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Power Asymmetries on the Intimate Front of Bondage and Colonialism: Sexual Exploitation in the American-Occupied Philippines 1898-1946

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Abstract

This essay examines sexual exploitation in the Philippines through the lens of human bondage, directly challenging the official civilizing narrative of the American Empire in the early 20th century. Using a transnational approach, I analyze American imperial ideology and colonial control on the intimate front, where sexuality, gender, and race were reconstructed to marginalize Filipina/os. By integrating perspectives on American military masculinity, prostitution, racial politics, and the commodification of the colonial subject, I argue that the American occupation expanded hierarchies in the Philippines. Under globalization driven by Southeast Asian colonization, contrasting images of Filipina/os and American occupiers became central to U.S. dominance in the Philippines. Therefore, photographs, newspapers, cultural works, and travel diaries that perpetuated racial-sexual stereotypes were key primary sources in this investigation. Furthermore, the sexual and racial marginalization during the colonial period continues to shape experiences of Filipina/os today. Finally, while I give significant attention to the consequences of power asymmetries in the American-occupied Philippines, Filipinas exercised agency in a way that complicates an exclusively victim-centred history. While sex work existed at the intersection of agency and oppression in the colonial Philippines, sexual violence remained a colonial tool for reinforcing American racism and imperial fantasies.

Introduction

During the American occupation of the Philippines, soldiers with sexually transmitted infections earned the nickname "Rough Rider," a term that glorified their exploits while masking a darker reality. These infections became symbolic battle scars, suggesting soldiers had not only faced conflict but also conquered the tropics—and, by extension, the Filipina women they encountered. Acts of "rough" sex were framed as performances of masculinity, but what of the Filipina women subjected to these aggressive or coerced encounters? The 1898 American invasion of the Philippines, easily interpreted as merely a transfer of colonial rule from Spain to the United States, brought profound shifts in governance and society. For American soldiers, the tropics were not only a battleground but also a stage for asserting manhood, with sexual access to Filipina women treated as a spoil of war. Yet, this systemic exploitation was more than a consequence of imperial conquest—it entrenched new hierarchies that would shape Philippine society.

There is a notable historiographical consensus among historians of American-occupied Philippines that sexual exploitation was a systemic tool for imperial control and domination. While they debate the importance of the different themes of imperial governance,[1] racial-sexual regulations,[2] and the socioeconomic facets of sexual exploitation,[3] I aim to unite these different

[1] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power : Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. University of California Press, 2010; Paul A. Kramer, "The military-sexual complex: Prostitution, disease and the boundaries of Empire during the Philippine-American War." *Asia-Pacific Journal 9, no. 302* (2011); Tessa Winkelmann. *Dangerous Intercourse: Gender and Interracial Relations in the American Colonial Philippines, 1898–1946*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.99767.

[2] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. Routledge, 1995; Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power : Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*; Victor Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies : Fantasy, Racial-Sexual Governance, and the Philippines in U.S. Imperialism, 1899-1913*. Duke University Press, 2016; Gladys Nubla, "The Sexualized Child and Mestizaje," in *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World.* Boston: BRILL, 2017.

[3] Nicholas Trajano Molnar, American Mestizos, The Philippines, and the Malleability of Race: 1898-1961. 1 ed., Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017; Anne E. Booth, *Colonial legacies: Economic and social development in East and Southeast Asia.* University of Hawai'i Press, 2007; Gabrielle Abando. "The Double-Commodification of the Filipina: Neocolonial Exploitation in the Entertainment Era." *Sojourners Undergraduate Journal of Sociology 1415, no. 1* (2023): 207-223.

dimensions from the literature. Accordingly, I am guided to answer how American military occupation created new racial-gendered hierarchies through sexual exploitation in the Philippines between 1898 and 1946.

Similar to the historical framework laid out by Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff for understanding slavery in the context of the particular society, I conceptualize sexual exploitation in the colonial Philippines as a form of bondage.[4] Here, I specifically understand sexual exploitation as any form of capitalizing on another's vulnerability for sexual purposes. While unlike chattel slavery in the lack of formal ownership, there are still elements of domination in this power dynamic. Ann Stoler's analysis of sexual exploitation as a tool of colonial control is particularly influential in shaping my approach to this topic. Unequal power dynamics made Filipina women especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation at the hands of American soldiers;[5] yet, the global and regional context at the turn of the 20th century is also imperative for this matter. Alessandro Stanziani argues that slavery in the Indian Ocean World (IOW) is tied to economic cycles, thus the colonial expansion in Southeast Asia in the 19th and early 20th centuries transformed the nature of bondage in the region. Globalization and modern capitalist forces gave rise to the modern sex trade, where huge demand for sexual services further gendered labour exploitation under imperial regimes.[6] Moreover, military occupation created significant gender imbalances in urban areas and ports, where colonial administrations institutionalized prostitution and concubinage to cater to soldiers.[7] Stanziani's concept of open systems of bondage in Southeast

[4] Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff. *Slavery in Africa : Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977.
[5] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 42-43.
[6] Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani. "Slavery and Bondage in the Indian Ocean World, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." Chapter. In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, edited by David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, Seymour Drescher, and David Richardson, 226–45. The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Cambridge University Press, 2017, 240-242.
[7] Campbell and Stanziani, *Slavery and Bondage in the Indian Ocean World,* 240-242.

Asian commercial hubs describes the fluid boundaries between various forms of servitude and slavery, sometimes allowing for social mobility. Within this context, sex work offered Filipina women a livelihood and occasional agency. Yet, it was also deeply exploitative, representing another form of bondage under American colonial rule in the Philippines.

