Close encounters of an imperial kind: Gandhi, gender, and anti-colonialism

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The colonial encounter was arguably an early instance of transnationalization that had lasting and significant effects on the organization of gender and sexuality in the subcontinent, and on the current gender dynamics of transnationalization. This paper will examine the juxtaposed dynamics of imperialism, nationalism, and the Gandhian enterprise under the colonial encounter. It will argue that this dynamic impacted severely on the practices and meanings of self-definition—individual, communal, and national—and elaborated them with an almost libidinal intensity in the fields of gender and sexuality, bringing sexual politics into policy and embodiment into theory and practice. The paper will outline the modes of masculinity that were generated, operationalized, transmitted, and embodied through this dynamic and will show how in the course of this encounter, this particular historical moment was indexed in a multiplicity of ways. To do this, I map out the distinctive gender politics that was mobilized by imperial coloniality, by Gandhi and by the politico-historical developments that are now almost emblematic of national and communitarian identity politics within the modern Indian nation-state. While doing this, the paper will trace the links that Gandhi made between sexual practices and national destiny, and elaborate the gender politics of such sexual experimentation.

Key words

Gender, Gandhi, sexuality, colonialism, nationalism, embodiment

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Introduction¹

The gender dynamics of contemporary processes of transnationalization are both continuous and discontinuous with the earlier and highly significant transnational moment of the colonial encounter. In this paper, I will argue that imperialism, the colonial encounter, nationalism, and the Gandhian enterprise put the practices and meanings of (gendered) self-definition—individual, communal, and national—under severe pressure. The flow of these events, I will argue, were to play out with libidinal intensity in the fields of gender and sexuality, quite literally inserting physiological difference into analytics, sexual politics into policy, and embodiment into theory and practice. Within this frame, I will attempt to understand how certain modes of masculinity—that remained, even at the best of times, subtly predatory on the feminine—were generated, operationalized, transmitted, and embodied within specific hegemonic formations that reference this historical moment in one way or the other. To do this, I map out the distinctive gender politics that was mobilized by imperial coloniality, by Gandhi, and by politico-historical developments that are now almost emblematic of national and communitarian identity politics within the modern Indian nation-state.

Since colonial hegemony is crucially about embodiment and power, since gendering is always processual and interrupted, and since subjects, subjectivities, and selves are formed in the intersections of culture and history, colonialism—rough and inorganic as it was—interrupted local dynamics and their formative contexts.² In this encounter (and more recently in globalization and its analogues), disparate rules of economic, social, institutional, and personal engagements came into conflict.³ Colonization, the nationalist struggle, independence, political democracy, the principles of welfare, industrialization, and so on, brought structural, institutional, and legislative changes, as well as social, spatial, and occupational mobility, all of which effected ruptures in the sex-gender system. The encounter itself left the colonial subject split, epistemologically destabilized, and faced with the challenges of dealing with theoretical, ideological, and practical changes in sexual, social, political, cultural, and other practices. Moreover, the transformations in sexualization effected by the encounter impacted on the perceptions of the encounter itself, as well as on the subjects engaged in it. These changes were subsequently and, perhaps, inevitably rendered in terms of an opposition between “tradition” and “modernity,” with the organization of sexuality serving as the site on which this encounter was played out.

Intuiting the trope of sexuality in imperialist projects and the equivalences made between the colonized and feminine subject, (male) members of the Indian intelligentsia became implicated in an ideological and strategic collaboration between patriarchy, imperialism, and the organization of sexuality, even as they resisted that imperialism and its projects of feminization. Within this nexus, the prevalent gendered binary was extended to the colonized subject disadvantageously (Hyam 1990, 1992; McClintock 1995; Montrose 1991; Sinha, 1995) as, colonizer-colonized, masculine-feminine, civilized-barbaric, powerful-powerless, thereby modulating the organization and meanings of race, gender, and sexuality. The newness of both context and terms of relations served to reconstitute the sexual imaginary in unforeseen ways. We see, for instance, that the feminine (typically signifying vulnerability, passivity, emotion, and so on) is deployed, again typically, to consolidate the oppositionally situated masculine (typically signifying impenetrability, control, rationality), and both become attributes of not just individuals, but of institutions, systems, communities, and even nations. It is of

particular significance that this series of oppositions intersects, engages with, and in turn poses the tradition-modernity divide as a question of power—political, ideological, institutional, structural—and its gendering. This discursive impulse still resonates.

