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ARTICLE

"Internal Frontiers": Whiteness, Intimacy, and the Expatriate Home in Britain's African Colonies during the Postwar Period

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Abstract

Using archival oral history interviews with ex-colonial officers from the Scottish Decolonisation Project and the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection, this article examines the intimate lives and domestic spaces of white expatriates in Britain's African colonies during the postwar period, often described as the "people's empire." In doing so, it seeks to better understand the socio-historical construction of imperial whiteness. It argues that the boundaries of the expatriate home acted as the "internal frontiers" of whiteness, insofar as racial difference was constructed through habitual bodily and domestic discipline concerning cleanliness, child-rearing, social interactions, and sex, which was monitored and enforced within expatriate social circles. Oral testimonies from white expatriates who lived and worked in colonial Africa highlight the contradictory nature of the discursive construction of whiteness, as both culturally distant from the African peoples over which it claimed racial superiority and dependent on operations of care and nurture provided by indigenous Africans. This article explores the ways in which Africans forged relationships with white expatriates as servants, lovers, and friends in order to examine how these ambivalent intimacies coexisted with, and were constitutive of, unequal racial hierarchies.

Keywords: Colonialism; Whiteness; Intimacy; Africa; Oral history

Introduction

Historians of imperialism have long demonstrated that the late colonial period in Britain's African colonies was shaped by a process of domestication, in which the influx of British wives with their children in tow produced new forms of expatriate life that shifted the nucleus of imperial politics from the frontier to the home.[1] In doing so, they have usefully undermined the distinction between public and private in imperial and racial politics, by demonstrating that everyday concerns in the colonies, such as maintaining bodily hygiene, dealing with servants, raising children, and deciding with whom to form

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[1] See Barbara Bush, "Gender and Empire: The Twentieth Century" in *Gender and Empire,* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 77–111; Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

intimate relationships, were also political matters.[2] These minute, quotidian considerations served to affirm one's status as a member of the colonial white bourgeoisie, and distinguish respectable white expatriates from both indigenous communities and undesirable, lower-status Europeans. Moreover, as the perceived vulnerability of white women and children necessitated constant protection from unfamiliar environments, harsh climates, and indigenous peoples, maintaining one's home according to such prescribed moral dictates provided a line of defence against the intoxicating and corrupting colonial landscape that lay beyond the compound walls. Thus, the expatriate home became an "internal frontier," described by Ann Stoler as "the essence of a nation," "constituting the criteria by which Europeanness could be identified, citizenship accorded, and nationality assigned."[3] However, as Stoler also notes, "a frontier locates a site of both enclosure and contact, of observed passage and exchange." Imperial domestic life, the site on which seemingly intractable racial differences were constructed, was also shaped by the labour of colonised others, who provided expatriates with nourishment, cleaned their homes and their bodies, satisfied their sexual needs, and offered companionship. Thus the permeable boundaries of the expatriate home provide a starting point for understanding the complex sites of intimacy and exchange that were essential to the cultivation of the white, bourgeois self.[4] Using oral history interviews with ex-colonial officers who served in Britain's African colonies during the postwar period, this article examines the intimate lives of the British colonial class in order to better understand how whiteness was forged *through* intimate relations with servants, friends, and lovers, both inside and outside of the compound walls.

   Upon arriving in Tanganyika in 1948, one of the first things a United Africa Company doctor and his wife observed about their new home was the dust: "we lived in perpetual dust . . . [which] would move through the house [like] a miniature tornado, everything would be filthy . . . and you had it in your hair, in your ears, in your eyes, everywhere."[5] The married pair's battle to eliminate dust from their home was indicative of the rituals of cleanliness and purity that maintaining one's whiteness in the colonies entailed. Yet, as Barbara Bush notes, "it was impossible to exclude fully from the white expatriate home the smells, dirt, and disease that white colonial discourse associated with the colonized."[6] Whiteness was neither immutable nor invulnerable, and in fact it was through these uncomfortable moments in which the external environment of the colonies breached the boundaries of the expatriate home that whiteness was constructed, challenged, and

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[2] See Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Will Jackson and Emily Manktelow, eds., *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Philippa Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire" in *Gender and Empire,* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134–55; Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); Carina Ray, "Interracial Sex and the Making of Empire" in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism,* ed. Ato Quayson and Girshi Daswani (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 190–211; Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexuality in 20th Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist* 16:4 (1989), 634–60; Ann Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves" in *Cultures of Empire,* ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 87–119; Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[3] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge,* 80.

[4] See Bush, "Gender and Empire,"77–111; Karen Tranberg Hansen, "White Women in a Changing World: Employment, Voluntary Work and Sex in Post-World War II Northern Rhodesia" in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance,* ed. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 247–68.

[5] National Library Scotland [hereafter NLS], UNLS002/122–23, Interview with United Africa Company Doctor and his Wife, 9 September 1987.

[6] Bush, "Gender and Empire," 93.

reformulated. The omnipresence of African domestic workers in expatriate homes, as well as the increasing presence of indigenous Africans in colonial social circles during the postwar period, exposed the tension between respectable, bourgeois whiteness, perceived as distant and distinct from its colonial contexts, and an imperial racial economy in which close contact between coloniser and colonised was ubiquitous. Far from undermining or transgressing hegemonic racial distinctions, intimate relationships with indigenous Africans were essential to the construction of bourgeois whiteness. The care and nurture provided by African servants, friends, and lovers produced and affirmed white bourgeois bodies, and thus white expatriate identities were forged in equal parts through the illusion of social segregation and the reality of close proximity to racialised others. Moreover, the contested sites of intimacy that such proximity produced existed alongside, and were in fact constitutive of, radically unequal racial hierarchies.

Through its focus on the minute, the local, and the intimate, this paper does not employ a traditional geographical framework. Rather than using a regional scope, I employ a comparison of individual households from across Britain's African colonies to highlight the interconnectedness of spatial scales of encounter that range from the level of the body to the boundaries of the home, and on through to national borders. To effect this comparison, this article focuses on the ways in which Africans forged intimate relationships with white expatriates as servants, friends, and lovers, although these categories are far from discrete, often with varying degrees of slippage between friends and servants and servants and lovers. Firstly, I examine the role of domestic workers "who witnessed the most intimate aspects of expatriate daily life, including bodily functions" in order to articulate the complex intersection of intimacy and imperial dominance, before turning my attention to friendship as a technology through which racial frontiers were monitored and enforced both in relation to indigenous Africans and to fellow expatriates.[7] The intersection between affection and subordination is further demonstrated as I explore the centrality of interracial sex to the construction of race and gender. First, however, I want to address the ways in which the progressive ideology of the postwar "people's empire" permeated both the personal and the political, and discuss the challenges with the archived oral histories that form this article's primary corpus.