I argue that during the American occupation of the Philippines from 1898 to 1946, sexual exploitation by American soldiers intertwined military dominance with the civilizing mission. From the intimate level to the social level, and then the globe, Filipina (specifically, their bodies) were the targets of conquest, and their embodied experiences demonstrated the extent of American domination over the Philippines. Rooted in racial ideologies and militarized masculinity, intimate forms of colonial control elucidated the sexual politics of the American empire that endured in Filipino society. These power imbalances reinforced governance and legitimized the American presence as benevolent during a period of expanding U.S. hegemony. These new hierarchies became especially visible in the racial stereotypes of Filipinas, the contrasting masculinities of American and Filipino men, militarized prostitution, and the policing of interracial intimacies.

Savage Imagery of Filipina Women

Per their civilizing rationale for conquest, the American presence in the Philippines constructed the Filipina as a sexual deviant who needed taming, thus exposing her to sexual exploitation at the hands of soldiers. Colonial literature had always employed sexual fantasies and perverted stereotypes of the tropics to distinguish their otherness. Stoler further specifies that sexual stereotypes of Asian women fulfilled not only a power fantasy for the colonial man but placed him above her in the various relations of power.[8] However, the sexual politics of the American empire

[8] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 42-44.

employed racial imagery of the Filipina to both dominate her on an intimate level and commodify her on the global level.

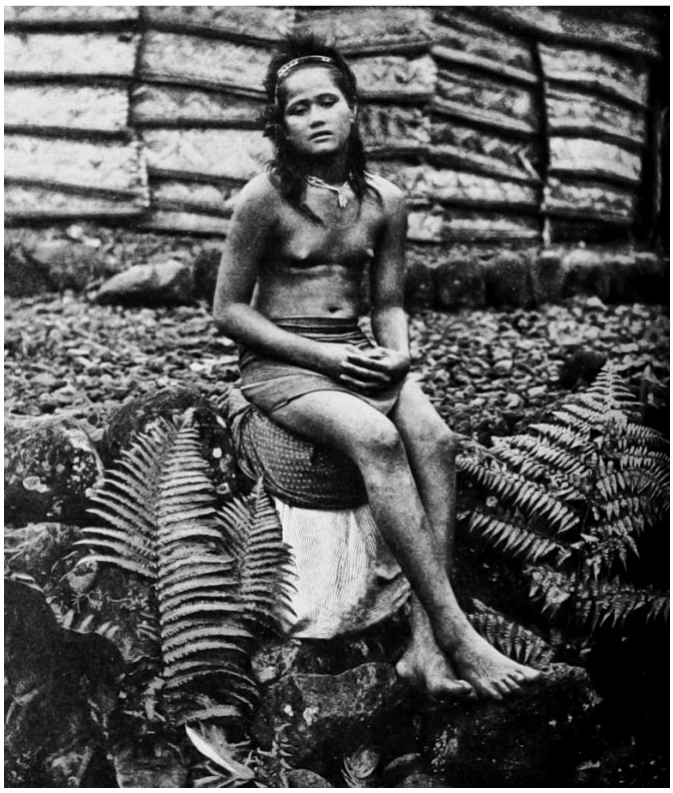

Figure 1: *Young Girl of the Visayan Tribe, Island of Panay*. From José de Olivares, *Our Islands and Their People*. Vol. 2. ND Thompson Publishing Company, 1899.

The photograph above illustrates how Filipina women were typically portrayed to American audiences: naked, savage, and sexual. Circulating images of the "primitive" Filipina in travel books, such as José de Olivares' *Our Islands and Their People*, submitted her for the American desire, and presented her as a visual possession.[9] Applying Marx's commodity fetishism, these exoticized depictions not only commodified the Filipina but also exploited her labour.[10] The colonial regime benefitted from access to Filipina sexuality, and the American

[9] Nerissa Balce, "The Filipina's Breast: Savagery, Docility, and the Erotics of the American Empire." *Social Text* 87 (2006): 89.
[10] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*, 212-214; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest,* Routledge, 1995, 181-183.

presence cultivated a thriving prostitution district near their military bases.[11] Filipinas were reduced to sexual objects for American soldiers and entertainment commodities in imperial literature, reinforcing their inferiority while projecting their exploitation onto a transnational stage. Beyond their immediate role in the sex trade, they were sexualized internationally—as mail-in brides, entertainers, and in pornography—beginning with the fetishization of Filipina bodies in American cultural works.[12] Considering the growing globalization of human bondage, human bodies had become totally commodified at the turn of the 20th century.[13] The racial-sexual stereotypes of the Filipina were applied as a tool of imperial control, but further perpetuated ideas of racial inferiority and sexual unfreedom as Filipina women became increasingly exploited in the global sex trade.

Sex work emerged as a survival strategy for some Filipinas, but the perceived degree of agency compounded their vulnerability and challenged their ability to be seen as victims. Orientalist fetishes framed Filipinas as deviants, perpetuating the narrative of sexual debauchery in the tropics, which justified violence against them.[14] This narrative maintained the Filipina as the perpetrator in the seduction of American soldiers and exposed her to more harm.[15] This is a similar racial stereotype that was employed against Black women—calling them seductresses and justifying rapes committed against them by white planters in the Americas.[16] Anne McClintock offers the concept of a "porno-tropic" tradition of European imperialism to essentialize the gendered dimension of violence when it concerns female fetishization.[17] In the context of the

[11] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*, 208-209.
[12] This included photos, travel diaries, literature, and letters sent back to the metropolitan United States. Balce, *The Filipina's Breast*, 91-103
[13] Campbell and Stanziani, *Slavery and Bondage in the Indian Ocean World*, 241-242.
[14] Balce, *The Filipina's Breast*, 92-93.
[15] Balce, *The Filipina's Breast*, 105.
[16] Tracey Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, Duke University Press (1999), 2 –11.
[17] McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, 22.

