, 2013.

¹⁰⁵ The Mother, "Illness, the Cause and the Remedy," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 6, no. 3 (1955): 79–97.

¹⁰⁶ "The Same Programme of Physical Education for Boys and Girls," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 11, no. 1 (1959): 112–132.

¹⁰⁷ The Mother, "The Problem of Woman," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 6, no. 2 (1955): 43–51; Id., "Some Experiences of Body Consciousness," *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 5, no. 3 (1954): 111. On this aspect, see also Kuchuk, "The Life Incarnate and the Life Divine: Spiritual Evolution, Androgyny and the Grace of the Goddess in the Teachings of Mirra Alfassa, the Mother of Integral Yoga," 48–66.

¹⁰⁸ Mother, "The Problem of Woman," 51. Interestingly, neither Alfassa nor Aurobindo referred to existing transgender traditions in the subcontinent where individuals of a third gender had long been an accepted part of society, most likely as they had been disrupted by British colonial rule. Serena Nanda, "Hijrās," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, et al. (2018). Print edition: online on 2 April 2023 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_900000015>

The Limits of Utopia

In practice, however, physical education at the ashram, although producing impressive results, lagged behind this utopian agenda. First, a significant part of the sadhaks were as irritated by the central role of sports in what was to be a contemplative community, as by the fact that this agenda had been initiated by its foreign woman head whom some did not accept in her role as “mother” and Sri Aurobindo’s shakti, i.e., divine power.¹⁰⁹ Numerous letters addressed to Sri Aurobindo between 1946 and 1950 testify to this sense of irritation, indeed of a certain resistance. In his replies, Aurobindo oscillated between supporting Alfassa and distancing himself from her ambitious agenda of physical education, stating that supermind would hardly “descend into the playground”, as he himself would be the last to meet the physical requirements for an encounter of this sort.¹¹⁰ Undoubtedly, however, the ashram’s agenda of physical education was not merely Alfassa’s brainchild. The same androgynous concept of future humankind may also be found in Aurobindo’s works.¹¹¹ Moreover, Aurobindo himself had stressed the role of physical education in the anti-colonial and nationalist struggle in his earlier years, when the Anushilan Samiti had trained its members in both “local” and “Western” sports disciplines.¹¹²

Aurobindo’s and Alfassa’s notion of future humankind notwithstanding, gender differences continued to be central to physical education at the ashram as well. Even though girls were allowed to wear shorts and tank tops from 1949 onwards, and sports did in no way aim at preparing them for a future life of motherhood as would have been typical of Indian physical education up to the Second World War according to Elena Valdameri,¹¹³ they continued to be easily recognizable by the caps they were obliged to wear to protect their hair. Only the group captains who were praised as “true candidates for supermanhood” in the licenses handed out to them wore gender-neutral uniforms, i.e., women’s uniforms were modeled on men’s.¹¹⁴ It was not just male uniforms that served as models to female ashram members. The male body likewise constituted the ideal when measuring students’ strength

¹⁰⁹ Sthaneshwar Timalsina, “Śakti.” In *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism. Vol. 2: Sacred Texts and Languages, Ritual Traditions, Arts, Concepts*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Angelika Malinar, Jayaprakash Narayan and Helene Basu. Leiden: Brill, 2018, 843–847.

¹¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Life and Death in the Ashram*, The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 2002), 780.

¹¹¹ Id., “The Divine Body,” 555.

¹¹² Alter, “Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism”.

¹¹³ Valdameri, “Training Female Bodies for New India”. See also the contribution to this volume by the same author.

¹¹⁴ Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother*, 367.

and endurance.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, it was only the male body that was idealized, such as in the portraits of Indian bodybuilders arranged according to classical works of European art. At least during the period under review, girls did not participate in international exchanges such as with the *Sporthochschule* in Cologne. There are also very few photographs showing female ashram members weightlifting. If they did practice it, their bodies markedly diverged from the ideal of the slim, fit body preached at the institution.¹¹⁶

In the light of the curriculum of the Anushilan Samiti as well as in that of the ashram, Joseph Alter's distinction between the allegedly non-communalist tradition of wrestling and practices such as lathi fights and drill embraced by Hindu nationalist organizations appears somewhat questionable. Rather, the organizations founded by Aurobindo show that wrestling could be very much part of an aggressive Hindu nationalist agenda—and that this agenda in turn might well go hand in hand with embracing internationalism.

Moreover, even though the ashram took a clear stand against Nazism during the Second World War, its sports events echoed the role of sports in the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. Indeed, these were more than echoes, as the ashram did not only entertain exchanges with athletes from Soviet Russia, but also with an institution exhibiting clear continuities to the Nazi regime. The director of the *Sporthochschule* in Cologne, Carl Diem, still in office during the 1950s, had been one of the central sports functionaries in Nazi Germany, organizing such major events as the Berlin Olympics of 1936.¹¹⁷ Students likewise complained about the military character of sports at the ashram, at least in retrospect. After Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya's death in 2010, some alumni compared the former director of physical education at the ashram to Stalin or Hitler.¹¹⁸ While Aurobindo and Alfassa hoped to contribute to India's liberation and independence as well as to the spiritual liberation of the sadhaks, their physical liberation was clearly caught in ambivalence.

¹¹⁵ See, for instance, "Report on the Quarter." *Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* 2, no. 2 (1950): 18.

¹¹⁶ Sarkar, *Memorable Years with the Mother*, 201.

¹¹⁷ Ralf Schäfer, „Verdrängen und Erinnern – Probleme im Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit des Sports am Beispiel von Carl Diem,“ in *Die Spiele gehen weiter. Profile und Perspektiven der Sportgeschichte*, ed. Frank Becker and Ralf Schäfer (Frankfurt/M.: Campus, 2014), 143–170.

¹¹⁸ Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya (Dada) 18 October 1923—8 January 2010. The Light of the Supreme. <http://savitri.in/blogs/light-of-supreme/pranab-kumar-bhattacharya-dada-18-october-1923-8-january-2010> (last accessed 1 March 2023).

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PART 3

Mobility and Confinement

Masculinity on the Move from Barcelona to Bombay: The Men of the Catalan Bourgeoisie and Their Bodily Encounters in Colonial India

Teresa Segura-Garcia

Abstract

In 1908, two travelers from Barcelona embarked on a year-long world tour. Stage designer Oleguer Junyent and textile heir Marià Recolons' trip took them across the British Empire, with India as their most significant stop. The chapter examines their bodily encounters in India through the written and visual sources produced around the tour. In the spaces of the emerging global tourism of the time—the restaurant, the hotel, the club—Recolons and Junyent interacted with British elites and with Indian men, both elite and subaltern. While the travelers immersed themselves into British elite bodily practices, it was Indians who were at the center of their most intimate connections. The chapter argues that metropolitan Spanish masculinity was fleetingly transformed by embracing the trappings of British imperialism while forging links with the colonized. In this way, it makes an original contribution to our growing understanding of the contact zone of European and Indian masculinities.

Keywords: masculinities; Barcelona; Bombay; colonial India; Catalan bourgeoisie; global tourism

As the train pulled out of Barcelona's Estació de França, Marià Recolons and Oleguer Junyent made an unlikely pair. Recolons was the British-educated nineteen-year-old son of one of Barcelona's wealthiest industrialist families while Junyent, thirteen years his senior, was an award-winning stage designer well-known in Barcelona for his work on Wagner operas at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the city's grand opera house. On 11 March 1908, with the luggage packed onto the train—travel guides, Junyent's drawing supplies, his camera—and the well-wishers having waved them off at the station, the two looked forward to reaching Marseille. It was the first stop in a year-long tour that would take them across the world. Their relationship at the start of this journey was ambiguous—they were friendly, certainly, but perhaps not quite friends. Junyent was, however, friends with Marià's parents, as well as

the go-to decorator for the entire Recolons family.¹ It was Marià's parents who had asked Junyent to chaperone their eldest across the globe and, crucially, provided the funds that made the tour possible. If Marià Recolons' goal was to see the world before joining the family business, Junyent hoped to find inspiration for his art in faraway lands, but also to burnish his reputation and further his career.²

Their starting point, Barcelona, was the second largest city in the metropole of a diminished empire. A major imperial power in the early modern period, most of Spain's American colonies achieved independence in the 1820s. For most of the nineteenth century, Spain held on to its colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and equatorial and northern Africa, in a phase of "imperial retreat."³ In 1898, war against the United States culminated in the loss of Spain's Caribbean and Pacific colonies. In the early twentieth century, however, Spain remained an empire: its African colonies, while modest in size, constituted a "new empire" that allowed metropolitan elites to imagine Spain as a colonial power.⁴ From the metropole of this remodeled empire, Junyent and Recolons visited Egypt, India, Ceylon, Australia, the Philippines, China, Korea, Japan, Canada, and the United States. A constant throughout their trip was an empire whose extension in the early twentieth century was formidable: the British Empire. Whether it was through direct rule or through indirect political, economic, and cultural pressures, the sinews of power of the British Empire stretched out before them. At the same time, this was an empire threatened by revolt and unrest in its most important colony, around which the entire imperial edifice was built: India. India loomed large in Recolons and Junyent's tour, as the place where they chose to spend the most time in the entire tour and as one of the two territories Junyent was most eager to visit—along with Egypt, a *de facto* British protectorate.

The chapter is an examination of the Indian leg of Recolons and Junyent's world tour against the backdrop of sometimes aligned, sometimes clashing masculinities—Catalan, British, and Indian. Its objective is to use their journey as a wedge

¹ Clara Beltrán Catalán, "Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenógrafo: Entre la tradición y la modernidad (1899–1936)" (PhD diss., Universitat de Barcelona, 2020), vol I, 76.

² Teresa Segura-García, "A Barcelona stage designer in colonial India: Catalan travellers, transimperial mobility and the British Raj in Spain, c. 1908", *Historia y Política* 49 (2023), 185–214.

³ Josep M. Fradera, "Empires in retreat: Spain and Portugal after the Napoleonic wars", in *Endless Empire: Spain's Retreat, Europe's Eclipse, America's Decline*, ed. Alfred McCoy, Josep M. Fradera, and Stephen Jacobson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 55–73; and "Canadian Lessons, Roads Not Taken: Spanish Views on Confederation", in *Globalizing Confederation: Canada and the World in 1867*, ed. Jacqueline D. Krikorian, Marcel Martel, and Adrian Shubert (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2017), 143–57.

⁴ William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Spanish Equatorial Guinea, 1898–1940", in *Cambridge History of Africa*, ed. Andrew Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), vol. 7, 537–43; and "The Economic Dynamics of Spanish Colonialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *Itinerario* 15, no. 1 (1991), 71–90.

that opens a space to investigate a larger area of inquiry: transimperial mobility between the Spanish and British empires in the early twentieth century. This wedge conforms to a distinct method of historical writing: global microhistory, a practice that allows historians to explore global forces through the prism of individual experience.⁵ Microhistory allows us to examine the global forces behind these questions—in this case, the history of masculinity—through one singular case.

Recolons and Junyent's world tour is particularly well-suited to a global microhistorical approach. It is the most substantial—in terms of the quantity, quality, and diversity of sources—of all visits of travelers from Spain to India in an entire century, from the mid-nineteenth century to Indian independence. Throughout the tour, Junyent wrote to his friend Miquel Utrillo—an artist himself, but also a cultural promoter who edited and published these letters, first as a serialized travelogue and later as a book.⁶ There are other written sources about the trip: magazine articles by Junyent and Recolons published in the Catalan and Spanish press, Junyent's concise travel diary and his collection of ephemera from hotels and steamships. The latter two—along with Junyent's letters to Utrillo—are held in the Armengol-Junyent Archive by the stage designer's descendants. During the tour, Junyent also produced an important body of visual sources. He sketched and painted furiously, often on scraps of hotel paper that freed him from carrying his own paper supplies. In India alone he produced over 200 artworks in mediums such as gouache, watercolor, and oil painting. An amateur photographer, he also took pictures with his compact VÉRASCOPE camera, complementing them with the purchase of professional images—a photographic collection now spread across the Armengol-Junyent Archive, the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona and the Mas Archive at the Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic in Barcelona.⁷ The chapter examines these written and visual sources through the theoretical insights of microhistory, which invites historians to read documents “beyond the edge of the page”, delving beneath their explicit content to unearth indirect suggestions and involuntary implications.⁸ Through this approach, Junyent and Recolons emerge not as the “faceless globe-trotters” of John-Paul Ghobrial's critique of global microhistory, but as fully fleshed out participants in the imperial currents of the world through which they moved.⁹

Transimperial history has produced suggestive studies that have destabilized metropolitan-centered imperial histories, emphasizing instead the multidirectional

⁵ John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “Introduction: Seeing the World Like a Microhistorian”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019), 1–22: 16.

⁶ Oleguer Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born* (Barcelona: Edicions de La Magrana, 1981).

⁷ Beltrán Catalán, “Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenógrafo”, 392.

⁸ Giovanni Levi, “Frail frontiers?”, *Past & Present* 242 (2019): 37–49 (41–42).

⁹ John-Paul A. Ghobrial, “The Secret Life of Elias of Babylon and the Uses of Global Microhistory”, *Past & Present* 222 (2014): 51–93 (59).

contacts, alliances and contestations established between different colonies and metropolises. While some disparate projects have examined the circulation of people and ideas between the Spanish and British empires in the modern period, this remains an understudied field—largely because the historiographical traditions of these two empires have not always been in dialogue with each other.¹⁰ Within this transimperial framework, an even more unexplored issue is the contacts between metropolitan Spain and colonial India.¹¹ The chapter contributes to these two interconnected areas and, through it, to the history of Spain from a global perspective.

Finally, the chapter also critically re-examines and expands our understanding of Recolons and Junyent's experiences abroad. It has so far been described as Junyent the stage designer's tour—the journey of a tourist-artist preoccupied with documenting the “exotic” architecture of India, China, and Japan for later use in his artistic output. This is the case of the prologue for the 1981 re-edition of Junyent's travelogue *Roda el món i torna al Born* (“Around the World and Back to the Born”)—the edition most readily available to readers today—as well as two more recent studies of the tour undertaken.¹² By decentering the tour to include Recolons and examining both travelers not as uncomplicated tourists but as men who commented on British imperialism and anti-imperial resistance from the viewpoint of Barcelona's upper classes in metropolitan Spain, the tour emerges as something more than a “creative parenthesis” in Junyent's artistic production.¹³ Research on Catalan travelers to other colonial or semi-colonial spaces, such as Morocco and Egypt, has demonstrated

¹⁰ For some of these examples, see Laura Díaz-Esteve, “Aguinaldo's British Men: Defending the Philippine Revolution through the Hong Kong and Singapore Press, 1896–1902” (PhD diss., Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2022); María Dolores Elizalde, “Dinámicas internacionales en Filipinas, más allá de patrias y banderas: Percepciones británicas en el cambio de soberanía entre españoles, americanos y filipinos”, in *Filipinas, un país entre dos imperios*, ed. María Dolores Elizalde and Josep M. Delgado (Bellaterra, Spain: Edicions Bellaterra, 2011), 209–250; and “Observing the Imperial Transition: British Naval Reports on the Philippines, 1898–1901”. *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 2 (2016): 219–243; Jeanne Moisan and Teresa Segura-García, “Marketing global y políticas imperiales de género: Las marquillas de tabaco entre La Habana y el mundo, 1860–1870, in *El imperio en casa: Género, raza y nación en la España contemporánea*, ed. Xavier Andreu-Miralles (Madrid: Sílex, 2023), 67–94; and Ander Permanyer-Ugartemendia, “Opium after the Manila Galleon: The Spanish Involvement in the Opium Economy in East Asia (1815–1830)”, *Investigaciones de Historia Económica* 10 (2014), 155–64.

¹¹ Enric Donate Sánchez, “La etapa desconocida en la ruta del Índico: Comercio español en la India británica a inicios del siglo XX”, in *La investigación sobre Asia Pacífico en España*, ed. Pedro San Ginés Aguilar (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2006), 309–322; and Maria Framke, “Political Humanitarianism in the 1930s: Indian Aid for Republican Spain”, *European Review of History* 23, no. 1–2 (2016): 63–81.

¹² Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 5–10; Carolina Plou Anadón, “La India: Turismo, experiencia personal e imagen en la obra *Roda el món i torna al Born*, de Oleguer Junyent”, *Indialogs* 3 (2016): 151–167.

¹³ Beltrán Catalán, “Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenógrafo”, 387.

that they saw the places they visited with a political gaze, often opining about colonialism.¹⁴ Recolons and Junyent's gaze as tourists is inextricable from the European imperialism that enabled their movement across the world. By reading the written and visual sources produced around the tour "beyond the edge of the page", the article reveals how the two men engaged with a world of colonizers and colonized. It does so by exploring the intimate encounters of Oleguer Junyent and his travel companion with the bodies they came into contact with in colonial India—a multiplicity of bodies in terms of gender, race, and class. There has been work on the bodies of British men in India, and work on the professional activities of non-British European men in India. Work on the bodies of non-British European elites in the subcontinent, however, constitutes an unexplored area. Because they were neither colonizer nor colonized, this area of enquiry can complicate our picture of the body in colonial India and colonial Asia, by going beyond some of its binaries.

A Stage Designer and an Industrial Heir Go on a World Tour

Oleguer Junyent (1876–1956) was born in Barcelona's El Born neighborhood in a family of craftspeople and artists. He studied at the Escola de la Llotja, Barcelona's art school, from 1889 to 1895. He also trained as a stage designer, rising through the ranks in the workshops of Barcelona's leading stage designers.¹⁵ From 1899 he spent some years in Paris and traveled through Italy and Germany, again drawing copiously.¹⁶ In 1901, he began collaborating with the Gran Teatre del Liceu. With his innovative themes and techniques, Junyent soon became one of the opera house's leading stage designers—particularly for the Wagner operas that the Liceu audience loved so much.¹⁷ He was intensely well-connected with Barcelona's industrial and political elites, who patronized him as a decorator for their grand residences.¹⁸ From at least 1902 he was a close friend of the influential Catalan politician Francesc Cambó—and was equally close to the ideology of Cambó's party, the Lliga Regionalista de Catalunya ("Regionalist League of Catalonia"). The main party in Catalonia at the time, it was a conservative, monarchic and Catalanist organization.¹⁹ This brief sketch of Junyent and the Barcelona he inhabited would not be complete without mentioning a significant trend in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Catalan art, shared with

¹⁴ Rosa Cerarols Ramírez, "L'imaginari colonial espanyol del Marroc: Geografia, gènere i literatura de viatges (1859–1936)" (PhD diss., Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2008), 198–228.

¹⁵ Beltrán Catalán, "Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenògrafo", 112–125.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135–182.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 197–230.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

¹⁹ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 8.

artistic movements in other parts of Europe: the taste for the exotic and the “Orient.” With the glut of operas and plays set in “the Orient” in the previous half a century, it made sense for a stage designer to visit territories such as Egypt, India, Ceylon and Japan—the lands, respectively, of Verdi’s *Aida* (1872), Delibes’ *Lakmé* (1883), Bizet’s *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1863), and Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

Junyent’s travel partner had no such artistic ambitions. He was, however, instrumental in facilitating the trip.²⁰ Marià Recolons was the eldest son of one of the richest couples of the Catalan bourgeoisie: Concepció Regordosa and Tomàs Recolons, both members of textile magnate families.²¹ It was this wealth that financed the trip for both travelers. All hotel bills were issued to Recolons, although a few added Junyent’s name after his.²² Junyent traveled with the financial means and the reference letters of the young man’s family, which were above what he would have been able to procure by himself even as an artist patronized by the Barcelona upper class. In exchange, Recolons’ parents expected Junyent to chaperone Marià and serve as a good influence—for instance, by prompting him to write letters back home if he failed in his filial duty to do so (Junyent was not very successful on this particular front, judging by Concepció’s complaints of lack of contact from her son).²³ There is one last important way in which Recolons was central to the trip: he was fluent in English, a language Junyent did not speak. As Junyent utterly depended on his translations, much of what he learnt about the places they visited was filtered through Recolons, in ways we unfortunately cannot reconstruct from the sources.²⁴ As for Recolons’ purpose in undertaking the tour, Utrillo argued that it was the same as all young men who travel: “to return made into men”.²⁵ A photographic portrait from 1909 reveals a self-assured young man with slicked-back dark hair and a small, neat moustache.²⁶ Whenever he appears with his travel companion in photographs and drawings, the physical contrast with Junyent—balding, shorter, with more angular features and a longer, wispiest moustache—is striking. These are, in short, our two travelers.

²⁰ Clara Beltrán Catalán and María Ángeles López Piqueras, “Maria Regordosa i Oleguer Junyent: Amistat i passió col·leccionista”, in *Mercat de l’art, col·leccionisme i museus, 2018*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda i Hugas and Ignasi Domènech Vives (Bellaterra, Spain: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2019), 107–154 (115).

²¹ Beltrán Catalán, “Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenògrafo”, 375.

²² Armengol-Junyent Archive.

²³ Beltrán Catalán, “Oleguer Junyent i Sans, pintor-escenògrafo”, 405–407.

²⁴ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ Marià Recolons, “Alrededor del mundo”, *Mercurio: Revista comercial ibero-americana*, 89 (1 April 1909): 1883–86 (1895).

In some ways, Recolons and Junyent's tour was far from unique. It was part of a wider upper-class trend across Europe: the practice of international tourism. Across the nineteenth century, the progressive development of railways and steamships—and, from 1869, the opening of the Suez Canal—facilitated travel across long distances.²⁷ As the tourism industry emerged, so did travel agencies, travel guides and luxury hotels. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European globetrotters that populated these spaces were financially elite, but not aristocratic, and saw global travel as a way to socially distinguish themselves.²⁸ They were joined by members of Barcelona's bourgeoisie, which in participating in global tourism invested in the cultural values of other European elites.²⁹ Catalan tourists mostly stayed close to home, however, generally traveling to Morocco or Egypt.³⁰ World tours including India were extremely rare. From the second half of the nineteenth century until 1908, the only other salient tourist from Spain whose world tour took him to India is Romà Batlló i Sunyol, who visited the subcontinent around 1900.³¹ Like Recolons, he was the son of a Barcelona textile magnate. In 1908 Barcelona, a world tour such as Recolons and Junyent's was an extraordinary marker of wealth, taste, and European-oriented modernity.

Recolons and Junyent's world tour was facilitated by the British firm Thomas Cook & Son, the world's most important travel agency at the time. Far from being "capricious",³² their itinerary largely adhered to the routes indicated by the travel

²⁷ Amy Miller, *The Globetrotter: Victorian Excursions in India, China and Japan* (London: British Library, 2019), 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹ Maria Dolores García Ramón, Antoni Luna, Lluís Riudor, and Perla Zusman, "'Roda el món i torna al Born': Geografies imaginàries dels viatgers catalans al Caire (1889–1934)", *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* 60 (2005): 71–85 (75).

³⁰ For the Ottoman empire, see Rodrigo Lucía Castejón, "María de las Nieves de Braganza y Borbón, apuntes de un viaje por la Mesopotamia Otomana", *Isimu* 20–21 (2018): 127–146; and Pablo Martín Asuero, *Descripción del Egipto otomano según las crónicas de viajeros españoles, hispanoamericanos y otros textos (1806–1924)* (Madrid: Miraguano, 2006), and "Estambul, capital imperial marítima en las descripciones de viajeros hispánicos (1784–1916)", *Tonos digital: Revista de estudios filológicos* 13 (2007). For China, see Qing Ai, *Nostalgia imperial: Crónicas de viajeros españoles por China, 1870–1910* (Madrid: Miraguano, 2019). For Morocco, see Cerarols Ramírez, "L'imaginari colonial espanyol del Marroc"; and Manuela Marín, "Un encuentro colonial: Viajeros españoles en Marruecos (1860–1912)", *Hispania* 56, no. 192 (1996): 93–114.

³¹ Romà Batlló i Sunyol, *De la China al Mar Rojo: Recuerdos de un viaje por el Asia meridional: China, Birmania, India inglesa, Java, Ceilán, Aden, Hawaii* (Barcelona: Luis Tasso, n.d.).

³² Carolina Plou Anadón, "Roda el món i torna al Born: Aproximación al viaje y a la obra de Oleguer Junyent", in *III Congreso virtual sobre historia de las vías de comunicación (del 15 al 30 de septiembre de 2015): Comunicaciones*, ed. Enrique Escobedo Molinos, Juan Antonio López Cordero, and Manuel Cabrera Espinosa (Jaén, Spain: Asociación Orden de la Caminería de La Cerradura, 2015), 207–238 (215).

agency as early as 1881.³³ These routes followed the easiest transportation lines, which in turn followed the course of European—and particularly British—influence across much of the world.³⁴ Out of all their destinations, India was the one where they made more stops, staying there for a couple of months. While Junyent may have certainly been interested in exploring India out of artistic interest, the pre-eminence of the subcontinent in the tour is undeniably linked to the fact that from the late nineteenth century Thomas Cook & Son put a lot of effort and resources into the development of Indian tours.³⁵ The Indian leg of Recolons and Junyent's journey was bookended by the subcontinent's two most important urban centers, the port cities of Bombay and Calcutta, as was standard for most tourists. After landing in Bombay from Aden, they took a series of northbound trains: first to Ahmedabad, in the Bombay Presidency of British India; then to the princely states of Jaipur and Alwar, in Rajputana; then to Delhi; then to Rawalpindi and Lahore in the Punjab province of British India; and, finally, to the princely state of Kashmir. From this northernmost point they headed south to Agra. Turning east, they visited the holy city of Banaras and reached Calcutta, the capital of British India, before getting on a steamship bound for Ceylon.³⁶ This was a fairly standard tourist itinerary, with two significant exclusions: on their way from Agra to Banaras they skipped Cawnpore and Lucknow, two important stops for British tourists. Both were sites of imperial remembrance that commemorated British losses in two respective sieges in the Indian Rebellion of 1857—a series of military and civilian uprisings that came close to overthrowing British rule over much of central and northern India.³⁷ It is possible that Cawnpore and Lucknow, with their links to the recent political and military history of the British Empire in India, held little appeal for these two Catalan travelers. After all, they already felt the presence of the British Empire everywhere they went.

³³ Thomas Cook, *Cook's Indian Tours: Programme of Cook's New System of International Travelling Tickets, Embracing Every Point of Interest Between India and Egypt* (London: Thomas Cook and Son, 1881).

³⁴ Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook's Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750–1915* (London: Aurum Press, 1997), 272.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

³⁶ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*.

³⁷ Stephen J. Heathorn, "Angel of Empire: The Cawnpore Memorial Well As a British Site of Imperial Remembrance", *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 3 (2007); Nayanjot Lahiri, "Commemorating and Remembering 1857: The Revolt in Delhi and its Afterlife", *World Archaeology* 35, no. 1 (2003): 35–50; Alex Tickell, "Cawnpore, Kipling and Charivari: 1857 and the Politics of Commemoration", *Literature & History* 18, no. 2 (2009): 1–19.

Bodily Encounters from Barcelona to Bombay

In her foundational work, Mary Louise Pratt has argued that colonialism produced “contact zones”: spaces of colonial encounters where subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures intersect. Recolons and Junyent’s presence in colonial India constitutes an unexplored contact zone: that of male elites of non-British origin in the subcontinent. In this contact zone, the two travelers recorded their encounters with Indians of all classes, as well as with various non-Indian elites. In terms of gender, this is a record that is heavily weighted towards men, with a smattering of women. A few upper-class British women appeared on the ship that brought the two travelers to Bombay. Once they reached the Indian subcontinent, the sources produced around the tour only record the presence of one type of women: lower-class Indians with links to the tourism industry, such as two Rajasthani dancers and a Kashmiri boatman’s daughter. Neither the British nor the Indian women are mentioned by name.

Subaltern Bodies

The written and visual sources produced by Junyent are full of the bodies of Indian men employed in the travel and tourism industries. They appear for the first time well before Junyent and Recolons reach the subcontinent. They are the unnamed lascars and servants onboard the *Egypt*, the boat that takes them from Marseille to Port Said. Junyent describes them as both weak and sartorially different—they are “squashed under the whitest of large turbans”.³⁸ Once in India, the body of the servant and the unskilled worker with links to the tourism industry makes constant appearances in the sources produced around the tour. At the restaurant of the Kaiser-i-Hind Hotel, for instance, *punkhwallahs* (manual fan operators) kept them cool and kept flies away as they ate.³⁹ By dining comfortably under the *punkhwallah’s* labor, Junyent and Recolons participated in the bodily and domestic practices of British and Indian elites in the subcontinent.

Recolons and Junyent’s interactions with some of these servants reflected profound power imbalances. The only Indian who has a name in the travelogue’s illustrations is Mahomed, “our servant... interpreter and model, all for one *peseta* a day”.⁴⁰ Junyent boasted of his financial superiority vis-à-vis poorer Indians, who he could recruit for multiple roles for small sums. Recolons and Junyent spent about

³⁸ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 15–17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

a month in Kashmir. About half of it was devoted to a trip to Mount Harmukh—an ambitious trek enabled by the labor of forty Indian porters carrying beds, blankets, luggage, water, and alcoholic drinks. Junyent noted that these forty Indian porters had been commandeered “by the medieval authority of our friends from Srinagar” (more on those friends later) and that they were mistreated by their four handlers.⁴¹ Violence and coercion were also present in their interactions with Indians who unwillingly found themselves roped into supporting their Kashmiri adventure. Passing through the villages to find provisions, the party had to resort to “forceful seizure” from the locals to procure chickens, eggs and beans. Junyent: “Those people did not want to have anything to do with Europeans and only comply through the ‘persuasion’ of violence”.⁴² It was precisely these Indians, the servants, the poor and the working-class, that he would take back to Barcelona to present them to a metropolitan audience. They constitute the bulk of Indians who are presented in the illustrations of Junyent’s travelogue. This was a demonstration of class privilege, exercised in the context of tourism, over the colonized subjects of another empire. Elite individuals and their worlds, by contrast, were rarely represented. Junyent occasionally captured them on the ground, in quick sketches such as the one representing a princely wedding procession in Jaipur. These pieces, however, were not turned into polished artworks to be presented to metropolitan audiences.

Not all the subaltern bodies who appeared in the sources were servants. In India, Junyent registered his interactions with local crowds in the public open spaces of cities such as Bombay, Jaipur, and Banaras. In the streets of Jaipur, Recolons and Junyent stood out—Junyent imagined that the locals’ stares were caused by their “admiration at our tanned skin” and speculated that they noticed “that affinity with them as southern people”.⁴³ The fabrication of kinship through skin color, however, was undermined by the production of bodily difference, with non-elite Indian bodies more often being presented as underdeveloped or diseased.

The making of physical and sartorial otherness reached its zenith in Junyent’s account of Banaras. In the holy city’s *ghats*—the steps that lead down to the Ganges, used for bathing and cremations—he recounted an experience of utter repugnance at the sight of Indian bodies of all types: the men bathing on the river in various stages of undress; the women bathing in thin shawls that revealed the contours of their bodies; the sick and elderly pilgrims flocking to the city to die; the dead and partially cremated bodies. Metropolitan distaste at the encounter with naked or semi-naked colonized bodies has been noted in other European travel writing to

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61.

India.⁴⁴ As Philippa Levine has established, it acquired a hierarchical significance: nakedness came to define primitiveness and savagery.⁴⁵ In Junyent's case, it affected his own body. As he attempted to paint the temples by a *ghat*, his own body failed him. He became ill with a fever—"perhaps out of revulsion", he speculated.⁴⁶ For most of their time in India, Junyent and Recolons sought refuge in exclusive spaces away from the crowds—spaces populated by other elite men.

Elite Male Sociability

Elite male sociability was an important aspect of Recolons and Junyent's bodily encounters in India. This section discussed it by first exploring their contacts with British men, to then move on to Indian men and non-British European men.

Meetings with elite British men happened in enclosed, exclusive spaces, far away from the open spaces populated by the Indian masses: the steamship, the train car, the restaurant, the club, and the hotel. On the steamships across their tour, they participated in the entertainment and games organized by British passengers. Junyent expressed his admiration for the British men he encountered in India. After leaving Bombay, Junyent recounted: "We spend the day on the train, with the pleasant company of metropolitan officers dressed like fairy-tale heroes". He described them with adjectives such as impeccable, shiny, strong, clean, wealthy, and happy.⁴⁷ This positive portrayal of the masculinity of rival colonizers stands in stark contrast with earlier depictions of British masculinity from the Spanish empire, where British men are derided as physically weak, ineffectual conquerors unable to master the colonial environment.⁴⁸

The bodily practices of the trip were in line with those of elite British men in India. They spent much of their time in clubs, a vital institution for male travelers in India.⁴⁹ They drank lemonade and soda on an almost daily basis.⁵⁰ They also adopted the sartorial style of British colonialists: a rare picture of Marià Recolons walking through Ajmer shows him wearing the *sola topi* worn by colonial officials

⁴⁴ Antoinette Burton, "Fearful Bodies into Disciplined Subjects: Pleasure, Romance, and the Family Drama of Colonial Reform in Mary Carpenter's Six Months in India", *Signs* 20, no. 3 (1995): 545-574.

⁴⁵ Philippa Levine, "Naked truths: Bodies, Knowledge, and the Erotics of Colonial Power", *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 1 (2013): 5-25.

⁴⁶ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 85.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁸ Moisand and Segura-Garcia, "Marketing global y políticas imperiales de género", 86-93.

⁴⁹ Miller, *The Globetrotter*, 104-105.

⁵⁰ Armengol-Junyent Archive.

in India.⁵¹ Junyent himself described these hats as “a British hallmark”.⁵² But they did not quite blend in. After visiting Mount Abu, at the club of the Rajputana Hotel they aroused the curiosity of Englishmen and other visiting Northern Europeans. Junyent argued that this curiosity was due to their “ultra-southern nationality” which, he imagined, imbued them with “exoticism” in the eyes of the British men they encountered.⁵³ At the same time, the fact that the two Catalans’ skin was darker than that of most white Britons may have also cast a cloud of racial suspicion around them—that of being of mixed Indian and European ancestry.⁵⁴

Despite the admiration Junyent professed for these British men, the two Catalans’ most significant meetings—from an instrumental as well as an emotional point of view—were not with British but with Indian men. Crucially, these significant meetings with elite Indian men happened *exclusively* in princely spaces: Jaipur and Kashmir. One evening while they were having supper in Jaipur, a hotel employee introduced them to a group of local notables, “educated people, although dressed in a half-oriental fashion”.⁵⁵ The only person there who did not speak English was Junyent. One of the Indian men, however, had studied in Paris and spoke French. He became “the first friend of another race” Junyent had found since their departure from Barcelona.⁵⁶ The next day, with this group of friends they visited the palace of the Maharaja of Jaipur, the Jantar Mantar astronomical complex, and the Hawa Mahal.⁵⁷ This would not be the first time that Indian elites in a princely state would enable their travel or forge an emotional link with them.

From Rajasthan they visited the princely state of Kashmir.⁵⁸ On their way to Srinagar they met one L. N. Sharma.⁵⁹ Junyent described him as a “Europeanised” local who had returned from London, where he had studied Law with a scholarship provided by the Maharaja of Kashmir. L. N. Sharma introduced them to his brother, who was employed by the Maharaja as the state’s director of Agriculture. The Sharma brothers too were instrumental: they found accommodation for Recolons and Junyent, organized visits and excursions for them, and located a boathouse for them to hire.⁶⁰ They also opened doors to spaces they would not have been able to

⁵¹ Armengol-Junyent Archive; Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona.

⁵² Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁴ I would like to thank Kate Imy and Erica Wald for this excellent point.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁸ Miller, *The Globetrotter*, 97.

