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# ENVIRONMENTAL ORIENTALISMS

Suzana Sawyer and Arun Agrawal

*Must it be The Rest against The West? . . . As population and misery increase, will the wretched of the earth overwhelm the Western paradise?*

—Cover of *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1994

**S**exuality, race, and conservation are words rarely heard in a single breath. Yet sexuality and race—two constructs steeped in power relations—form pervasive undercurrents through what is commonly conceived of as a nonpolitical, neutral realm—environmental conservation. In this paper, we develop a postcolonial and feminist critique of a particular trend in conservation discourses that views Third World overpopulation as the primary threat to the environment. We maintain that arguments that define population as the nemesis of global ecological stability and biodiversity possess racist and imperialist overtones and are buttressed by a peculiarly Western, gendered perception of Nature. Specifically, we point out that cultural idioms indicting Third World peoples as ravaging tropical Nature resonate suggestively with colonial attempts to sexualize, racialize, and control colonized geographies and bodies. These contemporary cultural idioms, we propose, are instances of environmental orientalisms.

Overpopulation is repeatedly underscored by many prominent conservationists as the primary cause of environmental destruction. Paul Ehrlich (Ehrlich 1968; Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1990; Ehrlich, Ehrlich, and Dailey 1997) and E. O. Wilson (1984; 1988a; 1992), to name two of the most eminent, openly condemn Third World populations as the principal threat endangering Nature.<sup>1</sup> A number of scholars have disputed the “overpopulation thesis” (Collins; Harvey; Mitchell; Watts

1983a, 1983b). They have highlighted its neo-Malthusian origins and neglect of political economy. Environmental problems, these opponents suggest, are essentially social; their origins cannot be deduced from human numbers. Political economic criticisms have underlined neo-Malthusian fallacies and demonstrated that a focus on population diverts attention from issues of distribution and production relations. Given the persuasiveness of their arguments, why, we inquire in this paper, is the concern with reproduction and overpopulation in the tropics so prevalent and tenacious? What is the cultural logic that renders the overpopulation thesis self-evident, even natural, to the Western eye?<sup>2</sup>

We do not provide definitive answers. We point, instead, to provocative parallels and intriguing transpositions. Our aim is to be suggestive of those processes in a cultural imaginary that conflate environmental concerns with demographic obsessions. Attention to colonial roots, we suggest, challenges the neo-Malthusian fervor popular in much contemporary Western conservationist discourse. Without claiming determinacy, our analysis seeks to unveil some of the trappings of a deeply gendered and raced understanding of environmental realities.<sup>3</sup>

Our text traces the punctuated genealogy of a cultural logic and peculiarly Western sensibility that links the overpopulation thesis with Europe's colonial legacy to claim and manage non-Western Nature and peoples over the past five hundred years.<sup>4</sup> Two salient themes form the core of our discussion: the West's feminization of Nature (or unexplored territory) and its concomitant obsession with the sexuality and reproduction of nonwhites. We note that by "West" we refer to a conceptual rather than a geographical space.

We begin by showing how an early colonial imagination marked native topographies and peoples as feminine spaces to be violated and thereby instantiated a sexual/racial hierarchy between colonizer and colonized. As colonial powers extended their reach inward, natural history's classificatory project to delineate identities and differences furthered Europe's economic aspirations. Natural science debates over the definition of species—embedded as they were in idioms of sexuality and gender—intertwined with European notions of race and interracial intercourse. During periods of colonial entrenchment, which we demarcate with the advent of a significant

white female presence in the colonies, the sexual/racial hierarchy acquired a renewed salience; racial distinction and sexual surveillance became ever more crucial elements in the maintenance of European domination. White colonial males vigilantly protected the sexual purity of white women against a threatening “Black Peril.” We suggest that this colonial legacy insidiously informs the logic behind that form of environmental conservation that simultaneously seeks to protect Nature and vilify Third World poor today. Nature is still feminine, but differently raced. Rather than being savage or untamed, she is vulnerable and fragile. She requires protection, not conquest and subjugation.

The use of gender to narrate European advances across new terrain—whether geographic, philosophic, or scientific—is not unique. Gender is a trope that, wittingly or not, permeates much of Western reality.<sup>5</sup> Our concern with gender is not to be read, however, as the deployment of a simplistic Man = Colonizer/Woman = Colonized metaphorical stamp with which to chart the course of Western conquests.<sup>6</sup> The slickness of such dichotomizations elides race and gender as conjunctural, historically constituted elements and denies the crosscutting effect of the interactions between raced genders and gendered races. Our concern with gender is intimately linked with our concern for race; gender ideologies, we believe, are marbled by racial, sexual, and class orderings. In an analogous fashion, the neo-Malthusian concern to protect Nature from exploding nonwhite populations<sup>7</sup> reflects a latent, yet impassioned, gender/race/sexual complex that mirrors earlier imperial projects.

## MAPPING THE TROPICS FEMININE

Oh zone so hot and glowing,  
 Queen of the earth art thou;  
 Sand is thy mantle flowing,  
 The sun doth crown thy brow.  
 Of gold, thou queenly woman,  
 Are all thy clasps and rims,  
 That fasten with fiery splendour  
 The garment to thy burning limbs.

—H. F. Freiligrath

The discourse of conservation we address comes out of a stringently positivist tradition. Nature within this tradition refers to the physical world of living organisms and exists separate from and prior to humans. For the likes of Ehrlich, Myers, Soulé, and Wilson (to name the most famous), nature is comprised of multiple, discrete, objective entities that exist *sui generis*, divorced from any sociohistorical lens.<sup>8</sup> Population biology, the collection of historical practices that disciplined the thinking of these experts, strives to isolate, measure, classify, catalog, and dissect unique organic units and their interrelations in the living world. Given the precise tools of observation and calibration, biological techniques can render obvious the mysteries of biodiversity as the “truths” of organic life.

In contrast, we challenge these certainties. As Donna Haraway provocatively suggests, “Organisms ... are not pre-existing plants, animals, potistes, etc., with boundaries already established and awaiting the right kind of instrument to note them correctly. Organisms emerge from a discursive process” (1992, 298). Both humans and their nonhuman instruments construct science’s “natural” objects. To claim something is constructed, however, makes it no less real; it points rather to its arbitrariness, questions its inevitability, and provokes historical inquiry.

Following Haraway’s (1992) lead, playing off Simone de Beauvoir, Nature—for us—is not born but made.<sup>9</sup> It is a cultural construct that takes on shape and meaning only within a particular social web of signification. Nature (as all other social reality) acquires definition and import within a matrix of competing and often contradictory social interests. At stake in the struggle to make claims over Nature are what it means, how it should be used, and who has the power to decide. Rather than embodying an absolute essence, therefore, Nature is the effect of particular discursive processes of power/knowledge that have historically fashioned the domains where distinction, meaning, and truth are made (Foucault 1970, 1980a, 1980b). Throughout the history of natural (and social) sciences, classification—the delineation of identities and differences—has been an essential element in the establishment of colonial authority and power to assert truths and rights. It is the seductive power of classification—the authorial force derived from the violence of “drawing lines” (Derrida 97–118)—

as applied to both bodies and landscapes that we wish to explore critically.