European consumption of "exotic" geographies through exploration, she presents the power relations in terms of the male penetration of the secret female interior.[18] I consider this eroticization of conquest to be particularly applicable to the Philippines because it evokes the origin of war and violence of the initial occupation in 1898. The Spanish-American War was a site of significant racial rhetoric, with Olivares writing on the "distinctly black" nature of Filipinos and using racial slurs as a marker of their savagery to justify the U.S.-led violence against them.[19] Even after the American victory, fear of continued Filipino resistance manifested itself as racial anxieties; and when coupled with the geographic separation of the Philippines from Western culture, the American colonists sought docility from the colonized population.[20] The civilizing narrative cast American soldiers as benevolent figures, while racial-sexual stereotypes of Filipinas obscured the violence of U.S. actions and absolved soldiers of accountability.

The contrast between Filipina and white female sexuality is key to the gendered power dynamic in the Philippines. Specifically, Frantz Fanon's approach to understanding the racialized person's experience compared to their white counterpart,[21] or how the American man perceives the Filipina versus the American woman. American men were seeing progress in women's rights back home, but Filipina women represented everything American women were not: compliant and submissive, they sought the white man's attention and lacked liberation.[22] In other words, all these qualities produced by oppression and internalized racism were seen as attractive to American soldiers. Further, the Roman Catholic Church's influence only contributed to stigmatizing sex work. The Roman Catholic church held a double standard on morality, where the adultery of men

[18] McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, 23.
[19] José de Olivares, *Our Islands and Their People*. Vol. 2. ND Thompson Publishing Company, 1899, 590-591.
[20] Balce, *The Filipina's Breast*, 102-103.
[21] Frantz Fanon. "Black skin, white masks." In *Social theory re-wired*, pp. 355-361. Routledge, 2023.
[22] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*, 211.

was accepted while condemning women involved in sex work.[23] Under this moral hypocrisy, Filipinas were marginalized both during colonial rule and in its aftermath. The Church's role contributed to lasting consequences, including internalized racism, colorism, and a desire to assimilate into Western culture. [24] W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double consciousness" captures the Filipina's awareness of her imposed inferiority, evident in the mass emigration of Filipinas during the 20th century. Many became increasingly vulnerable to trafficking, violence, and exploitation, especially as the Philippines became a hub for sex tourism—a direct continuity of military prostitution.[25] Nonetheless, this construction of Filipina femininity happened alongside that of soldiers' masculinity. Ultimately, the construction of Filipina femininity reinforced the racial-gender hierarchies that persist today, but in a parallel fashion to military masculinity.

Contrasting American and Filipino Masculinities

American militarized masculinity further shaped imperialism by disciplining the Philippines and reinforcing masculinity through the violence of war. To understand American conceptions of National Manhood at the turn of the 20th century, especially in the context of the Spanish-American war, it is necessary to return to American motivations for imperialism. Alfred McCoy considers the modern American military a "cult of masculinity," explaining that President William McKinley framed imperialism as a moral imperative.[26] At a time of modern war, the U.S. redefined gender roles to justify military actions, linking masculinity to national strength. Theodore Roosevelt, who became the 26th President of the United States in 1901, further viewed empire-

[23] Meredith L. Ralston and Edna Keeble. *Reluctant Bedfellows : Feminism, Activism and Prostitution in the Philippines*. Kumarian Press, 2009, 81-82.
[24] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*, 210.
[25] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*, 208-209.
[26] Alfred W. McCoy. "Philippine commonwealth and cult of masculinity." *Philippine Studies* 48, no. 3 (2000): 315.

building as a solution to a perceived crisis of American masculinity.[27] He believed men were becoming soft, privileged, and disconnected from endeavours that not only strengthened America's global standing but also reaffirmed the dominance of American men over other nations.[28] At the 1900 Republican convention, Roosevelt explicitly positioned the Philippines as a testing ground of American manhood, declaring: "We respect the man who goes out to do a man's work, to face difficulties and overcome them, and to train up his children to do likewise."[29] This vision of masculinity, emphasizing courage, self-sacrifice, and physical strength, was closely tied to patriotism, republican freedom, and effective governance.[30] For Roosevelt, American male degeneration could be deterred by imperialism in the Philippines, where the greatest test of manhood was found in subduing "uncivilized Filipino savages."[31]

Asserting American masculinity in international relations was closely tied to the feminization of Filipinos. Nerissa Balce writes that feminizing colonial subjects and attributing them tropes of docility helped illustrate them as unfit for self-government, thus justifying colonial rule.[32] However, McCoy and McClintock suggest that the entire territory was feminized, as reflected in the American tendency to call the Philippines "the Filipinas," a term commonly used for women from the Philippines.[33] This paternalistic and gendered military discourse allowed soldiers to internalize this gender dichotomy, and motivate them to protect a "feminine" and "vulnerable" nation.[34] The feminine symbol of the Philippines was further engendered in the 1930s