⁵⁹ Armengol-Junyent Archive.

⁶⁰ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 73.

visit otherwise, such as a garden owned by the Maharaja of Kashmir.⁶¹ While the tour was facilitated by Cook, on the ground they gained access to exclusive spaces through their Indian contacts.

The two Catalan tourists saw the Sharmas as having an extraordinary influence, due to their foreign education and their links with the Maharaja. But also because of their links with other white men.⁶² It was the Sharma brothers who introduced them to Frederic Madrazo, another Catalan stage designer who happened to be visiting Kashmir at the same time. The Sharmas also introduced them to Ralph C. Whitenack, an American employed in another princely state—the Maharaja of Baroda had hired him to be the director of the Bank of Baroda.⁶³ With the Sharmas, Madrazo and Whitenack, plus a couple of ministers of the state of Kashmir, they went on the two-week trek through Kashmir I mentioned earlier.⁶⁴ Again, the trip was arranged by the Sharmas, “our friends from Srinagar”. During the trek they developed a great friendship, as Junyent saw it, with the group, but particularly with the Sharmas. The princely states thus emerged as spaces of elite male sociability that linked Catalan artists and industrialists, an American citizen employed in a princely state, and a small group of Indian men with princely connections. These upper-class homosocial circles reveal a gendered dimension of travel—part of the construction of masculinity through which Junyent and Recolons fashioned masculine selves abroad. These masculine selves were aligned with elite British masculinity in India, yet they found emotional connections with Indian and other white, but not British, men.

Conclusion

While some disparate projects have examined the circulation of people and ideas between the Spanish and British empires in the modern period, this remains an understudied field—largely because the historiographical traditions of these two empires have not always been in dialogue with each other. Jorge Luengo and Pol Dalmau have argued for the need to bring Spain into the fold of global history, to demonstrate its embeddedness in a wide set of global connections.⁶⁵ If this historiographical project is to be advanced, it requires specificity and texture: some of these

⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

⁶² Ibid., 76.

⁶³ Teresa Segura-Garcia, “Baroda, the British Empire and the World, c. 1875–1939” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2015), 117.

⁶⁴ Junyent, *Roda el món i torna al Born*, 76.

⁶⁵ Luengo and Dalmau, “Writing Spanish History in the Global Age”, 444.

global connections were simply denser and more lasting than others. Microhistory emerges as a tool to reveal these textures. Even seemingly “minor” linkages such as Recolons and Junyent’s, however, can shed light on how imperial masculinities were connected with each other and with colonized masculinities.

The spaces of the emerging global tourism of the time—the restaurant, the hotel, the club, the Kashmiri houseboat—Recolons and Junyent interacted with British administrators and officers, but also with Indian men, both elite and subaltern, and white men from other countries. While both travelers enthusiastically immersed themselves into the bodily practices of British men in the subcontinent, it was Indian men who were at the center of their most lasting and intimate encounters. This chapter argues that metropolitan Spanish masculinity was fleetingly transformed in this contact zone, by embracing the trappings of British imperialism yet forging connections with the colonized elite. In this way, it hopes to make a contribution to our growing understanding of the contact zone of European and Indian masculinities.

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Purdah, National Degeneration, and Pelvic Politics: Women's Physical Exercise in Colonial India, c. 1900–1947¹

Elena Valdameri

Abstract

Against the background of pervasive anxieties of national degeneration, physical exercise for Indian girls and women became an issue taken seriously in the British colony from the early decades of the twentieth century on. This was true especially for girls and women belonging to the middle- and upper-caste and class sections of Indian society. This chapter examines the discourses that portrayed physical exercise as a scientific remedy to the ills allegedly brought about by purdah, or female seclusion, and to maternal mortality in particular. In doing so, it shows that the globalizing medico-scientific fixation with the breadth and flexibility of the female pelvis and its role in child delivery influenced the debates on women's physical education and contributed to its gendering.

Keywords: purdah; physical exercise; women's health; maternal mortality; colonial India; colonial medicine

Introduction

In the past few decades, scholars, especially historians of women's history, have shown that the size, shape, and position of the female pelvis, like breasts and labia, captured the imagination of several scientific studies and were attributed a prominent role in procreation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The medico-scientific and anthropological fixation with the breadth of the female pelvis and its role in child delivery influenced discourses of reproduction at the global level. Like in the case of head shape in craniometry, the differences existing in pelvises

¹ I am indebted to the co-editors of this volume and to Katherine Arnold, Tomás Bartoletti, Claire Blaser, Harald Fischer-Tiné, Maria Framke, Christian Jung, Nikolay Kamenov, Zhi Qing Denise Lim, Joel Michel, Margrit Pernau and Stephan Scheuzger for their comments and ideas. To Geraldine Forbes, Maneesha Lal and Samiksha Sehwat I am grateful for their inspiring writings. All shortcomings, errors and omissions in the chapter are mine alone.

were deemed to be marks of racial identity and hierarchies. Whereas initially it was believed by anthropologists that a wide pelvis was a characteristic of primitive races linked to their hypersexuality, by the 1820s the combination of craniometry and pelvimetry gave currency to the view that pelvises had grown larger in white women to accommodate the superior head size and intelligence of more civilized races during delivery. Even though it never reached the symbolic value of the cranium, the pelvis remained crucial for decades in placing different “races” on an evolutionary ladder. Offering conflicting and equivocal explanations on what exactly made a pelvis racially advanced and being associated with moral values that showed how gender was firmly rooted in sex, the story of the female pelvis remained a matter of debate well into the twentieth century.² Perhaps it was precisely this ambiguity that ensured its long-lasting popularity in both anthropological and medico-scientific discourse as well as its flexible adoption and often unruly appropriation.

While influential studies have thus explained how pelvimetry historically influenced the construction of racial difference and sexual dimorphism, what is decidedly less known is that ideas about the pelvis affected notions and practices of physical exercise, often upholding and reinforcing deep-seated beliefs of women’s innate physical weakness and fragility. This chapter attempts to piece together the ideas that linked the debate on the female pelvis and childbirth with the development of schemes of physical exercise for girls and women in colonial India and beyond. Centering on historical actors from different fields, such as medical doctors and physical culture experts, the chapter reveals the haphazard and contingent nature of processes of knowledge production, appropriation and circulation.

A rich scholarship on South Asia has investigated the emergence, especially from the fin de siècle onwards, of the male physical body as a crucial link between the strength and vitality of the national community and the health and vigor of its individual members.³ New ideas of “muscular” nationalism that emphasized the

² Among others see Rebecca Hodes, “The ‘Hottentot Apron’: Genital Aberration in The History of Sexual Science” in V. Fuechtner, D. E. Haynes, R. M. Jones (eds.), *A Global History of Sexual Science, 1880–1960* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 118–38; John Hoberman, “The Primitive Pelvis: The Role of Racial Folklore in Obstetrics and Gynecology During the Twentieth Century”, in C. E. Forth and I. Crozier (eds.), *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005): 85–104; Sally Markowitz, “Pelvic Politics: Sexual Dimorphism and Racial Difference”, *Signs* 26, no. 2 (2001): 389–414; Laura Briggs, “The Race of Hysteria: ‘Overcivilization’ and the ‘Savage’ Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology”, *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 246–73; Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body. Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004 [1993]), 156–8; Ornella Moscucci, *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800–1929* (New York: CUP 1990), 38–39; Londa Schiebinger, “Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy”, *Representations*, no. 14 (1986): 42–82.

³ For a concise analysis see Carey Watt, “Physical Culture and the Body in Colonial India, c. 1850–1947”, in H. Fischer-Tiné and M. Framke (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism*

entwinement of physical culture and political activism became powerful tools in the hands of Indians with which they could challenge claims to a “superior” “imperial masculinity”, and “perform” a nationalism based on a premise of hegemonic masculinity.⁴ While this has by now become a trope of South Asian studies, the emphasis that was placed on the female body as a polysemic site to be rendered fit, strong, modern and (Hindu) national through physical exercise to ensure the healthy reproduction of the nation is yet to be fully explored. As far as the female body is concerned, in fact, more attention has been paid to the discursive construction of it as the symbolic bearer of identity and honor, personally and collectively.⁵ However, as argued by Antoinette Burton, like symbolic ones, material bodies are neither self-evident nor static: they do not exist *a priori* but are produced and consolidated by their collision with historically specific events, formations and experiences.⁶

As I have shown elsewhere, Indian female fit bodies were culturally constructed, historically contingent, and based on often unstable and ambiguous gender differentiation norms. Advocated by a cacophony of historical actors and institutions, either Western or Indian, to teach Indian girls and women ways of behaving, moving and taking care of their bodies, physical fitness schemes gained increasing importance from the turn of the twentieth century in light of global and colonial specific factors. Female physical exercise targeted especially the “right sort of women”, namely middle-class, upper-caste Hindu girls and women, who were

in South Asia, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 345–58. This was a global phenomenon: with the increasing popularity of sports and fitness, fit bodies became a strong component of nationalism. Among many others see Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, *Transpacific Field of Dreams: How Baseball Linked the United States and Japan in Peace and War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012); Wilson C. Jacob, *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴ See for example Aishwarya Ramachandran and Conor Heffernan, “A Distinctly Indian Body? K.V. Iyer and Physical Culture in 1930s India”, *International Journal of the History of Sports* 36, n. 12 (2019): 1053–1075; Sikata Banerjee, *Make Me a Man!: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Joseph Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46 (1 July 2004): 497–534; Paul Dimeo, “Colonial Bodies, Colonial Sport: ‘Martial’ Punjabis, ‘Effeminate’ Bengalis and the Development of Indian Football”, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 19, no. 1 (2002): 72–90; Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate” Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁵ For a classic analysis of these themes see Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage, 1997. See also Mrinalini Sinha, “Gender and Nation”, in Bonnie G. Smith (ed.), *Women’s History in Global Perspective*, Vol. 1 (Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press 2004, 229–274).

⁶ Antoinette Burton, “The Body in/as World History” in D. Northrop (ed.), *A Companion to World History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 272–284, here 276.

expected to embody the highest physical, moral and intellectual standards of the Indian “nation”.⁷

In this context, ideologies of childbirth, fears of racial degeneracy, and population control urges opened a new arena of debate on the need for strong healthy female bodies—with physical exercise increasingly portrayed as a scientific remedy to the ills supposedly brought about by *purdah* (the custom of secluding and veiling women), in particular maternal and infantile mortality. This development was influenced by the emergence of professional medical platforms spearheaded by British women in India and centering almost exclusively on the care of Indian women. In what follows, I explore the link established between physical exercise, healthy reproduction and the pelvis both in colonial medical circles and among Indian physical culture experts in colonial India. The chapter intends to demonstrate that the focus on the female pelvis in terms of women’s physicality problematized forms of binaries such as colonized/colonizer, civilized/uncivilized women and mobility/confinement while (re)iterating sexual physical difference and gender stratification.

Physical Exercise As a Remedy for the Ills of *Purdah*

Initiatives surrounding physical exercise for girls and women appeared at around the turn of the twentieth century. Concerned with keeping female bodies healthy in view of their chief role as mothers of the nation as well as with anxieties about their feminine attractiveness, respectability and graceful movement, physical education was part of the curricular activities of a few schools in British India.⁸ Examples were the Kanya Mahavidyalya in Jalandhar⁹ and the Central Hindu Girl’s School in Benares,¹⁰ respectively founded by the Arya Samaji Lal Devraj and by the

⁷ Elena Valdameri, “Training Female Bodies for New India: Women’s Physical Education between Global Trends and Local Politics in Colonial South Asia, c. 1900–1939”, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 39, no. 11 (2022): 1240–1264.

⁸ *Progress of Education in India 1892–97: Third Quinquennial Review* (London, 1898), 379 and *Progress of Education in India 1897–1902* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing in India, 1904), 423.

⁹ See Madhu Kishwar, “Arya Samaj and Women’s Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 21, no. 17 (1986): 9–24. Also, J.E Llewellyn, *The Legacy of Women’s Uplift in India: Contemporary Women Leaders in the Arya Samaj* (Delhi: Sage, 1998) 26–46. The Arya Samaj was a Hindu revivalist religious and social reform movement whose origin goes back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Arya Samaj was particularly influential in North India among urban clerical castes until the 1940s, when it started dwindling. See Harald Fischer-Tiné, “Arya Samaj”, in K. A. Jacobsen (ed.), *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. V (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 389–396.

¹⁰ See “Education of Indian Girls”, in Annie Wood Besant, *The Birth of New India: A Collection of Writings and Speeches on Indian Affairs* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House 1917),

Theosophist Annie Besant. Like in the case of the male body, the nexus between individual female exercise and the health of the national body was clearly built on discourses such as the degeneration of the “stock”, influenced by widespread social Darwinist and (para-) eugenic views.¹¹

It was only from the 1910s and then more markedly from the 1920s that the attention to physical education for girls and women gained greater traction and became woven into worries about the quantity *and* the quality of the Indian population. The 1920s was, in fact, the period when population growth started being perceived as a problem in colonial India. In the view of Indian eugenicists, the reduction in India’s population, however, should not disproportionately reduce those segments of the population that they considered “fit”, namely the middle class comprising mainly upper caste Hindus,¹² whose women often observed purdah.

Within this framework, educated elite and middle-class Indian women vociferously discussed physical fitness in several English and vernacular publications across the political spectrum. In doing so, they engaged with new categorizations of Indian girlhood and womanhood in the context of the rising anticolonial nationalism. *Stri Darpan*, a Hindi magazine targeting literate women from the middle and upper-classes, dedicated a considerable amount of space to themes related to health and hygiene and carried several articles encouraging women to perform regular physical exercise notwithstanding the feeling of shame associated with a practice that, according to prejudice, was too masculine. In the magazine’s pages, as shown by Maneesha Lal, we find recurring references to infant and maternal mortality, tuberculosis and other ailments allegedly connected to purdah, the larger picture being women’s responsibility for strong children and for a nation free of disease.¹³

reproduced in Eunice de Souza (ed.), *Purdah. An Anthology* (New Delhi: OUP, 2004), 99–104. On Besant’s educational views and efforts to make Indian girls ‘ideal’ Indian women see Chandra Lekha Singh, “Making ‘ideal’ Indian women: Annie Besant’s engagement with the issue of women’s education in early twentieth-century India”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 54, no. 5 (2018): 606–25.

¹¹ See for instance, Lal Lajpat Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920), 149 ff. On the Indian adaptations of social Darwinism and eugenics see Luzia Savary, *Evolution, Race and Public Spheres in India: Vernacular Concepts and Sciences (1860–1930)* (London: Routledge 2019); Sarah Hodges, “South Asia’s Eugenic Past”, in A. Bashford and P. Levine (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 228–42; Harald Fischer-Tiné, “From *Brahmacharya* to ‘Conscious Race Culture’: Victorian Discourses of ‘Science’ and Hindu Traditions in Early Indian Nationalism” in C. Bates (ed.), *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity* (Delhi: OUP, 2006), 230–259; Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

¹² Rahul Nair, “The Construction of a ‘Population Problem’ in Colonial India 1919–1947”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, n. 2 (2011), 227–247: here 229.

¹³ See Maneesha Lal, “‘The Ignorance of Women is the House of Illness’: Gender, Nationalism and Health Reform in Colonial North India”, in M. Sutphen and B. Andrews (eds.), *Medicine and Colonial*

For Indian women, then, keeping physically fit was a duty to the national “body politic at large”. This was made clear in a 1920 article published on *Stri Dharma*, the official organ of the Women’s Indian Association (WIA),¹⁴ which interestingly gave exercise a religious twist in order to win the widespread resistance of the most conservative sections of Hindu society as well as to ground the debate in a nativist, if not anti-Muslim, perspective:¹⁵

Women in India little realize that their state of health is either a blessing or a curse to the Motherland they love. If the women of a country are weakly, sickly, undergrown, physically underdeveloped, then the whole nation will become physically degenerate [...]. Every young woman should continue the splendid religious exercises of Buskis [South Asian version of squats] and Dandas [South Asian version of push-ups] which were instituted by the Rishis. [...] Less time should be passed in the closed confined air of the home.¹⁶

While it is necessary to understand this increased attention to the female body against the backdrop of the intensifying anticolonial nationalism, ideals of the modern girl¹⁷ and the rise of a globalizing physical culture movement,¹⁸ our picture

Identity (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 14–40. See also by the same author “Purdah as Pathology: Gender and the Circulation of Medical Knowledge in Late Colonial India,” in S. Hodges (ed.), *Reproductive Health in India: History, Politics, Controversies* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006), 85–114.

¹⁴ Founded in Madras in 1917, this was one of the most important women’s organizations of the time along with the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) and the All-India Women’s Conference (AIWC). See Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 64–120.

¹⁵ The Indian women addressed by the analyzed magazines were very often Hindu women. Through Muslim domination, purdah had in fact become common among the Hindu middle and upper classes especially in Northern India. In a cultural-political context characterized by increasing communal tensions, the subtext of discourses on purdah was many a time framed in anti-Muslim terms. In other words, Muslims were blamed for women’s seclusion and Hindu women needed to be “freed” from such Islamic practice. But this did not detract from the fact that Muslim and Hindu women could be allied against purdah. On Muslim women and purdah see Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India: From Balance to Fervor* (Delhi: OUP, 2019), ch. 5 and by the same author, “Handlungskompetenz im Harem: Mädchenerziehung im indischen Fürstenstaat Hyderabad”, in H. Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Handeln und Verhandeln, Kolonialismus, transkulturelle Prozesse und Handlungskompetenz* (Münster: LIT, 2002), 91–12; Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, “Fostering Sisterhood: Muslim Women and the All-India Ladies’ Association”, *Journal of Women’s History* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 40–65; Karina Deutsch, “Muslim Women in Colonial North India 1920–1947: Politics, Law and Community Identity”, PhD Thesis, Cambridge Univ. 1998, esp. ch. 3 and 4.

¹⁶ “The Health of Women by Periammal”, *Stri Dharma*, 1920, Vol. I, n. 20, 167–9.

¹⁷ Priti Ramamurthy, “All-Consuming Nationalism: The Indian Modern Girl in the 1920s and 1930s” in A. E. Weinbaum at al. (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 147–173.

¹⁸ Sebastian Conrad, “Globalizing the Beautiful Body: Eugen Sandow, Bodybuilding, and the Ideal of Muscular Manliness at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of World History* 32, no. 1 (2021): 95–125.

would be incomplete if the influence exerted by medical colonial ideas in terms of purdah and physical exercise were not taken into consideration.

Purdah, an indicator of female sexual purity as well as an important marker of social respectability and status, included a varied set of cultural practices aimed at enforcing female modesty and at regulating gender relations according to class, caste, and religion.¹⁹ In the colonial view, however, the purdah system was an unproblematically homogenized symbol of the degraded condition of Indian womanhood,²⁰ while the *zenana* (the women's segregated quarters of a house) was demonized as a space of decadence, plight, and disease that needed educational, medical and scientific interventions. Purdah thus motivated various imperial and Indian nationalist commitments. On its emotional potency relied several Western and Indian women reformers to legitimize their interventions and carve out a new domain of gendered power for themselves.²¹ As various studies have demonstrated, the conviction that the purdah-observing Indian women were trapped in the allegedly unhygienic *zenana* prompted the institutionalization of women-targeting colonial medicine from the 1870s onwards. On the one hand, depicting the *zenana* as a "separate world"²² from which medical men were excluded, British and Indian medical women enhanced their employment opportunities in the still male-dominated medical profession.²³ On the other hand, the body of the *purdahnashin*—the

¹⁹ Overall, upwardly mobile classes adopted purdah to conform to upper-caste standards in the effort to acquire the same reputability.

²⁰ See for example Souza (ed.), *Purdah*.

²¹ Samiksha Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care in North India. Gender, State and Society* (Delhi: OUP, 2013), esp. ch. 4 and 5; Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion and Heathen Lands. American Missionary Women in India 1860s–1940s* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2000); Mary Hancock "Gendering the Modern: Women and Home Science in India" in A. Burton, *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, (London and New York: Routledge 1999) 149–161; Eliza F. Kent, "Tamil Bible Women and the Zenana Missions of Colonial South India," *History of Religions* 39, no. 2 (November 1999): 117–149; Antoinette Burton, "Contesting the Zenana: The Mission to Make "Lady Doctors for India," 1874–1885," *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 3 (1996): 368–97; Geraldine Forbes, "Medical Careers and Health Care for Indian Women: Patterns of Control", *Women's History Review* 3, no. 4 (1994): 515–30; Maneesha Lal, "The Politics of Gender and Medicine in Colonial India: The Countess of Dufferin's Fund, 1885–1888", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 68, no. 1 (1994): 29–66; Janaki Nair, "Uncovering the Zenana: Visions of Indian Womanhood in Englishwomen's Writings: 1813–1940," *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 8–34.

²² Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (eds.), *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1982).

²³ Scholars have demonstrated that reality was different. In fact, Indian women did not have easy access to male medical practitioners, the reasons being high costs and patriarchal structures which rendered women's health care secondary to men's. Moreover, even high-caste women could be willing to see male doctors, to whom the *zenanas* were accessible to provide their services to women (Lal, "The Politics of Gender", 39–43).

object of knowledge constructed as a malfunctioning organism that embodied the social disabilities of Indian women—constituted a site of civilizing effort and imposed imperial and nationalist obligations on women medical experts.²⁴

One of the results of such initiatives was that, in a timespan of around thirty years, three important professional medical platforms spearheaded by British women and unofficially connected with the colonial government were founded.²⁵ These were the Dufferin Fund (1885, DF), the Association of Medical Women in India (1907, AMWI) and the Women's Medical Service (1913, WMSI).²⁶ Their emergence coincided with that of a clear medical discourse that tied the practice of *purdah* to specific diseases, like osteomalacia, tuberculosis, anemia, and to risks of maternal and infantile mortality.²⁷ Fixated on *purdah* and with its “apparently transhistorical, apolitical, and scientific aura”, colonial medicine was “an effective agency of cultural colonialism”²⁸ that re-interpreted and reinforced ideologies of race and gender in medical and scientific terms. Moreover, the “apolitical” and “scientific” colonial medical discourse marginalized other socio-economic factors of women's ill health, such as colonial policies, poverty, malnutrition,²⁹ and stigma-

²⁴ According to Burton, providing medical care to the women of India grew into “the highest form of national-imperial service” (Burton, “Contesting the Zenana”, 392).

²⁵ This connection made them co-participants in the imperial agenda that, as asserted by David Arnold, promoted Western medicine in order to advance the security of the colonial state. Such an agenda entailed subordinating and replacing “rival systems of ideas and authority”, that is, indigenous medical systems and experts. See David Arnold, “Public Health and Public Power: Medicine and Hegemony in Colonial India”, in Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks (eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London: British Academic Press 1994), 152–172.

²⁶ This was run by the DF and the core of its employees were British women doctors of the AMWI (Sehrawat *Colonial Medical Care*, 182–4).

²⁷ Lal, “*Purdah* as Pathology”. Maternal and infantile mortality were a social reality. According to a 1927 report, “in 1920 the Crude Infantile Mortality rate, which is calculated on the total number of deaths and births per year was 424 deaths per mille of births, while in 1925 it was 214 deaths per mille of births, and in 1926 it was 218 per mille of births” [Lady Chelmsford All-India League for Maternity and Child Welfare. Report of the Maternity and Child Welfare Conference, held at Delhi, 4–8 February 1927 (Delhi: Delhi Printing Works 1927), 138]. Maternal mortality, instead, from 21 per mille in 1920, dropped to 13 per mille in 1926 (*ibidem*, 139).

²⁸ Judy Whitehead, “Tropical Medicine and Inscriptions of Stigma: The Lessons of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*”, *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de La Femme* 13, no. 1 (1992), 47–51, here 47.

²⁹ Ambalika Guha, *Colonial Modernities. Midwifery in Bengal c. 1870–1947* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018), *passim*; Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, (ch. 4 and 5); Lal, “*Purdah* as Pathology”. Lisa Trivedi “Maternal Care and Global Public Health: Bombay and Manchester, 1900–1950”, *Social History of Medicine* 34, Issue 1, (Feb. 2021): 46–69; Cecilia Van Hollen, *Birth on the Threshold: Childbirth and Modernity in South India*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Dagmar Engels, *Beyond Purdah?, Women in Bengal 1890–1939*, (Delhi: OUP 1996), 132–157. For a historical overview of maternal health policies in South Asia see Samiksha Sehrawat, “Colonial

tized traditional Indian birth attendants [*dhais*] as a “social pathology”³⁰ at the root of deaths surrounding childbirth.

Physical exercise figured among the effective remedies suggested by British and Indian medical journals against the diseases and physical debility brought about by purdah.³¹ Since, for colonial medicine, Indian women’s health meant essentially reproductive health, it is hardly surprising that the focus of the recommendations for physical exercise was “between the breasts and the knees”.³² According to Dr Rukhmabai (1864–1955), purdah was “an infliction on the natural dignity of womanhood and, on the purely physical side, results still in a deplorable lack of air and exercise and will lead to the physical deterioration of the race”.³³ *The Work of Medical Women in India*, a 1929 book that celebrated the activities of the Association of Medical Women of India in the previous twenty years and that was written by two British members of the same association, stated that:

The troubles during pregnancy and labour are not only due to the lack of medical aid, but to habits of life. The almost entire lack of physical exercise discourages metabolism and to this is often added an almost entire lack of sunshine and fresh air.³⁴

Legacies and Maternal Health in South Asia”, in C. Jullien and R. Jeffery (eds.), *Childbirth in South Asia. Old Challenges and New Paradoxes* (Oxford: OUP 2021), 40–67.

³⁰ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Colonial India. Essays on Politics, Medicine and Historiography*, [New Delhi: Chronicle Books 2008 (2005)] p. 100. As noted by Forbes, not only British-dominated women’s medical associations but also the Indian “new women” of the three main Indian women’s organizations, enamored with Western science and motivated by issues of respectability and refinement, played an important role in marginalizing the *dhai*, namely the only caregiver to whom the larger female population had access. See *Ibidem*, 79–100. See also Sandhya Shetty, “(Dis)locating Gender Space and Medical Discourse in Colonial India” in C. Siegel and A. M. Kibbey (eds.), *Eroticism and Containment: Notes from the Flood Plain* (New York and London: NYU Press, 1994), 188–230. For a reconstruction of the attempts at “modernizing” the knowledge and work of the *dhai* in Bengal see Guha, *Colonial Modernities*, ch. 3. On this see also several of the contributions in the above-mentioned Report of the Maternity and Child Welfare Conference, held at Delhi, 4–8 February 1927. For discourses of motherhood and working-class women see Samita Sen, *Women and Labour in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry* (Cambridge: CUP 1999), 142–76.

³¹ See for example H. S. Hutchison and S. J. Shah, “The Aetiology of Rickets, Early and Late”, *Quarterly Journal of Medicine* 15 (1922): 167–94; Grace Stapleton, “Late Rickets and Osteomalacia in Delhi”, *Lancet* 103 (May 1925): 1119–23.

³² Forbes, “Medical Careers”, 525.

³³ “Dr Rukhmabai”, in Souza (ed.), *Purdah*, 257. On Rukhmabai see Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters. Colonialism, Law and Women’s Rights* [Delhi: OUP, 2008 (1998)].

³⁴ Margaret Balfour and Ruth Young, *The Work of Medical Women in India* (Bombay: Humphrey Milford, OUP, 1929), 185. On Balfour and her role in maternal health in India see Engels, *Beyond Purdah?*, 132–134 and Sen, *Women and Labour*, 150–151.

The same book praised the work “nearly related to the medical one”, namely “the opening and development of the Girl Guides movement” and “the initiation of classes of physical culture of girls by the YWCA and others.”³⁵ The Girl Guide movement and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), even though not dedicated primarily to physical culture, promoted—like local girls and young women clubs as well as several other colonial and Indian institutions and associations—an array of physical exercise schemes.³⁶ For instance, the Wellesley College graduate Florence Salzer was a YWCA member and director of physical education at the Isabella Thoburn College, an American Mission school and elite female institution in Lucknow. She wrote the manual *Physical Exercises and Games for Indian Girls*, published in 1932, with lesson plans “scientifically devised”.³⁷ The book denounced some common Indian practices among Indian girls and women (such as balancing a big earthen pot on their hips) for jeopardizing their reproductive functions or for causing the birth of a deformed baby.³⁸ Salzer, former director of physical education in Rochester, New York, had been motivated to move to “wonderful” and “picturesque Hindustan” by the presence of “the shy Indian girls who ha[d] lived in a secluded ‘purdah’ all their lives”, something which made her cause particularly worthy.³⁹ Physical exercise thus, under the tutelage of white women, equated to a mission to civilize: it was among the practices to inscribe within the daily habits and bodily disciplines of the Indian women “others”.

From the second decade of the twentieth century, among the medical and obstetric research attached to the AMWI and the WMSI that posited the connection between seclusion and diseases affecting child delivery, several pelvimetric studies were conducted.⁴⁰ This literature attributed to the custom of purdah the worst

³⁵ Balfour, and Young, *The Work*, 185.

³⁶ On the Girl Guides see Kristine Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls: Girlhood, Empire, and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017). On the YWCA see Karen Phoenix, “A Social Gospel for India”, *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13, no. 2 (April 2014): 200–222. For the plethora of historical actors and institutions active in the promotion of physical fitness schemes in colonial India see Valdameri, “Training Female Bodies”.

³⁷ The book was reviewed in *Teaching. A Quarterly Technical Journals for Teachers*, vol. VI (Sept. 1933–June 1934), 46.

³⁸ Sudipa Topdar, “The Corporeal Empire: Physical Education and Politicising Children’s Bodies in Late Colonial Bengal”, *Gender and History* 29, no. 1 (April 2017): 176–197, here 184.

³⁹ “Minnesotans You Should Know”, *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, March 23, 1929, 441.

⁴⁰ Supriya Guha, “The Nature of Woman: Medical Ideas in Colonial Bengal”, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 3, no. 1 (1996): 23–38, here 30–32; Guha, *Colonial Modernities*, 166 and ff. Among the studies carried out in this period were: Kathleen Vaughan, “The Shape of the Pelvic Brim as a Determining Factor in Childbirth”, *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3698 (1931): 939–941; Margaret Balfour, “Diseases of Pregnancy and Labour in India with Special Reference to Community”, *Proceedings of the Seventh Congress of the Eastern Association for Tropical Medicine*, 1927, 318–28; Grace Stapleton, “Pelvic

cases of osteomalacia.⁴¹ Leading to a softening of the bones, this disease produced deformity which, once the bones became hard again, was rendered permanent. Osteomalacia attracted chiefly the attention of obstetricians because, in pregnant women, it could cause contraction of the pelvis, a maternal condition that hindered the smooth passage of the fetal head during childbirth and that could result in difficult if not fatal delivery.

One prolific author of studies on pelvimetry was Kathleen Olga Vaughan (?—1956), whose work was widely published in the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet*. Her 1928 little volume *The Purdah System and Its Effect on Motherhood*, which became quite influential even beyond medical circles, clearly pathologized purdah and blamed it, together with “native” midwifery, for the high maternal mortality in the colony.⁴² A review of the book claimed that it was “distressing to learn from this authoritative source that the evils of the purdah system were, if anything, understated by Miss Mayo.”⁴³ The reviewer referred to American journalist Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* (1927), which rendered a derogatory account of Indian society and culture.⁴⁴ Based on “salient facts”, Vaughan’s *The Purdah System* was considered more reliable than Mayo’s “impressions of a tourist.”⁴⁵

Vaughan was a British medical doctor, obstetrician and member of the AMWI who worked for around two decades in India. In 1903 she became superintendent of the Lady Dufferin Victoria Hospital in Calcutta and a few years later of the Diamond Jubilee Zenana Hospital in Srinagar, where she worked for three years.⁴⁶ During her medical service in Kashmir, Vaughan noticed the absence of contracted pelvis among women of the lower classes who were not confined in the *zenana*, such as the *manji* or boatwomen.⁴⁷ Vaughan was struck by the fact that better-off female city-dwellers suffered physically and mentally from childbirth, whereas women working in the fields or tending cattle, could deliver their children safely and “with no more difficulty than the animals around them have in parturition”.

Measurements in Indian Women”, *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India* 15, no. 2 (1927): 8–11.

⁴¹ For instance, Kathleen Vaughan, *The Purdah System and Its Effect on Motherhood. Osteomalacia Caused By Absence of Light in India, etc.* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1928).

⁴² Vaughan, *The Purdah System*.

⁴³ See “Lethal Social Customs”, *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 3529 (1928): 344–45, here 344.

⁴⁴ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1927).

⁴⁵ “Lethal Social Customs”, 344.

⁴⁶ “Obituary of Kathleen O. Vaughan”, *The Medical Women’s Federation Journal*, Vol. 39, n. 1 (January 1957), p. 138.

⁴⁷ Kathleen Vaughan, “The Case for Antenatal Exercises”, *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India*, Vol. XXI, no. 1, (February 1943): 16–19 and Vaughan, *The Purdah System*, 10, 17. For a critical analysis see Lal, “Purdah as Pathology”, 94–95; Guha, “The Nature of Woman”, 29 ff., Guha, *Colonial Modernities*, 166–67.

The explanation she gave was that Indian rural women—romanticized and looked upon as strong and healthy despite the extreme poverty and exposure to disease they suffered—led active lives that involved exercises that contributed to keeping the pelvic anatomy healthy and functional.⁴⁸ It was in the squatting position assumed by the “native” races of the East for defecation, as well as for work or rest, that pelvic development was perfect and childbirth easy.⁴⁹ Vaughan wrote:

The city dwellers, and especially women who on account of the custom known as “purdah” must remain in seclusion and live indoors from 8 years old and onwards, [...] find their confinements increasingly difficult and dangerous for themselves and their offspring. In China, the women who bind the feet are the class from which the difficult obstetric cases come.⁵⁰

According to Vaughan, ease of parturition was not a question of pelvis size as tied to race but of a certain “manner of life”:

The negress provides a good illustration. In her natural surroundings she gives birth to children with ease, but in America, [...] living in big cities such as New York and Baltimore, [...] she has more obstetric difficulties than the American white woman herself, and [...] this must be due to something in the manner of life in the crowded quarters of great cities.⁵¹

The pelvic brim and the fetal head, Vaughan argued, were meant to fit and when this was not the case it was a matter of an undeveloped pelvis, due to ankylosis of the sacro-iliac joints. In other words, the lack of mobility associated with “civilised conditions and habits”⁵²—and not only to heathen customs—had made the pelvis

⁴⁸ Vaughan, “The Shape of the Pelvic Brim”, 940. For recent discussions on the long-lasting romanticization of “Oriental poverty” see, for instance, Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp, Marion Gymnich and Klaus P. Schneider (eds.), *Representing Poverty and Precarity in a Postcolonial World* (Leiden, Brill, 2018).

⁴⁹ Kathleen Vaughan, “The Enlargement of the Pelvis in the Squatting Position and the Necessity of Exercise for the Pelvic Joints”, *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India XIII*, no. 3 (August 1935): 31–39. Radiograms confirmed the enlargement of the pelvic brim in the squatting position. “The Effect of Posture on the Pelvic Canal”, *The Lancet*, Feb. 17 (1934): 360.

⁵⁰ Vaughan, “The Shape of the Pelvic Brim”, 939.

⁵¹ Vaughan, “The Shape of the Pelvic Brim”, 940. Vaughan did not show any awareness of racial disparities in terms of maternal and infantile mortality in the United States, where black women were (and still are) more likely to die due to the influence of racial ideas and stereotypes on diagnoses and treatments. See Hoberman, “The Primitive Pelvis”, and, for a contemporary account, Khiara M. Bridges, *Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011).

