

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism

****Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century Studies in Imperialism****

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism presents a fascinating lens through which to examine the complex power dynamics of British colonial rule in India. This concept not only reflects racial and cultural hierarchies but also reveals how gender norms were constructed and weaponized to justify and maintain imperial dominance. The stark contrast drawn between the "manly Englishman" and the "effeminate Bengali" served as a cultural shorthand that reinforced British superiority while simultaneously emasculating the colonized subject in the eyes of the empire.

Understanding this nuanced intersection of masculinity, race, and empire is crucial to grasp how colonialism shaped identities and social relations in the late nineteenth century. It opens up a broader conversation about how imperialism was not merely a political or economic project but also a profoundly gendered and racialized endeavor.

The Construction of Colonial Masculinity in the British Empire

In the late nineteenth century, British imperialism was at its zenith, and with it came a heightened emphasis on idealized forms of masculinity. The figure of the "manly Englishman" was crafted as a symbol of strength, discipline, and moral superiority. This ideal was deeply intertwined with the values of Victorian England—self-control, physical vigor, and a sense of duty to civilize.

The Role of Empire in Shaping English Masculinity

Empire offered British men an arena to perform and prove their masculinity. The colonial context demanded qualities such as courage, leadership, and stoicism, especially in the face of the so-called "uncivilized" other. The Englishman was portrayed as the protector and ruler, embodying a heroic masculinity that justified colonial domination.

This performance was not just about asserting power externally but also about reinforcing gender roles at home. Imperial conquest became a metaphor for male virility and national strength. The colonial officer or

administrator was idealized as the epitome of manliness, standing in stark contrast to the colonized men who were often depicted as weak or effeminate.

Masculinity and Racialized Stereotypes: The Effeminate Bengali

The British colonial narrative frequently marked Bengalis—and more broadly many colonized Indian men—as effeminate, passive, and intellectually but not physically or morally robust. This stereotype was not accidental but a deliberate construct to undermine indigenous claims to power and resist colonial rule.

The "effeminate Bengali" became a symbol of decadence and decline, reflecting British anxieties about their own masculinity being challenged by colonized subjects. Descriptions of Bengalis as soft, overly refined, or lacking in physical courage served to delegitimize them politically and socially.

Intersecting Identities: Race, Gender, and Power in Imperial Contexts

The dichotomy between the manly Englishman and the effeminate Bengali was more than just a cultural stereotype; it was a mechanism of control. By feminizing the colonized male subject, the British empire could justify paternalistic rule and the supposed need to "civilize" the colonized.

The Impact on Bengali Society and Gender Roles

The imposition of these racialized gender norms had profound effects within Bengali society itself. Some Bengali elites internalized these colonial stereotypes, leading to tensions around identity and masculinity. The colonial gaze not only impacted how the British viewed Bengalis but also influenced indigenous perceptions of manhood and social status.

Moreover, the colonial emphasis on English masculinity often marginalized indigenous masculine expressions that did not conform to British ideals. This created a fractured sense of identity and sometimes spurred nationalist movements that sought to reclaim and redefine masculinity on their own terms.

Imperial Masculinity and the Policing of Bodies

The colonial regime's focus on masculinity extended into the regulation of bodies and behaviors. British officials often monitored the physicality of Indian men, associating athleticism, martial ability, and public comportment with strength and fitness to rule. The "martial races" theory, for example, classified certain

groups as more manly and thus more suited to military service, while groups like Bengalis were excluded and disparaged.

This policing of bodies was a form of social control that reinforced hierarchies and justified differential treatment. It also revealed how deeply embedded gender was in the machinery of colonial governance.

Studies in Imperialism: Analyzing Colonial Masculinity Today

Modern scholarship on colonial masculinity the manly Englishman and the effeminate Bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism has opened new avenues for understanding the cultural underpinnings of empire. Historians, literary critics, and cultural theorists have explored how these gendered stereotypes were circulated through literature, law, education, and popular culture.

Literary and Cultural Representations

Novels, travel writings, and colonial reports from the period often reinforced the contrast between English and Bengali masculinity. The Englishman was depicted as adventurous and rational, while the Bengali was portrayed as decadent and effeminate. These narratives shaped public opinion and supported imperial ideology.