[27] Kristin L. Hoganson. *Fighting for American Manhood : How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*. Yale University Press, 1998, 139.
[28] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 139.
[29] Theodore Roosevelt, "The Administration of William McKinley" (1900) in Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 145.
[30] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 150-151.
[31] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 134.
[32] Balce, *The Filipina's Breast*, 94.
[33] McCoy, *Philippine commonwealth and cult of masculinity*, 323.
[34] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 5-6.

with a rise of Miss Philippines pageants, which portrayed Filipinas as needing American protection.[35]

The demasculinization of Filipinos reveals the malleability of gender and racial categories in American imperial discourse. Filipino men were depicted as effeminate yet militarily ferocious; physically advantaged yet unfit; Oriental yet Black; submissive yet a sexual menace.[36] This contradictory framing arose partly from the challenge posed by Filipino guerilla resistance. While American forces struggled against their tactics, they refused to concede defeats, instead infantilizing Filipino fighters as "insubordinate" and "unorganized" in contrast to disciplined white soldiers.[37] Interestingly, traits that made American men honourable—such as martial strength—were reframed in Filipino men as savage and animalistic.[38] These descriptions mirror negative imagery of Indigenous people in the Americas, as well as Black men, both of whom were stereotyped as the Black rapist who threatened women.[39] These ideas were further reinforced by Darwinian theory and scientific racism, which cast Filipino men as uncivilized youths who had no self-control, and thus could not self-govern.[40] The perceived threat they posed to American, European, and Filipina women served as a pretext for the violent civilizing mission and the maintenance of a colonial hierarchy. Contrasted with the gendered constructions of Filipina women—who fulfilled the sexual needs and desires of soldiers—Filipino men were considered unproductive members of society, and they were denied self-governing capacities until they conformed to the American ideal of military masculinity.[41]

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[35] McCoy, *Philippine commonwealth and cult of masculinity*, 325-326.
[36] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 2.
[37] McCoy, *Philippine commonwealth and cult of masculinity*, 319-320.
[38] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 134.
[39] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 134-135.
[40] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 171-172.
[41] By the 1920s, the national Filipino military began employing similar notions of militarized masculinity and U.S. military organization in order to demonstrate their preparedness for independence. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 137, 140.

To illustrate the enforcement of gender constructs in the colonial Philippines and the policing of sexual crimes, I refer to the case of *United States v. Boss Reese* (1911). In brief, Captain Reese sexually assaulted his subordinates in the scout regiment; however, his case was hidden from the public and his initial punishment of imprisonment was dismissed.[42] The homosexual, thus non-normative, nature of his sex acts was central to the military court response. Even though most American perpetrators of sexual exploitation were not prosecuted, the stakes were even greater in Reese's case. Generally, Filipino same-sex acts were not policed, since it was seen as a waste of resources, and it complemented ideas of Filipino sexual perversion; but having a sexual deviant in the American ranks compromised the moral imperative of imperialism.[43] The challenge herein for the colonial administration lay in the shift from heterosexual to homosexual power dynamics, and in employing a heteromasculine framework to justify Reese's crimes. Rather than being prosecuted as a "sodomite," his behaviour was interpreted as fulfilling the gender-racial-sexual roles, with official case documents stating that he used his Filipino subordinates "as women."[44] His role as the aggressor thus fits into the norm of hegemonically masculine authority over the effeminate Filipino.[45] Fundamentally, this scandal challenged the hierarchies that sexual exploitation and colonial dominance had established in the Philippines, as the conflict only became resolved by administrative language choices. Captain Reese's case of "sodomy," synonymous with rape, was explained as a form of discipline against "his soldiers," and it fits into the hetero-masculine notion of dominating the Filipina woman.[46]

[42] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 63-64.
[43] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 68.
[44] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 66, 67.
[45] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 72.
[46] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 70.

Within the military masculinity project, women were used as a tool to encourage conscription and a reward for courageous soldiers—she was the prize to be won through conquest.[47] Veteran memoirs and settler editorials show that the American military treated the Philippines as a test of their sexual virility, where the sexual economy allowed them to come to understand their own sexual prowess.[48] Thus, American soldiers went to the Philippines with a sense of entitlement to Filipina bodies, and this created the conditions for what Tessa Winkelmann considers "dangerous intercourse" in the Colonial Philippines. She frames interracial intercourse as forged by warfare, thus the intimacy between American men and Filipinas acted as a site for imperial violence.[49] I further argue that the sexual needs of American soldiers were central to militarized masculinity. Since the imperial mission empowered soldiers to commit violent crimes against native people for the sake of civilizing them, sexually dominating Filipina women was a logical extension of the imperial quest for masculinity. Moreover, transplanted racism from the United States reduced the moral distress of violent crimes committed against native people, given that they were seen as inferior.[50] American soldiers had been conditioned to be racist and aggressive, thus encouraging them to execute violent rhetoric and terrorize Filipino inhabitants.[51]

Governing the Military-Sexual Complex

Sexual intercourse between American soldiers and Filipinas became a means of control and surveillance once the military administration recognized that it could not be eradicated. During the

[47] McCoy, *Philippine commonwealth and cult of masculinity*, 315.
[48] Abraham Van Heyningen Hartendorp, an American settler that lived in the Philippines for 50 years published a series of editorials that detailed his sexual exploits. Winkellman, *Dangerous Intercourse: Gender and Interracial Relations in the American Colonial Philippines*, 152-182.
[49] Winkellman, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 2, 7-10.
[50] Richard Welch. "American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response." *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (1974): 242.
[51] Welch, *American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response*, 242-243.