⁵² Kathleen Vaughan, “The Expanding Pelvis”, *British Medical Journal*, June 27 (1942): 786–7, here 787.

rigid and deprived it of its natural elasticity.⁵³ Through active life and specific exercise the proper development of the female pelvis and a healthy and smooth delivery could be ensured, regardless of race.⁵⁴

With her medical research disputing the existence of a clear relation between the female pelvis and race, Vaughan questioned, at least to some degree, the “science” of pelvimetry that had originated in the nineteenth century and had since then asserted a hierarchy of races.⁵⁵ In claiming that through physical exercise the pelvis could become more flexible—and maternity, as a natural function, “easy and safe”—she placated evolutionist fears about pelvises not seeming to keep pace with heads getting larger with the advancement of civilization.⁵⁶

The trajectory of Vaughan’s career after returning to England is an interesting one. While in the subcontinent she exploited purdah as a productive site for establishing her Western medical authority, once back in Europe she capitalized on her previous experience in India to take part in the rising medical movement that criticized the heavy medicalization of pregnancy and birth.⁵⁷ Vaughan became involved in projects at the St Thomas Maternity Hospital as well as in the maternity departments of Paddington and St Mary Abbot’s Hospitals, London, where she

⁵³ The view that delivery was a natural and normal function when the size of the mother’s pelvis fitted the size of the child’s head had been also espoused by a professor of anatomy of the Medical College in Calcutta [See Pan N., “Measurements of the Pelvis in Hindu Females”, *Journal of Anatomy*, Vol. 63 (Pt 2), (January 1929): 263–6].

⁵⁴ Kathleen Vaughan, *Safe Childbirth: The Three Essentials* (London: Baillière, Tindall and Cox 1937), *passim*; “The Case for Antenatal Exercises”, and “The Enlargement of the Pelvis”.

⁵⁵ The colonial medical doctor Albert Cook reached similar conclusions in Uganda in the 1930s. Focusing on Baganda women, he argued that their maternal problems were rooted in cultural and heathen customs and not in racial anatomy. His findings were strongly opposed by medical doctors that did not want to give up a racialist and evolutionist understanding of the female pelvis. See Nakakyike Musisi and Seggane Musisi, “Inimitable Colonial Anxiety: African Sexuality in Uganda’s Medical History, 1900–1945”, in Poonam Bala (ed.), *Medicine and Colonial Engagements in India and sub-Saharan Africa* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018) 131–153, esp. 142–43. For critical analyses of pelvimetry see fn. 1 above. Racial explanations of pelvic variations continued to be discussed well into the second half of the twentieth century. See for example, Herbert Thoms, *Pelvimetry* (London: Cassel and Company Limited 1956), 41, 55.

⁵⁶ Vaughan, “The Shape”, 940–941.

⁵⁷ Joanna Bourke, “Becoming the ‘Natural’ Mother in Britain and North America: Power, Emotions and the Labour of Childbirth Between 1947 and 1967”, *Past & Present* 246, no. Supplement_15 (December 2020): 92–114. Jessica Martucci, *Back to the Breast: Natural Motherhood and Breastfeeding in America*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2015), esp. ch. 1; Ornella Moscucci, “Holistic Obstetrics: The Origins of “Natural Childbirth” in Britain”, *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 79, no. 929 (2003): 168–73; Jenny Kitzinger “Strategies of the Early Childbirth Movement: A Case-Study of the National Childbirth Trust”, in J. Garcia, R. Kilpatrick, M. Richards (eds.), *The Politics of Maternity Care: Services for Childbearing Women in Twentieth-century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), 92–115.

was instrumental in starting prenatal and postnatal physical training for women preparing and recovering from the “athletic feat” of childbirth.⁵⁸ Through her publications and obstetric practice, Vaughan propounded the need of pregnant Western women to “go native” by embracing habits commonly associated with supposedly less civilized peoples.⁵⁹ These practices included adopting the squatting position daily for defecation and during labor as well as taking to the physical exercises normally carried out in their everyday life by “native races”, otherwise portrayed in the dominant medical discourse as ignorant, diseased, deformed and unable to take care of their body.⁶⁰ Recognizing the “native” habits as something that could be appropriated, Vaughan’s views cut through colonizer/colonized, Western/non-Western, scientific/unscientific binaries and revealed slippages from the pathologization of race and gender to the pathologization of civilization.

Vaughan’s “culturalist” call was not isolated in the period under purview. In Fascist Italy, for example, Giuseppe Poggi-Longostrevi, one of the founders of the Federazione Italiana Medici Sportivi, claimed that “if Italian girls could follow the example of the balanced and fecund women of primitive societies who practice a sort of “natural” athletics, they too would be able to develop their abdominal muscles, favoring beauty and maternity at the same time”.⁶¹ Sexual hygiene and birth control activist, Ettie Rout, a Tasmania-born New Zealander who settled down in London after the Second World War, was of a similar opinion. In her physical culture manual, recommended by medical doctors too, *Sex and Exercise*,⁶² she argued that the efficiency of intercourse, pregnancy and labor depended on a healthy pelvic floor and abdominal area. The book promoted a system of “rhythmic rotary” pelvic and hip exercises based on “native dances” and aimed at strengthening the abdominal, gluteal, and pelvic muscles. In her view, “primitive” women, thanks to their dances, enjoyed better muscular development and organic health than “civilized” women, and unlike these, they had no difficulties in recovering from childbirth.⁶³

⁵⁸ See Jonathan Hoffman & C. Philip Gabel, “The Origins of Western Mind–Body Exercise Methods”, *Physical Therapy Reviews* 20, no. 5–6 (2015): 315–324. See the 1939 video in which expectant mothers in Paddington hospital are shown practicing delivery-preparatory physical exercises designed by Vaughan, “Childbirth as an Athletic Feat”, 1939, Wellcome Library, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9wRBWDxReY>

⁵⁹ Kathleen Vaughan, *Exercises Before Childbirth* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951).

⁶⁰ For instance, Forbes, *Women in Colonial India*, 79–100. Hodes, “The ‘Hottentot Apron’”.

⁶¹ Quoted in Gigliola Gori, *Italian Fascism and the Female Body: Sport, Submissive Women and Strong Mothers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 88.

⁶² Ettie A. Rout, *Sex and Exercise: A Study of the Sex Function in Women and Its Relation to Exercise* (London: William Heinemann, 1925).

⁶³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, “The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain”, *Women’s History Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 299–317, here 304–6. See also Jane Tolerton,

Similar cultural appropriations, however, far from blurring cultural boundaries and threatening “the authority of oppositions sacred to the colonial project,”⁶⁴ shed light on the ambivalent and contrasting ways medical and obstetrical research and observations carried out in the colony could be deployed. They were used in the colonies themselves as “matériel for the social and political battle against “primitive” or “uncivilized” cultural practices,”⁶⁵ whereas, in the metropolitan centers, as tools of professional advancement and white bodily improvement against fears of racial degeneration.⁶⁶

Strengthening the Nation Through the Female Pelvis

Discourses connecting an underdeveloped pelvis and maternal and infantile mortality with a lack of mobility found ready purchase among Indian physical culture experts who, with their nationalist and eugenicist inclinations, saw healthy women’s bodies as crucial in ensuring a strong progeny.⁶⁷ The attention that these experts paid to the female pelvis, not so evident before the 1930s, can be explained as the outcome of interlinked global and Indian developments.

At the global level, the call for a “scientific” approach to physical education, informed by enduring biomedical and scientific theories and notions about sex differences, advocated forms of physical activity suited to women’s anatomy and physiology.⁶⁸ Such views reflected transcultural dominant beliefs about women’s social role and gave cautionary recommendations: women should engage in moderate activity, balanced by an appropriate measure of rest, to avoid any debilitating effect on their reproductive capacities.⁶⁹

At the India level, instead, the concern of Indian physical culture experts about women’s pelvic health can be explained as part of the broader strong reaction of

“A Lifetime of Campaigning: Ettie Rout, Emancipationist beyond the Pale” in J. A. Mangan and Fan Hong (eds.), *Freeing the Female Body: Inspirational Icons* (Abingdon and New York: Frank Cass Pub., 2001), 73–97.

⁶⁴ Gyan Prakash, “Science ‘Gone Native’ in Colonial India”, *Representations*, no. 40 (1992): 153–78, here 155.

⁶⁵ Roberta Bivins, “‘The English Disease’ or ‘Asian Rickets?’”, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 81, no. 3 (2007): 533–68, here 541.

⁶⁶ Vaughan explicitly referred to maternal and infant mortality in England in terms of racial degeneration in her book *Safe Childbirth*, 1–29.

⁶⁷ Mark Singleton, “Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century”, *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 2 (2007): 125–46.

⁶⁸ Jan Todd, *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women, 1800–1870* (Macon: Mercer University Press 1998), 137–170.

⁶⁹ For instance, Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

Indian nationalists to Mayo's *Mother India*. Intending to discredit Indians' claims to political autonomy, the book focused on child marriage and on the poor conditions of mothers, blaming an inherently "backward" Hindu culture for India's social ills.⁷⁰ In presenting purdah as one such social ill, Mayo relied on several official documents and reports, among which figured medical publications.⁷¹ The name of Vaughan as well as those of other women doctors of the AMWI appear repeatedly in the American journalist's book and so do references to conditions affecting the female pelvis.⁷² Thus, through multiple channels such as books like *Mother India* and *The Purdah System*, newspaper columns, women's magazines etc., colonial medical knowledge about Indian female bodies circulated and reached audiences beyond the narrow medical circles.

Indian physical educators, eager to acquire credibility and carve out a professional niche in a field that was increasingly scientized and transculturated, proved their expertise adopting globally-circulating theories and notions. Among physical culture experts in India, yoga specialists, consciously preoccupied with the "modernisation of tradition,"⁷³ were particularly receptive to biomedical and scientific research. In a climate of intense experimentation informed by a mix of rejection and assimilation of foreign modes of exercise, they presented yoga as the epitome of an essentially Hindu "national" scientific system of physical culture that could contribute to the nation-building project.⁷⁴ Framing embodied yoga technique's concern with health and better body functions in an explicitly nationalist discourse afforded them a certain prominence in the field of physical culture.⁷⁵

The beneficial physiological functions that yoga experts attributed to yoga fitted well with the fact that female bodies were tightly tied to medical notions and to always imperiled reproductive mechanisms. In his 1933 publication *Aasanas* (Yoga Postures), for instance, Swami Kuvalayananda (1883–1966), one of the most important promoters of modern yoga at the national and international level, wrote:

⁷⁰ See among others Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), Ishita Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age. Child Marriage in India, 1891–1937* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020) and Bhaswati Chatterjee, "Child Marriage and the Second Social Reform Movement", in S. Sen and A. Ghosh (eds.), *Love, Labour and Law. Early and Child Marriage in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2021), 29–62.

⁷¹ Whitehead, "Tropical Medicine". Mrinalini Sinha convincingly shows that these "facts" of *Mother India* were widely debated and appropriated within competing imperial and nationalist narratives (*Specters of Mother India*, esp. 109–151).

⁷² For mentions of Vaughan see Mayo, *Mother India*, 95 ff.

⁷³ See Joseph S. Alter, "Yoga at the *Fin de Siècle*: Muscular Christianity with a 'Hindu' Twist", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, n. 5 (2006): 759–776.

⁷⁴ Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (New York: OUP, 2010), 81–111.

⁷⁵ Joseph Alter, "Body, Text, Nation: Writing the Physically Fit Body in Post-Colonial India" in J.H. Mills and S. Sen (eds.), *Confronting the Body* (London: Anthem, 2004), 16–39.

Weak abdominal and pelvic muscles in the females are often responsible for the alarmingly large maternal mortality and the surprisingly large number of miscarriages in India [...]. So far as the thoracic and abdominal muscles are concerned, Yogic poses do train them quite satisfactorily. [...] if the student is a female, she can be sure of healthy pregnancy and safe delivery.⁷⁶

Kuvalayananda argued that the yogic physical culture of *āsana* and *prānāyāma* was a science that could generate healthy and muscular bodies and, as such, should be disseminated to the larger population in schools and colleges to serve the nationalist project and rebut the colonial image of a sickly Indian population.⁷⁷ The recommendations of the Bombay Government Committee of Physical Education in 1937,⁷⁸ of which Kuvalayananda was chairman until 1950, drew largely from the knowledge generated through his yoga experiments as well as from Western anatomical studies and physical training schemes that gave scientific authority to the former. Together, these focused on the perceived need to provide girls in primary and secondary schools with specific exercises to train their abdomen and pelvis to contain “the appalling maternal mortality which swe[pt] away 150,000 to 200,000 Indian mothers every year”.⁷⁹ Due to the still widespread evolutionist belief that “the development within the civilised races tend[ed] more and more to produce children born with large heads”, to have stronger and wider pelvises was seen as vital. But this could be achieved only through mild exercises accompanied by music, whereas track and field events and combative group games, recommended only for boys because seen as essentially masculine, had to be omitted from the curricula.⁸⁰ Exercises that involved strength, courage, stamina, competition or other characteristics which were considered “unfeminine” according to patriarchal ideals or “common sense” were branded as inappropriate for girls and women with the support of medical arguments. Discourses around yoga, thus, contributed to nationalist patriarchal projections that placed on the girl child the burden of

⁷⁶ Swami Kuvalayananda, *Aasanas* [Lonavla: Kaivalyadhama, 2012 (1933)], 104.

⁷⁷ See Mark Singleton, “Transnational Exchange and the Genesis of Modern Postural Yoga”, in B. Hauser (ed.), *Yoga Traveling. Bodily Practice in Transnational Perspective* (Cham: Springer 2013), 37–56; Joseph Alter, “Yoga and Physical Education: Swami Kuvalayananda’s Nationalist Project,” *Asian Medicine* 3 (2007): 20–36; Joseph Alter, *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 73–108.

⁷⁸ The 1919 India Act introduced dyarchy, namely a partial decentralization of the colonial powers in favor of a limited number of elected middle-class Indians. Local self-government, education, health, public works, industry and agriculture were among the subjects transferred.

⁷⁹ *Bombay Government Report of the Physical Education Committee 1937* (Bombay: Gov. Central Press, 1938), 19.

⁸⁰ *Physical Education Committee 1937*, 19.

reproduction as early as in her primary school years. Ironically, in a historical moment in which, as shown by Ishita Pande, childhood was defined as a moral category and pressure point in politics,⁸¹ the girl child could not escape the mother she would have to become, while “the possibility of spontaneity and discovery as befits the stage of girlhood” was largely erased.⁸²

A look at the works referred to by the committee, whose recommendations were subsequently employed by the United Provinces government in its educational institutes,⁸³ reveals not only a process of multidirectional citations but also the transnational mobility and scientific resonance of claims surrounding the female pelvis. Among these works we find two that are particularly worth mentioning. One is *The Theory of Gymnastics*, by Johannes Lindhard, a Danish medical doctor that had a huge influence on the gendering of physical exercise.⁸⁴ He argued that vigorous exercises would influence the shape of the feminine pelvis which would tend to approach the male type with children having “to pay with their lives for the imperfectly developed parturition mechanism of their mothers”.⁸⁵ These arguments were based on contemporary theories of “masculinization” and echoed late nineteenth-century theories of sex reversal,⁸⁶ according to which women taking up sport lost their femininity, tended to turn away from heterosexuality, might lose their ability to bear children or might even have “defective” ones.⁸⁷ The citation of *Sex Efficiency Through Exercises* by the Dutch gynecologist Theodor H. Van De Velde showcases, instead, the selective ways in which medical advice was adopted by Indian physical educators. Van de Velde’s *Sex Efficiency* promoted pelvic exercises with a view to improve women’s two special functions as sex partners and mothers so that they could be put “in the position to exert an active influence in coitus [...] by accentuating the sensations of mutual pleasure” as well as keep “healthy and ready for the heavy ordeal [of giving birth]”.⁸⁸ However, the Indian Committee completely

⁸¹ Pande, *Sex, Law, and the Politics of Age*.

⁸² Ruby Lal, “Recasting the Women’s Question”, *Interventions* 10, no. 3 (2008): 321–39, here 322. In the same article, the discussion about the conflation of the notions of girl and woman is relevant.

⁸³ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 115; Alter, “Yoga and Physical Education”, 31–33.

⁸⁴ Hans Bonde, “Projection of Male Fantasies: The Creation of “Scientific” Female Gymnastics”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 2 (2012): 228–46.

⁸⁵ Lindhard, *The Theory of Gymnastics* (London: Methuen and Company, 1934), 67.

⁸⁶ Lisa Carstens, “Unbecoming Women: Sex Reversal in the Scientific Discourse on Female Deviance in Britain, 1880–1920”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 20, no.1 (2011): 62–94.

⁸⁷ The famous German gynecologist Hugo Sellheim was one of the promoters of this theory. See Gertrud Pfister, “The Medical Discourse on Female Physical Culture in Germany in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries”, *Journal of Sport History* 17, no. 2 (1990): 183–98.

⁸⁸ Theodor H. van De Velde, *Sex Efficiency Through Exercises: Special Physical Culture for Women* (London 1932), 13. The work of Van De Velde was popular in India and Japan. Karve cited his publications (See Shrikant Botre and Douglas E. Haynes “Understanding R.D. Karve. Brahmacharya,

ignored the purpose of exercises against women's passivity in sexual intercourse and simply focused on their value in terms of having a safe delivery. Despite the liberating aspects of his pelvic exercises, Van de Velde cautioned against "violent and prolonged gymnastic exercise" as they posed a great strain on girls and women. The feminine pelvic region could be often injured by "lack of judgement" shown in games, gymnastics and athletics, the consequences becoming visible only in crucial moments like during pregnancy. The "golden mean" was the rule. Overall, in Van de Velde's view, athletic women were "not particularly adapted for motherhood. Rather the reverse."⁸⁹

The same Bombay Committee gathered in 1945–46 and published a lengthy and up-to-date report, in which the pelvis was still prominent when physical education for girls and women was discussed. The report referred to *A Modern Philosophy of Physical Education*, by Agnes R. Wayman,⁹⁰ one of the most prominent physical educators in the United States and promoter of views against women's competition in sports.⁹¹ According to Wayman, Head of the Department of Physical Education, at Barnard College, Columbia University, women's physical education "should be based upon sound educational psychology as well as upon sound physiological, anatomical and biological principles [...]. It should be governed by the fact that every girl is a potential mother, that every girl is a future citizen."⁹² What was

Modernity and the appropriation of Global Sexual Science in Western India, 1927–1953", in *Global History of Sexual Science*, 163–85, here 169, whereas Indian sexologist A. Pillay in his work *The Art of Love and Sane Sex Living* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons & Co, n.d., 1948, 17th edition), 174–80, referred to his pelvic exercises. In Japan, Van De Velde's work became quite influential especially after the Second World War (See in the same volume Mark McLelland, "Takahashi Tetsu and Popular Sexology in Early Postwar Japan 1945–70", 211–231, here 216–17).

⁸⁹ Van de Velde, *Sex Efficiency*, 54–55. Similar arguments based on hard to die theories on the female body vis-à-vis sport participation were widely circulating in the 1930s. Van de Velde in particular drew on the studies of the already mentioned German gynecologist Hugo Sellheim and of Stefan Westmann who discouraged women from taking part in competitive and strenuous sports. See Pfister, "The Medical Discourse".

⁹⁰ Agnes R. Wayman, *A Modern Philosophy of Physical Education for Girls and Women and for the College Freshman Program* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1938).

⁹¹ Agnes R. Wayman, *Education through Physical Education: Its Organization and Administration for Girls and Women* (Philadelphia and New York: Lea & Febiger, 1925), 121, 162–64. Karen V. Epstein, "Sameness or Difference? Class, Gender, Sport, the Wdnaaf and the Ncaa/Naaf", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 9, no. 2 (1992): 280–87 and Lynn E. Couturier, "'Play with Us, Not Against Us': The Debate About Play Days in the Regulation of Women's Sport", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. (2008): 421–42.

⁹² Wayman, *Education through Physical Education*, 59. On sex differences arguments made by women physical educators in the US see Martha H. Verbrugge, "Recreating the Body: Women's Physical Education and the Science of Sex Differences in America, 1900–1940", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 71, no. 2 (1997): 273–304.

worrisome for the Indian committee were the observations carried out by Wayman demonstrating that “the modern girls undoubtedly have smaller hips and tend towards the masculine type”,⁹³ something which resonated with Indian apprehensions towards women embracing a modern lifestyle.⁹⁴

The “scientific” principles on which the gender-differentiation of physical exercise was supposedly based were debated in newspapers too. For instance, a *Bombay Chronicle* reader, whose nom de plume—Athleticus—leads us to believe that this was someone connected to the milieu of physical education, and obviously a man, wrote a polemic letter to the newspaper denouncing the “idiocy of the ‘physical culture’ quacks” that trained little girls and young women in vigorous gymnasium exercises and standardized drills.⁹⁵ Athleticus instead praised “the tradition of the Swedish Manual” and the work of J. P. Müller, the Danish promoter of the nationalistic system of gymnastics, that had a strong eugenicist bent and was based on raising the level of the race as a whole.⁹⁶ Athleticus valued in particular the fact that these schemes:

Differentiat[ed] between men and women [...], between the male pelvis and the female [...]. That is why, while boys and girls may do certain standardized drill-exercises, the latter are required to stop them at a point where the continuance of a common programme is likely to injure their physical development which proceeds along the purely biologic lines. Any physical exercise that involves an undue strain on the [female] beautifully sensitive and fine nervous system, impedes the growth of the bone structure of the pelvis or hardens the thigh muscle is avoided because it produces repercussions that endanger parturition and even woman's life.⁹⁷

In the period under review, the large majority of Indian physical educators were men, their advice equating to patriarchal sanctions. However, especially in the

⁹³ Quoted from *Bombay Government Report of the Physical Education Committee 1945–46* (Bombay: Gov. Central Press, 1947), 26.

⁹⁴ Similar fears were expressed in Fascist Italy by the endocrinologist Nicola Pende, “Costituzione e fecondità”, in Corrado Gini (ed.), *Atti del Congresso internazionale per gli studi sulla popolazione* (Roma, 7–10 settembre 1931-IX), Vol. 3, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato 1933, 77–101. On the Indian modern girl see Priti Ramamurthy, “The Modern Girl in India in the Interwar Years: Interracial Intimacies, International Competition, and Historical Eclipsing.” *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 197–226.

⁹⁵ “Physical Culture for Women. Plea for Scientific Outlook: A Criticism” by “Athleticus”, *Bombay Chronicle*, 8 August 1936, 6.

⁹⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 98. Müller published a work *My System* in 1904 and *My System for Ladies* in 1915 that, as shown by the reference, remained very popular for the following decades. See Watt, “Physical Culture and the Body”, 346–9.

⁹⁷ “Physical Culture for Women”.

growing field of yoga, a few women, generally wives or daughters of famous male yoga experts, started to emerge and establish themselves from the 1930s on. One such example is Sitadevi Yogendra (1912–2008), married to Shri Yogendra (1897–1989), the founder of the renowned Bombay Yoga Institute. Her 1934 *Yoga: Physical Education for Women*, the first modern yoga book ever written by a woman, intended to demonstrate “the scientific foundation of physical education for women”.⁹⁸ Being a “non-violent and non-fatiguing activity” and as such suitable for women,⁹⁹ yoga is presented by Sitadevi as having been revived by a new scientific vigor that had provided it with greater authority. Her views were not different from those of her male colleagues regarding physical, physiological and psychological sex differences. A great deal of importance was paid to a wide pelvis and to ovaries. Their impaired functions, caused by the loss of proportions produced by “the tragic folly of muscle-cult and body building”, could affect the “charm, personality and behaviour of women”, while jeopardizing their “genetic, social and moral responsibilities [... towards] the future citizens of the world”.¹⁰⁰

Overall, the medical arguments selectively embraced by the above-mentioned Indian experts are revealing of the kind of physical exercise they wanted for Indian women. The same arguments also served the purpose of depoliticizing the issue of equality between men and women and thus naturalizing patriarchal ideals and conventional views of women’s social role in society. In other words, motivating their recommendations on the basis of health or disease gave experts the ideological benefit to dodge controversial issues and present their claims as incontrovertible *qua* informed by scientific notions and ideas. Moreover, presenting themselves as co-producers of pidginized forms of knowledge, theirs was not simply an uncritical and unshakable faith in the scientific knowledge produced in the West.¹⁰¹ On the contrary, they were agents in a process of knowledge hybridization which gave them increased authority by showing that Western science confirmed the benefits of their putatively indigenous ancient knowledge.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Sitadevi Yogendra, *Yoga Physical Education for Women* [Bombay: The Yoga Institute, 1947 (3rd edition)], 13.

⁹⁹ Sitadevi, *Yoga*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Sitadevi, *Yoga*, 35, 82, 24.

¹⁰¹ Even though the category of “Western science” is analytically untenable, this designation of science as Western is a durable construction of the interacting positivist and colonial discourses. A classic study is Jan Golinski, “Is it Time to Forget Science? Reflections on Singular Science and Its History,” *Osiris* 27,1 (2012): 19–36; for a more recent intervention see Kapil Raj, “Beyond Postcolonialism ... and Postpositivism: Circulation and the Global History of Science,” *Isis* 104, n. 2 (2013), 337–347.

¹⁰² A rich body of scholarship has been produced on the topic of knowledge circulation, hybridization, vernacularization and co-production. See, for instance, Projit Bihari Mukharji, *Doctoring Traditions: Ayurveda, Small Technologies, and Braided Sciences* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Kapil Raj, “Networks of Knowledge, or Spaces of Circulation? The Birth of British

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed a facet of the thus-far neglected history of women's physical education in colonial South Asia. It has done so by showing that women medical doctors' views about purdah as a factor of maternal mortality contributed to emphasizing the importance of physical exercise for girls and women. Overall, the emphasis on the female pelvis and on its role in child delivery played an important part in the gender stratification of physical exercise and resonated with the disquiet about the "degenerate" state of the existing Hindu society and with calls for racial regeneration. The new attention to the physically fit female body thus resulted in new discursive alliances between medical doctors, social reformers and physical education experts that could transcend the colonizer/colonized divide.

The chapter has shown that the medical research and observations about conditions supposedly correlated with the custom of purdah and affecting the pelvis and healthy child deliveries could take very different directions and have an impact beyond India. The case study of Kathleen Vaughan has revealed that her work on pelvimetry challenged dominant medico-scientific views that attributed the size of the pelvis and complications during childbirth to race. Drawing parallels between purdah and modern civilization, Vaughan saw in an insufficiently active lifestyle the causes of pelvic anatomical anomalies and attendant difficult, if not fatal, child deliveries. Once back in England, Vaughan started prenatal physical exercise programs that, inspired by the everyday habit of squatting observed in the "Oriental" races, made her a harbinger of the natural childbirth movement who could think beyond Western/non-Western, scientific/unscientific, civilized/uncivilized dichotomies. As such, Vaughan deserves further research and can be equated to better known figures, like the American anthropologist Margaret Mead, who became a strong advocate of the ideology of "natural" motherhood after conducting fieldworks in New Guinea and Bali.¹⁰³

In India, physical exercise for girls and women was scrutinized and scientized by the Indian physical culture experts considered in the foregoing account. This development was in line with a broader phenomenon underway at the global level, where schemes of physical education had to be rational and scientific in order to be judged as authoritative, worthy and safe for the "fragile" female body. So, in the process of carving out their professional niche and appearing as credible

Cartography in Colonial South Asia in the Late Eighteenth Century", *Global Intellectual History* 2, n. 1 (2017), 49–66; Raj, "Beyond Postcolonialism"; Deepak Kumar, "Unequal Contenders, Uneven Ground: Medical Encounters in British India, 1820–1920", in A. Cunningham and B. Andrews (eds.), *Western Medicine as Contested Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 172–211.

¹⁰³ On Mead see Martucci, *Back to Breast*, 45–55.

physical educators, Indian experts had at their disposal a rich body of literature to draw from. Such international medico-scientific publications were selectively appropriated and readapted to justify prescriptive agendas of nationalism and patriarchy. In doing so, Indian physical educators and yoga experts showed the ability of marshaling the existing biomedical and scientific knowledge to keep control over female bodies through a conscious politics of citation.¹⁰⁴ Their ideas were a mixture of cultural adaptation, “pidginized” innovation, and commitment to what they presented as Indian (Hindu) tradition.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that the female pelvis, used to tailor physical exercise for girls and women to their being perceived as reproductive vehicles, provided experts with a putatively “natural” instrument to enforce hegemonic gender identities and gendered bodies. In this way, male anxieties over women’s athletic ability, competition and independence— anxieties that echoed the one on women’s education at large¹⁰⁵—could be kept at bay. The disproportionate attention given to a healthy pelvis and to physical exercise, however, had the hidden potential to engender women’s emancipation. In other words, Indian women were provided with the possibility to claim an active physicality within the discourse of racial regeneration and national health and beyond the binaries of home confinement and mobility. All in all, linking female physical fitness with the goal of improving the nation, the “new patriarchy” advocated by nationalism bound women to a new legitimate subordination¹⁰⁶ and, at the same time, increased their space of maneuver in ways that men at pain to check female bodies had not anticipated.

¹⁰⁴ A similar process of selective citation that was used to render patriarchal and upper-caste practice hegemonic is discussed in Shefali Chandra, “Decolonising the Orgasm: Caste, Whiteness and Knowledge Production at the ‘End of Empire’”, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 43, no. 6 (2020): 1179–95.

¹⁰⁵ Among many others, see Tim Allender, *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820–1932* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Partha Chatterjee, “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India”, *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 622–33.

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Captive Bodies: Soldier and Civilian Internment in the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1942–1945¹

Kate Imy

Abstract

War forces people to live and die according to narrow ideas about wins or losses and enemies or allies. Yet the reality of war exposes the limitations of such distinctions. From 1942 to 1945, Japanese military leaders occupied several former British colonies across Southeast Asia. The soldiers who fought for the British Empire and became Prisoners of War included British, Australian, and Indian troops. Civilians held within Japanese internment camps were Asian, Eurasian, and European. Comparing soldiers' and civilians' experiences of internment shows how the body was a site of strict wartime and imperial policing across identity categories, remaking prewar understandings of difference and belonging.

Keywords: interment; Second World War; Malaya; Singapore; Japanese Empire; British Empire

From December 1941 to February 1942, Japanese military forces invaded Southeast Asia, resulting in the surrender and collapse of several European empires. Ultimately more than 200,000 allied POWs and at least 130,000 so-called “Western” civilians faced internment until 1945.² Among them were people like Sheila Allan,

¹ Material in this chapter also appears in “Dream Mother: Race, Gender, and Intimacy in Japanese-Occupied Singapore,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 52:3, (September 2021): 464–491 and *Losing Hearts and Minds: Race, War, and Empire in Singapore and Malaya, 1915–1960* (Stanford University Press, 2024).

² Key works on the British imperial experience of Japanese occupation include C.A. Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain’s Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (London: Penguin, 2005); Brian P. Farrell, *The Defence and Fall of Singapore, 1940–1942* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Group, 2005); Patricia Pui Huen Lim and Diana Wong, *War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000); Lachlan Grant, *Australian Soldiers in Asia-Pacific in World War II* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2014); Ban Kah Choon and Yap Hong Kuan, *Rehearsal for War: The Underground War Against the Japanese* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2002); Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star Over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and After the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, 1941–46* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2003); Karl Hack, *Defence and*

who was confined at Changi in Singapore from the ages of seventeen to twenty-one. There, she straddled the ambiguity of “girl”—as she framed herself in her memoir, *Diary of A Girl in Changi*—and woman, which subjected her to unwanted sexual advances before and during the occupation.³ Allan also had a white Australian father and Malay mother. Internment forced her to reconcile racial, gender, ethnic, and national identities in a context of strict gender segregation. Both Japanese and British leaders considered her “Eurasian” even though she did not identify this way and possessed no connection to Singapore’s Eurasian community. Japanese leaders even tried to separate her from her family, perceiving her as Chinese. While interned, some white European women used anti-Asian racial slurs against her. She coped with these tensions by rejecting her Siamese (Thai) stepmother and romanticizing Dr. Elinor Hopkins, the white British Camp Commandant for the women’s prison. Her descriptions of Hopkins alternated frequently between erotic, romantic desire and a longing for motherly intimacy.⁴ Allan’s experience suggests that internment exposed people’s bodies and minds to ways of seeing and being in the world that were impossible outside of wartime confinement. She was not alone.

Second World War internment offered military powers an illusion of certainty. Interned civilians had their own camps, while soldiers—as Prisoners of War—had others. Yet categories such as “European” or Asian, soldier or civilian, man, woman or child proved inadequate to reflect the intersecting and overlapping traumas experienced by many people across the conflict. By centering the experience of internment and its role in shaping identity, this chapter posits that wartime confinement embodied the violent consequences of binary thinking within and beyond colonial and wartime

Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941–1968 (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001); Catherine Kenny, *Captives: Australian Army Nurses in Japanese Prison Camps* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1986); Christina Twomey, *Australia’s Forgotten Prisoners: Civilians Interned by the Japanese in World War Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Yuki Tanka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in WWII* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996); Bob Moore and Barbara Hately-Broad, eds., *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming and Memory in World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1994); Sarah Kovner, *Prisoners of the Empire: POWs and Their Captors in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020). For more on internment numbers see Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn, “Japanese-occupied Asia from 1941 to 1945: One Occupier, Many Captivities and Memories,” in *Forgotten Captives in Japanese-occupied Asia*, ed. Karl Hack and Kevin Blackburn (New York: Routledge, 2008), 4, 8, 11.

³ Sheila Allan, *Diary of A Girl in Changi* (Pymble, NSW: Kangaroo, 2004); Sheila Allan, “Journey to Changi and Down Under ... diary of events between 8th December, 1941 to 24th November, 1945, written by a seventeen year old girl,” unpublished manuscript, Private Papers, Australian War Memorial, PR00666 (1942–1992), henceforth Allan papers.

⁴ Allan papers, 21. For more on these dynamics, see Imy, “Dream Mother” and Imy, *Losing Hearts and Minds*.

society. As many scholars have explored, colonial rule relied on hierarchies of identity that were often unstable and ever-shifting, but nonetheless had violent consequences for those experiencing inclusion or marginalization.⁵ Wartime internment amplified experiences of everyday violence and trauma, as well as exceptional moments of solidarity, care, and comfort. For many soldiers and civilians, the experience of Japanese occupation simultaneously challenged and reinforced prewar identities and desires. People living and laboring under conflicting imperial regimes had to define and cultivate a place for themselves amidst extreme trauma, privation, and uncertainty. They redefined and rearticulated gender, racial, and ethnic identities—as well as simplistic binaries between soldier/civilian, combatant/non-combatant, prisoner/laborer, colonial subject/collaborator—during their confinement. The outer turmoil of a war-torn world profoundly shaped the inner turmoil of identity and belonging. Yet identity categories, and one's ability to perform expected codes associated with that identity, impacted the means and access to survival. This turned identity into a practice of survival, leaving profound consequences for the postwar world.