Examining these texts today helps reveal the subtle ways in which gender and race were intertwined to sustain colonial power. It also challenges us to reconsider the legacies of these stereotypes in postcolonial societies.

Implications for Postcolonial Identity and Gender Studies

The legacy of colonial masculinity continues to affect contemporary discussions around gender and identity in South Asia and beyond. Many postcolonial theorists argue that colonial constructions of masculinity have left enduring scars, influencing how masculinity is performed and perceived in formerly colonized societies.

Studying these historical frameworks provides valuable insights into ongoing struggles with nationalism, gender expectations, and cultural identity. It also underscores the importance of deconstructing colonial narratives to foster more inclusive and diverse understandings of masculinity.

Key Takeaways on Colonial Masculinity and Imperial Power

To grasp the significance of colonial masculinity the manly Englishman and the effeminate Bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism, it's helpful to keep in mind several critical points:

- **Gender was a tool of imperial control:** Masculinity and femininity were constructed in ways that justified domination and subjugation.
- **Racialized masculinity shaped colonial relationships:** The portrayal of Bengalis as effeminate reinforced British superiority and the need for colonial governance.
- **Colonial masculinity had real social consequences:** It influenced indigenous identity, social roles, and nationalist responses.
- **Scholarly studies reveal the complexity of these constructs:** They show how deeply gender and race were intertwined in imperial discourse.

Exploring these dynamics helps us understand the broader cultural and political mechanisms of empire and offers a critical framework for analyzing other colonial contexts.

The interplay between the manly Englishman and the effeminate Bengali is not just a historical curiosity but a vital entry point into the gendered politics of power. It reminds us that imperialism was as much about shaping bodies and identities as it was about controlling land and resources—a legacy that continues to inform global histories and identities today.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the concept of 'colonial masculinity' in the context of late nineteenth-century British India?

Colonial masculinity refers to the ways in which British colonial authorities constructed and expressed ideals of manliness, often emphasizing traits like physical strength, moral superiority, and dominance, to assert their authority over colonized populations, particularly in late nineteenth-century British India.

How was the 'manly Englishman' depicted in late nineteenth-century

colonial discourse?

The manly Englishman was depicted as strong, rational, disciplined, and morally upright, embodying imperial virtues that justified British rule and contrasted with the supposed weakness or effeminacy of colonized men.

In what ways was the Bengali man portrayed as 'effeminate' in colonial studies?

Bengali men were often portrayed as effeminate, passive, and lacking martial vigor, a stereotype used by colonial authorities to depict them as incapable of leadership or self-rule, reinforcing British superiority and control.

What role did racial and cultural stereotypes play in shaping notions of masculinity in colonial India?

Racial and cultural stereotypes reinforced a binary between the 'manly' British and the 'effeminate' colonized men, legitimizing colonial dominance by suggesting that colonized peoples were inherently inferior and required British governance.

How did colonial masculinity affect the social and political dynamics between the British and Bengalis?

Colonial masculinity created a hierarchical relationship where British men asserted dominance over Bengali men, influencing social interactions, governance, and reinforcing colonial power structures through gendered narratives.

Can you explain how literature and media contributed to the construction of the 'manly Englishman' and 'effeminate Bengali' stereotypes?

Literature, newspapers, and paintings of the era often depicted Englishmen as heroic and vigorous, while portraying Bengalis as weak and effeminate, thus popularizing and normalizing these colonial gendered stereotypes among both British and colonial audiences.

What impact did these gendered colonial stereotypes have on Bengali nationalist movements?

Bengali nationalist leaders often challenged effeminate stereotypes by promoting images of strong, assertive masculinity to counter colonial narratives, fostering a sense of pride and resistance against British imperialism.

How did British colonial policies reflect the ideals of colonial masculinity?

Colonial policies, such as recruitment in the military or administration, favored traits associated with British masculinity, often marginalizing or excluding those deemed effeminate or weak, thereby institutionalizing gendered and racial hierarchies.

Are there any notable scholars who have studied colonial masculinity in the context of British India?

Yes, scholars like Mrinalini Sinha, Antoinette Burton, and Philippa Levine have extensively studied colonial masculinity, exploring the intersections of gender, race, and imperial power in British India.