initial military occupation, fulfilling the soldiers' sexual needs, while simultaneously protecting them, posed a challenge to the military administration. While soldier sexual desire for Filipinas was justified by the rhetoric of American military masculinity, prostitution—especially in a Catholic society—was largely considered immoral and a source of social evil.[52] The geography of commercial sex work in the Philippines is significantly tied to the concentrated military presence. Local economies in Manila and port towns became dependent on the sexual economies, while the borderlands of American colonial control saw sexual unions as a means of maintaining social control.[53] For context, modern prostitution was well established in the Philippines in the 19th century under Spanish rule, and the three main types we see are: brothel prostitution; escort workers, who worked out of their homes or visited men's homes; and "streetwalkers."[54] In contrast, concubine unions were dominantly domestic arrangements considered politically stable and healthier for soldiers in the colonies. Yet, in many cases, it was difficult to distinguish a prostitute from a concubine through these colonial categories. Still, the sex economy highlighted significant racial-sexual governance, revealing the extent of unequal power dynamics and Filipina vulnerability.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), commonly known as venereal diseases in the sources, occupied a central place in the official colonial medical discourse.[55] Disease has always been a visible product of the human-environmental relationship, and when it comes to imperialism in the tropics, disease was consistently a source of military anxiety.[56] Beyond concerns for soldier health, venereal diseases were believed to undermine the moral mission of American troops in the

[52] Ralston and Edna Keeble. *Reluctant Bedfellows : Feminism, Activism and Prostitution in the Philippines*, 81-82; Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 2,13.
[53] Tessa Winkelmann. "Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire in the Philippines Interracial Intimacies in Mindanao and the Cordilleras, 1898–1921," in *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World*. BRILL, 2017, 39.
[54] Ralston and Edna Keeble. *Reluctant Bedfellows : Feminism, Activism and Prostitution in the Philippines*, 79.
[55] Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 2-4.
[56] Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 181.

Philippines.[57] Filipino wartime mortality between 1898 and 1903 was among the highest in the world, but the deadly legacy of this conflict persisted in the form of disease throughout the 50 years of American occupation.[58] Local and military dependencies on prostitution led to soaring STI cases, and unlike previously endemic diseases, it highlighted an intersection of social and medical problems that the American occupation fueled.[59] Despite medical records showing that American soldiers imported many STIs, notably syphilis, fears grounded in racial-sexual stereotypes treated disease as inherent to Filipina bodies.[60] Soldiers were still warned of the danger that intercourse with Filipinas posed, but this danger was already an accepted reality for soldiers, whose masculinity was tied to courage and confronting the hazards of conquest.[61] Consequently, when thousands of soldiers contracted STIs, Filipinas were blamed, further entrenching racialized and gendered notions of disease in colonial discourse.[62]

Working alongside stereotypes of the savage Filipina, in conceiving her as the source of disease, she became a threat and not a victim in the sexually exploitative system. Indeed, official discourse on the need to protect soldiers resulted in aggressive surveillance and detention policies that uniquely targeted Filipina women to curb disease spread.[63] Medical officials in both the metropolitan U.S. and the Philippines specifically developed the idea that Filipina women were vectors of disease, thus employing the notion of "dangerous intercourse" and its impact on soldiers to scientifically maintain the moral imperative of occupation.[64] However, this discourse on the

[57] Mendoza, *Metroimperial Intimacies*, 41.
[58] An estimated 1.7 million people were killed, or 50 people per 1000. Ken De Bevoise. *Agents of Apocalypse : Epidemic Disease in the Colonial Philippines*. Princeton University Press, 2001, 13.
[59] De Bevoise. *Agents of Apocalypse : Epidemic Disease in the Colonial Philippines*, 92-93.
[60] Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 11.
[61] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 13; Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 181.
[62] In 1901, 29% of all sickness among American troops in the Philippines were reported to be STIs. Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 38.
[63] Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 8.
[64] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 39.

Figure 2: “Uncle Sam Before and After His Wish for Expansion,” "Expensive Expansion" (Boston, 1900), in Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 182.[65]

disease had the effect of enabling sexual violence against Filipina women and protecting soldiers from justice. As referenced in the “Rough Rider” joke from the introduction, soldiers who contracted STIs were glorified for their conquests yet portrayed as victims of the tropics, effectively obscuring their crimes against Filipinas.[66] This medicalization and vilification of Filipina women extended conquest, and all the sexual implications of militarized masculinity encouraged soldiers to violently dominate the already vulnerable population.[67]

Filipino nationalists, however, were active in challenging colonial rhetoric and attempted to create the image of elite Filipina womanhood, who instead suffered violation and rape by

[65] This 1900 cartoon highlights the impact of disease on American soldiers, portraying their sacrifice for the Empire. Similar depictions in American media reinforced stereotypes linking Asian people to tropical disease, bolstering the moral justification for colonization. However, such portrayals also provided ammunition for anti-colonialists, who criticized the corruption and moral decay that colonialism brought to the American image.
[66] Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 24.
[67] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 38.