Imagine the tropics, that realm labeled for centuries by Western scientists and novelists alike as the “torrid zone.” Torrid, in its strict sense, refers to that which is intensely hot, scorching. In its more emotive meaning, it evokes a realm of passion, fervid and sultry in its expression (OED). As Francis Putz, a prominent botanist, notes:

Reference to “tropical regions” has exotic & wonderful connotations, but the “torrid zone” (from the Latin *torre*, to roast, also, to be highly passionate, ardent, zealous) captures a more vivid image. (Putz and Holbrook 38)

Alexander von Humboldt designated “the torrid zone” that region where “an inexhaustible treasure remains still unopened” (in Putz and Holbrook 51).<sup>10</sup> For Henry Morton Stanley, en route to the Ashantee war of 1873, the “torrid extent” (1874, 5) of the western Sahara invoked H. F. Freiligrath to write the sensuous poem above. Yet, Conrad portrayed the torrid “wilderness” in *Heart of Darkness* as the fatal temptress seducing man through the “treacherous appeal” (48) of her “pitiless breast” (82). With its implicit sexual valence, the double entendre of “torrid” collapses meanings and marks the West’s imputed essence for tropical Nature as unquestionably feminine. Contact with this female essence generates, however, the promise of passion *and* peril.

Throughout Western history, conquerors, writers, philosophers, and scientists have produced contradictory images and forms of knowing that create the tropics. The humid tropics, “[more] than any other geographical” zone, “evokes a landscape & rhetoric of superlatives & excesses” (Putz and Holbrook 37). The feminization of the tropics, perhaps alone, stands out as the common theme among depictions. As the zone of eternal spring and fecundity, European cosmology linked the tropics to a feminine essence; birth (and by implication its opposite—death) forms the conceptual frame for thinking of the tropics. The biblical description of the promised Eden assures that “in the midst of the paradise of God . . . was there the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields her fruit every month

(Rev. 2:7, 22:2). Legendary for mythic treasures, the tropics were the feminized theater of European discovery, conquest, and penetration. Crowned with a jewel-like harmony of gentle natives, flora, and fauna, the tropics represented the antithesis of despotic European (male?) civilization. Riotous and mysterious, the tropics seduced naturalists with their chaotic labyrinth and luxuriant wonders. Yet, debauched through decay and teeming with growth, the torrid zone also embodied (through licentious, breeding bodies) an ominous specter. The magnificent black femininity of Conrad's Africa incited erotic allure and repulsive horror in an impossible mix. The African landscape, thus, could be imagined simultaneously as fertile and productive but also poisonous and fear provoking, as sensuous and mysterious but also treacherous and dangerous (McCarthy 25, 38).

Female fecundity, as symbolized in Europe's Other, provoked anxieties as well as enticements.<sup>11</sup> This ambivalence, we suggest, resulted from the anarchic ambiguities that could proliferate from the union of Europe and unknown geographies. While the tropics are gendered female, they are also raced nonwhite. Encounters between white and nonwhite aroused marvel but also produced taxonomic confusion. Categorical purity instantiated gender/racial hierarchies; categorical ambivalence imperiled colonial power. As we argue below, sexuality served as a crucible for casting and consolidating colonial power. Control over sexuality begot disciplined stock; uncontrolled sexuality bred deviant hybrids. In a different guise, the obsession with overpopulation and the protection of Nature echoes these colonial dictates.

## EARLY WESTERN IMAGININGS OF EUROPE'S OTHER

License my roaving hands, and let them goe  
 Behynd, before, betweene, above, belowe.  
 Oh my America! my Newfoundland!  
 My kingdom, safest when with one man man'd.  
 My myne of precious stones! my emperie!  
 How blest am I, in thus discovering thee!  
 To enter in those bonds is to be free;  
 That where my hand is sett my seale shalbee.

—John Donne, "Elegies, To His Mistress Going to Bed"

In the late sixteenth century, Jan van der Straet's drawing of Vespucci's discovery of America circulated widely throughout Europe (de Certeau; Hulme; Montrose; Rabasa). Reproduced through Theoder Galle's engraving in 1580, the scene represented Europe's nascent discourse of discovery that gendered "the New World as feminine, and ... sexualiz[ed] ... its exploration, conquest, and settlement" (Montrose 178). Understood allegorically, we use this image as a window through which to view a particular colonial process (see figure 1). Our concern is not whether van der Straet's drawing represents the "truth" of a historical event. Rather, our aim is to angle the frame so as to refract light upon a particular colonial process: "creative intervention in making truth" by colonial powers (Cosgrove 345). Read as a text, this vignette serves as a heuristic device to point to larger patterns.

Vespucci, the symbol of male Europe, fixes his gaze upon a personified, feminized, unexplored, and unknown (in the biblical sense) terrain. The engraving's text reads, "Americus rediscovers America; he called her once and henceforth she was always awake." As Todo-rov reminds us, "nomination is equivalent to taking possession" (27). The sexual subtext lies scarcely veiled: Vespucci, erect, armored, and clothed, hails a very much dis-covered, half-reclined America. "Awakened" (or perhaps more correctly irreversibly ripped) from her past, America—both the terrain and its inhabitants—waits in passive counterpoint to the masculine agency of European penetration. The subtext speaks through an implicit, hierarchical dichotomy between Culture and Nature, historical subjects and passive objects, male and female. Vespucci stands armed, empowered by the "ideological and technological instruments of civilization" (Montrose 180). Protected by a cross, a navigator's astrolabe, and a sword—the colonizer's tools of religion, empirical science, and violence—Vespucci embodies the agent of history and purpose. Nakedly dis-empowered, America appears startled, as if caught off guard, defenseless, and incapable of intervening in her future. Vespucci's object of knowledge and target of exploitation, America submits to his advance, apparently without struggle. America is hailed, claimed, and inserted into a European teleological order and Judeo-Christian cosmology. "Her" own history evaporates—inconsequential for European desires.

Sexual fantasies appear in virtually all early accounts of European advance into foreign lands. During his third voyage to the New





Figure 1. "Vespucci's Discovery of America." Engraving by Theodor Calle (1880) from a drawing by Jan van der Straet ca. 1575.

World, Columbus reportedly had a vision upon his discovery of a new continent; the globe took the shape of a woman's breast with her nipple being the site of Paradise (Columbus 30–38). Through imaginative transposition, the gushing forth of the sweet waters of the Orinoco River (the proof of terra firma) transformed into a female "teat" and through the metaphor of sensual pleasure mystified the impending debauchery of "sucking the wealth of a whole world" dry (Jara and Spadaccini 16). Other explorers hinted at their erotic fantasies through more than purely metaphorical tropes. For example, Jean Parmentier, a French trader, marveled in 1525 at young native females' sexual expression, proclaiming that when bedded, they were like "colts who had never experienced a rein" (quoted in Hemming 17).<sup>12</sup>

The obsession with native female nudity and sexuality was not a mere innocent male fantasy. The female body, both literally and metaphorically, was a primary terrain on which European colonialism asserted its power. Within a nascent colonialist discourse striving to legitimize and appropriate its fantastic "discoveries," the Western gender hierarchy served as a template through which to assert domination. Land gendered feminine and sexed as an inviolate female body was ripe for exploration and conquest.<sup>13</sup> Having returned from his voyage to the Indies with promises, Sir Walter Raleigh tantalized his compatriots' manly imagination by intimating that Guiana awaits "to answer euerie mans longing" (1–2, 6).