The colonial encounter notated the “dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence” (McClintock 1996:61) of caste, class, race, gender, and sexuality in the politics of empire. In fact, colonial hegemony was crucially about the distribution and management of power at both the microphysical and the systemic-structural levels, and we find policy exemplifications of how an epistemology of the social gets rooted in the sexual.⁴ The related disadvantageous and confusing gendering (as both violent *and* effeminate) and sexualization (as both inordinately promiscuous *and* impotent) of native men led to a situation where neither anatomical maleness nor social power prevented feminization or the denial of *exemplary masculinity* (Silverman 1992). The “femininity” of loss, alterity, and disempowerment were in fact the colonial male’s unwelcome heritage. Not surprisingly, those Indian men engaged with *recovering manhood* (Vivekananda, Gandhi, Golwalkar, Tilak) insisted on the *distinction* between sex and gender (“we may be powerless but we are still men”), and attempted to restore the older and more familiar equations between power and masculinity, that is, the gender of sex. Nevertheless, the destabilization in the gender-sex relation remains unmistakable in the tautological insistence that men are men. It is clear from this that the imperial encounter was, to an extraordinary extent, as much about contesting patriarchies, as it was about racial and/or nation-al and/or technological superiority. It is then also clear that the colonial encounter entailed a variety of structural, discursive, and epistemological shifts that were demoralizing for the colonized in and through a multiplicity of registers.

Recognizing this, Gandhi began to innovate notions of subjectivity and selfhood that had moral, political, ideological, and psychological dimensions, designed and tailored to salvage the “defeated” (male) subject. Propositionally, his espousal and even valorization from 1916 onward of the feminine within himself, and his recuperation of femininity as a moral principle and a signifier of civilizational superiority, may be read as an index of the inventiveness with which a paradigmatic shift was conceptualized and undertaken. This shift was located fundamentally in the dual senses in which Gandhi deployed the concept of *swaraj*, or *self-rule*: in its Gandhian formulation, this meant both control over the self, as well as freedom from British rule, with the first understanding emerging as a prerequisite for the fulfillment of the second. The first understanding could and did demand a radical re-examination of the (gendered) self: however, neither the work involved in such a project nor its angularities should be underestimated.⁵ Gandhi’s own active feminization of himself is epitomized in the image of him at the spinning wheel, where both posture and activity are distinctly feminine.⁶ He also actively courted an image of motherliness through his intense, even obsessive involvement in nursing. On several occasions, he observed and then maintained that only women—possessed of a strong “soul force” that made them sacrificial and moral beings of a higher order than men—were exceptionally well-suited to such labor-intensive, painstaking, and sacrificial tasks.⁷ The slippage whereby the circumstantial became the ontogenetic—that is, by which women’s socio-economic circumstances became a signifier of (their) strength—occurred even though Gandhi, like many within the nationalist elite, engaged quite sincerely with the raging “woman question.” Indeed, the valorization of women’s suffering served multiple political ends: (a) it deflected, by inversion, the European criticism of the treatment of women in India, seeking to represent Indian women, in particular, as imbued with, as well as the

embodiment of, the principle of *shakti* (energy/force/strength), the implicit argument being that (Indian) women suffered because they were strong enough to take it; (b) consequently they did not need any rescuing by the “civilized” white man from the hands of the “barbaric” Indian man, because the Indian man was now going to feminize himself, in order to become “strong” like his woman (and in this, it is significant that Gandhi’s own gender-reformist trajectory was opposite to that of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who sought to empower women by bringing them closer in potentials, capacities, and opportunities to men—Gandhi sought to render men closer to women—not, however, through reducing their potentials, capacities, and opportunities, but through (feminizing) transformations of (the male) self and perceptions of the self)⁸; and (c) it served to present the masculinities of British imperialist patriarchy as crude, rapaciously materialist, violent, hypocritical, and profoundly lacking in self-control and discipline, in contrast to the spiritually stronger, scrupulously nonviolent, disciplined Indian patriarchy that Gandhi sought to forge.