How does understanding colonial masculinity help us interpret imperialism and postcolonial identities?

Understanding colonial masculinity reveals how gendered power dynamics were central to imperial domination, shaping identities and resistance in colonized societies, and continuing to influence postcolonial gender relations and cultural narratives.

Additional Resources

****Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century Studies in Imperialism****

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism offers a critical lens through which to examine the intersections of race, gender, and power during British colonial rule in India. This concept has been pivotal in understanding how British imperial authorities constructed and maintained hierarchical identities, particularly by delineating the masculine ideal of the Englishman against the feminized image of the colonized Bengali male. Scholars in postcolonial and imperial studies have extensively analyzed this dichotomy to unravel the social and political mechanisms that underpinned colonial domination and shaped cultural perceptions of masculinity.

The late nineteenth century was a formative period marking intensified British control over India, accompanied by a surge in racial theories and stereotypes that justified imperial governance. Within this context, "colonial masculinity" emerged as a potent discourse, framing the Englishman not only as a ruler but as a paragon of virility, authority, and moral rectitude. Conversely, the Bengali male was frequently depicted as effeminate, weak, and incapable of self-governance. These gendered and racialized portrayals were instrumental in reinforcing colonial hierarchies and legitimizing imperial intervention.

Understanding Colonial Masculinity in Imperial Contexts

The idea of colonial masculinity encapsulates more than just gender norms—it functions as a socio-political construct designed to maintain colonial power. The British imperial project relied on defining the colonizer as inherently superior, and masculinity became a key axis of differentiation. In the case of Bengal, a region deeply impacted by British colonial policies, the Englishman was framed as the "manly" figure whose strength and discipline contrasted sharply with the "effeminate" Bengali, who was seen as passive and decadent.

This narrative was not merely rhetorical; it influenced administrative policies, social interactions, and cultural productions. The imperial state and British settlers actively promoted ideals of toughness, physical prowess, and moral certainty as markers of English masculinity. These ideals were often embodied in military service, cricket, and other public displays of strength and control. Meanwhile, Bengali men were stereotyped through literature, newspapers, and official reports as lacking these qualities, reinforcing their perceived dependency and inferiority.

The Manly Englishman: Traits and Representations

The archetype of the manly Englishman during the late nineteenth century was tied closely to Victorian ideals of manhood, which emphasized courage, leadership, and a rigid moral code. These traits were amplified within colonial settings, where the Englishman was expected to uphold the "civilizing mission" and manage the complexities of ruling a vast population.

Key features of the manly Englishman included:

- **Physical strength and endurance:** Seen in military prowess, sports such as cricket, and the ability to withstand harsh tropical climates.
- **Emotional restraint and rationality:** The Englishman was portrayed as composed and superior in intellect, able to govern with logic rather than passion.
- **Leadership and authority:** He was the natural ruler, embodying imperial power and control over colonized subjects.
- **Moral and cultural superiority:** The Englishman's masculinity was linked to a supposed ethical high ground, justifying colonial rule as benevolent.

These traits were extensively propagated through colonial literature, official discourse, and education

systems, reinforcing the ideal English masculine identity in opposition to colonized men.

The Effeminate Bengali: Stereotypes and Consequences

In stark contrast, Bengali men were often depicted as effeminate, indolent, and lacking in the martial qualities ascribed to their British rulers. This portrayal was deeply racialized, intertwining notions of gender with perceived racial and cultural inferiority.

The characterization of Bengalis as effeminate carried several implications:

- **Political and social passivity:** Bengali men were viewed as submissive and easily governed, reinforcing colonial control.
- **Cultural decadence:** The stereotype suggested a decline due to "softness," often linked to urbanization and the rise of a Western-educated Bengali elite.
- **Questioned masculinity:** Their manhood was doubted, undermining their claims to leadership or autonomy within the colonial framework.
- **Justification for paternalism:** The British claimed the need to "protect" and "uplift" Bengalis, legitimizing interventionist policies.

These representations had tangible effects, influencing colonial administrative attitudes, social hierarchies, and even the self-perception of Bengali men themselves.