American men. Tagalog language newspapers were key in publicly decrying the rape of Filipina women and highlighting the danger that occupation brought in terms of sexual violence.[68] Filipino nationalist rhetoric described American soldiers as depraved and pointed toward the multitude of sexual violence to delegitimize the American mission. Likewise, popular culture in the Philippines began to valorize the Christian symbol of a virtuous woman who stood in opposition to the colonial occupier.[69] When rumours of American atrocities against civilians, including rapes, murders and torture began to circulate in 1901, there were significant efforts to conceal details in the most scandalous of cases.[70] Interestingly, the military showed the least tolerance for crimes of insubordination among its troops, compared to crimes against Filipinos. Even though officially, rape was punishable by death, these cases were usually addressed with leniency, with the actions being justified by the racial-sexual stereotypes of native inhabitants.[71] Letters from the U.S. Military History Research Collection detail many acts of brutality provoked by the sense of authority these soldiers felt. And given that they saw civilians as "inferior," "short," "brown," and "sometimes half nekkid," violence against them was always seen as necessary for peace, civilization, and pacification.[72]

By 1901, there were clear shifts in sexual governance in response to the STI epidemic, and the military instead began to promote concubinage. Especially outside of Manila, or the "frontier" region of the empire, long-term liaisons between soldiers and Filipinas were considered a solution to STI spread and the immorality of prostitution.[73] However, there were also notable social and

[68] Cynthia Luz P. Rivera, "Filipino Women's Magazines"; Georgina Reyes Encanto, Constructing the Filipina: A History of Women's Magazines, 1891–2002 (Quezon City: University ofthe Philippines Press, 2004) in Winkelmann, Dangerous Intercourse, 24-25.
[69] Winkelmann, Dangerous Intercourse, 25.
[70] Welch, *American Atrocities in the Philippines*, 234.
[71] Welch, *American Atrocities in the Philippines*, 239.
[72] Welch, *American Atrocities in the Philippines*, 242.
[73] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 30-31.

political reasons for the eventual promotion of marriage. From the military's perspective, marrying a Filipina could be interpreted as fulfilling his civilizing duty; yet, in many periphery communities, this relationship also offered an opportunity for social mobility, where a Filipina wife of a soldier could help the colonial administration navigate a complicated political climate on the edges of the empire.[74] Nonetheless, STI spread to these distant regions of the Philippines illustrates the lasting impacts of American colonialism on Filipina bodies.

Governing interracial unions

Interracial unions were a contentious aspect of the American occupation but also served as pathways for empire-building in the Philippines. Here, I differentiate these unions from prostitution and align them more closely with concubinage, as previously defined: stable, monogamous relationships between American men and Filipinas, lasting either long-term or for the duration of the soldier's deployment. However, I cannot separate any interracial intimacies between soldiers and Filipinas from bondage, because larger power dynamics maintained Filipina vulnerability. Turn-of-the-century American cultural works commonly presented sexual relations between American soldiers and colonized people as dangerous to white racial purity and moral constitutions.[75] Interestingly, the sexuality of Black soldiers was regulated to a higher degree in the Philippines, as it provoked additional fears of moral corruption that were seen as a challenge to the civilizing mission of American troops.[76] While Black soldiers did form relationships with

[74] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 1; Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 31-33.
[75] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 153.
[76] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 42.

Filipina women, the gender and racial privilege of white American men ensured that interracial relationships in the Philippines were largely between white men and Filipina women.[77]

There was a notable geographic dimension to racial preference in the Philippines, where military officials excluded darker-skinned women, stereotypically from the southern provinces in colonial discourse, from the sexual economy.[78] Soldiers stationed in the Sulu and Mindanao provinces were discouraged from engaging in sexual relationships with Moro women, and instead, the administration made an admitted effort to secure access to lighter-skinned or foreign sex workers. In many cases, there was a visible Japanese presence in brothels across the archipelago that illustrated the ethnic preferences of the U.S. military.[79] Historian Paul Kramer notes that Japanese women were considered to be "the cleanest," less likely to carry syphilis, and less dangerous than local women.[80] However, this preference was also a product of local politics. The Moro are the predominantly Muslim peoples in the southern islands, and the military administration feared that sexual liaisons with Moro women would insult their leadership and lead to conflict.[81] In fact, the Moro were considered the most dangerous in the Philippines, carrying a racial-religious stigma that helped sustain soldier preferences for lighter skin tones.[82] In 1902, American Lieutenant Owen Sweet even claimed that access to Japanese sex workers preserved the American-Moro peace.[83] These compounding colonial and racial hierarchies reinforced skin colour as a symbol of social class. The lasting effects of racial preference in the American military-

[77] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 42.
[78] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 71.
[79] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 73.
[80] Paul A. Kramer, "The Darkness That Enters the Home: The Politics of Prostitution during the Philippine-American War," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Duke University Press, 2006.
[81] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 72.
[82] Kramer, *The military-sexual complex*, 10.
[83] Owen Sweet to Adjutant General U.S. Army, February 7, 1902, in *Affairs in the Philippine Islands*, 1746-1750.

sexual complex are still visible today in the Asian beauty industry, where skin-whitening products generate billions in annual revenue.[84]

However, the sexual geography in the colony, particularly in the southern Mindanao and the northern Cordilleras regions, is central to understanding the gravity of sexual relations in maintaining colonial control.[85] As the American empire began the *frontierization* of these Philippine provinces, they encountered communities in the North, and Muslim regions in the South, both of whom had maintained some degree of sovereignty from the Spanish, and thus evaded American colonial control after 1898. In both cases, American men in stable relationships with Filipinas were able to serve as conduits to local communities, helping consolidate colonial authority and expand the imperial project across the islands.[86] Notably, these unions differed significantly from the predominantly exploitative relationships in regions firmly under American control. For one, these men tended to assimilate into the local community and often required consent from local leadership to marry women there. This geographic dimension highlights varying degrees of sexual exploitation and power dynamics, as soldiers could not perform their militarized masculinity as fully in areas where the U.S. military's dominance was limited.[87]

However, there was a general softening of official condemnation of interracial unions in the Philippines over time, reflecting broader shifts in attitude toward the sex economy and diminishing fears that Filipinos were a threat to America.[88] The rise of literary fiction on empire and colonized people, coupled with waves of younger American soldiers replacing veterans in the

[84] Ryanne Co. "Being 'Morena': Does Skin Colour Still Matter When Talking about Beauty?" Tatler Asia, December 21, 2021.
[85] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 39.
[86] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 39-40, 45-46, 54-56.
[87] Winkelmann, *Rethinking the Sexual Geography of American Empire*, 45-46, 54-56.
[88] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 153-155.