The investment in the feminine subject was thus announced by the slippage noted earlier as much as by the attention to her in reform, a practice that was located clearly, strategically and very problematically in the interstices of religion, politics, morality, and the sexual economy.⁹ These reforms aimed to both enhance their status (by tempering customary law, for instance) and reconstitute and fashion woman within terms that declared the strategic investment in the embodied feminine subject, evident in the works of almost all the major nationalist leaders—Gandhi, Vivekanand, Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, but also in writers like Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Chandu Menon, and so on. In the process, they also bespoke the ambivalence of the nationalist elite toward the colonizer, as notional femininities were crafted and then instituted through oppressive practices, such as the revival of *sati*, on the one hand, and the adoption of Victorianisms, like cumbersome climate-unfriendly clothing, “English manners,” and domestic incarceration,¹⁰ on the other. Sometimes, women were addressed with greater complexity and ambiguity, as was the case with the Gandhian paradigm, where she was both *shakti*, or the driving force behind national destiny and *Sita*, the exemplar of purity and virtue who would facilitate the creation of *Ramarajya*.¹¹ It has been argued that Gandhi like other nineteenth-century reformers addressed the woman question within the discursive dynamics of nationalism (Katrak 1992; Patel 2000; Mondol 2002). The equivocality with which Gandhi linked female domesticity, child-rearing, and nurturing with national well-being (which, in a Gandhian frame, always had both moral and material aspects), is an indicator of the ideological deployment rather than the recuperation of women’s spaces.

Despite being implicated in these politics, Gandhi also offered alternative conceptions of universalism to the post-Enlightenment ethnocentric model of the colonial rulers (Parekh 1989:26). This was articulated mainly through a set of beliefs, values, concepts, and practices, the most well-known of which are *Satya* (Truth), *Ahimsa* (Nonviolence), *Swaraj* (both Self-rule and Home-rule), *Sarvodaya* (Universal benefit), *Bhramacharya* (the search for Brahma (truth) entailing celibacy),¹² and *Satyagraha* (broadly, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance, literally the pursuit of Truth, effectively the combination of the other five). These ideas and practices themselves, as the following discussion shows, were gendered, and offer an understanding of the relationship between practices of the self, stylizations of the self, and political practices. They articulate strategies of embodiment with political theorization and strategies. In order to show this, I will undertake a necessarily quick review of some the transformations in the processes of gendering that accompanied the

evolution of the nationalist and anti-imperialist discourses, and their impact on Gandhian thought.

Two highly significant social and political developments of the nineteenth century in India were the emergence of the politics of representation (Zavos 2005), and the introduction of the system of personal laws (from circa 1811–1812 onward) (Sangari 1995). Vijayan (2012) has linked these two developments and argued that they were instrumental in the institutional formation of communal identities along religious and gendered lines. At the same time, the notion of the communities themselves were riven by controversies because of intra-community disagreements between the elites of each community over the nature, scope, and content of the personal laws; but also because of confusions and suspicions over who constituted the respective communities. This, he notes, was part of the process by which the disparate and multiple socio-religious practices—distinguished by caste, tribe, and region—were stabilized under the rubric of a fundamentally Brahmanical “Hinduism.” As a result, the notion of the communal self, as opposed to an individual self, is gradually institutionalized, importantly, in the realm of the personal, through the processes of personal law, where each community sought to legitimize the powers of its hegemonic and dominant masculinities. Personal law—pertaining as it did to issues of *sati*, child marriage, widow remarriage, inheritance and property, the education of women and their participation in the public sphere—became the means to *defining a communal self through a gendered self*. It was also the domain where local patriarchies exercised dominion and where upper-caste/dominant norms were institutionalized, legitimized, and gained ascendancy, accounting for the institutionalization of “upper-caste racism” (Pandey cited in Mondol 2002:933). This process of *re-masculinization* in no way challenged colonial interests and was supported by colonial powers (Sinha 1995:140) notating a problematic and telling run-on between imperial power and the national(istic) elite. It may even be argued that the discursive process by which (Hindu) communal identity was consolidated and defined by upper castes and upper-caste interests, through the institution of personal laws (and therefore through the reorganization of the gender-sex system), is remarkably analogous to the gender-discursive mechanisms by which white-imperialist colonial power gained and established control over the colonized Indian communities: that is, imperial conquest incited and produced a process of “internal imperialism,” operationalized through the reorganization of the sex-gender system, which, in many respects, perpetuates to date.