Guiana is a Country that hath yet her Maydenhead, neuer sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not beene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent . . . , the graues haue not beene opened for gold. . . . It hath neuer beene entred by any armie of strength, and neuer conquered or possessed by any Christian Prince. (Raleigh 73)

Vital to European exploits was the symbolic slippage between land and a woman's body, between colonization and sexual mastery. America, as with all foreign terrain, was the object of a desire to know, conquer, and possess a feminized space. With her virginity "yet" intact, America's deflowering was naturalized (if not made virtually obligatory) through the European ideology of masculine mastery of the female. Delaney suggests that the agency imputed in male seed and the passivity in female soil "has been the predominant folk

theory of procreation in the West for millennia" (8). Unknown lands represented, in the words of Baron de Santa-Anna Nery, "the virgin soil which awaits the seeds of civilization" (quoted in Hecht and Cockburn 3)—the virgin land which lay idle in anticipation of European religion, reason, and technology.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, as many feminist scholars have observed (Nelson; Smith; Stolcke; Stoler 1991, 1995), what makes sexual liaisons matter is the race of the genders engaged. Relations between white men and nonwhite women produce strikingly distinct effects from those between nonwhite men and white women. Thus, the feminine is not passively homogeneous: racialized identity imputes substantive difference. Differently "[r]aced women," as Nelson provocatively illustrates, "produce different offspring even when inseminated by the same man" (222). During processes of colonial expansion, European men displayed superiority by sexually conquering nonwhite women. Yet, ambivalence and suspicion marked these unions. The ambiguity (pro-)created through the melding of difference also provoked uncertainty in territorial claims. European intrigue with its feminized/racialized object was half-conceived through fascination and fear.

Upon closer inspection, Jan van der Straet's engraving of America portrays Europe's fantastic anxiety with its Other. Upstage center, along the horizon, three naked females gather around a cannibalistic feast. Montrose (180) suggests the scene evokes an event Vespucci related in a later letter, in which he describes witnessing native women sexually seduce, kill, and subsequently roast and eat a male Spaniard. Faint, along the backdrop, the chorus of the native females' legendary sexual cunning and duplicity threatened to render Europe impotent. America, while alluring, was dangerous. Lasciviousness, treachery, and cannibalism intermingled in early colonial constructions of the New World and solidified in what Montrose calls a "crude and anxious misogynistic fantasy" (181). Through the potent synthesis of the savage and the feminine, the West ironically condoned its own predatory project toward newly appropriated territories and authorized violence upon appropriated lands and peoples.

European expansion entailed the inscription of European will and order onto foreign bodies and subjectivities. A racial and gendered hierarchical order was etched through the medium of rape. The rape of colonized land and the rape of colonized people went hand in

hand in the “manly rivalry” among incipient European states over the dominion and proprietorship of feminized, racialized, virgin terrain. Michele de Cuneo’s tale, during Columbus’s second voyage to America, is perhaps emblematic of this process:

While I was in the boat, I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, ... she being naked as is their custom, I conceived the desire to take my pleasure. ... [B]ut she was unwilling ... [whereupon] I took a rope-end and thrashed her well, following which she produced such screaming and wailing as would cause you not to believe your ears. Finally we reached an agreement such that, I can tell you, she seemed to have been raised in a veritable school of harlots (quoted in Todorov 49).

Thrashed, sexually exploited, and arrogantly conquered, an Indian woman is turned into a whore.<sup>15</sup> Stripped of identity, she symbolically represents an entire continent whose resistance to European penetration is glossed as manageable through force and whose true nature justifies European actions. As Montrose notes, “Whether ... physical or metaphorical, whether its object is woman, man, or a ‘country,’” Europe’s “object is always positioned as feminine” (208). We would add that Europe’s object is not merely positioned as feminine, but also raced as nonwhite.

## NATURAL HISTORY’S CLASSIFICATORY PROJECT

A nascent natural history played a critical and enabling role in consolidating patterns of domination as the agents of empire extended their reach inland. This fresh “orientation toward interior exploration and the construction of global-scale meaning through descriptive apparatuses of natural history” (1992b, 15) inaugurated, Pratt suggests, a new planetary consciousness. The aperture that enabled “the (lettered, male, European) eye” (Pratt 1992b, 31) to assimilate and naturalize exotic Nature into a European order coincided with the expanded needs of European capitalism. In a turn that rendered America, Africa, and Asia landscapes upon which to score (both in the sense to disfigure and to tally) the position of strategic raw material, this novel vision and sense of purpose buttressed the empire’s rising economic aspirations to possess and control.<sup>16</sup>

To assert claim to this sexualized space, both science and commerce seductively deployed a geography that gendered its splayed objects as feminine and its spectators as masculine within an economy of mastery and ownership. Two key practices enabled possession and control: ordering and display—the practice of inventory and of offering to the gaze. Inventory conveys the active sense of labor within relations of production (to invent), and anticipates the commodification and surplus value of the products of labor. Not only did the systematist crystallize a peculiarly Western and gendered way of naming, collecting, itemizing, and possessing Nature, but he likewise inventoried commercially exploitable knowledge. The detailed description of Nature’s particulars often became blurred with the sighting/citing of economic prospect. As Pratt reminds us, “the many forms of collection that were practiced” during the eighteenth century “developed in part as the image of [European capitalist] accumulation, and as its legitimation” (1992b, 36). Cataloging the globe’s flora and fauna advanced hand in hand with cataloging potential commodities and profits.

Within studies of the living world, Carl Linnaeus (Linnaeus in Latin), the father of modern biological classification, is most credited with reorienting the optics of Europe’s perception of Nature.<sup>17</sup> Previously viewed as an unruly labyrinth, Linnaeus ordered Nature through a singular, unified, classificatory system: “the Ariadne thread in botany is classification, without which there is chaos” (Linnaeus in Foucault 1970, 136; quoted in Pratt 1992b, 25). Linnaeus’s *System of Nature* (1735) was a descriptive taxonomic order that could systematically accommodate and classify every plant on the face of the earth, known or unknown, according to their reproductive parts (Foucault 1970, 134, 140–41). The Sexual System, as Linnaeus named his most general system of flora taxonomy, divided all plants according to the number, form, distribution, and relative magnitude of male sexual organs (stamen) and female sexual organs (carpel): the origins of scientific binomial nomenclature.<sup>18</sup> According to Haraway, Linnaeus “referred to himself as a second Adam, the ‘eye’ of God” whose calling was to give Nature “true representations, true names, thus transforming or restoring a purity of names lost by the first Adam’s sin” (1989, 9). Naming was central to Linnaeus’s project; for the true name, he believed, patterned the reality of objects<sup>19</sup>—“the possibility of *seeing* what one will be able to *say*” (Foucault 1970, 130). With wide scientific

and popular appeal, Linnaeus's classificatory system "launched a European knowledge-building enterprise of unprecedented scale" (Pratt 1992b, 25). Scholarly and amateur disciples alike roamed the globe in search of exotic specimens to add to Latin registers and display in European herbariums.

Yet, as Derrida reminds us, there is a violence in drawing lines and delineating identities by constructing grids of difference. The "technicians of the Lines" (116), the arbiters of classification, assumed the task of establishing Nature's order—identifying the globe's unique botanical specimens, extracting them from their particular, endemic surroundings, and locating them in their proper, systematic position through a "new written, secular European name" (Pratt 1992b, 31). Appellation, extraction, and possession triangulated the process by which "[o]ne by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order" (Pratt 1992b, 31). Wittingly or not, systematists were complicit in the colonial erasures of local contexts and histories and played a productive role in tabulating and accounting the future worth of colonized spaces.