1920s and 1930s, played a central role in these changing perceptions.[89] "Going native" was a common term for referring to American men who became outsiders to the imperial agenda in the early 20th century if they entered relationships with Filipina women. American expatriate Frank Cheney even wrote numerous poems between 1908 and 1920 in the *Manila Bulletin* that condemned interracial unions.[90] But by 1935, when the Philippines acquired Commonwealth status, and increasingly after the Second World War, the perception of their occupation of the Philippines was one of friendship and even romance.[91] Hammon H. Buck's 1927 *Chronicles of Sam and Maganda* took the symbol of the feminine and beautiful Philippines, (Maganda meaning "beautiful" and a character inspired by Filipino folklore) and positioned her as submissive, obedient, and under the protection of Uncle Sam.[92] Using many of the same tropes, *Chronicles of Sam and Maganda* reinforced the racism and sexism that was foundational to the American empire, but through a romance story. Buck even proclaimed himself a "Filipinista," someone who not only believed in American-Philippine friendship, but also embraced the idea of racial equality and tolerance.[93] Still, there are incongruities with considering the Chronicles as a story of love and tolerance, because it still promoted ideas of white and American supremacy.[94]

American settlement in the Philippines, however, saw a significant increase in the 1930s.[95] Younger soldiers in particular settled in the Philippines at higher rates, as marriage to Filipina women became less stigmatized, and American expatriation to the Philippines became more

[89] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination*, 1945–1961 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 23; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 2008); Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 155-156.
[90] Frank Cheney, "Brown of the Volunteers," undated, Frank W. Cheney Poems, folder 1, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
[91] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 153; Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 20-21.
[92] Hammon H. Buck. "Chronicles of Sam and Maganda," *Philippine Magazine* (1927).
[93] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 158, 165.
[94] Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 165.
[95] Frank Cheney, "Brown of the Volunteers," American Oldtimer 4, no. 11 (1937): 21

popular among soldiers stationed there.[96] Therefore, Filipina wives became increasingly accepted into military circles in the 20th century, many of whom would also return to the U.S. with their husbands, and sometimes children.

Figure 3: The front cover of Hammon Buck's *Chronicles of Sam and Maganda*. The American Historical Collection, Ateneo de Manila University. Retrieved from Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 162.

[96] Nicholas Trajano Molnar. *American Mestizos, the Philippines, and the Malleability of Race: 1898-1961*. University of Missouri, 2017, 4; Winkelmann, *Dangerous Intercourse*, 156.

The final dimension of the sexual politics and racial hierarchies of the American Philippines that I will explore is miscegenation, or the children born of interracial unions. While the image of an interracial union had already sparked American racial anxieties, racial mixing brought an entire front of biological racism to questions of colonial citizenship. Eugenics in the colonies was fused with ideas of "unfit" peoples and degenerate behaviour, while maintaining white rule and superiority.[97] Importantly, eugenics translated medical and gender-specific racism to social values and political principles—and mestizo (used in Spanish colonies) children were a particular battleground for this discourse.[98] Johann Fichte interprets this challenge as the "interior frontiers" of an empire, where a community's purity can be penetrated not only from the outside but from the inside.[99] The key matter is the moral issue of miscegenation, given that racial mixing has long since been used as a trope of contamination, presenting a political and sexual challenge to the empire.[100] The concept of an American mestizo in the Philippines also brought the rigid American racial hierarchy into conflict with the fluid Filipino framework.[101] And even as the American community was in its fourth generation in the Philippines in the 1940s, their partnership remained highly unequal.[102]

Mestizos represented both a real and imagined racial landscape in the Philippines, because their identity certainly shaped their existence, but they were also overrepresented in official colonial discourse. Most mestizo children were left with their mothers in the Philippines after their fathers returned, thus they were largely raised in their Philippine culture and blended into the larger

[97] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 63.
[98] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 63-65.
[99] Etienne Balibar "Fichte et la frontière intérieure: A propos des Discours á la nation allemande," Les Cahiers de Fontenay (1990): 58–59.
[100] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 80.
[101] Molnar, *American Mestizos, the Philippines, and the Malleability of Race*, 5.
[102] Molnar, *American Mestizos, the Philippines, and the Malleability of Race*, 109-110.