Gandhi’s curious but important equivocation in challenging upper-caste formulations of Hinduism, especially in light of the doctrine of *ahimsa*, is consequential to evaluating his gender, caste, and communal politics.¹³ In fact, it is possible to argue that his affirmation of caste serves to notate the extent to which his imagination and discourse were, finally and ironically (given his qualified¹⁴ furtherance of the Muslim cause in India), communal. What is immediately pertinent to this paper is the reconceptualization of both (gendered) selfhood and political-communal identity, and the ingenious ways in which Gandhi was to further yoke the two.

The colonizer’s justifications of colonialism in the Indian context were several, many of which found an echo with the nationalist elite,¹⁵ but especially after the 1820s, was articulated as a generalized “civilizational” weakness. This in particular was addressed by Gandhi precisely in civilizational terms, a strategy that is most clear in his philosophical articulation of the principle and enterprise of *satya*, or truth, as a fundamentally civilizational and Hindu one. The conflation between Indian and Hindu,

while articulating the enterprises of *satya* and *satyagraha*, is both deliberate and politic, indexing as it was supposed to, a paradigmatic shift and an epistemological break or departure, from the reigning Orientalist discourses of a once-glorious civilization now fallen into decay. This logic holds despite his assertion that any equivalent metaphysic, irrespective of the tradition from which it came, would suffice, since according to him there is a “religion” that “underlies all religions, which all human beings, without prejudice to their sectarian loyalties, can accept” (Parel in Baxi and Parekh 1995:65).

Nobody in this world possesses absolute truth. This is God’s attribute alone. Relative truth is all we know. Therefore, we can only follow the truth as we see it. Such pursuit of truth cannot lead anyone astray (*Harijan* June 2, 1946:167).

At the same time, his awareness of the instability and multiplicity of human truths and the possibility that one’s conscience may mislead one, led him to aver that “*satyagraha*, as conceived by me is a science in the making” (*Harijan* September 24, 1938:266). In fact, his circumspection is quite marked; in 1947, he observed that “I see that what we have been practicing during the fight against the British under the name of nonviolence, was not really nonviolence” (quoted in Appadorai 1969:325). Unsurprisingly then, such a conception of *satya* and *satyagraha* is sustainable only in a strictly nonviolent environment, hence the paramount importance of the notion of *ahimsa*, which also served to reign in the fissiparous tendencies within the nationalist movement (Vijayan 2012). Of course, Gandhi’s rendition of this notion of Truth makes it a discipline in itself, a way of approaching everything from the quotidian to the other-worldly, the material to the transcendental. It also added to the inversion (noted earlier) of the discourse of civilizational weakness, not least because of the enormous discipline involved in its pursuit. These included *biomoral* (Alter 1996) means such as celibacy (a key aspect of *brahmacharya*), rigorous austerity, fasts, dietary experiments, and vows of silence without which the mind stood to lose its firmness, stamina, courage, and ability for great exertion (*Hind Swaraj*:82). Moreover, celibacy, a key practice in the enterprise of *swaraj*, would free both the mind and the soul, and harness the power of *shakti* in the service of the nation. Sexual restraint was essential to an individual and a nation’s health and moral life both of which were viscerally interlocked for Gandhi. His denunciation of artificial contraceptives in favor of abstinence and the dislocation of sex from pleasure were part of his understanding of the former as necessary for true morality and the latter as crucial for *ahimsa*. The rigors of *swaraj* (self-rule) in this scheme of things, would eventually yield *swaraj* (home rule).