Imperial Whiteness in the "People's Empire"

The oral histories analysed for this article reflect the experiences of the British colonial class in Africa during the postwar period, in which the imperial state attempted to refashion itself as "a rejuvenated 'people's empire'" capable of "pulling together 'across differences of race and ethnicity'" to promote "the economic, social, and technical uplift of its dependent peoples."[8] Many of the interviewees cited here internalised the progressive ideology of the "people's empire," and for some their self-conception as a new kind of modern and enlightened colonial also shaped their understanding of shifting racial economies. For example, after joining the Corona Society in Gambia, a group set up to support the wives of colonial officers living overseas, Mrs. M. attempted to reform the group to be more inclusive of local Gambian women, and it was acts like this that led Mr. M. to compliment his wife by describing her as "colour-blind."[9]

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Andrew S. Thompson and Meaghan Kowalsky, "Social Life and Cultural Representation: Empire in the Public Imagination," in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Andrew Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 251–97, 257.

[9] NLS, UNLS002/98, Interview with district officer and his wife, 10 April 1986.

That many interviewees were keen to present themselves as progressive in regards to race and self-governance in the colonies may also suggest a more defensive self-conception of imperial whiteness that emerged in response to increasing criticism of the British Empire during this period. As Wendy Webster notes, the ideals of equal partnership that defined the rhetoric of the "people's empire" were not often realised in practice.[10] The Suez Crisis and counterinsurgency campaigns in Malaya and Cyprus, as well as the Mau Mau and Nyasaland emergencies, which Ronald Hyam argues "signalled the moral end of the British empire in Africa," drew sharp criticism both internationally and at home.[11] Accordingly, many interviewees viewed themselves through the eyes of an imagined anti-colonial critic and sought to pre-emptively defend themselves and rehabilitate the tarnished reputation of empire. Miss F., who worked in Northern Rhodesia from 1951 until independence in 1964, admitted feeling bombarded by critics who argued that the British should "have left [Africans] on the trees," and defended her position by stating that she felt a deep attachment to "the African" who looked up to Europeans, before catching herself and stating "I don't think we looked down to them."[12] Others attempted to distinguish their brand of technocratic, enlightened professionalism from contemporary criticisms of white settlers and missionaries, as well as popular depictions of the outdated British colonial, described by one of the interviewers as those who dressed in topis and white gloves and "hit their natives."[13] For example, in response to a question about the reputation of empire, Mr. and Mrs. I. defended the British colonial legacy by stating that they went to Nyasaland in 1960 for careers rather than as settlers, and that they were dedicated professionals despite receiving low salaries.[14] Thus, while the act of questioning what it meant to be white was a continuous feature of British imperial rule in Africa, the "people's empire" shaped many interviewees' self-conception of their whiteness as distinct from those who had come before. As Penny Summerfield notes, "the close relationship between culture, language and meaning makes it impossible to regard the influence of a public discourse . . . as some kind of mould that must be scraped off to reveal the supposedly underlying historical 'truths.'"[15]

Crucially, the ideology of the "people's empire" straddled both the personal and the political. For example, Mrs. M. sought to distinguish her and her husband from missionaries working in the same area by criticising their private rather than professional practices. She described their living conditions as isolated from the community and spoke disparagingly of the way in which they boiled and mosquito-proofed everything.[16] Earlier in the interview, Mrs. M. similarly distanced herself from the problematic behaviour of another expatriate towards his servants. "He was a bachelor who used to sit in his chair and blow his hunting horn for his boy to come. . . . It was all terribly, terribly colonial. . . . I didn't necessarily feel this was quite my right place." Attempts by Mrs. M. and others to evaluate and appraise the intimate habits of other white expatriates demonstrate a key concern of this article. In keeping with what critical whiteness studies scholars identify as the "Janus-faced" nature of whiteness—insofar as it is policed externally in relation to racialised others and internally to exclude those seen to deviate from its hegemonic ideals—much of this paper is concerned with the dual nature of whiteness and the

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[10] Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 55–91.

[11] Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 263.

[12] British Empire and Commonwealth Collection, Bristol Archives [hereafter BECC], BECC OH 0011, Interview with colonial office secretary, 13 September 1992.

[13] NLS, UNLS002/71–72, Interview with military police officer, 16 November 1987.

[14] NLS, UNLS002/46, Interview with district commissioner and his wife, 1 July 1985.

[15] Penny Summerfield, "Oral History as Autobiographical Practice," *Miranda* 12 (2016), 1–14, 5.

[16] NLS, UNLS002/98, Interview with district officer and his wife, 10 April 1986.

ways in which whiteness was guarded *within* expatriate communities.[17] Taking inspiration from Stoler's attempts to understand the influence of the colonial social landscape on European racial identities, and not just vice versa, this paper seeks to understand the ways in which British expatriates performed whiteness to themselves and amongst themselves, as well as in front of colonial subjects, even while its meaning was constantly shifting to accommodate new imperial ideologies.[18]

Race, Gender, and the Colonial Archive

This article takes as its primary corpus oral history interviews collected as part of the Scottish Decolonisation Project (SDP), which was established in 1985 by Professor D. C. M. Platt at the University of Oxford and the Department of Manuscripts at the National Library of Scotland, with the aim of documenting the experiences of Scottish people who lived and worked in Britain's colonies during the period of decolonisation. I also draw from a small number of interviews covering the same time period from Bristol Archives' British Empire & Commonwealth Collection (BECC), comprising interviews with British citizens who lived in Britain's colonies, conducted in the early 1990s. I listened to forty interviews, and, while both oral history collections include accounts from missionaries as well as those who grew up in the colonies, I focussed exclusively on those who entered the colonial service during the postwar period, although some remained for some years after independence.

Despite the fact that both oral history collections cover a wide range of topics, through its focus on intimate spaces, habits, and relationships, this article draws disproportionately from oral history interviews with women, often interviewed alongside their husbands. While this wasn't necessarily deliberate, it was perhaps unavoidable, for, as Will Jackson notes, "the 'private' remains a feminized domain," and trying to access such private spaces "involves engaging with an archive that constructs the intimate in part precisely *through* the confining of female subjectivities to the private sphere."[19] That I found the accounts of female interviewees to have greater relevance for my focus on domestic spaces also reflects the fact that, as Barbara Bush notes, white women acted as the "guardians of moral and physical health and hygiene in the expatriate home."[20] As such, this article takes inspiration from work by Karen Tranberg Hansen, as well as Vron Ware and Charlotte MacDonald, who emphasise the contradictory position of white women in the colonies as members of the "inferior" sex *and* the "superior" race.[21] This focus on the conflictual role of white women requires a degree of ambivalence, which I attempt to maintain throughout, not in regards to colonial racism, which is inarguable and overwhelmingly evident, but rather as a sensibility through which to view the

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[17] Matthew W. Hughey, "The (Dis)Similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of 'Hegemonic Whiteness,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33:8 (2010), 1289–309, 1292; see also France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher, "The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the 'Third Wave,'" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31:1 (2008), 4–24.