Throughout the eighteenth century natural history was primarily concerned with the timeless arrangements of Nature through a rational, unified, classificatory order. Fundamental to this process was the definition of species. Notions of species differentiation hinged on the reproductive capacity of offspring. If the product between two entities was fertile, they were of a single species; if the product was infertile—i.e., a hybrid—they constituted two distinct species. Hybrids—that which could not breed itself—were unnatural.<sup>20</sup> The OED's earliest cited use of "hybrid" (1601) noted that it was the "wilde Boare and tame Sow" that sired infertile "Hybrides." More commonplace analogs are the mule and hinny: a mule is the result of a cross between a mare and he-ass; a hinny [sic] is the result of a cross between a stallion and a she-ass. Yet, as the construction of these categories indicate, the gender of each of the crossbred species (or races) produces unique progeny. Mimicking natural history, theories of species delineation had implications for the mixing of races. During colonial entrenchment, the progeny incapable of furthering descent—indeed, of undermining imperial power—was that sired by a wilde Boare (read nonwhite man) and a tame Sow (read white woman). The

ultimate categorical transgression was one that tainted the purity of a racial hierarchy delineated along social evolutionary lines.

### **COLONIAL ENTRENCHMENT: PROTECTING WHITE WOMEN**

Apprehensions about the consequences that could follow more sustained contact with Europe's Other unleashed concerns among colonizers that proved momentous in structuring racial and sexual relations during later phases of colonization. Their fears were emblemized in the idea of "degeneration." While degeneration could take place through multiple forms of contact, the most intractable route was through sexual contact across race lines.<sup>21</sup> "Sexual pollution" precipitated the threat of "social chaos and the fall of the empire" (Smith, quoted in Hyam 1986b, 48).<sup>22</sup>

The notion of degeneration was intimately linked to nineteenth-century scientific debates on the classification of humans and the consequences of interracial unions.<sup>23</sup> The question of whether humans represented one or several species "stood or fell over the question of hybridity" (Young 9). If different races constituted different species, their union could not produce fertile hybrid offspring.<sup>24</sup> But the direct evidence showing that colonized "halfbreeds" could actually procreate refuted pseudoscientific claims about the infertility of hybrids. The notion of degeneration, as it came to displace beliefs about infertile hybrids proved critical in hierarchical discourses on race mixing. Between the 1850s and the 1930s, the regnant orthodoxy ruled that unions between allied races issued fertile offspring, while those between distant races produced either infertile offspring or tended toward degeneration. Degenerate mixed races were incapable of producing stable social organization, creating a high civilization, or withstanding assaults by more pure racial groups (Spencer, in Young 18–19). Such views had a double virtue: they naturalized the well-known fact that even within Europe there had been significant mixing of races (European races were allied to one another), and they dictated the erection of taboos against interracial sex and reproduction in the colonies (colonized races were distant and lower on the social evolutionary ladder).

The concept of degeneration assisted racist ideologies in two

ways: by simplistically exaggerating and fixing existing preconceptions about physical characteristics and behavior, and by shifting blame and offering reasonable grounds for exploiting and othering the degenerate.<sup>25</sup> The ideology of degeneration served to distance the Other *and* to construct bonds of solidarity among the colonizers.<sup>26</sup> Scientific medicine, natural history, sociology, and anthropology legitimized the search for difference and used constructed difference to justify socioeconomic distance and exploitation (Gould, 1980, 1981; Mosse; Gilman, 1985, 1986).<sup>27</sup> It mattered little whether those who were excluded and exploited possessed any of the stigmatized characteristics posited as their defining features.<sup>28</sup>

As imperial dominions became more entrenched, large numbers of white women arrived in the colonies. To breed a pure imperial race capable of ruling the tropics, white men in the colonies needed to reproduce with white women. But the presence of white women in the tropics simultaneously triggered the Black Peril—the danger that nonwhite males posed to the sexual virtue of white females. European administrators, travelers, and settlers recurrently described nonwhite males as lascivious and lustful, prey to primitive and uncontrolled sexual urges. Sexual intimacies between white women and nonwhite men, because they could produce nonwhite hybrids, threatened the security of white control over the tropics. They simultaneously undermined the twin bases upon which colonial ideologies of hierarchy were constructed: race and gender.<sup>29</sup> By the turn of the century, “sexual purity emerged as a controlling metaphor for racial, economic, and political power” (McClintock 1995, 47). Categorical purity instantiated gender/racial hierarchies; categorical ambivalence imperiled colonial power.

The words of Malouet from French West Africa epitomize colonial administrators’ fears:

[I]f the black man is assimilated to whites, it is more than probable that we shall shortly see noble mulattoes, financiers, and traders whose wealth would procure them wives and mothers from all estates. . . . [I]t is thus that individuals, families, nations become altered, degraded and dissolve. (quoted in Cohen 1980, 112)

Racial “assimilation,” erasing categorical distinctions, undermined political, economic, and racial control. It was essential to cordon off



white women in order to curtail the chaos ensuing from the overturning of a presumed natural order.

The racial imagery of sexual control that surfaced across Europe's empire in later phases of colonization displayed remarkable correspondences. In the Indies, Africa, South Asia, and the Americas, colonial governments enacted paranoiac legislation to protect the purity of the white woman from the uncontrolled sexuality of the colonized male, the Black Peril. Legislative measures, though not "an all-encompassing totality" (Spurr 2) regulating the sexual segregation of the races, constituted the most important rules governing sex across race lines.

Countless illustrations demonstrate the mixture of misperception, fear, and surveillance that characterized attempts to sequester the white female from the lustful gaze of the nonwhite male. Lamenting "the craze of white women for running after black [*sic*] men," the English Secretary of State described the visit of some Indian princes and their soldiers to England in 1902:

The smartest peeresses were only too ready to make a fuss with Bikaner and other Indian chiefs. . . . At Hampton Court the great difficulty of the officers was in keeping the white women away from our Native soldiers. (Quoted in Ballhatchet 120)

Concern with the sexual purity of the imperial race was imperiled by the allure of nonwhite men. Their sexuality was feared to arouse amorous appetites in white women. Since white women, vulnerable to incitements, were themselves incapable of judging with whom they should interact, white patriarchs had to assume the role of protecting and managing the virtue and sexuality of their women.<sup>30</sup>

In colonial Zimbabwe in 1911, Sam Lewis shot an African who purportedly made immoral suggestions to his two daughters. During his trial, Lewis passionately defended his honorable murder, rhetorically asking the jury:

Is it not absolutely abhorrent and does it not make your blood boil . . . but when beyond that . . . the degradation comes from a native, one of the race, which rightly or wrongly, for generations past, white people have considered absolutely below them in the human ladder. . . . I submit absolutely that human Nature has its limits. (Quoted by Pape 706)

As the white male patriarch, Lewis defended his natural right to prevent nonwhite males from access to white females, especially his own daughters, the progenitricies of his line. To prevent sexual interactions between nonwhite males and white females, colonial governments increasingly policed and sanctioned infractions across racial divisions. They passed stringent rules to police local males and enforced strict punishments on any native males suspected of crossing the conspicuously drawn race boundaries.<sup>31</sup> As Inglis suggests, the White Women's Protection Ordinance of 1926 in Papua