Imperial Studies and the Legacy of Colonial Masculinity

Academic studies in imperialism have increasingly focused on how gender and race intersect in colonial power dynamics, with "colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism" serving as a foundational case study. Scholars like Mrinalini Sinha, Antoinette Burton, and Nicholas Dirks have interrogated how masculinity was deployed to naturalize British supremacy and marginalize colonized subjects.

This research reveals that colonial masculinity was not a simple binary but a complex set of practices and representations that shaped identities on both sides of the imperial divide. The Englishman's manliness was constructed partly through the denigration of the colonized male's masculinity, creating a relational identity dependent on racial hierarchies.

Comparison with Other Colonial Contexts

While the Englishman/Bengali dichotomy is specific, similar patterns appear across other colonial encounters:

1. **French Algeria:** French colonial authorities often framed Algerian men as effeminate or barbaric, contrasting with French masculinity rooted in republican ideals of strength and civility.
2. **British Africa:** In regions like Kenya, British settlers portrayed African men as primitive and lacking in discipline, justifying paternalistic rule.
3. **British Southeast Asia:** Colonizers depicted local men as effeminate or unmanly to underscore the superiority of European masculinity.

These comparisons highlight how colonial masculinity functioned as a trans-imperial discourse, adapting to local contexts but maintaining core themes of racialized gender difference.

Implications for Postcolonial Identity and Memory

The legacy of colonial masculinity continues to influence postcolonial societies, affecting gender relations, national identity, and cultural memory. In Bengal and broader India, the colonial-era constructions of masculinity have been both challenged and rearticulated in nationalist and postcolonial narratives.

For instance:

- Nationalist movements often sought to reclaim a virile, heroic masculinity that countered colonial stereotypes.
- Postcolonial scholarship critiques the enduring effects of colonial gender binaries on contemporary social and political life.
- Gender studies explore how colonial masculinity informs ongoing debates about masculinity, modernity, and cultural identity in South Asia.

This ongoing dialogue underscores the lasting impact of late nineteenth-century imperial discourses on masculinity.

The study of "colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism" thus remains a vital field for understanding the complex ways in which gender and race have been intertwined in the history of empire. It challenges simplistic narratives of colonialism by foregrounding the cultural and ideological battles waged over the very definitions of manhood and power. Through this lens, imperial history becomes not only a story of political domination but also a profound investigation into identity formation and resistance.

Colonial Masculinity The Manly Englishman And The Effeminate Bengali In The Late Nineteenth Century Studies In Imperialism

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *Colonial Masculinity* Mrinalini Sinha, 1995 A revision of a doctoral thesis at the State U. of New York at Stony Brook. It argues that the emerging dynamics between colonial and nationalist politics in the 1880s and 1890s in India is best captured in the logic of colonial masculinity, and it traces the impact of colonial masculinity in four controversies: the white mutiny against the Ilbert Bill in 1883; the official government response to the Native Volunteer movement in 1885; the recommendations of the Public Service Commission of 1886; and the Indian opposition to the Age of Consent Bill in 1891. Distributed by St. Martin's Press. Annotation copyright by Book News, Inc., Portland, OR

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *Male Suicide and Masculinity in 19th-century Britain* Lyndsay Galpin, 2022-04-07 This book shows how interpretations of suicidal motives were guided by gendered expectations of behaviour, and that these expectations were constructed to create meaning and understanding for family, friends and witnesses. Providing an insight into how people of this era understood suicidal behaviour and motives, it challenges the assertion that suicide was seen as a distinctly feminine act, and that men who took their own lives were feminized as a result. Instead, it shows that masculinity was understood in a more nuanced way than gender binaries allow, and that a man's masculinity was measured against other men. Focusing on four common narrative types; the love-suicide, the unemployed suicide, the suicide of the fraudster or speculator, and the suicide of the dishonoured soldier, it provides historical context to modern discussions about the crisis of masculinity and rising male suicide rates. It reveals that narratives around male suicides are not so different today as they were then, and that our modern model of masculinity can be traced back to the 19th century.