[18] See Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 1995); Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable," 634–60; Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves," 87–119; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge.*

[19] Will Jackson, "The Private Lives of Empire: Emotion Intimacy and Colonial Rule," *Itinerario* 42:1 (2018), 1–15, 5–6.

[20] Bush, "Gender and Empire," 90.

[21] Hansen, "White Women in a Changing World," 247–68; Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso Books, 1992); Charlotte MacDonald, "Power that Hurts: Harriet Gore Browne and the Perplexities of Living Inside Empire," *Itinerario* 42:1 (2018), 16–32.

unknowability of the intimate. As Jackson notes, such "'barely visible' worlds of intimate encounters" are largely inaccessible to historians, and I approach this research with an acknowledgement of this opacity.[22]

Throughout both oral history collections, the interviewers appear to support the interviewees' pursuit to rehabilitate postwar imperial whiteness, and can be seen to provide a sympathetic ear for airing opinions which one might otherwise have been more cautious about stating openly in the postcolonial metropole of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In particular, the interviewer for the Scottish Decolonisation Project regularly offered interviewees the space to counter criticisms of the late imperial British state and promote the notion of a progressive "people's empire." Thus, my methodology requires reading "against the archival grain," and in doing so, I hope to identify what Stoler terms "imperial dispositions," by which she means "what it took to live a colonial life, to live in and off empire and [be] reflective of its practices."[23] Herein also lies the rationale for utilising oral histories in particular. Understanding the "people's empire" as a counterpart to the "people's war" might in and of itself suggest the particular utility of employing oral histories, but more than that, the interviews themselves provided fertile ground for the cultivation of the white, bourgeois self. As Summerfield notes, "the reconstruction of an individual's past in dialogue with an interviewer frequently involves the production of a narrative that puts the pieces of a life together and satisfies the teller."[24] It was in part *through* the recounting of their stories with the help of a sympathetic interviewer that the interviewees were able to try to make sense of their own whiteness.

The oral histories cited in this article are limited to the perspectives of British expatriates, and as such my methodological approach to these oral histories seeks to incorporate an understanding of the metanarrative of the archive as constitutive of imperial power. The colonial archive exists as a tool of imperial governance. It is the physical, or in this case sonic, manifestation of a taxonomic regime designed to classify and control.[25] As such, both oral history collections that comprise the focus of this article are themselves technologies of imperial knowledge production aimed at constructing and ordering Africa for the European imagination. Although my aim is to return the gaze to better understand the socio-historical construction of whiteness, this article, through its focus on sites of encounter and exchange, necessarily also addresses those colonised peoples the archive specifically seeks to document, define, and categorise, and yet who are excluded from it. It is not enough to say that indigenous Africans have been silenced within the archive. Rather, in its efforts to document and record humanity, the archive constructs Blackness as the other, the anti, or what Christina Sharpe terms "the constitutive outside."[26] Sharpe further highlights what is at stake in archival research by gesturing to the epistemic violence enacted when we do not challenge the narratives the archive seeks to proffer, arguing that this does "violence to our own capacities to read, think, and imagine otherwise."[27] To imagine otherwise in this study is to grasp at lives lived in excess of hegemonic ideals, think outside of fixed racial and cultural categories, and recognise intimacies that were deviant, indefinable, and unregulatable.

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[22] Jackson, "The Private Lives of Empire," 8.

[23] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3.

[24] Summerfield, "Oral History as Autobiographical Practice," 11.

[25] See Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 164.

[26] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), 28.

[27] Ibid, 13.

Domestic Servants

During an interview about his experiences of living and working in colonial Kenya, an ex-military police officer corrected the interviewer's assumption that prior to decolonisation Kenyans required permission to enter European housing areas by stating, "you must realise that in the white areas there were hundreds of Africans, nearly all serving as houseboys, cooks, gardeners, and of course most of them slept in their own quarters at the back of the house. . . . So no, no there was no restriction at all."[28] The image this statement evokes—of a segregated white housing enclave defined by the ideals of bourgeois domesticity that supposedly demonstrated its inhabitants' racial superiority but that was nonetheless reliant on Kenyan domestic workers—is significant. If the boundaries of the colonial home represented racial borders that differentiated the colonial class from the supposedly inferior cultures of indigenous Africans, the ubiquitous presence of African domestic workers within the sanctity of the home exposed the problematics of such racial distinctions. More importantly, it produced contested sites of intimacy and dependence that existed alongside systems of racial subjugation.

Mr. and Mrs. E., who moved to Nigeria the year before independence, described domestic servants as "both convenient and expected."[29] Mrs. E. continued, "the intense heat would make it impossible to carry out all the extra household duties . . . there is much more physical labour in looking after a household in a tropical climate." In keeping with Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk's assertion that while "local servants were often vital for the survival of settler families in the tropics" they also denoted "white households' special privileges and status," it would be overly simplistic to see this as a logistical necessity only.[30] As Stoler puts it, "the cultivation of the European bourgeois self in the colonies" produced a "body to be cared for, protected, cultivated, and preserved" and this "required other bodies that would perform those nurturing services."[31] Thus what Mrs. E. alluded to in that statement was not the impossibility of the work but the unsuitability of her body to carry it out. Furthermore, what goes unsaid in Mrs. E.'s assertion — because it does not need to be vocalised—is the "colonial common sense" that dictated the standard of living expected of a middle-class couple and members of the supposedly superior civilisation.[32] It is this standard that necessitated the additional physical labour and that could be invoked to demarcate racial status. For Mr. and Mrs. M., who lived in Nigeria from 1949 to 1959 and Gambia from 1959 to 1964, employing domestic servants was inextricably linked to their middle-class lifestyle and leisure activities.[33] As Mrs. M. explained, while in Nigeria, they had a cook, a steward boy, a small boy, a garden boy. and, because Mr. M. was fond of polo, two horse boys. When Mrs. M. lamented that after moving to an area where there was no polo and thus no need for horses so they had to "get rid of them," it's unclear whether she was referring to the horses or the servants who attended them, thus blurring the line between servants, commodities, and luxuries. This illuminates the dependencies and fragility of imperial whiteness, as both predicated on middle-class domestic conventions invoked to assert racial superiority and simultaneously reliant on access to racialised labour to achieve this standard.

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[28] NLS, UNLS002/164–65, Interview with Former Army Member and Public Servant, 17 May 1989.

[29] NLS, UNLS002/42–43, Interview with lawyer and his wife, 5 June 1986.

[30] Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, "Domestic Work in the Colonial Context: Race, Colour and Power in the Household" in *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers,* ed. Dirke Hoerder, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Silke Neunsinger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 245–53, 246.

[31] Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies," 97.

[32] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain,* 3.

[33] NLS, UNLS002/98, Interview with district officer and his wife, 10 April 1986.