[w]as the most significant expression of one aspect of the relations between black and white in the colony [Papua], the fear of sexual attack by black men on white women and girls: the "Black Peril." The extent of this fear is perhaps hard to believe today, but any reading of the papers of the day will uncover it. (Inglis v)

Threatened transgressions of sexual norms served conveniently as occasions to deploy metaphors manufactured to preserve hierarchical orders based on race and sexuality.<sup>32</sup> By collapsing the purity of the white female and the prestige of colonial authority into one, the threat of the Black Peril rationalized the policing of the allegedly promiscuous nonwhite male. Yet, the hysteria surrounding Black Peril had little correlation to actual incidences of rape or sexual molestation of white women (Cohen 1980; Gartrell; Hyam 1990; Schmidt). A reactionary press and a hysterical white-settler community impulsively transformed purported infractions of social distance into stark charges of rape. Actual incidents of sexual violation by nonwhite males were rare to the point of nonexistence. Accusations of sexual assault often served to obliterate differences and unite the numerically inferior European communities into presenting a common front against the danger to racial superiority.<sup>33</sup> Jordan's observation about nineteenth-century America is applicable to colonial circumstances: tensions about the sexual threat nonwhite males posed to white women bubbled to the surface at times when white control appeared in jeopardy (153). Indeed, there was little need to increase the numbers of other races if "the lovely white and red"<sup>34</sup> could be promoted instead.

## EUROPE'S COLONIAL LEGACY: PROTECTING NATURE FROM THE BLACK PERIL OF OVERPOPULATION

Contemporary claims by many Western environmentalists epitomize a cultural trope we have termed environmental orientalism. Disconcerting parallels emerge between a neo-Malthusian environmental discourse that seeks to protect a feminized, fragile Nature against overpopulation *and* a colonial legacy to protect fragile, white women against ominous nonwhite men. While still representing the sensuous labyrinth discovered by Europe's explorers, Nature no longer exudes danger. It is, rather, itself endangered. Still embodying the feminine, Nature is raced differently. Today she represents the threatened and vulnerable white woman who needs protection. Third World populations incarnate her Black Peril.

Upon seeing the tropical forests of coastal Brazil, Charles Darwin reveled at the "sublimity" of the "great, wild, luxuriant hothouse" of the "primeval forests undefaced by the hand of man" (quoted in Carneiro 73). Over a century later, E. O. Wilson named the tropical forest "our Eden, progenitrix, and sibyl" (1984, 12). The site of creation and procreation, the spring from which prophecy and promise well, the "torrid zone" continues to seduce. Like their forebears, the fathers of conservation biology affirm their classificatory mission through feminizing and sexualizing tropes. However, more than merely "a living treasure awaiting assay" (Wilson 1984, 145), Nature in today's environmental lexicon is the treasure to protect. It is still "exceptionally rich" and "exceptionally unexplored," but also "exceptionally threatened" (Myers 1988a, 207). "[G]rowing throngs of impoverished peasants spreading into every last corner of wildlife habitats" (Myers 1988a, 209) pose the peril.

Conservation science deploys the colonizer's tools of naming, appropriating, and ordering, and seeks "to generalize, predict, and ultimately control . . . the *Amazon* of input from nature" (Soulé 1988, 466; emphasis added). As McClintock reminds us, "The poetics of male authorship" implicit in the project of naming is not simply "a poetics of creativity" but simultaneously a politics "of possession and control over . . . posterity" (1990, 103).<sup>35</sup> Wilson tells us, "Biological diversity must be treated as a global resource, to be indexed, used,

and above all, preserved" (1988, 3). Mimicking colonial predecessors, biodiversity experts have appropriated Nature as global and simultaneously appointed themselves her keeper. More insidiously, the treasures of Nature—whether they are virgin forests or genetic reservoirs—constitute "*mankind's patrimony*" (Myers 1976, 200; emphasis added). Feminized Nature is anointed that possession most cherished by the *pater*—the patrimony, the inheritance to be passed through the masculine line.<sup>36</sup> The "principal way to safeguard" (Myers 1976, 199) Wilson's "Eden, progenitrix and sybil" is by excluding nonwhite Others—by preserving Nature in parks and reserves.<sup>37</sup>

The feminization of Nature in prominent writings about conservation is neither accidental nor isolated.<sup>38</sup> Images invoking female sexuality populate biological writings; Nature is the virgin womb "that spawned humans yet has been vanquished by them" (Janzen 305). Mythologically gendered as proto-virgins/mothers, Nature becomes a procreative vessel. The refugia theory of speciation names isolated refuge zones as "evolutionary nurseries" (Prance 1990, 50), the warm, moist repositories of reproduction that nurtured speciation when Pleistocene climate changes became inhospitable. Speciation is referred to as "birth" and species extinction as "hemorrhaging" (Wilson 1984, 122) or "painful . . . termination" (Soulé and Wilcox 11). Consistent with the sexual imagery, "reckless" ecological destruction is "an orgy of environmental brutality" (Iltis 99). In a seminal text, Soulé and Wilcox launched the manly "call to arms" to protect the "vulnerable," "virgin," "green mantle of Earth being ravaged and pillaged in a frenzy of exploitation" (7). As if they were the sons of the "second Adam, the 'eye' of God" (Haraway 1989, 9), these authors note: "Death is one thing; an end to birth is something else" (8). The quintessential conservation scheme, as conceived by UNESCO's "*Man and the Biosphere*" programs, is an area of concentric circles of circumscribed use around an "involute virgin core" (Whitmore 317; emphasis added). The era of conquest is over. Management is the current fetish.

The sleight of hand that constructs a feminized Nature as the global patrimony is exposed as soon as we pose the questions—protect Nature from whom? For whom? On neither score do conservationists such as Ehrlich, Myers, or Wilson leave us in doubt. Myers claims "growing throngs" (1988a, 209) are the harbingers of doom.

Ehrlich proselytizes, “The growth of human population must be halted ... [otherwise] the extinction of much of earth’s biota cannot be avoided” (1988, 25–26). Wilson is even more explicit. Expounding upon why biodiversity must be saved from overpopulation—“the raging monster upon the land” (1992, 328)—he tells us:

First, exploding human populations are degrading the environment at an accelerating rate, especially in tropical countries. Second, science is discovering new uses for biological diversity... Third, much of the diversity is being irreversibly lost through extinction caused by the destruction of natural habitats, again especially in the tropics. (1988b, 3)

To remove all doubt, Wilson reiterates: “The species diversity of the rainforests borders on the legendary... [D]espite their extraordinary richness, tropical rain forests are among the most fragile of all habitats... [P]opulation pressures in the Third World will certainly continue to accelerate deforestation during the coming decades unless heroic measures are taken in conservation and resource management” (1988b, 9, 10). Wilson’s concern about overpopulation—the effect of uncontrolled sexual and reproductive behavior among nonwhite peoples—is shared by many others.<sup>39</sup> In popular perception, the links between environmental degradation and overpopulation are seemingly so obvious that any discussion on environmental degradation reverts to an obsession with Third World population.<sup>40</sup>

The fixation with overpopulation in tropical areas and the reproductive behavior of nonwhite races parallels, in its form and motivation, the psychosexual paranoia of the colonial Black Peril. During periods of imperial entrenchment, colonial legislative norms policed the sexuality of nonwhite males and managed the wombs of white females. Today, a fragile Nature must be secluded from the untamed sexuality of the nonwhites. To ensure long-lasting preservation, many believe similar norms must be “codified in law and incorporated into ethics and organized religion” (Iltis 105).