In some instances, internment created commonalities across ethnicity, combatant status, and gender. White Australian Jack Turner described several hardships that were regular features of POW and internment experiences, including the long march to Changi camp and shortages of food.⁶ Frequent relocation on trains and ships provided some of the most horrific conditions, forcing POWs and internees to experience food shortages, lack of water, and poor sanitation in cramped quarters. Living in difficult conditions also increased soldiers' dependence on civilians for survival. Turner and fellow Australian Jack Williams snuck out of internment camps in Burma to visit villages where a Thai gardener and a Burmese man provided bananas, cigarettes, breadfruit, coffee, and other relative wartime luxuries.⁷ Indian POW Chint Singh similarly recalled that in New Guinea, an Indigenous couple found him dying in the jungle and gave him pumpkin, fish, and bananas.⁸

⁵ Farish A. Noor and Peter Carey, eds. *Racial Difference and the Colonial Wars of 19th Century Southeast Asia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 9, 15; Ann Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, 3 (July 1992): 514–551; Kristy Walker, "Intimate Interactions: Eurasian Family Histories in Colonial Penang," *Modern Asian Studies* 26, 2 (2012): 324; Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, 1 (Jan., 1989): 134–161, at 136–37.

⁶ Jack Wilfred Turner, "A True Autobiography of My Life as a Prisoner of War from 15 February 1942 till 12 September 1944. Also of My Experiences from 12 September 1944 till arrival in Australia," (henceforth Turner papers) PR00651, Australian War Memorial (henceforth AWM), 1–3.

⁷ Turner papers, 13, 87.

⁸ Chint Singh, "A Certified Copy of Story by Chint Singh: A Brief Sketch of the Fate of 3000 Indian P.O.W. in New Guinea." Wewack, New Guinea (4 November 1945), Micro-MS-Coll-08-1249, National Library of New Zealand, 17. Henceforth Singh papers.

They provided these amenities for weeks, at a time when others in his unit suffered greatly with food deprivation and supply shortages. Sometimes the dynamics were reversed—in Burma, civilians relied on Australian and American soldiers killing and selling them rats because Japanese forces took or destroyed so much food.⁹ Here, the soldier/civilian divide was complicated by POW's status as prisoners and their lack of access to the means of survival. At the same time, this extreme dependency on Asian civilians and Pacific Islanders rarely resulted in a long-term admiration, respect, or desire for inclusivity. Rather, it deepened soldiers' desire to regain personal autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Despite some common experiences, identity often shaped the flow of violence, including who was interned or imprisoned, and who did not survive. Turner recalled that one of the first duties Australian soldiers performed was burying a large number of Chinese civilians killed by Japanese soldiers.¹⁰ Japan's longer conflict with China, and Japanese leaders' fears of communism and suspicions about Chinese civilians, led Japanese military personnel to kill at least 30,000 Chinese civilians in Singapore by March 1942.¹¹ They forcibly conscripted many other Chinese civilians as laborers, along with other soldiers and civilians across Southeast Asia. Turner also recognized that Indian soldiers faced more difficult fates in Singapore than the average white POW. He described Indians being placed in a separate, fenced area, starved for a week, and then given the "choice" to either starve or join the anti-colonial Indian National Army as a Japanese ally. When men refused, Japanese leaders cut off fingers, filled their stomachs with water, and engaged in other torture. Those who survived became transport drivers and assured Turner that "When the time comes for the retaking of Singapore these Indians will give the British all the aid possible."¹² For Turner, Indian soldiers' perceived "loyalty" to the British Empire, and willingness to provide provisions for white POWs, was a prerequisite for perceiving their suffering as unjust.

Despite Turner's association of suffering with loyalty, it did not secure acceptance. As Anne Spry Rush and others have argued, many people across the British Empire understood and defined British identity as inclusive of all subjects across the empire. This was especially true for soldiers. For example, Major Naranjan Singh Gill received his education in India at the Chiefs' College at Lahore and the Royal Indian Military Colleges, both of which emphasized English-language

⁹ Turner papers, 51–52.

¹⁰ Turner papers, 3.

¹¹ Hack and Blackburn, "Japanese-occupied Asia from 1941 to 1945," 10, 13–14. See for example Lim Chuan Kim, letter to Bell (8 Jan. 1946), Private papers of Lim Bee Giok (henceforth Lim Bee Giok papers), 3DRL/74157, AWM.

¹² Turner papers, 8.

education and loyalty to the British Empire. He even gained a King's Commission from the British Military Academy at Sandhurst, earning him rank and status equal to a British officer. As a result, he described himself as possessing a "British background." Yet this promise of inclusion immediately crumbled with the Japanese occupation. Gill found that the "British did not care what happened to us, once the battle was lost. Instead of taking care of us, they said, 'All right, we will give them to you, the Japanese.'" ¹³ He lost his identity as a "British" officer by becoming just another Indian prisoner of the Japanese military.

For the tens of thousands of colonial soldiers and officers, like Gill, who became Japanese prisoners, surrender meant an immediate loss of a British identity and their claims to exalted masculinity. Indian soldiers and officers enjoyed the relative privileges of being considered and categorized as "martial races." This gave them a position higher than non-combatant followers who endured frequent demasculinization and fewer benefits from their service. ¹⁴ Yet surrender and internment denied Indians access to these colonial masculinities as well as the strong, masculine physiques that facilitated their service. Recruitment required them to meet strict requirements based on height and weight. They participated in rigorous physical training, and received rations, to make and keep their bodies strong and fortify a particular martial masculinity. Building their bodies gave them the power to inflict, rather than receive, the most brutal violence of the colonial state. Internment did the opposite. It forced soldiers to live in privation. It subjected them to the violent disciplinary methods deemed necessary by their captors. It made them powerless. It also transformed them into vulnerable laborers lacking any chance of upward mobility. Most even lived in former colonial prisons or so-called "coolie" lines, turning them into the marginalized underclass against which they previously defined themselves. It also led to criticisms of their previously exalted physicality. When Indian soldiers worked slowly due to malnutrition and eighteen-hour workdays in New Guinea, Japanese officials criticized them as inferior to Indigenous populations. One suggested, according to Indian soldier Chint Singh, "You India work no good, slowly slowly. Kanakas work very good hurry." When Chint Singh retorted that Kanakas had more food and Indians had malaria, the Japanese official beat him with a piece of wood. ¹⁵ Internment experience not only exposed the muddy distinctions between soldier, prisoner, and laborer, but also the fragility of martial status and masculinity.

¹³ Transcript of an oral history interview with Shri Naranjan Singh Gill, interviewed by Shri S.L. Manchanda for The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (11 April 1972), Mss Eur F729/7/1, British Library, 29. Henceforth Gill papers.

¹⁴ Radhika Singha, *The Coolie's Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict, 1914–1921* (London: Hurst, 2020).

¹⁵ Singh papers, 25–26.

The category of “officer” also revealed how intersecting British and Japanese colonial racisms shaped soldiers’ experiences. When Australian soldier Turner worked on the Thai-Burma railway, he observed that Australian and British officers did not have to do work.¹⁶ Indian officers, by contrast, lost such protection. Indian officer Gill recalled “Indian officers and men would be separated from the British; instead of the normal rule that officers of all nationalities are put in one camp, men of all nationalities are put in other camp.”¹⁷ Indian men’s hard-earned officer commissions were useless in the face of British and Japanese racialization. According to Indian soldier Jemadar Chint Singh, soldiers petitioned their Japanese captors for humane treatment early in the war, requesting among other things that officers be treated as officers and not forced to work.¹⁸ However, officers only gained special notice from Japanese leaders for punishment. When food went missing, Japanese guards called the Indian Officers and “beat them severely,” threatening them with the death penalty. When Japanese soldiers tried to instruct Indians in drill or the Japanese language, soldiers intentionally refused to learn. As a result, “We were severely beaten, especially the officers.” In New Guinea one Japanese nursing orderly, Pte. Maida, suffered from dysentery and ordered an officer, Kitial Singh, to clean his boots. Singh did so but left a little dirt so Pte. Maida took a big stick and beat him. Kitial Singh remained injured for a month before dying. Indian soldier Chint Singh eulogized another officer, Captain Nirpal Chand, when Japanese leaders executed him after he organized food-stealing campaigns to address starvation. Chand had also protested when Japanese leaders forced them to march despite fatigue and illness. Chint Singh explained that the Captain’s “loss is irreparable to us. He has guided us through many dangers of life and used to encourage us.”¹⁹ This trauma endeared Indian officers to Indian soldiers, alienating them both from Japanese captors and the British leaders who abandoned them. It solidified their shared suffering as Indians, while also giving them greater deference for how officers should behave and be treated. The everyday hardships of imprisonment and forced labor for Indian prisoners, meant that officer/soldier distinctions became almost meaningless.

Another commonality between Indian soldiers and officers was that both struggled to find justice for their suffering after the war ended. In early 1946, British Major and Barrister P.R. Mursell defended Japanese soldiers from accusations of War Crimes by insisting that Indian soldiers’ testimonies were unreliable. The problem, in his view, was that Indian soldiers’ statements were written before

¹⁶ Turner papers, 27.

¹⁷ Gill papers, 29.

¹⁸ Singh papers, 3.

¹⁹ Singh papers, 4, 7, 9, 24–25, 29.

they returned home to India, leaving no witnesses to take the stand in Singapore. By using such “dangerous” evidence, he contended, the court failed to “produce witnesses to testify against a man to his face in open court.” He asked the court if they were truly willing to accept the account from “an Indian whom you have never seen, in flat contradiction to all that is just and fair?” In Mursell’s view, Indian soldiers’ absence meant that the court “cannot accuse” Japanese soldiers “of a crime at all, for it is obvious how gross is the injustice of such an accusation, where the victim cannot confront his accuser, and give him the lie to his face.”²⁰ By Mursell’s account, Indian soldiers who were unwilling or unable to confront their former prison guards after four years of traumatic treatment must be lying about what they experienced. For many former prisoners of war, facing and recounting the trauma of imprisonment, forced labor, extreme violence, and starvation was too much to bear. They endured shame, anxiety and humiliation from which they wanted to move on as quickly as possible. Even more striking is the fact that Mursell’s swift condemnation occurred in a trial concerning a Japanese officer who beheaded an Indian soldier, Ghafoor, for stealing food. Mursell did not dispute that this occurred. Instead, he found it “the just penalty for a mean and detestable act of knavery.” Beheading an Indian soldier, in his view, was “just.” Stealing food while starving was the “detestable act of knavery.” Mursell’s response revealed how racialized codes of military masculinity were both reinforced and undermined by soldiers’ experiences as prisoners of war. After all, white British or Australian testimonies did not engender such skepticism. Yet Indian soldiers could no longer claim either their exalted masculinity as “martial races” or the status of victims to either war and colonialism. Any sense of belonging within the British Empire was destroyed by fighting and suffering for it.

Compared to Indian soldiers, white Australians resented the reversals in colonial racial hierarchies that internment and imprisonment promised. Turner noted that in Burma he helped construct the Thai-Burma railway and worked in a camp previously used by Tamil Indians on a rubber plantation.²¹ When relocated back to Singapore, white Australian men worked on an island off of Singapore’s west coast alongside “many hundreds of natives.” Those who worked on the railways faced maladies such as cholera, malnutrition, beri beri, malaria, and dysentery. Beatings increased over time, as did demands to work while sick or wounded. Turner hated it when Korean guards came into the camps, because, he speculated, they had been treated badly by the Japanese and now relished the opportunity to have control and power. He did not make a similar assumption about British

²⁰ Major P.R. Mursell, “Defence Counsel’s Address,” War Crimes Case Files, Defendant: Okamura Hideo, (c. 8 February 1946). WO 235/820, National Archives of Singapore (henceforth NAS).

²¹ Turner papers, 24.

treatment when Indian soldiers became their guards. In some camps, such as River Valley Road Camp in Singapore, British, Americans, Australians, Dutch, and Indians were housed together. This, he found, was the worst camp he lived in during the war. It had been constructed by the British for evacuees from Malaya during the invasion, and quickly fell into disrepair.²² In reality, many of the Japanese camps in which white prisoners resided reflected the prewar racial hierarchies of labor and confinement. White soldiers and civilians had to inhabit refugee camps, prisons, and plantation labor lines constructed for those who experienced racial and class marginalization under British leadership. Only during the war, while living within them, did white people confront the inadequacy of these conditions.

Compared to the powerlessness of laboring under Indian, Korean, and Japanese guards, Turner noted some positive encounters with German officers in Singapore. One officer spoke fluent English and asked Turner how he was being treated. When told the truth, the German “expressed his sorrow and told us the Germans had no time for the Japanese.” He also gave several men tins of bully beef and some bread and sausage sandwiches. When cars with Japanese officers passed the work party officer, a non-commissioned officer was supposed to call men to attention to salute. On one occasion the sergeant did not see the flags denoting the car and so a Japanese officer “smacked our POW Sergeant across the face.” One of the German sailors from the submarine saw this and “wasted no time in arriving on the scene and landing a beautiful punch on the chin of the Japanese officer knocking him on the ground.”²³ The Japanese officer just got back in the car and left. Despite some common experiences among internees and POWs across ethnicity, whiteness still carried currency during the Japanese occupation.

Among civilian internees, racial hierarchy exacerbated stressors and vulnerabilities. Shortly after the surrender, Sheila Allan learned that “Europeans mean ‘married to one’—‘children from such union’—or if you profess to be a ‘British subject!’”²⁴ In fact, British internees proved to be just as invested in strict identity categories as their captors. Nominal rolls at Changi had over a dozen categories.²⁵ Many internees condemned the diversity of the camps generally and the presence of Eurasians specifically. White Australian nurse Veronica Clancy resented living beside “yellow half casts [sic]” and wondered “how far these girls could be trusted?”²⁶ Constance Sleep, interned in Changi and Sime Road alongside Allan, alleged

²² Turner papers, 25, 31, 35, 78, 83.

²³ Turner papers, 83.

²⁴ Allan papers, p. 16.

²⁵ “Changi and Sime Road Civilian Internment Camps: Nominal rolls of internees,” Cambridge University Archives, RCMS 103/12/22 (1942–1967), 11.

²⁶ Private Papers of Veronica Ann Turner (nee Clancy), Australian War Memorial, MSS1086 (1940–45), p. 103, henceforth Clancy papers.

that “the native and Eurasian women” were disloyal, due to their apparent willingness to sew or work in match factories for the Japanese. While she conceded that white women took the work as well, she singled-out Asian and Eurasian women as the problem. She resented Eurasians in the camp because “Our funds have to pay for milk, eggs and fruit provided for these people.” This made her feel “bitter about it, and about the men in the camp who are the begetters of these Eurasian children.”²⁷ Many white European women resented the presence of Asian and Eurasian mistresses, referred to as “Mrs” and the last names of well-known British officials.²⁸ Others treated Eurasians as a burden and a nuisance in camps to deflect the humiliation of surrender. Many resented and condemned Asian and Eurasian civilians’ perceived ability to win favors from “both sides.”²⁹ In some cases, Asian and Eurasian internees did enjoy relatively better access to food through their connections with family and friends in occupied towns, inverting power dynamics and prewar access to material resources. In response, many white British women fought to regain power by alleging that the true origins of these luxuries were sexual relationships with Japanese guards.³⁰ Competition for access to resources—and survival—both amplified pre-war biases and revealed the shifting and relational access to privilege.

In some cases, white women avoided violence by increasing the sexual danger for Asian and Eurasian women by mobilizing prewar ideas about the prestige, vulnerability, and honor of white womanhood. White Australian nurses held at Palembang protested sexual coercion by suggesting that there were “a number of Eurasian girls in the camp” who were “more than willing to fill the part.”³¹ In contrast to this belief, teenager Betty Kenneison, a Eurasian girl with a convent education, remembered the trauma of her teenaged friend agreeing to work in the Japanese club in exchange for food and clothing. This could hardly be considered “more than willing.”³² Yet some white nurses were ready to offer-up Eurasian women as sexual sacrifices, believing that Eurasian women were a byproduct of sin and illegitimacy and therefore predisposed to sexual laxity.³³ Sleep understood

²⁷ Private Papers of Constance Sleep and Arthur Sleep, MSS. Ind. Ocn. S. 127–133, ff. 29–39, Bodleian Library, Oxford University Archives, 4, henceforth Sleep papers.

²⁸ Felicia Yap, “Sex and Stereotypes: Eurasians, Jews and the Politics of Race and Religion in British Asia during the Second World War,” *Social Scientist* 38, 3/4 (March-April 2010): 74–93, 83–4.

²⁹ Felicia Yap, “Eurasians in British Asia during the Second World War,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* S3, 21, 4 (2011): 501.

³⁰ Yap, “Sex and Stereotypes,” 86.

³¹ Clancy papers, 115.

³² Rebecca Kenneison, *Playing for Malaya: A Eurasian Family in the Pacific War*, (Singapore: Memoir NUS Press, 2012), 102–4.

³³ Yap, “Eurasians in British Asia,” 489.

things in these terms in Changi, when she noted that there were “quite a number” of “Eurasian and native girl friends” of Japanese guards.³⁴ White women claimed to have autonomy and rights over their bodies, while insisting that Asian or Eurasian women were outlets for men’s sexual needs. They framed this as a reflection of the “degraded” or “willing” nature of Asian women. This helped them maintain their own place in both British and Japanese racial and gender hierarchies and the prestige of white womanhood. Many white women had not experienced the gendered and racialized violence of colonialism until the occupation. Their status as white civilians protected them from the sexual brutality that many believed was natural for Asian and Eurasian women to endure. It is little wonder, then, why Sheila Allan exalted and emulated camp commandant Dr. Hopkins, not only in her personal admiration and desire for her, but by following her into the medical profession. The performance of white womanhood offered protection.

While condemning Asian women, some white women “tried on” and mocked various “ethnic” identities during internment, dressing up as Indian, Chinese, and Javanese women during theatrical performances.³⁵ White women condemned Eurasians as a threat to white prestige while also claiming the ability to play with racial boundaries for their own amusement.³⁶ This racial drag, which often relied on broad Asian stereotypes, imitated and mocked not only many of their fellow prisoners and former British subjects living outside the camps—but their captors as well. This made both Asian captors and Asian captives on the same “side”—the butt of the joke and the method through which white people found a way to “escape” and reassert power. Despite such realities, some white internees, such as Constance Sleep, felt that the war and occupation created interracial solidarity because “The natives...had a bad time” including “hunger, degradation, and often torture.”³⁷ However, this sense of “shared suffering” proved illusory as it did not extend to the postwar period. Sleep returned home to England by the October of 1945. By contrast, Sheila Allan described how Eurasians had “more or less got forgotten, put aside for the time being” because “they were busy repatriating, transporting all of the others first.”³⁸ Racial hierarchies returned to British colonial Singapore with even greater force after “liberation.” Sheila Allan looked back on Changi as a time that she endured *less* discrimination than when she moved to Australia after

³⁴ Sleep papers, 13, 17.

³⁵ Allan papers, 33.

³⁶ Alison Oram, *Her Husband Was a Woman! Women’s Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 2013).

³⁷ Sleep Papers, p. 23.

³⁸ Interview with Sheila Bruhn, Australians at War Film Archive number 1998, University of New South Wales (2004), part 7, 38:30. Henceforth UNSW interview.

the war. She recalled that in the camps, “Anybody that the Japanese considered not Japanese was interned, they were all alien.”³⁹

After the war, newspapers filled with tales of white husbands, wives, and children reuniting after suffering the indignities of captivity.⁴⁰ Endless films, articles, and memoirs emphasized the brutality of Japanese guards towards captives—including beatings, food shortages, and disease.⁴¹ These tended to overlook or exclude that Japanese guards themselves lived in such conditions, and that allied attacks on shipping exacerbated shortages. Those that mentioned that Asian women had been in camps—and vastly outnumbered white women—still exclusively included white women in the visual accompaniments. Especially worthy of comment was the outrage of white women doing manual labor in Asia. Betty Jeffrey, a white Australian nurse, wrote a famous novel entitled *White Coolies*—which emphasized the upheaval of racialized labor during the Japanese Occupation.⁴² “Coolies,” in the minds of most white Europeans, meant Asian labor. Foregrounding whiteness underlined that “White Coolies” were against the “natural” imperial order of British colonialism. Photographs and newspaper articles frequently depicted white women’s experiences in prison camps after liberation to emphasize that servility—especially in the service of an Asian “enemy”—were at odds with white femininity.⁴³ White imperial subjects frequently evoked coercive, racialized systems of repression closely associated with British imperial history, including slavery, to describe their confinement.⁴⁴ This left little space for depictions of women who were not white enough.

The perceived incompatibility of white femininity with manual labor influenced Sheila Allan’s treatment in the camps. She admitted that she took some undesirable jobs like sweeping the kitchen and cleaning drains in the early years of the occupation. She later maintained that racism did not play a large factor in her treatment. The only people who were not treated well, in her view, were those “who wouldn’t work or tried to get out of work.”⁴⁵ The situation often was more complex. Allan sometimes took jobs that other women did not want—and clearly

³⁹ UNSW interview, part 4, 22:30.

⁴⁰ See for example the numerous newspaper clippings in the C.A. Harness Papers, MSS. Ind. Ocn. S. 25., Bodleian Library, Oxford University.

⁴¹ See for example films such as Bruce Beresford, *Paradise Road* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1997); Jonathan Teplitzky, *The Railway Man* (Lionsgate, 2013); Angelina Jolie, *Unbroken* (Universal Pictures, 2014).

⁴² Betty Jeffrey, *White Coolies* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1954).

⁴³ See Harness papers.

⁴⁴ Clancy noted that white women “were put in the coolie lines” and would no longer “retain their former prestige.” Clancy papers, wallet 2 of 3, 360. Constance Sleep complained about doing “heavy work usually done by coolies.” Her husband, Arthur Sleep, claimed that those in the men’s camp were “treated worse than slaves.” Sleep papers, 3, 16.

⁴⁵ UNSW interview, part 3, 32:00 and part 4, 19:45.

felt that they should have—to do. Despite Allan’s optimistic belief that her hard work prevented her from facing discrimination, many white women used racial difference to explain inherent value. Constance Sleep was certain that Eurasians were “liabilities in the Camp. They either won’t or can’t take their share of running of the Camp.”⁴⁶ This marked Allan as lazy by default and compelled her to perform “coolie” labor to prove that she deserved access to European space and the social inclusion so necessary for survival. This earned her relative exemption from the abuse that other Eurasian women faced at the hands of white prisoners. Even after the war she worked hard to become a nurse so that she would not become a “burden to anyone.” This did not save her from being told to “go back to Japan” by the former Australian servicemen she nursed.

The glorification of white womanhood as a non-laboring identity shows how racial and gender binaries gained new meaning and devotion following internment. After interpersonal battles and accusations about theft in Changi, Allan decried “What a bitchy lot of females we have become!!!”⁴⁷ Constance Sleep expressed a similar sentiment: “I regret to say that I’m beginning to hate my own sex living for years in such close proximity to them...It is appalling!” She speculated that “the men on the other side of the Camp are feeling just the same about their sex.”⁴⁸ The lack of gender diversity in camps caused reverence and even nostalgia for prewar gender order. Veronica Clancy noted that changing gender norms shocked many of the internees. Throughout the occupation, clothing shortages were endemic. Constance Sleep observed that women had to work “in the blazing sun, many of them wearing hardly any clothes.”⁴⁹ Women had no privacy because frail undergarments could only be “discreetly veiled” which proved difficult “when doing chores.” As a result, when Clancy heard postwar news of “A nudist colony near Sydney” it was “staggering. After living in what was practically a nudist colony for so long we couldnt [sic] understand ‘Why’ anyone would voluntarily go around in their birthday suits.”⁵⁰ Interned women, according to Clancy, craved the opportunity to cover up. Internment meant that internees missed subtle shifts in gender norms. Upon liberation, Clancy even recalled seeing a strange sight: “two figures in grey...what ever is the uniform?” Before long they recognized a fellow nurse, and were “dumfounded, [sic] what on earth had happened to everything, fancy sisters in pants!”⁵¹ Nurses in wartime represented an idealized professional

⁴⁶ Sleep papers, 4.

⁴⁷ Allan papers, 123.

⁴⁸ Sleep papers, 14.

⁴⁹ Sleep papers, 15.

⁵⁰ Clancy papers, 85/625.

⁵¹ Clancy papers, 110/651.

status for women that enabled them, through delicate uniforms and gentle care, to emphasize norms of femininity and even protect themselves from sexual violence. The shift to more practical wartime attire came as a shock to those who felt deprived of the opportunity to perform prewar norms. Disgust at British and Australian culture enabling women to nurse without feminine codes represented another, if less pronounced, trauma.

For many former captives, the journey home intensified the desire to return to normal—which many cast as a return to the binaries and hierarchies that they felt eluded them in the camps. For Clancy this not only meant a desire for prewar gender norms, but a newfound confidence in prewar racial politics, such as the “White Australia” policy. She wrote: “According to Educationalists all races are equal. I do not know, but we always said that we would be prepared to do almost anything if it would help to keep Australia White. We all endorsed the Japanese idea of Asia for the Asiatics. One girl remarked, ‘Who would want to live with them, anyway’. So why not Australia for the Australians?”⁵² The surrender enabled white people who had previously occupied territory in Asia without reflection to see the potential loss of these colonies as a triumph of white solidarity instead of a humiliation. The commitment to “White Australia” after the war also meant that many who longed to flee Southeast Asia after the Occupation were unable to do so. Eurasians who tried to evacuate were often turned away even before the Occupation, and continued to face difficulties migrating after the war.⁵³ Eurasian veteran George Hess’e was refused entry to Australia, despite his service resisting the Japanese behind enemy lines in Force 136, because he was “dark skinned.” Eurasian women such as Esme Kenneison gained entry only after invasive physical inspections and her ability to “pass” as white.⁵⁴ Migration bars exposed the limitations of “shared suffering” for inclusion within the empire.

For many white soldiers and civilians, Japanese internment signified a temporary loss of status. It emboldened their feelings that if whiteness fell from its exalted status as a mark of rule, then the alternative of Black, brown, Asian, or Indigenous leadership would be even more brutal and exclusionary than European colonialism. Returning to societies marked by white supremacy, they came “home” to spaces in which whiteness offered status, inclusion, and citizenship. Memories of living beside Asian and Eurasian colonial subjects in filthy, traumatic conditions conflated these two realities—making them crave pristinely clean, and exclusively white, spaces. Internment amplified gender binaries by segregating men and women who in turn craved a return to gender diversity—if not a recognition of

⁵² Clancy papers, 6/544.

⁵³ Yap, “Sex and stereotypes,” 78.

⁵⁴ Kenneison, *Playing for Malaya*, 216, 218.

diverse genders. Asian and Eurasian subjects, meanwhile, reconciled the trauma of their experiences with memories of temporary inclusion. Chint Singh wrote from an Australian hospital upon his rescue that Australians who liberated their camp armed with much needed food and medical provisions, represented, in Chint Singh's view, their transition from "hell" to "heaven."⁵⁵ This delirious enthusiasm proved to be short lived, as colonial subjects encountered the postwar realities of delayed repatriation, migration bars, and turbulent transitions to post-colonial nation states. The Second World War offered a moment where prewar binaries felt almost meaningless. At the same time, wartime internment made alternatives to the prewar colonial world order seem even worse. Experiencing a prolonged, traumatic war created false memories, and nostalgia, for the prewar world and what it represented. Yet people like Chint Singh, who praised Australia, or Sheila Allan, who moved there, kept their dreams alive of a better tomorrow. They hoped and believed that peace would, and could, bring them a sense of inclusion without brutality, a place in the sun without suffering.

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⁵⁵ Singh papers, 61.

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PART 4

Respectability and Deviancy

Pigsticking: The ‘Noble’ Indian Boar and Colonial Constructions of Elite Masculinity

Erica Wald

Abstract

Sport was central to the lives of European officers serving in India. To many, pigsticking, or hunting of wild boar on horseback with spears, represented the pinnacle of elite European sport. This was the result of a number of the sport’s perceived qualities, not least of which was the nature of the prey itself. The Indian Boar was portrayed as a particularly “noble” foe—determined and bold in the face of death. Pigsticking came to represent a particular form of masculinity—one that was seen as essential for the ruling elite. The elite pigsticking coterie were particularly well connected socially, politically and militarily. This chapter explores the ways in which pigsticking came to represent an important facet of rule.

Keywords: pigsticking; sport; Indian boar; elite masculinity; colonial India; British rule

In regular instalments between 1805 and 1807, Captain Thomas Williamson released the collection that would become *Oriental Field Sports*.¹ Subscribers received billowing folio sheets, with illustrations drawn by Samuel Howitt.² These were dramatic, not simply for their imposing size. Each graphically illustrated the various (largely blood) sports which “gentlemen in the East” engaged in. Williamson addressed the preface “not merely to the Sportsman”, but to the broader British reading public, who, he guessed, would be eager for a narrative of adventure in Britain’s newly

¹ Thomas Williamson, *Oriental field sports: being a complete, detailed and accurate description of the wild sports of the East, and exhibiting, in a novel and interesting manner, the natural history of the elephant, rhinoceros, the tiger, the leopard, the bear, the deer, the buffalo, the wolf, the wild hog, the jackall, the wild dog, the civet, and other undomesticated animals: as likewise the different species of feathered game, fishes and serpents. The whole interspersed with a variety of Original, Authentic and Curious Anecdotes, taken from the Manuscript and Designs of Captain Thomas Williamson, who served upwards of Twenty Years in Bengal.* 1819).

² *Ibid.* The book was reprinted in 1808, and again in 1819, before being reprinted again later in the century (and indeed again in the twentieth century).

expanding empire.³ He assured his readers that his work was, “not intended for the ignorant, but for the more enlightened circles of the community...[as his details] may be corroborated by numbers in the first ranks of society.”⁴ Williamson promised something for everyone—a description of the chase for the British “Nimrod”; accounts of the Indian landscape for the nature enthusiast; snippets of history and philosophy for the budding Orientalist; and, to catch the rest, an account of customs and general “novelties”. In Williamson’s work and the many memoirs of European life in India which followed over the next century, often the most striking features of India were its “wild” ones: from snarling beasts of the forest, to the white ants who would eat the bed from under you while you slept.⁵ This, combined with a presentation of the “novelty” of Indian life stressed to British readers that India was most decidedly *foreign*, but was critically, at the same time, knowable and conquerable.

For Williamson, and the elite Anglo-Indian cadre that he had circulated in, sport was central—the grand trunk from which all other branches of life in India grew. *Oriental Field Sports* was an early example of the sporting memoir—one which showcased the range of sporting activities which an Englishman in India might (or, perhaps more accurately, *should*) enjoy. The Indian sporting memoir, of which Williamson’s was one of the earliest, was an immensely popular genre and an important and formative way through which the broader British public consumed ideas about India. Sporting memoirs asserted that *only* Englishmen truly, or “properly” appreciated sport in India.⁶ These texts could help illuminate these sports for the appreciative, enthusiastic reader in Britain. Indians, these texts increasingly posited, found sport to be “a drudgery” and did not fully grasp the framework in which sport might take place, and it was suggested, were incapable of managing India’s flora and fauna.⁷ Of course, European “management” mostly entailed bloody extermination, but this was framed as careful, *civilizational* management, moving India a step up the ladder of progress.

As these memoirs and the sporting magazines which followed made clear, there was an imagined hierarchy of prey, which corresponded to a ranking of the varied modes of hunting. Within this, few animals were held in as high regard as the wild

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., xi.

⁵ For an analysis of the ways in which the latter were actors in colonial politics, see Rohan Deb Roy, ‘White Ants, Empire And Entomo-Politics in South Asia,’ *The Historical Journal* 63, 2 (2020).

⁶ This marked a change from the eighteenth century, when, as John MacKenzie has noted, Europeans in India mostly participated as observers to Indian sport. See John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 170.

⁷ While this suggestion was already present in early nineteenth century memoirs, it became a more dominant narrative after the 1857 Rebellion.

boar, and the sport of hunting it, pigsticking. Indian rulers—past and present—from Maharaja Sujan Singh of Bikaner to Fateh Singh of Mewar, hunted wild boar, undermining the notion, highlighted above in sporting memoirs, that Indians were disinterested in the sport.⁸ A Rajput school image of an (unnamed) seventeenth century raja dispassionately sliding his saber into a rearing boar even featured prominently in the annual celebration of pigsticking, *The Houghunters Annual*, in 1932.⁹ However, memorialists insisted that the rules of “modern” pigsticking were shaped in such a way as to differentiate and perfect the art of the sport. Critically, Indian rulers had preferred hunting with a sword, or saber (thus, somehow nullifying their methods). Modern—British—pigsticking swapped a wooden spear for sword or saber and was, writers insisted, a different creation.

A pigsticking party generally involved three or four men, mounted on horses, supported by a veritable army of rarely-named Indian assistants. The plains and interior were the favored territories for pigsticking (Fig. 10.1), although officers went in search of boar at most stations across India. For seasoned hog-hunters, though, the best hunting grounds aligned with political topographies. The low-lying *churs*¹⁰ of Bengal and the *khadirs*¹¹ of north central India were within reach of the most important cantonments of Northern and Central India. The sport’s popularity grew exponentially in the years after the 1857 rebellion had rocked these same stations. In the second half of the nineteenth century then, elite celebrations of pigsticking can be read as one way in which the military and civil elite attempted to assuage fears of further upset and prove their unique fitness to effectively control and rule over India.

While high-ranking civil and military officers did not restrict their hunting solely to pigsticking, they were careful to insist that it represented the highest of sports, a sentiment ascribed to the particular “character” of the Indian boar. Writing his Indian memoirs over a hundred years later (but with no less enthusiasm), Robert Baden-Powell assured his readers that, “There is no doubt that pigsticking as a sport far transcends any other.”¹² Indeed, in addition to mentioning it in each of his works on India and sport, he wrote a dedicated ode to the sport, *Pigsticking; Or, Houghunting: A Complete Account for Sportsmen, and Others*.¹³

⁸ For Indian rulers and hunting, see Julie Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms: Hunting, the Environment and Power in the Indian Princely States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁹ *Houghunter’s Annual*, (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1932).

¹⁰ A *chur* is an alluvial, low-lying island, in this instance most closely associated with Bengal.

¹¹ *Khadir*, or *kadir* are alluvial riverbeds. The Kadir Cup, pigsticking’s Olympics, was held annually outside Meerut starting in 1879. Baden-Powell won the cup in 1883.

¹² Robert Baden-Powell, *Indian Memories: Recollections of Soldiering, Sport, etc* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1915), 37

¹³ Robert Baden-Powell, *Pigsticking; or, houghunting: a complete account for sportsmen; and others ... Illustrated by the author* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1889).