Swaraj was the crucial conceptual link between the community of individuals in pursuit of the Truth and the (gendered) individuals themselves. It implied not freedom or independence from restraint but rather self-rule and *self-restraint*. It gets linked to the nation via the notions of self-government and home rule, and to the individual through the idea of self-rule. But its affixation to the notions of self-government and self-rule, led to a redefinition of the framework within which these political goals had been located within conventional political discourse on them. That is to say, in a politically and morally innovative move *swaraj* referred simultaneously to a specific political ordering and to a specific ordering of the self: to freedom from British rule, to a type of political governance after that event, and to a related governance of the self. So, for Gandhi, home rule was about true *swaraj*, “real home rule is self-rule or self-control” (*Hind Swaraj*:103), and only then about the political arrangements of power. Gandhi’s struggle with imperialism led him to conceptualize political (re)construction not as a state enterprise, but as a moral even quasi-spiritual one, requiring a *metanoia*

that remained always intricately linked to the doctrine of Truth. There was never any question of the realm of the political being dissociated from that of the personal, or of political work being undertaken independently of self-stylization, or of any self-stylization occurring independent of appropriate self-embodiment. In this deeply spiritual-moral work and self-stylization, political gain was just incidental, a position that strained his alignment with the nationalist elite. Among the many paradoxes of this history was the fact that the nationalist elites were heavily invested in emulating British technology and governmentality, even as they sought independence from British rule:¹⁶ the only forms of self-modification and/or stylization that they were interested in, therefore, were those commensurate with and facilitating of that emulation. Gandhi's insistence on self-rule as a prerequisite for appropriate home rule thus ran counter to both aspects of this elite's politics. His stand that modernity and its accomplishments were fundamentally flawed only intensified the strain, especially since the local nationalist elite already had major financial stakes in modern technological, economic, and political systems. His skepticism about the state as an agent of reform, along with his conviction in small scale and grassroots, added to his understanding that "industrial modes of production encouraged wrong standards of wealth and achievement, eroded spiritual values and enabled patterns of living based on greed and consumption" (Brown 1995:89). They did not facilitate a moral economic order or social justice, which the spinning of *khadi* on the *charkha* (spinning wheel), for instance, symbolized.

The spinning wheel represents to me the hope of the masses. The masses lost their freedom, such as it was, with the loss of the *charkha* [spinning wheel]. The *charkha* supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the *charkha* included all the anterior and posterior industries—ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing, and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy.

The *charkha* enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self-contained. With the exit of the *charkha* went the other village industries, such as the oil press. Nothing took the place of these industries. Therefore, the villages were drained of their varied occupations and their creative talent and what little wealth these brought them. . . . Hence, if the villages are to come into their own, the most natural thing that suggests itself is the revival of the Charkha and all it means (*Hind Swaraj*, April 13, 1940:85).

Gandhi thus linked a model of development (*swadeshi*, small scale, self-sufficient, pro-poor, agricultural-based production), political practice (*swaraj* as home rule), a moral system (truth and *satyagraha*), self-stylization (*swaraj* as self-rule) and sexual practice (*brahmacharya*), a complex that is well-symbolized in the *charkha* or spinning wheel.¹⁷ Like the practices of *ahimsa*, *satya*, and *satyagraha*, the spinning of *khadi* too (which had been taken up enthusiastically by his women followers) became civilizational and moral attainments. Importantly, the practice of all of these, while generally recommended, was understood as especially compatible with femininity, which by now had evolved into a chain of analogous signifiers: *shakti*—moral power—renunciation—sacrificiality—nurturance—suffering—asexuality—courage. Gandhi's post-1916 reformulation of courage as equally a feminine attribute (Lloyd and Rudolph 1967:191) with unique connotations of its own, led him to recommend the incorporation of femininity into the masculine. Later, women come to be seen as the best candidates for *satyagraha* since they exemplified nonviolent courage, as well as the energy and force that would drive both, the struggle for independence as well as the social change that Gandhi envisioned and sought.