Through their oversight of the domestic domain and child-rearing, white women were constructed as the guardians and standard bearers of white racial purity, and as such there was a tension between the discursive construction of white femininity and a dependence on a predominantly male, African domestic labour force. As both Barbara Bush and Robyn Pariser highlight, this produced unusual, and at times uncomfortable, intimacies between white women and their male servants.[34] Often with little knowledge of the surrounding area, colonial housewives were forced to rely on their male servants for information and protection, especially while their husbands were away on safari.[35] However, it is evident from oral history interviews that, under threat of a subverted racial hierarchy, master-servant relationships were stabilised through certain societal norms and policed internally within expatriate social circles. The threat posed by an overwhelmingly male domestic labour force to the imperial order of things was in part neutralised by the language used to describe servants. All servants were referred to as "boy" regardless of their age and this served to infantilise them.[36] Thus when Mrs. E. asserted that she behaved towards her servants like "the headmistress of a boys' prep school" she reproduced this infantilisation and in doing so asserted her status as a member of the dominant racial group.[37] As Pariser puts it, "the home was a stage on which European women constantly needed to perform the role of the knowledgeable, patient, civilized colonial master in front of their staff."[38] This expectation to perform the role of mistress was enforced and monitored through the watchful, and at times judgemental, gaze of other expatriates. Along with multiple other interviewees who observed and appraised the behaviour of their fellow expatriates towards their servants, Mrs. E. criticised those with "enlightened views on how to treat servants" who instead "stirred up great trouble for themselves" because "their servants just thought they were fools and took them for a ride."[39] This is not only an example of the uneasy tension that existed in postwar colonial Africa, identified by Chris Jeppesen as between those who still subscribed to the old-fashioned ideals of the District Officer and those sneeringly referred to as the "secretariat type," but it is also just one example of the watchful gaze with which British expatriates policed whiteness internally by monitoring relationships with domestic staff.[40] Living in such close proximity to racialised others created spaces where racial distinctions could appear uncertain, hazy, and even contradictory, and the boundaries of whiteness needed to be policed accordingly to accommodate these inconsistencies.

The dependence of bourgeois bodies on African labour produced sites of intimacy and exchange that not only easily coexisted with whiteness but were part and parcel of unequal power relations. As Alison Light notes, "servants were the body's keepers, protecting its entrances and exits; they were privy to its secrets and its chambers; they knew that their masters and mistresses sweated, leaked and bled."[41] Especially for the interviewees who lived in remote postings, there emerged a complex intimacy with

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[34] Bush, "Gender and Empire," 95; Robyn Pariser, "The Servant Problem: African Servants and the Making of European Domesticity in Colonial Tanganyika," in *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers,* ed. Dirke Hoerder, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Silke Neunsinger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 271–95, 287.

[35] Pariser, "The Servant Problem," 287.

[36] Ibid., 272.

[37] NLS, UNLS002/42–43, Interview with lawyer and his wife, 5 June 1986.

[38] Pariser, "The Servant Problem," 282.

[39] NLS, UNLS002/42–43, Interview with lawyer and his wife, 5 June 1986.

[40] Chris Jeppesen, "'A Worthwhile Career for a Man Who Is Not Entirely Self-Seeking': Service, Duty and the Colonial Service during Decolonization," in *Britain, France and the Decolonisation of Africa: Future Imperfect?,* ed. Andrew W. M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen (London: UCL Press 2017), 134–56, 142.

[41] Alison Light, *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants: An Intimate History of Domestic Life in Bloomsbury* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 4.

their servants who not only fed them, cleaned for them, and managed their bodily fluids, but also provided their closest contact. For example, Mr. W., who lived in Nigeria from 1951 to 1961, quickly found that, after "inheriting" his steward boy from the resident before him, his steward would wait for him as he got out of the bath to help him dress.[42] Mr. and Mrs. J., who lived in Tanganyika, Nigeria, and Ghana between 1948 and 1967, fondly remembered their relationship with the houseboy they employed for fourteen years, as being like a "family unit."[43] It's important not to disassociate these pockets of intimacy from conditions of coercion and extreme inequality, for, as Shireen Ally notes, the "simultaneity of intimate care and destructive violence . . . delineates the psychic field of domination, most specifically in colonial subjectification."[44] The rules and conventions that regulated the movement of African employees within domestic spaces demonstrated that these forms of intimacy were born of imperial domination. Servants were variably not permitted to wear shoes in the house, touch their employers, speak unless spoken to, use the same dishes and eat the same food they had prepared for their employers, and, as Pariser notes, this "reinforced the notion that, while servants worked in their employer's household, they were not part of it. They reminded African servants they were inferior to their employers."[45] Therefore when Miss F. reminisced about a close relationship with a houseboy in Northern Rhodesia, to whom she gifted her golfing trophies, stating "he was very grateful and I liked that," the enjoyment she derived from this act resembling friendship was inextricable from the uneven power dynamic and her self-conception as the benevolent mistress.[46] Intimacy in this sense was not necessarily a subversive act, in fact "it was in the disarray of unwanted, sought after, and troubled intimacies of domestic space that colonial relations were refurbished and their distinctions made."[47]

These "troubled intimacies" were perhaps most apparent in the relationships between domestic servants and the children of their employers, where familial affections intermingled with fears of contamination and moral degeneration.[48] Mrs. M. fondly reminisced about her houseboy in Nigeria, who was "tremendously good" at caring for their young daughter.[49] Yet she also remembered being scolded by another housewife for leaving her child with him, stating, "there were people who got very worked up about leaving little girls with Muslim men . . . they thought they would be raped or something." For Mrs. M., this was a kind of prejudice that had begun to seem increasingly outdated in Britain's postwar empire, but that she nonetheless acknowledged still existed. "There were still a lot of people there who were very ambivalent I think about locals. I think there was a lot of prejudice still, in fact I know there was." This simultaneously demonstrates the way in which fledgling intimacies were able to emerge even in circumstances of extreme race and class inequality, and the impulse to police such intimacies through the enforcement of social norms.

That being said, I want to avoid positing moments of intimacy between expatriates and their servants as either the kind of racism identified by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his critique of Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa*—a kind of racism that is "persuasively put forward as love. But it is the love of a man for a horse or for a pet"—or examples of some kind of pure,

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[42] NLS, UNLS002/109–12, Interview with engineer and his wife, October 1987.

[43] NLS, UNLS002/122–23, Interview with United Africa Company Doctor and his Wife, 9 September 1987.

[44] Shireen Ally, "Domestics, 'Dirty Work,' and the Affects of Domination," *South African Review of Sociology* 42 (2011), 1–7, 2.

[45] Pariser, "The Servant Problem," 286.

[46] BECC OH 0011, Interview with colonial office secretary, 13 September 1992.

[47] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge,* 6

[48] Ibid.