Dennery, a French journalist writing in 1931 on the population of Europe’s Other, expounded graphically, “In the supply of men, Asia possessed vast reserves, masses that multiplied beyond all reckoning ... teeming races of mankind, more numerous than all the white peoples of all the other continents” (quoted in Spurr 88). Dennery’s

fixation with the swarming multitudes in the tropics resonates uncannily with Ehrlich's horror. As he rode a taxi in India, Ehrlich despairs:

The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping ... people clinging to buses. People herding animals ... People, people, people, people. As we moved slowly through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect. ... [We] were, frankly, frightened. ... [S]ince that night I've known the *feel* of overpopulation. (Ehrlich 1968, 15–16; emphasis in original)

Tropical peoples exude palpable danger. Predictably, overpopulation only exists in the tropics.

Two features linking Nature's degradation to overpopulation account for the seeming intuitive appeal of the overpopulation thesis in the West. First, the idea that overpopulation causes Nature's degradation possesses a very simple, even simplistic, numerical logic. Resources, after all, are finite. If the numbers of humans keep growing, per capita availability of resources will decline. One must, therefore, reduce population levels. The argument seems seamless. But such accounts ignore any analysis of the distribution of consumption and waste production, and the socioeconomic causes of population growth and decline. Not surprisingly, few efforts seek to control the overpopulation of white populations. Instead, governments in countries like France feel justified in providing incentives to their citizens to produce more children, and scholars such as Gina Maranto bemoan the fact that American women put off having children.<sup>41</sup>

Second, the overpopulation thesis portrays the problem of resource depletion and environmental deterioration as apolitical. Overpopulation threatens the entire world. Unless controlled, it has the potential to lay waste "our" future by destroying "our" environment. More apocalyptically, it threatens not just humans but all extant species. To save Nature, then, "we" must reduce population. Thus formulated and reified, the overpopulation thesis erases the internal fissures that the monolithic "we" glosses over. "We" all have a duty to reduce overpopulation wherever it exists. But it is implicit that populations are "growing explosively" (Raven 1988, 120) in only a specific part of the globe—the torrid zone. Conveniently, this shifts the blame for Nature's degradation on Third World populations.

Spirited critiques of the overpopulation thesis have failed to dislodge it from the Western imagination as the prime cause of environmental degradation. But like the colonial Black Peril, the contemporary Black Peril reflects a displacement. Environmental degradation may be real enough, but its causes cannot blithely be located in larger numbers of poor peoples. Its sources are deeper. Processes of inequitable overaccumulation and overconsumption lie at its core. Misplacing and displacing blame on Third World populations distorts accountability.<sup>42</sup>

The overpopulation thesis insidiously justifies a colonialist rhetoric that, during periods of colonial entrenchment, asserted the common heritage of tropical resources and sought to justify European control on scientific grounds. Albert Sarraut, former governor-general of French Indochina around the turn of the century, for example, found Europeans confronted by a dilemma:<sup>43</sup>

While in a narrow corner of the world, Nature has concentrated in white Europe the powers of invention, the means of progress, and the dynamics of scientific advancement, the greatest accumulation of natural wealth is locked up in territories occupied by backward races, who not knowing how to profit by it themselves, are even less capable of releasing it to the greater circular current that nourishes the ever growing needs of humanity. (Quoted in Spurr 29)

A similar dilemma today confronts the world, according to the overpopulation thesis. Treasures of biodiversity or valuable forest species may lie in the tropics but “can make a significant contribution to modern agriculture, . . . medicines and pharmaceuticals, and to industrial processes . . . *especially in the advanced world with its greater capacity to exploit genetic resources*” (Myers 1976, 119; emphasis ours). James Scheuer, former chairman of the Subcommittee on the Environment in the U.S. House of Representatives, spoke in a similar vein when he talked about scientific leadership to protect Nature:

The time has come to act before the decline of species becomes crisis situations. *We* need to strengthen endangered species laws worldwide, but *we* also need to supplement them with equally strong biodiversity legislation. *We* need to inventory biological resources and their status, and to identify species and ecological communities of outstanding value. With this knowledge *we* can begin to plan for the sustainable

management of *our* resources. *We* can take measures to protect “hot-spots” containing sensitive species of critical ecosystems. (207; emphasis ours)

There is a slippage between Third World populations’ perceived inability to control reproduction *and* their inability to recognize their long-term interests, let alone protect and preserve Nature.<sup>44</sup> Non-white tropical countries are unable to protect Nature even if they wish to because of their inability to control their reproductive urges and numbers. Thus the disingenuity of the “we” is clarified to be a privileged elite. Western expertise guarantees the future security for a feminized Nature because it is through such expertise that we come to know what is best.<sup>45</sup>

Scientific capacity to “generalize and predict, and ultimately control,” (Soulé 1988, 466) becomes the basis on which the West lays claim to the tropics. As Wilson tells us, “biologists have begun to fill volumes with concrete proposals for the further exploration and better use of [bio]diversity, and with increasing emphasis on the still unexplored portions of the tropical biota” (1988b, 5). Janzen goes a step further and ordains “[b]iologists, tropical ecology’s clergymen,” as “the representatives of the natural world,” “in charge of the future of tropical ecology” (1986, 396, 306).<sup>46</sup> These proposals seek to classify biodiversity for its utilitarian, commercial value. They display a dynamic of science progressing hand in hand with commercial profit similar to that discernible in colonizing Europe’s endeavor to classify species in unknown terrain.<sup>47</sup> The rhetoric of global patrimony—of Nature being “everyone’s birthright” (Myers 1985, 333)—is merely a guise. It is a trope that allows First World elites to dismiss as “geographical accident” (334) the fact that Nature’s wealth resides in the tropics. It legitimizes conservationist discourses that lay claims to control tropical nature and displace blame on Third World overpopulation.

## CONCLUSION

This paper suggests that the feminization of Nature in Western thought has played an enabling role in structuring the particular, though changing, relationship the West imposes between itself and



its Other. During initial European expansion, early colonial imaginings of tropical Nature in all her sensuousness and savagery were crucial components to legitimize the exploitation of raced foreign lands and bodies. Embedded in a gendered discourse of discovery, Europe viewed its newly claimed territories as feminine and non-white, sexualizing a mode of exploration and conquest that was simultaneously erotic and dangerous. In later colonial instantiations, with the advent of a significant European female population in the colonies, the uncontrolled and threatening wildness of nonwhites was explicitly addressed through a concern with European racial purity. Beliefs about the degeneration that would result if white women became sexually available to nonwhite males, even when these males were seen to be effeminate, created anxieties that found expression in taboos, norms of behavior, and explicit legislation to discourage such contacts. In much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas, nonwhite males were labeled the Black Peril while white females embodied the European trophies to be protected. Such labeling did not occur simultaneously across colonial possessions, but followed a particular chronological rhythm. Although our examination of the sexual/racial politics during processes of colonization is sweeping, and these processes have their internal inconsistencies, we believe they signal important historical patterns of relationships between the West, Nature, sexuality, and overpopulation.