If every woman in India spins, then a silent revolution will certainly be created, of which a Jawaharlal [Nehru] can make full use. Unless steam-generated power is put to proper use, the engine will not run and the person generating the steam may himself be scalded by it even unto death. (*Hind Swaraj*, April 14, 1946: 88)

Eventually as Parekh (1989:220) notes, Gandhi wanted to become a “complete woman.” This “womanhood”—that hosted the chain of signifiers given above—would have to be adopted by men at large to yield a sustainable morally upright nation. Interestingly, women themselves featured in this national landscape mainly as domestic renunciators. While Gandhi’s movement brought women onto the public political stage, his nationalism here seeks to fix the unstable and shifting terrain of gender in two ways: firstly, through the ideological appropriation of the terms of femininity as domestic, nurturing and so on, to further a larger seemingly “spiritual” agenda; and secondly, in that very move, fixing these terms by yoking them onto a national communal identity, so that to belong as women in the “Hindu” fold, is to be domestic, nurturing, and so forth. The constellation of Gandhian ideas clearly work together to weave a sign of moral superiority and civilizational achievement; the sign itself, however, is undone by its gendering.

While Gandhi disrupts and reconfigures the ways in which gender is aligned at the beginning of the twentieth century, the crucial lapse in political terms is feminization without any real empowerment of women. This happens because patriarchal structures within the systems of religion, caste, and class, for instance, are not addressed systemically; some in fact, are endorsed or reinvented. Given that Gandhi’s was not a feminist project but a spiritual-political one—and that consequently, his program to reorganize the sex-gender system was only a means to those spiritual-political ends, rather than to address or redress imbalances in that system—to expect a focused critique of patriarchy in Gandhian thought would perhaps be somewhat untenable. However, that his political philosophy expressly used and deployed gender in unexpected and even deviant ways, suggests that Gandhi was well aware of social and political imbalances within the systems he so deployed. His political philosophy, driven by the moral practice of self-transformation, and aspiring to offer an alternative to notions of the self already in place, nevertheless retained markers of caste, religious exclusivity, and gender-sex bias that have had historical effects that are still being assessed. The significant overlap between the Hindu nationalist ideology of the 1930s and 1940s with Gandhianism has been noted (Mondol 2002:931, Jaffrelot 1969), and we note here, for instance, the complex relationship that the contemporary Hindu right has with Gandhi, whom they saw as a Muslim lover practicing Muslim appeasement. Although they were not averse to Gandhi’s promotion of Hinduism in general, what particularly incensed the Hindu right about Gandhi’s position was what they perceived as his emasculation and even explicit feminization of “the Hindu community,” in relation to “the Muslim community,” which they saw as a betrayal of Hindus in general. At the same time, those discursive strains in his philosophy that valorize Hinduism and defend caste, have been effectively mobilized by the Hindu right, especially in their resurgence since the 1980s. This, along with the now well-known international impact of Gandhi as a moralist, a political strategist, and a social theorist on figures such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, and Einstein, or in the fields of peace and conflict studies, is one of the many complex legacies of the historical amalgam that is known as the colonial encounter. Vithal Rajan has suggested that even this legacy may not be so distinct from the relations that evolved out of the earlier colonial encounter; he writes:

A newly imagined spiritual aura around India's great political leader, who in the West's re-written history of India achieved independence by a spiritual act, also subtly re-emphasizes the civilizing mission of the West, which promises to continue rewarding well-mannered high-flown spirituality with political concessions (Rajan 2006:1,425).

The impact that he continues to have as a national actor-pedagogue is indexed somewhat by the extent to which his praxis is referenced explicitly or idiomatically in popular film worldwide, but especially in mainstream Bombay film (Gabriel 2003). In a rather ironical trick, the present Gandhi family on the political stage (Sonia and Rahul Gandhi), descendants of Jawaharlal Nehru and *no* relation to Gandhi at all, appear to have, through a public relations coup of sorts, successfully laid claim to being his political heirs, thereby harnessing the moral legitimacy that Gandhi still commands.¹⁸ Another lasting effect of the historical imperial encounter may be discerned in the communalization of politics and society in India, which continues to be played out with devastating effects in genocidal experiments, but also in the realm of personal law; and while Gandhi may not be held personally responsible for these consequences—indeed, he strove ferociously against many of these tendencies in very original and innovative ways—it can nevertheless be argued that the political discourses and dynamics that he set in motion, far from ameliorating the condition of women, served in many ways to consolidate the control of their communities over them.