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *Men and masculinities in modern Britain* Matt Houlbrook, Katie Jones, Ben Mechen, 2024-01-16 Men and masculinities provides an engaging, accessible and provocative introduction to histories of masculinity for all readers interested in contemporary gender politics. The book offers a critical overview of ongoing historiographical debates and the historical making of men's lives and identities and ideas of masculinity between the 1890s and the present day. In setting out a new agenda for the field, it makes an ambitious argument for the importance of writing histories which are present-centred and politically engaged. This means that the book engages head-on with ferocious debates about men's social position and the status of masculinity in contemporary public life. In establishing a critical genealogy for the proliferation of this crisis talk, it sets out new ways of understanding how men's lives and ideas of masculinity have changed over time while patriarchy and male power have persisted.

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* Graham Huggan, 2013-09-12 The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies is a major reference work, which aims to provide informed insights into the possible future of postcolonial studies as well as a comparative overview of the latest developments in the field.

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colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *Britain and Empire, 1880-1945* Dane Kennedy, 2014-07-22 Britain and Empire, 1880-1945 traces the relationship between Britain and its empire during a period when the two spheres intersected with one another to an unprecedented degree. The story starts with the imperial expansion of the late nineteenth century and ends with the Second World War, at the end of which Britain was on the brink of decolonisation. The author shows how empire came to figure into almost every important development that marked Britain's response to the upheavals of the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. He examines its influence on foreign policy, party politics, social reforms, cultural practices, and national identity. At the same time, he shows how domestic developments affected imperial policies. Written in an engaging and accessible manner, this book: integrates British and imperial history in a single narrative provides a useful synthesis of recent historical research in the area analyses topics ranging from ideology and culture to politics and foreign affairs contains a chronology, glossary, who's who and guide to further reading Britain and Empire, 1880-1945 provides an up-to-date, accessible survey, ideal for students coming to the subject for the first time.

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colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Imperial Histories* John Marriott, 2016-03-23 Written by leading scholars, this collection provides a comprehensive and authoritative overview of modern empires. Spanning the era of modern imperial

history from the early sixteenth century to the present, it challenges both the rather insular focuses on specific experiences, and gives due attention to imperial formations outside the West including the Russian, Japanese, Mughal, Ottoman and Chinese. The companion is divided into three broad sections. Part I - Times - surveys the three main eras of modern imperialism. The first was that dominated by the settlement impulse, with migrants - many voluntarily and many more by force - making new lives in the colonies. This impulse gave way, most especially in the nineteenth century, to a period of busy and rapid expansion which was less likely to promote new settlement, and in which colonists more frequently saw their sojourn in colonial lands as temporary and related to the business mostly of governance and trade. Lastly, in the twentieth century in particular, empires began to fail and to fall. Part II - Spaces - studies the principal imperial formations of the modern world. Each chapter charts the experience of a specific empire while at the same time placing it within the complex patterns of wider imperial constellations. The individual chapters thus survey the broad dynamics of change within the empires themselves and their relationships with other imperial formations, and reflect critically on the ways in which these topics have been approached in the literature. In Part III - Themes - scholars think critically about some of the key features of imperial expansion and decline. These chapters are brief and many are provocative. They reflect the current state of the field, and suggest new lines of inquiry which may follow from more comparative perspectives on empire. The broad range of themes captures the vitality and diversity of contemporary scholarship on questions of empire and colonialism, encompassing political, economic and cultural processes central to the formation and maintenance of empires as well as institutions, ideologies and social categories that shaped the lives both of those implementing and those experiencing the force of empire. In these pages the reader will find the slave and the criminal, the merchant and the maid, the scientist and the artist alongside the structures which sustained their lives and their livelihoods. Overall, the companion emphasises the diversity of imperial experience and process. Comprehensive in its scope, it draws attention to the particularities of individual empires, rather than over-generalising as if all empires, at all times, and in all places, behaved in a similar manner. It is this contingent and historical specificity that enables us to explore in expansive ways precisely what constituted the modern empire.

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: Imperial Citizenship Daniel Gorman, 2006 This is the first book-length study of the ideological foundations of British imperialism in the early twentieth century. By focusing on the concept of imperial citizenship, the book illustrates how the political, cultural and intellectual underpinnings of Empire were constructed and challenged by forces in both Britain and the 'Britons overseas', in the settlement colonies of Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Debates about imperial citizenship reveal how Britons conceived the Empire: was it an extension of the nation-state, a collection of separate and distinct communities, or a type of 'world state'? These debates also discussed the place of Empire in British society, its importance to the national identity and the degree to which imperial subjects were or were not seen as 'fellow Britons'. This public discourse was at its most fervent from the South African War (1899-1902) to the early 1920s, when Britain emerged victorious, shocked and exhausted from the Great War.--Book jacket.