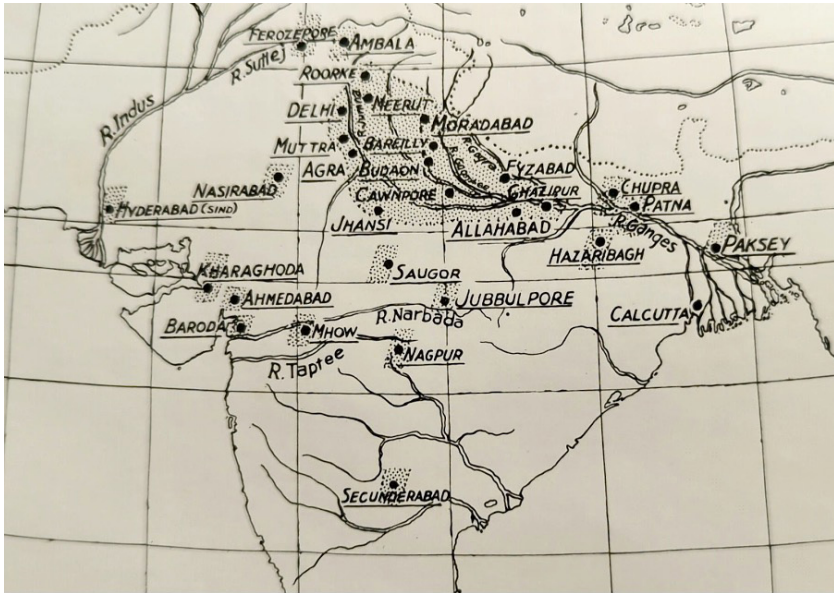


Figure 10.1. Pigsticking map. Source: *Hoghunters Annual*, 3 (1930)

In recent years, historians have examined the myriad ways in which sport, generally, and blood sport, in particular, both shaped and informed understandings of empire.¹⁴ This chapter suggests that the hunt was a significant way in which elite Europeans interacted with, and understood, the *mofussil*.¹⁵ It further suggests the ways in which pigsticking was not a straightforwardly “muscular” sport as such, but was nevertheless understood to be particularly suited to the body of the ruling elite and, moreover, was clearly read as a reflection of rule. The chapter begins to unwrap this association and explores the ways in which pigsticking served to

¹⁴ For the broader literature on sport and hunting, see Joseph Sramek, “Face Him Like a Briton”: Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800–1875,” *Victorian Studies* 48, Summer (2006); Callum McKenzie and JA Mangan, eds., *Militarism, Hunting, Imperialism: “Blooding” the Martial Male*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); Brian Stoddart, “Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, 4 (1988). The literature on pigsticking specifically is smaller, but significant. See, for example Meera Anna Oommen, “Colonial Pig-sticking, Imperial Agendas, and Natural History in The Indian Subcontinent,” *The Historical Journal* 64, 3 (2020); JA Mangan and Callum McKenzie, “Pig-sticking is the Greatest Fun”: Martial Conditioning on the Hunting Fields of Empire,” *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War Without Weapons*, ed. JA Mangan: Taylor & Francis, 2003.

¹⁵ The *mofussil* denoted the areas outside the three presidency capitals. The term implies the “up-country”, provincial areas of India. For a more detailed analysis of this understanding, see my *Everyday Empire: Social Life, Spare Time and Rule in Colonial India* (upcoming, 2025).

facilitate a particular elite social network at a time when one's "clubbability" was often determined by sporting prowess.¹⁶ It speaks to the ways in which colonial binaries were muddled by the very elite who so often elevated them.

The Sporting Memoir and Projections of Power and Adventure

While the disproportionate amount of time spent hunting (rather than "soldiering") which these memoirs reflect might strike the modern reader as unusual, for most of the officer class, this relationship was seen not simply as mutually beneficial, but was believed to make for better officers and rulers, both physically, and more critically, politically. What is striking about the majority of these texts, whether the authors were of civil or military background, is their suggestion of the ways in which particular sports shaped not simply the physical body, but the political one. Sporting memoirs bore titles which combined suggestions of power and adventure while asserting a sense of rational order and rule. Moreover, authors were clear to signal that their authority on the subject came from the positions they held within colonial governance. George Sanderson, whose authority in providing elephant catching tips for his British readers came from his position as Head of the Government's Elephant Capturing Establishment in Mysore, released *Thirteen Years Among the Wild Beasts of India*.¹⁷ Andrew Fraser, a former Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, published *Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots*, which promised armchair readers a Civil Servant's view of the Central Provinces through his encounters with elite and peasantry alike, mediated (of course) through sport.¹⁸

The number of memoirs which focused on sport and India grew exponentially after the 1857 Rebellion. In this sense, we can read these memoirs as serving a number of important functions. First, they acted as a recruitment lure for service in India through their suggestions of the life of adventure and derring-do which awaited the respectable young man who chose Indian service. Second, in their descriptions of sportsmen who remained calm, if not blasé, in the face of danger,

¹⁶ I am borrowing here from Mrinalini Sinha's arguments on clubbability, access to power and the construction of the colonial public sphere. See Mrinalini Sinha, "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: the Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India," *The Journal of British Studies* 40, 4 (2001).

¹⁷ G. P. Sanderson, *Thirteen years among the wild beasts of India: their haunts and habits from personal observation; with an account on the modes of capturing and taming elephants* (London: William Allen & Co, 1879).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Andrew H. L. Sir Fraser, *Among Indian Rajahs and Ryots. A civil servant's recollections & impressions of thirty-seven years of work & sport in the Central Provinces & Bengal ... With 33 illustrations & a map* (London: Seeley, Service & Co, 1912).

whether in the form of a charging boar, or coiled tiger, they reassured readers that such men could just as calmly “manage” any other forms of violence which might emerge in the course of service.

In his *Indian Memories*, Robert Baden-Powell indicated the critical link between “soldiering” and “sport”. He suggested that two sports in particular were the most suitable to equip young officers with the skills needed for successful leadership and imperial service—pigsticking and polo:

It is...an undoubted fact that in pigsticking and in polo...the British officer has the benefit of an exceptionally practical school for the development of horsemanship and of handiness in the use of arms when mounted, and it is a form of training, which appeals to every young officer so much that he learns for himself instead of having the knowledge drilled into him...[Polo and pigsticking] have...altered the lives and careers of many young officers. In addition to the natural training involved, they have completely driven out from the British subaltern the drinking and betting habits of the former generation, and given him in place of these a healthy exercise which also has its moral attributes in playing the game unselfishly; and above all, in the practice of quiet, quick decision and dash that are essential to a successful leader of men.¹⁹

This connection is perhaps more honest and appropriate than Baden-Powell would have recognized. Both sports were linked by horsemanship, which held its own associations with the upper class. However, pigsticking in particular presents us with an excellent analogy for imperial conquest and rule.²⁰ It was a blood sport, conducted by a small group of European officers (usually three to four). They often justified the hunt as conducive to the further “civilization” of “wild” India—clearing out the voracious pigs destroying the crops of farmers unable to protect the fields which provided their livelihoods—and thus ‘enabling’ the spread of useful cultivation. In their task, they were assisted by the above-mentioned unnamed (and often unacknowledged), army of Indians, engaged in what was often the most dangerous work of “beating” the fields to flush out the boar. This group was led by a smaller number of trained Indian hunters, the *shikari*,²¹ themselves under the “guidance”

¹⁹ Baden-Powell, *Indian memories.*, 30–1

²⁰ Of course, one can draw a similar conclusion with polo. Modern polo had its origins in Manipur, where the game was enjoyed by local elites. A combination of British military elites and tea planters appropriated the game, “refining” and “perfecting” it (in their view) and wrote a formal set of rules. It was quickly adopted by cavalry units across India and exported to England (and beyond).

²¹ The term “shikari” itself went through a process of colonial transformation. While originally (in Anglo-Indian understanding) the term implied a lower caste Hindu hunter who made his living trapping animals, it came to mean both the Indian hunter who accompanied Europeans on the hunt (often to track and plan the hunt) and was further appropriated as a general, catch-all term applied

of the European hunt leader. The sport was not overly reliant on physical prowess, but instead “experience” of the Indian landscape and implicit understanding of the intentions of fellow hunters was deemed to be more critical for success.

Pigsticking was seen to not only build certain qualities necessary in an officer, but it also facilitated career advancement through facilitated career advancement through the social network of avid pigstickers and the tent clubs formed to support them. Thomas Gordon, whose India experiences (more unusually) traversed between Civil and Military posts, formed a number of friendships through hunting that would serve his career well.²² The regular hunting parties that he joined soon introduced him to more senior officers. Through his position in the Poona Tent Club, where he served as Master, Gordon attracted the attention of his higher-ranking officers. Upon his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, General Sir William Mansfield offered Gordon a staff position as Persian interpreter in May 1865. Gordon’s period of staff service was one of duty heavily mixed with leisure. Through pigsticking, Gordon formed friendships with, among others, Lord Mayo (who offered him a staff position) and Sir Alfred Lyall, then Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Provinces.²³ In 1884, after being appointed Brigadier General of the Rohilkand District, he spent the summer months in Naini Tal, where Lyall invited him to meet the Viceroy and Lady Dufferin, during their visit to Lucknow. These social meetings facilitated not just career advancement but supplied Gordon with extra credibility for his proposals for particular reforms within the army.

Hierarchies of Hunter and Hunted

As Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani have argued, human/animal entanglements permeated every aspect of life in the British Empire.²⁴ Just as there were hierarchies of prey and methods of hunting in Europe which had been, figuratively, shot through with class narratives, so too was this replicated, or fabricated, in India.²⁵ Both the Indian *shikari* and the lower-class European soldier, when not

to the hunt itself. See Henry Yule, Arthur Burnell, and W Crooke, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases: And of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical, and Discursive* (London: John Murray, 1886), 827.

²² Thomas Edward Sir K. C. B. Gordon, “A Varied Life: A Record of Military and Civil Service, of Sport and of Travel in India, Central Asia and Persia, 1849–1902,” (London: John Murray, 1906), 51

²³ *Ibid.*, 82, 211

²⁴ Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani, eds., *Animalia: An Anti-Imperial Bestiary for Our Times*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 1.

²⁵ For a history of class and sport in England, see Emma Griffin, *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain Since 1066* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007). Similarly, Steinhart argues the

under the guidance of a “gentleman” officer, were often dismissed as dangerous and threatening to the good order of Indian fauna. Both required careful management to achieve what they were “meant” to do.²⁶ Similarly, ideas of propriety, again linked to class, can be read in the animals which European soldiers were expected or permitted to hunt, when allowed to do so by their commanding officers. In the area directly around the cantonment, a soldier might take aim at squirrels, or perhaps wandering dogs.²⁷ Wandering further afield (though not too far), William Cairnes suggested that the “sporting” Tommy might find ducks or even snipe to shoot.²⁸ However, Cairnes was more unusual in this encouragement, as many observers suggested that the European soldier could not be trusted. Incidents where soldiers out hunting for the day had either killed Indian villagers or sacred animals resulted in the introduction of pass systems and the publication of detailed lists of the animals which they were forbidden to kill.²⁹

In contrast to the wanderings of the amateur soldier-hunter, pigsticking was a more structured affair, most closely associated with the upcountry masculinity of higher-ranking officers and officials. The prolific writer and magazine editor Joachim Stoqueler noted,

Excepting jackals-hunting and snipe shooting, very little field sport is to be enjoyed in the immediate neighbourhood of the Presidency towns...it is the exclusive privilege of the dweller in the interior or among the hills...But those who have lived long in India seldom hesitate to give a preference to life in the Moffusil, for there is endless pleasure in shooting and hunting, and health is promoted by the activity they demand.³⁰

ways in which the Black hunter in colonial Kenya was labeled as a “poacher” while elite whites were granted the title of “hunter”. See Edward I. Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi: EAEP; Athens: Ohio University, 2006).

²⁶ Meera Anna Oommen argues that the relationship between the shikari and European hunter was a fluid, though asymmetrical one and that both groups worked the relationship to their advantage. See Oommen, “Colonial Pig-sticking, Imperial Agendas, and Natural History in The Indian Subcontinent,” 639.

²⁷ It is telling that these dogs were referred to using a derogatory, caste-based term.

²⁸ “A British Officer” [W.E. Cairnes], William Elliot Cairnes, and Richard Caton Woodville, *Social Life in the British Army* (London: Harper & Brothers 1899).

²⁹ See, for example, the Kausauli cantonment handbook for details of the pass system for soldiers and the lists of animals and birds which they were forbidden from shooting. Cantonment Committee Kasauli, *Hand Book of the Kasauli Cantonment* (Kasauli Cantonment Committee 1923), 47–53. For more on the sporting activities of the rank-and-file, see my *Everyday Empire: Social Life, Spare Time and Rule in Colonial India* (upcoming, 2024).

³⁰ J. H. Stocqueler, *India; Its History, Climate, Productions, and Field-Sports; With Notices of European Life and Manners, and of the Various Travelling Routes* (London: George Routledge & Co,

Hence, those in the city had the pleasure of “society” while the *mofussil* provided more satisfactory opportunities to partake in sport. We can read this dismissive view of Presidency “society” in several ways. First, this was a view heavily informed by understandings of race— that Indians lacked the intellect or wit to contribute meaningfully to “proper” (read: European) society. Second, this was a gendered view which saw the “society” of the cities and larger towns as dominated by and for the wives of higher-ranking officials.

This exercise in ordering also extended to the animal world. In the case of India, three animals ranked at the top of this taxonomy: the elephant, the tiger and the boar.³¹ While Europeans hunted elephants for a brief period during the nineteenth century, as Jonathan Saha has argued, they were primarily used as instruments and ornaments: serving in the army and later timber industry, all the while associated with the pomp and pageantry of rule—both Indian and European.³²

The final animal of this Indian triumvirate, the wild boar, gained its place due to the hunting passions of the colonial elite. Enthusiastic pigstickers layered qualities on the wild boar which secured this ranking. While tigers (slain, or coiled and leaping) and caparisoned elephants featured prominently in sporting accounts and paintings and occupied a particular place in British imaginings of India, in terms of “worthy prey”, the pig outranked both. Perhaps astonishingly, many memoirs dismissed the tiger in a back-handed fashion. While a boar was ‘more daring than any animal in the jungle’,³³ a tiger, though deadly, was “cowardly” sneaking into villages to pick off easy prey, whether cattle or hapless villagers. Alternatively, it

1853), 130. India was administered from its three “Presidency” capitals—the cities of Calcutta (Bengal), Madras and Bombay.

³¹ MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting Conservation and British Imperialism*, 178. There is a rich and growing historiography on animals and imperialism. For a cross-animal/cross species examination see Jonathan Saha, *Colonizing Animals: Interspecies Empire in Myanmar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On elephants, see Jonathan Saha, “Colonizing Elephants: Animal Agency, Undead Capital and Imperial Science in British Burma,” *BJHS Themes* 2, (2017). Sujit Sivasundaram, “Trading Knowledge: The East India Company’s Elephants in India and Britain,” *The Historical Journal* 48, 1 (2005). On tigers, see Kate Brittlebank, “Sakti and Barakat: The Power of Tipu’s Tiger. An Examination of the Tiger Emblem of Tipu Sultan of Mysore,” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 2 (1995); Sramek, “‘Face Him Like a Briton’: Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800–1875”; Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher, “Picturing the Indian Tiger: Imperial Iconography in the Nineteenth Century,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 42, 3 (2014).

³² Jonathan Saha, “E is for Elephant,” *Animalia: An Anti-Imperial Bestiary for Our Times*, eds. Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), 57.

³³ Robert H. Elliot, “Gold, Sport, and Coffee Planting in Mysore. With Chapters on Coffee Planting in Coorg, the Mysore Representative Assembly, the Indian Congress, Caste, and the Indian Silver Question. Being the 38 Years’ Experience of a Mysore Planter,” (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1894), 154

might “slink” into the jungle or up a tree. More damning still, a tiger might have the audacity to *hide* from hunters. A tiger used its weapons—its teeth and powerful claws—brutishly, while the boar managed its “nimble” tusks with nobility and fearlessness.³⁴

In much the same way that European ethnographers applied certain “characteristics” to India’s regions and peoples, so too were boar from different parts of India ascribed different characteristics. The hogs of Bengal, fed largely on sugarcane, were “very large, lusty and savage”³⁵ while the pigs of the Deccan were more measured, and better able to run over long distances and difficult terrain. Oommen has suggested the ways in which the hunters’ understanding of these boar varieties was later absorbed by naturalists.³⁶ However, for the purposes of this chapter, what is significant is the ways in which the Indian boar was anthropomorphized—assigned a number of emotional and social characteristics, the most important of which (in the eyes of pigstickers) was its ostensible “nobility”. As opposed to the “common” pig snuffling through the forests of England, the Indian boar was “fine, upstanding, active and courageous.”³⁷ Indian boar were ascribed an intelligence that other animals were not. Humorous illustrations, such as the one featured in the *Hoghunter’s Annual* of 1939, wryly suggested the parallels between hunter and hunted. (Fig. 10.2) Two boar sit comfortably in a study, wisps from their tusks suggesting cigars, boasting of their exploits. They are surrounded by pictures of the hunt, crossed spears mounted on the wall and, most prominently, two human mounts of their “prey”. The parallels and characteristics even further drew the suggestion of equivalence in the boar / human battle. The boar had the same qualities celebrated by this band of martial elite and was therefore the most worthy “opponent” in battle.

A boar was also valued for its unpredictability. Rather than run in a straight line, it might suddenly “jink”—turn on its pursuer, mid-chase—and make a charge for the man (and his horse). Finally, unlike “lesser” prey, a boar died fighting until the last moment and without a sound.³⁸ For these military observers, this last point was the most significant in the construction of the boar as a properly worthy adversary. Boar were brave, even in the face of certain death, and this allowed them to rank higher than India’s other, larger, game. Hence the boar’s qualities—of intelligence, bravery and dedication (among others) aligned with the same qualities celebrated by the

³⁴ See, for example, Henry Shakespear, *The Wild Sports of India; with detailed instructions for the Sportsman, to which are added remarks on the breeding and rearing of horses, and the formation of light irregular cavalry* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), 35

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 51

³⁶ Oommen, “Colonial Pig-sticking, Imperial Agendas, and Natural History in The Indian Subcontinent,” 645.

³⁷ Baden-Powell, *Indian Memories.*, 37

³⁸ “Varieties of Indian Sport,” *Murray’s* 6, (1889), 64



Figure 10.2. “Snaffles” [Charles Johnson Payne], “I got that one near Meerut,” *Hog Hunters Annual*, 12 (1939).

colonial ruling elite. Thus, ascribed on the boar, he could then be hunted and killed, his numbers carefully managed, for the effective management of the countryside.

For the benefit of readers in England, writers also compared fox hunting with pigsticking. Both were framed as undoubtedly the preserve of the elite, however, the champions of pigsticking assured readers that this sport was far superior in every way—not simply for the character of the prey, but for the way in which hunters interacted with each other. Fox hunting was painted as a more passive sport—a (human) participant could simply enjoy the hunt for the promise of an active gallop through the countryside, or for the stylish clothing one was expected to wear on the hunt. In another paean to pigsticking, *The Sport of Rajas*, Baden-Powell insisted,

“In pig-sticking every man rides to hunt, whereas in fox-hunting the majority (although for some occult reason they will seldom own to it) hunt to ride.”³⁹ In this assertion, pigsticking required *active* participation from every participant and the true pigsticker was not concerned with such fripperies as clothing. By virtue of the small numbers of men on each hunt, it was also valued for its exclusivity.⁴⁰

The actual logistics of the pigsticking hunt belie this exclusivity. The *shikari* was accompanied by his own assistants. A *puggee*, or trained tracker, was required to detect the pig’s prints, or *pugs*. Coolies carried boxes of tents, guns, ammunition, and other assorted supplies—which stretched beyond the food for meals to casks (and casks!) of port and other imported alcohols. The *shikari* was responsible for arranging the labor of up to 100 villagers as beaters to “beat” the cover in an attempt to force the boar from its hiding place. In some hunts, drummers were employed for the same end. The pay for these men was low—normally two pice per day—and they were required to work from before dawn until mid-day.⁴¹ More worryingly, these men were often the most vulnerable to attack, often gored by the razor-sharp tusks of the boar, with the chase often halted to attend to one of these grizzly gorings.

There was a clear, proscribed set of rules for the hunt. At no point, unless the life of the hunter was in danger, was a gun to be used to dispatch the pig. Instead, the boar was to be impaled with a spear, the length and weight of which varied from region to region. Sows were to be avoided, and pregnant sows especially so. The rules for the Tarra Hog Hunt (formed by officers stationed in Mymensingh, Faridpur and Jumulpur)⁴² noted that members who *knowingly* speared a sow were required to pay a gold mohur, and any member who shot a hog (as opposed to using a spear, except in the case of protecting his own life), would be expelled from the club for this “unpardonable and unsportsmanlike offence.”⁴³ Once the boar was on the run (pursued by the group on horseback), the aim of each hunter was the “first spear”—to be the first in the group to spear the boar and draw blood. This wound was the most highly prized, but it was not usually fatal for the boar. The mechanics of “sticking” the pig were also complex. Instead of throwing the spear at the boar, a rider had to come parallel (or on top of) the boar (putting his horse’s torso and legs at risk) and spear the boar through its shoulder blades (and into the heart). Memoirs made particular note of this proximity. Unlike hunting with rifles, part of the allure of pigsticking was this very closeness.

³⁹ Robert Baden-Powell, *The Sport of Rajahs* (Toronto George N Morang & Company, 1900), 8.

⁴⁰ This counting only included the elite hunters, blurring or barely acknowledging the presence of the many others who facilitated the hunt.

⁴¹ Williamson, *Oriental Field Sports*, 36.

⁴² Present day Bangladesh.

⁴³ J. H. Stocqueler, *The Bengal Monthly Sporting Magazine* (Calcutta: Printed by William Rushton, 1833), March, 225

At the same time that writers proclaimed the boar's innate nobility, it was equally painted as malicious vermin, devouring crops and harassing villagers incapable of preventing an "infestation" of their numbers.⁴⁴ Boar often fed or grazed in cultivated fields—mainly rice, sugar or corn. These were typically laid out near villages, and certainly close to human habitation. Sugar cane was widely suggested to be the boar's favorite food. The crop required fertilization with manure and well-tilled ground to flourish and was normally planted near villages with wheat, barley or grains planted around it. Greater numbers of boar took up residence in the fields between November and March when farmers began the harvest.

The season with the greatest number of opportunistic boars was, accordingly, the time when most farmers were occupied in the fields. While some villages turned toward professional *shikari* to rid their crops of boar, others turned to the nearest cantonment. European accounts were careful to portray this relationship as another example of European benevolence, "protecting" India by clearing areas "infested" with boar to allow for the progress of civilization—in the form of cultivation. Many memoirs went further to suggest that pigsticking, and hunting more broadly, was driving forward the march of civilization in India. This, they argued, was due to the fact of lands being cleared of troublesome boar (or tigers), allowing villagers to grow profitable crops on the land. Stocqueler enthused,

While formerly there was a howling wilderness, now villages have sprung up, and the land is cultivated, and the jungle cleared; the march of civilisation has made inroads on the domains lately sacred to the tiger and the bear.. The natural consequence of all this is, that the tigers have been obliged to retreat before the approach of civilisation, and where formerly there were hundreds, you now will not find one...⁴⁵

Recounting a similar story of a particular band of hog pests, Major General Burton wrote that the pack were so voracious that "no grain field was safe from their ravages."⁴⁶ Ignoring village watchmen sat out to protect the crops (even as they flung stones at them, or chased them with cudgels), the pigs would simply trundle to another corner of the field to carry on eating, or worse, charge the villagers. As suggested above, two themes emerge from these narratives. First, Indian villagers were incapable of protecting their own well-being (and that of their crops) from these aggressive pests of the natural world. Second (therefore), the pigsticker was a benevolent protector and savior of India's villagers, and their crops, doing what

⁴⁴ Edmund Francis Burton, *Reminiscences of Sport in India* (London: WH Allen, 1885), 172

⁴⁵ Stocqueler, *India; Its History, Climate, Productions, And Field-Sports; With Notices of European Life And Manners, And of the Various Travelling Routes*, 136

⁴⁶ Burton, *Reminiscences of Sport in India*, 173

they were “unable” to do themselves. In this way, pigsticking was neatly inserted into ideas of benevolent colonial governance following a narrative which paralleled that of the colonial control of “man-eating” big cats.⁴⁷ European rule enabled the “axe and the plough” to reclaim the jungle, forest and wastes of India, while the European sportsman completed this process by holding its wild animals in check.⁴⁸ Hence, in this vision, leisure and political power were two sides of the same coin.

For writers such as Stocqueler, the civilizing process of clearance could not be accomplished by an Indian hunter. The caste status of the *shikari* was often remarked on in memoirs. Caste was certainly an enduring obsession for European writers and observers of India, however, the language used around caste in the memoirs repeats a broader pattern which used caste to suggest the one-dimensionality of Indian subjects. Hence, the *shikari* was only able to hunt, the *puggee* only able to track, the *dhobie* only able to wash, and so on. In 1822, Daniel Johnson wrote, “Although there are very few natives in India who sport often for amusement, there are great number whose profession or business is solely to catch or kill animals and game, by which they gain their livelihood; these men [whose forefathers have followed the same profession] are brought up to it from their infancy, and as they pursue no other business through life, they become surprisingly expert.”⁴⁹ Countering this image of the ancient Ford Production Line, was the robust, *multi*-talented European sportsman, who not only perfected the art of killing, but, it was implied, more impressively did so as a side-line, a *hobby*.

When not in the employ of Europeans, the *shikari* was often maligned for killing prey around a village to levels which rendered it more difficult for Europeans to find game.⁵⁰ Indian hunting activities were also used to make a more pointed political commentary. In the debates over the Arms Act, one Mysore planter suggested that because of more guns being in Indian hands, there were fewer animals available to European hunters.⁵¹

⁴⁷ For the ways in which the narrative of the man-eater was politically crafted, see Shafqat Hussain, “Forms of Predation: Tiger and Markhor Hunting in Colonial Governance,” *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 5 (2012), 2.

⁴⁸ Stocqueler, *India; Its History, Climate, Productions, And Field-Sports; With Notices of European Life And Manners, And of the Various Travelling Routes*, 129

⁴⁹ Daniel Surgeon Johnson, *Sketches of Field Sports as followed by the Natives of India. With observations on the Animals, etc.* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1822), 1

⁵⁰ See, for example, Burton’s description of the area around Secunderabad where he dismisses the “poaching natives, of a low and rowdy character, who continually sally forth from the cantonment and shoot any and everything they can get hold of.” Burton, *Reminiscences of Sport in India*, 328

⁵¹ See, for example, the commentary of Robert Elliot, who remarked that due to the “number of guns in the hands of the natives, the game within [the reach of a planter] has been mostly destroyed”. Elliot, “Gold, Sport, and Coffee Planting in Mysore. With Chapters on Coffee Planting in Coorg, the

While lower caste *shikari* were often paid by villages to trap particular animals (for example, big cats or wild boar), those performing this more traditional role were dismissed by memorialists either as “poachers” or unskilled brutes for their use of nets and traps. Writers were quick to note that the Indian *shikari*’s methods of trapping or killing pigs were inferior to the “noble and manly sport” of Europeans hunting on horseback.⁵² Instead, *shikari* found their “rightful” place when employed in a servile relationship by British hunters. Major Shakespear insisted, “I never allow my shikarees to shoot. If I did wish to have a man to shoot with me, I would not allow him to carry my rifle.”⁵³ Instead, the role of his *shikaris*, he suggested, was firmly embedded in the master-servant relationship, a man always ready to hand him a loaded rifle and be able to clean it.

In common with their portrayal of working-class (or poor) peers in England, *shikari* required superintendence, without which they were either portrayed as “low and rowdy” “poachers” who hunted indiscriminately (as opposed to the upper-class European “sportsman” who ostensibly went forth with a sense of selection), or vital but one-dimensional accompaniments to the European huntsman. Memoirs portray the careful organization of the hunt—implying a sense of thought and planning that it was suggested the Indian *shikari* lacked. There are obvious parallels between the way in which the *shikari* and the Indian sepoy were portrayed. The men’s masculinity and knowledge of the task at hand was evident, but both were painted as one-dimensional and unable to truly “lead” or manage. The *shikari*’s sole purpose was tracking and hunting. Thought and forward planning was, on the other hand, the preserve of the European.

Conclusion

While hunting had long held a place of importance for Indian rulers, the way in which European observers portrayed ruling interactions with the hunt changed by the nineteenth century. Princely hunting was, these memoirs asserted, mere “spectacle”. The prince within this pomp was a passive, if not lazy, participant. In contrast, they asserted the importance of modern, active, and engaged sport, preferably with an opponent who was well-matched. Modern pigsticking fit this bill.

Mysore Representative Assembly, the Indian Congress, Caste, and the Indian Silver Question. Being the 38 Years’ Experience of a Mysore Planter.”, 452

⁵² Johnson, *Sketches of Field Sports as followed by the Natives of India. With observations on the Animals, etc.*, 48

⁵³ Shakespear, *The Wild Sports of India.*, 19

The emotional qualities assigned to the Indian wild boar—fierce, yet noble—meant that it occupied a particular place in the pantheon of Indian animals. Of particular relevance to this volume is the fact that the framing of the boar, and elite engagement with it, continually defied binaries. It was at once the most noble beast of the *kadir* and an aggressive pest whose path of destruction threatened colonial modernity. More critically for the hunter, it meant that it was the most fitting foe for the ruling elite. Through a proliferation of popular sporting memoirs, keen pigstickers were portrayed as multi-talented, active, thinking sportsmen. The qualities which the ruling elite needed to meet and defeat a boar in the field were the same as those needed to manage and control an unpredictable and potentially rebellious landscape.

The rise in popularity of pigsticking came at a particular political moment for the British in India. Lingering anxieties fed ideas about what kind of man was needed to rule an unruly, unpredictable India. The intelligent, sharp-witted officer, who was, nevertheless able to follow the directives of his superiors (whether they be in Calcutta or in a *kadir* in Meerut), was framed as confidently capable, able to manage the approaching tusks of a boar as easily as he could possible political jinks.

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The Many Lives of the “European Vagrant” in Colonial Singapore, c. 1890–1940

Zhi Qing Denise Lim

Abstract

Amidst mounting anxieties surrounding European vagrancy across Asian port cities, a murder in Hong Kong constituted a tipping point in the push for vagrancy legislation in colonial Singapore, resulting in the enactment of the 1906 Vagrancy Ordinance. This chapter examines the ways in which the “European vagrant” in Singapore was constructed in relation to notions of work, cleanliness, and space, by law and in the English-language press. The imagined European vagrant body thus given corporeality, was contested by alleged vagrants and used, in times of economic downturn, by commentators and impoverished Europeans alike to make claims to respectability. Using newspapers, colonial records, letters, memoirs, and fiction, this chapter shows how discourses on the European vagrant body exemplified the relational character of seemingly dichotomous categories, not least that of respectable-disreputable, that were simultaneously ascribed to and juxtaposed against it.

Keywords: vagrancy; whiteness; colonial Singapore; British Empire; Hong Kong; racial prestige

These haunt the grogshops with eye alert for Tommy Atkins, or Jack Ashore with pockets flush. They toil not, neither do they spin. They lower the status of Europeans in Oriental eyes. They stop people on the streets to beg for money which, if forthcoming, they spend in drink and, in some places, they terrorise women into giving them money for the same purpose. The terrible event at Hongkong shows to what an extent some of them are capable of going.

—“The Beachcomber,” *Straits Times*, 12 January 1905.

On 11 January 1905, three young “European” beachcombers, Charles Smith, Erik Hogman, and William Nason, were executed in the British colony of Hong Kong. During an attempt to steal a sampan to travel to Singapore in November 1904, the unemployed seamen had, “willfully and maliciously with aforethought,” killed

a Chinese boatwoman in Victoria Harbour.¹ In Singapore, the murder trial, the sentence, and the execution were extensively covered in leading English-language newspapers.² The murder, apparently illustrative of an Asia-wide European vagrancy crisis, set off a slew of commentaries in the Singapore press decrying white beachcombers in the “Far East”, whose presence, as argued in these pieces, was injurious to racial prestige. Legislation to deter such “undesirable” Europeans from the shores of “Far Eastern” ports seemed more urgent than ever. Accordingly, the Vagrancy Ordinance was enacted in the Straits Settlements in 1906.³

Amidst anxieties surrounding the potential diminution of racial prestige as a result of European beachcombers in the colony, the figure of the “European vagrant” came to life through stereotypes promulgated in the press and given credence by legislation. According to the prevalent cliché, the “white” vagrant was typically an out-of-work seaman or soldier, penniless and idle. He evidently consumed in excess cheap, dubious alcohol one could find in predominantly Asian-run grog shops whenever he got his hands on money and lounged in public spaces that Asians could freely access. Perceived to be drunk and disorderly, the vagrant European threatened to subvert colonial hierarchies and physically endangered both Europeans and Asians. Notably, his frequent appearance at the Esplanade—a location favored by European women for leisure strolls and gossip—“frighten[ed] the ladies to whom [he applied] for alms.”⁴

The debates about vagrant Europeans consisted of a somatic dimension, which lends itself to examining the designation of European vagrancy as deviant, as attempts by the colonial authorities at subduing the apparent disorder of European vagrancy reflected expectations of how Europeans should behave in colonial settings. Such examination reveals the construction of the European vagrant as a response to a range of concerns and anxieties, from racial prestige to Asian vagrancy, and its embodiment of a stereotype, a site of contestation, and articulation of colonial expectations. The analytical approach of “body-as-contact-zone”, posited by Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “allows us to navigate the dynamic relationship between representation and ‘reality’ and to see the work of mediation that embodied subjects perform between the domestic and the foreign, the quotidian

¹ “Murder at Hongkong,” *Straits Times*, January 4, 1905, 7.

² “Murder at Hongkong,” 7; “The Hongkong Harbour Murders,” *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, January 10, 1905, 5; “Triple Execution at Hongkong,” *Straits Times*, January 19, 1905, 8.

³ Singapore served as the seat of government of the Straits Settlements from 1832. The Straits Settlements originally consisted of Penang, Singapore, Malacca, and Dindings. Christmas Island, Cocos Islands, and Labuan were added subsequently.

⁴ *Straits Times*, March 30, 1905, 4.

and cyclical, the dynamic and the static.”⁵ As such, the discourses on European vagrancy in Singapore and other Asian ports pointed at its purported gravity, and reflected acute European anxieties surrounding the diminution of racial prestige in the eyes of the colonized, and its threat to colonial legitimacy. Yet, such discourses also illustrated colonial authorities’ wider attempts at regulating European dress and behavior vis-à-vis respectability and “deviance”, as well as how such efforts at times backfired, or were co-opted by Europeans for other agendas. Seemingly dichotomous categories were simultaneously ascribed to and juxtaposed against the European vagrant, such as those of respectable-disreputable; industrious-idle; clean-dirty; sober-drunk, etc. What seemed to be a straightforward narrative of colonial discipline towards “errant” Europeans in the name of prestige and legitimacy is hence complicated by the agency and the very instability of the European vagrant construct that at once stabilized and destabilized colonial structures of rule.

The purported contradiction of colonial middle-class expectations of industriousness, cleanliness, and self-discipline by vagrant Europeans put the precarity of imperial respectability and prestige in stark relief. Idle, begging, and indulging in excessive drinking, they evidently posed a danger to women, honest soldiers, and seamen. They were, according to the press, “men who have lost all their sense of decency and respectability as white men, who are a danger to themselves, a reproach to the Colony, and a menace to the safety of life and property.”⁶ Their exposure of alleged European weakness to the colonized evidently posed potential existential threats to the Empire at its zenith by calling into question the rhetoric of racial and/or civilizational superiority that undergirded colonial rule.⁷

The emphasis on “respectability” delineated the “interior frontiers” within the European population by marking those who fell short of performing respectability as deviant.⁸ If “deviance” articulated colonial expectations ex negativo, then the problematization of European vagrancy reiterated the lines between the acceptable and the unacceptable, even as it appeared to undermine them.⁹

⁵ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Postscript: Bodies, Genders, Empires: Reimagining World Histories,” in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 407.

⁶ “The Beachcomber,” *Straits Times*, January 12, 1905, 8.

⁷ See, in the South Asian context: Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Caste and “White Subalternity” in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009), 183; David Arnold, “European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7, no. 2 (1979): 104–27.

⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 651.