[49] NLS, UNLS002/98, Interview with district officer and his wife, 10 April 1986.

unproblematic affection.[50] Instead, I would like to leave some room for ambivalence, and to talk about the kinds of love and intimacy that emerged from within, and were constitutive of, imperial racial hierarchies. I also want to acknowledge the ungovernable excess of intimate relationships that evaded attempts at regulation. Mrs. G. provides a fragmentary glimpse of such a love in her description of the relationship between her children and the family's servants in Basutoland, where they lived from 1956 until independence.[51] "We had been there, you see, a long time and two of the children were born there so that these children were very much their property, the nanny's property . . . [it] was really quite a wrench on both sides when we left." The intermingling of care and domination at work here was made apparent when during a conversation about crossing the border into segregated South Africa, Mr. G. stated that while they would not have been able to travel with their Sotho friends they could travel with their nanny in the backseat, referring to this as a "curious ambivalence." In this setting, the border acted as a critical point where racial difference was demarcated and enforced, and where the unregulatable affection between a black nanny and her white wards was temporarily obscured to become nothing more than an employee with her employers. Affection and familiarity between domestic servants and their employers coexisted with conditions of extreme inequality and racial subjugation. Or put simply, "intimacy 'happened' not despite colonial racism but because of it."[52] The internal frontiers of whiteness were constructed in relation to this ambivalence towards the racialised other, as simultaneously paternalistic yet antagonistic, dominant yet dependent, distant yet intimately intertwined.

Friends

The importance of the expatriate home, as a space within which the essence of whiteness was policed according to everyday, minute decisions about who was invited into one's home and in what capacity, is made evident in the Scottish Decolonisation Project's line of questioning. In multiple interviews the interviewer habitually asked if interviewees made friends with Africans and specifically if they invited them into their homes, at one point even explicitly stating "I mean these are really archive questions aren't they?"[53] The significance of the home as a site for delineating racial and cultural categories was further demonstrated when during the same interview Mr. and Mrs. G. described contradictory friendships between white South African farmers and a Sotho vet.[54] Whilst socialising in the club at Maseru, the white farmers would "slap him on the back, and he would beat them at golf, he would beat them at tennis and they would drink to him. Cross the divide of the Caledon River, when they rang up and said . . . please come and look after my cow, they couldn't take him through the front door. . . . This was all part of the social process." Much like the border between Basutoland and South Africa, which forced Mr. and Mrs. G.'s nanny into the backseat of the car to perform the role of employee and nothing more, the threshold of the home was itself a racial border, restricting which colonial subjects could enter intimate spaces and under what circumstances. As such, I now turn my attention to another form of intimacy, friendship, specifically the tenuous and protean categories around which appropriate friendships were formed.

Multiple interviewees noted the impact of an emerging class of Western-educated African elites on both their professional and personal lives during the period leading

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[50] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (London: James Currey, 1993), 151.
[51] NLS, UNLS002/48, Interview with government officer and his wife, 6 November 1986.
[52] Jackson, "The Private Lives of Empire," 9.
[53] NLS, UNLS002/48, Interview with government officer and his wife, 6 November 1986.
[54] Ibid.

up to decolonisation. Miss F. noted with some embarrassment that once Europeans in Northern Rhodesia observed that independence was imminent they began inviting locals of high social standing to their cocktail parties.[55] Rather than a sign of the gradual disintegration of racial boundaries, it would be more accurate to see this as an example of what Stoler identifies as the "tenuously balanced assessments of who was judged to act with reason, affective appropriateness, and a sense of morality" through which racial identity was assigned.[56] While such protean assessments may have mitigated the extent to which Africans were considered "other" and allowed for cross-cultural friendships, they also presented those Africans deemed to conform to such standards as exceptional. Mr. R., who moved to Kenya in 1952 and remained there even after independence until 1974, noted of his only Kenyan acquaintance, "if you closed your eyes you could have been talking to somebody from Eton and Oxford."[57] This sense of exceptionalism is also evident in the interview with Mr. and Mrs. J. who stated that, unlike in Tanganyika where they socialised with local Africans who worked as doctors, lawyers, and in government service, once they moved to Nigeria they struggled to forge friendships outside of the expatriate community, because "it was so primitive it was impossible."[58] Timothy Burke similarly highlights that as Western bodily and domestic disciplines were increasingly adopted by the new emerging African elite, this came to be seen as the distinction between traditional and modern, African and European, heathenism and Christianity.[59] For Mr. and Mrs. M., Christianity and its attendant cultural connotations provided the common ground on which interracial friendships could emerge.[60] When the interviewer observed that Mr. and Mrs. M. appeared to socialise freely with local Gambians, Mr. M. qualified this by stating that they socialised predominantly with Christian Gambians who had been educated in England and listened to Mozart. Moreover, for Mrs. M., the "problem" with socialising with local Muslim women was made apparent both when visiting local emirs' wives in purdah and hosting them in her home, experiences in which she struggled to "make rather difficult small talk." Therefore, in addition to the language barrier—neither Mr. or Mrs. M. spoke Mandinka and were therefore only able to socialise with English-speaking Gambians—Mrs. M found that entertaining locals in one's home had the potential to fortify, as well as contravene, cultural distinctions. Thus, while I don't want to obscure or denigrate intimacies that existed in friendships between the British colonial class and local Africans, the act of deciding who to invite into one's home in a social capacity offered white expatriates a tool through which to survey and assign racial difference.

As with relationships between expatriates and their domestic servants, it is important to maintain a degree of ambivalence capable of encompassing at once an understanding of the inequalities that shaped interracial friendships and the excesses of intimacy that defied easy categorisations. Despite stating, "I must admit I am basically anti-Black" after being asked about friendships with locals in Nigeria where he lived from 1947 to 1964, Mr. P. quickly followed this up by describing two exceptional friendships with two men he viewed as "the nearest approach to Jesus Christ" he had ever met.[61] In reference to one of these friendships he told the interviewer that this friend "saved my bacon many times" but refused to elaborate as these stories related to sex. While this alludes to a shared intimacy between friends, these friendships were simultaneously

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[55] BECC OH 0011, Interview with colonial office secretary, 13 September 1992.

[56] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge,* 6.

[57] NLS, UNLS002/164–65, Interview with Former Army Member and Public Servant, 17 May 1989.

[58] NLS, UNLS002/122–23, Interview with United Africa Company Doctor and his Wife, 9 September 1987.

[59] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women,* 43.

[60] NLS, UNLS002/98, Interview with district officer and his wife, 10 April 1986.