Finally, urban centers—fundamentally modern and transnational in nature—are sites for much sexual experimentation, some of which are market driven, and some of which are driven by identity politics that at the moment retain a “Western” discursive frame. Yet, while most sexual rights movements have, and are intended to have, a transformational politics and are therefore overtly political, few, so far, have been able to coherently identify and politically articulate the links between themselves and other modern social movements around typically modern issues of equity or sustainability (say, female infanticide, labor, casteism, displacement, poverty, racism). For its heuristic value alone, it would be interesting to trace the orientations of these linked but highly divergent practices of sexuality and the self. For this reason again, it is possible to argue that the complex and innovative mechanics whereby Gandhi injected gender-sexual politics into political transformation and integrated *metanoia* and social change, is among the most neglected legacies that we have of a previous, productive, but equally fraught transnational moment. It will be especially interesting to see what emerges philosophically, ideologically, and in praxis when the Gandhian paradigm is deliberately made to encounter contemporary thoughts on and practices of gender and sexuality.

Notes

¹ An early version of this paper was presented at the Centre for Gender Excellence of Linköping University in 2009.

² The impact of British rule in India was multifaceted. New values, technologies, and institutions, some of which were part of the processes of founding the modern nation-state, were to have a profound impact on what came to be India (Niranjana et al., 1993; Sarkar, 1983).

³ This has been theorized variously in India (e.g., Chatterjee, 1993, 1998; Nandy, 1983). However, as Gyan Prakash (Cited in Nicholson, 1996, 1995:96) observes, the polyphony of the native voice does not merely highlight a value placed on multiplicity, but “arises from the recognition that the functioning of colonial power was heterogeneous with its founding oppositions.”

⁴ See Ballhatchet 1980; Hyam 1990; and Stoler 1989 for instances of policy regulations of the sexual and social relations between colonizer and colonized.

⁵ Nandy 1983, Kakar 1989, and Alter 1996 are right to remind us that scholars tend to skirt the troubled and troubling area of Gandhi's sexual experimentation. Here, I too, for lack of space, will skirt the issue.

⁶ In this context, see Devaki Jain's observation that Gandhi was "methodologically" a feminist, because for him "the means were as important as the ends" (Jain, 1986: 267–68).

⁷ "I have suggested . . . that woman is the incarnation of *ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labor? But she forgets them in the joy of creation (*Hind Swaraj*, 24 February 1940: 13–14). For a review of Gandhi's engagement with "the woman question," as well as of feminist responses to this engagement, see Sujata Patel 1988.

⁸ Although this was not even uniformly exhorted, but determined substantially by caste. See Vijayan (2012) for an analysis of the ways in which caste and gender intersect in Gandhian thought.

⁹ For a detailed elucidation of how I use this term, see Gabriel (2010).

¹⁰ Although this was already in practice amongst the upper castes, colonialism served to reinforce it, through its own Victorian antecedents, rather than ameliorate it.

¹¹ A mythic metaphor for an ideal form of governance for India that refers specifically to the legend of Ram as the ideal king, under whose governance none were unhappy, and, more generally to any such form of governance. Of course this version denies Sita's story. According to popular and north Indian versions Sita, the long-suffering wife of Rama, is abducted by Ravana, whom she keeps at bay with her "soul-force" till Rama rescues her. Unfortunately, he refuses to accept her because she may be suspected of sexual infidelity. In one version, Sita leaves him at this juncture, in another more popular one, she undergoes an *agnipariksha* (test by fire) to prove her purity. At any rate, precisely because she is venerated because of her utility for the mainframes of patriarchy, Sita is a highly oppressive model of patriarchal femininity. (See Gabriel 2002 for a discussion of the relative worth of Sita for patriarchy within popular invocations of her; see also Gokhale and Lal, 2010).

¹² See Vinay Lal's (2000) elaboration of Brahmacharya.

¹³ Stone 1990, has noted the analogy of caste in Gandhi's pro-imperialist politics in South Africa. For an interesting attempt to recover Gandhi's ideas of nonviolence for contemporary political usage, see Godrej (2006).