⁹ Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow posited that the analytical approach of “thinking with deviance” allows us to examine how colonial expectations were articulated or subverted. Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow, “Introduction: Thinking with Deviance,” in *Subverting Empire: Deviance and*

Press representation of European vagrants, undergirded by the law, cautioned against non-conformity to middle-class notions of respectability and industriousness, condemning the deviant vagrant as dishonest and immoral.¹⁰ It called into question the very Europeanness of supposed vagrants; they were nominally so, yet, as deviant, disreputable bodies, insufficiently so. Tracing its emergence and materialization in the wake of the Hong Kong murder and the enactment of the Vagrancy Ordinance, this chapter looks at the ways in which the *European* vagrant in Singapore was constructed, in relation to notions of work, cleanliness, and space, in the English-language press and legislation. Although the Summary Criminal Jurisdiction Ordinance 1872, and later the Minor Offences Ordinance 1906, also contained provisions for vagrancy, the first part of this chapter focuses on the Vagrancy Ordinance 1906 as it was crucial in delineating the European vagrant figure and codes of conduct expected of Europeans in a colonial setting. Equally, if not more, anxiety-inducing was “respectable” Europeans seemingly in danger of drifting into deviance in times of economic depression. The last section of the chapter discusses how the *European* vagrant figure was evoked in published appeals, newspaper reports and commentaries in the Depression years of 1930s to portray out-of-work Europeans as distinct from the vagrant and as morally impeccable and worthy of financial help. Most of the newspapers cited in this chapter, especially the *Straits Times* and the *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, were edited by Europeans. The *Straits Times*, in particular, was regarded in Singapore as a “European paper” in terms of readership and perspective.¹¹ Yet, while the construction of the European vagrant in the press as discussed in this chapter could be regarded as being from a European perspective, it is unclear the extent to which such a perspective could be considered as representative of the European population in Singapore, as the identities of those who spoke out on this issue could not always be clearly distinguished.

Vagrancy Across Asian Ports in the Nineteenth Century

Since the early nineteenth century, Singapore had struggled with managing large numbers of destitute and sick Asians. In 1848, the *Straits Times* reported having received several complaints regarding the “unsightly and diseased vagrants that

Disorder in the British Colonial World, ed. Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 8.

¹⁰ Susanne Elizabeth Davies, “Vagrancy and the Victorians: The Social Construction of the Vagrant in Melbourne, 1880–1907” (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 1990), 451.

¹¹ George L. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter* (Selangor: Eastern University Press, 1985), 26.

infest the town." Europeans' charity to these vagrant Asians, supposedly, supported "idleness and imposition", as the alms they received were allegedly spent on opium smoking. The *Straits Times* thus posited that unless a legislation was passed to curb the "constant influx" of the destitute and diseased, there could be "no chance of effectually checking an evil which duly becomes more serious."¹² Newspaper reports on destitute Chinese and other Asians in other parts of the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States, and neighboring Philippines, Batavia, and Deli reflected an apparent crisis of Asian vagrancy in southeast Asia by the end of the century.¹³ Comparable tropes of idleness, vice, and need for government intervention would reappear in the discourse on vagrant Europeans. Similar dehumanizing and derogatory language was also used to refer to European beachcombers, who were described in several newspaper articles as "parasites"¹⁴, thereby delineating the undesirability of their destitution and differentiating them from those who had fallen on hard times through "no fault of their own".

While in nearby British India a marked increase in the number of European vagrants, coinciding with an apparent spike in incidents of crime and "disorderly behavior" from the 1860s, engendered a notion that these Europeans could no longer be tolerated,¹⁵ in Singapore, as the "white" seamen population significantly increased in the 1860s, so did concerns surrounding their drunkenness and destitution. According to Roland St. John Braddell, a prominent lawyer in Singapore, there was no suitable accommodation for European seamen in Singapore at that time, hence they spent their time ashore in "the gin-shop and the tavern, so that liquor wrought havoc amongst the sailors."¹⁶ Though a temperance campaign reportedly started "in real earnest" in the 1860s,¹⁷ in 1890, the *Straits Times* reported that there had been an "appreciable increase in the number of charges brought against

¹² *Straits Times*, July 22, 1848, 2.

¹³ See, on Deli, *Straits Times*, October 14, 1886, 3; *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, October 24, 1887, 12; on Batavia, *Straits Times*, June 4, 1884, 3; on Penang, *Straits Independent and Penang Chronicle*, May 8, 1889, 4; on Malacca, *Malacca Weekly Chronicle and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 24, 1888, 2; on the Philippines, *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, September 3, 1890, 11; on Perak, "Crime in Perak," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 19, 1897, 3.

¹⁴ See for example, *Straits Times*, February 8, 1905, 4; "Beggars Banished," *Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser*, October 31, 1905, 2.

¹⁵ Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans*, 141.

¹⁶ Roland St. J. Braddell, "The Good Old Days," in *One Hundred Years of Singapore, Being some Account of the Capital of the Straits Settlements from its Foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919, Volume II*, eds. Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, Roland St. J. Braddell (London: John Murray, 1921), 501.

¹⁷ Braddell, "The Good Old Days," 501.

Europeans, particularly sailors of the loafer type.”¹⁸ Many of these charges were of vagrancy or being “drunk and disorderly”.¹⁹

In their calls for action against European seamen’s drunkenness and destitution, the papers looked to other British colonies in the region for solutions and suggested similar actions to be taken in Singapore. For one, the *Daily Advertiser* in 1891 urged the establishment of a Charitable Society modelled after one that operated in Rangoon, which accommodated seamen at the Seamen’s Rest before their removal from the city.²⁰ Neighboring Asian ports were attributed in press commentaries as the source of vagrant Europeans; in addition to those having arrived in Singapore on British, American or German sailing ships, they were “ex-soldiers from the Philippines, ne’er-do-wells from the new China railways, and broken men from every quarter”.²¹ The undesirability of itinerant Europeans was emphasized in one newspaper leader; according to the editor, the majority of “these beach combers spend their time fluctuating between Shanghai and India ... being moved on from port to port, each time at the expense of the last community plagued by their presence.”²² In an account by John Cameron, the editor of the *Straits Times* from 1861–7, Australian grooms, who were contracted to care for horses onboard ships headed for Singapore, added to the numbers of destitute Europeans as they could not find jobs after coming ashore.²³ Three things can be observed: First, the discussion of European vagrancy and the characterization of vagrant Europeans in the press mirrored the established tropes of “Asian vagrancy”. Second, the same discussion was also informed by the controversy around “low and licentious Europeans” occurring elsewhere in Asia, information of which was circulated through imperial networks. Third, the movement of vagrant Europeans, facilitated by the very imperial networks that undergirded the functioning of the British Empire, illustrates the undesirability of the mobility of *certain* Europeans as well as the valiant attempts to keep them out of the colonies for fear of tarnishing racial prestige.

¹⁸ “Vagrant Seamen,” *Straits Times*, August 25, 1890, 2.

¹⁹ *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, October 15, 1890, 3; *Daily Advertiser*, May 16, 1893, 3.

²⁰ “A Charitable Society,” *Daily Advertiser*, January 5, 1891, 2.

²¹ “The Beachcomber,” 8.

²² “Beggars Banished,” 2.

²³ John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: Being a Descriptive Account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca; Their Peoples, Products, Commerce, and Government* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1865), 281. On the perception of vagrant European grooms in India and Australia, see: Arunima Datta, “‘Pony Up!’ Managing Destitution among Grooms from Australia in British India,” *Labour History*, no. 122 (2022): 155–79.

The Making of the European Vagrant: Vagrancy Ordinance 1906

While by the end of the nineteenth century the first laws against vagrancy had been enacted in the Straits Settlements, the lobbying for authorities' intervention against European vagrancy following the murder in Hong Kong in 1904 clearly reflected press commentators' stance that these laws were wholly insufficient. Pertinently, the existing laws were considered insufficient, not because of the large numbers of vagrant Asians, but particularly because of the presence of destitute Europeans in Singapore and the surrounding region. Even as existing laws were evidently ineffectual in managing the multitude of Asian vagrants by the end of the nineteenth century, no decisive legislative action was undertaken to remedy the situation until the Vagrancy Ordinance was legislated in 1906, about fifteen months after the murder.

Evidently problematic was the prospect of destitute Europeans in British colonies in Asia and the dangers they could pose to lives, order, and crucially, racial prestige. Though the beachcomber-murderers in Hong Kong were of American and Finnish nationalities, their death sentence was hailed in Singapore press as being "an unprecedented incident, as regards to *European* criminals, in the Far East."²⁴ Commentators who had already been pushing for official measures to curb European vagrancy in Singapore capitalized on the furore over the murder, with one newspaper editor proclaiming, "Hongkong, like Singapore is the center of gravitation for the wandering beach-comber who fluctuates from port to port in the Far East, but unlike Singapore, Hongkong is making a serious attempt to banish, or rather, discourage, the white waster from its shores."²⁵ That the Vagrancy Ordinance in the Straits covered persons of all nationalities, whereas the Hong Kong legislation was intended only for "beach-combers of European and American origin",²⁶ underscores the perceived urgency in the aftermath of the Hong Kong murder to address the "problem" of vagrant Europeans.

The first vagrancy laws, commonly known as those provided by the Summary Criminal Jurisdiction Ordinance 1872,²⁷ generally defined the vagrant as someone who engaged in fortune-telling, had no means of subsistence and fixed abode, solicited donations through either exposure of injuries or deceptive means, or was

²⁴ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (Weekly)*, January 5, 1905, 12. Emphasis is my own.

²⁵ "The White Waster," *Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser*, November 11, 1905, 2.

²⁶ Short-Hand Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 1905, B 227, The National Archives (TNA), CO 275/71.

²⁷ Harry Tan, "'We Are Not Like Them': Stigma and the Destitute Persons Act of Singapore," *International Journal of Law in Context*, 17 no. 3 (2021): 318–35.

in possession of house-breaking tools or weapons.²⁸ Thus, vagrancy, under the 1872 Ordinance, and later the Minor Offences Ordinance 1906, could be seen more as a miscellaneous set of behaviors and actions. In contrast, the Vagrancy Ordinance 1906 defined the “vagrant” as someone who begged or was “not being physically able to earn, or being unwilling to work for, his own livelihood and having no visible means of subsistence.”²⁹ Vagrancy, then, was critically conceptualized in terms of work in addition to indigence, and the vagrant, under the Vagrancy Ordinance, was either the disabled or the able-bodied work-shy.

Specifically, for press commentators and legislators, the supposed (un)productivity and work-shyness of the able-bodied vagrant was central in their construction of the European vagrant figure. That such idleness was perceived to be characteristic of the destitute European was reflected in the praise for an amendment made to the vagrancy law in Hong Kong following the murder, which obligated vagrants in the House of Detention to perform manual labor: “Hongkong appears at last to have hit upon an efficacious expedient for dealing with the skulking, able bodied, white vagrants who pester her shores no less than is the case in Singapore”.³⁰ According to the newspaper article, being made to work was “just what such fellows most dread and no doubt many will prefer to clear out of the Colony rather than to work in prison or in the House of Detention.”³¹ Similarly, the Vagrancy Ordinance in the Straits—modelled after the one in Hong Kong—provided for the committal of vagrants into Houses of Detention, where they were made to work until suitable employment could be found, repatriation, or discharge.³²

Even though persons physically unable to earn their own livelihood were considered as vagrants under the Vagrancy Ordinance, the main objective of the Ordinance was, as published in the Government Gazette, “to get rid so far as possible of useless members of society, to help so far as possible, blameless decrepitude, and in cases where the decrepitude or the inability to work is of a temporary nature, to restore to health and enable the patient to regain the habit of self-support.”³³ Thus the Ordinance distinguished between “deserving” and “undeserving” poor, reminiscent of the 1834 English Poor Law. In the climate of the nineteenth century

²⁸ Charles Goodricke Garrard, *The Acts and Ordinances of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, from the 1st April 1867 to the 7th March 1898, Vol. I* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898), 284.

²⁹ *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, vol. 41, no. 17, March 9, 1906, 655.

³⁰ *Straits Times*, July 26, 1905, 4.

³¹ *Straits Times*, July 26, 1905, 4.

³² *The Laws of the Straits Settlements (Revised Edition), Volume II, 1901–1907, Revised up to and Including the 31st Day of December, 1919, but Exclusive of War and Emergency Legislation* (London: Waterloo and Sons, 1920), 235.

³³ *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, vol. 41, no. 1, January 5, 1906, 45. Houses of Detention were established in Singapore, Malacca, and Penang.

when work became central to life and its meaning, engagement in civil society was contingent on one’s capability and willingness to provide labor. Not doing so was seen as being non-compliant to the social contract, and the “deservingness” of the poor to receive assistance was differentiated by their perceived willingness and ability to work.³⁴ The disabled, aged, and sick, for example, were recognized as being unable to earn a livelihood through no fault of their own and hence deserving of help, whereas the able-bodied “undeserving poor” was characterized as irresponsible and idle for willfully refusing work. Under the Poor Law, workhouses were established, offering subsistence to the poor in appalling conditions, to avoid disincentivizing work.³⁵ The Houses of Detention in the Straits Settlements established under the Vagrancy Ordinance were neither prisons nor workhouses.³⁶ Yet, that admitted vagrants were put to work during their time in the institution and were expected to work afterwards illustrates the centrality of work in the authorities’ definition and management of vagrancy.

Another feature of the Vagrancy Ordinance was its provision for the removal of vagrants from the Straits Settlements. The vagrant could enter into an agreement with the relevant colonial authority to obtain a passage out of the Straits Settlements, with the condition of not returning within five years. Vagrants, for whom employment could not be found within “reasonable time” after admission into the House of Detention, were repatriated and liable to imprisonment should they return to the Straits. According to the Attorney-General, these clauses ideally “enable many persons of the vagrant class to leave the Colony, and we should not see them again, because if they came back, contrary to their agreement, they would be banished.”³⁷ Thus the Ordinance emphasized the undesirability of the unproductive vagrant, who evidently needed to be forced back to work or be removed from the sight of the colonized.

In official statistics, Europeans were typically enumerated in the same category as Eurasians of “mixed” European and Asian descent. It is therefore difficult to determine the exact number of Europeans who were admitted into the House of Detention as vagrants and repatriated for much of the duration under study. We can infer from Tables 11.1 and 11.2, however, that the number of Europeans convicted as vagrants and admitted into the House of Detention was exceedingly small,

³⁴ Andrew King, “Introduction: Living Work,” in *Work and the Nineteenth-Century Press: Living Work for Living People*, ed. Andrew King (Oxon: Routledge, 2023), 3–5.

³⁵ Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 46.

³⁶ Short-Hand Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 1905, B 227.

³⁷ Short-Hand Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Straits Settlements, 1905, B 227.

and they were more likely than not repatriated. The minute numbers of European vagrants, in comparison to those of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnicities, reflect in part the proportion of their populations in Singapore. According to the 1911 census, of a total population of 311,985, there were 5,803 Europeans; 4,712 Eurasians; 222,655 Chinese; 46,952 Malays; and 27,990 Indians.³⁸

Table 11.1. Number of persons admitted into the House of Detention in Singapore, 1907–1910

Year (x) (1 July, x–30 June, x+1)	Europeans and Eurasians	Chinese	Malays	Indians/ Tamils	Total
1907	7	270 ^a	1	15 ^b	293
1909	6	415	4	85	510
1910	6	179	4	38	227 ^c

Sources: Compiled from “Ordinances 6, 7, and 9 of 1906: Vagrancy; Banishment Amendment; Exclusion”, 5 November 1908, TNA, CO 273/338/43620; “Working of Vagrancy and Banishment Ordinances”, 31 August 1910, TNA, CO 273/358/29572; “Working of Vagrancy, Exclusion and Banishment Ordinances of 1906”, 14 September 1911, TNA, CO 273/371/32510.

^a including 35 men transferred from Malacca

^b including 1 man transferred from Malacca

^c including 13 transferred from Malacca

Table 11.2. Number of Europeans and Eurasians admitted into the House of Detention in Singapore, 1907–1910

Year (x) (1 July, x–30 June, x+1)	Admitted	Repatriated	Employment Obtained	Released by order of the Governor	Died
1907	7	0	2	4	0
1909	6	5	1	0	0
1910	6	0	3	2	1

Sources: Compiled from “Ordinances 6, 7, and 9 of 1906: Vagrancy; Banishment Amendment; Exclusion”, 5 November 1908, TNA, CO 273/338/43620; “Working of Vagrancy and Banishment Ordinances”, 31 August 1910, TNA, CO 273/358/29572; “Working of Vagrancy, Exclusion and Banishment Ordinances of 1906”, 14 September 1911, TNA, CO 273/371/32510.

³⁸ The figures are for the Settlement of Singapore, which includes the districts Singapore Municipality; Singapore Country; Labuan; Christmas Island; Coco-Keeling Islands. H. Marriot, *Report on the Census of the Colony of the Straits Settlements, Taken on the 10th March, 1911* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1911).

The juxtaposition of the few Europeans sent to the House of Detention against the number of Chinese vagrants is made starker when we consider that large numbers of destitute Chinese, who would have otherwise appeared in the figures above, were repatriated by Chinese charitable organizations.³⁹ The year 1909 stands out. It is shown in Table 11.2 that between 1 July 1909 to 30 June 1910, six "Europeans and Eurasians" were admitted into the House of Detention in Singapore, and five of them were repatriated. Additionally, it was notably mentioned in the annual report of the Prisons for that year that, between 1 January and 31 December 1909, "several" *European* vagrants had been committed into the House of Detention in Singapore.⁴⁰ That five out of the six "European and Eurasian" vagrants admitted into the House of Detention were repatriated attests to the tendency to repatriate these vagrants despite costs. This is not least because Europeans typically came out to the Straits only after having secured employment, as it was notoriously difficult for one to obtain "suitable" employment after arrival.⁴¹

The vagrant was identified not just by a lack of means of livelihood, but also by his/her "lack of *visible* means of subsistence."⁴² This raises questions surrounding what sort of employment was considered to provide sufficient means, for whom, and crucially, what did a vagrant *look* like? This process of identification, arrest, charge, and conviction of a vagrant was thus to criminalize a certain set of socio-economic circumstances, which arguably varied depending on one's "race".⁴³ For the European, sufficient means of subsistence typically meant financial resources to appear respectable, which was an essential criterion to being accorded "European" status.⁴⁴ Considering the colonial aversion towards the visibility of

³⁹ "Ordinances 6, 7, and 9 of 1906: Vagrancy; Banishment Amendment; Exclusion", 5 November 1908, TNA, CO 273/338/43620.

⁴⁰ *Annual Departmental Reports of the Straits Settlements for the Year 1909* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1910), 61, TNA, CO 275/81.

⁴¹ According to one account, there existed no temporary employment in Singapore which the "tramp" could be engaged in, "unless he happened upon a vacancy at the top and was capable of filling it, and such vacancies were scarce." Harry L. Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1923), 216.

⁴² *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, vol. 41, no. 17, March 9, 1906, 655. Emphasis is my own.

⁴³ Paul Ocobock, "Introduction: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective," in *Cast Out: Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective*, ed. A. L. Beier and Paul Ocobock (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), 1.

⁴⁴ In the context of colonial India, Satoshi Mizutani has explored how "domiciled Europeans" demanded employment with greater remuneration that would allow them to finance a "European" way of life, by making claims of "Europeanness." Satoshi Mizutani, "Contested Boundaries of Whiteness: Public Service Recruitment and the Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association, 1876–1901," in *Empires and Boundaries: Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender in Colonial Settings*, eds. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Susanne Gehrman (New York: Routledge, 2009), 91.

vagrant Europeans to the Asian population, destitute Europeans who could not maintain a façade of possessing a certain amount of means expected of a European in colonial settings, especially in non-“European” spaces, constituted an embarrassment. Hence, an out-of-work Englishman, who had sold his belongings in exchange for some money until he was left with “a few chairs and a couple of tables,” had to move with his family from a “respectable quarter of the town” to a so-called “hovel among Chinese squatters” during the night because he was evidently “too ashamed to let his neighbours see to what quantity his furniture had been reduced.”⁴⁵

Defining the European Vagrant

It is undoubtedly clear from newspaper reports rejoicing the enactment of the vagrancy legislation that cleanliness, industriousness, and respectability were criteria of Europeaness that vagrant Europeans ostensibly did not possess. Vagrant Europeans were typically portrayed in the press as being untidy and dirty, or disabled. For example, Charles Stirling, a former marine engineer who was sent to the House of Detention after serving a sentence for “being drunk and incapable,” was described in the press as “looking very much the worse for wear and very much in need of a bath” when he appeared before a magistrate.⁴⁶ In another instance, Frederick Crawley, a destitute Latvian whose body was found in the river, was described in a newspaper article as “a familiar figure in the streets and in public houses always shabbily clad.”⁴⁷ David Moore, a former railway worker in Bangkok who lost sight in his right eye from a locomotive spark, appeared in the dock for vagrancy as he could not find employment following surgery to remove his eye. Moore, however, was not convicted; the judge released him in evident “hope that he might get work.”⁴⁸

Harry L. Foster, writing about his experience as a beachcomber in Asia in the early 1920s, detailed the reactions of the denizens of the pre-eminent Raffles Hotel to his unkempt appearance. Foster had arrived in Singapore looking “like a wreck”; he “needed a shave,” was “yellow with fever,” and his clothes were “stained and wrinkled.”⁴⁹ “Even my sun-helmet and my camera failed to give me any semblance to respectability,” Foster lamented.⁵⁰ Upon arriving at the Raffles Hotel, he was barred from entering by a Sikh gateman, who did not salute him as he did other

⁴⁵ “Malaya’s Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed,” *Straits Times*, August 25, 1935, 17.

⁴⁶ *Straits Times*, December 17, 1915, 6.

⁴⁷ “European Found in River,” *Malaya Tribune*, June 16, 1928, 10.

⁴⁸ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 12, 1909, 5.

⁴⁹ Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 192.

⁵⁰ Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 192.

Europeans and “demanded” to know what Foster wanted. Foster bristled at being stopped, a reaction that he attributed to “the pride of the white race” but reckoned that “coming from one so unkempt it must have sounded ridiculous.”⁵¹ Foster described the reactions of Europeans on the veranda to his appearance:

A lady on the veranda surveyed me amusedly through her lorgnette. Another lady giggled. A young man stepped to the veranda rail to obtain a better view of me, and said “Ha!”—just one brief “Ha!” delivered as the English comedian might deliver it in a Broadway musical comedy, as though I were not quite deserving of a complete, “Ha! Ha!” ...

I reddened through my sallow coat of tan. I could feel my ears burning. My blood boiled.⁵²

Evidently, Foster’s unkempt appearance had earned him the derision of the Europeans and deprecation of the Sikh gateman at the Raffles; the latter being illustrative of an inversion of colonial hierarchy. Foster’s embarrassment and anger at the Europeans’ mirth towards him further reflected the typecasting of the disheveled as stripped of the respectability expected of a European in colonial settings and as a subject of ridicule.

Such a stereotype of the dirty and ill-dressed vagrant was so ingrained that it baffled other Europeans when destitute Europeans presented themselves otherwise. In such a manner, vagrant Europeans could leverage on the perceived characteristics of the vagrant to contest their alleged deviancy, and hence Europeanness, though the efficacy of such an attempt is debatable. For example, Christian Novi, a Norwegian who was charged with vagrancy in 1909, reportedly appeared in court with “no infirmity ... cleareyed, erect, and well-dressed.” Such an appearance was evidently so far removed from the popular image of a European vagrant that a reporter remarked that “it was hard to make anything of him.”⁵³ At another court hearing, an administrative cadet noted that an Englishman, who was allegedly in arrears, had seemed close to becoming a beachcomber, yet he appeared well-dressed in court.⁵⁴ That the European vagrant was associated with a certain look and whose deviation from it flummoxed Europeans suggests that the unkempt vagrant body served as a juxtaposition to the clean, well-dressed, respectable European body that was expected in colonial settings. Simultaneously,

⁵¹ Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 193.

⁵² Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 194.

⁵³ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 12, 1909, 5.

⁵⁴ Frank Kershaw Wilson, “Letters Home, January 1915–December 1916, while as Administrative Cadet, Singapore,” Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 162.

the vagrant body became a site on which claims to Europeanness could be made by “vagrants” themselves.

The Spaces of European Vagrancy and Drunkenness

Allegedly someone whose “moral fibre is not particularly strong”, the vagrant European was typically portrayed as a person who lacked restraint and spent whatever small sums he possessed on drink.⁵⁵ Additionally, he was often reported in the press as being disruptive, harassing passers-by and exerting violence against Asians.⁵⁶ Whereas “respectable” middle-class European men were given the opportunity to “rehabilitate” their “character” when they were found intoxicated in places where drunkenness was frowned upon, the perceived weakness of the drunken, working-class vagrant European instead marked them as marginal bodies in need of discipline and removal.⁵⁷ This class-biased trope was echoed in other parts of the British Empire. An article printed in the Singapore press, first published by the Calcutta-based *Empire*, attributed European vagrancy exclusively to excessive alcohol consumption among the lower classes, which allegedly reflected their weak character.⁵⁸

Examining the presence of itinerant Europeans in the very spaces they were evidently active in deepens our understanding of how class-biased anxieties surrounding their presence in a colonial setting shaped the construction of the European vagrant. Considering vagrancy as a state of being and its members commonly perceived to be former seamen and soldiers, anxieties surrounding vagrant Europeans overlapped to a great extent with those surrounding European seamen and rank-and-file soldiers’ behavior. For one, the spotlight was cast on the grog shops where vagrant Europeans, seamen, and soldiers purchased and consumed cheap alcohol, which were predominantly run by the Chinese, Indians, and a handful by “low-class” Europeans.⁵⁹ The patrons of one such grog shop was

⁵⁵ “A Charitable Society,” 2.

⁵⁶ “Vagrant Seamen,” 2.

⁵⁷ In 1909, E. Edwards, a Senior Boarding Officer of the Marine Department, was found by his colleagues to be intoxicated at work. He was liable to dismissal because he had been found drunk at work twice before and was cautioned by the Master Attendant two years prior. An enquiry was opened to investigate the charge of drunkenness. Despite being found guilty, Edwards’ reinstatement rather than dismissal was recommended by the enquiry committee as an “opportunity of re-establishing his character.” “Charges against E. Edwards,” 13 May 1909, TNA, CO 273/347/18874.

⁵⁸ “The Beachcomber in India,” *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, August 28, 1914, 2.

⁵⁹ W. H. M. Read, *Play and Politics: Recollections of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1901), 126.

described by Harry Foster as "hard-faced men in clothing as disreputable as [his] own, professional vagabonds all of them, who made their living by telling hard-luck stories to passing tourists, and who wouldn't have accepted employment if they could have found it."⁶⁰

The alcohol sold in grog shops and public houses was perceived by Europeans as dubious and deleterious to the European body; the effects were regarded as especially pernicious for soldiers and seamen. A prominent European businessman proclaimed: "The liquids which were sold in these places were, most of them, of the vilest description. Brandy was defiled with tobacco juice, and red chillies were inserted to give the spirit pungency. I know the case of the boatswain of a man-of-war, who drank only one glass of one of these concoctions, and was rendered mad-drunk, it being more than a week before he was again fit for duty."⁶¹ The imbibition of questionable alcohol prepared by Asians and other "disreputable" Europeans evidently endangered the European body and impacted his capacity for labor. Yet, such risk posed to the European's ability to work was arguably because these Europeans were excluded from "white" spaces such as hotels and clubs, which imposed entry restrictions based on profession, and by extension, class.⁶²

In addition to the alleged harmful effects of grog-shop alcohol on vagrant Europeans' health, interactions between intoxicated vagrant Europeans and Asians elicited concerns over an inversion of colonial hierarchies. This was exemplified in John Cameron's mid-nineteenth century account of an Australian groom, whose search for employment in Singapore had proven futile; the date of the account illustrates the long-standing concerns surrounding an inversion of colonial hierarchies.

I heard a disturbance proceeding from one of the low native toddy or arrack shops that are scattered through the town. I stopped to ascertain the cause, and with some difficulty obtained access to the den, where in a corner sitting up on a filthy mattress with some remnants of bedding around him, evidently unable of himself to move, was the same man who two months before had come before me with all the indications of robust health. I stooped over him, and it was a time before I could recognize him; the sunken eyes, hollow

⁶⁰ Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 200.

⁶¹ Read, *Play and Politics*, 126.

⁶² There were "four main white clubs" in Singapore, which served exclusively European clientele. Exclusionary practices were in place in the clubs; for example, the Tanglin Club, exclusively frequented by colonial officials, excluded businessmen from membership. R. C. H. Mckie, *This Was Singapore* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1942), 65; Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, 82.

Hotels similarly had in place exclusionary practices along class divisions. The Raffles Hotel, for instance, was considered by elite Europeans as a "second-rate place" as "all sorts of people went there." In contrast, the Europe Hotel was regarded as the "exclusive one for the best people in the European community" because it enforced strict social barriers. Peet, *Rickshaw Reporter*, 83.

cheeks, and sallow hue of fever were there. Perhaps dissipation had had something to do with it, but the climate and the state in which he had lived had had more. ... The poor fellow had from the first taken up his abode in that house, and at the beginning he must have been a most desirable lodger; it seems too that here he had exhausted, whether in drink or in the simple necessities of life I could not ascertain for certain, the funds which had been liberally given him in town. But his money was now done, and disease had overtaken him to the extent that prevented his seeking for more. The brutal Kling lodging-keepers who had at first been his slaves had turned upon him, and fearful lest the expenses of burial might have to be added to an already unsatisfied boarding account, they wished to turn him out into the streets. ... The scene and the circumstances were humiliating enough to any European.⁶³

As Cameron described, the former groom had stayed at a spirit shop ran by Indians and imbibed “native” drink allegedly unsuitable for the European body, which, in combination with the tropical environment and living conditions, had caused him to become weak and ill. Worryingly, the Australian, slumped on a “filthy mattress,” was at the mercy of his Indian hosts and his unkempt, exhausted figure exposed the weak, incapable European body to all who visited the shop. Racial prestige was thus tarnished, and the colonial order subverted.

Apart from grog shops, vagrant Europeans reportedly lounged in busy public spaces. The Esplanade (or the Padang, as it is called today) was one public space in which the presence of vagrant Europeans caused consternation. This was especially so, as the Esplanade was an open, rectilinear, manicured field designed to demonstrate to the colonized population how nature could be domesticated, and with the erection of several imposing buildings along its periphery—such as the Parliament House, the Cricket Club, City Hall, and the Supreme Court—the Esplanade had “deliberately evoked colonial power and discipline.”⁶⁴ It was publicly accessible and served various uses, ranging from being the playing field for cricket, to hosting royal celebrations and band performances.

The aforementioned Christian Novi, being penniless, was reported in the press as having spent his nights asleep on the grounds of the Singapore Recreation Club (SRC) on the Esplanade. According to one article, Novi refused to leave Singapore on a free passage to Penang offered by the Norwegian Consul and a ship captain. He then demanded a refund for the passage ticket, which was refused, and “went on a bender” before returning to slumber at the SRC.⁶⁵ That Novi was intoxicated

⁶³ Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, 282–3.

⁶⁴ Chee-Kien Lai, “Maidan to Padang: Reinventions of Urban Fields in Malaysia and Singapore,” *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 21, no. 2 (2010): 58.

⁶⁵ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 12, 1909, 5; *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (Weekly)*, November 18, 1909, 7.

and slept on the grounds of the SRC would have particularly perturbed the colonial authorities and other Europeans, considering the SRC comprised of Eurasian members and shared the Esplanade with the Singapore Cricket Club, whose members were elite Europeans. Not only was Novi's drunken and sleeping form visible to both colonizing and colonized populations, but his slumped figure also powerfully contradicted the colonial rhetoric of respectability, self-restraint, and racial superiority that the Esplanade was designed to evoke. Besides constituting a potential loss of racial prestige, vagrant Europeans sleeping in open space undermined the colonial authorities' efforts to exert control over public spaces; the authorities considered the regulation of behavior in public spaces to be essential in maintaining public order.⁶⁶ Whereas under the Minor Offences Ordinance persons convicted of being "drunk and incapable" or disorderly in public were typically fined or imprisoned for no more than fourteen days, Novi, who appeared in the dock for vagrancy, was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment in order to, as the press put it, "sober up."⁶⁷

The European Vagrant as an Articulation of Colonial Expectations *ex negativo*

As a significant portion of European businesses in Singapore were involved in the management of rubber estates in Malaya, the falling prices in rubber during the 1921–1922 rubber slump and the 1929 Depression saw many Europeans lose their jobs or have their wages cut.⁶⁸ Scores of Europeans employed on Malayan plantations were dismissed after rubber prices fell at the end of 1920.⁶⁹ Between 1930 and 1933, 40 percent of the European planters in Malaya were laid off and a significant number of Europeans employed in the tin industry were put out of work.⁷⁰ Some planters' salaries were evidently "down to subsistence level" and many took a one-third pay cut to avoid being sent back to Europe.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment*, 1996, reprint. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018), 269.

⁶⁷ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (Weekly)*, November 18, 1909, 7. It is unclear under which Ordinance Christian Novi had been charged for being a vagrant, but it is most likely the Minor Offences Ordinance, which carried a penalty of a maximum two months' imprisonment or a fine of a maximum \$25 on first conviction. *The Laws of the Straits Settlements (Revised Edition)*, 246.

⁶⁸ J. G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya, 1880–1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-east Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), 127. W. G. Huff, "Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration in the 1930s Singapore Great Depression," *Economic History Review* 54, no. 2 (2001): 300–301. "British Malaya" referred to the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, as well as the Straits Settlements.

⁶⁹ Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, 127.

⁷⁰ Huff, "Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration," 301.

⁷¹ "Padres and the Press," *Straits Times*, March 22, 1933, 10; Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, 132.

According to a planter in Malaya, while it was always “degrading” to be out of work, “it is a thousand times worse for a white man in a tropical country.”⁷² The annual reports of the Straits Settlements recorded a decrease in the European standard cost of living between the years 1920 and 1922, and the years 1929 to 1933, reflecting decreasing amounts of disposable income among Europeans during these periods.⁷³ Slight compared to that of the Asian standard, the decreases in the European standard can be attributed to the expenditure on items with “relatively inflexible downward prices,” such as education in Europe, club membership, and clothing.⁷⁴ Such expenditure, considered essential for Europeans in colonial settings, illustrates the societal expectation to maintain a façade of “respectability” even during periods of economic downturn.

That out-of-work Europeans were unable to maintain their respectability and required help to do so was a central trope in published appeals for financial donations. A *Straits Times* article published in 1933 urged its European readers to contribute monetarily to European relief, positing “the fact that its recipients are stricken with poverty in a strange land, and one in which their racial self-respect compels them to maintain certain standards, makes their cases peculiarly distressing.”⁷⁵ In the same year, the European Unemployment Committee published urgent appeals in newspapers for monetary donations, contending that it was “a personal as well as a collective responsibility that our own people should be looked after when they have fallen on evil times through no fault of their own and helped until conditions improve and they are once more able to help themselves.” As these appeals show, it was considered imperative that laid-off Europeans “not be allowed to sink below that standard of living in which they can retain their self-respect and maintain their pride in their own race.”⁷⁶ Unlike work-shy vagrant Europeans, Europeans thrown out of work in times of economic depression were characterized in various appeals, letters to editors, and articles as unfortunate and deserving of financial assistance to maintain some semblance of respectability expected of Europeans in colonial settings. The unfortunate plight of these Europeans and their deservingness of help were further emphasized by evoking the looming threat of vagrancy. Unemployed Europeans increasingly turned to vagrancy, claimed in a letter to the editor, with some evidently “in a hopeless state with no respectable

⁷² “Planter” to *The Financier* (London), reprinted in *Planter*, 1, No. 9 (April 1921), 35, quoted in Butcher, *The British in Malaya*, 127.