[61] NLS, UNLS002/71–72, Interview with military police officer Nigeria, 16 November 1987.

inseparable from an uneven racial power dynamic, which Mr. P. himself admitted, stating that while he loved them he always maintained a sense of superiority. In keeping with Burke's description of the "noble savage" trope, in which Africans deemed to be untouched by the influences of Western modernity were seen as morally purer than Africans who aspired to above their station by mimicking Europeanness, Mr. P. was keen to present his friends as possessing a distinctly unmodern authenticity.[62] When the interviewer asserted that because one of his friends served in the army he would have been more educated and world-weary, Mr. P. quickly corrected this, stating that "they wouldn't have learnt much in the bush in Burma."[63] Later in the interview, this fetishisation of authenticity as synonymous with inferiority was made more explicit, with Mr. P. stating that he preferred the "downtrodden and poor" Efik people to the educated Igbo class, who he described as "smart alecs." I raise this not to undermine the love Mr. P. felt for his Nigerian friends, although I admit I find it difficult to accept the veracity of such a love, but instead to highlight that these contested sites of intimacy were a product, rather than an aberration, of imperial, racial politics.

Norms concerning social interactions were not only constitutive of imperial whiteness as it related to indigenous Africans, but also acted as a means through which to police whiteness internally amongst European expatriates. A recurring question throughout the Scottish Decolonisation Project interviews referred to the "bad behaviour" of fellow expatriates, described by the interviewer as drinking too much, beating their servants, and keeping mistresses.[64] The significance of this interview question is twofold. Firstly, it exposes the fragility of whiteness within a colonial environment that was seen as corrupting, licentious, and hostile.[65] In response to the interviewer's question about "bad behaviour," Mrs. J., who lived in Tanganyika, Nigeria, and Ghana, admitted that there were some expatriates who couldn't cope with the tropical climate because they were not "psychologically fit enough," adding that Africa was no place for a perfectionist.[66] This is in keeping with Stoler's assertion that the "essences" that defined coloniser and colonised were asymmetric, with non-Western essences perceived as relatively fixed and unchanging, and European essences as fragile, requiring constant vigilance to maintain their purity.[67] The true marker of whiteness was an ability to maintain affective purity through self-discipline even within a supposedly corrupting environment.[68] The interviewer's request for her interviewees to make a judgement between good and bad behaviours demonstrates the way in which this was enforced socially amongst expatriates through minute, everyday interactions. Secondly, "bad behaviour" among expatriates threatened to weaken the image of civilisational superiority through which racial subjugation was justified. Thus it is notable that during her interview with Mr. and Mrs. J., the interviewer followed up her question on "bad behaviour" by asking what Ghanaians made of these wayward expatriates.[69] While Mr. J. replied that he did not know what local Ghanaians would have made of such people, the interviewer's question in itself makes apparent the impulse to perform whiteness in front of colonial subjects within social settings. Racial difference was conflated with appropriate social conduct and this could alienate both indigenous locals and white expatriates who were deemed nonconforming and unrespectable.

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[62] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women,* 22.

[63] NLS, UNLS002/71–72, Interview with military police officer Nigeria, 16 November 1987.

[64] NLS, UNLS002/4–5, Interview with a government officer and his wife, 11 October 1988.

[65] See Jackson and Manktelow, *Subverting Empire,* 15.

[66] NLS, UNLS002/122–23, Interview with United Africa Company Doctor and his Wife, 9 September 1987.

[67] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge,* 97.

[68] Jackson and Manktelow, *Subverting Empire,* 5.

[69] NLS, UNLS002/122–23, Interview with United Africa Company Doctor and his Wife, 9 September 1987.

Furthermore, as George Bishi highlights in his study of "undesirable" whites in Southern Rhodesia, class played a significant role in judging affective appropriateness, and this was made apparent in Mr. R.'s description of class conflict in Kenya between soldiers and the white settler community.[70] Mr. R. described the average working-class British soldier, stating "if he wasn't doing his duty, [he] was probably down in Nairobi getting as many beers down him as possible," leading to "fights in public places, public hotels, which immediately the average European out there who was still changed for dinner [in] black tie . . . looked down on very much." Thus, whiteness was policed internally among expatriates in part according to minute decisions about how, where, and with whom one socialised. The process of expanding social circles to include some exceptional Africans and contracting them to exclude undesirable white expatriates should be read as a constitutive process of whiteness, and a means through which its borders were policed and redrawn in accordance with changing social and political landscapes.

Lovers

Historians of empire have increasingly studied interracial sex and relationships in the colonies as a means through which to examine what Mary Louise Pratt terms the "contact zone," "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power."[71] Many such scholars have noted that despite colonial concerns surrounding sexual chasteness and miscegenation, sex across the colour line was not transgressive but rather constitutive of white European gender identities.[72] This final section centres the parallel histories of a secretary from Stirling working in the Nigerian colonial office and an unnamed woman from a remote village in Tanganyika to further explore the centrality of interracial sex to the construction of gendered whiteness. Despite the apparent differences between these two disparate figures, exploring their histories in tandem exposes the technologies of sex that constructed the former as representative of the "sexual-cum-racial purity" of the British colonial class and the latter as an embodiment of the sexual deviance that the colonies came to represent.[73] The archive offers us only a fragmentary glimpse of the unnamed woman in an interview with a Scottish surveyor recruited by the British colonial office to work first in Gambia and then in Tanganyika in the early 1950s.[74] Whilst stationed near an unnamed remote village in Tanganyika, the surveyor asked his unnamed houseboy to procure an unnamed woman for sex. Two years later, a young woman from Stirling was recruited to work in the Nigerian colonial office to perform the dual role of secretary and respectable wife-in-waiting within the expatriate social scene.[75] Understanding their histories in parallel requires effectively collapsing geographies to unpack the intersections between these two women as they navigated the imperial, patriarchal order. Therefore, while the partiality of the archive obscures the contextual and local differences of their respective situations, I exploit the narrative of interconnection that it produces to

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[70] George Bishi, "Immigration and Settlement of 'Undesirable' Whites in Southern Rhodesia, c. 1940s–1960s," in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa,* ed. Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyle-Hermann (London: Routledge, 2020), 59–77, 64; NLS, UNLS002/164–65, Interview with Former Army Member and Public Servant, 17 May 1989.

[71] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991), 33–40, 34.

[72] See Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable," 634–60; "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies," 87–119; *Carnal Knowledge*, 1-21; Jackson and Manktelow, *Subverting Empire*; Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire," 134–55; Ray, "Interracial Sex," 190–211.

[73] Ray, "Interracial Sex," 194.

[74] NLS, UNLS002/25–26, Interview with surveyor, 10 October 1988.

[75] NLS, UNLS002/67–68, Interview with colonial office secretary, 12 January 1988.

explore the significance of interracial sex, and more importantly care and intimacy, to imperial racial identities.