demographic.[103] However, the colonial dilemma with mestizo existence was whether or not they helped or harmed the colonial mission.[104] Did they help preserve ideas of white supremacy and should they be granted citizenship, or did they represent a form of moral decay and should the administration ignore them? This question was also challenged by the Filipina mother's social status—was she a prostitute, a concubine, or a bride to an American soldier?[105] One path of degeneracy that the colonial administration feared was that abandoned mestizo girls would become dancers or sex workers and hurt the image of American moral supremacy by fulfilling a Filipina stereotype of sexual promiscuity. This gendered fear is equally well documented in French and Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia, because colonial respectability was built on this racial-gender power imbalance, but if women with "white blood" became the subject of colonized desire, it would tarnish the American nation.[106] The age profile is also important because while all Filipinos were infantilized to justify colonial rule, Filipina/o children also held a hypersexualized image in colonial imagination.[107] Glady Nubla argues that colonial discourse actually never mentions "childhood," because the infantilized nature of Filipinos was assumed. However, American teacher Ralph Kent Buckland, who worked in the Philippines, published a memoir titled *In the Land of the Filipino* in 1912, where he first infantilized Filipina women, calling them "brown children of the tropics," then he sexualized them and wrote of their immodesty.[108] Overall, Americans began to fear the reappropriated sexual stereotype that they imposed on the people of the Philippines. Americans saw the protection of the mestizo child as a safeguard of their moral

[103] Molnar, *American Mestizos, the Philippines, and the Malleability of Race*, 121.
[104] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 83.
[105] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 85.
[106] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 67-70.
[107] Gladys Nubla. "The Sexualized Child and Mestizaje: Colonial Tropes of the Filipina/o". In Gendering the Trans-Pacific World, Brill, 2017, 165.
[108] Ralph Kent Buckland, *In the Land of the Filipino* (New York: Every Where Publishing, 1912), 78-79; Nubla. *The Sexualized Child and Mestizaje*, 165.

reputation, but in their sexualization, the American ability to properly control the Philippines was challenged.[109]

To some extent, this fear is tied to the longstanding tropes of Black and Indigenous men as sexual threats to white women. But it also reflects the interconnection of whiteness and sexual desire. Proximity to white supremacy fostered ideas of white-adjacent beauty standards, where Filipina women were socially pressured to resemble American women, and Filipino society was taught to desire white women.[110] Even after Philippine independence in 1946, colonial structures that privileged white men remained and continued to shape urban, rural, and military prostitution. Eric Tagliacozzo outlines 20th-century trends in Southeast Asian prostitution and claims that military prostitution actually increased from World War II, after the Japanese occupation in the Philippines, and expanded further with American military base growth into the 1980s during the Vietnam Wars.[111] The influence of Orientalism in the West further sustained the American demand for Asian women through sex tourism, which has been thriving since the 1990s in the region.[112] In any case, the global order continued to witness the proliferation of sexual exploitation. Even though there is a clear divide in the global geography of development when it concerns prostitution, sex tourism, and trafficking, Western culture and ideology perpetuate fetishized stereotypes of Southeast Asian women, further marginalizing them on a global scale.

[109] Nubla. *The Sexualized Child and Mestizaje*, 193.
[110] Abando, *The Double-Commodification of the Filipina*.
[111] Eric Tagliacozzo. "Morphological shifts in Southeast Asian prostitution: The long twentieth century." *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 2 (2008): 256-263.
[112] *Tagliacozzo,* "Morphological shifts in Southeast Asian prostitution, 263-267.

Conclusion

Overall, sexual intercourse was an inescapable front of American conquest and domination in the Philippines. Influenced by their racial mythologies and European Orientalist tropes, the American military committed violence and created new asymmetrical power structures, while maintaining the benevolent nature of their occupying presence in the Philippines for nearly 50 years. Beginning with the racial-gendered stereotype of the savage Filipina, her perceived incivility exposed her not only to sexual violence from American soldiers but also to commodification as a sexual object for the Western gaze. Constructing the Philippines as a feminine country in contrast to the "young male" American nation further empowered the colonial mission. Systemic policing of sexual interactions between Americans and Filipinas allowed the colonial administration to justify continued oppression against Filipinas by claiming it protected their soldiers from STIs and perceived moral decay. Finally, on the racial front of American-Filipina unions, the Americans upheld racial and ethnic preferences for both Filipina desirability and colonial citizenship.

There are still many pathways through which I could extend my investigation. Temporally, exploitative power dynamics continue with American militarism in southeast Asia, regional human trafficking networks, and diasporic communities. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Hochschild's work on the domestic and sexual labour of diasporic women from developing countries is especially intriguing as an extension.[113] Regionally, I only briefly touched on the topic of foreign, notably Japanese, sex workers in the Philippines, so what of this regional sex trade? Furthermore, there is more to consider regarding the legacies of mestizo children in the Philippines. Despite their contentious existence in the colony, they also became desired for their potential to maintain colonial influence in seats of power. While I followed a gendered hypothesis on the topic of

[113] Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Arlie Russell Hochschild. *Global Woman : Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. 1st ed. Metropolitan Books, 2003.

mestizo children, what about children born from interracial unions between Filipino fathers and American mothers, what of their conditions? Certainly, these unions faced unique restrictions, as sexual relationships between white women and colonized men were far more heavily policed than in the opposite direction.[114]

Initially, I sought to uncover a clear pattern of cause and consequence between sexual exploitation and the creation of racial and gendered hierarchies in the Philippines. While I maintain this relationship, my research also challenged me to nuance my understanding of military dominance on the intimate level, especially when it concerned the spectrum of bondage conditions for Filipina women. Marginalization and agency often existed concurrently. Additionally, the geographic dimension of sexual exploitation—from embodied experiences to the societal, then global level—reveals the danger of homogenizing the effects of these power structures. Ultimately, sexual exploitation is tied to militarism, therefore, when considering all current and future military action, whether war or 'peacekeeping,' I encourage reflection on the heightened potential for the sexual exploitation of vulnerable people.

[114] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 76.

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