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: Colonial India in Children's Literature Supriya Goswami, 2012 Colonial India in Children's Literature is the first book-length study to explore the intersections of children's literature and defining historical moments in colonial India. Engaging with important theoretical and critical literature that deals with colonialism, hegemony, and marginalization in children's literature, Goswami proposes that British, Anglo-Indian, and Bengali children's literature respond to five key historical events: the missionary debates preceding the Charter Act of 1813, the defeat of Tipu Sultan, the Mutiny of 1857, the birth of Indian nationalism, and the Swadeshi movement resulting from the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Through a study of works by Mary Sherwood (1775-1851), Barbara Hofland (1770-1844), Sara Jeanette Duncan

(1861-1922), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), Upendrakishore Ray (1863-1915), and Sukumar Ray (1887-1923), Goswami examines how children's literature negotiates and represents these momentous historical forces that unsettled Britain's imperial ambitions in India. Goswami argues that nineteenth-century British and Anglo-Indian children's texts reflect two distinct moods in Britain's colonial enterprise in India. Sherwood and Hofland (writing before 1857) use the tropes of conversion and captivity as a means of awakening children to the dangers of India, whereas Duncan and Kipling shift the emphasis to martial prowess, adaptability, and empirical knowledge as defining qualities in British and Anglo-Indian children. Furthermore, Goswami's analysis of early nineteenth-century children's texts written by women authors redresses the preoccupation with male authors and boys' adventure stories that have largely informed discussions of juvenility in the context of colonial India. This groundbreaking book also seeks to open up the canon by examining early twentieth-century Bengali children's texts that not only draw literary inspiration from nineteenth-century British children's literature, but whose themes are equally shaped by empire.

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colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: *Re-presenting the Past* Ann-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska, Louise Ryan, 2014-06-11 Feminist history continues to change the way history is written, and in doing so changes our view of the past. The authors of this collection explore how issues of sexuality, class, nationalism and colonialism informed the ways in which women were represented and continue to be represented in history. They show the ways in which women have been excluded, silenced and misrepresented in stories of the past, and how women's lives have been distorted or simplified in conventional historical accounts. Together, they suggest fresh ways of approaching women's history, and use examples of work in new areas of research such as women's health and leisure in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the various methodologies being proposed.

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varied colonial sites. A useful guide to recent scholarship on the culture of imperialism.

colonial masculinity the manly englishman and the effeminate bengali in the late nineteenth century studies in imperialism: Butterflies Will Burn Federico Garza Carvajal, 2003-12-01 As Spain consolidated its Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, discourses about the perfect Spanish man or “Vir” went hand-in-hand with discourses about another kind of man, one who engaged in the “abominable crime and sin against nature”—sodomy. In both Spain and Mexico, sodomy came to rank second only to heresy as a cause for prosecution, and hundreds of sodomites were tortured, garroted, or burned alive for violating Spanish ideals of manliness. Yet in reality, as Federico Garza Carvajal argues in this groundbreaking book, the prosecution of sodomites had little to do with issues of gender and was much more a concomitant of empire building and the need to justify political and economic domination of subject peoples. Drawing on previously unpublished records of some three hundred sodomy trials conducted in Spain and Mexico between 1561 and 1699, Garza Carvajal examines the sodomy discourses that emerged in Andalucía, seat of Spain’s colonial apparatus, and in the viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico), its first and largest American colony. From these discourses, he convincingly demonstrates that the concept of sodomy (more than the actual practice) was crucial to the Iberian colonizing program. Because sodomy opposed the ideal of “Vir” and the Spanish nationhood with which it was intimately associated, the prosecution of sodomy justified Spain’s domination of foreigners (many of whom were represented as sodomites) in the peninsula and of “Indios” in Mexico, a totally subject people depicted as effeminate and prone to sodomitical acts, cannibalism, and inebriation.

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