For the Scottish surveyor, having access to the unnamed woman's body was central to his masculinity. During his interview with the Scottish Decolonisation Project he stated, "there was no way that I was going into the bush a lusty guy for a whole year and not having a woman, I mean it was just something that was wrong, completely wrong."[76] Not only was sex with racialised women expressed as a right, or at the very least an inevitability, but the surveyor's statement also exposes the interplay between entitlement and dependency. While invoking Foucault's assertion that technologies of sex were more about affirming bourgeois bodies than enslaving others, Stoler makes the relevant point that even within such sexual schema, bourgeois bodies were dependent bodies requiring protection and care, which necessitated racialised labour as concubines and domestic servants.[77] The surveyor described the unnamed woman as "a village girl that your cook organised and brought into your camp."[78] Just as the cook attended to the surveyor's other bodily needs such as hunger, hygiene, and comfort, he also arranged for the unnamed woman to service his sexual needs, and in doing so affirmed the surveyor's body as one in need of service. The surveyor's racial and gender identity was inextricably bound up with an entitlement to transgress racial borders and a dependence on the unnamed woman's perceived sexual availability.

The surveyor's relationship with the unnamed woman might appear to contradict an imperial system that justified racial subordination in part by invoking principles of sexual restraint. Sexual excess "characterized those in need of the civilizing hand of colonialism" and racial superiority was demonstrated through a capacity for self-discipline within a licentious and corrupting environment.[79] In fact, the surveyor later described being alienated from the expatriate community after bringing the unnamed woman with him on a social trip, stating "I was ostracised more or less because I had my black lady with me . . . but because I had done that and it was known, my second visit to Mahenge I wasn't invited by the DC for dinner which would normally happen the first night."[80] What was of most importance here was not the sexual act itself, but the public nature of their relationship. Imperial whiteness was *performed* through minute, everyday actions and enforced internally amongst expatriates, so it was not the act of interracial sex that threatened to subvert the imperial racial order but rather who the surveyor was *seen* to have sex with, care for, and make love to. Colonial common sense dictated that acts of public intimacy were reserved for respectable feminine bodies like that of the secretary.

In contrast to the unnamed woman, the secretary arrived in Nigeria as a suitable wife-in-waiting, a domesticator and a protector of British racial integrity. When the secretary observed that the recruitment panel at the colonial office were more interested in what she could do socially than professionally, it was because she presented a respectable alternative to deviant sexual relationships like that of the surveyor and the unnamed woman.[81] Yet it would be an oversimplification to posit the secretary as a late addition to a pre-existing sexual economy or solely a means through which to ease the tension, identified by Stoler, "between a culture of whiteness that cordoned itself off from the native world and a set of domestic arrangements . . . that repeatedly transgressed these

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[76] NLS, UNLS002/25–26, Interview with surveyor, 10 October 1988.
[77] Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies," 111.
[78] NLS, UNLS002/25–26, Interview with surveyor, 10 October 1988.
[79] Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire," 136.
[80] NLS, UNLS002/25–26, Interview with surveyor, 10 October 1988.
[81] NLS, UNLS002/67–68, Interview with colonial office secretary, 12 January 1988.

distinctions."[82] In fact, many scholars have noted the discursive significance of the perceived sexual purity of white women to imperial racial politics.[83] "Just as white men's unfettered sexual access to colonized/enslaved women embodied the raced and gendered power dynamics of empire, so too did the restricted sexual access of colonized/enslaved men and white women to one another."[84] "Black peril"—the sexual threat black men were thought to pose to white women—has been well litigated elsewhere, with many arguing that fears around "black peril" emerged particularly during times of racial anxiety.[85] What interests me most here is not the conditions that created these fears but the way in which they constructed the secretary's body as one in need of protection from this supposed threat. During her interview with the secretary, the interviewer appeared fixated on this sexual threat, repeatedly asking if she ever felt in danger even when the secretary repeatedly stated that she did not.[86] It was not only the perceived vulnerability of the secretary to a corrupting colonial landscape at stake in this line of questioning, but by extension the vulnerability of the white race to moral degeneration. As Helen Callaway illustrates, "in situations of political dominance, women's sexuality becomes a symbol for the body of the ruling group; a woman sexually penetrated by an outsider . . . represents the violation of that group's integrity."[87]

Racial distinctions were constructed and enforced both in relation to interracial sex and attendant relations of care and intimacy. Thus, as marriages between European women and African men became increasingly common in Nigeria during the late 1950s and 1960s, the secretary's disapproval of these unions was predicated less on the act of sex itself and more on the perceived inability of African men to adequately care for white women by providing standards of living befitting European femininity. "Most of these Nigerian men that married white women, I mean they all had their bits on the side . . . let's say a young girl had met perhaps a student in this country and had married him, came over in the mail boat. Well I have seen them coming off that mail boat, all his family are there, it's a different matter seeing all his family there to meet and sometimes you know going to live maybe in rather squalid, down in Lagos you know."[88] While fears surrounding the sexual predations of racialised men are as old as empire itself, the domestication of empire in the twentieth century created new concerns that African men were incapable of providing living standards appropriate to white femininity.[89] This in keeping with Carina Ray's study on "the white wife problem" in British West Africa, in which she cites cases where wealthy West African men were permitted to live with their European wives in the colonies only after proving that they would provide them with a standard of living befitting their race.[90] Whereas working-class interracial couples were denied entry for fear that their poor living conditions would destabilise race relations. Therefore racial anxieties surrounding interracial sex and intimacy during the late colonial period in Britain's African colonies were not only to do with fears of miscegenation and racial degeneration, but were also related to bourgeois domestic conventions.

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[82] Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies," 112.

[83] See Bush, "Gender and Empire," 77–111; Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*; Ray, "Interracial Sex," 190–211; Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable," 634–60.

[84] Ray, "Interracial Sex," 194.

[85] See Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire,* 235–6; Ray, "Interracial Sex," 190–211; Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable," 642.

[86] NLS, UNLS002/67–68, Interview with colonial office secretary, 12 January 1988.

[87] Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire,* 237.

[88] NLS, UNLS002/67–68, Interview with colonial office secretary, 12 January 1988.

[89] Levine, "Sexuality, Gender and Empire," 134–55.

[90] Carina Ray, "'The White Wife Problem': Sex, Race and the Contested Politics of Repatriation to Interwar British West Africa," *Gender & History* 21:3 (2009), 628–46.