There are disturbing parallels, we suggest, between the colonial focus on the Black Peril and the current conservation debates that preoccupy themselves with overpopulation. Contemporary claims that portray a feminized Nature as under siege from multiplying non-white masses unexpectedly mimic earlier colonial attempts to protect white women from the sexual threat of nonwhite males. Nature still embodies the feminine. But a symbolic transposition has occurred: today, the trophy in need of protection is Nature in all her richness and frailty; exploding nonwhite populations in the Third World are the new Black Peril. In exploring the echoes of a cultural logic across historical periods, this paper has attempted to move a step closer to exposing a rhetoric of environmental orientalism that blames Third World populations as constituting the major threat to Nature. Such a construction of the threat to Nature obfuscates. It deflects attention from political-economic processes responsible for environmental

degradation, chief among them capitalist overaccumulation and disparities in income and consumption.

## Notes

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1. Although in their most recent work Ehrlich, Ehrlich, and Dailey attempt to nuance their arguments about solutions to overpopulation, they still see it as the principal threat to nature.

2. Kennedy and Connolly, authors of the article in the *Atlantic Monthly* from whose cover we take the epigraph at the beginning, turn finally to contraception and Western science to solve the world's problems. As Sugnet (18) points out, the need to solve problems is not the result of a desire to promote social justice or aid those in distress. Rather, it is to protect the privileged West against mass immigration.

3. Sandilands (91) points out that population discourse portrays population as a "problem of the regulation of certain *kinds* of bodies, specifically exoticized, racialized bodies that are figured as unruly, uncontrolled, and incapable of submerging their desires to the common good of sustainability."

4. Our explorations take us across discrete political, economic, and discursive colonial formations in search of the forces that shape current environmental orientalisms. The common theme we highlight does not, we insist, erase the internally riven character and multichromatic aspects of orientalist formations. Such fractures are important both as sites that inspire new forms of domination and from which innovative resistance wells. This paper, however, paints in broad strokes a historically persistent picture: the deployment of (always contested) raced and gendered hierarchies to control access to desired resources and exclude cultural Others.

David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* greatly facilitated our thinking through his illuminating discussion of "unexpected parallels and common genealogies" (4). For insightful discussions on divisions and contradictions within orientalism see Lowe; and Spurr. See Agrawal; Behdad; and Moore for a discussion of how fractures in hegemonic constructions may be critical both to domination and resistance.

5. We take gender to be a culturally constructed schema that fashions relations and perceived differences among men and women and a fundamental matrix through which to enact power. Understood as "a persistent and recurrent way of enabling the signification of power in the West," the discourse of gender need not always nor necessarily be "literally about gender itself" (Scott 1069). Rather, it provides a grid of social reference upon which to chart and stage the exercise of power—that is, it extends a medium through which to effect differential control over the access to material and symbolic capital.

6. For a trenchant critique of universalizing within Western feminism, see Donaldson; and Mohanty (1987; 1988).

7. We refer here to Paul Ehrlich's two books, *The Population Bomb* and *The Population Explosion*, the latter written with Anne Ehrlich.

8. See Ehrlich and Ehrlich (1991); Myers (1988b); Soulé (1995); Soulé and Wilcox; and Wilson (1988b).

9. Historically, Nature has prompted an abundance of conflicting meanings and visions in the Western imagination; it is an unstable trope fraught with ambiguities. Williams (219–24) offers a valuable review of the concept of Nature. For a nuanced discussion on the concept of Nature and the multivalent uses to which it has been historically employed in both Western and non-Western societies with respect to gender, see MacCormack and Strathern; Jordanova (1989); and Braun and Castree.

10. Philip H. Gosse, in his nineteenth-century text *Romance of Natural History*, mused how in the tropics “the gigantic scale of life strongly excited astonishment” (in Putz and Holbrook 51). And during his expeditions *In Darkest Africa*, Stanley suggestively noted that the moist forest of the torrid zone “with her unknown treasures, shaded us with her fragrant and loving shades, and whispered to us unspeakable things sweetly and tenderly” (1: 221).

11. Jean Bodin conflated the relationship between climate, sexuality, and degeneracy in arguing that the African sun made the Africans inordinately lusty so that once launched upon debauchery they maintained the most execrable voluptuousness. The resulting intimate relations between men and beasts were what gave birth to monsters in Africa (quoted in Cohen 1980, 20).

12. Thevet, a French traveler, noted in 1575, “The women are as voluptuous as *femmes du monde*. They are also cunning and highly experienced in whatever could help attract men to sleep with them. They know herbs which they use on their husbands and which arouse them so that they are constrained to go to the women or else suffer pain in their private parts” (quoted in Hemming 17). See also Hemming (3); and Hyam (1990, 96).

13. Both Kolodny (11); and Parker (140–41) note how similar tropes were used to describe and feminize newly “discovered” territory across the Americas: John Smith, in his musings of the New England shore, noted “her treasures having never yet been opened, nor her originalls wasted, consumed, nor abused”; Thomas Morton spoke of New England as “a faire virgin, longing to be sped, And meete her lover in a Nuptiall bed”; while Robert Mountgomry depicted Carolina as “Paradise with all her Virgin Beauties.”

14. Stanley, on his expedition into the interior of *The Darkest Africa*, eulogizes Africa as “still a virgin locked in innocent repose” (quoted in Spurr 178).

15. This gave a distinct character to the soil that lay in wait for its seed. Keymis, Raleigh's lieutenant, wrote of Guiana in 1596, “[H]ere whole shyeres of fruitfull rich groundes, lying now waste for want of people, do prostitutes themselues unto us, like a faire and beautifull woman, in the pride and flower of desired yeares (f2i).” This virgin land—“Come boys: Virginia longs till we share the rest of her maidenhead” quips the early popular slogan in colonial North America (Carr 49)—embodies not simply

any woman. It is the explicitly sexed-being—the virgin/whore—whose empty soils prostitute themselves.

16. See Carr; Kolodny; and Parker.

17. For an understanding of Linnaeus's work in relation to that of his contemporaries, see Foucault (1970, 125–65).

18. Scientific nomenclature employed a two-part system of ordering: male sexual parts and their defining characteristics designated the class, followed by the female sexual parts and their defining characteristics designating the subgroup or order (Judd). Contemporary botanists consider Linnaeus's Sexual System obsolete, but his Latin binomial nomenclature of genus and species persists. Interestingly, the genus (the former placeholder of male sexual parts in the Sexual System) is a capitalized Latin noun while the species (the former placeholder of female sexual parts) is a lowercase Latin adjective.

19. For the natural historian, the living world was chaos out of which the scientist orchestrated order. His goal was to discover, unveil, and display to the eye what already existed, "reveal . . . the sovereign order of Nature" (Linnaeus [1735] 1964, 13), the hidden truth. But rather than unravel the tangle biologically, Linnaeus viewed Nature representationally. The practice of purification—divulging true denomination—occurred first, through the meticulous discrimination of identities and differences among a select number of visible, privileged characters, and, second, through the precise juxtaposition of matter (plants) within the "squared and spatialized" blocks of tabular grids (Foucault 1970, 132). Positioned within multiple tables representing different levels of ordering, "any species, without having to be described, can be designated with the greatest accuracy by means of the names of the different groups in which it is included" (Foucault 1970, 141).

20. As Lee noted in his *Introduction to Botany* in 1788, "Hybride" was "a Bastard, a monstrous Production of two Plants of different Species" (OED).