⁷³ *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Straits Settlements, 1931* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1932), 56–57; *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Straits Settlements, 1933* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1934), 36.

⁷⁴ Huff, “Entitlements, Destitution, and Emigration,” 304.

⁷⁵ “Down—But not Out,” *Straits Times*, March 15, 1933, 10.

⁷⁶ “A Call for Help,” *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, March 10, 1933, 8.

clothes—old and worn out.”⁷⁷ Their “desperate and heroic fight to keep up appearances” was noted in an editorial.⁷⁸

Even as they became impoverished, out-of-work Europeans apparently embodied the “acceptable” characteristics Europeans in colonial settings ought to possess. For one, cleanliness was evidently essential to appearing respectable. A reporter, after visiting the Katong residence of a recipient of the monthly grant disbursed by the European Unemployment Committee⁷⁹, remarked that the couple “guard jealously this outward evidence of their respectability. Neat rooms, scrupulously clean...”⁸⁰ This was affirmed by J. E. Cookson, the chairman of the Committee in Singapore, who noted that “the families cannot be living too well on the amount they get a month from us, but the one thing I have noticed is that they manage to keep their homes clean.”⁸¹ The representation of impoverished Europeans in the press as stretching their “limited” means to maintain cleanliness and respectability stood in stark contrast with the aforementioned portrayal of unkempt vagrant Europeans. It furthermore exemplifies the deservingness of out-of-work Europeans to receive help, by illustrating their abilities to spend money wisely, as opposed to vagrant Europeans’ perceived inclination to splurge on alcohol.

The implications of an empty purse went further than keeping clean. One newspaper article remarked upon “the miseries ... of job-seeking when one is without the wherewithal to purchase razor blades, soap or a toothbrush ... and when the dhoby has declined ... to return the last white suit.”⁸² The financial constraint in keeping up appearances expected of a European in colonial settings evidently undermined the search for employment, while simultaneously emphasizing the industriousness of able-bodied Europeans who had been thrown out of work. To make matters worse, according to the article, water, gas and electrical supplies were cut off when payments were not made timely, and the situation was “made all the worse when a European ... has to fetch water for bathing and household purposes from a roadside stand-pipe”.⁸³ Evidently, having to retrieve water from a public stand-pipe in

⁷⁷ Public. “The Unemployed,” letter to the editor, *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, December 9, 1930, 19.

⁷⁸ “Padres and the Press,” 10.

⁷⁹ By the 1930s, European families with less means moved to areas on the outskirts of the Singapore town, such as Katong, where rents were reportedly cheaper and more affordable. “Malaya Must Save 300 Europeans,” *Straits Times*, March 12, 1933, 9.

⁸⁰ “Keenest Sympathy Aroused,” *Straits Times*, March 13, 1933, 12.

⁸¹ “Malaya Must Save 300 Europeans,” 9.

⁸² “Malaya’s Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed,” 17. “Dhoby” is a Hindi word for “washerwoman.” Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, new ed., ed. William Crooke (Calcutta: Rupa, 1986), 312.

⁸³ “Malaya’s Renewed Prosperity Mocks the Unemployed,” 17.

order to keep clean constituted an embarrassment for Europeans, for it was an evident testament to their lack of means to afford necessities like running water. Such embarrassment was exacerbated, considering that the colonized laboring classes, to whom Europeans were supposedly superior to per colonial rhetoric, had access to piped water at home.⁸⁴

The discourse on European destitution during periods of economic downturn tended to represent European unemployment as “nothing more than a grave misfortune” that warranted sympathy.⁸⁵ Gaze, a policeman in W. Somerset Maugham’s *Footprints in the Jungle* (1927) described the experiences of unemployed planters, many of whom went to Singapore in search of employment that was practically non-existent: “They all go there when there’s a slump, you know. It’s awful then, I’ve seen it; I’ve known of planters sleeping in the street because they hadn’t the price of a night’s lodging. I’ve known them to stop strangers outside the ‘Europe’ and ask for a dollar to get a meal.”⁸⁶ Yet, money-making ventures were impeded by colonial imperatives of maintaining racial hierarchies; a bootblack stand operated by two Englishmen was ordered to close by the authorities, reportedly because “shoes were not shined by white men in the Orient.”⁸⁷ Seemingly straightforward differentiation between deserving and undeserving European poor based on their willingness to earn a livelihood was thus in fact complicated; categories of work-shyness and industriousness cannot be applied without taking into consideration the inherent demands of the Empire to uphold the façade of racial prestige and superiority.

The policy of the Straits Government was to repatriate destitute persons who did not have any prospects of gaining employment. While the Government contributed monetarily to unemployment relief bodies, it was done so on the condition that such contribution was used for the sole purpose of repatriation.⁸⁸ Coupled with a seemingly lack of vacant positions for unemployed Europeans, the Government’s preferred approach of repatriation was, for these Europeans, akin to being treated as a “vagrant.”⁸⁹ In one instance, an Australian man, who had been living in Malaya for 28 years, was dismissed from his position in the mining industry because of the economic slump and surrendered himself to the police. He was thereafter sent to the House of Detention until communication could be established with his

⁸⁴ “Municipal Commission,” *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, February 18, 1890, 4.

⁸⁵ “A False Step,” *Straits Times*, October 7, 1930, 12.

⁸⁶ W. Somerset Maugham, *Far Eastern Tales* (London: Vintage, 2000), 13. The “Europe” refers to the Europe Hotel.

⁸⁷ Foster, *A Beachcomber in the Orient*, 216–7.

⁸⁸ “Unemployed,” *Straits Times*, September 28, 1931, 12.

⁸⁹ “The Unemployed,” *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, December 9, 1930, 19.

former company or friends in Australia.⁹⁰ The aversion towards the repatriation of some unemployed Europeans exemplifies middle-class European derision towards vagrancy. The author of a letter to the editor derided the lack of assistance by the authorities and the proposed repatriation of out-of-work Europeans, who apparently after years in Malaya, could no longer attempt to start anew in England: "when they do go and ask for a post, or for some temporary relief, they are told that nothing can be done. But if they like, a passage can be arranged for them, and they can be sent Home as 'vagrants.' What a filthy attitude for anyone to take up, treating poverty and distress with such insolence!"⁹¹ Evidently, European "vagrants," perceived to embody undesirable traits of idleness, uncleanness, and lack of self-restraint, were considered to be at the bottom of the barrel, and to be treated as one, even figuratively, was considered by "respectable" Europeans as abhorrent. The repatriation of out-of-work Europeans and the disapproval towards it furthermore exemplify the unsteadiness of the construct of the European vagrant and the relational character of the binary attributes that supposedly differentiated the vagrant European from the respectable.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the characterization of vagrant Europeans in the Singapore press as oft-drunk, disorderly, unkempt, and work-shy. Particularly, the able-bodied European's perceived disinclination to work was central to the colonial authorities' conceptualization and management of vagrants in the Straits Settlements. In both press discourse and criminalization of vagrancy we see the circulation of knowledge and people through imperial networks at play; destitute, itinerant Europeans in Singapore evidently came from neighboring port cities, and the Vagrancy Ordinance of 1906 was modeled after the vagrancy law in Hong Kong. Crucially, the murder of a Chinese boatwoman in Hong Kong in 1904 by "European" beachcombers prompted a furor in Singapore surrounding itinerant Europeans, leading to the enactment of the Vagrancy Ordinance in the Straits. With legislation reinforcing contemporary tropes of the vagrant in relation to their inability and/or disinclination to work, the deviant body of the European vagrant embodied colonial expectations *ex negativo*. Yet, the category of the European vagrant was an unstable and performative one: vagrant Europeans' modification of their appearance stupefied other Europeans; "respectable" Europeans evidently needed financial

⁹⁰ "A Slump Victim," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, December 5, 1930, 10.

⁹¹ "European Fighting Against Destitution," *Straits Times*, September 10, 1935, 12.

help to keep clean and could procure passage out of Singapore by surrendering themselves as “vagrants.”

Considering the spatial dimensions of European vagrancy affords us a deeper understanding of how colonial imperatives of racial prestige shaped the characterization of the European vagrant and its undesirability. The anxieties surrounding European vagrant bodies’ potential diminution of racial prestige premised on their presence in public spaces, where interactions with the Asian population took place. Vagrant Europeans were portrayed to be active in seemingly culturally and physically contaminating spaces such as Asian-run grog shops and bars, as well as in open spaces like the Esplanade, which were accessible to persons of all ethnicities. The exposure of the evident idle, weak body of the European vagrant to Asian gaze, as colonial logic went, risked the destabilization and inversion of colonial hierarchies, prompting the removal of these Europeans, even if, in reality, the number of (convicted) European vagrants was exceedingly small.

Out-of-work Europeans’ claims to respectability in appeals for financial help appear to reiterate the binary attributes assigned to vagrant Europeans and impoverished, unemployed Europeans of the ‘30s. In contrast to vagrant Europeans who were deemed as dirty, work-shy, thriftless, and thus undeserving of help, out-of-work Europeans were presented in the press as clean, industrious, frugal, and deserving of aid. Yet, the very evocation of the European vagrant figure to make such claims against exemplifies how these sets of binary attributes were relationally defined; that is, these labels lose their meanings outside the binary. To understand the European vagrant construct “beyond binaries” thus, is to understand the relational character of the binary attributes that were ascribed to and juxtaposed against it, as well as how the employment of such dichotomous categories simultaneously reiterated and undermined colonial structures of power.

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Exhibiting “Civilization”: The Hong Kong Junta and the Portraits of Filipino Bodies and Minds, 1898–1899

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Abstract

According to William Howard Taft, the first American civil governor of the Philippines, the US retained the islands in 1898 to prepare Filipinos for self-government. Rich historiography has analyzed how imperial representations of Filipinos, mostly portrayed as uncivilized, justified this “Benevolent Assimilation.” This study enhances that literature by examining how the Revolutionary Government of the Philippines—from January 1899 on, the First Philippine Republic—contested those depictions. Analyzing the Philippine Revolutionary Records, this chapter demonstrates that this government tried to reach US audiences with information emphasizing its leaders’ preparedness for ruling according to Western political modernity. They used portraits of their bodies and minds, making them appear as refined gentlemen.

Keywords: Philippine Revolution; First Philippine Republic; imperial representations; US imperialism; Philippine-American War; respectability

“This is a great day for the Philippines,” a Western journalist wrote early on 29 September 1898.² He was one of the “Britishers, Americans, and other foreigners” whom the leaders of the Filipino Revolutionary Government had invited to attend a “grand holiday at Malolos.” Almost a month and a half had passed since the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War had ended.³ The United States and the Filipino Revolutionary forces had collaborated in fighting their common Spanish enemy since

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² “The Position at Manila...,” *Hong Kong Daily Press*, 7 October, 1898, p. 2.

³ As different authors have stated, the more common term Spanish-American War obscures the preceding struggles for independence that Cubans and Filipinos fought and the imperial interventions

April 1898, and, after its defeat in August, a tense interlude began. On the one hand, the US intentions towards the Philippines were unclear. On the other hand, the peace conference where Spain and the US were going to decide the future of the Filipino archipelago excluded the Filipinos. Therefore, the leaders of the newly erected Filipino Government—which became the Philippine Republic on January 1899—feared that the US would occupy the islands and ignore their political authority.

Consequently, the Filipino Government executed a resonant diplomatic and media campaign to encourage the international community, especially the US, to recognize its legitimacy as the representative of the sovereign Filipino nation and respect its demands for self-government. As historian Paul A. Kramer noted, that campaign for recognition was waged mainly “in the language of ‘civilization’.”⁴ In the face of racist Western prejudices about the alleged savagery of Asian populations, this campaign’s outcomes emphasized the efficacy of the government Filipino revolutionaries had erected, legal and historical arguments that legitimized its sovereignty, and the Filipino respect for the rules of civilized warfare. All this evidence aimed to prove that Filipinos both deserved and, due to their high evolutionary status, were prepared for self-government.⁵ Among this campaign’s displays of Filipino civilization was the festivity the journalist mentioned above attended, the ratification of the independence of the Philippines—which President Emilio Aguinaldo had proclaimed on 12 June 1898. This Western correspondent presented the event to the *Hong Kong Daily Press* as “the most ostentatious affair yet attempted by the insurgents.”⁶ The chronicle he wrote for this newspaper vividly illustrates the Filipino Government’s attempts to earn the sympathy of Western observers and, at the same time, these foreign observers’ actual opinions about the islanders.

The *Daily Press* article began by explaining that, given the uncertain future disposition of their islands, “the insurgents were strengthening their hand every day.” In case Spain tried to reimpose her rule, they had to be prepared to fight. If the United States were to hold the Philippines, “they would have already shown military activity and a successful provisional government because they will have made a showing of what they can do and proved that they do possess qualities of organization and administration.” Even so, the author expressed restlessness at the leader’s honest endeavors “to prove that as far as they themselves are concerned they are quite worthy of the control.” He hoped Aguinaldo would not be “guilty of such absolute folly” as resisting the American authority in the islands. In the

that came soon after. See Paterson, “United States Intervention in Cuba, 1898”. However, for the sake of brevity, the author uses the more common Spanish-American War in this text.

⁴ Kramer, *Blood of Government*, p. 100.

⁵ Kramer, pp. 97–102.

⁶ “The Position at Manila....” The following paragraphs also comment on this chronicle.

writer's opinion, this would lead to an absolute defeat and would be irrational, as "the US would do its best to treat the natives with all fairness and give them both protection and prosperity." Therefore, according to this journalist, Filipinos should gratefully welcome the American arrival to the archipelago.

In addition to these manifested reasons to support an American authority in the Philippines, the correspondent's depiction of the party, carefully planned to exhibit the aptitudes of the Filipino Government, evidenced that no propaganda could alter his racist perception of the islanders as a society unprepared for autonomy. Besides admitting that the food "was not that bad" and pointing out how all the foreigners received the kindest treatment, the writer denigrated every other aspect of the celebration condescendingly. According to him, "everything was done in the same tawdry, tinsel way that characterizes all Orientals, not even excepting the Japanese." In commenting on the Filipino leaders' appearance, he stated:

Perhaps the most amusing side of the festival to foreigners was the appearance of all ministers and members of congress in black evening dress and high black hats. It was almost grotesque to see these dark-skinned natives in the heat of mid-day marching through the streets and assembling in black evening dress, especially as not one suit in ten fitted the wearer, while the hats looked as if they had been collected from the four corners of the earth.

Despite this, he asked readers not to be too critical, as the Filipino leaders were "kindly-inclined, good people," did their best, and knew no better. He even recognized that they "made an impressive appearance." By playing their part to perfection, they gave "plain evidence that with proper coaching and education they can eventually assist in the government of the islands to a greater degree than was first deemed possible." Allegedly, the correspondent shared those scornful comments because he feared that "the natives" would also build a "shady, showy Government provided they are granted autonomy or independence," which was "the great central idea through everything said and omitted at Malolos."⁷ Therefore, all the Filipino exhibitions of strength and political capability were a cause of concern for this journalist: they manifested Filipino aspirations of autonomy that would become an obstacle to US tutelage.

The image of the Filipinos exhibiting themselves in Western gala attire and this writer's condescending comment on how the black evening dresses with high black hats "didn't suit the wearer[s]" are highly evocative. They articulate both actors' awareness of the significance of Filipinos' physical appearance and the ideas they could convey related to their political, social, and cultural preparedness for self-government according to Western political modernity. Such conception of

⁷ "The Position at Manila...."

Filipino bodies and minds as symbolic and discursive signifiers are the subject of abundant studies. On the one hand, rich historiography on US Imperialism in the Philippines has explored how, during and after the 1898 war, dominant representations in the US of the Philippines and Filipinos presented them, respectively, as an immature body politic and a childish and uncivilized population unprepared for self-government—as the chronicle above exemplifies. Those portraits helped justify the US policy that President William McKinley called a “Benevolent Assimilation”: allegedly, the US would raise the Filipinos from a state that was considered savage and barbaric and guard the Philippines against foreign interference until Filipinos could govern and defend themselves.⁸ On the other hand, thought-provoking works dealing with Filipino resistance to Spanish and US colonial ethnographies have also focused on the Filipino nationalists’ use of their bodies and minds as an instrument for political and social advancement.⁹

Building upon those bodies of literature, this research delves into, quoting Kramer again, the Filipino Government’s campaign for recognition based on the concept of “civilization” to explore how it used Filipino bodies and minds as political credentials between 1898 and the first months of 1899—when Filipino efforts to obtain the US’ recognition were most intense.¹⁰ To do so, it connects existing literature on the politicization of Filipino bodies—by Filipinos in other moments and by the US—with a review of the private correspondence of the Filipino leaders that managed the 1898–1899 media campaign and some of their media implants.¹¹ As a result, this chapter details how the Filipino Government’s campaign about “civilization” drew from an older tradition of Filipino political activism to systematically respond to the 1898 US accusations of Filipino savagery.¹² On the one hand,

⁸ The literature on the relation between US knowledge and rule of its empire is vast. For their focus on the “body politics” of the emerging American Empire, see Fitzpatrick, “Body Politic”; Balce, “The Filipina Breast”; Balce, *Body Parts of Empire*.

⁹ Among others (also referenced below), Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism*; Hau, “Philippine Literary Nationalism”.

¹⁰ On the Filipino government’s media campaign and its managers, see Kramer, *Blood of Government*, pp. 97–102; Campomanes, “Figures of the Unassimilable,” pp. 76–123; Campomanes, “La Revolución Filipina”; de Viana, “Philippine Foreign Service”; Epistola, *Hong Kong Junta*; Agoncillo, *Malolos*, pp. 310–372.

¹¹ The chapter relies on the copy of the revolutionary papers available in Washington DC: “Philippine Insurgent Records, 1896–1901” series, part of the Records of the Adjutant General’s Office 1762–1984 (Record Group 94), at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC [henceforth, PIR]. I have also used John R. M. Taylor’s edited collection of a selection of these records: *Philippine Insurrection*.

¹² In their accounts of the development of Filipino nationalism in the last third of the nineteenth century, some authors have already presented a continuity in the Filipinos’ efforts to prove their “civilization” to overcome racial prejudice and consequent political marginalization between the

the Filipino Government adopted methods and ideas from the previous reformist Propaganda Movement, which had already defended Filipinos' high social evolutionary standing in front of Spanish audiences between 1872 and 1892. On the other hand, the Filipino Government adapted that strategy to dialogue with US public opinion, its 1898–1899 main target, to systematically contradict the specific arguments American media offered to prove Filipino uncivilization and dependency. Consequently, they constructed an image of civilized Filipino bodies and minds that mixed ideas already defended by the Propaganda Movement, such as the Filipino elites' Western education and social behavior, with new arguments that acquired relevance during the Revolution, such as the Filipino respect for the rules of civilized warfare. More broadly, by demonstrating how the representations of Filipinos were another battlefield of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars—where previous generations of Filipino nationalists had already fought—this chapter aims to highlight how powerful discourses on colonized bodies could be.

It is important to note that, as Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz established, during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, the Filipino Government spoke to two different audiences. The first one was internal, Filipino and Asian, and Aguinaldo's Government highlighted the Asian roots of Filipino nationalists to encourage support from that region's societies, especially Japan. The second audience the Filipino Government tried to reach was the Western societies whose recognition they sought, which emphasized the humanitarian and internationalist dimensions of the Philippine Revolution.¹³ Given this chapter's interest in the Filipino campaign for recognition of Western powers, it is the messages they sent to these audiences and the strategies used to reach them that this text presents, which could be unrepresentative with the messages directed to internal and other Asian audiences.

Filipino Bodies and Minds and the Eyes of Empire

As Bonnie M. Miller cogently demonstrated, in the wake of the 1898 war, "cultural productions" offered a "compelling script for US intervention." Filipino revolutionaries were depicted as brave and heroic freedom fighters, worthy of trust in their shared fight with the US against the allegedly tyrannical and decaying Spanish Empire.¹⁴ Once the war finished, however, and Filipino aims for self-government clashed with the US

Spanish and the American colonial periods. See, for example, Kramer, *Blood of Government*, pp. 35–86, 87–158. This chapter, however, aims to expand this knowledge of the 1898–1899 media campaign by closely examining how the Filipino diplomats in charge of it instrumentalized the politics of the body.

¹³ CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation*, pp. 87–88.

¹⁴ B. M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*, p. 13.

interests in the Pacific, this portrayal radically changed. The US government and the supporters of its expansionist agenda argued that the population of the Philippines was a heterogeneous mix of uncivilized tribes. Therefore, their argument followed, abandoning the archipelago would leave the islands in internal anarchy and in danger of occupation by another European empire. Consequently, besides alleging strategic and economic benefits of controlling the Philippines, the expansionists defended that the US was responsible for protecting the archipelago from foreign invasion and teaching the islands' population the art of self-government until it was ready to stand for itself. President William McKinley called that policy a "Benevolent Assimilation" and guaranteed that most Filipinos would welcome it. He added that only a tiny fraction would oppose it: the followers of Emilio Aguinaldo, who had erected the Revolutionary Government. This minority, US authorities argued, aimed to retain all the power, establish a dictatorship, and tyrannize the rest of the islanders.¹⁵

The actual motives behind expansion were far more complex, as they included a wide range of political, economic, financial, social, and psychological pressures, both national and external.¹⁶ Despite the varying degrees of relevance that different researchers have attributed to these causes, all recognize that, in 1898, the rhetoric about Filipinos needing protection from foreign imperial powers and a responsible tutor that prepared them for self-government was widespread. The first expressions of those ideas established the basis of, using Thomas Richards' term, an "imperial archive," a vast system of knowledge about the US' imperial possessions and its inhabitants that extended far beyond 1898.¹⁷ Quoting Oscar V. Campomanes, "the New [US] Empire and its ideologues" created "a massive political and cultural archive which denationalized Filipinos and deemed them as racialized subjects unfit for self-determination, requiring systematic US tutelage."¹⁸ Abundant studies have looked at how such representations of Filipinos and the Philippines appeared in various US cultural media—such as journalism, photography, literature, cinema, and public exhibitions—and in the public discourses and archives of US political, administrative, military, and academic authorities.¹⁹ Overall, those depictions not

¹⁵ Reference explanations of the events after the Spanish-American War and the beginning of the Philippine-American War, including the arguments used, include Wolff, *Little Brown Brother*; S. C. Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*; Linn, *The Philippine War*.

¹⁶ For a historiographical review, see Woods, "The Burden of Empire."

¹⁷ Richards, *Imperial Archive*. Of course, the reference work regarding the imperial representations of colonized territories and their domination is still Said, *Orientalism* and also his *Culture and Imperialism*.

¹⁸ Campomanes, "Figures of the Unassimilable," p. 48. Also, Thompson, "Representation and Rule"; Thompson, *Imperial Archipelago*.

¹⁹ For some references on each media, see Brody, *Visualizing American Empire*; Deocampo, "Imperialist Fictions"; Wesling, *Empire's Proxy*. Among many other examples, on McKinley's public

only served the US to conceive its newly subject peoples but also established the basis to justify the American occupation of the Philippines and to design its rule.

In creating that imperial archive, the US echoed what other Western empires had done to rationalize imperial domination. Among its predecessors was the Spanish Empire in the Philippines. For centuries, the Spanish authorities restricted the involvement of the local population of the archipelago in metropolitan and colonial spheres of power, appealing to its alleged incapacity or unpreparedness for self-government. For example, according to an 1876 address to the Spanish Parliament by Manuel Azcárraga—an expert on the Philippines who had occupied various judicial and administrative positions in the archipelago—the five or six million natives on the islands were still incapable of exercising the political rights granted to Spanish citizens, and “they would neither need them nor understand them.”²⁰ Azcárraga represented a dominant conception in Spanish politics and public opinion.

These stereotypical images of Filipino bodies and minds, however, did not go unchallenged. Just as there was a continuity between the Spanish and US discourses on the supposed uncivilization of the inhabitants of the Philippines, Filipino reformists and revolutionaries at different stages of the nationalist struggle also worked to correct these imperial misconceptions. During the nineteenth century, the Philippines went through profound economic and social changes that led different sectors of the local population to demand an increase of their political rights within the Spanish Empire. To do so, various members of those sectors with political aspirations tried to prove those images of Filipino savagery wrong. The Propaganda Movement was the most influential advocate in Spain for a new relationship between the islands and the metropolis. Active between 1872 and 1892, it was formed by a “native” and mestizo-educated elite called the *ilustrados* (in English, enlightened). Based in Barcelona and later in Madrid, they demanded the extension of Spanish metropolitan law and rights to the archipelago and the application of reforms that alleviated the increasing discontent. To advance their cause, *propagandistas* denounced that metropolitans had scarce knowledge about the Philippines and its inhabitants. They directly confronted the racist and condescending stereotypes that justified low “native” participation in the archipelago administration: they argued that Filipinos were not children in need of a tutor and

relations efforts to sell the annexation, see Hildebrand, *Power and the People*, pp. 30–51. On debates in Congress about annexing the Philippines based on massive production of information on them, see Barreto Velázquez, *La amenaza colonial*. On academic discourses about the savagery of the Filipinos caused by the Spanish tutelage, see Cano, “Deliberate Distortion.”

²⁰ Quoted in Elizalde, “Filipinas, fin de siglo,” p. 309 (footnote 5). On Spanish nineteenth-century ethnographic representations of Filipinos, see also, among others, Muñoz Vidal, “Filipinas en la ilustración gráfica”; Sánchez Gómez, *Un imperio en la vitrina*; Lasco, “De Estatura Regular.”

that their level of enlightenment made them worthy of greater participation in their islands' government.²¹

When the '90s arrived, in the face of continuing intransigence by Spain, several *ilustrados* gave up on their demands for reforms. In the case of the Propaganda Movement, this metropolitan inflexibility compounded with a lack of economic support, internal divisions, and personal disagreements and resulted in the slimming and final dissolution of the collective. Some of its members, however, brought their experience to the 1896 Revolution, and two of them became prominent managers of its media campaign. The first one was Mariano Ponce. Ponce was writer and manager of *La Solidaridad*, the standard media of Filipino reformers in Spain. Also, he was secretary of the Asociación Hispano-Filipina in Madrid, and a noted member of Filipino masonic lodges in Spain.²² The second one was Dr. Galicano Apacible—a physician who, during his studies in Spain, had joined the reformists and, in 1897, had almost been arrested by the Spanish authorities.²³ As Resil Mojares established for Ponce's case, and that could be extended to Apacible, this *propagandista* applied well-known methods to new goals: instead of campaigning for reforms, they wanted independence.²⁴

These ex-propagandistas joined a Filipino exiled community based in Hong Kong that had grown during the last third of the nineteenth century escaping the Spanish repression and had benefited from the liberal climate of the British port. Just like Ponce and Apacible, during the 1896 Revolution, this community—whose members had previously supported the Propaganda Movement in Spain—received many other exiles that escaped Spain's repression. This was the case of Felipe Agoncillo, a lawyer that arrived in December 1896 escaping from deportation, who led the organization among that exiled community of the Philippine Revolutionary Committee. It aimed to collect support from foreign nations to provide Filipino combatants in the archipelago with arms and other necessary supplies and propagate the nature and goals of the Filipino national struggle through diplomacy and the press.²⁵

After the pause of the rebellion in December 1897, in April of 1898, Filipino revolutionaries restarted hostilities against Spain next to the US Army. During this

²¹ The reference history of the Propaganda Movement is still Schumacher's *Propaganda Movement*. For a complete and exhaustive synthesis of the works of the Propaganda in Spain and the ideas they tried to convey, see Kramer, *Blood of Government*, 52–66.

²² Mojares, "Los itinerarios de Mariano Ponce"; CuUnjieng Aboitiz, *Asian Place, Filipino Nation*, pp. 112–147.

²³ Alzona, *Galicano Apacible*, pp. 17–35.

²⁴ Mojares, "Los itinerarios de Mariano Ponce," p. 91.

²⁵ de Viana, "Philippine Foreign Service," pp. 22–24; Laura Díaz-Esteve and Albert García-Balaña, "Civilized Violence. Appealing to the Laws of War during the 1896–1897 Philippine Revolution" (article currently under peer review process).

new phase of the Revolution, the Filipino revolutionary leaders formalized the Hong Kong committee as a vital department of the Filipino state that would fill the void of government left after the expulsion of Spain. On 23 June, 1898, Emilio Aguinaldo decreed the constitution of a committee abroad, based, again, in Hong Kong, that included a diplomacy delegation. Although some of its members would change throughout the conflict due to internal divisions and disagreements on the final goal of the Revolution, the committee—better known as the Hong Kong Junta—was composed of a central managing board and correspondents in capital cities of Europe and America. It aimed, according to Aguinaldo’s orders, “to work for the recognition of the belligerency and independence of the Philippines.”²⁶ To achieve those goals, it had “to engage in propaganda work in foreign countries, enter into diplomatic negotiations with foreign governments as authorized and instructed, and procure whatever was required for waging the Revolution.”²⁷

Echoing the Propaganda Movement’s pivotal goal of demonstrating Filipino civility, during the Spanish-American War, the Hong Kong Junta tried to prove that US authorities and audiences—and, more broadly, Western powers—did not grasp the nature of the inhabitants of the Philippines and the realities in the islands. That lack of knowledge, their argument followed, inevitably altered the US’ vision of which policy it should apply to the Philippines after Spain left the archipelago. As the intentions of the US to forcefully remain in the Philippines became clear towards the end of 1898 and during the Philippine-American War, the Junta would argue that US politicians and media misrepresented Filipinos as savages on purpose to push the “Benevolent Assimilation” agenda. As a result, to correct those politically harmful impressions, the Junta executed an ambitious communication campaign directed to a global audience—but with a specific focus on the US—to spread, using Mary Louis Pratt’s term, “autoethnographic expressions.” Pratt noted, “if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans [in this case, Americans] represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.”²⁸ In this case, the Filipino Government spread representations of the young Filipino nation and its leaders constructed in response to or in dialogue with US metropolitan representations of their soon-to-be subjugated others. The Junta tried to contradict the misrepresentations Western media offered of Filipinos as savages unprepared for political modernity. It tried to place the young Filipino nation on a high level of evolutionary standing in the contemporary social Darwinist hierarchies that the US used to justify the alleged Filipino dependency.

²⁶ Epistola, *Hong Kong Junta*, p. 145.

²⁷ Epistola, p. 144.

²⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 9.

The Junta first closely monitored international public opinion on the Filipino people and their struggle. Then, with that information, they defined the best strategy to, quoting Galicano Apacible, “rectify the inexactitudes foreign newspapers published,” knowing that “public opinion influenced notably the decisions of foreign cabinets.”²⁹ They assessed the messages the Filipino government should emit to earn the sympathy of international observers and tried to draw these foreigners’ attention to them. Having presented the Filipino corps in charge of the Filipino Government’s campaign to demonstrate Filipinos’ civility, the next section argues the Junta adapted methods and arguments already employed during the Propaganda Movement and used new strategies to specifically respond to the discourses on alleged Filipino inferiority that many Western media spread. Both in US imperial ethnographies and in Filipino ethnographic self-representations, Filipino bodies and minds appeared as crucial signifiers of their political capabilities.

Exhibiting Civilization in the Contact Zone and through Photography

In the Hong Kong Junta campaign for recognition, the Filipino Revolutionary Government leaders’ appearances were the most immediate display of the Filipino enlightenment. Personal sacrifice and self-discipline played a crucial role in Filipino nationalism. As Caroline Hau explained, during the last third of the nineteenth century, Filipino nationalism intimately linked the destiny of the collective Filipino struggle for liberation to the “bodily dispositions and actions of its individual members.” Secularizing inherited colonial and “Christian” doctrines of self-abnegation and suffering, Filipino nationalism demanded that its members engaged in disciplined efforts of self-improvement so they were prepared for “executing the intentions of conscientiously patriotic selves in order to strive for the welfare of ‘the people’ and toward the realization of the new imagined, national community.” That involved, on the one hand, “intellectual and spiritual reorientation”, that is, cultivating their minds and spirits.³⁰ Along this line, it is essential to highlight how *ilustrados* engaged in different scholarly subjects, like ethnography, folklore, and history, which—as abundant literature has expounded—provided the intellectual grounding of the Filipino nation.³¹ On the other hand, Filipino nation-

²⁹ Galicano Apacible to Apolinario Mabini, 18 September, 1898, PIR, Folder 396, document 1. Original: “rectificar las inexactitudes que publican los periódicos extranjeros. No se le ocultará a V. que la opinión p[ú]blica influye mucho en las decisiones de los gabinetes extranjeros.” [All translations are by the author]

³⁰ Hau, “Philippine Literary Nationalism,” p. 40.

³¹ Mojares, *Brains of the Nation; Thomas, Orientalists, Propagandists, and Ilustrados*.

alism "required as well a corresponding corporeal or bodily readjustment to meet the demands" of history.³² That translated into building their physical bodies and adopting a social behavior that linked them to modernity.³³ Therefore, as Hau put it, the insurgent body was "at once the trope and the proper instrument of national liberation and radical social change."³⁴ Those efforts at self-improvement were key to the Propaganda Movement while campaigning for Filipinos' higher political rights within the Spanish Empire. During the 1880s, *propagandistas*—with their knowledge, manners and looks—presented themselves in the European cities they inhabited as living proofs of Filipino enlightenment. In this way, they evidenced that the Spanish conception of a backward Philippine society, unprepared to assume certain political rights, was wrong.³⁵

During the 1898 campaign for recognition, Filipino individuals' cultivated bodies and minds, with the accompanying moral and intellectual capacities, were also crucial signifiers of the entire nation's preparedness for independence. A first example of such embodied displays of Filipino civility was the Malolos government's opening ceremony mentioned in the introduction. According to the Western reporter who exhaustively described it for the *Hong Kong Daily Press*, every aspect of the festivity—including the Filipino leaders' appearances, the food, and the decoration—had been staged, at least in part, to convince foreign observers like him of the Filipino preparedness for autonomy. Another display of Filipino civility was a concert held at the Ateneo Rizal in Cavite on 23 July 1898, just weeks before the end of the Spanish-American War, when tensions between the Filipino and US political elites over the disposition of the islands after Spain's defeat were already mounting. According to a chronicle of the event published in Hong Kong's the *China Mail*, the revolutionary leaders had staged the event to honor the leaders of the US Navy and Army forces sent to the Philippines to support the Filipino fight for freedom and to cement a lasting friendship between the two countries. As well as summarizing the good wishes of cordiality expressed, the chronicle also noted that the Ateneo was "fairly decorated and illuminated" and that the "congregation of youth and beauty of the insurgent families of standing was surprising to those who had not already partaken Filipino hospitality." This, and other references such as the Filipinos' "catholic cordiality" in receiving the foreign guests, again illustrate the importance attached to demonstrating the Filipinos' adoption of Western sociability and gentlemanly behavior.³⁶ In a similar vein of breaking down Western

³² Hau, "Philippine Literary Nationalism," 40.

³³ Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism*; Pérez, "Play and Propaganda."

³⁴ Hau, "Philippine Literary Nationalism," 40.

³⁵ Shumacher, *Propaganda Movement*; Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism*.