¹⁴ Judith Brown 1989, records Gandhi's refusal to sanction a marriage between his second son Manilal and a Muslim girl in South Africa: "Intercommunal marriages are no solution to this problem."

¹⁵ Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Aurobindo, the early Gandhi, Vivekananda, Lala Lajpat Rai, among several others, were deeply ambivalent about the British presence in India, which they saw as degrading, the result of degradation, and an opportunity to catch up with the rest of the modern world. See Chatterjee 1986; Parekh 1990, 1989; Zavos 2000; Vijayan 2012; among others.

¹⁶ See Seth 1999, for an interesting analysis of this question.

¹⁷ "I believe that no other path but that of nonviolence will suit India. The symbol of that *dharma* [religion/spiritual path] for India is the spinning-wheel as it alone is the friend of the distressed and the giver of plenty for the poor. The law of love knows no bounds of space or time. My *Swaraj*, therefore, takes note of *Bhangis*, *Dublas* [two of the lowest castes] and the weakest of the weak, and except the spinning-wheel I know no other thing which befriends all these." (*Young India*, January 8, 1925: 18)

¹⁸ Although, arguably, this is also interrupted and colored by the looming figure (and its resonances) of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who dominated the Indian political stage for more than a decade from the late 1960s onward, not on the moral grounds that Gandhi established, but on the strength of feudal and clientelist networks of power (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967).

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Résumé

La rencontre coloniale a certainement été un des premiers exemples de transnationalisation ayant eu des effets significatifs et durables quant à l'organisation des genres et de la sexualité sur le sous-continent, et quant aux genres dans la dynamique actuelle de transnationalisation. Cet article étudiera la juxtaposition de ces dynamiques – impérialisme, nationalisme et entreprise gandhienne - durant la rencontre coloniale. Il soutiendra le fait que cette dynamique a eu un impact conséquent sur les pratiques et les significations de l'autodéfinition, aussi bien au niveau individuel, collectif que national, et que ces dernières ont été développées avec une intensité quasi libidinale dans les domaines du genre et de la sexualité, mettant en pratique les politiques sexuelles, et l'incarnation de l'individu en théorie et en pratique. Cet essai exposera les grandes lignes des modes de masculinité ayant été générés, opérationnalisés, transmis et incarnés à travers cette dynamique et au cours de cette rencontre, faisant d'eux l'index de cette

période historique, et ce, à travers une multitude de manières. Afin de mener à bien cette recherche, j'ai fait la description des politiques distinctives en matière d'égalité des sexes ayant été mobilisées par l'impérialisme colonial, par Gandhi et par les développements politico-historiques, maintenant devenues quasi emblématiques des identités politiques nationales et communautaires au sein de l'État-nation indien moderne. À ces fins, l'article s'attachera à faire ressortir les liens créés par Gandhi entre les pratiques sexuelles et la destinée nationale, et élaborera les politiques en matière d'égalité des sexes de telles expérimentations.

Resumen

El encuentro colonial puede ser considerado un ejemplo temprano de transnacionalismo que tuvo efectos significativos en la organización del género y la sexualidad en el subcontinente y en las dinámicas actuales de género transnacional. Este artículo examina las dinámicas yuxtapuestas de imperialismo, nacionalismo y el proyecto de Gandhi en el marco del encuentro colonial. El artículo argumenta que esta dinámica impactó tremendamente en las prácticas y significados de autodefinición—individual, comunal y nacional—y ha elaborado con una intensidad casi libidinal en el campo del género y la sexualidad, incorporando políticas sexuales dentro de la política y encarnándose dentro de la teoría y la práctica. El artículo describe las formas de masculinidad que fueron generadas, operacionalizadas, transmitidas e incorporadas a través de esta dinámica y en el curso de estos encuentros. Para ello, he trazado las políticas de género que han sido movilizadas por el colonialismo imperial, por Gandhi y por los desarrollos histórico-políticos que son ahora casi emblemáticos de la política nacional y la identidad comunitaria dentro del estado moderno de la India. Al hacer esto, el artículo traza los vínculos que Gandhi hizo entre las prácticas sexuales y el destino nacional, y la elaboración de las políticas de género de esta experimentación sexual.