21. As might be imagined, the consequences of contact between the races were not similar across the gender divide. Despite fears of degeneration and loss of imperial prestige, colonial officials tolerated sexual relations between white men and native women. Practical exigencies in the earlier stages of empire building, where large numbers of white men were present in the tropics without any white women, meant that white men entered into relationships with local women that ranged from casual sexual advances to long-term liaisons including concubinage, and, in some cases, even marriage (Ballhatchet; Gann and Duignan; Hyam 1986a; Stoler 1991, 1995; Van Helten and Williams 1983). Local women could provide a checkered variety of services to their white masters—as guides to local languages and customs (Cohen 1971, 122); in easing the travails of cultural, physical, and psychological adaptation (Butcher 200–202; Callaway 49; Kennedy 1987, 175; Stoler 1985, 31–34); and simply as sexual objects (Ballhatchet 10–16; Bush 11–17; Dadzie 24–26; Hyam 1986b, 51–72; Jordan 144–49; Stoler 1991, 53–60).

22. See also Shaw for a discussion of the racial and sexual discourses in colonial Kenya.

23. Young presents a detailed discussion of this debate.

24. One of the points Haraway (1989) makes in this influential work is in relation to the discursive exclusion of Africans from the human species, an exclusion that was instrumental in establishing the coherence of the European races.

25. See Ballhatchet; Gilman (1985); Mosse; and White for some of the arguments explaining the need for creating the Other.

26. See Ballhatchet; Gilman (1985); Mosse; and White for discussions about how the imagined or concrete existence of an Other serves as an occasion to construct bonds of solidarity.

27. McClintock (1995, 48) provides a similar account of the purposes that fears of degeneration might help meet. According to her, such fears helped justify state intervention to protect purity and to cordon off those groups that were seen as the source of the contagion of degeneration.

28. Proust's nomination of Jews and homosexuals as the "accursed race" (quoted in Mosse 134), with its powerful biblical resonances, could serve equally efficiently to designate the peoples of the tropics as the Other. In often blindly transferring to the nonwhite peoples characteristics such as savagery, barbarism, lustfulness, sensuality, uncleanness, indolence, and physical imperfection—characteristics that had been implicated in defining the Other in many ages and places, racist doctrines demonstrated an essential bankruptcy. Unfortunately, conceptual or intellectual bankruptcy of theories does not indicate a commensurate political impotence—often the reverse, as many contemporary experiences demonstrate.

29. As H. M. Lambert in the colonial office in England said in a similar vein, "[S]ex with the natives destroys 'the very basis on which the authority of the government rests'" (quoted in Hyam 1990, 175).

30. For similar dynamics in Latin America, see Martinez-Alier; Seed; and Nelson.

31. Hyam (1990) provides a comprehensive mention of such legislation in southern and central African colonies and also during the colonization of America.

32. One well-publicized instance of the period was the marriage between Ruth Williams, a London secretary, and Seretse Khama, heir to the chieftaincy of Bangwoto in Bechuanaland. Their marriage was condemned as "striking at the roots of white supremacy" (Hyam 1990, 204). White prostitutes in colonial Zimbabwe who were willing to sleep with black men, white settlers alleged around the turn of the century, were directly responsible for increasing the Black Peril (Van Onselen; Pape 703). Around the same time, the colonial government in Bengal changed the Excise and Licensing Act to prevent European women from serving as barmaids. That European women could serve liquor to natives was "profoundly degrading to the prestige of the ruling race" (Ballhatchet 139). White women who migrated to South Africa could not serve as domestic servants because of white anxieties about social and sexual contact with black male servants. Over time most of them married into white settler society. (Van Helten and Williams 19). In a similar vein, official and unofficial white opinions could blame white women for acting indecorously and carelessly, for forgetting that the average male native had strong sexual passions, for being too familiar with servants and natives, for being single, in short, for anything that could be perceived as "letting the side down" (Gartrell 168; Stoler 1991, 70; Schmidt 172–73).

33. A number of writers have also pointed out these characteristics associated with the mobilization of the metaphor of Black Peril. Pape suggests (699) that fears of the Black Peril were for the most part a manufactured phenomenon and at times a fully hysterical obsession among the white populations of colonial Zimbabwe, spawning a range of exclusionary legislation to help solidify a white and male racist order. Ball-hatchet; and Inglis point out the flimsy and often fake grounds on which accusations of rape and sexual assault were constructed. In general, these characteristics of the Black Peril correspond to Gilman's account of "stereotypes" (1985) and Morse's account of the construction of nationalisms in Europe. Stereotypes usually invest the Other with features that fall apart under close scrutiny and help increase group cohesion. Stoler (1991, 68–69) summarizes these features coherently in her discussion of exclusionary practices and discourses in the East Indies.

34. The words are from Benjamin Franklin (quoted in Jordan 143), but they reflect widespread colonial concerns that the white population was small and needed augmentation.

35. In conjuring up a sense of the "naturalist's trance, the hunter's trance" Wilson writes of his first journey to Surinam in 1961: "I imagined richness and order as an intensity of light. . . . I imagined that this place and all its treasures were mine alone and might be so forever in memory" (1984, 6–7).

36. For further reference to Nature as patrimony see Myers (1985, 333); and Lynch and Talbott (136).

37. For a review of the concept of national parks and their spread throughout the tropics, see Keiter.

38. See Sawyer for a discussion of sexualized and feminized tropes in relation to Ecuador's Amazonia.

39. See, for a small sample of writings that concern themselves with overpopulation, Abernathy (1991); Fischer; Hardin (1993); Holdren; Meffe, Ehrlich, and Ehrenfeld; Ness, Drake, and Brechin; and Pimental et al.

40. Concern with overpopulation and the environment seems so obvious that it colonizes seemingly unrelated subjects as well. See, for example, Lévi-Strauss summarizing his views on race and culture (21), Jack Nicholson talking about solar energy (165), or Crick and Watson talking about their discovery of the double helix structure of DNA (Jaroff 59).

41. See Sugnet's (30) critique of Maranto in the *New Atlantic*.

42. We do not investigate this aspect of the argument. For insightful analyses of the nature of the threat that overaccumulation and material consumption in the West pose to the environment, see Collins; Merchant; and O'Connor.

43. Similar claims are also evident in other pronouncements made during the colonial period. Lugard, the British governor-general of Nigeria between 1907 and 1919, suggested that the tropics were the "heritage of mankind." Nor were thinkers on the left immune to the sentiments that possessed colonial officials like Lugard and Sarraut. The French socialist Rouanet suggested there was no reason why "the peoples of the civilized European and American countries (who) find themselves before enormous expanses . . . should not use these expanses to better the economic existence of

their countries" (quoted in Arndt 39). The American writer Richard Davis wondered in 1896 what was to be done to the world's land that was lying unimproved, "[w]hether it shall go to the great power that is willing to turn it to account or remain with its original owner, who fails to understand its value" (Spurr 28–31).

44. For a discussion of the links between poverty, overpopulation, and sustainability, see Redclift; Lele; and Vivian.

45. See Taylor and Buttel for a discussion of links between scientific advances and the environmental discourse.

46. Agrawal (1997) suggests arguments that tropical resources form a global heritage, that Westerners possess the scientific knowledge to develop the resources, and that their capacity justifies their claims over tropical treasures were evident throughout the colonial period as well.

47. Efforts to systematically document species and specimens for profit bear uncanny resemblances with attempts to catalog indigenous knowledges around the world before indigenous peoples become "extinct" or the pressures of modernization change cultures in unknowable ways. The objective in present-day efforts is also highly utilitarian: to discover practices that are commercially viable or that might enable development to take place more efficiently (Agrawal 1995).

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