³⁶ "The War." *The China Mail*, 2 August, 1898, p. 3.

prejudices about supposed Filipino savagery through direct interactions, the Filipino Government also invited foreign citizens—such as journalists—to travel through the territory under Filipino control during the war to study its reality.³⁷

The private correspondence of Filipino leaders demonstrates their awareness of how compelling first-hand impressions like these were to convey the idea of civilization to foreign observers. The following letter by Mariano Ponce exemplifies that concern while expressing how useful photography could be for them to spread those images beyond the contact zones between Filipinos and foreigners:

...it produces a better effect to view a photograph than any information spread in newspapers. When they see how the houses are, groups of well-dressed students, trained troops, military men and courageous generals, beauties, conversationalist black eyes, an impressive Parliament whose representatives, instead of wearing loincloths and feathers in their heads, wear tailcoats and white ties with elegance; all of this at a simple glance persuades more than a speech.³⁸

In mentioning Filipino parliamentarians that wore “loincloths and feathers in their heads,” Ponce was referencing the specific racialized, gendered, and sexualized visual grammar that was already widespread in the US to convey ideas of Filipino savagery.³⁹ On the one hand, Filipino individuals were represented in those terms, and, as Miller cogently demonstrated, the abundant visual caricatures of Emilio Aguinaldo are the most evident example. While during the Spanish-American War craze, the media had portrayed him as “young, handsome, brave as a lion, patriotic and self-sacrificing,” visual constructions of Aguinaldo underwent a radical transformation as the clash of interest between them and the US came to the fore.⁴⁰ The media turned to portray him, most often, in an “Africanized” way. According to Miller, Aguinaldo’s most typical racialized expression was to appear with “black

³⁷ S. C. Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation*, pp. 93–95.

³⁸ Letter from Mariano Ponce to F. Lichauro, Yokohama, 5 April, 1899. Letter 157 in Mariano Ponce, *Cartas sobre la revolución, 1897–1900* (Manila: Biblioteca Nacional de Filipinas, 1932), pp. 319–320. Original: “Veo que aquí, con la afición al arte fotográfico de esta gente, produce mejor efecto la vista de una fotografía que cualquiera afirmación que se haga en los periódicos. Cuando ven que hay casas de tal estilo, grupos de colegiales bien trajeados, tropas formadas, tipos marciales y bizarros de generales, bellezas, ojos negros parlanchines, un parlamento imponente cuyos representantes en vez de ir con taparrabos y con plumas en la cabeza, visten frac y corbata blanca con elegancia, todo esto a simple vista convence mejor que un discurso.”

³⁹ On photographic and other visual representations of Filipinos in the US, see, among others: Vergara, *Displaying Filipinos*; Halili Jr., *Iconography of the New Empire*; Ignacio et al., *The Forbidden Book*.

⁴⁰ B. M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*, p. 197.

skin, large lips, hoop earrings, and kinked hair."⁴¹ On other caricatures, the Filipino leader presented stereotypical Asian features, resonating with "rampant cultural prejudice against Chinese and Japanese immigrants."⁴² Besides these racialized traits that connected US audiences' conceptions of Filipinos to the stereotyped ideas they had in relation to American minorities, they also presented Aguinaldo and other Filipinos as vulnerable and unlearned kids. Additionally, as Nerissa Balce pointed out, the Philippines were metonymically represented through the bodies of the Filipinas, whose breasts represented the colony's resources and whose nakedness signified the savagery of the populations to which they belonged.⁴³ For pro-imperialists, those representations of Filipinos as unruly savages, uneducated children, and objectified women confirmed "the moral, political, and economic necessity of US dominion over the islands."⁴⁴

To contradict those visual images, not only did the Filipino Government try to exhibit its inhabitant's civility through their direct encounter with foreign observers present in the Philippines, but it also tried to impress that idea in the US public sphere. Just as the *propagandistas* had exhibited Filipino civilization in Europe, so did Filipino diplomats abroad, most importantly, Felipe Agoncillo, the representative of the Filipino Government in the US during the fall of 1898, when the Peace Treaty was being negotiated. Several authors have demonstrated that while in the US, Agoncillo appeared as an embodiment of Filipino civility that corrected the preconceptions of the islanders as "uncivilized savages."⁴⁵

More broadly, to spread that impression to a much wider audience, the Junta also resorted, when possible, to photography. As Vicente Rafael proved, during the Propaganda Movement, Filipino nationalist imagery had already constituted "an attempt at self-fashioning."⁴⁶ Some of the portraits of the members of the First Philippine Republic could also be interpreted that way. The most eloquent example is a report published in the Parisian *Le Monde Illustré* in April 1899, two months after the outbreak of the Philippine-American War. Three expressive photographs accompanied the text: a portrait of Agoncillo, another of the members of the Junta (Fig. 12.1) and a third one depicting one troop of the Filipino Republic's army

⁴¹ B. M. Miller, pp. 200–201.

⁴² B. M. Miller, p. 200.

⁴³ Balce, "The Filipina Breast."

⁴⁴ B. M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*, p. 202.

⁴⁵ On the US media coverage of Agoncillo's visit, see Hoyt, "Agoncillo's Mission to America;" Campomanes, "Figures of the Unassimilable," pp. 76–126. For a fascinating analysis of how Filipinos in metropolitan spaces acted as embodiments of Filipino enlightenment during the American colonial period, see Prieto, "Delicate Subject;" Ventura, "I Am Already Annexed'."

⁴⁶ Rafael, "Nationalism, Imagery," p. 605.

(Fig. 12.2). All of them visually challenged the stereotypes of Filipino savagery and childishness spread by US outlets eager to misrepresent Filipinos.

To begin with, in these pictures, Filipinos showed their political credentials through their dress. During the nineteenth century, there were many particularities in Filipino clothing.⁴⁷ However, in many of the images spread in their campaign, instead of dressing in traditional Filipino clothes, like the Barong Tagalog, they wore Western attire. Referring to the period of American occupation right after the war, Mina Roces argued that “Filipino male politicians disassociated themselves from the colonized claiming to be among the powerful” by wearing the *Americana*, the Western suit associated with the “English-speaking, university educated, professional political.”⁴⁸ In that way, as Roces stated, “in vestimentary code, men were identified as heirs of the colonizing powers—the future wielders of power in the emerging nation.”⁴⁹ Along similar lines, in these *Le Monde Illustré* images from 1899, the leaders of the First Philippine Republic also used their dressing to equate themselves with the leaders of, using their terms, “civilized nations.”

Such interpretation is also consistent with Christopher Bayly’s depiction of a trend towards the uniformation of clothing during the turn of the century. As this historian noted, elite men in colonial societies across the world adopted sober and formal European wear to express trustworthiness, responsibility, self-discipline, and respectability.⁵⁰ The power of such symbolism finds further support in the fact that Westerners “lampooned ‘natives’ who mimicked them,” aware that the colonized were doing so to blur Western imperial hierarchies.⁵¹ An evident example of this dynamic is the *Hong Kong Daily Press*’ chronicle mentioned in the introduction, especially the journalist’s mockery of the Filipinos as “dark-skinned natives in the heat of mid-day [...] assembling in black evening dress” that did not suit them.

Secondly, the postures of the Junta’s members and that of the troop try to convey relevant ideas of the campaign of civilization. According to Rafael, during the Propaganda Movement, images of the *ilustrados* showed them exhibiting gentlemanly postures and serious expressions, which made “one think of collected interiors in command of their exterior representations, of rational minds holding together bodies in studied repose.”⁵² Similarly, Filipinos in these two photographs also exhibit a gentlemanly, dignified posture. In the first case, the clean and elegant office, full of books and newspapers, relates the leaders of the Filipino Republic,

⁴⁷ Roces, “Dress, Status, and Identity.”

⁴⁸ Roces, “Gender, Nation and the Politics of Dress,” p. 25.

⁴⁹ Roces, “Women, Citizenship and the Politics of Dress,” p. 13.

⁵⁰ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 12–17.

⁵¹ Bayly, p. 17.

⁵² Rafael, “Nationalism, Imagery,” p. 605.



Figures 12.1–2. “Le Comité Philippin de Hong-Kong” and “Officiers et soldats de l’armée tagale aux Philippines” in “M. Agoncillo et la Cause Philippine,” *Le Monde Illustré*, 8 April, 1899, 272–273. Retrieved from Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département Philosophie, histoire, sciences de l’homme, FOL-LC2-2943, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

whose impressive flag hangs on the wall, to erudition and cultivation. By doing so, they distanced themselves from the portraits that showed the Filipinos as “coming out of the woods,” as Galicano Apacible described one particular US cartoon they saw, which is representative of many others.⁵³ Far from being a primitive society, with that image, the Junta tried to demonstrate they possessed intellectual and social capacities and knowledge to rule a country according to political modernity.

In the case of Figure 12.2, the position of the troop suggests organization and discipline, challenging widespread US depictions of the Filipino combatants as unruly and violent savages. At the same time, the troop’s attitude, with all men staring directly at the camera, conveys an idea of defiance and bravery, demonstrating that they were manly enough to defend the Republic, undermining common depictions of Filipinos as childish. Finally, the presence of an actual child in the first row, to the viewer’s right, expresses a sentiment of camaraderie and the idea that the whole nation is ready to fight for its freedom. Overall, the images in *Le Monde Illustré* visually evidenced what Agoncillo, interviewed in the accompanying article, tried to explain through words: that the Filipinos not only deserved the recognition of their independence but, just as important, that “they are able to govern themselves.”⁵⁴

In sum, the leaders of the Philippine Revolution consciously attempted to convey the idea that they were civilized and, therefore, prepared for autonomy, by exhibiting their cultivated bodies and minds through direct interactions with foreign observers and through photography. Still, as the next section explains, despite Ponce’s conviction that photographs like the analyzed ones, “at a simple glance persuade[s] more than a speech,” most archival evidence of the ethnographic self-representations Filipinos spread during the 1898 and 1899 campaign for recognition is textual.⁵⁵

Not Just “Dark Skinned Natives in Black Evening Dress”

During the 1880s, beyond presenting themselves as embodiments of civilization, *ilustrados* in Spain had tried to advance their cause, first and foremost, through political lobbying—creating fruitful relationships with Spanish liberal and republican politicians—and a journalistic campaign in newspapers in the peninsula—most notably, *La Solidaridad* (1889–1895) and other Spanish media. Similarly, between

⁵³ Isidoro de los Santos to Apolinario Mabini, 14 September, 1898, PIR 406.2. Original: “Bray me dijo a m[i] de otra caricatura en la que sale nuestro presidente silbando ante los Americanos como llamando a bandadas de negritos saliendo de los bosques.”

⁵⁴ “M. Agoncillo et la Cause Philippine,” *Le Monde Illustré*, 8 April, 1899, p. 272.

⁵⁵ Ponce to Lichauco, Yokohama, 5 April, 1899 in *Cartas sobre la Revolución*.

1898 and 1899, the Filipino Government also made a considerable effort to share their narratives of the Revolution in their diplomatic exchanges and the media. To reach global Western audiences, the Junta constantly worked to get their texts printed in the nearby press of Hong Kong—which could be telegraphed to Europe and America—or tried to send them directly to European and American media outlets such as the Associated Press.⁵⁶ In this regard, their Records also demonstrate that Filipinos built a network of influential media allies, such as Ferdinand Blumentritt, the famous Austrian ethnographer who had already collaborated with the Propaganda Movement, and William G. St. Clair, editor of the *Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser*.⁵⁷ Additionally, the government also hired at least two British press representatives who made critical efforts to bring its message to Western audiences: Howard W. Bray and Chesney Duncan.⁵⁸ As a result, some Filipino texts were published in the US and a much larger amount appeared in the Hong Kong Anglophone media and the *Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser*.

A close analysis of these texts shows that in all its media implants, the Junta directly dialogued and responded to US reports on the conflict. While most of the US media explained the causes of the conflict and reported on each episode of the war in a way that emphasized the alleged ferocity of the Filipinos, the Filipino reports responded by trying to prove the opposite: Filipino readiness for self-government. That is, they sought to offer a narrative of the Filipino revolutionary movement that supported the ideas of cultivation, discipline and strength embodied in the images analyzed earlier. As Kramer noted, their campaign was based on three main arguments: the efficacy of the state created by the Filipino revolutionaries, legal and historical arguments that legitimized its sovereignty, and the Filipino adherence to civilized warfare.

To begin with, as several analysts of the US media reaction to the 1898 and Philippine-American Wars have demonstrated, the expansionist elites and the press did not contextualize the fight for freedom that Filipinos had already waged against the Spanish Empire and the antecedents of that struggle.⁵⁹ The press did not accurately portray the complexity of the Filipino revolutionary movement and its aspirations. Moreover, no matter how skillfully Aguinaldo made a case for

⁵⁶ For examples of their mentions to the Hong Kong and foreign press, see the various documents on PIR 493.

⁵⁷ Sichrovsky, *Ferdinand Blumentritt*. The author of this text has analyzed William St. Clair's cooperation with the Filipino propaganda campaign in a forthcoming article to be published in *Diplomatic History* and entitled "The *Singapore Free Press* and the War of 1898 in the Philippines".

⁵⁸ On Howard W. Bray, see Díaz-Esteve, "The *Singapore Free Press*...". On Chesney Duncan's appointment as press advisor, see Epistola, *Hong Kong Junta*, 156.

⁵⁹ See, among others, B. M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*; Vaughan, "The 'Discovery' of the Philippines;" Welch Jr., "The 'Philippine Insurrection';" Welch Jr., *Response to Imperialism*.

Philippine independence, the “Filipinos’ aspirations,” as Christopher A. Vaughan observes, “were irrelevant to US editors.”⁶⁰ Instead, the Hong Kong Junta framed the 1898 war into a larger Filipino struggle for reforms in the archipelago. They narrated how, after centuries of education, Filipinos were enlightened, brave, and honorable enough to stand up for their liberty and improve their people’s well-being. After decades of peacefully demanding reforms to the island’s administration within the Spanish Empire, a revolution against tyranny had started in 1896, before any US intervention. Once the 1898 war had begun, they argued that far from being mere puppets supporting the US war effort, the Filipino-American collaboration had been planned as a cooperation between two equal nations. Still, the Junta argued that the Filipino forces had managed to expel the Spanish troops from most of the archipelago without the help of the US—which was waiting for reinforcements for most of the war. As a result, they protested that Filipinos had hardly earned their autonomy.

Among the many texts that exemplify this discourse is American journalist A.H. Myers’ extensive report entitled “America’s Transgressions in the Philippines”, published in *The Singapore Free Press*. A private letter to Emilio Aguinaldo identified it as a “well-written manifesto” that was worth spreading, as it explained point-by-point the Filipino narrative of the war.⁶¹ After attacking the US media for misrepresenting the situation in the Philippines and the Filipinos, Myers defended the revolutionary leaders’ position in different polemic situations that the Americans had exploited to attack the legitimacy of Aguinaldo’s government. For example, Myers explained the pact between Admiral George Dewey and Emilio Aguinaldo that established the terms of collaboration between their armies at the beginning of the 1898 war. Such an episode became much discussed in the US press, because the US government argued that they had not made any promises of Independence to the Filipino revolutionaries in exchange for their help. By contrast, Myers explained that Admiral Dewey had guaranteed the following: “if the Filipinos co-operated with the Americans, the result could only be one and that was Independence, for which they had been fighting for years.” After that, this journalist analyzed through abundant evidence how those collaborations had developed, highlighting the fundamental role the Filipino troops—and not the Americans—had played in expelling Spain from the archipelago.⁶²

The second key argument of the Junta campaign was exhibiting, in Kramer’s words, the results of the Filipino Government’s “competitive state-building” efforts.⁶³

⁶⁰ Vaughan, “The ‘Discovery’ of the Philippines,” p. 306.

⁶¹ Isidoro de los Santos to Emilio Aguinaldo. Hong Kong, 18 March, 1899, PIR 479.6.

⁶² A.H. Myers, “America’s Transgressions in the Philippines,” *The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser*, 24 March, 1899, p. 3.

⁶³ Kramer, *Blood of Government*, p. 98.

In most of their media implants, the Junta defended that Filipino leaders had established a competitive state that followed the rules of enlightened government, that had widespread support, and that was able to maintain peace in the areas under its control. Quoting a letter by Isidoro de los Santos—one of the members of the Junta based in Singapore—they tried to “refute and destroy the malicious lies that the European and American press[,] inspired by ignorant or by enemy brains, were constantly publishing that the revolutionaries were a crowd of ferocious ambitious [people] captained by an animal chief with no less thirst for glory.”⁶⁴ Such concern derived from the awareness of US accounts that attacked the leadership of the Philippine Revolution, accusing its members of being egoistic rebels who aimed to establish a dictatorship among masses of a semi-barbarian population.

An eloquent example of the Filipino efforts to respond to those ridiculing images of the Filipino leaders is the above-mentioned letter by de los Santos, written on 14 September, 1898. He warned about one of the numerous “base of rumors” against Aguinaldo: a proclamation “regarding the badges for the dignitaries of the Revolutionary Government[,] with a golden or silver chain according to their ranks, and the chain and whistle for the President [Aguinaldo].” Indeed, as several historians have observed, the proclamation became a rich source of mockery regarding the leader’s alleged ambition and arrogance. For example, de los Santos warned that the *New York World* had printed “America like a great old man sitting and[,] at his feet open[,] the carton puppet of a general with a chain, and from the chain the whistle, and a hat with a sign that said ‘Aguinaldo’.”⁶⁵ As a response to this attack, they managed to publish in *The Singapore Free Press* a lengthy editorial that tried to justify the use of those badges, comparing them to the dressing codes of other “civilized” countries and concluding that Aguinaldo “merely took over existing Spanish regulations and adopted the official insignia in everyday use, but varying these in such a way as to mark the supersession of Spanish authority by Filipino authority, while at the same time continuing administrative authority, under the new regime, with the least possible indications of a break in its scope or character.” “The case being so,” the text followed, “the epithets ‘childish’ and ‘puerile’ so glibly,

⁶⁴ Isidoro de los Santos to Apolinario Mabini, 14 September, 1898, PIR 406.2. Original: “...en sentido de refutar y destruir los terribles infundios de la Prensa Europea y Americana sugeridas por cerebros ignorantes quizás o enemigos publicando a mandoble que los revolucionarios eran una bandada de feroces ambiciosos capitaneados por nuestro jefe animal con no menos aspiraciones de grandeza.”

⁶⁵ de los Santos to Mabini, 14 September, 1898, PIR 406.2. Original: “Otra base de los infundios en contra de nuestro Presidente en la actualidad es la proclamación [...] de las insignias de las dignidades del Gobierno Revolucionario con aquello del collar de oro y plata según el mando[,] lo mismo que la cadena y el silbato para el Presidente. [...] El *New York World* ha gravado a la Am[érica] como un gran viejo sentado y en sus pies abiertos un muñeco como general de cart[ón] con una cadena, y de la cadena el silbato y el sombrero con letrero diciendo [‘]Aguinaldo.’”

in ignorance of facts, applied to Aguinaldo's proclamation *re* official badges, will come back on those who made use of them with boomerang-like effect."⁶⁶

Finally, the last key argument of that media campaign was the Filipino respect for the rules of civilized warfare. Throughout the Spanish-American War and interwar period, the Filipino Government constantly spread the message that the Filipino Army had paid the utmost attention to treating prisoners correctly and behaving according to international humanitarian law. Again, one of the multiple examples is Myers' chronicle. Myers argued that "Aguinaldo raised an Army, and promised Admiral Dewey that the warfare should be conducted upon the recognized methods of modern warfare: that there should be no cruelty, murder, nor pillage." Furthermore, he followed: "Notwithstanding reports that may have been cabled and written to the US to the contrary, the Filipinos have openly challenged anyone to prove one single instance where this promise has been violated."⁶⁷

Along a similar line, the Junta insisted on the fact that the Filipinos had tried as much as they could to avoid hostilities, that they had pursued the recognition of the Republic through all the diplomatic means possible, and that, contrary to the accusations of the US authorities, American troops had started the Philippine-US War. Indeed, the US political and military elites insisted throughout the conflict that Filipino troops, after having pestered the disciplined and patient US Eighth Army Corps for months, had finally attacked them on 4 February, 1899. This allegedly demonstrated the unruly and traitorous character of the Filipinos, who were ungrateful to their one-time allies without whom, according to US narratives, they would still be under Spanish tyranny. Aware of the significance of the event, just a few days after the battle, Apacible explained to Aguinaldo: "When we received news of the outbreak of the hostilities, I telegraphed immediately to all of our representatives to protest, as well as to the Associated Press and to other newspapers."⁶⁸

One of the results of that effort was an account in the *Hong Kong Daily Press* published on 15 February 1899, entitled "Filipino Account of the Hostilities at Manila" and signed by Kaibigan Nañg Bayan, "Friend of the Country." The text was a lengthy contradiction of the narrative the *Manila Times*—but more broadly, the hegemonic US public opinion—offered at the start of the clash in Santa Mesa, and with it, of the character and legitimacy attributed to the Filipino Republic. The article argued that the *Manila Times* and the American military authorities were making the most of the US audiences' ignorance of the Philippines and its people and their control of the outgoing information to deceive Americans about

⁶⁶ "About a couple..." editorial, *The Singapore Free Press & Mercantile Advertiser*, 15 September, 1898, p. 2.

⁶⁷ A.H. Myers, "America's transgressions in the Philippines."

⁶⁸ Galicano Apacible to Emilio Aguinaldo, Hong Kong, February 20, 1899, PIR 493-13.

the reality of the conflict and its main characters. While offering their narrative of the clash through many pieces of evidence and details, the author of the text blamed the US troops and authorities for the sins their media attributed to the Filipinos. First, the author tried to demonstrate that the US had planned the clash to encourage its senators to ratify the Paris Peace Treaty in the upcoming vote on 6 February. Among the arguments it offered to demonstrate Filipino innocence, the author pointed out the inconsistencies in the US account of the alleged Filipino attack by explaining the positions of the different forces in the area and exposing what would have been a logical military strategy. Also, defending the indisputable authority of Gen. Aguinaldo and the discipline of his troops, the author denied that Aguinaldo's unruly subordinates had instigated a Filipino attack, as the US suggested. Instead, it argued that Filipinos had been surprised by an American attack after believing the US promises not to cause any problems. This way, they demonstrated US trickery, attributing to the Americans the traitorous character that the US press often attributed to the Filipinos. Finally, the text defended the efficiency of the Filipino army in the battle. It declared that the most significant death toll had occurred among the civilian population, mostly defenseless women and children killed by the American forces. The text denounced this as a "monstrous outrage on civilization." The argument that the Americans, not the Filipinos, were conducting warfare without respect for international regulations became another essential trope of the Junta discourse.⁶⁹

In summary, the Hong Kong Junta worked hard to promote a narrative of the Philippine Revolution that, by detailing the motivations and behavior of Filipinos at every stage of their struggle, proved the legitimacy and strength of their movement and their readiness for self-government, as also demonstrated by their direct contact with foreigners or through photography.

Conclusion

Throughout the Spanish-American war and the first year of the Philippine-American War, the Hong Kong Junta tried to spread autoethnographic representations which stressed the civilization of the Filipino leaders and, more broadly, of the nation they represented. To do it, its members drew on methods and ideas from the earlier Propaganda Movement but also responded to contemporary Western misrepresentations of the islands. As demonstrated, after openly denouncing the distortion of the nature of Filipinos and their Revolution in Western public opinion, they demonstrated

⁶⁹ Kaibigan Nañg Bayan [translated as "Friend of the Country"], "Filipino Account of the Hostilities at Manila," *The Hong Kong Daily Press*, 15 February, 1899, p. 2.

that Filipinos had the necessary level of enlightenment for independence, as shown by their struggle against the Spanish tyranny, their erection of a functional government after its defeat, and their conduct of the war, following the rules of civilized warfare. They tried to impress those general ideas in images such as in the examined report of *Le Monde Illustré* and also through their narratives of particular controversies that many US authorities and media exploited to allege Filipino “unpreparedness,” such as Emilio Aguinaldo’s proclamation on the use of badges for the revolutionary leaders and the outbreak of the Philippine-American War.

All in all, those efforts showed the intense battle the Junta fought to construct an image of Filipino bodies and minds that placed them high on the scales of enlightenment that Euro-American powers constructed to justify their rule over peoples they considered in an inferior stage of development. Representations of Filipino bodies and minds became evidence of their political credentials. This constituted another battlefield for the Revolution, demonstrating how powerful the socio-cultural signification of bodies was in the politics of imperial recognition.

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Afterword

Willemijn Ruberg

The History of the Body: Binaries and Embodiment

Since the 1990s the “bodily turn” has impacted social, economic and political history. Initially developing from gender history and the history of medicine, often in Europe or the Global North, body history is now encompassing more fields and more geographical areas as well. This edited volume *Bodies Beyond Binaries in Colonial and Postcolonial Asia* not only expands the history of the body geographically, it also aims to open up the binaries in which the body is often thought, such as the dichotomy between body and mind or between colonized and colonizer.

Binary thinking was prominent in structuralism but could also be found in the first body histories that were strongly influenced by poststructuralist approaches aiming to deconstruct discursive dichotomies such as man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, or sane-mad. These histories of the sexed, raced, classed or disabled body aimed to show how discourses that purportedly addressed a biological body actually forwarded cultural, hegemonic norms on gender, race, class or ability and thus performed these norms rather than accurately describing some natural body.¹ In regard to colonialism, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), influenced by Michel Foucault’s ideas on the connection between power and knowledge, as well as by Jacques Derrida’s notion of deconstruction, is a good example of this approach, even though this book is not generally regarded as part of the history of the body. Said laid bare how Orientalist discourse opposed the indolent, depraved and sensuous native’s body to the Western colonizer’s rational and logical mind.²

While much of the early work in body history was therefore informed by the deconstruction of essentialist discourses on the sexed, raced or disabled body, other approaches can be found as well. Phenomenological approaches, for instance, focus more on how our life worlds are experienced from a first-person point of view. French phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) regarded the body as the primary site of knowing the world: our bodies are our

¹ For an overview of theories used in the history of the body see Willemijn Ruberg, *History of the Body. Theory and History Series* (London: Macmillan International/Red Globe Press, 2020).

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]) 38–40.

way of being-in-the-world. Dismissing the traditional Cartesian separation of body and mind, Merleau-Ponty located subjectivity in the body.³

Psychiatrist and postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), born in the French colony of Martinique, criticized and built on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology when he described the mental and bodily experience of being a black man in a colonial world, particularly in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon argues that it is only in the encounter with the white imagination and white gaze that a phenomenology of blackness, including the experience of skin difference and of being the black Other is revealed. The body is *made* black and its free movement in a colonized and racially oppressive world is restricted by the white gaze and invisible racial boundaries.⁴

Fanon thus demonstrates how cultural conceptions of race work in daily life, experienced in the lived body. Phenomenological approaches highlight embodiment –or the lived body– surrounded by a life-world that is suffused by cultural norms. The notion of embodiment forms another powerful strand in the history of the body: rejecting Cartesian dualism, embodiment rather encompasses the body’s relational experiences: with other people, other things and the environment. In chapter 2 of this volume, Samiksha Sehrawat applies Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology as one of three theoretical approaches to explore colonial medical authority in colonial South Asia. Sehrawat’s focus on the patients’ “lived body” exposes these patients’ agency in seeking or leaving biomedical therapy.

Although it remains difficult for historians to describe the lived body from a first-person perspective, since primary sources on these individual experiences are often lacking, the notion of embodiment can still be used to explore how cultural norms are incorporated by the individual body or resisted. In this volume, this becomes particularly visible in chapters that address clothing or hair. In her chapter, Laura Diaz-Esteve describes how Filipinos around 1900 showed their political credentials through their dress: “elite men in colonial societies across the world adopted sober and formal European wear to express trustworthiness, responsibility, self-discipline, and respectability”. The chapter by Sara Legrandjacques, in turn, identifies how in the 1900s Chinese students were separated from their Indochinese classmates, a separation facilitated by their unusual clothing and hairstyle (shaved heads except for a long tail and their long Manchurian dresses). Legrandjacques argues that students’ bodies were politicized and could be used both to rebel against national Chinese or the colonial French enemy. Dress and hairstyle could

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London, [1945]) part I.

⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1952] 2008).

both affirm and reject modernity. Legrandjacques emphasizes that these strategies of dressing reveal multiple meanings associated with westernization.

Clearly, these analyses of Asian embodiment through dress and hairstyling are examples of how the body can be actively used to incorporate or reject political and cultural values. Often, this embodiment is strongly connected to gender. Julia Hauser, in her chapter on physical education in ashrams in India, remarks on gender differences expressed through dress: Hindu women were obliged to wear caps to protect their hair, despite utopian claims on gender neutrality in physical education. The entanglement of gender, power and surveillance also surfaces in the debates about veiling. Many postcolonial scholars have noted how “cultural difference” is perceived to be located in the practice of veiling and how Western notions of the meaning of veiling dismiss the voice of the subaltern, as well as geographical and class differences between practices of veiling.⁵ The woman’s body thus becomes a terrain over which influence is fought. As Samiksha Sehrawat notes in her chapter on medical practices, British female medical doctors disregarded any ethnic rules regarding veiling adopted by their South Asian female patients and showed no concern for their consent. Chie Ikeya, who in her chapter describes the female body of the Burmese Muslim as “a potent embodiment of difference”, blurring the binary frame of the Burmese Buddhist native versus Indian Muslim foreigner, also signals how readers debated the wearing of the burka for Burmese women, as part of the vexing question of how Burmese women should dress in public: modern or conservative? These chapters emphasize how important dress and hairstyle are for the analysis of embodiment.

The Individual and the Social Body as Symbols

The debates on dress and hairstyle do not only show how the notion of embodiment can be used, but also point to another approach to the body prominent in many chapters in this edited volume: to regard the body as symbol and to pinpoint the relationship between the individual and the social body. In the words of anthropologist Mary Douglas: “The human body is always treated as an image of society”.⁶ Douglas posited the existence of two bodies, the self and society or the social body and the physical experience of the body, and argued that “There is a continual exchange of

⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, *Boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 333–58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>. Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*; vol. 3 of *Collected works* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003 [1970]) Chapter 5 “The Two Bodies”, 70.

meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other”.⁷ In this vein, Chie Ikeya compares “The spiritually, sexually, and physically exploited body of Burmese converts and wives of Indian Muslim men” to “the forced marriage” of Burma to India under British colonial rule, to be solved by a divorce, both on the personal and on the national level.

Similarly, several other chapters note the importance of physical education or a healthy body for a healthy nation. Elena Valdameri argues that in colonial India women’s bodies as reproducers were, just like men’s bodies, seen as vital for the strength of the nation and therefore concludes that certain sports “shaped not simply the physical body, but the political one”. And Laura Díaz-Esteve mentions how during the 1898 war, in the United States the Philippines were regarded as an “immature body politic” and the Filipinos represented as “a childish and uncivilized population unprepared for self-government”. In addition, the female body of the Filipinas was taken as a symbolic representation of the nation in the representation of female breasts as the country’s resources and their nudity as the savagery of the colony’s inhabitants. In short, the symbolism of the body in Asia, particularly the interaction and metaphorical relationships between the individual and the social or political body, is highlighted in this edited volume, in line with existing approaches in the history of the body which, influenced by work in symbolical anthropology, traced the parallels between the individual body and its representation in nationalist discourse.

Dynamic Bodies

Whereas this (symbolical) relationship between the individual and the social body, especially as it was conceived by Mary Douglas, seems to be static, the chapters in this volume highlight the importance of dynamic change that is a vital part of bodies. Historian Ivan Crozier rightly described the task of the historian of bodies to “consider them in action”:

Another aspect of considering bodies in space and time is an awareness that the “same” body differs according to locale. The body is not used the same way when it is sick, during sex, as it ages, for pleasure, for work, for sport, or when it is represented (according to art or fashion). Bodies may appear to be the one stable aspect of our identity, but when we look at their uses, and the experiences we have through the body, we find that they are malleable, fluid, adaptable entities that are the artificial stratum of life.⁸

⁷ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, Chapter 5 “The Two Bodies”, 65.

⁸ Ivan Crozier, “Introduction. Bodies in History – The Task of the Historian”, in Idem, ed., *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Modern Age* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), 1–22, here 21.

Crozier calls this “the underdetermined character of the corporeal”.⁹ In regard to the place of the body in global history, Antoinette Burton made a similar remark when she wrote that the body “is an agent, a force” that is not static:

And in the context of world history, the body has the capacity to register circulation, mobility, processes of exchange and trade, political economies in all their scope and scale—to dramatize, in short, the very connective tissue of globality in its myriad micro and macro forms.¹⁰

As all authors in this volume show, there is not one “Asian body”. Several chapters underline the dynamic quality of the body by showing the role of the body in knowledge circulation and transmission as well as the processes, such as (physical) education, through which the body is shaped to strengthen the nation. Kate Imy’s chapter, by contrast, addresses the collapse of the body and the near disappearance of pre-war racial, gender and power binaries during soldier and civilian internment in the Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore in the Second World War. These seemingly solid bodily identities became fluid over a short period of time. Similarly, Zhi Qing Denise Lim takes the case study of the European vagrant in Singapore and other Asian ports to reveal the “deterioration” of racial prestige in the eyes of the colonized, thus also unveiling how solid corporeal identities can fall apart.

The Body as Lens

More attention to the dynamics of the body and its role in processes of making and transmitting knowledge should be one of the aims of the field of the history of knowledge, as well as the history of the body, both in the global North and in the global South. Other new directions include using the body not as an object of study, but as a lens through which to view larger themes. Antoinette Burton already suggested we take “Recourse to the body—not merely as a subject but as a method for apprehending historical processes, vectors of power, capillaries of circulation and materialities of violence and struggle”.¹¹ In recent years, several historical studies have been published that used the body as a lens through which to view slavery, democracy, political theory or human rights.¹² As is noted in the Introduction to

⁹ Crozier, “Introduction. Bodies in History – The Task of the Historian”, 21–22.

¹⁰ Antoinette Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, in Douglas Northrop, ed., *A Companion to World History* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012) pp. 272–284, here 276.

¹¹ Burton, “The Body in/as World History”, 275.

¹² Kathleen M. Brown, *Undoing Slavery: Bodies, Race, and Rights in the Age of Abolition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023); Hedwig Richter, *Demokratie. Eine deutsche Affäre. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020); Charlotte Epstein, *Birth of*

this volume, the body can be used as a “useful heuristic tool” and has already been employed as a “prism through which to explore ideas of imperialism, nationalism, colonial struggle, and modernity”.¹³

In addition, research on the history of the (Asian) body may be embedded more in the recently developed theories of new materialism. New materialism can be seen as a critique of the late twentieth-century dominance of the linguistic paradigm in the humanities, as well as a re-examination of the central place of the human being, focusing rather on the connections between humans and non-humans such as objects, animals, plants and the environment. It thus foregrounds “matter” and seeks to go beyond discourse analysis and binary oppositions such as nature/culture, biological/technical, self/other, female/male, body/mind, all dualisms that had contributed to the domination of women, people of color, nature, workers and animals.¹⁴ In this volume, Erica Wald unveils human-animal entanglements in her analysis of British colonial celebrations of pigsticking in India. More new materialist analysis featuring “naturecultures”, as Donna Haraway framed it, or the idea that “bodies and meanings co-shape one another”,¹⁵ will bring the field of the history of the body more into contact with environmental history and environmental humanities, as well as with theoretical approaches connecting matter and meaning. The chapters that mentioned hair and dress, as I wrote above, already form an interesting starting point to address the material aspects of the body. Hopefully, these future historical studies will cover the human body’s frailty as well as its strength, including attention to diversity and disability, and at the same time capturing the networks of which these bodies are part.

the State: The Place of the Body in Crafting Modern Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Giusi Russo, *Women, Empires, & Body Politics at the United Nations, 1946–1975* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023).

¹³ Introduction to this volume.

¹⁴ For an overview of new materialist theories and their application to the history of the body, see Ruberg, *History of the Body*, chapter 6, 93–109.

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, 2008) 4.

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