In contrast to the secretary, the unnamed woman, while being available for sex, was not eligible for care within the imperial sexual economy. In fact, it is for this reason that I refer to her as the unnamed woman, in reference to Saidiya Hartman's "unnamed girl," the young sexualised subject of an archival photograph whose "direct gaze says everything about the kind of female property she is—one not in the class of those deserving protection."[91] For Hartman, the image of the unnamed girl's small naked figure evokes a broader story of the sexualisation of black women that denied their right to protection and care, and it is this legacy of black femininity that the unnamed woman inhabits. While interracial sex between European men and African women was commonplace, and in fact central to imperial politics, the act of care, of providing black women with the protections they had long been denied, was a far greater act of transgression. So when the surveyor found himself ostracised from the expatriate community for inviting the unnamed woman with him to Boma Mahenge, it was this act that too closely resembled affection, and not the act of sex itself, that was seen to subvert racial boundaries. Jackson similarly posits acts of intimacy and care as racial transgressions in his discussion of George William Linfoot and Gracie Sibiya, who were charged with breaking the South African Immorality Act prohibiting extramarital sex between white people and people of other races.[92] When the police entered Linfoot's home they found Sibiya alone in the bed, half-dressed with an indentation in the pillow next to her, and, while there are many sexual positions that would not leave an indentation on the pillow, "what that image suggests is a far more poignant intimacy—of two bodies at rest."[93] This offensive act of allowing black women into one's bedroom not solely for sex but for rest is echoed in Mr. P.'s interview with the Scottish Decolonisation Project about his experiences in Nigeria.[94] "It was quite the common thing for a bachelor or a husband doing a tour on his own, he would have the steward boy bring a little maiden in, and he would kick her out of bed the following morning of course . . . the steward boy would come in, lift the net, 'come on time to go.'" Thus when Mr. P. later referred to an acquaintance who "went native" by marrying a Nigerian woman, it was his morally transgressive act of publicly loving her and sharing his life with her that constituted this perceived subversion of the racial order. Racial distinctions were formulated not only in accordance with sexuality but affinity.

While the parallel stories of the unnamed woman and the secretary largely fall in line with the assertion that interracial sex was a constitutive element of imperial whiteness, what these stories expose is the far more contested issue of care and intimacy. When writing this, I struggled to think of a way to describe the unnamed woman's relationship to the surveyor, as it is unclear if she was coerced or compensated, or perhaps their relationship fell into some undefined third category. While calling her his lover doesn't adequately capture the intermingling of subjugation with familiarity—she was neither lover nor property—it led me to wonder whether she ever allowed herself to imagine loving him and having him love her back. Jackson similarly questions, "was sex between Europeans and Africans in colonial Africa no more than the operation of racial and patriarchal power? Is there room to talk of love?"[95] These contested sites of intimacy constituted the fertile ground on which race and gender were constructed, challenged, transgressed, and reformulated. It is this same sense of conflict that is evident in

[91] Saidiya Hartman, "An Unnamed Girl: A Speculative History," *New Yorker,* 9 February 2019, https://www.new-yorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-unnamed-girl-a-speculative-history.

[92] Will Jackson, "Not Seeking Certain Proof: Interracial Sex and Archival Haze in High-Imperial Natal," in *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World,* ed. Will Jackson and Emily Manktelow (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 185–204, 196.

[93] Ibid., 199.

[94] NLS, UNLS002/71–72, Interview with military police officer Nigeria, 16 November 1987.

[95] Jackson, "Not Seeking Certain Proof," 187.

Hartman's statement that "the entanglement of violence and sexuality, of care and exploitation, continues to define the meaning of being black and female," and there is no more fitting way to address the partial glimpse of the unnamed woman that the archive offers but with an acceptance of this ambivalence.[96]

Conclusion

The archived oral histories which form the primary corpus of this article demonstrate the ways in which whiteness needed to be continually performed in even the most intimate and quotidian of spaces in the colonies, and this was reproduced as the interviewees retold their experiences from the postcolonial metropole a few decades later. Minute, everyday considerations such as cleaning one's home and body, raising children, socialising with friends, and choosing with whom to have sex could be invoked as markers of racial and social status. For this reason the term "choreography" is often used in reference to the socio-historical construction of whiteness, in acknowledgement of the way in which whiteness is constituted through overlapping, layered, and at times contradictory habitual bodily and domestic practices.[97] Moreover, as made evident in many of the archival interviews, British expatriates in African colonies observed and appraised the ability of their fellow Europeans to properly execute this "choreography of the everyday," and in doing so policed the frontiers of whiteness both internally and externally.[98]

More importantly, however, the oral histories demonstrate that imperial whiteness was defined by insecurity, uncertainty, and contradiction. Whiteness was simultaneously predicated on an affective cultural separation from the colonised communities over which it claimed racial superiority, and yet intimately intertwined with indigenous peoples in complex and intersecting ways that continuously threatened to subvert racist hierarchies. Bourgeois white identities were defined not by social segregation but instead by their numerous dependencies on the labour of racialised others, who filled their stomachs, washed their bodies, loved their children, and fulfilled their sexual desires. If the "internal frontiers" of whiteness were enforced according to various spatial scales of segregation between self and other—the body, the home, the neighbourhood, and the nation-state—then the opportunity for intimacy and exchange which these sites produced exposed the porous nature of such frontiers. The boundaries of the expatriate home represented frontiers of whiteness not because they prohibited or prevented interaction with the surrounding tropical environment, but precisely because they permitted some breaches, limited others, and reformed in relation to unforeseen interactions. Perhaps most significantly, the expatriate home was a space within which care and intimacy were entangled with exploitation and racial subordination. Structural inequality and the complex sites of interaction, intimacy, and dialogue that emerged directly from such conditions of inequality were a necessary condition for the construction of whiteness in the colonies.

Despite having been collected with the aim of presenting an image of colonial Africa through the European gaze, the archived oral histories at the centre of this article are far more instructive for understanding how the racial identities of the interviewees themselves unfolded in relation to the colonial environments they once called home. In 2014 a YouGov poll on the British imperial legacy asked its respondents, "Overall do you think

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[96] Hartman, "An Unnamed Girl."

[97] See Les Back's description of the "choreography of whiteness" in "Whiteness in the Dramaturgy of Racism," in *The Sage Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies,* ed. Patricia Hill Collins and John Solomos (London: Sage, 2013), 444–68, 457; and Stoler's description of the "choreography of the everyday" in *Carnal Knowledge,* 17.

[98] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge,* 17.

the countries that were colonised by Britain are better off or worse off for being colonised?"[99] Setting aside the inanity of the question's framing, what is most striking here is that there was no question about the impact of colonisation on the colonisers. The universalising ideals of whiteness and the fallacy of whiteness as culturally distant and superior allows for the history of an empire to be misidentified as the history of a nation.[100] In order to acknowledge the obfuscation of enslaved, racialised, and immigrant labour that continues to be central to the construction of whiteness, we must refuse to go along with the archive's efforts to relegate the colonial inheritances of whiteness to a temporal and spatial "elsewhere."[101] Examining the intimate lives of the white colonial class in Africa highlights that British racial identities were forged through proximity to racialised others. Yet the simultaneous obscuration of this reality also continues to shape a culture of whiteness predicated on both remembering *and* forgetting, speaking *and* staying silent.

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[99] Will Dahlgreen, "The British Empire Is 'Something to Be Proud Of,'" YouGov, July 26 2014, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire.

[100] Gurminder K. Bhambra, "Brexit, Trump, and 'Methodological Whiteness': On the Misrecognition of Race and Class," *British Journal of Sociology* 68:1 (2017), 214–32, 220.

[101] Elizabeth Edwards, "The Colonial Archival Imaginaire at Home," *Social Anthropology* 24:1 (2016), 52–66.